

Your Obsidian Workflow is Missing a Physical Notebook

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Lessons learned from my first two weeks of combining Bullet Journaling with Obsidian



Photo by [Aaron Burden](#) on [Unsplash](#)

I'm deep into the 'honeymoon period' of combining [Bullet Journaling](#)

(Bujo) using a physical notebook with my Obsidian workflow. That being said, I am approaching the experiment with a critical eye for what will likely stick in the long run vs. what seems nice now. Conclusion so far:

No matter what your digital workflow looks like, it's worth discovering where in it a physical notebook adds value.

This Bujo journey is specific to me, but my hope in sharing the exploration with you is that it may help you see where a physical notebook could work for you. When incorporating a new method like Bujo into your workflow, it is easy to make one of two extreme mistakes:

- *over-fit* your behavior to match the core principles of the method you are experimenting with or
- *under-appreciate* the unique constraints that make the tool or system you are testing useful to you in the first place.

The key is to find a ‘middle way’ that fits neatly into your lifestyle that is neither an impulsive change nor a dogmatic adoption of something new and shiny to you.

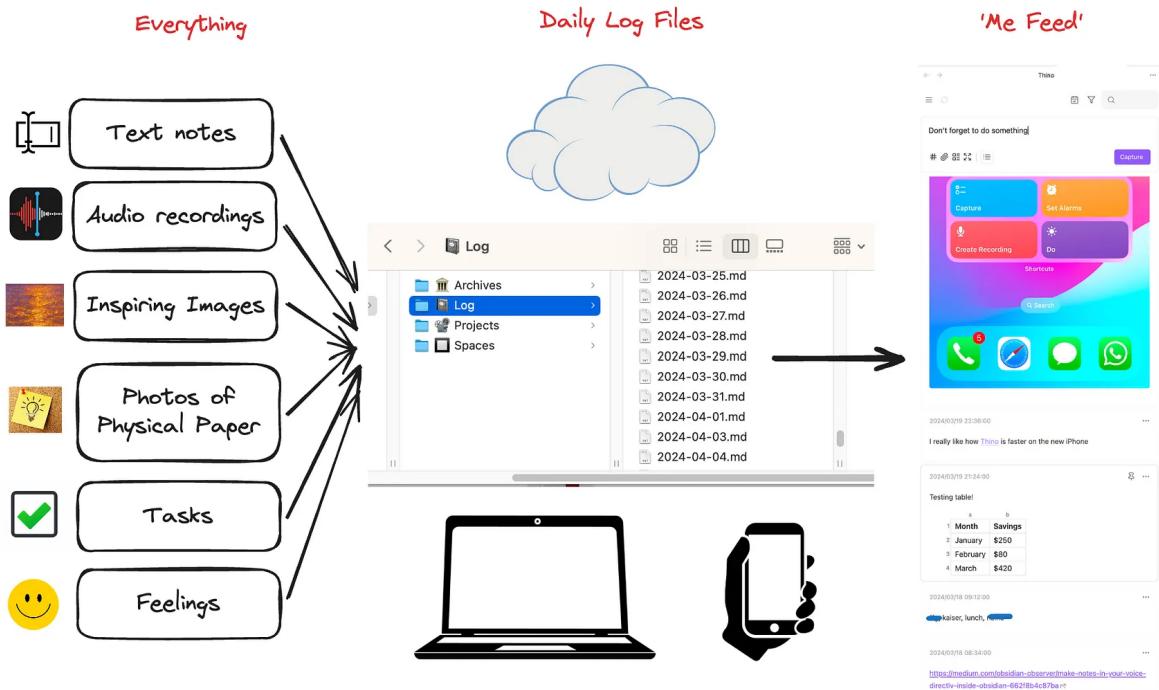
Use your physical notebook to figure out what to do with your digitally captured mess.

When starting to Bujo, I did some research and noticed that many people in the community tend to use their physical journal as a primary source of capture. This includes ideas, tasks, notes, calendar events (eg. see link at end of post), and even feelings. ‘Past me’ may have been tempted to also use BuJo as the primary method for capture for this experiment. ‘Current me’ realizes that this zeal is misplaced.

The digital workflow I describe in my personal ‘Capture to Do’ (CD) method (linked below) is something I’ve been refining for years. On an almost weekly cadence, I find that sharing a tidbit of my workflow to acquaintances and friends is of use to them. Shaking that foundation is not something I am interested in right now.

In fact, when I added a physical notebook into my mix, I appreciated my digital workflow even more. In it, it is easy to capture thoughts wherever I am, use whatever type of media I need, and quickly retrieve information whenever I need it. But, despite my best intentions, I suspected I would end up capturing more and more in my physical notebook. Instead, I am discovering the best place a physical notebook occupies in my overall workflow.

My digital CD workflow uses plain text and other multimedia files stored on my computer and phone to capture *everything*. It all gets automatically appended into daily logs, stored in the cloud, and is well visualized as what I call a ‘Me Feed’ using the Thino plugin available in Obsidian. (Links to posts that dig into more detail on all of this at the end of this post.)



Aside from literally capturing photos of my notebook, it's not exactly clear where Bujo would fit into this workflow. In the inaugural Bujo post I made a couple of weeks ago, I was wise enough to realize I'd keep my capture purely digital as shown above. The last two weeks has brought more clarity on what happens next.

Use your physical notebook to process and even store digitally captured scraps of paper.

First, although most things I capture tend to be digital, I inevitably doodle on scraps of paper or sticky notes. I have already developed a habit to take photos of most scraps that I think may be useful so I can process them digitally down the line. The difference now is I tend to store these scraps either in my notebook pocket or directly on notebook pages.



Not my notebook but here to illustrate how serious people get about sticky notes in their notebooks! Source: [All About Planners](#). I have also put bits of printouts and QR codes linking to Obsidian notes in my notebook.

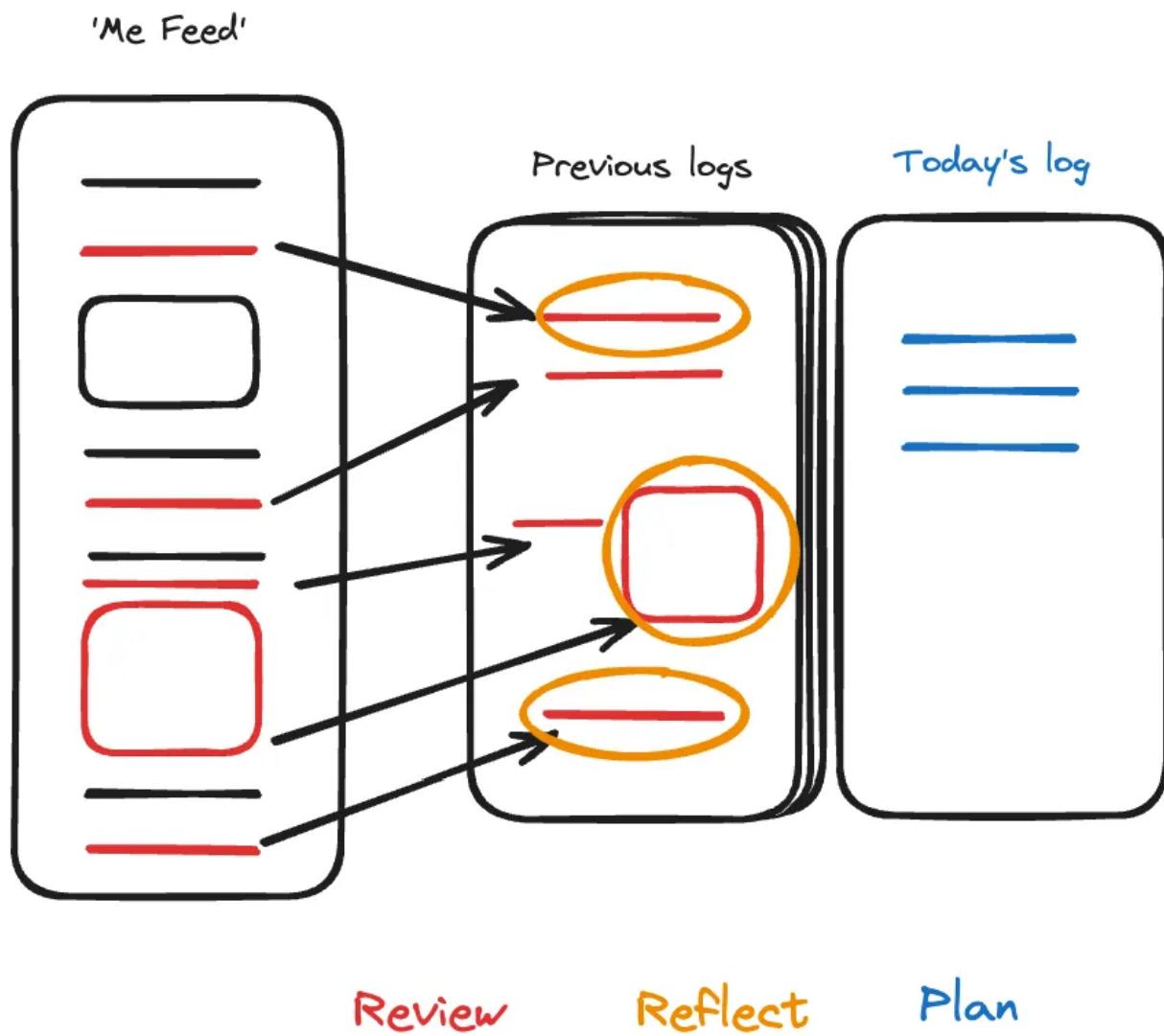
In the last two weeks, I've also stored a few useful sheets of paper that came across my way and two letters I needed to mail. These physical scraps are either eventually discarded or pasted directly into a notebook page. In general, I know I have everything I need to capture with just my phone, but the notebook is really nice to have when I have a moment to slow down and process these scraps.

Organization of knowledge in your physical notebook should mirror and complement your digital workflow.

There are three key aspects of my digital workflow that are mirrored in the way I manage my physical notebook.

1. **Repetition.** Using the  approach, I'm encouraged to *shamelessly repeat*. This means that when you are in the moment of capturing something, you don't worry about whether you've captured it before. The idea is that so long as you have captured everything you need to in one place, it will get processed and it doesn't really matter if there are duplicates in your digital *or* your physical notebook. This command to myself reduces friction when moving thoughts from mind to bits and eventually to paper.
2. **Flexibility.** I've noticed many workflows (including Bujo itself) rely fairly heavily on the idea of periodic reviews. Crucially, like with my digital log, I don't worry whether I've updated my notebook every day or not. Surprisingly, I've found that I end up updating my notebook most days *because* I do not place pressure on myself to do so. I've noticed that when I become rigid with how often I update my notes or how consistent they are across the digital and physical realms, the added friction demotivates me to use the system in the first place.
3. **Names and Categories.** The  approach also uses a very simple folder organization scheme (spiritually similar to the 'PARA Method' if you've heard of it) to help separate daily logs from active projects and general spaces of interest. In my physical notebook setup, items in my digital daily log will often be refined and filtered before insertion in my Bujo daily log. Bujo collections (chunks of pages devoted to a particular topic) will often correspond to 'projects' or 'spaces' in my digital setup. Therefore, even though the

physical medium is very different from the digital one, consistency down to the exact names of the projects and spaces also reduces friction: I avoid cognitive overhead of organizing differently across mediums. (I'll go into more detail on how exactly this looks in a future post. See the “ALPS” section of the  article for more details on the digital setup.)



Make your physical notebook an incredibly rewarding space to review, reflect, and plan.

The primary value I find in incorporating a physical notebook into my workflow is to take all of the stuff I've captured and make sense of it. My notebook is not necessarily a place I go to relax, but it certainly is a more natural and comfortable place for me to walk through what I've captured, think about what really resonates with me, and choose the best immediate route moving forward on multiple timescales.

In fact, one morning in these last two weeks I swear my Bujo literally saved me. I was so overwhelmed with thoughts and the variety of things to do in a short period of time, that I essentially entered a state of paralysis. To get myself in motion again, I normally would take a look at my digital journal, filter for the tasks I need to do, and interleave them with the required events of the day. This time, I went straight to my Bujo and almost immediately felt a sense of and clarity and warmth absent from my digital experience.



Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

At that moment, I realized my Bujo is becoming a real companion to me and complements my digital workflow well. I flip through its pages curiously and allow time for me to slow down enough to really make sense of what's in it and what to do next. A surprising amount of value I derive comes from the physical reward of carrying it around like it's an actual book I'm constantly working on. It's this aspect of incorporating a physical notebook into my (mostly Obsidian) digital workflow that I will dig into deeper in subsequent posts on the topic.

Thanks for joining me.

Related posts:

- [Inaugural Bujo post](#)
- [My “Capture to Do” \(CD\) digital workflow](#)
- [Physical rewards make hard tasks and habits easier to form \(“Satisfy the Beast”\)](#)
- [Thino: the ‘Me Feed’ plugin I use in Obsidian](#)

External links:

- [Create your own pocket for your notebook](#)
- [Using Bujo with a digital calendar](#)