

WHAT IS A MARKDOWN FILE?

The file format your AI speaks natively, the ten symbols you actually need, and the free Microsoft tool that converts anything – PDF, Word, PowerPoint, even audio – into it.

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Every system in this library – the second brains, the routines, the agents – runs on the same humble thing: markdown files. If that term has been floating past you in every AI video, here's the whole story in four minutes.

01 MARKDOWN IN ONE MINUTE

A markdown file (.md) is a **plain text file** with a few symbols that mean formatting. No app owns it. It opens in anything – Notepad, TextEdit, Obsidian, VS Code, your phone – and it will still open in 30 years.

THIS IS A COMPLETE MARKDOWN NOTE

```
# Meeting with the county
## Follow-ups
- [ ] Send the draft agreement
- [x] Confirm the June numbers
The county wants two options by Friday – see [the notes](meeting-notes.md).
> "If we can't measure it, we can't fund it."
```

The ten symbols you actually need:

TYPE THIS	YOU GET
# Title / ## Section	Headings (more #, smaller heading)
bold / <i>*italic*</i>	Bold and <i>italic</i>
- item	A bullet list · 1. makes it numbered
- [] task	A checkbox · - [x] checks it
[text](url)	A link
> quote	A quote block
---	A divider line

That's it. You already know markdown – you've been half-writing it in text messages for years.

02 WHY THE AI CROWD IS OBSESSED WITH IT

- It's AI's native language.** Claude and ChatGPT read and write markdown natively – headings, lists, and tables survive the round trip instead of turning to mush.
- It's token-efficient.** The same document as markdown costs a fraction of what a Word file's formatting baggage costs – faster answers, more room for actual content.
- It's future-proof and it's yours.** Plain text: no subscription, no lock-in, searchable with any tool, works with version control.
- It's what your second brain is made of.** Obsidian notes ARE markdown files (Guides N° 02 and N° 04) – which is exactly why AI can work inside those vaults.

03 MARKITDOWN – CONVERT ANYTHING TO MARKDOWN

Here's the unlock: most of your existing knowledge is trapped in OTHER formats – Word docs, PDFs, PowerPoints, spreadsheets. **MarkItDown** is a free, open-source tool from Microsoft (MIT-licensed, built by their AutoGen team) that converts virtually anything into clean markdown, built specifically for feeding documents to AI.

It handles: PDF · Word · PowerPoint · Excel · images (with OCR) · audio (transcription) · HTML · CSV/JSON/XML · ZIP folders · even YouTube URLs → transcripts.

QUICK START (TERMINAL, ONE INSTALL)

```
pip install 'markdown[all]'\n\n# Convert one file\nmarkdown report.pdf > report.md\nmarkdown deck.pptx -o slides.md\n\n# A whole folder of old Word docs\nfor f in *.docx; do markdown "$f" -o "${f%.docx}.md"; done
```

It also runs as an MCP server for Claude Desktop – meaning Claude can convert files mid-conversation without you touching a terminal. Search "markdown-mcp" on GitHub.

04 WHAT THIS UNLOCKS

- Feed AI the real document** – a 40-page PDF becomes clean text the model can actually work through, tables intact.
- Rescue your old knowledge** – a decade of Word docs becomes vault notes in one batch command. This is how old files join your second brain.
- Skip the copy-paste marathon** – PowerPoint decks, Excel sheets, and YouTube talks go straight to markdown summaries.

Starter move: pick ONE folder of old documents. Batch-convert it. Drop the output in your vault's inbox. You just gave your second brain its backstory.

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