

Turn any PDF, Word file or slide deck into clean text for AI

MarkItDown is a free tool from Microsoft. Install it once, then convert any document with one line. No account, no upload, no page limits.

WHAT IT IS

A file converter that speaks AI

MarkItDown takes a document on your computer — a PDF, a Word file, a spreadsheet, a slide deck — and rewrites it as plain text that keeps its structure: headings stay headings, tables stay tables, lists stay lists. That plain text is what you paste into ChatGPT, Claude, or any other AI tool. It runs on your own machine, so nothing gets uploaded anywhere.

WHAT IT DOES

One command, most file types you own

- Converts PDF, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, HTML, CSV and EPub files to clean text
- Keeps headings, tables, lists and links intact instead of dumping one wall of text
- Reads image and audio files, and pulls transcripts from YouTube links
- Opens a ZIP file and converts everything inside it in one go
- Works offline, with no file size or page limit

WHAT IT REPLACES

The free-trial PDF converters that cap you at five pages

Most online "PDF to text" sites want an email address, limit you to a handful of pages, and upload your document to their server. The alternative is copy-pasting page by page and losing every table on the way. MarkItDown handles a 300-page PDF in seconds, for free, without the file ever leaving your laptop. It is open source and released by Microsoft under the MIT licence.

BEFORE YOU START

You need Python, version 3.10 or newer

Python is a free program that other free programs are built on top of. Your Mac already has a version of it, but it may be too old. Step 1 checks it and installs a newer one if needed, so don't go looking for it now.

STEP 1

Open Terminal and check your Python

1 Press **⌘ + Space**, type **"Terminal"**, press **Enter**.

A plain black-and-white window opens with a blinking cursor. This is normal — it is just a place to type commands instead of clicking buttons. On Windows: press the Windows key, type "PowerShell", press Enter.

2 Copy the line below, paste it into the window, press **Enter**.

```
python3 --version
```

If it answers 3.10, 3.11, 3.12 or 3.13, you are done with this step — go to Step 2.

3 If it says **3.9 or lower**, or **"command not found"**, install Python.

Go to **python.org** → **Downloads**, click the download button, open the file that lands in your Downloads folder, and click through the installer. Choose version 3.12 or 3.13 rather than the newest one — 3.14 currently pulls in an outdated MarkItDown. On Windows, tick **"Add Python to PATH"** on the first installer screen. Then close Terminal, open it again, and repeat step 2.

STEP 2

Install MarkItDown

1 Paste this in and press **Enter**.

```
python3 -m pip install --user "markitdown[all]"
```

It takes one to three minutes and prints a wall of scrolling text. That is normal. It is finished when you see "Successfully installed" and the cursor comes back. If you get an error containing **externally-managed-environment**, run the same line again with **--break-system-packages** added at the end.

2 Check that it worked.

```
python3 -m markitdown --help
```

A short set of usage instructions appears. That means it is installed.

STEP 3

Convert your first file

1 Type this, then press the spacebar once — do not press Enter yet.

```
python3 -m markdown
```

2 Drag your PDF from Finder straight into the Terminal window and let go.

The file's location gets typed out for you. This saves writing out folder paths by hand, which is where most people get stuck.

3 Press Enter.

The converted text prints straight into the window. Select it, copy it, paste it into your AI tool of choice.

4 To save it as a file instead, add -o and a name before pressing Enter.

```
python3 -m markdown ~/Desktop/report.pdf -o ~/Desktop/report.md
```

Replace report.pdf with your own file. This writes report.md onto your Desktop. A .md file is just text — double-click it and it opens like any note. That's it.

REFERENCE

What you can throw at it

FILE	WHAT YOU GET BACK
PDF	The text, with headings and tables preserved
Word, PowerPoint, Excel	Text, slide content, and spreadsheet rows as tables
Images	Text found in the image, plus the photo's own details
Audio files	A written transcript of what was said
YouTube link	The video transcript, if the video has one
ZIP folder	Everything inside it, converted one file after another

GOOD TO KNOW

Scanned PDFs come back nearly empty. If a PDF is really just photographs of pages, there is no text to pull out. Test it by trying to select text in Preview — if you can't, MarkItDown can't either.

Only convert files you trust. The tool opens whatever you point it at with your own permissions, exactly like double-clicking the file would. Treat a document from a stranger the way you'd treat an email attachment from one.

The short command often works too. Once installed, plain **markdown report.pdf** usually works. If your computer says it doesn't recognise it, that's a common setup quirk — keep using **python3 -m markdown**, which always works and does exactly the same thing.

To remove it later: run **python3 -m pip uninstall markdown**, then press y and Enter.