Writing Markdown on the Go

Peter Humburg

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I now use markdown for most of my writing. Whether it is a post for this blog, a technical report or a presentation for work, if there isn't a good reason not to, I use markdown to write it. As it happens, I also spend a fair amount of time commuting by train and bus. Sitting on public transport seems like a great time to get some writing done. I've always felt that my train journey is a bit too short to make unpacking the laptop worthwhile[1] and on the bus it is just too cumbersome.

The obvious solution is to use my (Android) smartphone[2] but without a text editor with decent markdown support that is likely to be frustrating. After looking around a bit I've settled on JotterPad. Its full screen mode allows writing without too many distractions[3]. It also provides a toolbar with shortcuts to many symbols commonly used in markdown, removing the need to hunt for them in the depths of the Android keyboard. It has a preview function, as you would expect from a markdown editor, and a night mode that I rather like. There is also integration with online dictionaries and a thesaurus, so you don't have to switch apps to look up a word. This all works great to write prose[4] and certainly has helped me to make my commute more productive. I now can get some of my writing done while travelling, or even while waiting at a train station or bus stop.

To make this all work seamlessly I use git[5] to store my documents. I then use PocketGit to connect to my repositories from the phone. PocketGit provides a full featured git client with a clean, easy to use interface and cloning a repo from GitHub only takes three taps on the screen[6]. My only complaint about PocketGit is that credentials can't be shared between repositories. It would make life even easier if I could set up my GitHub credentials once and then use them for all GitHub repositories. Despite this shortcoming it is a great app that works very smoothly and gives me easy access to all my files on GitHub.

This means I get the full power of git on my phone. For most of my writing this translates into having a detailed version history and not having to worry about an internet connection while I write[7], while still being able to sync everything back to my laptop with ease[8]

Generally this works well[9] as long as I don't try to write much code. I don't usually do much coding during the commute so this hasn't been much of an issue but JotterPad is definitely not the right tool for that. There are of course other editors with good syntax highlighting capabilities. I'm currently trying QuickEdit but while that has support for syntax highlighting of many different languages it doesn't have markdown support. What I would love to see is an editor that not only understands markdown but also does syntax highlighting for embedded code blocks. If you know of an Android app that does that, let me know in the comments.

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[1] on days when the train doesn't get stuck on the way at least

[2] currently a Moto X, in case you were wondering

[3] and using as much of the screen as possible

[4] as opposed to code

[5] mostly via GitHub

[6] and password entry, unless you are using SSH keys

[7] the connection during the train journey is pretty unreliable

[8] I probably should note that JotterPad has Dropbox integration, if that's your thing. I find that GitHub works better for me, at least in part because the documents I'm writing are often part of larger projects.

[9] although predictive tipping can certainly cause some surprises