Testing & Evaluation Sheet

Standard Notes

1. Tool Overview

Name:	Standard Notes
Category:	Note Taking software
Purpose:	Free, secure note-taking app with end-to-end encryption and other privacy features.
Date	4/3/2025
Status:	Deployed ☑ Operational - Actively running/maintained ☐ In Testing - Currently being evaluated or piloted ☐ Inactive/Deprecated - No longer maintained or functional
Deployment Architecture:	☐ A standalone software - Runs entirely locally (e.g., runs on computer and doesn't depend on external server) ☐ A locally hosted service with separate server and client component - Run both backend/frontend yourself (e.g., backend could be on a local network, or self-hosted on cloud) ☑ A service with a local client that's hosted by a third party - You install a client on your device, but it connects to and depends on a remote server (e.g., Signal: install app (client), but Signal's servers handle message relaying, etc.) ☐ A service that is hosted by a third party but can also be self-hosted
Version:	Desktop 3.195.13

2. Installation & Setup

OS Compatibility	● Desktop: Windows, Linux, MaxOS (Intel, Apple Silicon), Web app ● Mobile: iOS, Android
Installation Manual:	Yes
Installation Steps:	1. Go to Standard Notes Website 2. Click the "Download for free" button

	3. Open the file from your download folder
	    a. You may have to "remove protection" to allow for installation
	4. Create your account
	    a. *Note: Standard Notes does not have a recover password function. If you lose your password all of your data will be lost*

Mention if command-line setup or special configurations are needed	● No special commands are needed
Common Installation Issues & Fixes:	● Unable to sign in, even if email & password are correct a. Both email field and password field are case sensitive
User Documentation:	Yes
Required Technical Knowledge	Beginner

3. Testing & Evaluation

Category	Details	Score
Operational Functionality:	**Functionality** ● Features include linking to other files, tagging notes, starring notes. ☐ The tool is mostly non-functional with many broken features and bugs. ☐ Several broken features or bugs ☐ Minor bugs or issues ☐ Mostly functional with few bugs or no bugs ☑ Fully functional with no bugs **Internet Dependence:** ● Has offline functionality ● "Any notes which have been previously synced to the device will be accessible without a connection. Any changes you make to notes while offline will be saved to the device. These changes will be synced to your account as soon as network connectivity is restored and the application is opened."[1]	2.7

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[1] https://standardnotes.com/help/59/can-i-use-standard-notes-totally-offline

	● Yes, since it will function offline, the software is able to work on a 2G and 3G network **Localization & Language Support** ● Only be available in English ● There is not a community actively working on localization **Mobile Accessibility** ● Mobile friendly as they have a dedicated app in the app store. ● On the apple app store they have 3k reviews with an average review of 4.7. ● The mobile app works simple basic note creation and editing ○ *Note: Mobile version does not allow for encryption*	
Usability for Non-Technical Users	**Ease of Installation & Deployment** ● The software is easy to install and configure, with a straightforward setup process ● Their FAQ page is decently comprehensive covering a lot of common questions [2] ● The installation process typically takes less than 10 minutes. The application is lightweight, under 1MB in size, though the installation time could vary depending on the user's speed and internet downloading speed. ● Short 4 step installation process, not needing any command lines ● On their website guides do not have dates attached to the last update date. ● Github's guides **User Onboarding Experience** ● The website has documentation for first time users **Technical Experience Level Required** ● Symbols and buttons are large and many of the buttons are on the main page. Many of the buttons are labeled and if they are not labeled if you click on them they provide information where a user would be able to deduce what task it does. ● Standard Notes is a minimalist interface that is intuitive and user friendly. The core features including creating notes, organizing them with tags, and syncing across devices are easily accessible and clearly labeled.	4.3

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[2] https://standardnotes.com/help

Security & Privacy Strength	**Encryption Standards**	4.2
	● 2FA- This feature is not automatically enabled, however there is a page where it describes the couple of steps to enable	
	● End-to-end encryption - Using XChaCha20-Poly1305	
	● No, however that is not one of the functions of this software	
	Known Strength resilience	
	● The software does not seem to be blocked in China	
	○ Using ChinaFirewallTest website	
	● Does not have built in circumvention techniques	
	● Most recent 3rd party audit was conducted in 2022[3]. Issues were found and addressed by the company.	
	Comparison with Known Standards	
	● There was a 3rd party audit and they found that the software had flaws but "This issue was addressed by the Standard Notes team and the fix was verified by Cure53 by inspecting the respecting PR/Diff on Github."	
	Data Minimization	
	● They don't store IP addresses, however Cloudflare or AWS-based firewalls "may be used or retained" to prevent abuse and spam.	
	● If users contact support they store communication to improve service, but don't use 3rd party software	
	● Doesn't collect any location based-information or track usage data	
	Privacy Policy Accessibility and Clarity	
	● Yes, they have a clear data handling policy that uses basic language so the average user is able to understand exactly what is happening	
Maintenance/Sustainability	**Community support**	2.7
	● The community is decently small with 67 "watching" the GitHub	
	● They have a discord and twitter community	
	Development active status	
	● Github was last updated in November 2024	
	● iOS most recent update was 9 months ago	
	● Development team is slow to respond	
	Funding and Sponsorship	

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[3] https://standardnotes.com/help/2/has-standard-notes-completed-a-third-party-security-audit

	- In April 2024, Standard Notes was acquired by Proton, a privacy-focused technology company. - It is likely that Proton now provides financial and operational support following the acquisition. - The platform is also partially funded through user subscriptions - There is no publicly available evidence of major corporate sponsorships linked to Standard Notes. - The software seem financially stable as Proton is a large company	

Performance / Effectiveness & Reliability	**Testing Environment Setup:**
	 - **Device:** HP 11th Gen Intel(R) Core(TM) i7-11800H @ 2.30GHz
	 - **OS:** Windows 64
	 - **Network:** Wifi
	 User Experience Observations
	 - During normal use, the tool is smooth.
	 - When pushing the software by copying large documents, software may lag
	 Speed & Responsiveness:
	 - Opening up the application does not take a long time
	 - No lags noticed
	 Resource Usage:
	 - Idle:
	    - CPU <1%
	    - Memory 278MB
	 - Active:
	    - CPU:17%
	    - Memory: 875MG
	 Network Performance:
	 - Send: 14 B/sec
	 - Receive: 21 B/sec
	 Reliability
	 - It has a 3rd party audit and has been peer reviewed
	 - Attempted multiple times to import downloaded documents and was unsuccessful.
	    - Attempted uploading encrypted file twice
	    - Attempted uploading unencrypted file three times
		3.0

Deployment Considerations:	**Open Source & Transparency:** - All of the code is available on Github for independent verification **Cloud vs. Local Deployment:**	

	● To run the software you don't need to use AWS/Azure since it is already deployed. **Dependencies:** ● No, to run and use the free version of the software it does not require any dependencies **Post-Deployment Maintenance** ● Once the tool is downloaded, it is straightforward to maintain. ● Forking and modifying the project is decently straightforward since files are labeled and structured in a hierarchical structure **Merge/Sustainability:** ● Standard Notes is open to community contributions, currently there are 45 individuals who have contributed to the repository. ● They have "forum" where community members can discuss issues and seek support ● Their most recent pull request was #2891 on March 6th 2025 ● The project does not have a section on their README regarding how to make changes back to their repository ○ *Note: Assuming standard Github workflow for submitting changes to main repository*
4. Testing Scenarios	
Basic Functionality	● Able to type text, using the copy and paste features work. ● Unable to insert images, create tables as these features are behind a their upgraded software
Exporting Data	● Able to export data in both encrypted and decrypted status

Importing Data from downloaded backup	● Unable to successfully import previous notes from a download backup
	    ● Steps taken to import data
	        ● Downloaded imported data with a test file (both encrypted and decrypted)
	        ● Pressed "Import backup"
	        ● Selected either encrypted or decrypted JSON file
	        ● Entered in password associated with account
	        ● Message popped up saying import was successful
	        ● No files showed up

5. Insights & Recommendations	

Key Findings	**Strengths:**
	• Easy of use: The tool is straightforward, both in terms of access and to operate
	• The software has inhouse security including end-to-end encryption and local data storage
	
	Weaknesses:
	• Limited Text Editing Capabilities
	    a. The Ctrl+Z function does not revert to the previous word as expected; instead, it undoes one character at a time, functioning similarly to a backspace key.
	    b. The indentation feature does not follow standard formatting behavior. Pressing the tab key inserts only a single space rather than a standard tab indentation.
	    c. The free version of the software offers limited functionality, lacking basic formatting tools such as bold, italics, and underline. Users are restricted to plain text input with no rich text capabilities.
	        i. More advanced text editing options are available however they are behind a paywall

Suggested Improvements	• Undo/Redo Function - Enhance the undo/redo system to support action-based history rather than rolling back changes one character at a time. • Text indentation - Standardize text indentation to align with conventional word processing behavior
Alternative Tools:	• Obsidian • Joplin • Logseq • Anytype
License	AGPL-3.0 license

Cost/Resource Implications	**Total Cost of Ownership:**
	• Pricing Plans [4]
	    ○ Standard: Free
	    ○ Productivity: $63/year
	    ○ Professional: $84/year
	
	Maintenance:
	• Free Version: No ongoing maintenance required
	• Paid Versions: Maintenance primarily involves managing subscription payments and any additional features included in the upgraded plans

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[4] https://standardnotes.com/plans

	● The software is lightweight meaning many users would be able to download the software onto their device.
Why is this useful to civil societies in authoritarian environments?	Standard Notes has end-to-end encryption and is available offline, which are essential in authoritarian environments. It collects minimal metadata and has the ability to run without cloud dependency making it attractive for civil society organizations (CSOs) operating under surveillance, as they are reducing their risks by not uploading to the cloud. The tool is not blocked in China, and its free version makes it accessible to low-resource groups.