



The  
**Essential  
iPad  
Guide**  
for  
**Principals**

by Justin Baeder  
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**THE HIGH-  
PERFORMANCE  
ADMINISTRATOR**

# The Essential iPad Guide for Principals

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## Introduction

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The iPad is rapidly growing in popularity as a productivity tool and computing platform. If you, like many other school leaders, have recently purchased or are considering purchasing an iPad, it's important to understand how the device will fit into your life and how it can increase your effectiveness. In this article, you'll learn how to make the iPad an integral part of your workflow, how to use some of the most essential apps, and how to evaluate additional apps to determine if they should become a part of your repertoire. In addition, you'll see how the iPad can (and can't) be used as a laptop replacement, and how it can be used for classroom observations and teacher feedback.

## Workflow

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The *way* you use the iPad will determine whether it's a toy or a powerful tool for managing your work as a leader. If you develop a reliable workflow, you can harness the power of dozens of your favorite apps to tap into your creativity, keep your information organized, and contribute to your effectiveness.

Thousands of apps are available for the iPad, which presents a danger: If you use each app separately, your important information will be dispersed among them, and may be hard to keep track of. For example, you don't want to do great brainstorming in a whiteboard app but then forget to do anything with it. If you have 20 different apps holding your work, it's easy to forget what you've done and where it is.

The key to managing your app workflow is to ***limit the number of places where actionable***

**information resides.** Most apps have a way to email a document either as plain text or as an attachment. Use this feature to send your work to your own email inbox so you can follow up later. For example, if you do some brainstorming in a whiteboard app, you can email an image of the whiteboard to yourself so you have it in your inbox for later processing.

If you identify action items, add them to your to-do list rather than leave them in another app (see below for my recommended to-do list app). Similarly, if you make an appointment, add it to your calendar. If it's not easy to do this (e.g. if you're taking meeting notes in an app such as Evernote), you may want to simply email the document to yourself to ensure that you follow up later, but it may save more time to put the information directly into the app where it will ultimately reside. It's only two clicks to exit an app, open the calendar or to-do list, and start adding the new item.

**Never assume that you'll check each separate app later for actionable information.** Meeting notes tend to be ignored once the meeting is over; brainstorming tends to remain nothing more than ideas on a screen; opened web pages tend to get closed; bookmarks are easy to find later but are just as easily ignored. **When in doubt, email yourself** or add the critical information to one of your core workflow apps.

### **Core Workflow Apps**

A few apps are so important to your workflow that you'll rely on them almost exclusively for guiding your decisions about what to work on. The three major types of apps that contain actionable information are my to-do list, calendar, and email.

- **To-do list:** I use OmniFocus, a powerful to-do list manager. If it's a task or project I'm responsible for, it's in OmniFocus. Other popular options are Things and the web-based service Remember the Milk.
- **Email** – the built-in email app on the iPad is excellent. Needless to say, it contains my work email, including any documents that I've emailed to myself from other apps.
- **iCal** – the built-in calendar app on iPad, which syncs with my Outlook/Exchange work

calendar and my Mac personal calendar.

If I need to deal with something and it's not in one of the above apps, *I email it to myself, put it on my to-do list, or add it to my calendar* to ensure that I don't lose it. If you find yourself forgetting to check your core apps (like your calendar for the next day), put a recurring popup reminder on your calendar so you remember to check it regularly. Even better, the iPad supports "push" notifications, so apps like OmniFocus can remind you when they contain something you need to see, even when they're closed.

### **Batching**

One of the benefits of having your work organized is that you can do similar kinds of work in a batch or group. This is almost always faster, because you don't have to switch between different tools or mindsets to complete each item. On the iPad, this is one of the advantages of using different apps for specialized purposes. Having similar items in one app – for example, all the EdWeek articles I want to read together in [Instapaper](#) (more on this below) – makes it much easier to get everything done quickly, since I'm not switching back and forth between different apps.

One way to make batching fit your workflow is to recognize when a group of tasks is *not* a good idea to do on the iPad. For example, if I have a number of emails that contain attachments I want to save to my computer, I won't read them on the iPad. It makes more sense to mark them as unread and wait until I'm back at my desk so I can save the attachments.

### **Workflow Summary**

1. Limit the number of apps containing actionable information
2. Email yourself or put a to-do item on your list if you have actionable information in other apps
3. Do similar items together in a batch (even if this means you can't do them on the iPad)

## Evernote – Information That Moves With You

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As a principal, I receive a large amount of information that I may need to reference in the future. I have a good paper filing system, but I don't want to print and manually file anything if I can avoid it.

Evernote is my digital file cabinet. It will accept text, photos, and file attachments, and make all of them searchable. For example, if I'm at another school and see a playground rules poster I like, I can take a picture with my phone and email it to Evernote. Searching for "playground" will bring up the photo, because *Evernote can actually read text (including handwriting) inside photographs.*

Best of all, your data lives on Evernote's servers, and is available from almost any internet-connected device, so your reference information is always on hand. If you're feeling ambitious and have a good scanner, you can even scan your paper files into Evernote and get rid of your file cabinet. There's also a bookmarklet to clip items you find on the web.

Since the iPad doesn't have a file system or a built-in physical keyboard, it's important to have easy ways to get information on and off the device. Evernote is a great example of how apps should work in this regard:

- Your data is synched wirelessly between the iPad and any other computers and devices on which you have Evernote installed (PC, Mac, iPhone, BlackBerry, Android, Windows Phone, web, and more)
- You can email text, photos, and files (as attachments) into Evernote, and email them from Evernote to any address
- You don't need to sync with the iPad cable to have your data accessible on your computer

Regardless of whether you choose to use Evernote, these are great features to look for in any app.

## iPad Reading Apps

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The iPad is particularly well-suited to reading, given its web access, portability, long battery life, and great screen. Below I discuss several terrific apps for managing your reading workflow.

A note about reading as a task: if you need to read something by a specific date (e.g. for a meeting), put it on your calendar or to-do list. Otherwise, you can simply use the following apps to read material of interest whenever you get a chance.

### **Instapaper**

I believe that leadership is creative work, and creative work requires inspiration and new ideas. Reading is therefore an essential part of the work of leadership, yet we don't read as much as we should. If you have a pile of unread leadership magazines in your office or home, you know what I mean. When you want to read something (eventually) but don't have time right now, save it to [Instapaper](#).

[Instapaper](#) works best for those moments when you find yourself wanting to read an online article, but you realize you aren't going to have time to finish it without interruption. Instead of printing the article and using the resulting clutter as a reminder to read the article, save the article to Instapaper and read it at your convenience. The typography is the best I've ever seen, and the interface is excellent – I'd rather read an article in Instapaper than any other way.

It helps to install the Safari [bookmarklet](#) to easily save articles you find online. This will take a minute but it's worth it.

Most education publications such as [EdWeek](#), [Educational Leadership](#), [Phi Delta Kappan](#), etc. offer their content free online to print subscribers. Since I don't want a pile of EdWeek papers

filling my office or home, I flip through the paper, search for the articles I want to read online, and save them to Instapaper.

Instapaper saves public web articles and anything you email to it. For reading material that isn't already on the public web (e.g. EdWeek articles, which require that you be a logged-in subscriber), you can copy and paste into Evernote, then email the Evernote document to a special Instapaper email address. While this is a bit of a pain, it has the added benefit of giving you a searchable backup copy in Evernote.

Always look for opportunities to do things in batches – if you're saving articles from a website into Evernote, do it all at once, and send them to Instapaper all at the same time.

### **Reeder and Google Reader**

If you use [Google Reader](#) to subscribe to RSS feeds, [Reeder](#) is a great app for accessing your feeds from the iPad – much better than Google's own iPad interface. You can easily read and share items from your feeds in this intuitive and inexpensive app.

If you don't use RSS and Google Reader, you might want to look into doing so – it saves you the trouble of manually checking blogs and news websites for new material. Unlike Instapaper, which is for saving *individual* articles that you find anywhere on the web, RSS allows you to *subscribe* to all of the new articles or posts on a specific blog or website. Many news websites offer different RSS feeds (subscriptions) focusing on different topics, so you don't have to receive articles you aren't interested in.

### **iAnnotate PDF Reader**

Sometimes you need to read an article more carefully and take notes for later reference. If you're taking graduate or advanced certification classes, you probably receive plenty of PDFs. While Safari, Mail, iBooks, and Evernote can all open PDF files, a specialized reader app such as [iAnnotate](#) will save your place and let you mark up the article.

iAnnotate's interface is very easy to learn, and it's easy to save PDF files to the app. It's easily worth the \$10 price tag.

### **Kindle & iBooks**

An increasing number of popular and education-related titles are available for Amazon's Kindle app or the iBooks reading app. Last Spring, I bought a paperback copy of Kim Marshall's *Rethinking Teacher Supervision & Evaluation*, but I also clicked the "I want to read this book on Kindle" link on Amazon's website. A few months later, a Kindle edition was released. I've found that reading on the iPad is much more convenient than reading a paper book, since I always have all of my Kindle books with me thanks to my iPad.

A little-known feature of the Kindle app is that you can highlight important passages and view a list of all the passages you've highlighted, either on the iPad or on Amazon's Kindle website. This is a great way to review what you've learned from a book, and to copy quotes for your newsletter or other projects.

## **Evaluating Apps**

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When should a new app become part of your repertoire? There are thousands of apps in the iTunes App Store, and more are added each day. There isn't enough time in the day to try them all, and most of them are not worth your time. Here are some questions to ask yourself when considering a new app:

1. Does it have an easy way to get actionable information into my core workflow apps? (in most cases, this will be a "send via email" option)
2. Do I know other people who use the app and can give me advice?
3. Is the app published by a reputable company that updates it regularly? (if not, the app may crash in future versions of the iPad operating system)
4. Does the app sync wirelessly with an online service? (this is important for backup)



purposes – you shouldn't have to sync via cable every day)

5. Does the app solve a problem otherwise improve my ability to manage my work? (Many polished apps are totally unnecessary – ask yourself what value the app will add)

Don't be afraid to explore the App Store and spend a few dollars trying new apps, but set a high bar for whether an app should become a permanent part of your workflow. Beware of very cheap apps - the best apps tend to be either free or fairly pricey. If you're considering a pricey app, read the reviews first.

## **Using the iPad as a Laptop Replacement**

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How viable is the iPad as an alternative to a full-featured laptop? It depends on the type of work you need to do. The iPad does not have a file system, so if you need to work with Microsoft Office documents, you may find it cumbersome. However, adding a keyboard and learning about other ways to store information may make the iPad more viable as a laptop replacement.

I highly recommend getting a Bluetooth wireless keyboard. [Apple's model](#) is extremely light and portable, and makes your iPad an excellent replacement for a laptop in meetings, on the road, or in classroom observations. (I don't recommend the bulkier Apple iPad keyboard stand, which isn't portable.)

I'm getting fairly fast typing on the iPad's on-screen keyboard, but for extended typing, it's extremely helpful to have a real keyboard.



I've found that for some types of work, the iPad is just as good as my laptop, and with its light weight and all-day battery life, it's superior in many cases. For example, I use the iPad for all of my walkthroughs and formal observations.

## Conducting Walkthroughs with the iPad

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With its wireless Internet connectivity and long battery life, the iPad + Bluetooth keyboard combo is great for conducting walkthroughs. A few favorite techniques:

- Create a form using Google Spreadsheets, and enter observation notes directly into this form from the iPad. (Google recently made it possible to edit documents directly from the iPad, but you may find this easier to do on your laptop or desktop computer.)
- Take notes in Evernote, Pages, or another word processing or notetaking app.
- Take notes directly in an email message, and send it to both the teacher and yourself

Regardless of which technique you use, there are a few issues to address:

- How will you keep track of which teachers you've observed on which days, and who should be next?
- How will you keep a record of the feedback you've provided, and follow up with the teacher later if necessary?
- How will you make it easy to find your observation notes later?

Principal [Chris Lehmann](#) developed a [great form](#) using Google Spreadsheets, which I tried and found very easy to use (for entering feedback, at least). You create a form and enter information into the form, and the results are added to a Google Spreadsheet. The drawback is that you need constant 3G or Wi-Fi internet access to use Google Forms.

I've also tried using OmniFocus to keep track of both whom I need to visit and what feedback I provided. OmniFocus is a great task management app, but I've found that it's not great for holding large amounts of text. You can type a note into a task, and even email it, but the resulting email is oddly formatted, and adding lots of text can slow down your database loading and synching.

However, OmniFocus shines when it comes to **keeping track of whom you've visited**. You can set recurring tasks, re-order them, and set reminders. I made a list of all the teachers in my school, and when I visit a teacher's room and give feedback, I drag that teacher's name to the bottom of the list so I know I'll get to everyone. When it's time to pick a room to visit, I look at my list and see who's at the top.

**So far, I've found Evernote to be the best app for taking notes and emailing feedback.** I

already use Evernote as my virtual file cabinet, so it's easy to use it for this additional purpose. I take notes in Evernote (starting a new note for each classroom visit), then email them to the teacher directly from Evernote. Evernote works even if you're offline, so you can take notes even if you're out of wifi range, and they'll send/sync when you're back online. To make it easy to find all the notes for a particular teacher, I add two tags to each note: the word "feedback," and the teacher's name.

Using these tools, here's the workflow I've developed: Whenever I can get into classrooms, I visit the room at the top of my list (in OmniFocus), take notes in Evernote, email them to the teacher, and move the teacher's name to the bottom of my list in OmniFocus (I can also add the date to the note field in OmniFocus so I can quickly see all the dates I've visited the room).

## Making it Work for You

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Keep exploring and learning. As you make the iPad work for you, I'd love to hear from you. What apps do you use on the iPad? Are you considering getting an iPad? [Let me know what you think.](#)

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*For other articles on principal performance and productivity, visit [www.eduleadership.org](http://www.eduleadership.org).*

For information on Justin's workshop **The High-Performance Administrator: Managing Time, Workflow, and Communication to Maximize Your Impact on Student Learning**, [click here](#).

