ToolGPA

NOVEMBER 2026

Substack

The Insider's Guide

Newsletter, podcast and video publishing with paid subscriptions



Every plan, grade, refund rule and rival among email marketing and newsletter tools, read from Substack's own pages.

Made by Substack Inc. · checked Nov 12, 2026 · toolgpa.com

3.2
GPA



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Who made this guide, what else is on the site, and how to cite it

ToolGPA put this guide together from Substack's own pages, its app-store listings and our grades. Every fact in it is on Substack's page too, where it is kept up to date. Checked Nov 12, 2026.

Welcome

What it is, who it suits, its grades and the ten things to know first

3.2

GPA, above 57 of the 57 other email marketing and newsletter tools we grade

Substack is a publishing platform where writers and creators run a newsletter, podcast or video show and can charge readers for paid subscriptions. It costs nothing to start; the company takes a share of paid-subscription revenue instead of a monthly fee. Posts also appear in Substack's own app and network, which the company says brings in more than half of new subscribers.

To get you started, here are **8 things to know about Substack**, taken from its own pages and our grades.

> **It is a publishing platform, not an automation tool: the pages read describe no drip sequences or segmentation.**
>
> From our report card of Substack

1 **Best for writers who want to start a paid newsletter free**

It has apps for iPhone and Android as well as the web.

2 **It is free**

Substack has no paid plan at all. Free to start, with no platform fees or tiers; Substack keeps 10% of paid-subscription revenue.

3 **It runs on 3 platforms**

Web, iOS and Android.

4 **Paid subscriptions**

Writers choose which posts are free and which are for paid subscribers only, and Substack handles the sign-up and payment side.

5 **Newsletter, podcast and video**

A publication can carry written posts, podcasts and video shows, with live video available for creators who want it.

6 **Built-in reader network**

Substack publishes a reader app and a discovery network, and says more than half of new subscribers arrive through that network.

7 **A 3.2 GPA, above 57 of 57**

That is against the other email marketing and newsletter tools we grade, on value, the free plan, features, ease of use and platforms.

8 **Keep it**

Substack is free, so making your own would save you nothing.

Substack at a glance

PRICING Free	FREE PLAN Yes
FREE TRIAL None stated	RUNS ON Web, iOS, Android
MADE BY Substack Inc.	CATEGORY Email Marketing & Newsletters
OUR GRADE 3.2 GPA, very good	

The report card

Best for writers who want to start a paid newsletter free

Substack lets you publish a newsletter, podcast or video with no upfront fee and takes 10% of paid-subscription income. It has apps for iPhone and

Android as well as the web. It is a publishing platform, not an automation tool: the pages read describe no drip sequences or segmentation.

TOOLGPA REPORT CARD	**Substack**	Graded Nov 12, 2026
SUBJECT	GRADE	COMMENT
Value for money	A	Free to start with no tiers, and no cost until you charge subscribers. Then Substack keeps 10% of paid-subscription revenue, and card fees come out of your share too.
Free plan and trial	A	Free outright, with no paid plans or tiers listed and the same features for every publication.
Features	C	Paid subscriptions, newsletter, podcast and video, a reader network and subscriber chats. The pages read describe no drip sequences or list segmentation.
Ease of use	B	No rating on record, but nothing to set up: sign up, write and publish. Apps are listed for iPhone and Android.
Platforms and integrations	B	Web, iPhone and Android, with no desktop app and no integration list on the pages read.
Grade point average		Very good, out of 4.0 **3.2**

An A is worth 4 points, a B 3, a C 2, a D 1 and an F nothing. The GPA is the average of the five.

Who Substack is for

- ✓ Fits if you want to start writing for free and let readers find you in the network
- ✓ Works for writers who plan to charge, as no monthly fee applies

Who it is not for

- ✗ Watch out: Substack keeps 10% of paid-subscription revenue, on top of card fees
- ✗ Skip it if you want drip sequences or segmentation, which the pages read do not describe
- ✗ Not for you if you want a custom site or heavy design control
- ✗ Watch out: there are no paid plans, so features and limits are the same for every publication
- ✗ Skip it if you want a desktop app, as only web and phone apps are listed

Good to know

Good for

- ✓ Writers who want to start a paid newsletter with no upfront cost
- ✓ Creators publishing text, podcasts and video in one place
- ✓ Writers who value built-in discovery over full design control

Worth knowing

- ⓘ Substack keeps 10% of paid-subscription revenue, and credit card processing fees come out of the writer's share as well.
- ⓘ There are no paid plans or add-on tiers listed, so features and limits are the same for every publication.
- ⓘ It is a publishing platform rather than a marketing-automation tool; the pages read do not describe drip sequences or list segmentation workflows.

What it costs

Every plan, the free plan, ways to pay less and how prices have moved

Free

No paid plan at all

Substack is free to use.

> **Free to start with no tiers, and no cost until you charge subscribers.**
>
> From our grade for value for money

SUBSTACK

$0

Free to start with no tiers or contracts. Writers keep 90% of paid-subscription revenue, minus credit card fees.

The free plan

Free to start, with no platform fees or tiers; Substack keeps 10% of paid-subscription revenue.

Read from substack.com on Nov 12, 2026.

What it does

Its main features, where it runs, what it works with and who makes it

3

Places it runs: Web, iOS and Android

Newsletter, podcast and video publishing with paid subscriptions. Here is what it does, as its own site describes it, and what it covers: email campaigns, paid newsletters, community.

> **Paid subscriptions, newsletter, podcast and video, a reader network and subscriber chats.**
>
> From our grade for features

Paid subscriptions

Writers choose which posts are free and which are for paid subscribers only, and Substack handles the sign-up and payment side.

Newsletter, podcast and video

A publication can carry written posts, podcasts and video shows, with live video available for creators who want it.

Built-in reader network

Substack publishes a reader app and a discovery network, and says more than half of new subscribers arrive through that network.

Subscriber chats and community

The app includes discussions and chats hosted by writers, so subscribers can talk with the writer and each other.

Own your list

Substack states that writers own their content and their subscriber list, and that the platform is free to leave.

Where it runs

Web iOS Android

What it works with

Its own pages name no integrations.

Substack is made by Substack Inc.

Where it stands

Its grades against its category, and whether to keep it or make your own

57/57

Other email marketing and newsletter tools it is graded above

Substack's GPA of 3.2 is higher than 57 of the 57 other email marketing and newsletter tools we grade.

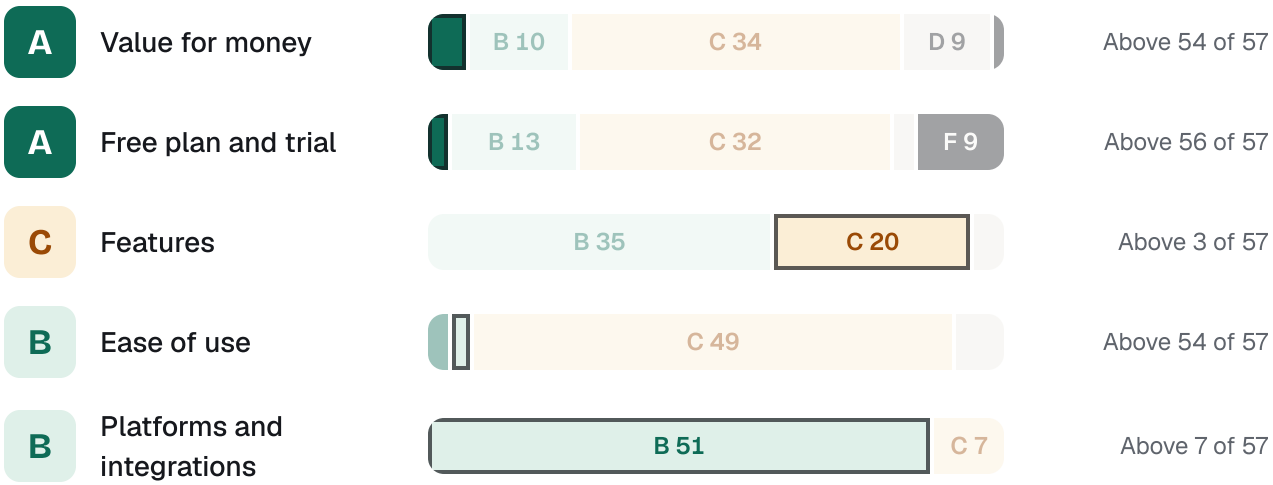
It stands best on free plan and trial (A, above 56 of 57) and worst on features (C, above 3).

Substack has no paid plan.

On features, ease of use and platforms it scores 2.7 out of 4, and no tool on the category's chart scores higher without costing more.

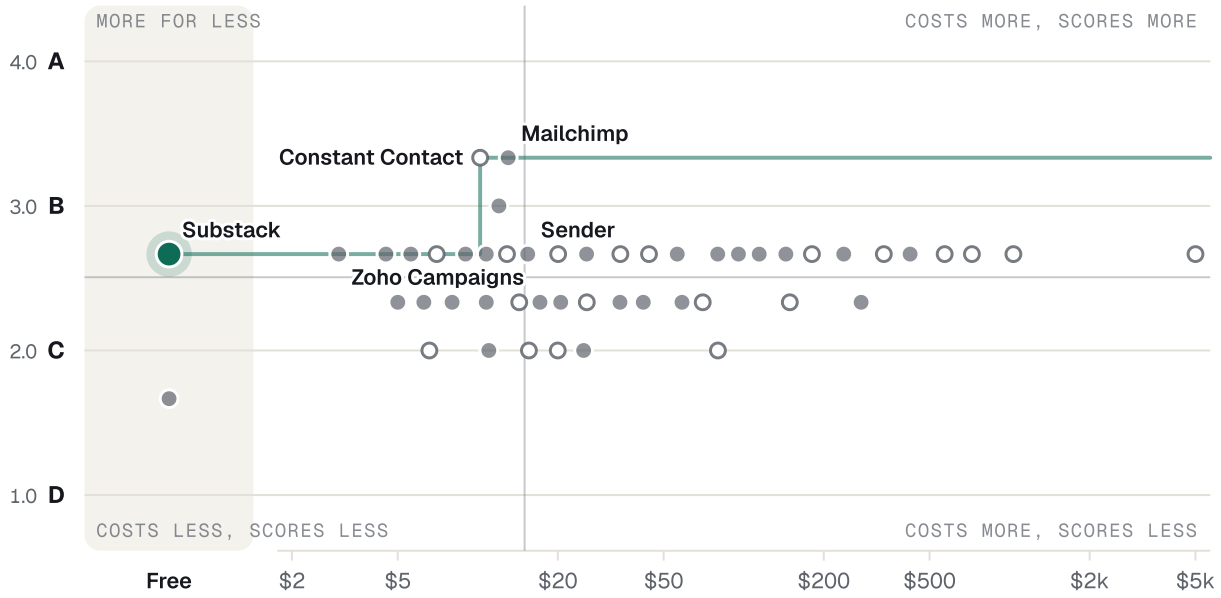
Each grade against the category

Every bar is all 58 email marketing and newsletter tools we grade, cut by the letter each got. Substack's own letter is outlined.



Price against what you get

Each dot is one of 50 email marketing and newsletter tools. Further left costs less; higher up scores better on features, ease of use and platforms. Substack is the marked dot.



What paid plans start at, a month (each step along is roughly double)

Keep it, or make your own?

Whether this is something you could build for yourself with an AI app builder, and what you would give up.

Keep it

Substack is free, so making your own would save you nothing.

And it is not the kind of software a weekend replaces. It is one of the better ones too: its GPA of 3.2 is higher than 57 of the 57 other email marketing and newsletter tools we grade.

What you could make

- Paid newsletters: an app builder makes this well.

What you could not

- Newsletters sent to thousands of people that still reach the inbox.

- A members' space with posts, chat and events that people keep coming back to.
- A real app for iOS and Android. Something home-made would be a web page.

What this rests on. Substack's listing: what it does, where it runs, what it plugs into and what it costs. It is a judgement about the kind of software this is. We have not built a replacement for it, and making your own means looking after it too. How we decide, and every tool's verdict.

The alternatives

The tools it is most often weighed against, side by side



beehiiv, Ghost, Kit, Buttondown and MailerLite

The 5 tools Substack is most often weighed against, with where each one differs from it.

2.4 GPA

beehiiv

Free plan · from $49/mo

Newsletter platform with paid subscriptions, ads, website and podcast.

- Only Substack lists iOS and Android apps.
- Substack also covers community.
- beehiiv also covers marketing automation and forms.

Substack and beehiiv compared in full

2.2 GPA

Ghost

Free trial · from $15/mo

Open source publishing with newsletters and paid memberships.

- Substack has a free plan. Ghost does not, though it has a free trial.
- Only Substack lists iOS and Android apps.
- Ghost is open source, according to its own site.

Substack and Ghost compared in full



2.6 GPA

Kit

Free plan · from $33/mo

Email marketing and paid newsletters for creators.

- Only Substack lists iOS and Android apps.
- Substack also covers community.
- Kit also covers marketing automation and forms.

Substack and Kit compared in full



2.4 GPA

Buttondown

Free plan · from $9/mo

Newsletter software priced by active subscribers, with add-ons.

- Only Substack lists iOS and Android apps.
- Substack also covers community.
- Buttondown also covers marketing automation.

Substack and Buttondown compared in full



2.6 GPA

MailerLite

Free plan · from $12/mo

Email newsletters, automations, sites and paid subscriptions.

- Only Substack lists an Android app.
- Substack also covers community.
- MailerLite also covers marketing automation and forms.

Substack and MailerLite compared in full

PART 06 · QUESTIONS

Quick answers

The questions people ask about it, each answered in a line or two

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Questions, each answered in a line or two

The short version of everything above, for when you only need the answer. Each one is told in full in its part of the guide.

Is Substack free?

Yes. Substack is free to use.

How much does Substack cost?

Substack lists one plan. Substack: $0.

What platforms does Substack work on?

Substack is available on Web, iOS and Android.

Does Substack have a Windows app?

No Windows app was listed when its pages were read on Nov 12, 2026. Substack is listed for Web, iOS and Android.

Does Substack have a macOS app?

No macOS app was listed when its pages were read on Nov 12, 2026. Substack is listed for Web, iOS and Android.

Is Substack open source?

Substack is not described as open source on its own site, as read on Nov 12, 2026.

Who makes Substack?

Substack is made by Substack Inc.

What are the alternatives to Substack?

The closest alternatives to Substack in our directory are beehiiv, Ghost, Kit, Buttondown and MailerLite.

How does Substack compare with other email marketing and newsletter tools?

Substack's GPA of 3.2 is higher than 57 of the 57 other email marketing and newsletter tools we grade.

Is Substack good value for money?

ToolGPA grades Substack A for value for money. Substack has no paid plan.

Could I make my own version of Substack?

Substack is free, so making your own would save you nothing. And it is not the kind of software a weekend replaces.

Where this guide comes from

The prices, plans, platforms and features were read from Substack's own pages on Nov 12, 2026, and the grades were given on Nov 12, 2026. Graded from this listing, whose facts were read from Substack's own pages on 12 November 2026. Not based on using the product, and shorter than our full reviews.

Every tool we list gets five grades, A to F, each with its reason, and a GPA that averages them. How each is decided is at toolgpa.com/grades. This guide is ToolGPA's own work; it is not made, paid for or approved by Substack Inc. Prices change, so check substack.com before you buy.

substack.com
substack.com/going-paid
substack.com/about
substack.com/app

About ToolGPA

Who made this guide, what else is on the site, and how to cite it

5,038
Tools graded, in 95 categories

ToolGPA grades software the way a school report grades a pupil: five subjects, a letter for each with the reason written beside it, and a GPA that averages them. Prices, plans and platforms are read from each maker's own pages and dated, so you always know how fresh a figure is.

Every grade, review and ranking on ToolGPA is our own judgement. No company can pay for a grade or change one. Every tool on the site has a guide like this one, free to download and pass on. It all lives at toolgpa.com.

5,038
tools graded

95
categories

739
price changes on record

579
apps priced in 12 countries

What else is on toolgpa.com

Substack, kept up to date

Everything in this guide, with prices and grades as they are today

toolgpa.com/tools/substack

How grades are given

The rules behind every letter and every GPA

toolgpa.com/grades

Value charts

What each tool costs against what it scores, for every category

toolgpa.com/charts

Compare

Any two tools side by side, plan by plan

toolgpa.com/compare

Price changes

Every price rise and cut on record, each with its source

toolgpa.com/price-changes

Prices by country

What apps cost on the App Store in 12 countries

toolgpa.com/prices-by-country

Pay less

Every public discount: yearly billing, students, nonprofits

toolgpa.com/save

Keep or make

Which tools are worth paying for, and which you could build yourself

toolgpa.com/keep-or-make

Scan for the live page

Prices and grades as they are today

Quoting this guide?

Please name ToolGPA and link to the live page, so readers can check the figures for themselves:

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ToolGPA, "Substack: The Insider's Guide",
checked Nov 12, 2026.
https://toolgpa.com/tools/substack
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Know someone choosing between email marketing and newsletter tools?

Send them this guide:
toolgpa.com/tools/substack/guide

ToolGPA elsewhere: youtube.com/@toolgpa

See our other guides

The best-graded email marketing and newsletter tools after Substack, each with an Insider's Guide of its own.

Email Marketing & Newsletters Insider's Guide

Every one of the 58 email marketing and newsletter tools we grade, compared

SendFox Insider's Guide

Email newsletters and list building for creators on a budget

3.0 GPA

Zoho Campaigns Insider's Guide

Email, SMS and WhatsApp campaigns that tie into Zoho's apps

3.0 GPA

EmailOctopus Insider's Guide

Simple, low-cost email marketing with a free plan for 2,500

2.8 GPA

ToolGPA

Choosing software? Every tool graded, every price dated.

Compare tools at toolgpa.com ›

Everything in this guide is ToolGPA's own summary of what Substack's pages, its app-store listings and public reviews said on the dates shown. Grades are our judgement under the rules at toolgpa.com/grades. Every grade, review and ranking on ToolGPA is our own judgement. No company can pay for a grade or change one. Substack is a trademark of its owner, and this guide is not made, paid for or approved by Substack Inc. Prices and plans change: check substack.com before you buy.