Calm's reviewers credit it with *sleep* and calm; its low stars are mainly about paying

> 16% of Calm's newest reviews say it helps them sleep and 15% that it helps them feel calmer; Balance's 14% and 20%, of a small read. Paying is the main subject of Calm's low stars. Headspace's read is far angrier (71% low stars to Calm's 34%), so its paywall share of all reviews is bigger (16% to 11%), yet of low stars Calm's is bigger (26% to 18%). The opening: Headspace's AI (19%).

Calm
against Headspace, Insight Timer, Balance

961 reviews read
App Store, Google Play
dated 2 Sep 2026 to 1 Nov 2026

633 of the 961 in a theme
sorted by a model, 17 corrected by hand, counted exactly

November 2, 2026
public reviews only; no reviewer names

THE SHORT VERSION

Calm's reviewers praise sleep and calm; paying is its problem; AI and layout are Headspace's

16%

of Calm's newest reviews say it helps them fall asleep

Balance 14%, Insight Timer 6%, Headspace 2%

26%

of Calm's one- and two-star reviews fault the paywall

Headspace 18%, of a far angrier read

19%

of Headspace's reviews push back on its AI features

Calm: 0%

44%

of Calm's Google Play reviews read give one or two stars

App Store: 24%

01 **Sleep and calm are Calm's praise**

64 of its 397 reviews say it helps them sleep, 49 of them on the App Store. Balance is close at 14% of 88; Insight Timer's 6%.

02 **Low stars are about paying**

The paywall holds 35 of its 134 one- and two-star reviews, billing, access or support trouble 34, price 20, unexpected charges 12. Headspace's paywall holds 18% of its low stars, against Calm's 26%.

03 **Headspace's reviewers fight the app**

24 of its 120 reviews fight its layout and 23 its AI features. Insight Timer's push back on forced questions and streak prompts (11%).

Counts are of the 961 reviews we read (App Store, Google Play), not of everyone who uses it. A share is of each app's own reviews read. Themes are a model's sorting; the counts of that sorting are exact.

WHAT WE READ

The newest 200 reviews per app and store, back two months at most

Calm's App Store read is the shortest, from 6 Oct 2026; every other read starts in September. Balance's 88 reviews are a small read: a sign, not a firm share. Each store's own star rating covers every rating, not just these.

APP	APP STORE	GOOGLE PLAY	1-2★ READ
Calm YOU	**4.77★** · 2M ratings read 199: 6 Oct 2026 to 1 Nov 2026; 24% 1-2★	**4.48★** · 617K ratings read 198: 20 Sep 2026 to 1 Nov 2026; 44% 1-2★	34% (134 of 397)
Headspace RIVAL the other big paid meditation and sleep app on both stores	**4.84★** · 974K ratings read 49: 3 Sep 2026 to 31 Oct 2026; 69% 1-2★	**4.25★** · 340K ratings read 71: 2 Sep 2026 to 30 Oct 2026; 72% 1-2★	71% (85 of 120)
Insight Timer RIVAL a meditation app with a large free library, on both stores	**4.9★** · 449K ratings read 157: 2 Sep 2026 to 1 Nov 2026; 26% 1-2★	**4.7★** · 264K ratings read 199: 21 Sep 2026 to 1 Nov 2026; 21% 1-2★	23% (82 of 356)
Balance RIVAL a meditation and sleep app on both stores	**4.88★** · 121K ratings read 48: 2 Sep 2026 to 1 Nov 2026; 2% 1-2★	**4.63★** · 49K ratings read 40: 3 Sep 2026 to 28 Oct 2026; 18% 1-2★	9% (8 of 88)

Both stores list newest first: we read the newest 200 per store, then only the last 60 days (dates per store). The star rating and count are each store's own, over every rating; the 1-2★ share is of what we read, and the newest reviews can run angrier than an all-time rating.

SIDE BY SIDE

Sleep is Calm's and Balance's (16% and 14%); layout and AI are Headspace's complaints

Each cell is the share of that app's reviews read that say the theme. Green is praise, red a complaint, grey a request.

SHARE OF EACH APP'S REVIEWS READ THAT SAY IT · REVIEWS IN BRACKETS

THEMES SORTED BY A MODEL (GEMINI) · COUNTS EXACT

WHAT REVIEWERS SAY	CALM	HEADSPACE	INSIGHT TIMER	BALANCE
PRAISE helps me feel calmer	15% (59)	2% (2)	11% (39)	20% (18)
PRAISE huge variety of meditations and voices	5% (18)	2% (2)	22% (79)	8% (7)
PRAISE helps me fall asleep at night	16% (64)	2% (3)	6% (20)	14% (12)
COMPLAINT too much is locked behind the paywall	11% (44)	16% (19)	2% (8)	2% (2)
COMPLAINT billing, access or cancelling trouble, often with no answer	9% (35)	9% (11)	3% (11)	2% (2)
COMPLAINT a cluttered layout makes things hard to find	2% (9)	20% (24)	7% (24)	0% (0)
COMPLAINT forced questions and streak prompts	1% (3)	1% (1)	11% (40)	0% (0)
COMPLAINT the subscription costs too much	6% (24)	8% (9)	0% (1)	0% (0)
COMPLAINT unwanted AI coaches and voices	0% (0)	19% (23)	1% (4)	0% (0)

Other themes: the app crashes, freezes or won't open (50); great for beginners learning meditation (26); charged when I didn't expect it (23); lots of high quality free content (20); cannot log in or reset password (10); audio stops playing or skips randomly (9); and 7 more. 633 of the 961 reviews are in a theme; of the 328 that are not, 126 are a few words of four- or five-star praise and 50 give one or two stars. Every review is listed in the HTML version.

A model (Gemini) named one set of themes for every app and marked which each review says (up to three); we count its sorting. Base per app: Calm 397 reviews; Headspace 120 reviews; Insight Timer 356 reviews; Balance 88 reviews.

WHAT CALM'S REVIEWERS COMPLAIN ABOUT

Calm's low stars are about the *paywall*, billing or access trouble, and the price

Those three, with each rival's share; Balance's are small numbers. Also: 13 about unexpected charges, and 4 about updates that took something away, the latest on 1 Nov 2026.

too much is locked behind the paywall

share of reviews, then of low stars: Calm 11%, 26% · Headspace 16%, 18% · Insight Timer 2%, 7% · Balance 2%, 12%

Disappointed

“You can’t even try anything for free to see if you want to keep the app or not.”

1★ · Calm · App Store · version 7.4 · Oct 2026

“you have to pay for everything. free account access gives you 2/3 minute clips.”

1★ · Calm · Google Play · Oct 2026

billing, access or cancelling trouble, often with no answer

share of reviews, then of low stars: Calm 9%, 25% · Headspace 9%, 13% · Insight Timer 3%, 12% · Balance 2%, 25%

Frustrated

“I am so frustrated. I absolutely love the app. I paid for the year and I can’t login in anymore. I reached out to customer service and no reply email for 2.5 weeks. So sad there is no real support for this app.”

1★ · Calm · App Store · version 7.3 · Oct 2026

Calm does not recognize a subscription purchased through Apple

“Calm won’t recognize my Apple subscription and is doing absolutely nothing about it.”

1★ · Calm · App Store · version 7.3 · Oct 2026

the subscription costs too much

share of reviews, then of low stars: Calm 6%, 15% · Headspace 8%, 6% · Insight Timer 0%, 1% · Balance 0%, 0%

“$80 yearly for sounds I can find on the internet for free. Not going to happen.”

1★ · Calm · Google Play · version 6.86 · Sep 2026

“This is unbelievably expensive.”

1★ · Calm · Google Play · version 5.11 · Oct 2026

The themes here hold 79 of Calm's 134 one- and two-star reviews read; 27 are in no theme. Quoted as written, whole, without reviewer names; each quote is an example, the share beside the theme the evidence.

WHAT THE RIVALS' REVIEWERS SAY

Headspace's reviewers fight its layout and its AI; Insight Timer's its questions

Complaints that take a big share of a rival's reviews and a small share of Calm's. Few reviews name a rival: 2 Calm reviews name Headspace, both preferring it, so don't overclaim.

a cluttered layout makes things hard to find

share of reviews, then of low stars: Calm 2%, 3% · Headspace 20%, 22% · Insight Timer 7%, 16% · Balance 0%, 0%

Terrible navigation

“UI leaves be more anxious than before I opened the app”

1★ · Headspace · App Store · version 8.32.1 · Sep 2026

Good app, too compilciated not intuitive

“Very hard to find specific meditations. Can’t go back to find older meditations. Get stuck in the multiple days”

2★ · Headspace · App Store · version 8.32.1 · Sep 2026

unwanted AI coaches and voices

share of reviews, then of low stars: Calm 0%, 0% · Headspace 19%, 21% · Insight Timer 1%, 4% · Balance 0%, 0%

AI meditation coach? Nope!

“Mindfulness and AI are not compatible”

1★ · Headspace · App Store · version 8.38.1 · Oct 2026

Concerns

“This app has been a good thing, but I believe ai chatbots have no place in a service designed for meditation and mindfulness.”

3★ · Headspace · App Store · version 8.31.1 · Sep 2026

forced questions and streak prompts

share of reviews, then of low stars: Calm 1%, 2% · Headspace 1%, 1% · Insight Timer 11%, 28% · Balance 0%, 0%

“Way too complicated. Always make things harder than it should be. A million questions is ridiculous.”

1★ · Insight Timer · Google Play · version 20.35.0 · Sep 2026

Wastes your time with forced engagement

“Used to use this app daily. Then they started forcing engagement with questions and emotion check ins. These are obnoxious and time wasting. Only get this app if you want to lose time daily to a wellness corporation.”

1★ · Insight Timer · App Store · version 20.39.0 · Oct 2026

Quoted as written, whole, without reviewer names. Each quote is one review: an example of its theme; the shares beside the theme are the evidence.

WHAT REVIEWERS PRAISE

Calm is praised about equally for *sleep* and calm; Insight Timer for its variety; Balance for calm

What each app's reviewers praise, with every app's share beside the theme.

helps me fall asleep at night

Calm 16% · Headspace 2% · Insight Timer 6% · Balance 14%

"I am so happy I found Calm...my sleep troubles are over!"

5★ · Calm · Google Play · version 7.3 · Oct 2026

"thes sleep stories really help me fall asleep."

5★ · Calm · Google Play · version 7.2.1 · Oct 2026

helps me feel calmer

Calm 15% · Headspace 2% · Insight Timer 11% · Balance 20%

"I love this app! It has helped me so much to be a calmer and more centered individual. Highly recommend!"

5★ · Balance · Google Play · version 1.212.0 · Oct 2026

Lifesaver

"Sleep is way up and anxiety is now manageable"

5★ · Calm · App Store · version 7.4 · Oct 2026

huge variety of meditations and voices

Calm 5% · Headspace 2% · Insight Timer 22% · Balance 8%

Great meditations

"I'm really enjoying using this app everyday. They have a great variety of stuff and a ton of challenges to keep you motivated . I highly recommend"

5★ · Insight Timer · App Store · version 20.40.0 · Oct 2026

Fully meditated

"This app helps me to sleep deeply. I love all the different styles of meditation. There is something for everyone"

5★ · Insight Timer · App Store · version 20.38.0 · Oct 2026

Quoted as written, whole, without reviewer names. Each quote is one review: an example of its theme; the shares beside the theme are the evidence.

THEIR WORDS, AND THREE MOVES

Lead with *sleep stories* on the App Store, say what free gives on Play, and test simple against Headspace

The phrases reviewers repeat (each chip says how many are Calm's), and three lines taken from the reviews.

PHRASES 4+ REVIEWS WROTE · REVIEWS, CALM'S OF THEM

- guided meditations 29 Calm 8
- sleep stories 29 Calm 27
- fall asleep 21 Calm 13
- free trial 16 Calm 6
- every night 13 Calm 7
- customer service 12 Calm 10

Counted, not chosen by a model: runs of 2 to 4 words that 4 or more of the reviews we read wrote, names left out; 6 of the 40 counted.

STORE LISTING · HELPS ME FALL ASLEEP AT NIGHT

Lead the listing with sleep

START FROM THEIR WORDS

“The sleep stories really help me fall asleep”

Calm's 16% against Insight Timer's 6%. Balance is close, so name the sleep stories, a phrase from Calm's own reviews.

From reviews: #316 (Calm), #81 (Calm), #1 (Calm)

GOOGLE PLAY LISTING'S FIRST LINES · TOO MUCH IS LOCKED BEHIND THE PAYWALL

State what free gives, and the trial's terms

START FROM THEIR WORDS

“I'm grateful for the free content on here”

One review says this; 44 say too little is free, 29 on Play. Say which sessions are free and how many listens, checked against the app, and that the seven-day trial asks for a card.

From reviews: #373 (Calm), #41 (Calm)

A SMALL AD TEST · A CLUTTERED LAYOUT MAKES THINGS HARD TO FIND

Test simple against Headspace

START FROM THEIR WORDS

“Great app simple to use”

20% of Headspace's reviews fight its layout; Calm's 2% (9). Few Calm reviews say simple, and some fault its recent changes, so test before scaling.

From reviews: #367 (Calm), #371 (Calm), #429 (Headspace)

Each line takes a run of 3 or more words from the first review named; the others are on the same subject (#n = its number in the HTML list). Built on reviewers' words, with a few of our own where a reply needs them: match it to Calm's own voice before using it.

HOW WE READ IT

What we read, how it was sorted, and what it cannot tell you

What was asked. “Calm”: we read it as Calm (meditation and sleep app). No rivals were named, so we picked 3: Headspace (the other big paid meditation and sleep app on both stores); Insight Timer (a meditation app with a large free library, on both stores); Balance (a meditation and sleep app on both stores).

The reviews. The newest 200 reviews per app on each store, then only those from the last 60 days (635 older ones left out): the US App Store, in whatever language each reviewer wrote, and Google Play set to US English (a few are in other languages). Reviewer names and the developer's replies are not kept.

Dates. Calm on App Store 6 Oct 2026 to 1 Nov 2026; Calm on Google Play 20 Sep 2026 to 1 Nov 2026; Headspace on App Store 3 Sep 2026 to 31 Oct 2026; Headspace on Google Play 2 Sep 2026 to 30 Oct 2026; Insight Timer on App Store 2 Sep 2026 to 1 Nov 2026; Insight Timer on Google Play 21 Sep 2026 to 1 Nov 2026; Balance on App Store 2 Sep 2026 to 1 Nov 2026; Balance on Google Play 3 Sep 2026 to 28 Oct 2026; read November 2, 2026.

The themes. A model (Gemini) named one set of themes from a sample of the reviews, added themes for reviews it left out, then read each of the 961 reviews and marked the themes it says, up to three; a second pass reread each against its theme and kept only those that say it. 633 of the 961 reviews are in a theme (17 corrected by hand, each with its reason in the HTML list). The counts are exact tallies of that sorting; the sorting is a reading, not a measurement.

The quotes. Every quote is one review, stored as written and shown whole. No reviewer names. Reviews that name an account, carry a link, or name or describe a private person are counted but never quoted (11 left out for naming a person). 4 reviews with only emoji in the body left out.

What it cannot tell you. Store reviews come from people who chose to write one, mostly the delighted and the annoyed; a newest-first read is what reviewers say now, not over the app's life. A share is of the reviews we read, not of users.

The evidence. The HTML version of this report lists every review we read, by theme, with a link: to the review on Google Play, to the app's reviews page on the App Store.