

Zotero

Imagine typing your paper and with just two clicks, magically adding your in-text citations. When you are done with your paper, a single click will insert your bibliography. Make a change to your paper by adding or removing a source? Not a problem! Use the wrong citation style? You can easily change all your citations to a new style.

It's not a dream, it's Zotero. Zotero is a nonprofit, free, easy-to-use tool to help you collect, organize, and cite research.

How do you get started with Zotero?

To get started with Zotero, go to zotero.org/download. On this page, you will install two items.

First, you will install the software for your computer. Zotero is available for Microsoft Windows, macOS, and Linux.

Next, install the Zotero Connector. This plugin sits inside your web-browser and allows you to automatically import sources into Zotero. The "connector" plugin will also allow you to cite sources in Google Docs.

Zotero Connectors are available for Firefox, Chrome, and Safari.

Once you have those two items installed, it's time to start using Zotero.

Getting to know Zotero

When you open your Zotero Library, you will see three sections. From left to right, these sections offer increasingly detailed looks at your library.

The far left column holds your folders, or as Zotero calls them, your "collections". Your new Zotero Library will have a few collections for you to get started with, but you can see from mine that you can have unlimited collections, and even nest them within each other. To create a collection, just click the button that looks like a folder and a green plus.

Next, if you click on a collection, the middle section of the Zotero library will become populated with a list of sources stored in that collection.

Notice that there are small arrows along the left-hand side of the list. If you click an arrow, you can see any attachments to the item. For books and films, the attachment will usually be a hyperlink to the catalog or website where you found it. For websites, the attachment will usually be a screenshot of the website on the day that you added it to Zotero; this is useful since websites often change and update their content.

Finally, for articles the attachment is usually the full-text of the article. So you don't have to worry about losing the full-text of the article; it is always safe and sound in Zotero.

If you click on one of the sources, the far right section will become populated with the detailed citation information for that source. You can click on any of the fields to modify the information if Zotero happens to have something entered wrong. You can also change the item's type if needed. In this section of Zotero you can also type in notes for yourself. These notes are searchable, so you can make notes like "use this in my introduction" to help plan your paper.

Here's a tip: make sure that the title of your source is in sentence case, with only the first letter and proper nouns capitalized. Some citation styles (such as MLA) want every word in the title capitalized, while others (like APA) don't. When Zotero creates citations, it can change lower-case letters to uppercase as needed by your citation style, but it can't the reverse: it can't make uppercase into lowercase. So, to save yourself time correcting the capitalization later, always put your source titles into sentence case.

How do you get sources into Zotero?

Remember that "Zotero Connector" that you installed in Firefox, Chrome, or Safari? That is what we are going to use to get sources into Zotero.

Please note that the Connect button will appear slightly differently in the different web browsers.

If we are looking at this book on Amazon.com, the Zotero button has changed to a small book since it knows that we are looking at a book. If we look at a movie, it changes to a film button. By clicking the button, we can add the source to Zotero (notice that you can choose which collection to put it in as well). See, now that movie is listed in my Zotero library!

This also works when looking at books and films in the library catalog or on most other sites.

When you are looking at an article, the Zotero button changes to a little piece of paper. When you click the button to add the article to Zotero, Zotero will also try to download the full-text of the article and

attach it to the citation information. If by chance zotero can't download the full-text automatically, you can easily download the .pdf yourself and attach it to the citation information by clicking the paper-clip button in Zotero.

If you are looking at a webpage that lists multiple articles, the Zotero button becomes a folder. You can click on this folder to import multiple sources at one time.

How do you cite sources with Zotero?

As we have already demonstrated, you can easily add sources in Microsoft Word by using the Zotero buttons that appear in the top ribbon. Just click "add/edit citation," search, select your sources, and hit "enter" on your keyboard.

Don't forget to include the page number in your in-text citation if needed. To do this, just click on your source after searching and then type in the page number before pressing "enter."

Here's a useful tip: if you can't remember what the title or author of your source is, instead of searching click on the "z" on the search box and then "classic view." From here, you can browse your Zotero collections.

When you are done with your paper, a single click will insert your bibliography.

If you make a change to your paper by adding or removing a source, just refresh your bibliography to update it. Use the wrong citation style? You can easily change all your citations to a new style.

In addition to Microsoft Word, you can also use Zotero to cite sources in Google Docs.

Just look for "Zotero" in your Google Docs menu; if it doesn't appear, you may have to uninstall and reinstall the web browser "connector" plugin to get the latest version.

The first time that you use Zotero in Google docs, you will be prompted to authenticate the plugin with your Google account. After that, the plugin works just the same as in Microsoft Word.

Of course, don't forget to pull out a copy of the citation manual and double-check the citations to make sure that they are 100% perfect! Sometimes even the best computer programs can make a mistake.

Advanced

Here are three more advanced tips & tricks to get the most out of Zotero.

First, consider creating a Zotero account, which will allow you to synchronize your Zotero library between devices and to access your library from the Zotero website. In Zotero, just go to “edit> Preferences > Sync” to create an account and change settings. Be aware, however, that you only get 300 MB free cloud storage.

If you want to use a cloud-based word processing software, such as Google Docs, you can still use Zotero to help create your in text citations and bibliography. Simply right-click on a source or on a collection to copy the citations, which you can then paste into your Google Doc.

Finally, what if you have a pile of .pdfs on your computer from research you have already completed? Simply drag & drop the .pdf into the middle section of Zotero, select one or more .pdfs, right click, and chose “Retrieve Metadata for PDFs.” Zotero will scan the documents to find any identifying information that it can use to retrieve the article’s full citation information.

More help

For more tips and tricks for using Zotero, visit Randall Library’s Zotero guide at lib.uncw.edu/zotero .

From this guide you can also easily make an appointment with a librarian to get one-on-one help with all your Zotero questions.