

Zotero or Mendeley: Which One Is Best?

Introduction

Citation management systems take the drudgery out of citations. They also organize your research in one central place.

Both Zotero and Mendeley are free for most of their features.

They differ in:

- the way sources are added
- the amount of free storage they provide
- their ability to generate a free-standing bibliography

Next we'll compare their various features. Then you can pick the tool that best suits your needs.

Getting Started

For Zotero, go to zotero.org, create a free account, and download the Zotero desktop.

For Mendeley, go to mendeley.com, create a free account, and download the Mendeley Reference Manager.

The Cloud and the Apps

You can work with your sources on the Zotero and Mendeley sites but the real power is in the desktop apps. Both desktops sync with the cloud so your sources are always backed up.

The Interface

Zotero has a three-pane structure

- sources in the middle
- folders on the left
- file details (metadata) on the right

Mendeley has a two-pane structure:

- sources on the right
- folders on the left

Clicking on a source in Mendeley will bring up its details. Make sure this metadata is accurate. If there are errors in it, they will appear in your reference list.

Adding Sources

Zotero

If you want to add books, articles, and webpages to Zotero, first add the extension to your browser. It is found in the tools menu in Zotero. The extension will sit in the top right corner of your browser.

You can also add PDFs from your computer by clicking on "store copy of file." Note: You get 60 MB of free storage for this option. If you store many files, you will have to pay a small annual fee.

Mendeley

Add PDFs from your computer. The data needed for citing will be automatically extracted. You have 2 GB of free storage for this option. You must manually add non-PDF sources such as books.

If you want to add webpages to Mendeley, first add the extension to your browser. It is found in the tools menu in Mendeley. The extensions will appear in the top right corner of your browser. It works with webpages but not with Laurier's books and articles.

Reading/Annotating PDF Files

Zotero

Double click on an article to read, highlight, and add post-it notes to it.

Mendeley

Click on "read" to read, highlight, and add post-it notes to an article.

Citing and Creating Reference Lists

Zotero

Click on "add ins" in the Zotero tools menu to install the Word plug-in. A Zotero tab will now appear in Word.

Add citations as you write. At the end of your paper, click on "add/edit bibliography" and it will magically appear.

Mendeley

Install the Word plug-in from the tools menu in Mendeley. If you have a Mac computer, you need the latest iOS. You also need Word 2016 or Word 365

The options for citing are located in “Mendeley Cite” under the “References” tab in Word. Click on "citation settings" to choose your citation style. Search for your citations to add as you write. At the end, click on the 3 dots to add your bibliography. Magic! Remember to proofread.

Reference Lists

Unlike Mendeley, Zotero can create a formatted reference list from one of your Zotero folders. To do this, highlight the items, right click, and choose "create bibliography from items."

Which One Is Best?

It's a matter of personal preference but consider the following differences:

Types of sources: Unlike Mendeley, Zotero can automatically import books and a variety of sources.

Storage cost: Mendeley provides 2GB for free while Zotero gives you 60MB.

Collaboration: Zotero allows unlimited collaboration of files. Mendeley is more restrictive unless you make your Mendeley group public.

Generating a Reference List: Only Zotero can generate a free-standing reference list from one of your folders.

If you have any questions just email us at libcitations@wlu.ca