Zotero or Mendeley: Which One Is Best?

You want a good citation tool and wonder which one to choose. Both Mendeley and Zotero are free for the majority of features, and both include Word plug-ins that allow you automate citations. In addition, both are cloud-based, an essential feature if you work on more than one device.

First, I will give you a brief run-through of what each tool can do and then we'll look at the advantages of each. Let's start with Zotero. If you go to the Zotero site, you can create a password and download the Zotero desktop. When you add articles, websites, and other material, they appear in the middle pane of the desktop application. Each time you add an item, the author, title and other citation details are automatically extracted. You can organize your work by creating folders.

How do you add items to Zotero? First, you need to install the "browser connection." It will then live at the top of your browser. When you find an article, book, or website, simply click on the Zotero icon, and your citation data will be automatically added to your Zotero Desktop. If your item is an article and the PDF is available on the page, Zotero can import it. You can view it by clicking on the arrow beside the title.

To create a bibliography, highlight the relevant items, right click, and choose "create a bibliography." Another way of creating a bibliography is from within Word itself. When you open up a Word document, you will see Zotero at the top on your menu bar. As you type, you can automatically add your citations. To add the list of references, simply place the cursor in the right spot, . . . All references listed in your in-text citations will appear automatically.

Let's turn now to Mendeley. As with Zotero, you can create a free account and download the software. Its 3-pane structure works the same way too.

But it differs in the way it imports items. PDFs must first exist on your computer and be added singly or in folders.

Books and websites can be added through the browser add-on. Once you add the Word plug-in," Mendeley citation tools appear under "References."

So now that you see how they work, which tool is best for you?

Zotero has some unique advantages:

- If you use a wide range of formats, not just PDF articles, Zotero works better than Mendeley
- You can collaborate for free with as many people as you want in Zotero versus Mendeley which only allows you one group of 2 or 3 members.

Mendeley too has its own benefits:

- You can highlight the PDF copies of articles and add notes to them right within the software, making it a one-stop research tool.
- Unlike Zotero, Mendeley has phone and tablet apps. These free apps sync seamlessly so you can read and mark up articles anywhere on the go
- And Mendeley gives users 2 GB of free storage. That is a lot more room than Zotero's 300 MB.

So as you can see, the tool that works best depends on what is important to you.

For more information, check out our related videos on citation tools at library.wlu.ca/help/tutorials.

If you have any questions please ask us at library.wlu.ca/askus.