Zotero - The Basics

What is Zotero and what does it do?

Before learning what Zotero does, it is important to know what it is. Zotero is an extension for the Firefox web-browser. It runs in its own pane within Firefox, separately from web pages. Zotero is, at the most basic level, a citation manager. It is designed to store, manage, and cite bibliographic references, such as books and articles. In Zotero, each of these references constitutes an item.

How do I install it?

Zotero is installed by visiting zotero.org, clicking the download button on the page, and selecting Zotero 4.0 for Firefox.

How do I open Zotero?

For Zotero for Firefox, click the Zotero icon in the Firefox toolbar to open your Zotero library. This brings up a pane with all of your references, collections, and notes. You can close the Zotero for Firefox pane by clicking on the X icon in the upper right of the Zotero window or by clicking on the toolbar icon again. The Zotero window does not have to be open for you to do “quick saves” of material you want to add to your research collection.

What kind of items are there?

Every item contains different information, depending on what type it is. Items include books, articles, and documents to web pages, artwork, films, sound recordings, bills, cases, and statutes, among many others.

What can I do with items?

Items appear in the center column. The information for an item is in the right column. This includes title, creator, publisher, date and any other data needed to cite the item.

Organize Collections

The left column includes My Library, which contains all items. Clicking the button above the left column creates a new collection, a folder into which items relating to a specific project or topic can be placed. Think of collections like playlists in a music player: items in collections are aliases (or “links”) to a single copy of the item in your library.
Capturing Items

If a capture icon appears in the address bar in Firefox, Zotero can automatically create an item of the appropriate type and populate the bibliographical fields needed for a citation. If a full-text PDF is available, it will usually be automatically attached to the item. Importing from some websites will also attach useful links (e.g. to the PubMed entry) or Supplemental Data files.

Single or Multiple Captures

If the capture icon is a book, article, image or other single item, clicking on it will add the item to the current collection in Zotero. If the capture icon is a folder, the web page contains multiple items. Clicking it will open a dialog box from which items can be selected and saved to Zotero.

Saving a Web Page

Clicking the Create New Item from Current Page button in the Zotero toolbar creates a Web Page item and saves the page as an attached snapshot. This saves the page itself as an item with very limited bibliographical information. If you have a choice, we recommend that you always use the address bar icon instead.

Add Item by Identifier

Zotero can add items automatically using ISBN number, Digital Object Identifier (DOI), or PubMed ID. This is done by clicking the Add Item by Identifier button in the Zotero toolbar, typing in the ID number and clicking OK. You can even paste or enter (press Shift+Enter for a larger box) a list of such identifiers at once.

Manually Adding Items

Items can be added manually by clicking the New Item button in the Zotero toolbar, then selecting the appropriate item type. Bibliographical information can then be added manually in the right column. Apart from the versatility this provides, it is important for adding primary documents.

Citing Items

Zotero uses Citation Style Language (CSL) to properly format citations in many different bibliographic styles. Zotero supports all the major styles (Chicago, MLA, APA, Vancouver, etc.) as well as a great many journal-specific styles.
Word Processor Integration

Zotero's Word and OpenOffice plugins allow users to insert citations directly from their word processing software. This makes citing multiple pages, sources, or otherwise customizing citations a breeze. In-text citations, footnotes and endnotes are all supported.

Automatic Bibliographies

Using the word processor plugins makes it possible to switch citation styles for the entire document at once or automatically generate a bibliography from the items cited.

Manual Bibliographies

Zotero can insert citations and bibliographies into any text field or program. Simply drag-and-drop items, use Quick Copy to send citations to the clipboard, or export them directly to a file.

Syncing

Use Zotero at multiple computers with syncing. Library items are synced through the Zotero servers (unlimited storage), while attachment syncing can use the Zotero servers or your own WebDAV service to sync files such as PDFs, images or audio/video.