

References Management
Computer Tools for Economists
CEU, Fall 2011

Andrea Canidio

May 31, 2012

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Easy case:

this paper is relevant to something that you are already writing.

- since your research idea is already set, you just have to decide whether this paper should be cited, and where.
- Save the paper in the 'literature' folder of your research project's folder. Explain briefly in your introduction why this paper is relevant.

Problem

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Difficult case:

this paper is relevant to some ideas you had last week while taking a shower.

- Is this paper really relevant?
- Is this paper something you will need again?
- Is this paper something that you should cite?

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-
- hard to say, it depends on how your project evolves.

Old-school solution



Can we do better using some computer tools?

What we need:

- Digital storage (piles of papers are so 1900!)

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- Easy to share with other people.
- Can export in Bibtex
 - in the end of the day, you want to be able to build a bibliography out of the papers that you stored.

The solution

To be honest, I haven't found the perfect tool yet. I will discuss different things I use (typically when working with different people), their pros and their cons.

- Email (to yourself and to your coauthors)
- 'Literature' folder in dropbox (or in Subversion)
- tex file (or better, a bibtex file)
- Google reader
- Zotero

Email (to yourself and to your coauthors)

Cons:

- No single place for your files
- No precise bibliographical reference (only the PDF or a link)
- Not easy to retrieve at a later date

Pro:

- Especially when working with other people, it forces you to read the paper carefully, make a meaningful summary of the most relevant points, and explain why it is relevant to the research project.

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Not that bad

I do use this system sometimes with some coauthors.

'Literature' folder in Dropbox (or Subversion)

Pro:

- Easy to share / sync across computers
- All files in one location

Cons:

- No precise bibliographical reference (only the PDF or a link)
- Not so easy to add comments (you could have a have a separate file, but cumbersome)
- Too easy to save and share it: some of your coauthors (or you) may add papers to the 'literature' folder of your project just because the title sounds relevant. A lot of noise is created.

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Risky

Depending on you, on your coauthors, and on how clear is your research idea, you may end up with tons of papers saved in the 'literature' folder without knowing what is relevant and why it is relevant.

Tex file (or better, a bibtex file)

Pro:

- Your bibliography is done!
- You can add comments to each reference.
- Easy to search and share.

Cons:

- It takes time to find, enter and save the exact reference of each paper.
- You need to be committed to writing a meaningful description of each paper that you add.

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Common solution

According to a very informal, small-sample survey, this seems the most common method. To me, it doesn't seem ideal. Maybe the more you progress in your career, the more your research topics become well specified and clear, the more this method is appealing (and I'm definitely not there yet!).

Google reader. Part 1: On the virtue of reading blogs

Working papers are to published papers what blogs are to working papers.

Blogs allow you to:

- Follow the academic debate in real time (Economics has a lot to learn from other fields with this respect. For example Math is light years ahead).
- Understand what are the policy-relevant research questions.
- What is your favorite economist thinking about right now? What are the things he deems important?
- Get the news before it becomes news.
- A paper is going to make a splash if you can tweet about it.

Google reader. Part 2: keep your blog posts organized.

Problem:

Tons of blogs, tons of posts, lot's of noise.

Solutions

- Take a look at my website for a list of the best econ blogs around.
- Take a look at my Google + page for the best posts.
- Use Google reader.

Google reader. Part 3: pro and cons.

Pro:

- Keep all your blogs in one place.
- Easily save, tag, comment, share individual posts.
- Easily search saved posts for future retrieval.

Cons:

- Only for blog posts: only good for getting ideas / starting a research project.
- Highly addictive.

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Indispensable

If economics is going the way of math, blogs will become an indispensable tool for a successful academic career. Google reader helps you managing it.

Zotero. Part 1: what is Zotero?

- Firefox plug in (there is also a standalone version but I didn't try it).
- Whenever you find something interesting on the web, you can click on an icon and save in the Zotero library.
 - You can save anything: article, web pages, blog posts, ...
 - If it is an article, all the bibliographical information, the link and the pdf are saved automatically.
- You can use Zotero to organize your saved items, tag them, comment on them.
- Watch this video: http://www.zotero.org/support/quick_start_guide

Zotero. Part 2: pro and cons

Pro:

- you can easily manage article that are relevant to an ongoing project, as well as pages that you just find interesting and that may become useful later on.
- easily add comments.
- you can drag a pdf into the Zotero library, and Zotero will find the bibliographic references.
- Everything stays in sync across different computers.

Cons:

- Everything is saved 'on the cloud', but there is a limited storage capacity (if you exceed it, you must pay a subscription).
- Interface is less than ideal.

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Very useful

This is my reference management of choice.