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Reference Managers that Support Collaborative Research: Dreaming of the

Perfect Fit

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ABSTRACT. Reference or citation managers aid in capturing and managing citations and associated full text, tracking references and citing them properly in manuscripts, and creating bibliographies. With more features than ever, selecting the most appropriate reference manager can be overwhelming for users and librarians alike. One common situation in which librarians are asked for advice involves building shared libraries of references to support collaborative group work. This project developed a structured evaluation for comparison of several common citation managers and prototypical use cases to help match features with user needs, preferences, and workflows. As products evolve and needs change – is there a "perfect fit"?

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BACKGROUND

Reference managers, also known as citation managers or bibliographic management systems or software, are strategic tools used for the personal management and usage of article citation information (metadata) and full text (often via portable document format / PDFs).

Although at times it may be overwhelming and tedious, the process of managing references need not be one of the more complicated elements of the research endeavor. Formatting papers and bibliographies based on citation styles makes the reference manager a key element of the scholarly toolkit.

The sheer variety of reference managers available may make the selection of a specific tool seem overwhelming. Although a quick search of the Internet results in dozens of available choices, many libraries struggle to keep up with supporting just a handful of such constantly evolving software programs. While most reference managers facilitate acquisition, organization, and deduplication of literature search results, they differ with respect to certain features and pricing.

The current set of reference managers do more than just collect, store, and organize references and then integrate with word processing software for reference citation and bibliography creation. They support the development and management of robust personal digital libraries of information relevant to the user's field of interest. A variety of features exist to support the use of these personal libraries and changing user workflows. These include storing and annotating PDFs and citations, searching and sorting through citations and notes, organizing through folders or tagging, sharing references for teaching or project purposes, collaborating with colleagues through written documents and social networking, backing up of citations and

notes online/into the cloud, and synchronization of work among devices.^{1–3} Themes of interest reported by reference manager users in one qualitative study included: avoiding plagiarism, backing up files, changing citation styles, creation of a personal library, and augmenting social networking.⁴

The creation of a personal library has become integral to the working processes of the academic scholar. Reading and learning from scholarly papers is one core element of the research process. Yet due to the dramatic increase in the publication of these papers over the last few decades, evaluating what, when, and why to read them can be a challenging endeavor.^{5, 6} Gathering and managing bibliographic information (articles) is essential to the research process of the academic user, and therefore, to the broader process of researcher personal information management (PIM).^{7, 8}

This process becomes even more complicated as users of all types—students, staff, librarians, instructors, and researchers--increasingly collaborate asynchronously and synchronously on a variety of scholarly products and in a variety of ways in the online environment.^{9, 10} Thus, understanding and supporting the intersection of personal information management and the use of reference managers in collaborative settings becomes even more important, as librarians seek to support academic users.

SETTING

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) is classified as an R1 or researchintensive university. The Health Sciences Library (HSL) is the primary library for the UNC Schools of Dentistry, Medicine (including Allied Health professions), Nursing, Pharmacy, and Public Health. It also serves UNC Hospitals and the statewide North Carolina Area Health Education Centers (AHEC). The Health Sciences Library is one of the largest of its type in the United States, providing health information services to almost 13,000 Health Affairs faculty, staff, and students; nearly 3,000 community-based clinical preceptors; and over 7,000 staff and medical residents based at the UNC Medical Center. It employs approximately 60 full-time equivalent librarians and staff and has annual expenditures of approximately \$8 million.

CATALYST

As is the case at many research-intensive universities, librarians at UNC-CH are called upon to support a number of different reference managers and to help different types of users with many different needs and preferences choose from among them. An increasingly common situation is users who need a product that supports collaborative work. A number of challenges and opportunities resulted in librarians at UNC-CH's Health Sciences Library developing a structured way to evaluate and present information on several common reference management systems that support collaborative work. The specific catalysts for this project included receipt of a National Library of Medicine (NLM) funded *Administrative Supplement for Informationist Services* that included a specific aim related to bibliographic citation management across laboratories; a campus-wide library discussion of citation management product licenses, costs, features, and performance; negotiation of a new Scopus license that included the option of a campus-wide Mendeley Institutional Edition license with favorable terms; campus demonstration of a new citation management tool (F1000 Workspace, available for free with the university's

F1000 license) at the request of a large campus laboratory and subsequent piloting of the product; and expanding support of systematic and comprehensive literature reviews.

In 2014, the UNC-CH Health Sciences Library was awarded 1 of 11 NLM Administrative Supplements for Informationist Services in NIH-funded Research Projects to work for two years with a team of UNC-CH researchers on their NIH-funded R01 grant providing specific services in distinct need areas identified by the R01 parent grant's principal investigator. One of the specific aims of this grant was to assess current (data and) bibliographic management processes and to recommend best practices and new tools. Among the needs related to this specific aim was for a reference management tool for use in a shared environment, both across laboratories at UNC-CH and with researchers across the world.

As work on the NLM supplement got underway, campus libraries were in the process of discussing the ProQuest RefWorks license renewal, including cost, features, and performance of the new platform (then called Flow, now new RefWorks). In 2016, the UNC Chapel Hill Libraries system made the decision to discontinue their RefWorks license as of August 2017, knowing this would result in a large number of users who would need resources and assistance in selecting a new reference manager and making the switch. With the renegotiation of a campus license of Elsevier's Scopus, Elsevier also offered a competitively priced option for the Institutional Edition of Mendeley, significantly expanding the features available to users over the free version.

At about this time, one of the large research laboratories on campus requested a demonstration of a new product, F1000 Workspace, which was available for free to campus users as part of the university's F1000 license (formerly Faculty of 1000).

Aware of these developments, one of the librarians on the grant, who served as Liaison to the Department of Allied Health Sciences, decided to pilot F1000 Workspace and the Mendeley Institutional Edition with three classes in which students completed collaborative projects. Prior to this time, RefWorks was used exclusively for these classes.

The Health Sciences Library was also expanding its support of systematic reviews, which are increasing in importance and number as research products for students and faculty. Systematic reviewers ingest large numbers of citations and PDFs into citation managers, where they deduplicate the results of their literature searches, store and organize their results, and export the results to screening software (such as Covidence <covidence.org>) or to tools such as Excel. This, too, served as an impetus to compare among the citation management tools now available to the university's librarians and users.

In addition to Mendeley Institutional Edition and F1000 Workspace, users could choose to use EndNote Basic for free or pay less than \$100 through UNC-CH's campus bookstore to gain full access to EndNote (Desktop plus Online) for their citation management needs.

Thus, many options existed for those users losing their RefWorks access, but the library needed to prepare to help their users intelligently choose among them. With an August 2017 cancellation date for RefWorks, helpful comparisons needed to come together quickly.

Finally, during the current academic year (2017-2018), citation manager consultations have revealed increasing preferences for and emphasis on collaborative online group work efforts, both for class projects and among researchers. These situations call for citation managers that support their collaborative efforts and often require librarians to help users select one primary citation management tool and to migrate citations from one tool to another.

COMPARISON FACTORS

Against this backdrop, UNC-CH HSL librarians needed a structured way to evaluate the citation managers available to UNC-CH users that support collaborative work. The librarians wanted to develop a common set of characteristics to compare among citation managers that would take into account aspects important to librarians in their own use of citation managers and to librarians as they help users select and use these tools. They also wanted to take into account users' evolving uses.

The tools evaluated in the first round were Mendeley (free and Institutional Edition) and F1000 Workspace. EndNote Basic (online only) and EndNote (Desktop plus online) were added later. These tools were selected based on their availability to faculty and students and their use in instruction and personal reference management by librarians at the Health Sciences Library. With low uptake of Zotero among HSL users and the lack of librarian Zotero expertise, it was not included in comparisons at that time. Zotero has subsequently been added to the summary comparisons on the LibGuide.

Comparisons started with a structured evaluation covering the following characteristics: sharing; access; ease of ingesting accurate citations, including from a variety of databases, from PDFs and folders of PDFs, from other bibliographic managers, and from web importer tools; duplicate removal or "deduplication"; ability to organize content to enhance browsing and searching; ability to make, organize, and track notes or annotations; ease of installing and using a citing-while-writing tool; available bibliographic styles; export options; ability to upload and track versions of a co-authored article; and product support. Additional unique features distinguishing one reference manager from another emerged during the course of the evaluations

and are noted in product overviews and use cases. The results of the evaluation were made available to users through an online resource guide (LibGuide), which includes a PDF download of the updated poster at http://guides.lib.unc.edu/comparecitationmanagers>.

PRODUCT OVERVIEWS

Cost and license details and unique features vary among the products and change over time. Features and pricing reported are as of February 27, 2018. The details are not always easy to find quickly on product websites, and the terminology can vary from one product to another, making overall comparisons tricky. Some of the most important distinguishing characteristics, particularly for collaborative use situations, are highlighted below.

EndNote Basic and EndNote Desktop http://endnote.com/

EndNote Basic is a "completely free online-only access to our basic reference manager" available from the EndNote website <http://endnote.com/product-details>. It allows the user to save and organize up to 50,000 references and store up to 2 GB of attachments. A unique limit is that EndNote Basic allows you to use only 21 of the "most popular" predefined bibliography formats (including Modern Language Association [MLA] and American Psychological Association [APA]), as opposed to F1000 Workspace, Mendeley, and EndNote Desktop, all of which have more than 6,000 formats available. Used alone, it doesn't have a PDF auto import folder, the ability to create a citation from a PDF with a digital object identifier (DOI), integrated PDF viewer, or full-function citing-while-writing <http://endnote.com/product-details/basic>. If desired, EndNote Basic (online) can be upgraded to function in conjunction with EndNote Desktop, which includes over 6,000 citation styles and has many additional features <http://endnote.com/product-details/basic>. There is no library size limit and no charge for unlimited cloud storage. Software is purchased individually, with special student pricing available in addition to multi-user licenses and site licenses for large groups or organizations.

Because the purchased license of EndNote (Desktop) is not tied to an institution, users have full access if they leave their institution. EndNote (Desktop) can be used without Internet access, which is helpful to frequent travelers or those in international settings with limited or metered access. One major, and unique, feature of EndNote Desktop is the ability to batch download PDFs. This function allows the user to search and retrieve the full text for multiple citations, with the full-text automatically connected to the citation. This feature may be especially useful to Systematic Review Teams, who, in their process of review, must obtain large quantities of full-text access. Another unique feature of EndNote Desktop is that it is relatively easy for users to edit existing bibliographic formats or create new ones themselves.

Sharing of libraries with others is available in versions X7 and X8; however, sharing and syncing of libraries to the cloud is complex and should be done with care to avoid inadvertently combining or overriding libraries. An unlimited number of libraries can be shared by others; however, these can only be accessed from the desktop. A notable limitation is that users can share just one library from their personal desktop and must end sharing of that library if they wish to share a different one <http://endnote.com/product-details/library-sharing>. Although the other reference managers discussed in this comparison have web browser-based "importers" that can grab open PDFs and associated metadata and incorporate them into the reference manager

program, EndNote's Capture tool captures just the metadata. EndNote's mobile app is available just for iPad's (no Android version).

F1000 Workspace < https://f1000.com/work/>

F1000 (formerly Faculty of 1000) institutional subscriptions include F1000 Workspace at no extra cost. F1000 characterizes F1000 Workspace as "beyond a reference manager" and "an easy and intuitive way to discover, read, annotate, write, and share scientific research" <https://f1000workspace.com/>. Without an F1000 institutional subscription, individuals can purchase a \$9.95 "premium" monthly subscription (discounted 50% for students); laboratories or other groups can negotiate a reduced rate. Individuals leaving an institution can take their library of citations and PDFs stored within "project" folders with them but cannot create new projects without a paid account; however, they can be invited to additional projects by others with institutional or paid accounts. Additional information on F1000 Workspace plans can be found on the F1000 Workspace website.

A unique feature of F1000 Workspace is the ability to collaborate on Word manuscripts within F1000 Workspace with version control and shared comments. F1000 Workspace also offers the ability to use the citing-while-writing feature in Google Docs as well as in Word. For Mac users, it includes an app for Manuscripts, a Mac iOS tool designed for writing scientific manuscripts. F1000 Workspace will, upon request, modify or create new bibliographic styles very quickly and then make them available to all users at the next update. Librarians and users at UNC-CH have found support via the integrated chat button to be outstanding and fast (within hours), and F1000 to be responsive to suggestions for new features. As of this writing, offline

access to F1000 Workspace is limited to an offline reading list; F1000 reports working toward having full offline functionality up and running this year. Distance learners and others who will be away from campus for longer than 60 days, must contact F1000 support (via integrated chat) to extend this time period. F1000 reports that they are considering lengthening this time frame. Mobile apps are available both for iOS and Android operating systems.

Mendeley <https://www.mendeley.com/>

The Mendeley reference manager offers a free plan with 2 GB of "personal library space" or storage, a 100 MB shared library, and up to five private groups with up to 25 collaborators. This plan can be upgraded to one of three premium plans, which allow you to increase your personal library space: The Plus plan, at \$4.99 per month, includes 5 GB; the Pro plan, at \$9.99 per month, includes 10 GB; Max, at \$14.99 per month, includes unlimited personal library space. Yearly subscriptions offer a one-month discount. The Mendeley Institutional Edition (MIE), for organization-wide collaboration, increases the number of private groups from five to unlimited with the number of collaborators increasing from 25 to "up to 100."

One unique feature of Mendeley is the ability to create multiple layers of subfolders, which can be helpful to students writing dissertations or theses with multiple chapters and to those participating on Systematic Review teams. Mendeley Desktop (along with EndNote Desktop) can be used offline without web access. Another unique feature is Mendeley Data, "a secure cloud-based repository where you can store your data, ensuring it is easy to share, access, and cite" https://https://www.mendeley.com/datasets. Mendeley offers both iOS and Android mobile apps. A unique limitation is the inability to export in a format that can be directly imported into Excel for Systematic Review screening if not using other specialized software. Another challenge experienced at UNC-CH is inconsistent access and linkage to institutional full-text.

USE CASES

Four prototypical use cases or scenarios were developed to represent some of the library's major user groups and to capture the most significant differences librarians had noticed were particularly important to each of these groups. These use cases were of Public Health Graduate Students, Medical Residents, Research Laboratory ("Lab") Teams, and Systematic Review Teams. By focusing on these four cases, the librarians were able to compare specific functionalities of each tool in the context of diverse uses in order to help match recommendations with user needs. Within each use case, more specific needs were addressed; these are highlighted below.

Public Health Graduate Students

The Health Sciences Library serves a large number of graduate students, and the UNC-CH Gillings School of Global Public Health, with its large cohorts of graduate students provides a use case that enables generalization to an even larger population of graduate student users. These students do much literature searching and writing requiring citation of diverse items (e.g., grey literature, books), which spurs a need for institutional access links within the citation manager and automatic ways of adding citations to the citation library to help cut down on time spent searching for citations and full text. Additionally, the use of Google Docs has increased among both undergraduate and graduate students, leading to a need for a citation manager that integrates with Google Docs (see Figure 1). Currently, this feature is unique to F1000 Workspace.

[PLACE FIGURE 1 HERE]

Legend: FIGURE 1. Use Case: Public Health Graduate Students

Medical Residents

For the Medical Residents – or Resident Physicians – working at UNC Hospitals, mobile access is important, and residents also frequently use BrowZine <browzine.com>, a current awareness tool that makes most of the library's electronic journals available newsstand style on their mobile devices. For this group of users, the ability to send PDFs from the BrowZine app directly to their citation manager (e.g., EndNote and Mendeley) is very useful. As residents are reaching the end of their training and beginning the next stage of their careers, they also look for citation managers that allow them to keep their full library of citations and PDFs in a free basic account when they leave the institution (see Figure 2).

[PLACE FIGURE 2 HERE] Legend: FIGURE 2. Use Case: Medical Residents

Research Lab Teams

Research Lab Teams at a research-intensive university often have many users collaborating both within and across laboratories and institutions that need to gather citations and full text, and to write papers together. This can make reference managers helpful but more complex to select and coordinate. Working with multiple layers of folders to keep literature related to different aspects of research separate, finding full text for search alert citations, and suggesting articles related to those already imported are particularly important for this group of users, and at times for others (see Figure 3). Additionally, these users need to work on manuscripts collaboratively, and they seek good version control as they are working plus integration within the citation manager that allows annotation. This is a unique need currently filled just by F1000 Workspace. Finally, due to the need to promote and present research, researchers sometimes look for the ability to use their library of citations and PDFs offline when traveling, something that may at times be important to other users. Currently, this need is met by Mendeley and EndNote (desktop), with F1000 Workspace allowing access just to an offline reading list. F1000 reports that they expect to implement full offline functionality this year.

[PLACE FIGURE 3 HERE]

Legend: FIGURE 3. Use Case: Research Lab Team

Systematic Review Teams

Systematic Review Teams make a good use case for comparisons, with the collaborative and large-scale nature of these projects extending beyond systematic reviews to other comprehensive literature reviews and group projects. Those working on systematic reviews need a citation

manager able to ingest large result sets, to quickly and accurately deduplicate results from multiple databases, to apply multiple tags to their references, to make notes that can be attributed to different members of the team, and to export the results to screening software (e.g., Covidence) or to software such as Excel (see Figure 4). The Health Sciences Library has expanded its service of systematic reviews in the last few years, leading to an increasing number of users requesting help not just performing the review, but also choosing a citation manager to use for the review. HSL librarians prefer EndNote (Desktop) or F1000 Workspace for systematic reviews. Both allow ingestion of large result files from multiple databases and provide deduplication options that are accurate and easy to use.

[PLACE FIGURE 4 HERE]

Legend: FIGURE 4. Use Case: Systematic Review Team

ADVISING USERS

When helping users select a reference management system, it is important to use active listening techniques to assess quickly what the user needs in a reference manager. It is helpful for librarians to have a sense, in advance, based on the type of user or use, of the features that might be most important. Having both general and detailed comparison charts and prototypical use cases in mind is helpful for quickly getting the user to the best solution. At times, the librarian needs knowledge of very specific details. Often, users don't know what features they are looking for that might be most important in their situations. Here, the use cases can be particularly helpful, showing typical reference manager needs for a type of use or user.

Challenges

When helping users select the best reference management tool for their needs, a major ongoing challenge exists: the speed at which reference managers evolve impacts the ability of librarians and users to stay up-to-date on reference manager attributes. These changes are outside of librarians' and users' control. It is desirable for products to be straightforward about upcoming changes and accurate about their expected deployment schedule, but this ideal is not always met. Librarians need to remain aware of product changes and develop systems for updating others regularly, especially in libraries where multiple reference managers are supported. Frequent updates may impact the consistency of advice given to different users in similar situations. For this reason, product support and responsiveness is important for both librarians and users.

Potential Solutions, Resources, and Ongoing User Assistance

In order to minimize the impact that product feature changes have on the work of the library and the user, all librarians supporting these products need not only a basic working knowledge of these tools, but also resources for remaining current across the different products they support. Individual librarians within a group can specialize and serve as consultants to one another about the nuances of a specific product. Librarians serving as product specialists can update online resources and take the lead on specialized classes.

At the UNC-CH Health Sciences Library, comparisons among the citation managers most frequently supported have been fashioned into an online resource guide (LibGuide) that is easy

to access and to update <http://guides.lib.unc.edu/comparecitationmanagers> (see Figure 5). This guide is intended not only for librarians and library staff but also for users. This guide helps all librarians and library staff who use citation managers or advise others on their selection and use to keep up to date across multiple citation managers. It also helps users make informed decisions when selecting a citation manager. An overall summary chart allows for quick, overall comparisons, and advice is given for balancing priorities when making a selection. The guide links to a downloadable PDF with detailed comparison information for the four use cases described above.

[PLACE FIGURE 5 HERE]

Legend: FIGURE 5. Comparison of EndNote, F1000 Workspace, Mendeley, Zotero: At a Glance LibGuide

If users need further assistance in choosing a reference manager after reviewing the online resources, they can request individual or small group consultations. At the UNC-CH HSL, these reference manager consultations are normally handled by graduate research assistants or liaison librarians. Once a reference manager has been chosen, a consultation can be scheduled for individual assistance with start-up or use. Additionally, graduate student research assistants regularly teach scheduled or on-demand free courses on each of the managers to library users. These classes generally cover just the basics; if a user would like more in-depth instruction, scheduling an individual consultation is recommended. Finally, in some programs, liaisons incorporate teaching about selection and/or use of reference managers into their student orientations or course- or curriculum integrated teaching.

Taking a course is not necessary, however. In addition to the Health Sciences Library's citation manager comparison guide, HSL librarians have created online guides (LibGuides) for each supported reference manager that users and librarians alike may consult <hr/>
<http://guides.lib.unc.edu/citingandwriting>. Particularly useful to HSL users, especially those working on group projects, is a guide showing users how to move citations and PDF libraries from one manager to another – in every possible combination. Constructing guides such as these is highly recommended to support users and to lessen the workload for librarians. These online guides can also help point users to product resources that the librarians and graduate research assistants have found most useful.

LIMITATIONS

Experiences with reference managers may vary across context, users, uses, and evolution over time. This comparison examined one small set of reference managers with a focus on collaborative use. Application focused on a select set of prototypical use cases common in one context: a large, research-intensive university's health sciences library serving primarily health professionals. The comparison took place at one point in time. Other reference managers and other features may be as or more important in other contexts and settings or for other types of users. Finally, this work represents the experiences of the liaison librarians and graduate research assistants at one particular institution, as they used these tools in their own work and to support their users in selecting and using these tools.

CONCLUSION

Supporting selection and use of reference management systems in collaborative academic settings need not be an overwhelming challenge. Consultative support by reference librarians at health sciences libraries, in conjunction with instructional courses and online resource guides, can provide both overviews and in-depth information about reference management systems.

The creation and application of "use cases" can help guide librarians helping users selecting reference management systems. Each user's personal preferences, needs, and workflow must be taken into account in selecting a reference manager. The strengths, weaknesses, and unique features of each tool combine with user factors and situations to impact selection of the preferred reference manager. Reference managers are continually evolving, so the decision-making process may be dynamic rather than a static, one-time decision. Reference managers evolve, with changed or updated features, and products may cease to exist or change in ways that are not desirable to long-time users. User needs may also change over time. In collaborative efforts, different user needs, approaches, and contexts may have to be balanced.

Librarians often need to use and/or keep up to date with several different reference managers. Both librarians and users need convenient ways to keep up to date with the rapid changes in reference managers to ensure the most efficient and effective use of these products. The utilization of comparison charts as well as prototypical use cases can help with this comparison and learning process. Since products evolve and user needs change, decisions may need to be revisited over time. Indeed, there may not be a "perfect fit."

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