

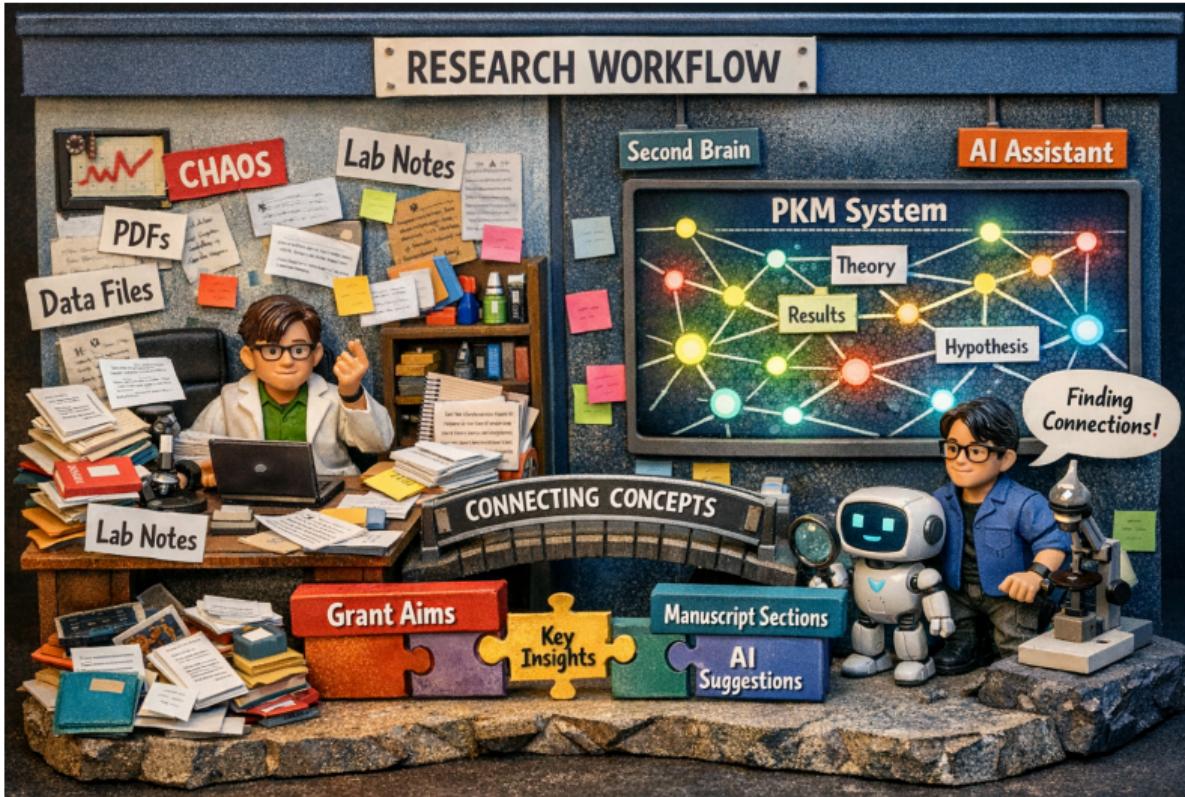
Using Obsidian with AI to Support Scientific Writing

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The Information Management Problem



Source: Marcus Birkenkrahe, Dec. 19, 2025.

Personal Information Management

Vannevar Bush

Calvin N. Mooers



- Founded Raytheon in 1922.
- Initiated the Manhattan Project
- 1945 *Science: the Endless Frontier* → NSF in 1950
- 1945 *As We May Think* → Memex and HyperText

- 1948 coined *informational retrieval*
- Zator Corporation and Rockford Research
- TRAK programming language
- Mooers's Law 1959

Mooers's Law and its Corollary

- An information retrieval system will tend not to be used whenever it is more painful and troublesome for a customer to have information than for him not to have it.
- Where an information retrieval system tends not to be used, a more capable information retrieval system may tend to be used even less.

Goals of this talk

- Open Obsidian and load provided vault.
- Walk through installing backlink plugin for Obsidian.
- Use folgezettel when adding and finding notes.
- Retrieve notes to assemble a paper outline.
- Introduce smart connections.

Starting a Zettelkasten

The screenshot shows a Zettelkasten application window with two main sections. On the left, the 'Welcome' section displays a note with the title 'Welcome' and the text: 'This is your new vault. Make a note of something, [create a link](#), or try [the Importer](#)!'. On the right, the 'Graph view' section shows a network graph with a purple node labeled 'Welcome' and a grey node labeled 'create a link', connected by a line. The interface includes standard window controls (minimize, maximize, close) and navigation buttons.

Welcome

Graph view

Welcome

Welcome

This is your new vault.

Make a note of something, [create a link](#), or try [the Importer](#)!

Welcome

create a link

Notes in Vault Folder

Jan	1	17:23	00.0 Index of indices.md
Jan	1	17:20	23. Literate Programming.md
Jan	1	17:22	24. Computational Notebooks.md
Jan	1	18:01	30 Knowledge Management.md
Jan	1	17:57	30. Knowledge Management.md
Jan	1	17:33	30.1 Mindmapping.md
Jan	1	17:56	30.2 Writing Workflow.md
Jan	1	17:41	30.3 Zettelkasten.md
Jan	1	17:42	30.3a Tracking progress.md
Jan	1	18:00	30.3m Zettelkasten Indexing.md
Jan	1	17:54	30.3m1 Luhmann indexing.md
Jan	1	17:55	30.3m2 Folgezettel Indexing.md

Importer Plugin

Install Importer

1. Follow instructions in [Community plugins > Install a community plugin](#)
2. Download and enable [Importer](#) from the list

Import from other apps and file formats



Notion



Microsoft OneNote



Evernote



Apple Notes



Google Keep



Bear



Craft



Roam Research



</> HTML files



Import CSV files



Markdown files



Textbundle files



Zettelkasten notes

Installing a Plugin

Plugins

Explore 2,705 Obsidian plugins made by the community.

[API Docs](#)[Join the community](#)

folgezettel

Note ID

By Dominik Mayer

2,127 downloads

Displays notes by their ID, enabling structured sequences for manuscripts or a Zettelkasten ("**Folgezettel**").

[Install](#)[Learn more](#) [Copy link](#)

Narrowing selection with folgezettel

The screenshot shows a Zettelkasten application interface. On the left is a sidebar with a tree view of notes and various icons for file operations. The main content area displays a note titled "30.3 Zettelkasten". A sidebar on the right lists sub-topics under "30.3 Zettelkasten".

Left Sidebar:

- File icon
- Folder icon
- Up arrow
- Down arrow
- Search icon
- Close icon

Tree View (Notes):

- 00.0 Index of indices
- 23. Literate Programming
- 24. Computational Notebooks
- 30 Knowledge Management
- 30. Knowledge Management
- 30.1 Mindmapping
- 30.2 Writing Workflow
- 30.3 Zettelkasten** (selected)
- 30.3a Tracking progress
- 30.3b Kinds of notes
- 30.3e Zettelkasten Workflows
- 30.3f Fundamental Rules
- 30.3h Steps for using a ZK in writing...
- 30.3i Zettelkasten and Mindmaps

Main Content Area:

30.3 Zettelkasten

[30.3a Tracking progress](#)
[[30.3b]]

30.3b Kinds of notes

30.3p Hybrid Zettelkasten

30.3o Paper-based Zettelkasten

30.3j Zettelkasten-related websites

Type # to link heading Type ^ to link blocks

Live updating of filenames

The screenshot shows a digital note-taking interface with three main panels: a sidebar, a central note editor, and a right sidebar.

Left Sidebar: A vertical list of notes and sections, many of which are underlined, indicating they are active or linked. The list includes:

- 00.0 Index of indices
- 23. Literate Programming
- 24. Computational Notebooks
- 30. Knowledge Management
 - 30.1 Mindmapping
 - 30.2 Writing Workflow
 - 30.3 Zettelkasten** (highlighted in yellow)
 - 30.3a Tracking progress
 - 30.3b Kinds of notes
 - 30.3c Not Used Yet
 - 30.3d The "related" field in BibTeX
 - 30.3e Zettelkasten Workflows
 - 30.3f Fundamental Rules
 - 30.3h Steps for using a ZK in writing...
 - 30.3i Zettelkasten and Mindmaps
 - 30.3j Zettelkasten-related websites
 - 30.3l Force-directed graphs
 - 30.3m Zettelkasten Indexing
 - 30.3m1 Luhmann indexing
 - 30.3m2 Folgezettel Indexing
 - 30.3m3 Schepers Indexing

← → 30.3s Disadvantages of Digital Zettelkasten ⏪ ...

30.3s Disadvantages of Digital Zettelkasten

[30.3 Zettelkasten](#)

☰ ⏪ ⏩ ⏴ ⏵ ⏷ ⏹ ⏸

Linked mentions

30.3 Zettelkasten

[[30.3s Disadvantages of Digital Zettelkasten]]

Unlinked mentions

Index Note in Obsidian

The screenshot shows the Obsidian application interface with three main panels:

- Left Panel (Table of Contents):** A sidebar menu listing various sections and notes, with "30.3 Zettelkasten" currently selected.
- Middle Panel (Content View):** The main workspace displays the content of the selected note, titled "30.3 Zettelkasten". The content includes several blue underlined links to other notes like "30.3a Tracking progress" and "30.3t Disadvantages of paper-based ZK".
- Right Panel (Search and Index):** A sidebar showing a search bar and a list of index cards. The card for "30.3 Zettelkasten" is expanded, showing its sub-links such as "30.3l Force-directed graphs" and "30.3t Disadvantages of digital zettelkasten". Other collapsed cards include "30.3m Zettelkasten Indexing", "30.3n Digital Zettelkasten", and "30.3o Paper-based Zettelkasten".

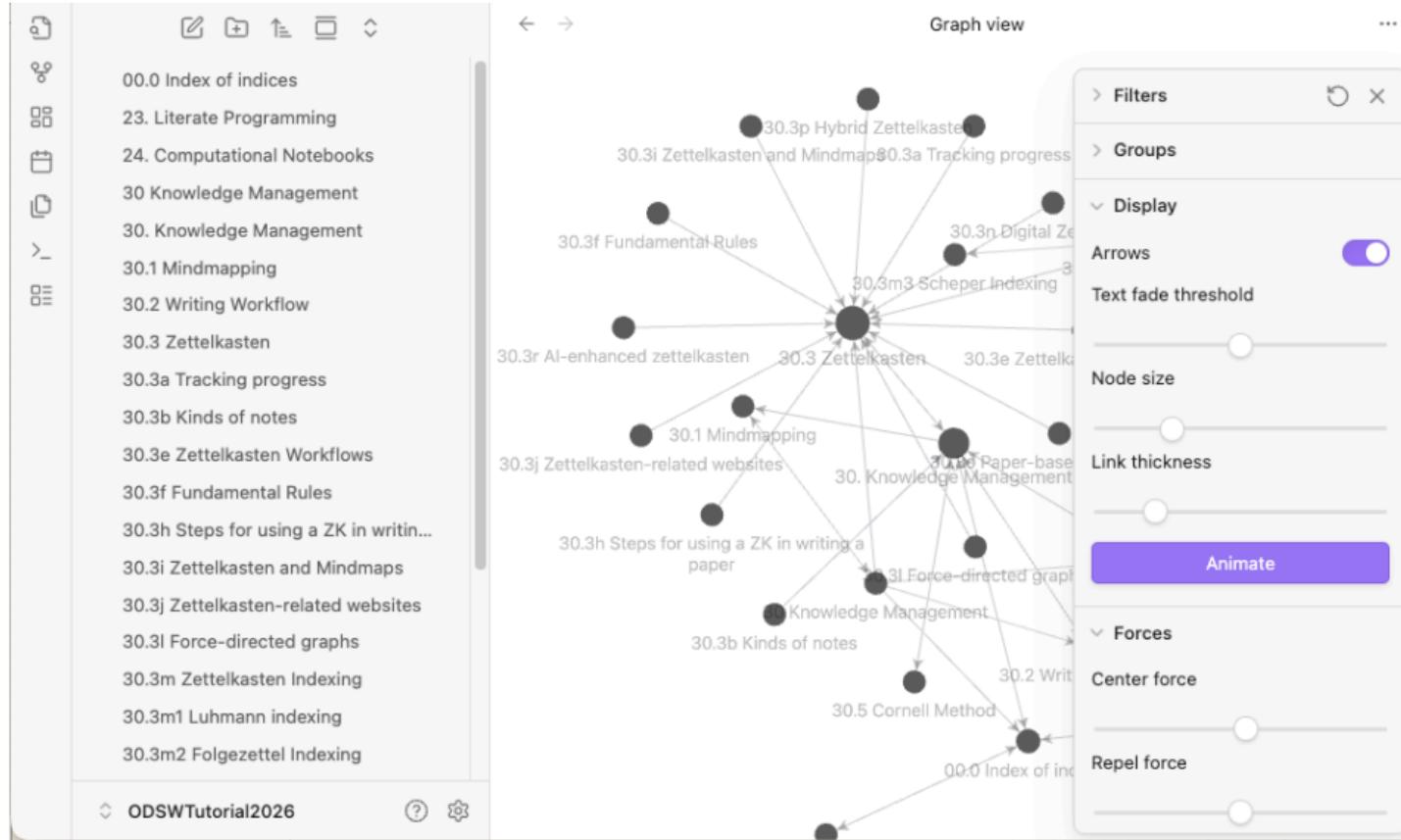
Backlinks:

[30. Knowledge Management](#)

Unlinked mentions

19 backlinks 82 words 723 characters

Bidirectional links revealed with double arrows



Features to Consider in Selecting ZK Software

- Software in your comfort range of computer skills.
- Familiar note format (plain text, markdown, org-roam, LaTeX).
- Local archive.
- Version control (see September 2025 video).
- Vendor lock in.
- Graphical viewer.
- Interoperability with mobile devices.

Which Notes get a folgezettel?

No

- fleeting
- literature or reference

Yes

- atomic (permanent or main)
- hub or index
- keyword
- structure (or synthesis)

Questions to ask before adding note

0. Would I use this information in one of my future lectures, manuscripts, or grant applications?
 1. What is it about?
 2. What does it mean for ...?
 3. How does it connect with ...?
 4. Swapping context: From the context of the source to the context of ones own thoughts?
 5. Does it contradict, complement, confirm, or specify what I believed before?

Things to consider while gathering literature notes

- Read with a question or problem in mind (e.g. how does this relate to the manuscript that I am writing?).
- Capture ideas that you disagree with because these trigger you to write a lot.
- Reflect on what you think the author thinks because meaning is created through the act of reading and there can be many meanings.
- Record someone else's interpretation of a passage that you are unsure about. Interpretive communities produce meaning.

Source: Doto 2024.

Batch processing literature notes

- Check your ZK for existing atomic notes as a refresher.
- Take copious notes on the first review article.
- Expect progressively fewer notes when reading additional reviews articles as your knowledge builds.
- Process all of the literature notes into atomic notes in one sitting to avoid redundancy.

Reasons Why Users Abandon Their Zettelkasten

- Cultivating knowledge garden is more work than expected.
- Garbage in garbage out (GIGO).
- Failure to review the old notes on a regular basis.
- Too little structure can hinder navigation
- Software envy.
- The Corollary to Mooers's Law (see slide 5).

Guidelines for balancing order and disorder

- Expect that effort spent on hub notes declines after initial burst (AI can help)
- Atomic notes should rise to 80-90 percent of notes, ignoring literature notes.
- Try to go deep on one topic to generate a lot of atomic notes.
- Spend effort keyword notes when gathering notes of a manuscript (AI can help).

Topics that Trigger Flame Wars

- Paper vs digital.
- Foglezettel vs links
(best: do both at least for some parts).
- Top down vs bottom up.
- One note per file vs multiple notes per file
(org-mode hang-up? Does ease adding backlinks if parent node is present in the same file).
- Database dependent vs filename dependent.

Upcoming Talks

Date	Speaker	Topic
January 16, 2026	Blaine Mooers	Using Obsidian with AI to support scientific writing
February 20, 2026	Matthew Younger	Polyglot programming
March 27, 2026	TBD	
April 17, 2026	Jindahl Shah	Experiences with Knowledge Management
May 15, 2026	Marcus Birkenkrahe	Agentic programming

Open dates in 2026: Jun 19, Jul 17, Aug 21 Sep 18, Oct 16, Nov 20, Dec 18

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