

Digital Tools for Humanities Research

Citation and Source Material Management

- Zotero – Open-Source citation management software
 - Runs on Windows, MacOS, Linux
 - Can manage your PDFs as attachments (see below)
 - Has plugins and integrations for Microsoft Office and LibreOffice
 - Can import citation information automatically from ISBN or DOI
 - Zotero @ FSU
- Zotmoov
 - Normally, Zotero will store your PDFs in a network of hidden folders and synchronize them to its own, paid cloud storage :(
 - Zotmoov is a Zotero plugin that allows you to choose a different folder on your computer, possibly one connected to OneDrive or Google Drive

Notes

- Obsidian
 - Runs on Windows, MacOS, Linux, and mobile
 - Notes formatted in Markdown (see below)
 - Not open source but freely available with many plugins
 - Allows note linking, 3D visualization, flow charts, sketch boards
 - Stores notes as a folder of text files. If you stop using Obsidian, you can still access them in any other text editor.
 - Wants to sell you its own, paid cloud storage :(

Word Processors

- Microsoft Word
 - Free for University affiliates, subscriptions for everyone else
 - DOCX file format is industry standard for journals and publishers
 - Not open source
 - Pushes cloud storage and now AI
- LibreOffice
 - Open source, free for everyone
 - Uses ODT format by default but highly compatible with DOCX
 - * LibreOffice is better at rendering DOCX files than Word is at ODT
 - Excellent PDF export options
 - User interface feels like Word 2003 (a benefit to some...)
- Scrivener
 - More like a combination of Obsidian and Word/LibreOffice
 - Allows you to write in snippets, rearrange them, and compile into DOCX and other formats

- Geared toward novel and book writers but can be used to organize research
- Not open source
- One-time fee, must buy versions for MacOS, Windows, and mobile separately
- Academic discount

Plaintext Workflow

The following tools are for a different way of working. They involve drafting in a text editor and then exporting to DOCX, PDF, HTML. Originally developed by bloggers and digital-first authors but gaining traction among academics. Parallel to the LATEX and Overleaf workflow used in the sciences.

Markdown

- Markdown is a way of formatting plain text that allows for basic formatting, like **bold**, *italics*, headings, and footnotes¹.
- You use a plain text editor to write in Markdown. Then, you use a utility—either one built into the text editor itself or a separate program—to convert the markdown to an output format.

Text Editors

- Microsoft VSCode – Industry-leading text and code editor
 - Partly open source
 - Windows, MacOS, Linux
 - Tons of plugins and AI Copilot
 - Can customize the appearance for different “languages” (i.e., markdown)
- Emacs
 - One of the original text editors from the 1980s
 - Fully open source
 - Windows, MacOS, Linux
 - Extremely customizable
 - * Can save your settings as a text file to transport them to other computers
 - Can be used as an outliner, planner, project manager, email client, etc. etc.
 - Steep learning curve, huge time suck

Markdown Converter

- Pandoc
 - Open source

¹Sample footnote

- Command-line utility for converting between dozens of different file formats. Ex., markdown to DOCX, ODT, RTF, HTML, PDF (via LaTeX).
 - * `pandoc sample.md -o sample.docx`
- Can use a template to standardize output formatting
 - * `pandoc sample.md -o sample.docx --reference-doc=manuscript-template.docx`

Consideration

Advantages

- Distraction-free writing
- Draft first, format later
- Markdown text files are small
- Citation management
 - You can curate your bibliography in a BibTex file, embed citation keys into your Markdown manuscript, and then compile the citations automatically as part of the export process
- Sync, version control, collaboration with `git` and GitHub
- Easy export to a variety of formats: DOCX for publishers, PDF for printing, HTML for web
- Markdown is spreading (Zotero, Obsidian, web developing)
- Learn digital humanities tools
- Open source tools are free to use and privacy-friendly

Disadvantages

- **Warning:** Learning curve (time suck)
- Customization (time suck)
- Need to convert to DOCX for collaboration and feedback (time suck)