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 automagically 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

Writing in Plain Text

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. The Programming Historian has an excellent article explaining the advantages and mechanics of this workflow.

Markdown

- Markdown is a way of formatting plain text that allows for basic formatting, like **bold**, *italics*, headings, and footnotes.[1]
- 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

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[1]A sample footnote.

Markdown Converter

- Pandoc
  - Open source
  - 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`

Considerations

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
- Outputs accessible `.docx` files with Styles used correctly
- 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)