

ZotLog: Inspiring students to adopt structured methods in *Zotero*

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Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to inspire students to adopt structured methods when they explore and retrieve information. It is based on lab notebooking methods and on managing and documenting the flow of references in *Zotero*, a reference management software.

A little history

Since 2009, I have been pushing students to record their research in the same way as chemistry researchers do in their laboratory notebooks. For example, they have to:

- detail the results of each search performed in each database they access
- report any alert they create
- provide research tips for each database
- record their login and password for each database

At first, I asked them to write all of this down in a structured paper notebook. Then, around 2011, it became a formatted and structured MS Word document, but students were still slow to adopt these methods.

In 2014, I incorporated these methods into *Zotero* and noticed that they were more willing to use them in this format.

How it works

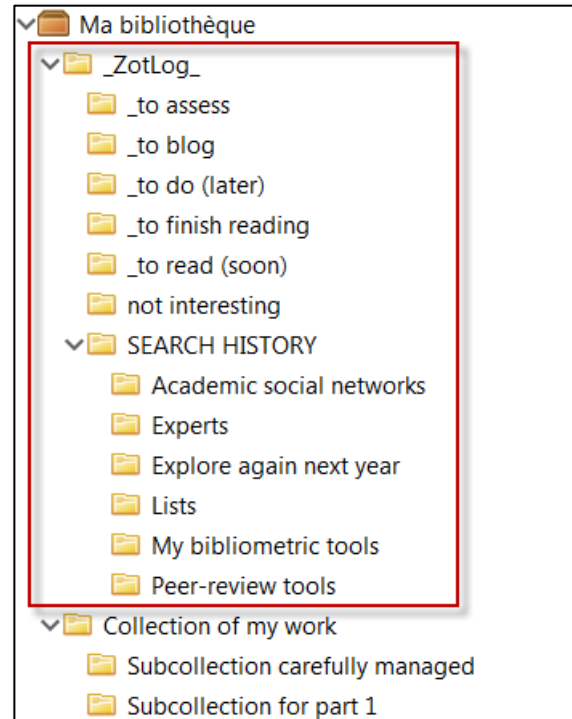
In their *Zotero* library, students add a new collection tree next to their own collections. The root of this collection tree is called *ZotLog*. It contains collections of references and collections of stand-alone notes.

Collections of references

Their purpose is to manage the flow of references. The two most important ones are:

- **To assess:** contains all the new references arriving in the *Zotero* library. It is like a filter, or a port of entry for each reference. Only the ones that fit the topic studied go forward.
- **Not interesting:** contains the references that students retrieved but that, for numerous reasons, are not usable in their work. Instead of deleting them, I strongly suggest that they keep a record of what they have already assessed and rejected. I use the allegory of non-conclusive experiments in science.

If they want to personalize further, they can also use collections such as: **To read (soon)**, **To blog**, **To show to my supervisor**, etc.



Collections of stand-alone notes

A collection called *SEARCH HISTORY* is created. It contains a lot of stand-alone notes.

Each stand-alone note contains a detailed record of a queried resource:

- URL, login and password
- How the resource was used, which keywords were used, which boxes were checked, which links were browsed, etc.
- What was successful and what was not
- Whether an alert was created
- Tips on the resource

Most of the stand-alone notes describe a database or an online resource, but they can be used to record:

- lists of successful keywords for searches
- lists of favourite call numbers (LC and Dewey classifications)
- experts on the topic studied (with comments)
- publishers and journals to follow
- publishers and journals to avoid
- contact information of the liaison librarian
- list of academic social networks
- etc.

Students can download and reuse a ZotLog collection containing hundreds of stand-alone notes at <https://www.zotero.org/groups/zotlog> (in French). When they download this collection, students can then go through all the notes already created for a sample research subject and edit them based on their own research subject.

Notes

I thank the students of the PLU6058 seminar for their valuable feedback that has helped me improve this tool over the years.

This activity was first posted on the blog *Tribune CI*

<https://tribuneci.wordpress.com/2016/10/11/zotlog-structurer-son-parcours-de-recherche-avec-zotero/>

Google Scholar 2018-01-02

<http://scholar.google.com>

login: / password :

"jeux de rôles" OR "jeu de rôles" OR "jeux de rôle" : not bad

"donjons et dragons" OR "donjons & dragons" OR "dungeons & dragons" OR "dungeons and dragons" : good

"role playing game" OR "roleplaying game" OR "roleplaying games" OR "role playing games" : good but a lot

no alert was created

In GS, I prefer setting-up alerts on scholars, not on topics

Cannot filter by peer-review (assess yourself!)

Metadata

Resource type(s): Learning Object

Information Literacy Frame(s) Addressed: *Searching as Strategic Exploration - Research as Inquiry*

Discipline(s): All

Type of Institution: College, university

Scope: Classroom-level, course-level

Tags: Zotero, reference management, method, laboratory notebook

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