

# ZOTERO: Feel the Source

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the term itself actually derives from the Albanian verb zotëro-j [zɔtərɔj] 'master, acquire'.<sup>1</sup> The final -j marks the 1st person indicative (the regular citation form for Albanian verbs); in the imperative, we would get the bare verb root zotëro [zɔtərɔ].

## Background:

Zotero is an advanced bibliographic software produced by the Centre for History and New Media of George Mason University. It is a Free Libre and Open Source Software (FLOSS), that is, its code is available to anyone who wants to contribute and propose upgrading. It is distributed as plug-in for the Mozilla's Floss browser Firefox, and enables users not just to collect all sort of reference materials with only one click, but also to add personal notes, highlight sentences, create linked tags, organize the collections in many different ways, and of course produce very effective and precise bibliographies with just one click. For an overview on Zotero's functionalities, see these videos and tutorials:

[http://www.zotero.org/support/screencast\\_tutorials](http://www.zotero.org/support/screencast_tutorials)

## 3 things that make Zotero unique:

1. Unlike previous projects, Zotero has been built by practising researchers and teachers. The historians in charge of Zotero developed it in response to many of their frustrations with previous tools. Because of their position as engaged researchers and teachers, they were able to build a tool that fits much more organically into the research process, using Zotero to grab metadata for acquisitions. Instead of reentering information it is possible to just grab and edit information already available through other services and export it in a host of metadata formats allowing librarians to take the information to other tools and systems they use for cataloging.
2. Aside from this, Zotero is an attempt to make reference management easier. While the proliferation of research tools and bibliographic management systems has changed how many scholars work, the majority of scholars in many fields still use hand written note-cards. Ease of use was a central feature for our developers from the first day and by borrowing the iTunes style interface and drag and drop functionality, our tool becomes very intuitive.
3. Another unique feature for Zotero is its location. Because Zotero 'lives' in your browser it is already where you are online. Previous software require you move into other tools to do your research.

*'Two decades of staring at a screen on which Microsoft Word has been the standard*

*interface for scholarship has clouded our sense of what an academic application might be. Most academics still think of an application as something they download from the Internet or install from a disk, that has its own icon on their computer's desktop, and its own window once it has launched. The result of this vision has been a balkanization of the research environment into multiple, generally unrelated windows, such as Word, a Web browser, a standalone citation tool like EndNote, and notes written in various digital or even analog forms' (Cohen n.d.).*

[By creating Zotero items from Web pages researchers and students can archive and annotate things unique to the web \(blogs, forum discussions etc.\) and then cite those web resources in reliable ways. The Web browser has become the location for research, we visit more web sources than libraries....](#)

## Advanced

I aim at covering all aspects and variants of Backup, Syncing, Word Plug-ins, and how to finely tune Zotero to the desired outcome. For instance, you can edit most Zotero preferences through the preferences window. However, the preferences window does not include all of the different ways you can customize your copy of Zotero. To view the the full list of Zotero's preferences, including many hidden preferences, type "about:config" into the Firefox location bar and enter "zotero" into the Filter field at the top of the list that comes up. All Zotero hidden preferences are preceded by "extensions.zotero." more at: [http://www.zotero.org/support/hidden\\_prefs](http://www.zotero.org/support/hidden_prefs) (e.g. fontSize"1.0" This preference allows you to increase or decrease the size of text in the Zotero interface).

FAQ and documentation:

<http://www.zotero.org/support/>

## Back-up

As with all important data, it is a good idea to back up your Zotero data frequently.


One way to do it is to copy and save in other location the Zotero folder with the sqlite file. Or, just to export the entire library once and again with a format easily readable by zotero, that is, the Zotero rdf archive. Note that these data files are different from a Zotero RDF file (e.g., "Exported Items.rdf") created via Zotero's export functions. While you can import data from an RDF file, restoring your data files directly is currently a much more accurate and reliable method.

The best way to do it, in my view, is to set up a syncing process onto an external cloud.

**Warning: Before you copy, delete or move any of these files, be sure that Firefox is closed. Failure to close Firefox before moving these files could result in damage to your data.**

## Synchronizing

The most important thing, I guess, is to understand where Firefox stores your Zotero library: action, preferences, advanced, show data directory. Once you know this, *go and explore it*, you will see zotero.sqlite which contains the majority of your data (note that these data files are different from a Zotero RDF). Copy that one (or even better your entire Zotero data directory) into another computer (lets say to desktop) and point your other computer's Zotero to that folder, again: action, preferences, advanced, custom (this time) to the path onto your desktop where you saved the zotero.sqlite (or even better the entire Zotero data directory). If you point the Zotero Directory to a third party storage software (e.g. Dropbox), then all your Zotero data will be saved to the cloud space, and as long as you are on a computer with access to the network, you can build off the same library.

Open the Preferences Menu in Zotero. You can access Preferences either by selecting on the  pull down menu in the Zotero pane, or in the Firefox Tools menu → Add-ons pop-up (click the Preferences button)



Click on “Custom” under Storage Locations and select the directory for your Zotero library. A “Select a Zotero Data Directory” pop-up will appear. Once you select the directory, Zotero will restart Firefox. You're now ready to go!

## Importing Biblio from EndNote

In 2008 Thomson Reuters sued George Mason University (which actually *does* have a site license for EndNote) for providing reverse-engineered software, that is , for having given users the ability to move between reference software. The allegations were dismissed in June 2009 (full lawsuit is widely available on the web: <http://www.citmedialaw.org> ).

Despite Zotero being a free and extremely powerful software, there seems to be no interest in our college to implement it, or to make it easy to use to students and staff. The Library staff is busy, in fact, at providing training for a poorly equipped web version of the proprietary software End-Note (distributed by the well-known multinational Thomson Scientific), paradoxically preparing future customers for them (chances are that the software license ends ends with the students graduation, whilst students might want to access their research after graduation). Students, on the other hand, complain that there are not enough places available for these

sessions. So, it appears legitimate to ask why it is not possible to spread the word and start thinking seriously of replacing the mainstream software with Zotero, creating more training hours and places from savings made on the software. Moreover, whilst Zotero is multi-platform, the full version of EndNote only works with Windows and Mac (no possibility to integrate the library software on Open Office either). Last but not least, EndNote does not have multi-user capabilities, which has in fact become another powerful feature of Zotero (basically you can create a group and edit the same bibliography on that co-operative project).

**So, how do I import records from EndNote?** Many people coming to Zotero already have extensive collections stored in other reference management software. The following information describes how to make the move from EndNote to Zotero, but the same basic steps apply to many other reference management systems. ...

[http://www.zotero.org/support/kb/importing\\_records\\_from\\_endnote](http://www.zotero.org/support/kb/importing_records_from_endnote)

## Appendix

### Plug-ins:

See also: <http://www.zotero.org/support/plugins>

in particular, for word processor plug-in installation (I happily use the FLOSS Open Office, developed by Sun Micro-system, but there is also the Word plug-in for Microsoft users):

[http://www.zotero.org/support/word\\_processor\\_plugin\\_installation](http://www.zotero.org/support/word_processor_plugin_installation)

### Free Storage:

**Ubuntu One:** <https://one.ubuntu.com/plans/>

(part of the new release of Ubuntu 9.10, *Karmic Koala*) 2gb (open source)

**Dropbox:** <http://www.getdropbox.com/> 2gb

**Gspace:** <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/1593> 7gb

**Webshare on drive N (PC) or Homes (Mac):** <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/it/file-storage/> (?)

### Other useful Firefox extensions:

PDF Download

<http://www.pdfdownload.org/>

Tabscope

<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/4882>

FTP Client:

<http://fireftp.mozdev.org/>

Auto Search:

<http://autocontext.extra.hu/index.html>