

PhD Professional Development Series

Staying up to date with the literature

We discussed different issues related to the literature: how to find new relevant papers, how to manage to read them, and how to keep the papers organised.

Finding the papers to read

- Save a search from a search engine (e.g. scopus, web of science, cabi) and set alerts monthly for example. Save the results that seem relevant to you in Zotero or the library that you use.
 - o To avoid the risk of not opening the email right away and losing it, you could set Outlook so that emails for this sender get automatically put in a certain folder
- Some of us have too many areas in their PhD projects and saving such search with all the key words might give too many potential papers
 - o Tips to use Boolean words to narrow the search so that words need to be close to each other, instead of putting just “or” between them
 - o If you get a too long list of papers, you could use ChatGPT to help you narrow down the list
- Set alerts from journals in your field
- Subscribe to newsletters of relevance
- Check the references shared in seminars within your field
- Read a newly published paper in your field and check its references
- Filter your search in search engines with the year, for example 2026 to only get new papers
- Share papers with your supervisors or research group
- Follow people whose papers might be relevant to you on social media
- Once you find a good paper, you can search for connected papers, different tools exist for that:
 - o [Connected papers](#)
 - o [Linked papers](#) (from the PhD planner website)
 - o [Litmaps](#)
 - o [Research rabbit](#)
- Other AI tools can maybe help you to search for relevant papers:
 - o [Asta](#)
 - o [Scispace](#)
 - o [Undermind](#)
 - o [Rayyan](#)
 - o Some of these tools might be able to help you write, but remember to be careful with what information you give it and how you use it for your writing.

Reading papers

Once you find relevant papers, you can save them in Zotero under “unread”. The risk is that they never get read because we don’t actually take the time to read papers regularly. Don’t worry, you’re not the only one!

- To narrow down the list of papers you want to read, you can start by focusing on the ones that are directly related to your current project
- Some apps exist to listen to papers instead of reading them, for example [Audemic](#)
- Attending a journal club within your field – you can even lead one and choose the paper yourself with a relevant paper that you would like to read and discuss
- Pin the unread papers in your search engine or save them in your literature folder, and keep an excel list with the most relevant articles to read
- To find time to read papers:
 - o Find the time that suits you best, for example after the afternoon fika
 - o Block some time in your calendar to read papers, with the “easy read” at different times than the papers that are harder to read
 - o Don’t read the whole paper directly, start for example with the abstract and conclusion to assess if it is a relevant paper, and then read more if you need. You can also stick to reading only the methods or the results depending on what you need this paper for

Organising papers

Once you find papers to read, take the time to read them, how can you keep them organised?

- Keep track of the paper read on Excel (with columns with the information about the paper such as title, authors, date, collection where it is saved on Zotero or equivalent) and add a column for notes and thoughts about the paper
- If you use Zotero, highlight text and annotate the paper, Zotero can make a notebook out of it so that you can read everything you highlighted and thought
- On Zotero, you can add tags with colors and they appear in front of the paper’s title. You can for example add a color for “read paper” to find unread papers more easily
- You can also have two big folders on Zotero, one with the read papers and one with the new ones that have the same collections inside, and once you have read a paper you can move it to the folder of papers
- You can organise papers by linking them on Zotero
- If you read a paper that you think can be used in your manuscript later, you can save the quote (e.g. author et al. date) in the outline of your paper in the section where you want to use it, to save it for later. You can also add a note or a comment on why you think it will be relevant to cite this paper there.

Good luck in your literature search, reading and organisation! You can also follow webinars from the library, or ask them for help specific to your project!