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# Citation Creation Resources and Faculty/Student Preferences: A Report

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## **Citation Creation Resources and Faculty/Student Preferences: A Report**

*Benjamin R. Harris and Anne Jumonville*

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### **Background and Purpose**

After reviewing the RefWorks bibliographic management software's usage statistics in comparison to its cost, and after considering the impact of difficulties with generating accurate RefWorks bibliographies in the MLA and APA styles, a number of librarians suggested that the collection of information on Trinity students' resource preferences and citation behaviors would be valuable. A brief survey was devised (a) to determine whether or not students and faculty continue to use RefWorks and (b) to collect information about additional resources that students and faculty may use as part of their "bibliographic behaviors."

### **Method**

The researchers selected four questions for the survey---a demographic question as well as three others focused on participants' preferences related to the collection and citation of sources. To collect information about participants' habits as they gather and cite sources, the researchers included specific options as well as an open "other" option. Due to the fact that individuals may use a variety of tools for gathering or citing sources (depending on the assignment or other research situation), participants were able to "check all that apply."

From February 2012 to April 2012, the survey was available via the library homepage, as well as its Twitter feed and Facebook page. During the final weeks of the survey period, liaison librarians were encouraged to distribute information about the survey to classes that they had taught during the spring 2012 semester.

### **Demographics**

The survey instrument collected demographic information about the grade level of students and the rank of non-students (faculty or staff). 63 first/second year students completed the survey, along with 45 third/fourth year students. Seven faculty members and one staff member completed the survey.

### **Data and Analysis (by question)**

#### **1. What resource/tool do you use to collect/gather research sources?**

Based on their answers, a majority of students across grade levels use Microsoft Word to gather and store this information. Students also use email or RefWorks as tools for these activities. The faculty response was fairly evenly split.

Two answers deserve additional attention. While only a small number of students cited the specific use of GoogleDocs in the gathering of sources and information for citations, it is possible that participants equated “Word” with similar types of programs. Therefore, it is possible to interpret the percentage of participants citing Word as a collection/gathering tool as referring to word processing/document software, generally.

Another answer that might cause some concern for librarians is one student participant’s use of the “Add to Folder” option in EBSCO databases as a means for storing citation information. While it may be possible that the student has an account in the database, thereby allowing him or her to save citations in their own personal account, this is not clear.

#### First/Second Year Students (63 total)

Word	50	79%	
Email	23	37%	
RefWorks	20	31%	
On Paper	13	21%	
GoogleDocs	2	3%	
Other	4	6%	<i>(add to folder, easybib, Trinity website, Qiqqa)</i>

#### Third/Fourth Year Students (45 total)

Word	36	80%	
Email	22	49%	
RefWorks	16	36%	
On Paper	10	22%	
GoogleDocs	1	2%	
Other	5	11%	<i>(Trinity Lib Page, MLA International Bib, online articles, Excel)</i>

#### Faculty/Staff (8 total)

Word	3	38%	
Endnote	2	25%	
RefWorks	2	25%	
On Paper	2	25%	
Other	2	25%	<i>(Mendeley, Email)</i>

## 2. What resource do you use to create citations/cite sources?

The library’s “Citing Sources” pages and EasyBib were popular resources among all ranks. Further, the popularity of citations provided via specific databases may be surprising. Since the accuracy of these citations can be questionable, and due to the fact that only a limited number of style options are available using these resources, the researchers surmise that the availability

of a citation creation option in databases with which students are highly familiar may be the primary reason for the high rank of this option.

It is also valuable to note the disparity in variety of responses between first/second year students and third/fourth year students. This suggests that after beginning classes in their major, participants are more likely to use a tool more consistently as they create bibliographies. This may be due to faculty suggestion, a decision based on prior experience with a variety of sources during their first/second year, or may relate to a specific tool's known ability to produce accurate bibliographies for certain citation styles.

#### First/Second Year Students (63 total)

EasyBib	35	56%	
Library Citing Sources	35	56%	
Online Generators	22	35%	
Database Provided	22	35%	
Citation Guide Sites	19	30%	
Citation manual/print	14	22%	
RefWorks	8	13%	
Other	4	6%	<i>(Qiqqa, book recommended by professor, OWL Purdue, memory)</i>

#### Third/Fourth Year Students (45 total)

Library Citing Sources	27	60%	
EasyBib	17	38%	
Online Generators	17	38%	
Citation manual/print	8	18%	
Database Provided	17	38%	
Citation Guide Sites	17	38%	
RefWorks	12	27%	
Citation manual/print	8	18%	
Other	2	4%	<i>(Word, book recommended by professor)</i>

#### Faculty/Staff (8 total)

Citation Guide Sites	5	63%	
Citation manual/print	3	38%	
Database Provided	2	25%	
Library Citing Sources	2	25%	
Other	6	75%	<i>(NoodleBib, EndNote, Mendeley, pub guidelines)</i>

### 3. Why do you use these tools/resources?

Qualitative responses taken from answers to this question help explain decisions that researchers make as they choose resources to help collect and cite information. However, in most cases it is difficult to associate comments with a single tool. For example, a participant may explain making the decision to use a tool due to ease and accuracy, but they may choose several tools in their answer to question #2. Still, we can make assumptions about participants' preferences as they relate to information gathering and citation tools.

Overwhelmingly, the most common answers across all ranks focused on ease of use and convenience.

*I use these tools because they are easy to get to on the internet, and take less time than finding them in a book.*

*Those are the tools I find easiest and know how to use well. EasyBib is free and an easy name to remember when I need to remember what the website is called.*

*I use EasyBib because it does the whole citation for you; you only have to put in the information. I use the library website sometimes when EasyBib can't be used because of teacher instructions.*

*They are the most convenient, mostly because they are the most familiar.*

*Most of them are online, which means easily accessible and user-friendly.*

The accuracy of the output from a citation tool or resource was a lesser concern in comparison to ease, convenience, and speed. At times, ease and accuracy were parallel considerations for participants' choices.

*They are easily accessible, and I feel that they help me give the correct citation.*

*It is much easier to get a lot of information in one place. It is more convenient and especially useful if you are of unsure of a citation. They also really help to organize and keep track of sources when they may otherwise get out of hand*

*I use the library website citing sources page because I know that it is reliable. Almost all of my teachers have told us to use the library's page so now I automatically use that site.*

*I use resources like the Coates Library Citing Sources webpage because the site provides up to date information on how to properly cite the most commonly used citation methods. Also, the library website provides information about which style edition of a particular citation method is being represented.*

*Because it provides a quick and easy way to guarantee that you're completing the citations in the right way.*

*I have found that it can be faster to just study the citation guidelines and create them myself than to plug them into a citation engine. I collect sources in a google doc because I can access it and edit it easily from anywhere, and because I tend to annotate as I go, which is easier in a document.*

*Simplicity and accuracy. I just download the library's citation guides pdfs and follow them. If the kind of citation I need isn't listed there, I make an educated guess or ask somebody. After repeated use, some citation formats I have on memory.*

*I used to use EasyBib, but found that it makes a lot of mistakes and I'm better off just doing the citation myself and referencing the Lib Guides.*

While the statistical data shows that RefWorks is used less often in comparison to other resources, its advocates are passionate:

*RefWorks does all the work for me when I'm citing articles, but accessing the article again from RefWorks takes a while so I normally just send the link for the article to myself or paste it in a word document*

*RefWorks is awesome. It's a too well kept secret and should be more publicized to students. I love the export feature and in the auto import from sites like EBSCOHost. It makes it really easy! Tell more first years about this resource!*

*RefWorks allows you to send the reference straight to your folders from the abstract of the article on the Trinity Library site and different databases. This makes annotated bibs a dream! You can gather all your sources in one place, make separate folders for each topic, class, or paper, and even generate your citations straight from the site. You can even go back to the RefWorks page later to look at your sources in order to navigate back to the later. I discovered RefWorks as a first year and have used it ever since. While there are some glitches with it and it takes a little getting used to, it is an extremely helpful tool, especially when citing primarily online sources like journal articles.*

Several faculty members offered extended answers to this question:

*I started using endnote because the formatting of sources was more consistent to APA style. Also, RefWorks combined with Write-N-Cite was making my computer crash. I also tried Zotero, but quickly found out that it did not deal properly with APA. I don't mind a little formatting here and there, but I don't need a product that can't even handle a journal article properly. I like to have print versions of the APA manual available, to*

*double check citation style. One can't just rely on the software to do it properly. Finally, I would like to use the Library website more often, but there are some source types that are not covered, so I have had to direct my students to other library sites (for example, I could not find instructions for citing a photograph in APA style). I've only played around briefly with RefWorks and the tools in Word, and it took more time to fix all the little errors than it was worth. I would like to be able to automate this aspect of my research, but I haven't found a tool that works for me yet.*

*I use these tools and resources for their convenience. EndNote, in particular, has been a life saver, and I wish I had had access to it sooner, especially after horror experiences with Zotero and RefWorks. I also keep a print copy of the APA manual, and short citation guides for other styles. I use them to double check EndNote.*

### **Suggestions**

#### 1. Collecting and Gathering Sources

- a. The library may include information related to gathering and organizing sources as part of its "Citing Sources" page. Beyond RefWorks, the library could include links to Qiqqa, Mendeley, and similar citation/source collection and organization software.
- b. The library may wish to expand its offering beyond RefWorks to include subscription access to one of a number of other resources, such as EndNote or NoodleTools.
- c. Librarians may consider the information collected in this report as they make suggestions to classes, individuals students, or faculty members.

#### 2. Citing Sources

- a. The library may include additional resources to its current list of online citation machines or generators. In particular, both Qiqqa and Mendeley are not included on the current page.
- b. Librarians may wish to suggest specific sources for the citation of sources in certain classes.
- c. Comparative research on the accuracy and capability of various citation resources may be conducted, to help librarians, students, and others select citation-generation software options based on citation style.