FACULTY OF
LAW AND CRIMINOLOGY

ZOTERO MANUAL

LAW AND CRIMINOLOGY PROGRAMMES

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1 WHAT IS ZOTERO?

Zotero is a software package that acts as a database manager for references and can produce references and a bibliograpy. Such programs make collecting, storing, managing and using bibliographic data much easier and clearer. They are commonly called reference managers. EndNote and Mendeley are other examples of reference managers.

The big advantage of using reference managers is saving time because have your own database (library) of consulted literature, which you can easily search. Moreover, when writing academic texts, references and bibliography are automatically displayed in the correct citation style.

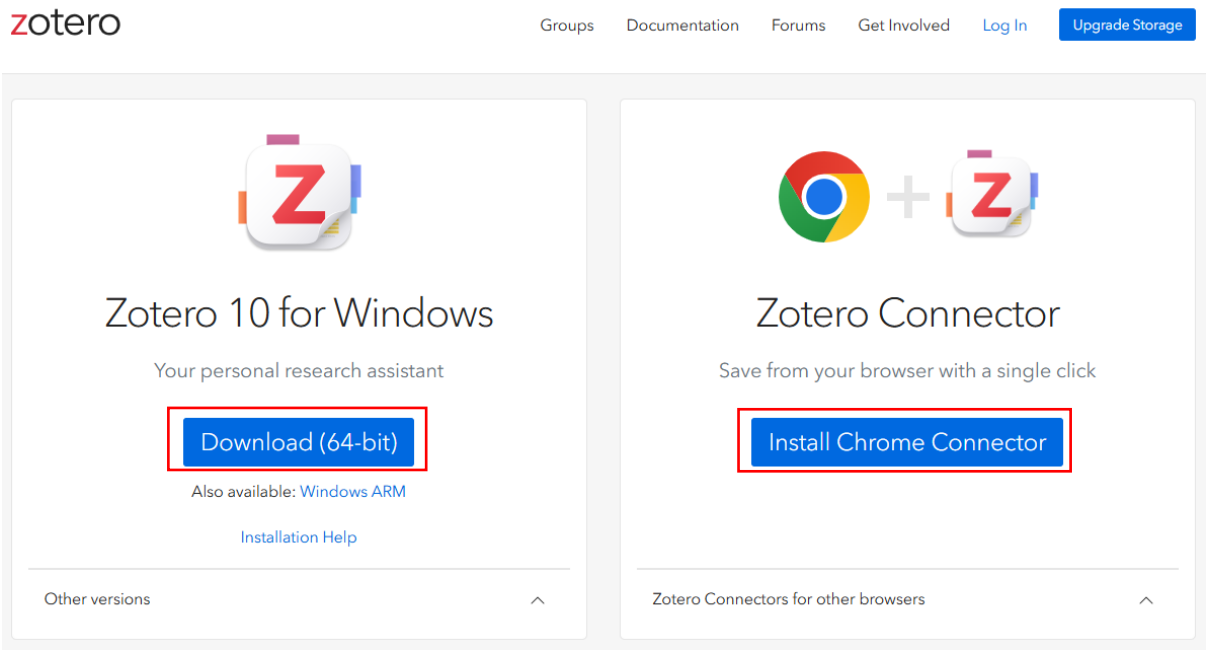
With Zotero it is possible to:

- enter literature references yourself into a personal library or import them automatically from databases such as Strada lex, HeinOnline, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Lib.ugent (the university library's online catalog), Biblio, ...
- edit and search reference data,
- insert citations in texts and format them in the desired bibliographic style such as APA, V&A, Chicago, Harvard, ... or in journal–specific bibliographic styles (International Review of Law and Economics, British Journal of Criminology, etc...),
- import pdf files and link these to references in Zotero,
- compose ordered bibliographies (e.g., by subject) and group references within a database,
- look up the full text of an article.

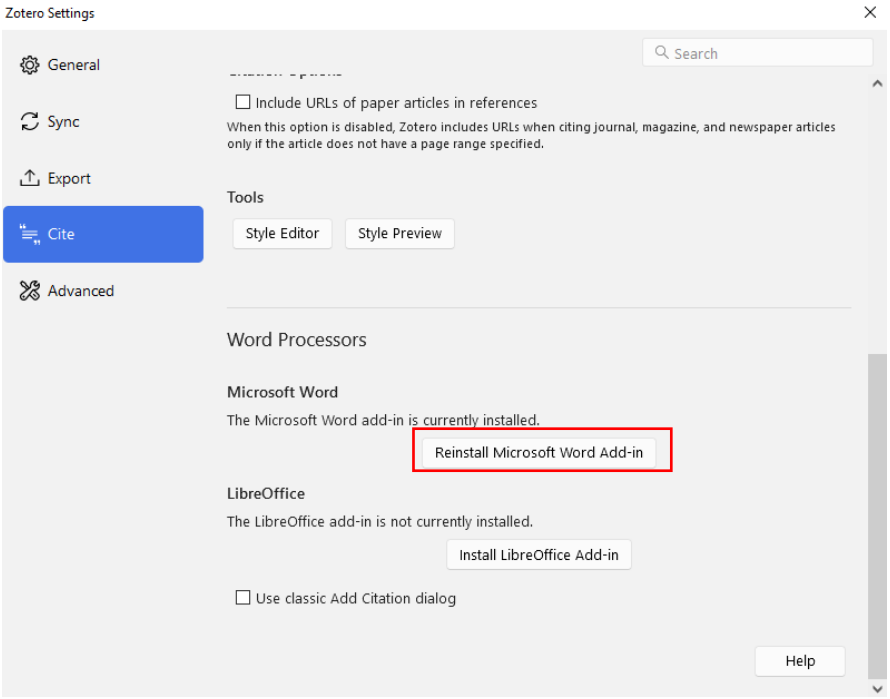
2 INSTALLING ZOTERO

Zotero is open source software: this means you can download it for free from the website (contrary to EndNote for example, which requires a subscription). There you will find three components to make full use of Zotero: the standalone program, the browser plugin and the word processor plugin.

- The standalone program is the reference manager itself, which you can also use offline after downloading. Choose the appropriate operating system, open the file that is downloaded and follow the instructions to complete the installation (for the 'Setup Type', it is best to choose 'Standard').
- Zotero Connector is the browser plugin for Zotero, which will allow you to easily add references you find online to your library (cfr. infra). Choose your preferred browser (Chrome, Firefox, Edge or Safari) and click 'Install [...] Connector'. You can then add the extension to your browser. If you work with Safari, you do not have to download Zotero Connector, only activate it. To do so, go to Safari (top left when you have a browser window open) – 'Settings' – 'Extensions'. Restart your browser after installing or activating the plugin.



- The plugin for word processors (e.g. Microsoft Word) is installed automatically when you start Zotero for the first time. If you don't have a word processor on your own computer, you can install Office for free on your own PC via Ghent University. With this plugin you will be able to easily add references and a bibliography to the text you are writing.
  If you do not see the plugin in Word after installing Zotero, you can still install it manually using Zotero. To do that, in Zotero go to 'Edit' – 'Settings' – 'Cite' – 'Word Processors' – 'Install Microsoft Word Add-in'.

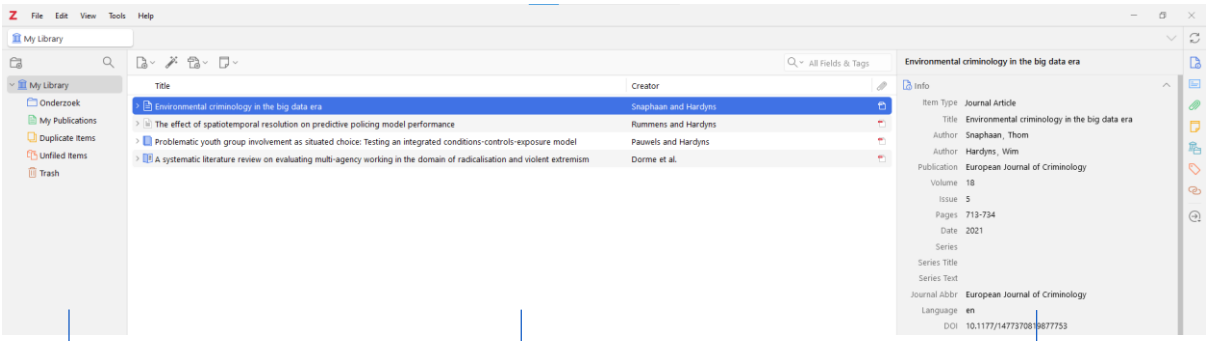


If you want to access your reference library from anywhere (not just on your own device) and share references and resources via groups, you also need to create an account. This can be done via https://www.zotero.org/user/register/, where you can enter the requested data to register. You can change these afterwards (including your e–mail address).

Important: for the rest of this manual, we assume you are using a Windows PC or laptop, not a MacBook. On a MacBook, the operations will be analogous to those described here, but may differ slightly here and there.

3 SETTING UP AND USING YOUR ZOTERO LIBRARY

3.1 Home screen



My library
In this panel you can easily navigate between the full reference list, parts of that list (collections), duplicate items, etc.

Reference list
Here you see the overview of the entire database or the selected group of references. For each reference a number of fields are shown. The list is easy to sort by clicking in the header of a column.

By right clicking on one of the columns it is possible to show other fields. It is also possible to change the order of the fields by dragging the columns.

If you have attached a pdf of a source, you can access it by clicking on the pdf icon in the ‘attachments’ column.

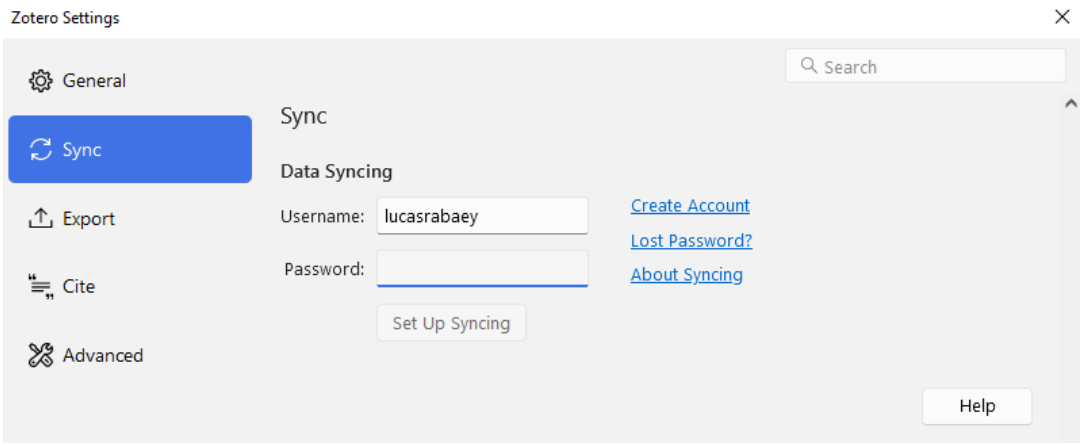
The search bar at the top right allows you to search by keywords within your own library.

Reference
Within this panel you view the currently selected reference. The ‘Info’ tab allows you to quickly make changes to references. In the other tabs you can add notes, labels and related resources, but that is beyond the scope of this manual.

3.2 Creating a library

Zotero always works within 'My Library': this is your general library that will be linked to your profile when you create it. Within that general library you can create collections (libraries) and subcollections (groups). You can create a new collection by choosing 'File' – 'New Collection' or by clicking on the folder with the plus sign underneath (the 'New Collection' button).

If you want to access your library and sources from anywhere (not only from your computer), it is important to link Zotero to your account (cf. part 2) to synchronize your library. To do that, go to 'Edit' – 'Settings' – 'Sync'. There you enter your account information to set up synchronization.



Since the free version of Zotero has a data limit of 300 MB, you can save space by choosing to be able to access linked files (e.g. the pdf of an article) only from the online version. To do this, uncheck 'Sync as Full Text Content' in the sync settings where you linked your account.

3.2.1 Entering data

In this manual, we discuss five different ways to add references in Zotero: adding references manually, importing pdf files, using an identifier (ISBN or DOI), importing directly from a database with an RIS file, and importing directly from a database with the browser plugin.

Important: This guide assumes on-campus use of your computer, or off-campus with a VPN connection.

3.2.1.1 Manually

- Click ‘File’ – ‘New Item’ or the ‘New Item’ button above the reference list .
- First choose the appropriate source type (e.g., ‘Journal Article’).
- The fields to be filled in will vary slightly depending on the source type you choose. The first fields are often required to arrive at a complete reference (e.g., title, author, publisher, journal title, date, etc.). The additional fields are not mandatory, but are useful to complete the data.
- Names of authors are entered as follows: last name, first name. Sometimes the author of a publication is not a person but an organization. To enter those, you can click on the box next to the field where you enter the author's name. This will change the two fields for first and last name to one field, where you can enter the name of the organization.
- If there is more than one author, organization or editor, you must list them as well. Add an additional author or editor by clicking the plus sign.
- When entering indexed fields (author, journal title and keywords), data are automatically suggested using previously entered references.
- Enter the data without additional formatting (not bold, italic,...), because the final formatting will be determined by the chosen output style.

3.2.1.2 Importing pdf files

Zotero provides the ability to import a pdf file, immediately adding both the reference and the file itself to your library.

Adding references based on pdf files is only possible for pdfs with the appropriate metadata (e.g. from full text scientific databases). You can easily do this by dragging the pdf file into the reference list of the (sub)collection in which you want to add the reference. Zotero will then automatically create a reference based on the information in the file, and link the file to that reference. Don’t forget to check this automatic reference: there is a chance that Zotero still makes small mistakes, because the information in the pdf is wrongly recorded (e.g. the year of consultation is noted as the year of publication instead of the real year of publication). If you think the information is incorrect, you can manually adjust this automatic reference where necessary in the right panel under 'Info'.

Electronic versions of articles or documents can also be added manually to an existing reference. You do this by right-clicking the reference you want to add the file to, select ‘Add attachment’ and then select

'File' or 'Linked File'. In the first case, you add a copy of the file to Zotero, in the second a link to the file's location.

3.2.1.3 Via identifier (ISBN or DOI)

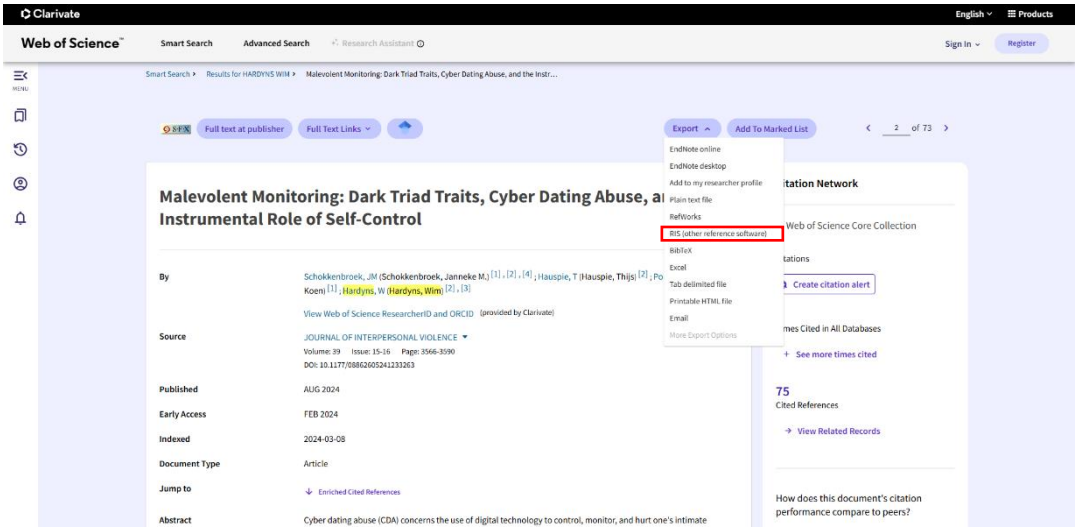
If you know the unique identifier for a source (ISBN for a book, DOI for an article), you can also add a reference based on that. You can do that by clicking on the magic wand in the toolbar above the reference list .

3.2.1.4 Direct import from databases (RIS file)

For a number of databases, it is possible to import references directly into Zotero. Regarding the direct import of references from the Belgian legal databases (Jura, Strada lex, LexNow), this function is only available in Strada lex. After importing the references into Zotero, be sure to check that the work was done correctly and that all information was filled in correctly.

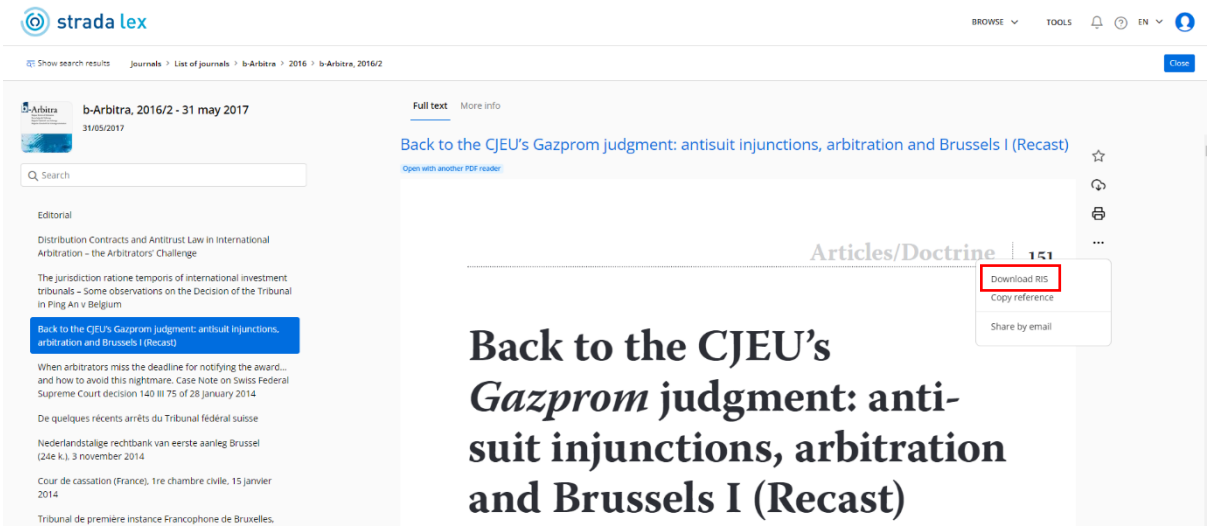
Web of Science

- go to Web of Science (via the catalog or directly via https://webofknowledge.com)
- perform a search
- check the desired documents or click on the article that interests you
- click on 'export' – 'RIS (other reference software)'
- select 'Record Content: Full Record' in the pop–up that appears and click on 'export'. The document will now be downloaded. By clicking on the file, you will open the reference in the collection you currently have opened in Zotero. You can also import the reference(s) into a new collection. In the pop–up window, be sure to uncheck 'Import to a new collection' if you don't want Zotero to create a new collection every time you import something this way. You can also leave it checked to import the reference(s) into a new collection.



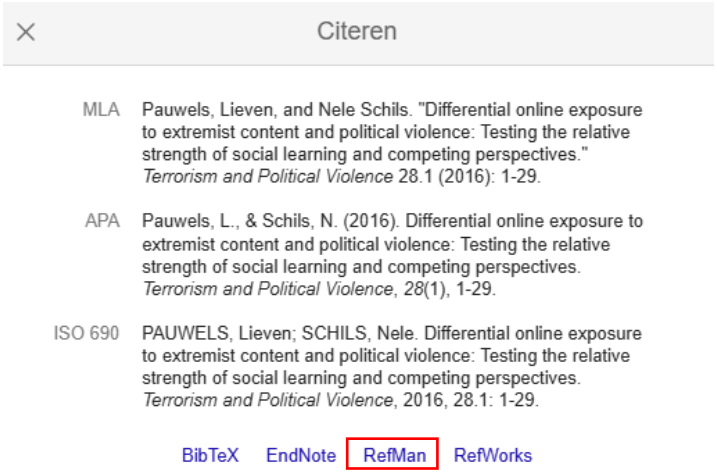
Strada lex

- open Strada lex (directly from https://stradalex.com or from the catalog)
- perform a search and click on the title of the article you want to export to Zotero
- click on the three dots below the button to print the article on the right
- select ‘Download RIS’
- when you open the downloaded reference, it will be added to Zotero



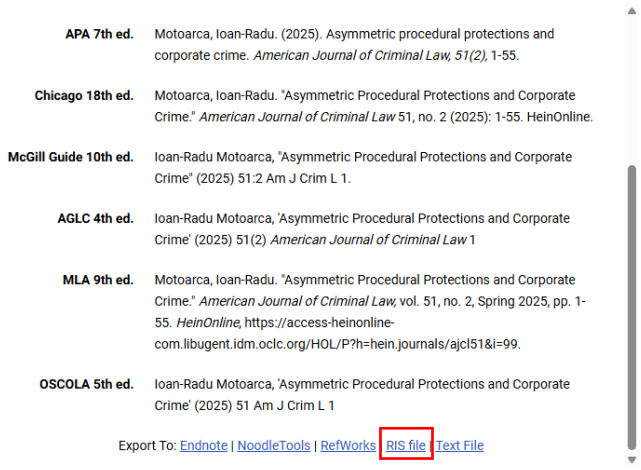
Google Scholar

Under each search result in Google Scholar, the cite (❞) option is displayed. Click on RefMan to download the RIS file. You can then open that file to import the reference and add it to Zotero.



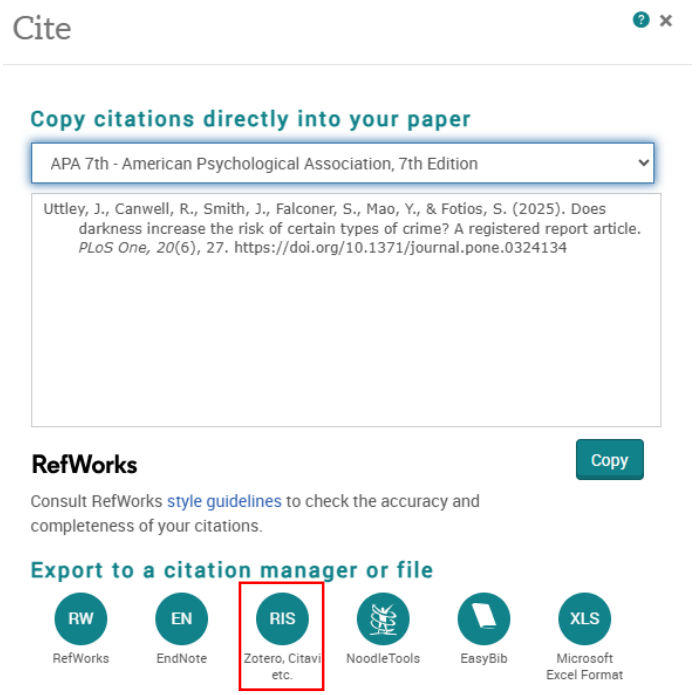
HeinOnline

- Open HeinOnline (directly from https://heinonline.org/HOL/Welcome or from the catalog)
- Perform a search and click on the article you want to import into Zotero
- In the text of the article, click on 'Display citation information' at the top left and at the bottom you can choose 'RIS file'
- When you open the downloaded reference, it will be added to Zotero



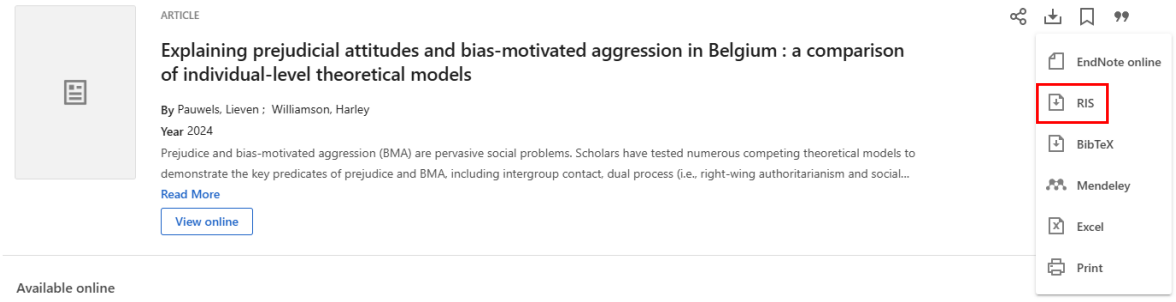
Proquest

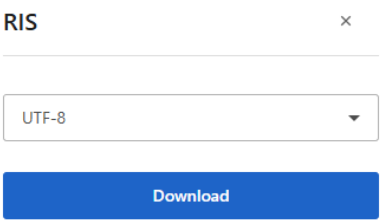
- Open Proquest (directly from https://search.proquest.com or from the catalog)
- Perform a search
- Check the articles you want to export to Zotero and click . Select 'RIS' in the pop-up that appears.
- Click 'Continue' in the next pop-up window.
- When you open the downloaded reference, it will be added to Zotero.



Ghent University catalog

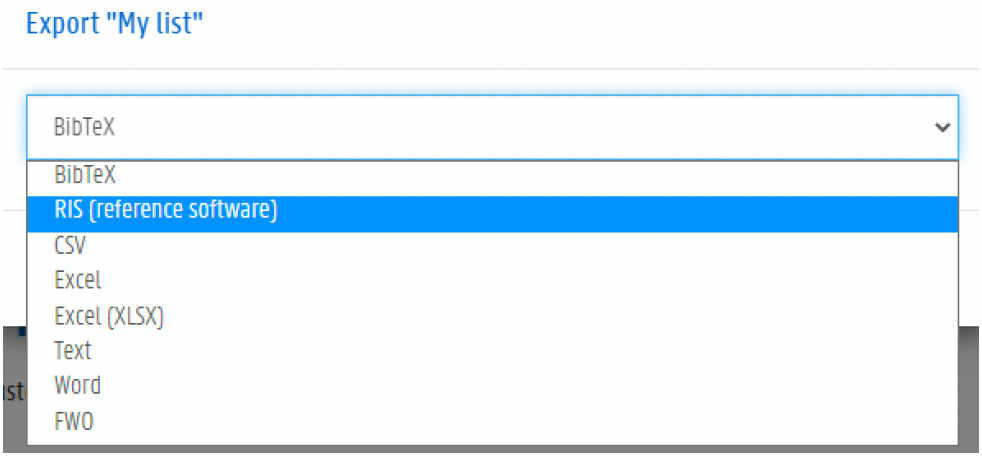
- Go to https://lib.ugent.be and perform your search
- Click on the title you want to import, click on the 'Export' button on the right and select 'Export RIS'.
- In the pop-up that appears, select UTF-8 (the standard option) and click 'Download'.
- When you open the downloaded reference, it will be added to Zotero.





Biblio (Ghent University Academic Bibliography)

- Go to https://biblio.ugent.be and perform your search
- Add the references you want to export to your personal list via ‘add to list’.
- Navigate to your personal list, click on ‘actions’ and select ‘Export list’.
- Select ‘RIS (Reference Software)’.

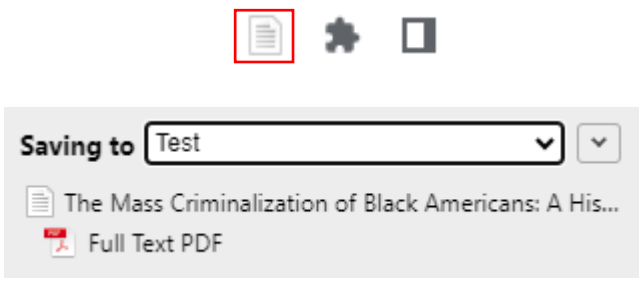


3.2.1.5 Direct import from databases (browser plugin)

To import references directly into Zotero, there is another method besides downloading and opening RIS files. If you have downloaded the browser plugin Zotero Connector and added it to your browser, you can also use it to easily add resources to Zotero. To make the plugin easy to use, we recommend pinning it to your browser (via ‘Extensions’ at the top right of your browser window) so that the button to import references to Zotero is always visible.

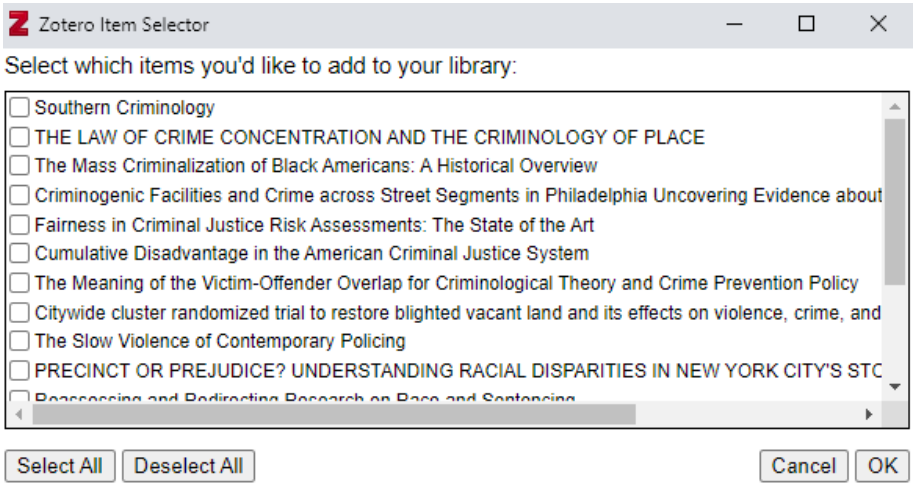
Using the browser plugin via the top right button works best in international (general or otherwise) databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, ProQuest, HeinOnline, etc. For Belgian legal databases, you will import more (and more correct) information through the RIS file (cfr 3.2.1.4).

When you are on the page of a source whose reference you want to import into Zotero, you will see a button in the upper right corner of your browser to add the reference to Zotero. When you click that, you will see a new window where you can choose in which (sub)collection in Zotero you want to save the reference. To do this, first click the icon to expand the window, select the appropriate (sub)collection and click ‘Done’.



It is also possible to import multiple sources into Zotero at the same time. Just as you can check sources in the results list of a search to download a RIS file of multiple references, Zotero Connector will allow you to import a selection of multiple sources. When you arrive at a database result list after a search, click the button in the top right again (which now has the icon of a folder). You will then see a screen

where you can select the sources from your result list whose reference you want to export to Zotero. You will then also be able to choose again in which (sub)collection you want to import the reference.

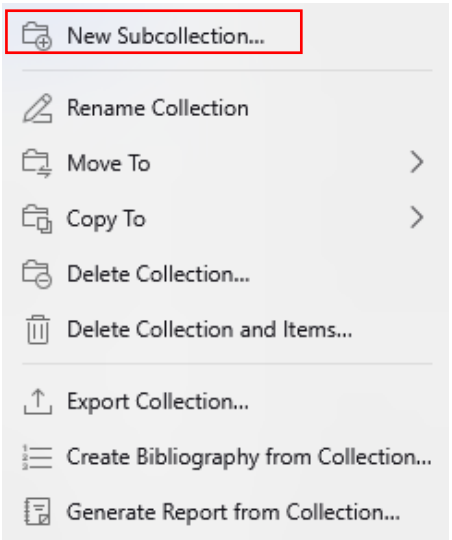


3.3 Using your library

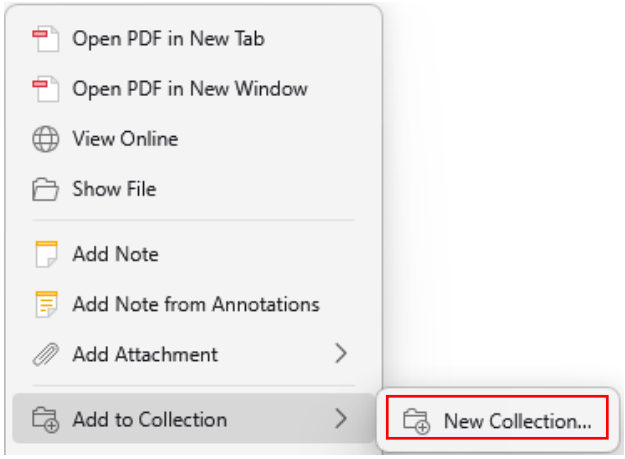
3.3.1 Collections

Working with collections makes it easy to classify and retrieve your references according to your own criteria. You can make further subdivisions into levels by creating subcollections. This allows you to structure your entire library of references, just as you would do on your computer when you organize all your documents in folder structures. For example, you can create a separate collection of references per research assignment, as well as per research topic, etc.

You can create a new (sub)collection in several ways. You can click the ‘New Collection’ button in the upper left corner. When you have given the new collection a name, it will appear in the list in the left panel. You can then make it a subcollection of an existing collection by dragging it there.
You can also create a new subset directly by right–clicking on an existing collection and selecting ‘New subcollection’.



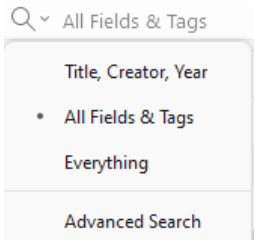
The two methods above create new empty collections that you can then populate with references. If you want to create a new collection directly from a set of references, you can do that too. To do so, select the desired references (with Ctrl), right click on one of the references and select ‘Add to Collection’ > ‘New Collection’.



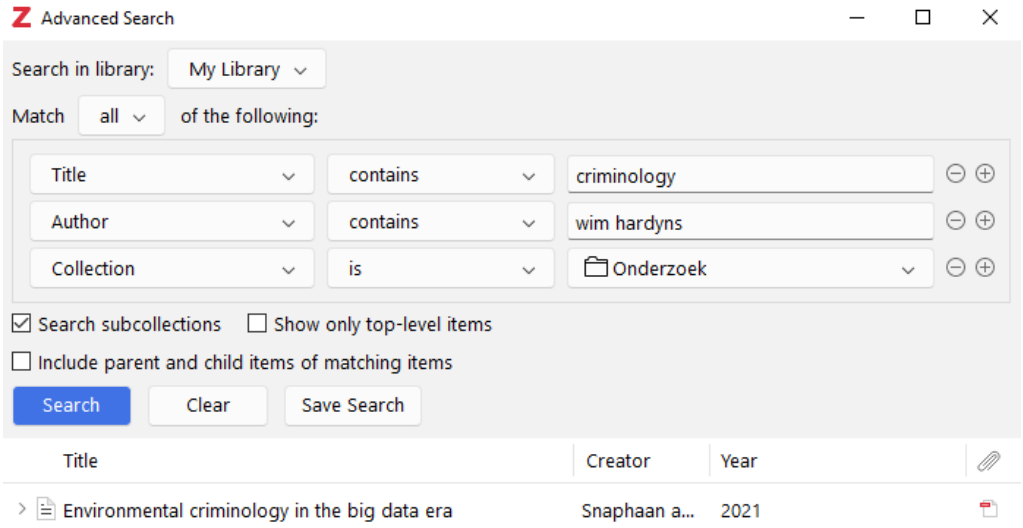
In this way, you can also add references to existing collections: they will appear in the drop–down menu. You can also do the same by dragging the references to a collection in the left panel. The references will always remain in the collection you dragged them from, i.e. you copy them.

3.3.2 Searching within your library

The search bar above the reference list panel allows you to search your library. Select a (sub)collection on the left if you want to limit your search to a part of your library. In the search bar you can specify whether you want to search all fields of references, only title, author or year, or everything (all fields and the full text if you added it).



To perform an advanced search, click on ‘Advanced Search’. In the screen you will then see, you can perform an advanced search by combining different terms, searching on specific fields, etc.

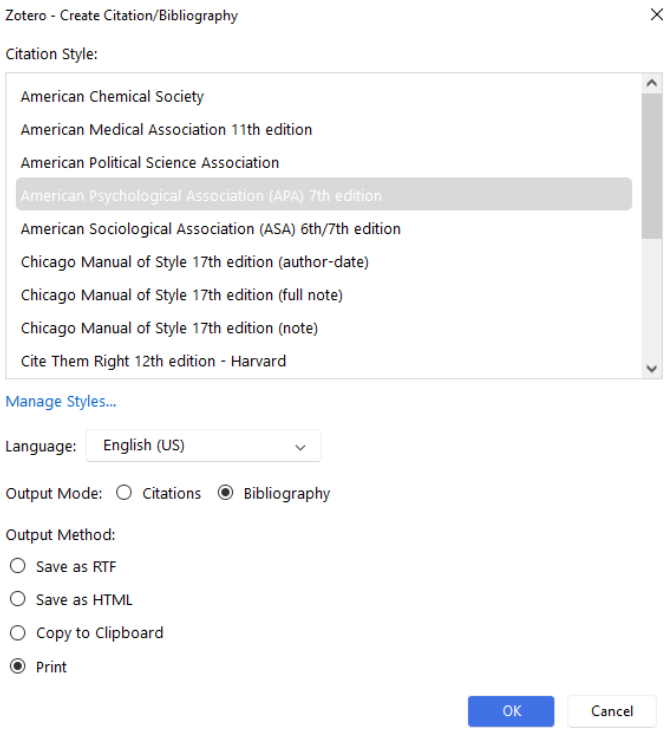


3.4 Printing

It is possible to print all or part of a collection/library in the desired style.

- Select the references to be printed
- Right–click and select ‘Create Bibliography from Items’
- Choose your desired citation style, whether you want to create a bibliography or references from the references, and select ‘Print’
- Zotero will send the created bibliography directly to your printer

Using the same method, you can create a file that is editable in Word (‘Save as RTF’).



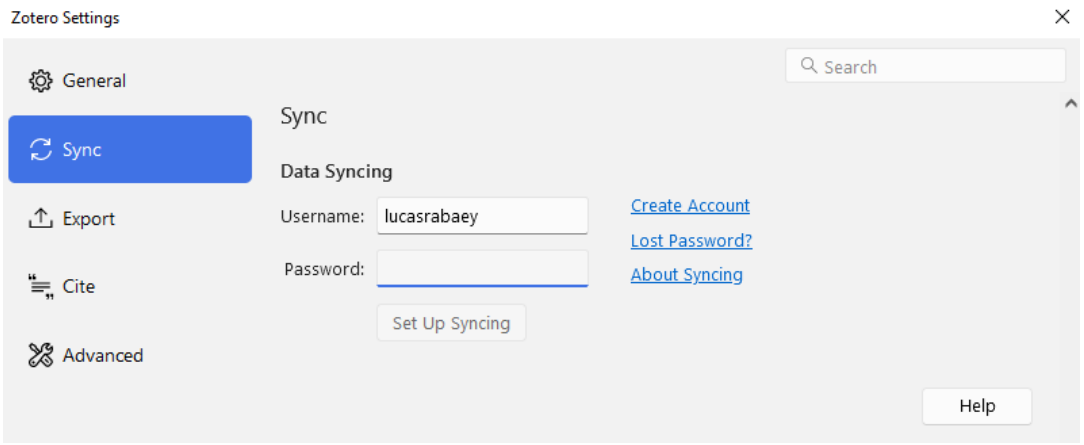
If you want to add references to a file or mail, you can simply select and drag them to where you want to add them, or copy them via Ctrl+Shift+C. Zotero will then automatically create a bibliography in the reference style you selected via ‘Edit’ – ‘Settings’ – ‘Export’.

3.5 Sharing

Zotero provides several ways to share your reference library or (sub)collections. Depending on the situation, it's best to use one of several methods. If you want to work in Zotero on multiple devices, synchronize your library. If you want to collaborate on a library with several people, create a group to set up a reference library together. If you just want to share your references with others (without collaborating), you can export your library for others to import. The reverse also works: you can import exported libraries (including from other reference managers) into Zotero.

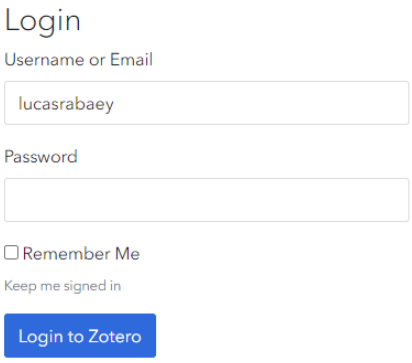
3.5.1 Synchronizing

As mentioned in section 3.2, it is possible to access and edit your library in Zotero from anywhere by synchronizing using your Zotero account. Via 'Edit' – ‘Settings’ – 'Sync' you can enter your account details to set up synchronization.

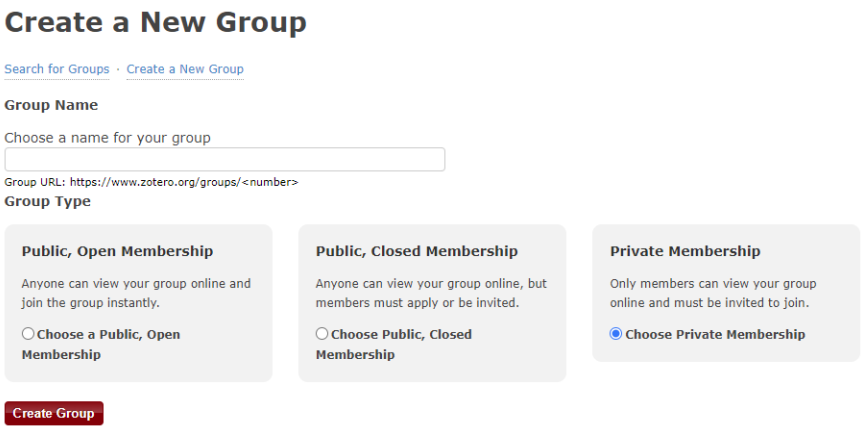


3.5.2 Groups

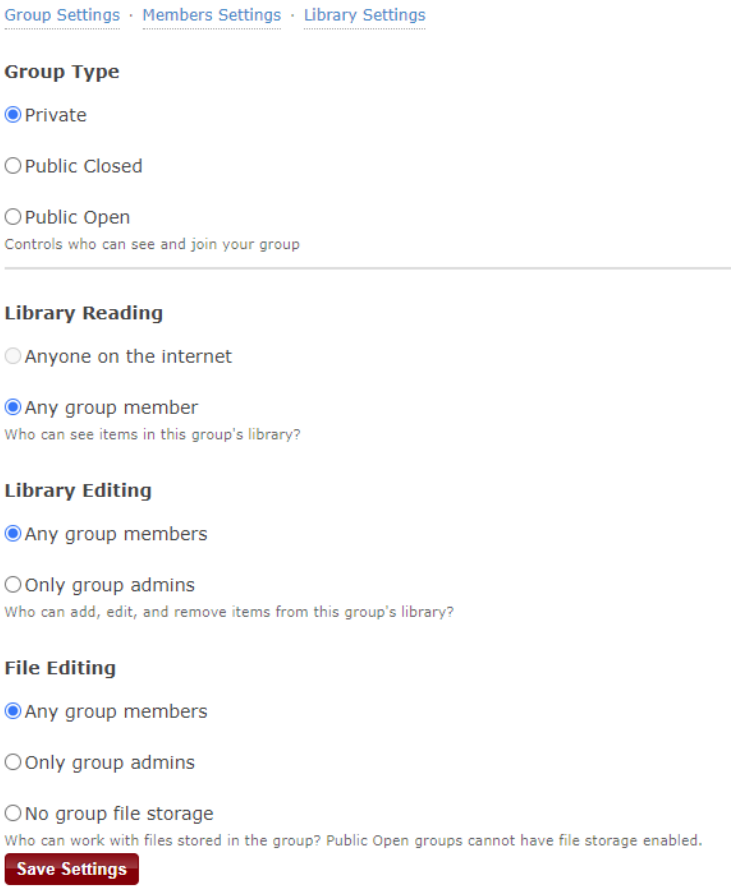
To collaborate with others on a reference library, you can create groups in Zotero. To do this, select ‘File’ – ‘New Group’.
Clicking that button will redirect you to the Zotero website, where you will first have to log in with your account information before you can create a new group.



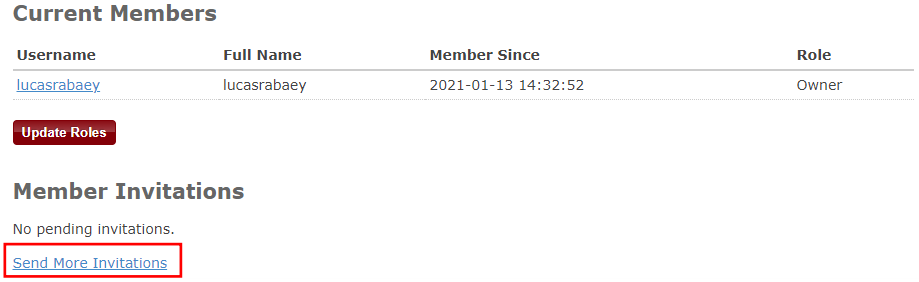
Through ‘Groups’ on the Zotero homepage, you will go to the overview of groups. Via ‘Create a New Group’, you will be taken to the home screen to create a new group. There you can choose a name for the group (e.g., the project or group work you are collaborating on) and choose the group type. There are three different group types: public groups with open membership, public groups with closed membership and private groups. Public groups are findable through Zotero's website, private groups are not. Groups with open membership are open for anyone to join. With closed membership, you must receive (or request) an invitation to join the group. Private groups always have closed membership: you can join them by invitation only. Click 'Create Group' at the bottom to create the group once you have chosen a name and type.

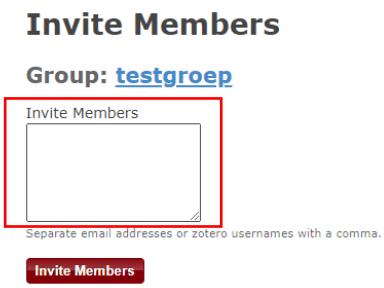


In the ‘Library Settings’ you can set up options for using your group reference library: who can see and edit your library, and who can edit files in the library?



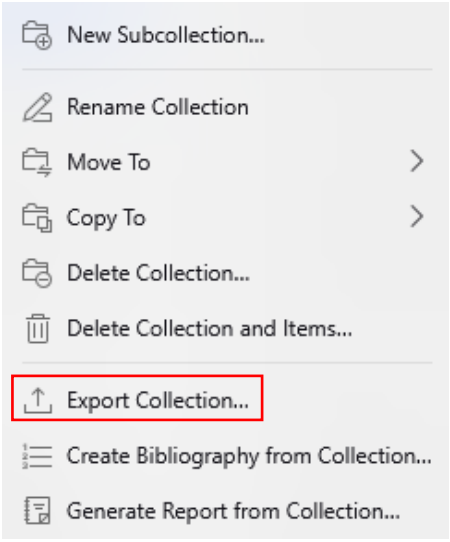
In the 'Member Settings' you can see all members of the group and their roles. In this guide, we will not elaborate on the different roles within groups. The 'Send More Invitations' button allows you to invite others to join your group. To do so, under 'Invite Members' you need to enter their email address (which they used to create an account with Zotero) or their Zotero username.



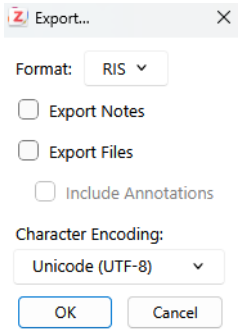


3.5.3 Export/import

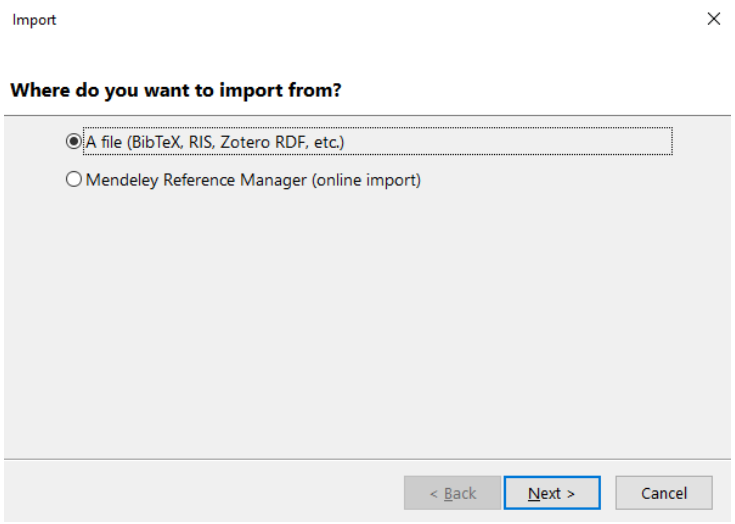
To simply share your library or (sub)collection with others without working on a shared library, you can export it. To do so, right–click on the collection and select ‘Export Collection’. You can also do the same with your entire library by right clicking on ‘My Library’ and selecting ‘Export Library’.



In the screen that appears next, you can select the file type and additional options. You choose the file type under 'Format': Zotero RDF is the default and the most appropriate option when someone will also open your exported library in Zotero. If that person is using another reference manager such as EndNote or Mendeley, then you can choose RIS: a commonly used file type. In addition, you still have the option to export both notes and files linked to the library. You can leave character encoding on Unicode (UTF-8)



This way you can transfer your Zotero reference library to another reference manager. Conversely, this also works: libraries from other reference managers can be imported into Zotero. To do this, go to 'File' – 'Import' and choose the appropriate option. If you exported your library from another reference manager (e.g. as an RIS file), then select the first option and select the appropriate file. After importing, be sure to check that the information is included correctly. Where necessary, you can make adjustments in the reference panel.



In the next part of the tutorial, we will go into more detail about using Zotero as a tool for writing an academic paper and talk about creating a bibliography of sources you refer to in a text, among other things.

4 ZOTERO AS A WRITING AID

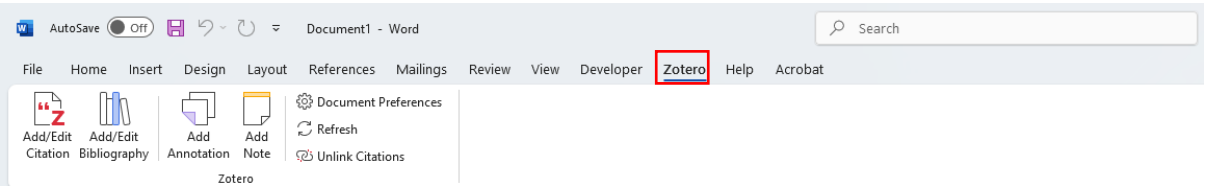
4.1 Cite while you write

4.1.1 Introduction

The dynamic link between Zotero and Word allows you to call on Zotero's references and (formatting) capabilities while writing, the *Cite While You Write* principle. Moreover, if both Zotero and Word are open, you can easily switch between the two programs.

When you insert references and a bibliography in Word, your bibliography is automatically updated with the new references you refer to in your text. The references and bibliography are formatted according to your chosen citation style.

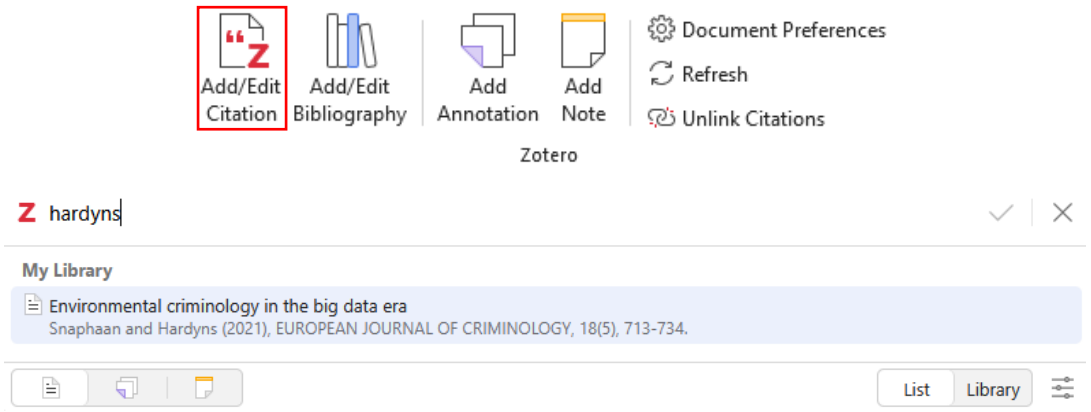
When you install Zotero, the Word plugin is automatically installed and will appear in the toolbar at the top. Note: if Word is already open before you first install Zotero, Zotero will not appear in your toolbar at the top. You must first close and restart Word before Zotero will appear in the toolbar. If you do not see the plugin, you can manually install it in Zotero (cfr. 2).



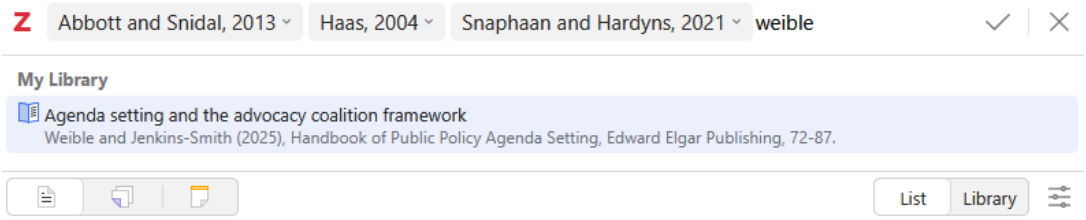
4.1.2 Adding a reference

Before adding a reference, make sure the cursor is in the right place in the text. A reference always appears in the place where it applies. For Zotero, it doesn't matter if you know in advance whether a reference style will work with footnotes (references at the bottom of the page, e.g. V&A or Chicago), or with references within a text, e.g. APA or MLA. Zotero will automatically select the appropriate formatting based on the chosen reference style (cfr. 4.1.3).

You can add a reference via the 'Add/Edit Citation' button. After this a search bar will appear where you can search for the reference you want to insert. Select the desired reference and click on Enter to insert the reference.

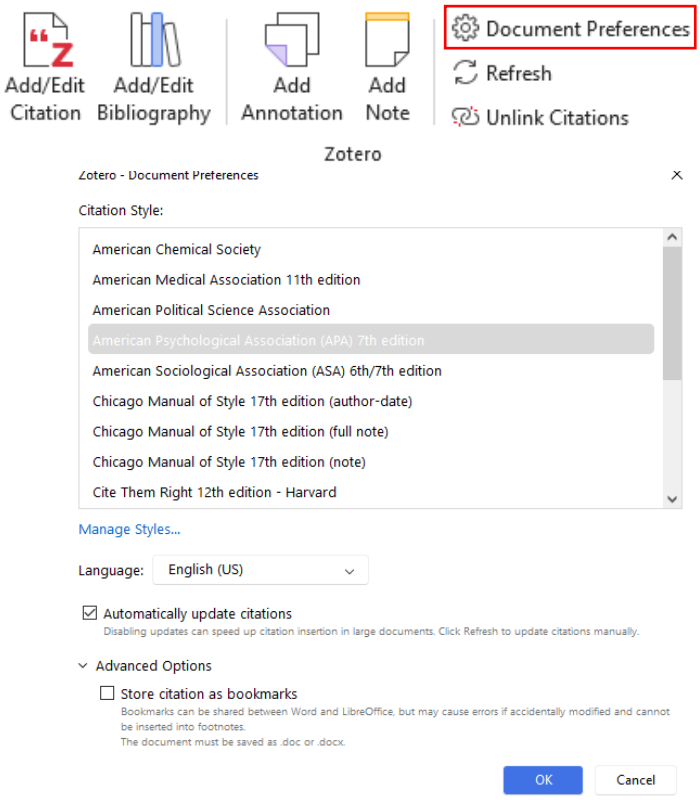


Inserting multiple references is easily done by searching for other references after selecting the first reference. When your selection is complete, you can insert them by clicking Enter.



4.1.3 Citation style

The references and bibliography are displayed in your chosen citation style. You can change this citation style via the 'Document Preferences' button. In the window that opens you can choose your desired citation style.



At the bottom you will also see that the option to automatically update references is on. We will discuss this further in the next section (4.1.4).

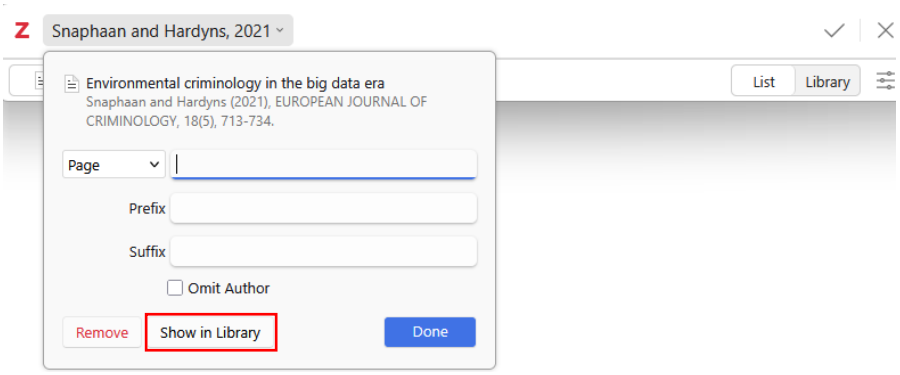
4.1.4 Editing and deleting references

When you insert references or a bibliography, you will see that they are in a gray field when you select them. That means the reference is linked to your library in Zotero. It is better not to make changes directly to the fields in Word. Changing information in a reference is done through Zotero. If you want to add information to your reference (such as page numbers of a specific citation), you can do so via the Zotero plugin.

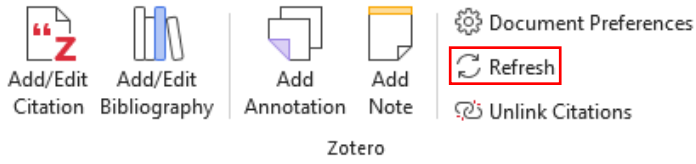
Editing references

Select the reference in your document and click 'Add/Edit Citation' in the Zotero tab in the toolbar at the top. Then select the reference and click 'Show in Library'. When you now switch to your Zotero window,

you will see that that reference is selected. You can then make adjustments in the reference panel on the right (e.g., change authors, date, title, etc.). You can also navigate directly in Zotero to the reference you want to modify.



Once you have made the changes in Zotero, you will see that they do not yet show up automatically in the reference in Word. To apply these changes, click 'Refresh' at the top of the toolbar.



Adding specific pages, additional information... to a reference

Some reference styles support references to specific pages in a book/article/... Since entering a reference in Word with Zotero sometimes involves an entire publication, the specific pages must be entered later. This can be done by selecting the reference and clicking 'Add/Edit Citation' again (cfr. supra). Here you can add specific pages or a prefix or suffix. You can enter the page numbers (just the digits, possibly separated by a hyphen if it concerns several consecutive pages), and Zotero will automatically make sure that the rules of your selected citation style are followed. Prefixes and suffixes can be used to add any additional information to your reference, as in the following example: '(**see also** Snaphaan and Hardyns, 2021 **for a discussion of this phenomenon**)'. Prefixes and suffixes are displayed as you enter them in the respective fields.

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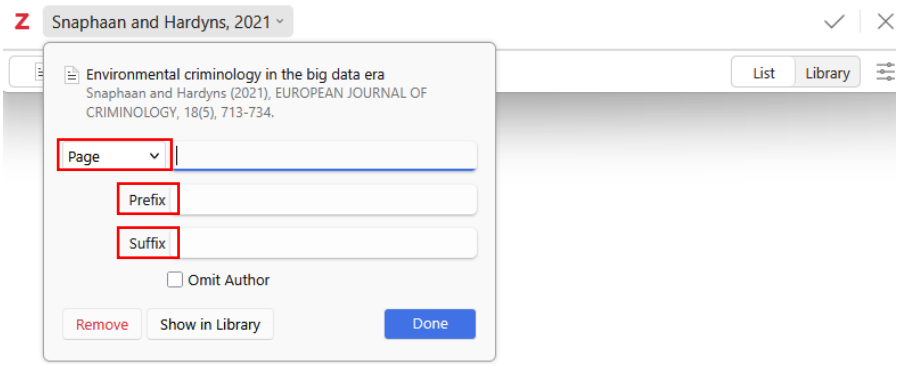


In some referencing styles with in–text references (such as APA 7th) you have already mentioned the author(s) of a source in the main sentence. This means that you don't need to mention them in the brackets of your references, e.g. '**Snaphaan and Hardyns (2021)** mention that (...)'. To do this, click on 'Omit Author'.

4.1.5 Inserting a bibliography

Via 'Add/Edit Bibliography' you can insert a bibliography of your used sources. Zotero will automatically put the bibliography in the format of your selected citation style, just like for references in your text.

Once you have created a bibliography in your document, Zotero will automatically update it when you add new references in your text.

If you want to make changes to your bibliography (e.g. because there is information that is incorrect or missing), you can do so directly in Zotero at the sources to be updated. As with the references, you can then use the ‘Refresh’ button to have your changes made in Zotero reflected in Word.

5 USING APA (7TH) AS A CITATION STYLE IN ZOTERO

Within the criminology programme, APA is usually preferred as a citation style. This citation style, established by the American Psychological Association, is currently in its 7th version.

Some general characteristics of the APA referencing style :
- references to the text itself with the name of the first author(s) (name–date system)
- book title or journal name in italics
- bibliography alphabetical by author
- edited volumes use the name of the editor, unless referring to a specific contribution

The specific rules related to this reference style are well documented and further explained in the Encyclopedia of Criminological Sciences course.

In the criminology programme at UGent, the guidelines regarding the use of the APA reference style, possibly in combination with the V&A reference style, are very clear:
Students should use one – or if required, a combination – of the two following reference styles: (1) the American Psychological Association (APA) style or (2) the Juridische Verwijzingen en Afkortingen (V&A) style.

For a paper with only social science sources, the APA style will be used. A paper with primarily legal sources will use the V&A style.

If a paper contains both social science and legal sources, a combined system is adopted, using V&A style (with footnotes) for legal sources and APA style (in–text references and bibliography) for social science sources.

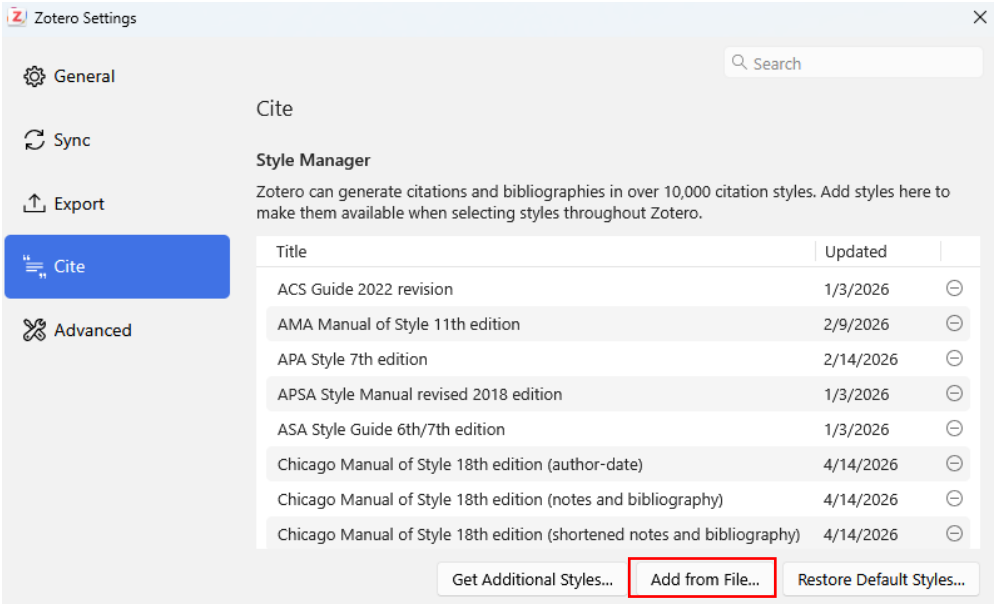
Automatically combining both styles in one document via Zotero is not possible. In this case, for the sources referenced via the APA style, it is recommended to use the Zotero plugin in Word. For the sources referenced using the V&A style, you can use the footnote function (References > Insert footnote) in Word. You then add those sources manually.

6 USING V&A AS A CITATION STYLE IN ZOTERO

Within the law programme, the “Juridische Verwijzingen & Afkortingen” (V&A) citation style is often used. Since the thorough update of this citation style in September 2024, it is also available within Zotero.

Before you can use this style in Zotero, you must first download and install it. This can be done as follows:

- Download the V&A style from https://vena.be/zotero
- Save the file (.csl) in a permanent location (preferably not in a temporary folder, such as the ‘Downloads’ folder)
- In Zotero, go to ‘Edit’ > ‘Settings’ > ‘Cite’
- At the bottom of the list of styles, click on ‘Add from File’ to import a new style.
- Select the downloaded file. The style will now appear in the list as ‘Verwijzingen en Afkortingen (Belgium)’. Note that you may get an error message when importing, but you can ignore it.



You can find all information on the use of the V&A citation style in Zotero (how to add specific sources, how to refer in text, etc.) on the official website: https://vena.be/. There you will find how to add each source type in Zotero to obtain a correct reference.

USEFUL LINKS

(Re)searchtips on Zotero:
How to install Zotero?: https://onderzoektips.ugent.be/en/tips/00002165/
How to manage sources in Zotero?: https://onderzoektips.ugent.be/en/tips/00002166/
How to cite in Word?: https://onderzoektips.ugent.be/en/tips/00002167/

Documentation Zotero: https://www.zotero.org/support/

In case you have any questions, please contact: rbib@ugent.be or libservice@ugent.be

Version July 2026
Faculty library law and criminology
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