

# Keeping up with the ~~Jones's~~ LITERATURE



- 1 Do a quick search to identify the major themes, keywords, and journals published in your topic area.
- 2 Use those themes to create an organizational system for your reference library.
- 3 Add functional tags to your organizational system.
- 4 Subscribe to journal email updates.
- 5 Sign up for Google Scholar search alerts.
- 6 Fill and maintain the reference library.
- 7 Create a reading goal and set aside time to complete it.

# Step-By-Step



- 1** Get familiar with what is out there.  
*Time estimate: 45 minutes*

Reviewing the literature for an unfamiliar topic area can be overwhelming. Start with a broad keyword search and review the results to see what themes and subthemes, keywords, and journals emerge. The goal is to mentally map which themes and keywords are common in your area of interest and where to find them.

1. Put a broad keyword representing your topic into Google Scholar (or other databases as appropriate to your topic area).
2. Find articles with titles matching the topic you are interested in. Restrict to recent years as needed.
3. Look at each search result. In the authorship area, usually just before or after the abstract, there will be a section marked **keywords**. You may need to go to the article's website or open the full text to find this. Start a list of relevant keywords and note journals that come up regularly. Use these keywords to modify your search terms to get better matches.
4. Continue to skim the titles and update your keyword list as needed. When you feel you have a general idea of overarching themes and keywords in your topic, stop.

# Step-By-Step



- 2** Build an organizational structure based on the themes and subtopics you identified. *Time estimate: up to 3 hours*

The easiest way to manage data is by keeping it organized from the start. You can use your identified themes, concepts, and keywords to create the organizational structure for organizing your references.

1. **Pick a reference manager.** Search “compare reference managers”, to compare free and paid options.
2. **Learn your tool.** Read the instructions or watch tutorials for the reference manager you’ve selected. You can often use many time-saving features if you know they’re available.
3. **Create a reference library and set up a folder/tagging structure.** Create a folder/tagging structure using the themes you found while skimming the titles (some reference managers use the term keyword rather than tags). There’s no right or wrong approach here; you can change it later. If you’re unsure where to start, make some folders for the major keywords you found.
4. **Keep it functional.** When creating the organizational structure, remember what your system needs to do. In the future, your library will probably get large. You want enough folders, subfolders, and tags to make finding specific articles easy, but not so many folders/tags as to be overwhelming. Find the sweet spot for you.

# Step-By-Step



3

Add functional tags to your reference library.

*Time estimate: 30 minutes*

There are two kinds of tags that you'll use in your library: **1) content** and **2) functional**. In step 2, we focus on content tags. Now, it's time to add the functional ones.

1. **Add a tag for "read."** You will add this tag to articles as you finish reading them. You don't need a tag for "unread" because, by default, all references are unread until you tag them as read.
2. **Add priority tags.** To keep up with your reading without feeling overwhelmed, you'll need a way to prioritize the articles. A simple high, medium, and low system works well. When you gather your references, you'll decide which articles you absolutely must read, which you should read, and which would be nice to read and sort them accordingly.
3. **Add relevance tags.** Relevance tags are for articles you have read and categorized their relevance to your topic. Again, you want three categories, highly relevant, somewhat relevant, and least/not relevant.

# Step-By-Step



4

Sign up for journal updates.

*Time estimate: 30 minutes*

Make it easier to keep up with developments in your field by automating the process as much as possible.

1. Take the list of journals you identified in Step 1.
2. Go to each journal's website.
3. Subscribe to the journal's emailed Table of Contents and/or journal updates mailing list.
4. Create a folder for these notifications in your email and set up a rule/filter to automatically file them in the folder.

5

Sign up for Google search alerts.

*Time estimate: 30 minutes*

Continue to automate the process by having Google email you search alerts based on keywords you've set up.

1. Decide which search terms you want to be alerted to. These can be keywords, key phrases, authors, etc.
2. Follow Google Scholar's instructions for creating email alerts.\*  
<https://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/help.html#alerts>
3. Create a rule/filter in your email to have these alerts go automatically to the folder you set up in Step 4.

\*Other databases also have automated search functions. Contact your school's librarian for information on additional tools you have access to.

# Step-By-Step



## 6

Fill and maintain the reference library.

*Time estimate: setup 3 hours, maintenance 15 minutes*

1. Do a search for the most relevant keywords you identified.
2. Skim the titles. If you have mostly relevant results (70% or better), use the reference manager and database tools to group download your results into your library.
3. If you have a large number of irrelevant results, use search operators (e.g., not/or/and) to refine your search.
4. Repeat the search with different keywords/phrases until you've gotten a decent number of citations into your library. Do not worry about getting them all, we will cover that in Step 7.
5. When the download is complete, it's time to file the articles. Start by getting them into their categories/subcategories. Then, based on the title/abstract, add priority tags for reading. This may take time, depending on how many results you have. If necessary, set daily goals with a set number of citations to sort and tag.
6. Once you have the initial results filed, schedule a recurring 15-minute monthly appointment with yourself to review the references flagged by your alerts. Add all relevant references to your library.

# Step-By-Step



## 7

Create a reading goal and stick to it.

*Time estimate: varies*

1. **Set realistic reading goals.** Pick goals that work best for you and that you will stick to. Some prefer setting quantitative goals on the number of articles or pages read, while others prefer time-based goals. Be sure to make them reasonable, or you will demotivate yourself. Students are often surprised by how long reading can take.
2. **Find a way to track your goals.** Create a system for monitoring your progress. You can log the number of pages or articles you read and total them each week. Or, you can create checkboxes for reading in 15-minute increments and tick them off as you reach them.
3. **Start with high-priority articles and work your way down.** Start with reading the highest priority articles and work down. Keep a few articles handy to read if you have time (e.g., waiting for an oil change or a meeting to start). Fill free time during the workday with reading.
4. **Check article references against your library.** Compare each article's references against your library, and add relevant articles you've missed. You'll know how complete your library is by how many new references you have to add.
5. **Maintain Organization.** Be sure to keep up with the organization/structure of your library. Tag articles with the “read” and relevance tags as you complete them. Prioritize incoming articles.