



# Staying current: Keeping up with the latest literature

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Through graduate-level research and education, students gain the required experience and knowledge that develops them into experts in their field of study. Much of this knowledge is obtained from reviewing the literature, which is required for coursework, experimental question and design development, thesis writing, and more. After graduate studies, scientists often conduct literature reviews to prepare research proposals, protocols, and outreach material. However, outside of these tasks, it can be challenging to keep up to date with the latest literature.

Keeping up with the latest literature is instrumental in research, outreach, and professional careers. For graduate students, being knowledgeable about the latest research is essential for developing projects, interpreting data, and understanding findings' relevance. While developing research projects, being knowledgeable about

the most recent studies can reveal the current limits of understanding on a topic—allowing researchers to design experiments aimed at addressing these knowledge gaps. New and improved methodologies are being published routinely as the exponential development of technology continually advances data collection. Keeping up to date with these developments can provide improved or more cost-effective data collection. Some of these developments can solve logistical issues that previously hindered a research project. After the project design and data collection stage of research, staying informed of recent research insights can inform the analysis of the data as it is important that results can be compared with other published findings. Additionally, the findings of an ongoing research project may have more relevance or importance when considering other recent findings or suggestions.

Given the importance of keeping up to date with the latest literature, we have outlined some tips below to help with the process.

### **Monthly Review of Relevant Journals**

Perhaps the most tried and true method of keeping up with the latest literature is a monthly review of the contents of the most relevant journals in your field of study. One of the key advantages of this method is that you will be exposed to studies that are not directly related to a target study topic. Their methods or findings may, however, be indirectly relevant to your ongoing research or results. This facilitates interdisciplinary research, which is contributing greatly to the growth of many fields of study. One drawback to this method is the costs associated with subscribing to and reading multiple journals a month. To alleviate these costs, you could collaborate with colleagues by dividing the journals among each other and forwarding relevant papers to the group. This requires being somewhat knowledgeable about the research interests of colleagues, which is a good practice to have anyway.

## **Connected Papers**

Connected Papers ([www.connectedpapers.com](http://www.connectedpapers.com)) is a free service that provides a visual tool for finding papers that are relevant to a given topic or field of study. Connected Papers searches ~50,000 papers and generates a graph of dozens of the most relevant papers to a given paper, including papers that weren't cited by the original publication. Arranged by similarity, the generated graph shows the papers most related to each other and most cited by others as well as the connections between each paper. This tool is extremely useful for having a broader understanding of a topic while conducting a literature review. In addition to finding the most similar papers, it also has a "prior works" feature that lists the papers most commonly cited by the papers included in the graph. As Connected Papers advises, these prior works often include important seminal works in the field of study of the paper used in the generation of the graph. While all these functions help with keeping up to date with the literature, it is the service's "derivative works" function that is most useful. With this function, users are able to generate a list of papers that cite those generated in the graph. These are generally more recent publications and include papers that may have been otherwise overlooked.

## **Search Engine Notifications**

Search engine notifications are another useful tool that automatically delivers newly published paper titles to your email inbox based on the terms and parameters you define. Relevant databases, such as Web of Science or JSTOR, enable you to set up alerts for numerous search terms at your desired interval of time, such as daily, weekly, or monthly. Google Scholar also has the capability to set up article alerts via email for your defined search terms, which produces a daily register of recently published articles with titles containing your keywords. Another option is to set up Table of Contents alerts through specific publishers, such as *Nature* or *Science*. As a member of

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, you have access to 13 scientific journals (seven journals through a personal or institutional subscription; six journals that are gold open access), such as the *Soil Science Society of America Journal* (SSSAJ). Reoccurring content alerts (daily, weekly, or monthly) can be set per your preference.

## **RSS Feeds**

Similar to the notifications provided by search engines like Web of Science or JSTOR, RSS feeds are also useful tools for having newly published papers relevant to your interests delivered via email. This method has been around for quite some time, so there are many ways of using them and services offered to assist with creating and keeping up with RSS feeds relevant to a given topic. These services range from free to subscription-based models, and many of them also offer other services such as being reference managers. Among these services include Feedly, PubCrawler, PubChase, Papers, and more.

## **Get Involved with Your Societies**

Another way to keep up with the latest literature is to engage in opportunities with your Societies.

- Volunteer to be a peer reviewer. Get additional insight from manuscripts that you might peer review. More information can be found at [www.soils.org/publications/journals/peer-review](http://www.soils.org/publications/journals/peer-review). ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are developing a peer-review mentorship program to help facilitate training of peer reviewers. Look for more information coming soon.
- Apply for an open social media editor position with one of the Society journals. With a short term of one year, the position creates discussion and notes newly published research on the journal social media accounts.

- Consider an opportunity with the Societies' books committee. Gain insight and depth into book topics and research. Contact Richard Easby ([Send Message](#)) for information or to get your questions answered.

## **Final Thoughts**

There are numerous tools available that will deliver relevant research articles to your inbox. However, the most useful tools are the ones that you use the most regularly. Finding a system that works for you is the key to success. We recommend trying a combination of the tools listed above to figure out which ones enable you to stay the most up to date with literature in your field. And remember, downloading a new paper into your citation manager does not count as reading it—so be sure to set aside time to read the new literature coming your way as well.

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