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EasyBib: A Review

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this article is to inform the reader about EasyBib, a citation management tool that Mabee Library at MidAmerica Nazarene University selected as a subscription-based resource after comparing it to similar products. EasyBib stood out as the best product for the university's needs. The article addresses why we chose this product, its features, and how it is used in instruction sessions. It also informs the reader about EasyBib's library edition and how it differs from the free version with which many people are familiar. Furthermore, upcoming features of the product, as well as how we plan to use it in the future are mentioned.

EasyBib: A Review

At MidAmerica Nazarene University, we use three citation styles: Chicago/Turabian, MLA, and APA. This is challenging for students when they move from their general education courses to their degree specific classes. It is also challenging for librarians and the faculty who teach multiple styles. In December 2011, we started to look for citation management software that would assist students, faculty, and the library staff.

EasyBib stood out as the best option for what we both needed and wanted. Over the last several years many options such as Zotero, RefWorks, and EndNote were considered. While these products are widely used we felt that EasyBib best suited our needs. Other libraries might find that their needs are best met by another product.

EasyBib is a web-based citation management system that was created by ImagineEasy Solutions. Partners include WorldCat, Credo Reference, yolink, and studybreakmedia. EasyBib is marketed by OCLC. It was important to us that our citation management system be web-based because we did not want students to have to download a file. It was also important that the student's would have access to their work from any machine. This feature is available with EasyBib, as each user is able to create their own account and save the bibliographies with which they are working. There is a free version of EasyBib that we discovered many of our students were already using. In the free version the only citation option available is MLA. This knowledge made the decision to subscribe to the library edition much easier. Pricing for the library edition of EasyBib is based on an institution's current student enrollment.

According to EasyBib's website (2012) the library edition is "geared to the average undergraduate student," but we have found it beneficial for graduate students and faculty. The library edition is free of advertisements, allows the interface to be branded to our library, and provides access to features that are not available in the free version. The library edition also partners with OCLC and thus, has access to the bibliographic content of the OCLC WorldCat database. Like many of our databases EasyBib uses IP authentication, making the process for its access familiar to our faculty and students, and limiting access to this online resource to valid university credentials.

Features

Our use of EasyBib has focused on the citation features of the product, as it allows a person to create citations in Chicago/Turabian, MLA, and APA styles. In-text citations can also be generated using the library edition of EasyBib. Users may toggle between citation styles while users are entering citation data. EasyBib will help the user create citations for fifty-nine source types, including a standard book, journal article, and website, as well as more obscure sources such as an e-mail, interview, and a painting. Within EasyBib, you can paste a URL and the metadata from the website is pulled into a citation entry form. A user can also look up books by using the ISBN and an article by using the DOI. If the book is in WorldCat, EasyBib will pull the required citation elements from the bibliographic record into the entry form. EBSCOhost and Credo Reference, two online resources to which we subscribe, allow a user to export the citation information directly into EasyBib. EasyBib also allows the user to select the medium in which the source was found.

Figure 1. Screenshot of EasyBib's homepage provided by J. de Gaia.

If the citation information is not available through WorldCat and cannot be exported from another source, EasyBib has a manual entry form where the elements can be recorded by the library user. The form serves as an excellent instruction tool, as it builds the citation in real time. This allows the user to see how the components are placed in the citation. Once the bibliography has been created the user can save it has a Google Document, print it is a Word Document, or save it in their personal account (that they would need to create).

Figure 2. Screenshot of EasyBib's homepage customization provided by J. de Gaia.

Figure 3. Screenshot of manual entry form provided by J. de Gaia.

Instruction

We have promoted the use of EasyBib during instruction sessions, we have spoken to individual faculty about it, we point students to it at the reference desk, and we list it on our library database page. We have also incorporated EasyBib into workshops on citation styles. In the future, we plan to create a video tutorial for our online students.

EasyBib, like any citation tool, is not perfect. While the ability of EasyBib to work in the three citation styles that we use on campus is a huge benefit, it can also result in students incorrectly formatting citations when they do not remember to select the correct style. The default style is MLA and this has caused a few issues for students who have used EasyBib to create their bibliography, but who did not remember to select the citation style required for their class.

Despite the availability of EasyBib, basic citation style instruction remains important. For example, in APA style, the entire article title should not be capitalized. If a user enters the article title with incorrect capitalization, EasyBib provides an error message written in red to provide guidance that the text might not be correctly capitalized. Capitalization

rules are listed in a box at the bottom of the page. This feature is pointed out during instruction, but at times students do not notice the error message and are not familiar enough with APA to know the correct capitalization rules. Overall, though, while citation styles are still taught the time that is dedicated to this instruction has decreased.

The breadth of available EasyBib functions was a selling feature for us, but there has not been an opportunity to instruct on all of them. In the future, we hope to utilize the other features that EasyBib has to offer, including a search interface that lists if the source is credible. EasyBib also provides evaluations of websites, a citation guide that shows students where to find the required elements for a citation, and information on plagiarism. It also has the ability to analyze a bibliography and let the student know if the bibliography is thorough or if more work is needed. A user can also create an outline and notes in EasyBib.

Conclusion

Overall, we have been extremely pleased with EasyBib. It has provided a standardized resource for our campus community in an area where once we were lacking tools. We have received enthusiastic responses from both faculty and students about the product. There have been visceral reactions from students who say that they are thankful for a tool to aid them with their citations. Jasmine de Gaia, the product manager for EasyBib, said in an e-mail (2012) that "the team is working on various exciting enhancements, including collaboration tools, upgrades to the Notebook service, and content management functionality." We are looking forward to the enhancements that are coming. ☩

REFERENCES

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