

# The Effortless Academic's Manual

This course will teach you how to take notes as an academic. It will introduce you to many different tools/hacks. It will save you countless hours and make you a better researcher.

Why? Because notes will become an extension of your mind. An extended mind has more ideas, knows more information and is quick.

Explore and enjoy!



**A map for this online course**

Return to this central note to navigate through the video contents of the course. Check out the [Inventory aboard this course](#) as well.

On the top left of Obsidian you will find a small star icon: ☆ . You can click on it whenever you are lost and return here.


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I periodically update this course. Be sure to get the newest version for more content and improvements. See [Updating The Course](#) to learn how.

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# 1. Exercises in the dry dock: Obsidian Basics

In this chapter we want to get familiar with the features Obsidian has. In later chapters we will start using these features to create the perfect note taking tool.

 20min, interactive tutorial)

## 1.1 [I have not used Obsidian before, take me to the beginner course.](#)

*Learn the basics of [Markdown](#) and [formatting](#). If you have never used Obsidian, run through this course first. You will get some understanding by trying everything out. The more theoretical concepts in this course will make much more sense afterwards. You can skip it if you have already used Obsidian.*

 30min, video)

## 1.2 [Using the Obsidian User Interface](#)

*The User Interface (UI) in Obsidian is in some ways simpler and in some ways more complex than MS Word. We will explore all kind of nifty ways to use it to get the most out of Obsidian.*

 20min, video)

## 1.3 [Visual layout for your notes](#)

*One of the most stunning features of Obsidian is Canvas. It allows us to arrange notes like objects on a table. We can link those notes together into a powerful mindmap that can be used to stay organized, gain more insight into complicated topics or just keep track of the 100s of papers you read.*

**Bonus:**  [Syncing Notes across devices](#)

Obsidian works mostly offline, but with a few tricks we can get it to sync across devices and even your phone. This is a short tutorial from a tweet with images.

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## 2. Learning Navigation: Note Taking System

This is the main emphasis of this course. It will teach you how to take notes, how to organize a huge collection and specifically what to look out for with academic notes.

(📺 32min, video)

### 2.1 [Rules of Note taking](#)

*In this video we will look at what GOOD note taking strategy is. Commonly we think of notes as condensed summaries on a lecture. But this misses the mark, because to be creative we need to take CONCEPTUAL notes that heavily LINK to one another. I identify 7 guidelines for myself to create notes that think for me and increase creativity.*

(📺 60min, video)

### 2.2 [Optimal Structure for your Note Collection](#)

*Once your note collection grows it becomes incredibly difficult to keep track of where things are and navigate. This is why I dedicated a whole hour to explain the different methods that you can structure your notes. The better your structure, the more notes you can make without starting to forget them and the more powerful your academic experience becomes.*

(📺 45min, video)

### 2.2 [Making Source Notes](#)

The foundation of the academic note taking system is the source note. It is a note relating to a single paper and connecting all the concepts it mentions. It also acts as a citation "anchor" or key. There are a few best practices described in this video about

**Bonus:** 💡 [Starter Kit Obsidian Vault](#)

This is an example Vault with numerous explanations on how the ideas you have learned in this chapters are *practically* used. I suggest you set it up after finishing this chapter and use it alongside the rest of the course - as it has already all elements we talk about set up. You can try it out directly as you watch the videos.

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## 3. First Mission: Using Zotero for papers

[Zotero](#) is a tool to organize and collect your references. It is a bit outdated but the most "connected" tool out there. I see it as a bridge between different parts of the academic tool ecosystem. It is also central for Literature Discovery we explore in the [Effortless Lit Review Course](#) course.

(📺 60min, interview)

### 3.1 [Using Zotero with Mushtaq Bilal](#)

*Mushtaq Bilal, PhD has the biggest following of academics on Twitter. He is famous for his ideas on using AI for academic writing and using Zotero. In this tutorial he shows us how he uses Zotero and explains a few AI tools he uses*

(📺 9min, video + article)

### 3.2 [Helpful Zotero Plugins Showcase](#)

*Zotero comes with many plugins. I looked into about 50 of them and found the 5 most useful ones. In this short video and long article you can check out how to translate PDFs, tag your paper, improve the UI and a few more things.*

(📺 43min, video)

### 3.3 [Linking Obsidian and Zotero](#)

*If you are using Zotero to annotate and read PDFs as many academics do, you can automate the process of getting those annotations into Obsidian. The end result is that with one key stroke we create a source note and pull all the relevant metadata, annotations and notes from Zotero to Obsidian.*

**Bonus:** 📖 [Annotation in Zotero vs annotations in Obsidian](#)

*Mushtaq suggests to annotate your PDFs in Zotero and import them into Obsidian. But if you don't use Zotero, but another Reference Manager you can use this workflow instead.*

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## 4. The Arcane Arts: Dataview and Tables

Using Zotero and Obsidian you are equipped for the vast majority of your academic note taking journey. But there are more advanced features in Obsidian, that you can learn to add a piece of arcane magic ✨ to your vault.

(📺 15min, video)

### 4.1 [Tables and Interaction with Excel](#)

*Tables in [Markdown](#) are absolutely terrible. Yet tables are incredibly useful. With the help of two plugins we can overcome the difficulties Obsidian has with tables and even allow for copy and paste to and from Excel/Google Sheets or Numbers.*

(📺 38min, video)

## 4.2 [Dynamic Tables with Dataview](#)

*Dataview is the second most downloaded plugin in Obsidian. It allows to create tables lists or calendars form your notes. Unfortunately it is not very easy to use. In this tutorial I break down Dataview to the simplest possible recipe, that you can use to cover the majority of use cases.*

**What advanced features am I missing? [Let me know](#) and they might find their way into an updated version of the course.**

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# 5. Managing your Fleet: Stay organized in Obsidian

Nobody these days gets by without a calendar or todo lists. Obsidian offers a few ways how we can use these with our notes. This will not replace the tools you use now, but can enhance your academic work by staying a bit more organized on note related tasks.

(📺 22min, video)

## 5.1 [Keep track of your work using Calendar](#)

*The calendar plugin in Obsidian has many purposes. You can use it to track your personal progress, the outcomes of multi-day experiments in the lab or any other projects you have.*

(📺 16min, video)

## 5.1 [Organize your todos where they are needed](#)

*Tasks or checkboxes are integrated by design into Obsidian. We can use these with the tasks plugin to add todos to our notes. We embed the todos into the context that the work is done in. This makes it a very powerful technique to keep your note collection healthy and your research moving.*

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# 6. Distant lands on the Horizon: Outlook

Now we have learned Obsidian quite in depth, it is time to look up at the horizon!

(📺 17min, video)

## 6.1 [From Word, Google Docs or Notion to Obsidian](#)

*This tutorial will teach you how to get all your notes from Word, Google Docs or Notion in one automated step. If you have dozens of word documents floating around, don't miss out on this.*

(🎥 50min, interview)

## 6.1 [Interview with Lennart Nacke on getting more citations.](#)

*Prof. Lennart Nacke has accumulated over 28000 citations for his work. His secret is a strategy of picking the right journals and writing the right papers. Whether you believe or not in citations as a metric, it is a "currency" a lot of people look to. Learn how the academic publication system works from within.*

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Thank you so much for sailing this far with me!

I really hope it helped you and will continue to be useful in the future, please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have any suggestions or complaints!

### 👉 Any questions or feedback?

Get in [touch with me](#) and let me know any questions you have.

If you would like to leave some anonymous feedback, please use this [Google Form](#).

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Don't forget to check out [Inventory aboard this course](#) for additional (and not less important) information on the subject matter.