

Airtable: A Resource for Research

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Introduction

Working on a new research project is exciting but can quickly overwhelm with all the possibilities and available literature. As you begin exploring the existing literature, you might find it difficult to keep track without organization (Shaw, 2014). At the beginning of a research project, researchers should establish a plan that includes provisions for organizing materials and data. One example of keeping organized, specifically when focused on the literature review, is an annotated bibliography, a list of sources with notes (*Annotated Bibliography*, n.d.). As you conduct a literature review, it is essential to be efficient and not to repeat searches, track your progress, and explain how you found your information (Sullivan, 2021). Finding an excellent way to organize and manage literature can be difficult. While reference managers like Zotero and Mendeley allow you to keep track of papers and assist with citations, these tools do not allow researchers to keep track of important information from the content of the literature. To stay organized and easily access information, Airtable, a web-based database, was used by two researchers to create an innovative annotated bibliography.

How it Works

Airtable is an original web-based database that users can use for many different purposes by creating a database relevant to their work (*Airtable | Create Apps That Perfectly Fit Your Team's Needs*, n.d.). Over 250,000 companies use Airtable for inventory tracking, event planning, and human resources (*Airtable | Create Apps That Perfectly Fit Your Team's Needs*, n.d.). The first step to starting with Airtable is creating a base, a hub where all the data is stored. Users can share each base with multiple collaborators. After the base is created, you can customize your base with multiple tables, which function like a spreadsheet (see Figure 1). Within the table, you will need to identify the type of information you want to collect and create a field for each item. For conducting a literature review, we included fields such as the title of article/document, year published, author(s), journal/source, theoretical/conceptual framework, purpose, population, method, notes, and an attachment to upload the original file. We used the form function for each piece of literature to enter relevant information for each field.

Figure 1
An example table within an Airtable base.

Name	Year	Focus
1 Alternative Route Special Educators' Perceptions of P...	2019	Special Education (Preparation)
2 Best Practices Article: Teacher Recruitment for an Alt...	2019	Recruitment (Alt Cert Program) (Rural)
3 Editor's Perspective Article: Culturally Responsive Pe...	2019	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Pres)
4 Transferability and Alignment of Program Exemplars L...	2018	Preparation
5 Three Teachers, Three Outcomes: Alternatively Certif...	2018	Literacy (Mentoring) (Support)
6 Editor's Perspective Article: Alternative Certification ...	2018	Classroom
7 Critical Incident Reviews of Alternatively Certified Sp...	2018	Special Education
8 Selecting Top-of-the-Class Teachers for an Alternativ...	2017	Principal Preparation
9 Editor's Perspective Article: Improving Alternative Ce...	2017	Soft Skills (Teacher Improvement)
10 Best Practices Article: Gradually Increasing Individual...	2018	Alt Cert Program
11 Novice Veterans: An Exploration of the Roles Teach f...	2017	Teach for America (Class)
12 Editor's Perspective Article: Mathematics Problem So...	2017	Math (Literacy) (ELL)
13 Alternative Certification Teacher and Candidate Rete...	2016	Certification (Preparation) (Retention)
14 Using Simulation to Support Novice Teachers' Classr...	2016	Classroom Management (Comparison)
15 Best Practices Article: Hitting the Target with Transl...	2016	Retention
16 Editor's Perspective Article: Action Research for Alter...	2016	Action Research
17 Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Preservice Residenc...	2015	Undergraduate Teacher Preparation
18 Going Back to School: Why STEM Professionals Decl...	2014	STEM (Decide to teach)
19 Quality Alternative Certification Programs in Special E...	2014	Special Education

Once we entered the information for the literature we had previously identified, we could customize the base using different views to adjust how and what information was displayed in the table. By adjusting the views, we were able to make sense of trends (e.g., publication dates), easily identify similarities (e.g., number of quantitative studies), or focus on a subset of papers (e.g., a particular type of population). We utilized three views: a grid view, a basic spreadsheet table; the gallery view, large cards on a grid; and a Kanban view, with cards stacked on a board. We also used customizations such as filtering or hiding fields, sorting to arrange a field alphabetically or numerically, or grouping records to visually create a separation. Users can save each view to easily re-access it.

Results and Implications

There are many benefits to using Airtable. Once a base is created, it is easy and quick to go back and reference both the annotations and the file of the uploaded paper. The adjustable views allow different ways to browse and present literature throughout the research process. New information can be added and bases can easily shared with other researchers. In the long run, using Airtable saves time. It is easy to use when studying trends or quantifying areas of work. However, you may only find Airtable useful for certain stages in your research. Airtable would be best to use when there will be continuous work on the area of study.

Future Plans

We plan on continuing to use Airtable to organize research for literature reviews. We will also use Airtable for new projects and journal articles and plan to reference bases we have already created. We also plan to explore additional opportunities for using Airtable in academia.

Cost and Resources Needed

Airtable can be free or low-cost depending on the plan selected. The researchers for this innovative poster used the free plan. The free plan is advertised as best for individuals or small teams learning how to use Airtable. The free plan includes unlimited bases, up to five users, one app per base, one sync integration, 1,200 records per base, and 2GB of attachments per base. Other plans include the plus plan for \$10 a month. This plan includes three apps per base, three sync integrations, 5,000 records per base, 5GB of attachments per base, custom branded forms, six months of revision history, and automatic table syncing. The pro plan is \$20 per month and is best for teams or companies to create workflow and apps. This plan includes ten apps per base, seven sync integrations, 50,000 records per base, 20GB of attachments per base, Gantt and timeline views, one year of revision history, personal lock views, and field and table editing permissions. The final plan is enterprise for advanced custom needs and is priced after contacting the sales team. This plan includes unlimited workspaces per organization, unlimited apps, salesforce and Jira on-prem sync integrations, 100,000 records per base, 1,000GB of attachments per base, three-year revision history, SAML-based single sign-on, enterprise-wide admin panel, an ongoing success plan, professional services, and add-on professional services. Anyone using Airtable would need a device with internet access. Airtable can be accessed via the web or app available for mobile and desktop on iOS, Android, Mac, and Windows.

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