

PowerNotes

Helping Students Connect Research to Writing

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Summary: A tool that, with the right development, promises to fill the gap between research and writing.

What is it?

PowerNotes is a browser extension for Chrome (and soon Mozilla Firefox) that was created to help fill the gap in between finding sources and writing a paper. The vendor highlights the product as a way to improve reading comprehension, prevent unintentional plagiarism, enable students to gather, annotate, and save research content and citation information efficiently, and provide students with a writing tool through an effective organizational framework. The vendor also promises that PowerNotes provides instructors and librarians visibility into students' research process.

PowerNotes works with any webpage you browse, including subscription databases. It allows users to highlight information on websites that users can assign topic labels and annotations to. This information is presented in quotes with a link to the source. Citation information is automatically collected and may be revised, but users would have to export the citation information into a citation tool (like Zotero) to obtain formatted citations. Users can see their project outline based on the quotes they highlighted and topic labels they used in a new browser tab. In this tab, users may move quotes around to other topics, revise topic labels, and add annotations to highlights in order to finalize a topical outline that can help them jumpstart the writing process.

Anyone can sign up for up for a free account that includes access to one project. Individuals can also purchase access to unlimited projects through either monthly or yearly subscriptions. The premium version is sold to libraries through a yearly subscription that is reasonable for large colleges with student need for such a tool. Subscribers have access to unlimited projects.

There are no other extensions or other resources that duplicates everything PowerNotes does. There are products that capture one aspect of the tool, such as highlighting and annotating from a screen (see [Weava Highlighter](#), [Additor](#), or [NoteOn](#) Chrome extensions). There are also citation tools that go beyond PowerNote's citation feature. The topic headings and ease of re-organizing highlights and notes sets PowerNotes apart from these other options.

At a vendor presentation, the vendor highlighted future planned developments, such as adding additional user notes in the outline view, exporting to Google Docs, sharing outlines, copying projects, creating mobile apps, and integration with Learning Management Systems that would greatly improve the usability of this tool.

Quick Evaluation

The tool does what the vendor claims for gathering, annotating, and saving content and citation information, but any claims that it can reduce plagiarism and improve reading comprehension are a bit exaggerated. These goals would not be accomplished by simply promoting or providing students access to this tool. This tool does begin to fill the gap between students finding sources and writing, but libraries may prefer to wait until further developments entice them to pay for unlimited student access (which is currently a flat fee that many colleges would find reasonable).

The tool is easy to use, although users may wish to disable the tool when they don't need it. This tool has potential, especially if the vendor decides to add the generation of citations within PowerNotes and other improvements. Allowing subscribing libraries to customize the login page and user screen to highlight library resources and curated free web resources could entice additional libraries to subscribe.

At a vendor presentation, the vendor said they were working toward full ADA compliance. Current tests (from the PowerNotes project and outline pages) do come up with many violations with the majority being due color contrast issues and a few to missing alternative text, missing labels, etc.

This extension is not available on the mobile Chrome browser, so users can't highlight content to add to their outline. Users can log into the PowerNotes website from a mobile device browser and can revise the outline, annotations, and topic labels.

Relevant Links

[Chrome Extension with User Reviews](#)

[PowerNotes Instructor Blog](#)

[PowerNotes YouTube Channel](#)

[PowerNotes Website](#)