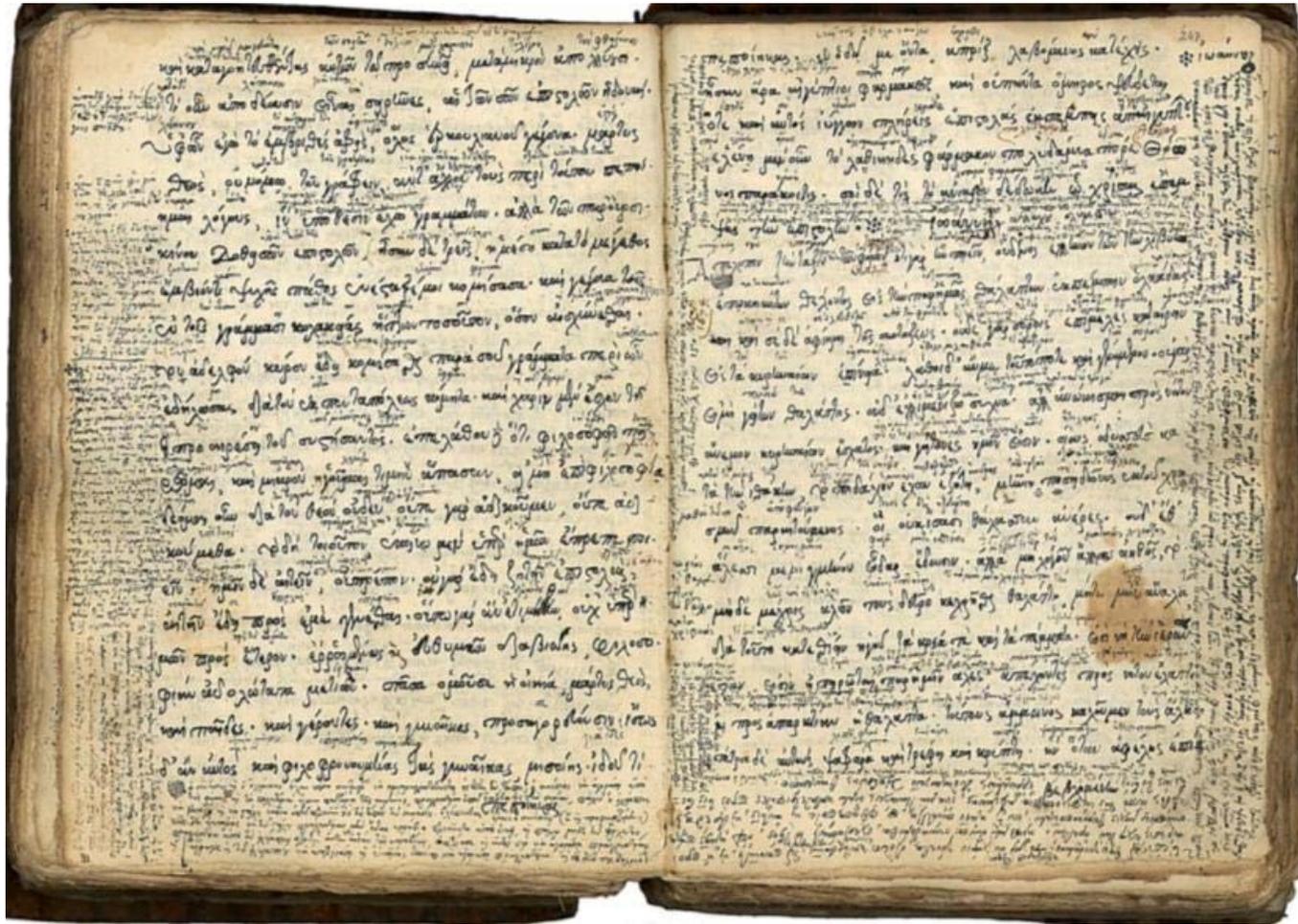


HOW TO KEEP UP WITH YOUR LITERATURE



A special report brought to you by Trauma MedEd ([TraumaMedEd.com](https://www.TraumaMedEd.com))

Introduction

One of the most important things in nearly any profession is keeping up with the inexorable advance of knowledge. With the rapidly moving pace of just about everything these days, anybody who fails to do this slowly falls behind. Of course, there are a number of ways to stay current. These include reading, listening to talks, thinking about information, and teaching.

But first, **why is it even important to keep up?** Sometimes, you just plain have to. It's part of your job. Or, you're a teacher and need to be smarter than your students. Maybe you need to pass a test, like a certification or board exam. Or you might need to get some fresh ideas for a project or your research.

How do you actually accomplish this? Some of the ways are pretty obvious. You can read. Or listen, if you prefer audiobooks or podcasts. Watch YouTube videos. Once you've acquired and absorbed the material, you have to think about it, digest it. Put it into context. And then, the comes most important part.

You've got to use it! Put it to use in your profession or personal life. Teach it to someone. If you don't, it will end up gathering dust in your mind, and will be quickly forgotten.

I'm going to show you an **easy, five-step technique** for using either conventional or digital tools to simply and efficiently keep up with the information in *your* field.



Yes, this is an actual product!
Courtesy of moonjuiceshop.com

Step 1. Select Your Sources

There are three broad types of sources that you should be consuming, and they are based on how closely they are related to your chosen field of interest. I'll provide examples below from my own field of interest, trauma.

Definitely in your discipline

These are sources, journals, newspapers, and magazines that are predominantly filled with content of great interest to you. Usually, you find at least 75% of the content interesting. For me, these are core trauma journals such as The Journal of Trauma, the European Journal of Trauma, Scandinavian Journal of Trauma, and a few others.

Somewhat in your discipline

These sources contain some content that is of interest, but the actual amount may vary from small (10%) to moderate (75%). Any more than that, and they should be in the "definitely in" category above. For me, these are generally sources in other medical specialties that have some content on trauma and injury. Examples include the Journal of Emergency Medicine, Journal of the American College of Surgeons, and the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery. However, some of their content is off topic and only occasionally interesting to me.

WTF

Yes, that's right. WTF! And no, it's not the acronym for the World TaeKwonDo Federation. This is material that has absolutely nothing to do with your chosen field. It's meant to help cross-pollinate your brain with new and strange ideas from other fields That's how some of the world's most brilliant innovations came about! Some of my own WTF sources include sites and blogs that cover TED talks, cooking, technology, business, online security, publishing, and more.



If you're interested in seeing my current reading lists, [click here](#) or go to <http://bit.ly/WHATIREAD> (all caps)

Step 2. Review your sources efficiently

In the old days we had paper, and lots of it. Journals, magazines, newspapers, and books. Unfortunately, it wasn't very efficient. Paper takes up a lot of space. No one, other than libraries, can afford to subscribe to multiple journals. And you have to physically pick up your stuff and go there. No wonder it was so hard to keep up in the not so distant past!



Then along came digital. It's just the opposite of paper. It takes up no space. Much of the content is free, one way or the other. We have access to it just about everywhere. And it usually doesn't catch on fire.

But digital content requires two new things. **Hardware** and **software**. And you must *choose wisely* in order to keep things as comfortable and efficient as possible.

Hardware.

A vast selection of devices is now both readily available and inexpensive. There are two main considerations: mobility and size. Mobility comes in two flavors, bolted down (desktop computer) and mobile (everything else). Size ranges from tiny (small smartphone) to massive (large tablet or flat screen). Each user needs to figure out which combination best meets their needs.

My recommendation: Get a tablet computer that you are comfortable with, in any size that suits your viewing habits. This offers a good combination of portability and ease of viewing. Select one that sports an operating system that you like, since you'll undoubtedly be using it for other tasks as well.

Software

The second essential item for consuming digital content is an application that lets you consolidate Rich Site Summary (RSS) news feeds. Nearly every journal, magazine, paper, and blog produces an RSS feed. So you need software that not only can read these feeds and package them into an easily viewable package, it needs to add the ability to organize it.



There are many products out there, and most are available for both Windows, Chrome, and iOS. The list of good RSS readers changes frequently as new and better ones become available. Most offer a freemium model, where basic functionality is available for free, and more useful add-ons cost a few dollars per month extra. A few are truly free, but many of these seem a bit clunky to me.

Some are actual apps that must connect to the internet, some are web-based systems, and a few fall into both categories. Currently, some of the best are Feeder, Feedly, Feedbin, NewsBlur, and FlipBoard. You can find all of these products, and more, by using your search engine. Try out the free versions and decides which one “feels” best to you.

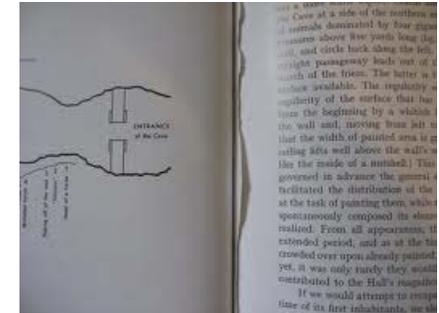
My favorite for the past seven years has been Feedly. It’s easy to use, intuitive, full-featured, and available for every device made. The free version will work fine for nearly everyone, but the premium version sports some efficiency and productivity boosters that are worth the \$65/year to me. One of the most important features of the product is the ability to mark or save items for future review. This is critical to the next step in keeping up.



Step 3. Bookmarking

In this step, you start by reviewing each new item in every one of the news feeds to which you subscribe. This serves three purposes. First, it allows **efficient use of time**. You can move through each article, abstract, or summary fairly quickly. It allows you to **time-shift**, and do your work any time you have 15 minutes or a half hour to spare. Finally, and the real reason why you are doing this step, is to **separate the wheat from the chaff**. Which ones pique your interest? Which ones are boring. And which ones are just not very good at all.

In the days of paper, we had several ways to physically bookmark pages. Some were good, some were just plain bad form, like ripping the pages out. But in the digital age, things are different. Once again, there are a number of products out there that allow you to mark and/or save the items you are really interested in. Examples of these products include Pocket, Instapaper, and Evernote. Pinterest and Facebook Save also have bookmarking capabilities, but put it all out there for everyone to see. That's great if you're into social media.



It's very important that your bookmarking app is integrated with your RSS reader. Otherwise the extra steps needed to mark something that you are reading will rapidly become very annoying.

My favorite bookmarking app is Instapaper, which is integrated with Feedly. If I'm reading something interesting, I just click the little **I** at the top of the page. Saved!

Step 4. In-Depth Review

Now it's all about some quality time with your collection of articles. Set aside an hour or so to **take an in-depth look at only the items you bookmarked**. How often do you need to do this? It depends on how many sources you have, and how often you bookmark. If your numbers are low, you may only have to bookmark once a week. In that case, you could do the in-depth work every 2-4 weeks. I have nearly 50 sources, and scan through them almost daily, so I spend 1-2 hours per week for this step. Just experiment to see what works to optimize your time.

In addition to your list of bookmarked articles, you will need **online access** to their source materials. For blogs, that's easy. Only internet access is required. But for magazine or journal articles, you'll need online access to a content library. In medical fields, most individuals have some type of access to the biomedical library of their hospital or university. For non-medical publications, your public library can be of assistance.

Now, **move through your bookmark list**. Read the abstract or synopsis. Then take the time to actually start reading the article. I like to read the introduction first, then the conclusions and recommendations. I skip the stuff in the middle for the time being. That gives me some basic information that I can try to fit into the mental framework of what I already know.

Is it something completely **new**? Is it at least **interesting**? Does it clarify or contribute to **controversy** in a useful way? **Can you (or others) possibly use this information in some way?**

What you are doing is separating the good stuff from the crap. Unfortunately, there's a lot of crap out there, especially in academic medicine. But that's probably true in most fields. Always remember this rule:

If the article actually falls into that 90% category, delete the bookmark. Don't waste any more of your valuable time on it. **Focus on the 10%.**



**NINETY
PERCENT OF
EVERYTHING
IS CRAP.**

If you believe the article makes the cut, now it's time to prove it. Read those very important middle parts of the article: the methods, results, and discussion. Look critically at how the results were obtained. Do they seem legit? Are the statistics reasonable? Are the results actually meaningful? I read a paper 40 years ago comparing evaluating the effect of a new antihypertensive medication. They found that the medication *significantly* decreased systolic blood pressure. *From 125 to 121 torr!* Looks like the control group wasn't even hypertensive in the first place. And this actually got published in a major journal! Definitely in the 90%!



Finally, and most importantly, does the work support the authors' conclusions? Sometimes what the abstract says and what the paper shows are completely different, which is why you should *never base opinions or care on an abstract!* **Read before using!**

And always remember this:

“No single paper or article should ever cause you to radically alter your practice”



Even though the work seems to be well done and properly designed, remember that *most of what is published only has a 95% chance of being true*. You don't know if this paper is one of the 5% that are wrong without having others try the same experiment. Several times. Wait until you see a body of supportive literature developing before you actually put any new concepts to use in real-life situations.

Step 5. Save and Apply

Wow! It seems you have actually identified a valuable piece of information! Now you need to do two things with it.

First, stash it away so you can find it again in the future. There's nothing as frustrating as knowing you have a particular article somewhere, and not knowing where you put it. Make sure you have an organized system for saving it. If you're a paper person, print it and add it to your nicely organized files. If you prefer electronic organization, save it as a PDF file and add it to your nicely organized e-files. There are plenty of software options to help with this, including products like Evernote, Dropbox, and other cloud storage services. The key is that **you must have a system that allows you to effortlessly search and find the information again.**



And the last, but most important task is for you to **put the new information to use!** It may be something that is useful for your job, or may improve patient care. It might actually help you pass a test or get a new job. If you are a researcher, the information could stimulate new ideas, or suggest new approaches to problems you are investigating. **But probably the best way to retain that new information is to teach it to someone.** Share it with a colleague, a peer, your students, or even your professors!

Once you adopt and begin following this 5-step system for keeping up with your literature, you'll find that it becomes a pleasant way to uncover new and interesting facts, build your knowledge base and overall perspective in your field, and use new information to further your career and personal life. Enjoy!

Thanks!

This ebook was written by Michael McGonigal, author of *The Trauma Professional's Blog*. Thanks for downloading it!

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For a website focused on trauma performance improvement, visit TraumaMedEd.com.