

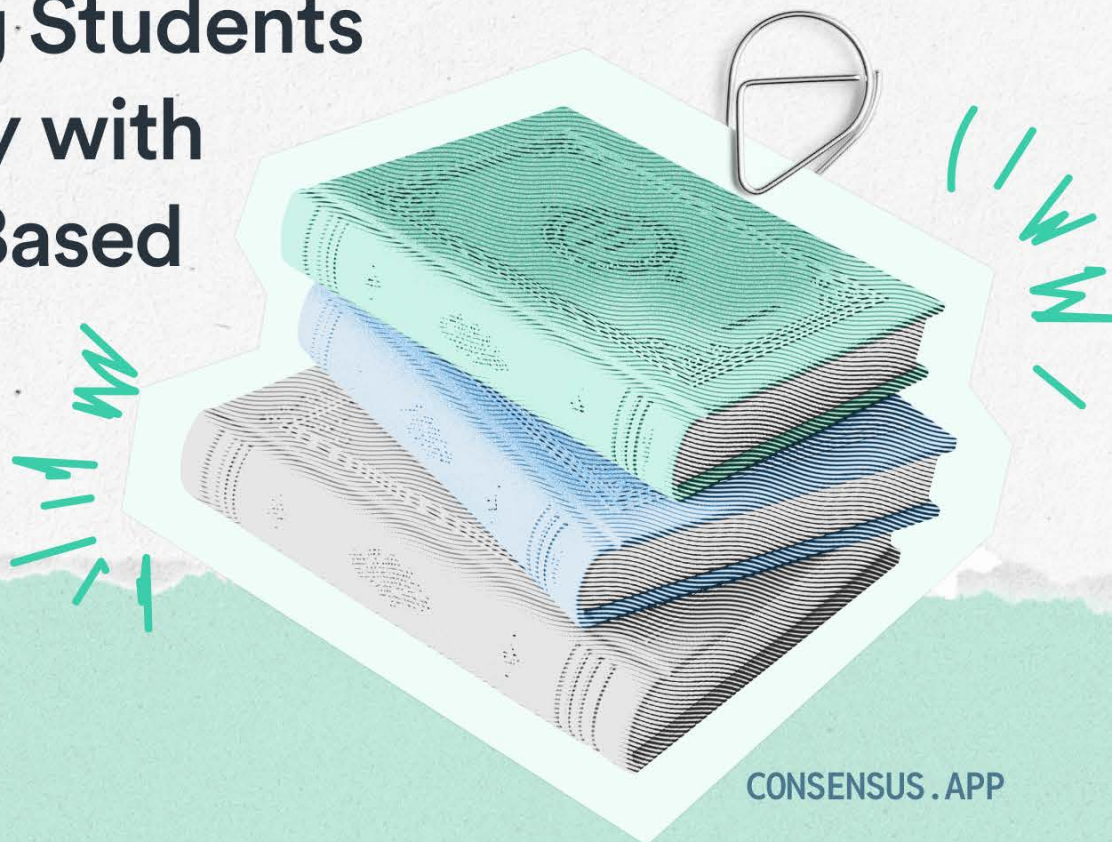
RESEARCH STARTS HERE



LIBRARIANS

A Librarian's Guide to Consensus

The Playbook for
Supporting Students
and Faculty with
Evidence-Based
Research



01 Introduction

The emergence of Gen-AI continues to change the landscape for librarians and information professionals. I have created a Librarian's guide to serve as a playbook, showing how Consensus can assist patrons in organizing content and finding the best information to support their research from beginning to end. Here is a step-by-step guide.

02 Teaching Effective Prompting Fundamentals to Faculty, Researchers, and all Patrons

Understanding the difference between prompting general-purpose AI tools and research-specific systems is essential for helping patrons become effective researchers.

Approach to Prompt Structure Traditional verse Research Gen AI Platforms

Approach to prompting

Unlike general LLMs that generate text from their training data, Consensus retrieves and synthesizes actual published research. You can ask conversationally ("Show me recent evidence on X") or precisely ("RCTs from 2020–2024 on Y"). Consensus interprets open-ended requests and automatically constructs rigorous searches behind the scenes, filtering by study type, date, and relevance without requiring Boolean operators or database expertise.

ChatGPT and Claude work best with open-ended, conversational prompts. You can request tone, style, or creative outputs. These systems are excellent for brainstorming and writing support, but are prone to hallucinations.

Consensus, by contrast, works best when the prompt is precise and research-driven, as if you are querying a database. With Consensus, you are directing the tool to find and summarize existing research using prompts such as "What do peer-reviewed studies say about X?" or "Compare the evidence for approach A versus B." Consensus surfaces actual findings with citations, helping you quickly identify which papers deserve deeper attention.

Limitations

General AI tools are excellent for brainstorming and writing support but are prone to hallucinations. Consensus does not hallucinate in the same way because it pulls from published literature, but it is limited to the research it indexes. Librarians can highlight this tradeoff and show when each tool is most appropriate.



Example in Practice

When a student asks, "How does social media affect mental health?" I explain that ChatGPT might return a conversational overview or opinions. Consensus, on the other hand, can pull together the main findings from peer-reviewed studies, complete with citations and statistics. This not only gives them reliable evidence but also teaches them how to formulate stronger, research-oriented prompts.

This example helps students understand how and why their prompt must shift depending on the tool:

- ChatGPT/Claude → "Explain this," "Help me think through this," or "Write this for me."
- Consensus → "What does the research show?" "Compare findings," or "Summarize the evidence on X."

Through this contrast, students learn the fundamental difference between creating text with an LLM and retrieving and synthesizing real studies with Consensus.

Once patrons understand how to form a research-ready question, the next instructional step is helping them interpret the initial evidence overview using the Consensus Meter.

The Consensus Meter is one of the most librarian-friendly features because it instantly shows where the science stands. By aggregating the most relevant studies into a visual snapshot, it helps students quickly understand whether the literature generally supports, contradicts, or shows mixed findings on a topic. The Meter is triggered whenever a user asks a yes or no research question, such as questions that begin with "Does," "Is," or "Can," where the goal is to determine whether an effect exists.



Example in Practice

If a student comes to the reference desk asking, "Does creatine supplementation improve athletic performance?" the Consensus Meter provides a quick evidence overview. From there, I encourage them to dig deeper by applying filters such as:

- Meta-analyses (to prioritize higher-quality evidence)
- Recent studies (to ensure currency)
- Journal ranking (to introduce evaluation of source quality)

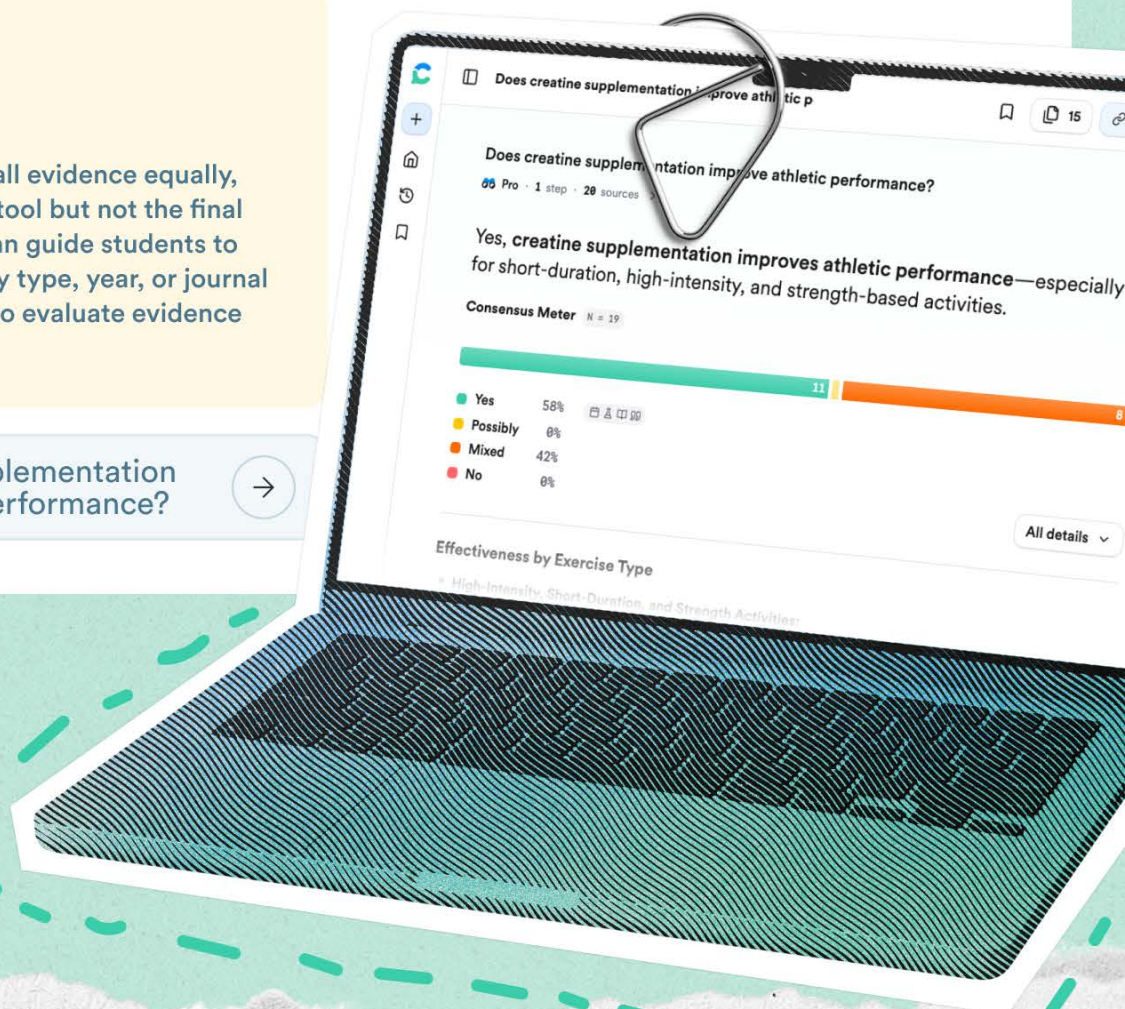


Teaching note

The Consensus Meter treats all evidence equally, making it a great orientation tool but not the final word on a topic. Librarians can guide students to refine their approach by study type, year, or journal ranking, teaching them how to evaluate evidence quality.



Does creatine supplementation improve athletic performance?



Teaching Search Refinement: Applying Filters and the “Less Is More” Principle

After students understand how to interpret the initial evidence snapshot through the Consensus Meter, the next step is teaching them how to refine a search. One of the most important skills in reference and instruction work is helping patrons recognize that narrowing a topic leads to stronger, more usable research results. In this context, “less is more” becomes a foundational research strategy.

Consensus supports this process by allowing patrons to filter results by discipline, publication year, journal ranking, study type, and open access. These filters help students move from broad curiosity to precise, academically rigorous inquiry.



Example in Practice

- **Initial Topic:** What are the long-term effects of tariffs on supply chain performance?
- **Search filters applied:**
 - Past 5 years
 - Journal Rank: Q1
 - Open access
- **Result:** The narrowed search yields results more focused and actionable. In this example, the refined search highlights specific impacts such as increased costs, reduced efficiency, and disruption of global value chains, citing papers from 2024 and 2020

This demonstrates to students how a narrower query, paired with thoughtful filtering, leads to clearer and more academically meaningful evidence.



Draft an outline of the effects of creatine in athletes.



Topic

What are the long-term effects of tariffs on supply chain performance?

🔍 Sources 🔍 ➔



Filters

Publish year

Any Past 2 yrs. Past 5 yrs.

2021 — 2026

☐ Open access ☒

Journal rank ⓘ

Q1 ☒

Q2 ☐

Q3 ☐

Q4 ☐

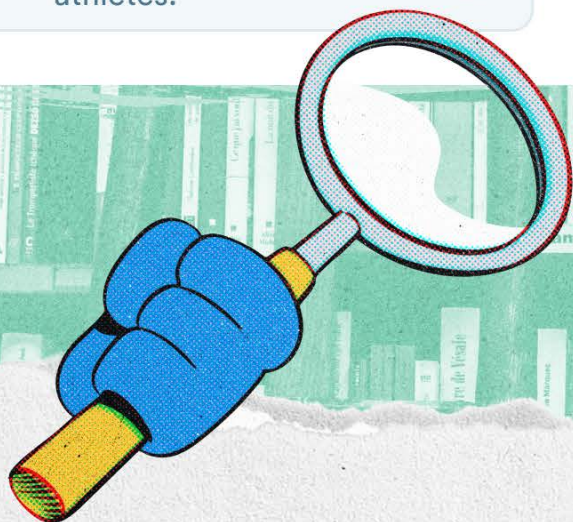


Results

What are the long-term effects of tariffs on supply chain performance?

🔍 Pro · 2 steps · 15 sources ➔

Tariffs tend to worsen supply chain performance long term, especially for globally integrated, complex supply networks, unless firms successfully reconfigure and digitalize.



As students become more advanced researchers, it is helpful for them to see how a search is structured and refined behind the scenes. Consensus provides a visual breakdown of its search process, which mirrors the logic of systematic review methodology. This visualization helps patrons understand not only what studies were retrieved, but why certain studies were included or excluded.

Consensus retrieves studies from trusted scholarly sources such as Semantic Scholar and PubMed, providing transparency into both the search process and the origin of the evidence being analyzed.

This feature is especially valuable when teaching graduate students, faculty, or anyone working on literature reviews, because it introduces them to the core components of rigorous evidence synthesis in a clear and approachable way.



Example in Practice

Librarian's Role:

Demonstrate how Consensus visualizes the search strategy, which is critical for systematic reviews.

What the visualization shows:

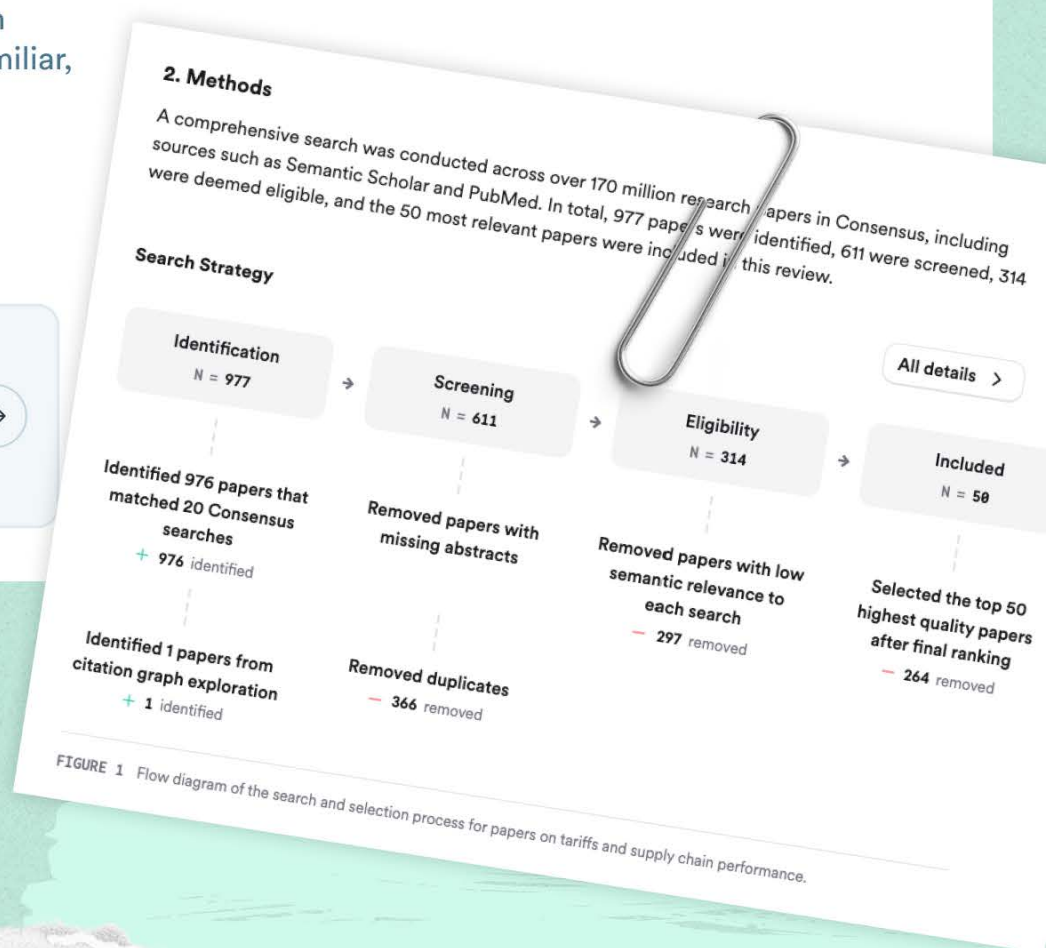
Consensus presents a simplified, PRISMA-like flow of the information retrieval process:

1. Identification: collects relevant papers identified across sources such as Semantic Scholar and PubMed.
2. Screening: Removes duplicates and articles with missing abstracts
3. Eligibility: Evaluates remaining studies for semantic relevance and quality
4. Included: Final selection of the highest-quality, most relevant papers

This structure makes the research process more transparent and familiar, particularly for students learning systematic review principles. It provides a practical, visual introduction to how evidence is gathered and refined.



What are the long-term effects of tariffs on supply chain performance?



Teaching Advanced Literature Review Skills to PhD-level students and faculty using Deep Research

For graduate students, faculty, and researchers conducting in-depth literature reviews, Consensus offers a Deep Research feature that provides a structured, multi-step exploration of a topic. This tool goes beyond a standard search by guiding users through a series of focused questions that reveal the breadth, nuance, and complexity of the research landscape.

Deep Research is especially helpful when patrons are unfamiliar with Boolean logic or advanced database strategies. It enables them to conduct a rigorous inquiry using clear, natural-language prompts while still yielding methodologically meaningful results.



Librarian Guidance

When teaching Deep Research, librarians can position it as a guided literature review assistant. Explain that Deep Research does not replace critical reading or formal systematic review methods; instead, it helps patrons break down a broad question into logical components, understand the structure of the evidence base, and identify areas that require closer examination.

Librarians can also emphasize how this approach mirrors academic practices: surveying foundational work, identifying mechanisms, evaluating safety or adverse effects, comparing populations, reviewing controversies, and mapping influential studies. This helps students and faculty understand not only what the research says but how scholarly conversations develop over time.



Example in Practice

Prompt and Goal of Exercise:

The example below illustrates a detailed breakdown of the Consensus deep research feature. It highlights how the tool simplifies the methodologies and information retrieval process through straightforward prompts.

What Deep Research Provides

Consensus produces a step-by-step breakdown of the research. For example, a Deep Research query on creative supplementation might include:

- 1 **Initial Survey:** Establishes the overall scope of research
- 2 **Foundational Overview:** Summarizes key findings and historical context
- 3 **Zoomed-In Effects:** Examines specific outcomes or mechanisms
- 4 **Safety and Adverse Effects:** Identifies risks, side effects, and limitations
- 5 **Population Differences:** Compares results across age groups, training levels, or genders
- 6 **Non-Performance Outcomes:** Highlights findings outside athletic performance
- 7 **Contrasts and Controversies:** Surfaces conflicting results in the literature
- 8 **Citation Graph:** Maps relationships among influential studies
- 9 **Paper Ranking:** Prioritizes high-quality or highly relevant studies

This structured progression helps patrons understand how complex topics are organized within the literature, supporting more well-developed literature reviews and research proposals.



A common challenge for students and researchers is organizing the evidence they have gathered. Traditional databases often require users to manually compile findings into spreadsheets or documents, which can be time-consuming and difficult to maintain. Consensus helps streamline this process by generating research tables that summarize key findings, categorize effects, and link directly to cited sources.

These tables provide patrons with a clear, structured way to compare studies, identify themes, and prepare for writing literature reviews, presentations, or annotated bibliographies.



Librarian Guidance

When teaching students or faculty how to synthesize research, librarians can use the table feature to demonstrate how evidence can be organized into meaningful categories. Encourage patrons to think about:

- Which effect categories matter for their research question
- How key findings align or diverge across studies

This approach helps learners understand that synthesizing literature is not just about gathering articles; it is about organizing thoughts and insights in a way that supports clear argumentation and academic rigor.



Example in Practice

Addressing Student Needs

When a student asks, "What are the best resources to organize my scholarly articles as well as to summarize my findings?", librarians can introduce them to Consensus tables. For example, a table exploring the effects of creatine may include:

1. Effect Category (e.g., strength gains, cognitive outcomes, recovery rates)
2. Key Findings (summaries of what the literature shows)
3. Citations (with direct links to PDFs or study pages)

This format provides a visually intuitive, academically structured way to manage research evidence, making it easier for students to move into the writing and synthesis phases of their work.



Create a table of the effects of creatine.



Create a table of the effects of creatine.

Pro · 1 step · 20 sources

Effects of Creatine Supplementation

Effect Category

Key Findings

Citations

Muscle Strength & Mass

Increases muscle strength, lean mass, and power, especially with resistance training

1 3
16 20

Exercise Performance

Enhances high-intensity, short-duration exercise; speeds recovery; less effect on endurance

1 3
19

Body Composition

Increases fat-free mass, slightly increases body mass, reduces body fat percentage

8 9

Cognitive Function

May improve memory, attention, and processing speed; effects on other domains are mixed

2 11

Neuroprotection

Shows neuroprotective effects in animal models and some clinical trials (e.g., ALS, Huntington's)

2

Recovery & Muscle Damage

Reduces muscle damage markers (CK, LDH) and soreness post-exercise; aids recovery

Room for Collaboration: Share your results with students, faculty, and fellow researchers.

Collaboration and privacy

As patrons progress through their research, they often need to save their work, share it with collaborators, or maintain confidentiality depending on the sensitivity of their topic. Consensus provides flexible sharing and privacy controls that help students, faculty, and research teams manage their work responsibly throughout the research process.

These features are especially important in academic environments where projects may involve sensitive data, unpublished ideas, or collaborative drafting across multiple stakeholders.

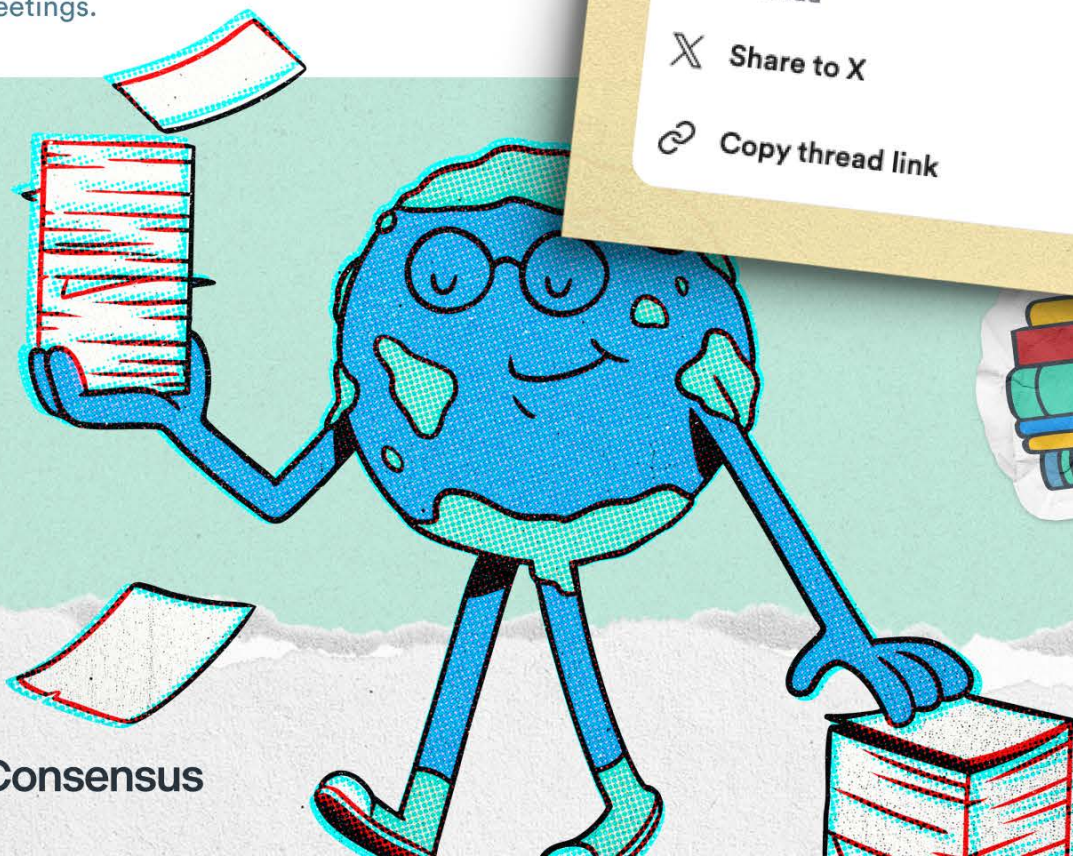
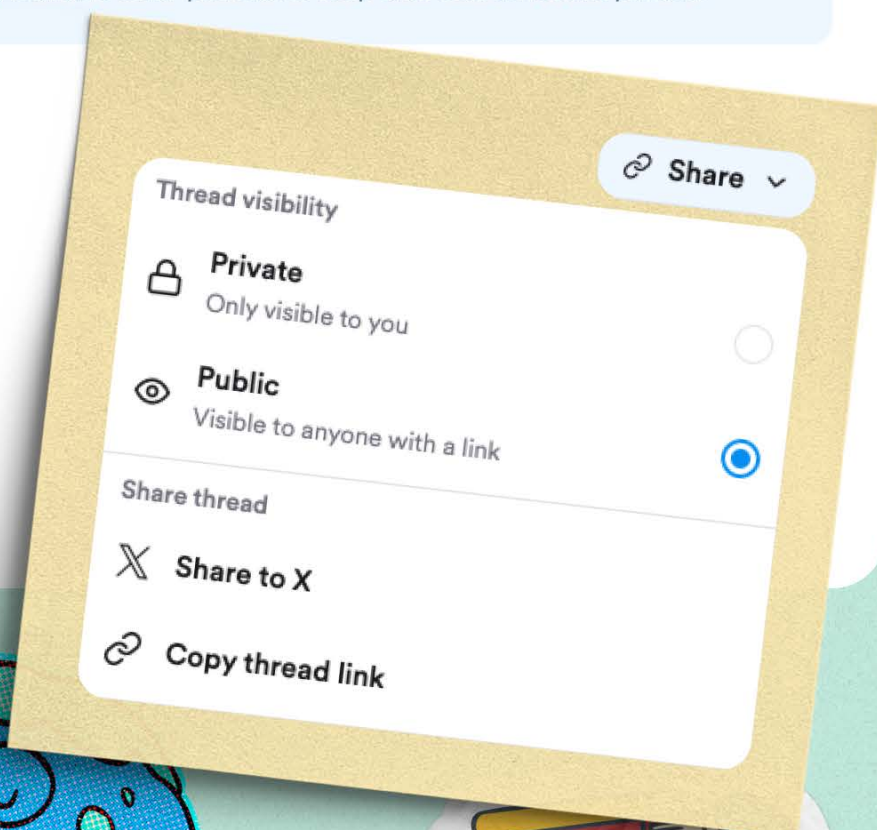


Example in Practice

- **Scenario:** You're currently working with a biology professor who has collected articles on a sensitive topic and wants to keep them private until publication
- **Librarian's solution:** The thread visibility options let you make it **private**, **public**, or **share** the thread link on social media platforms like X. Overall, the export feature enables patrons to share their research results easily. Conversely, it allows other patrons to keep their search results private.

Alternatively, if the faculty member is collaborating with colleagues, the librarian can show them how to generate a shareable thread link, allowing trusted collaborators to access the results without making the project public.

Consensus also offers straightforward export options, enabling patrons to save their research summaries, tables, or Deep Research outputs for use in external writing tools, presentations, or lab meetings.



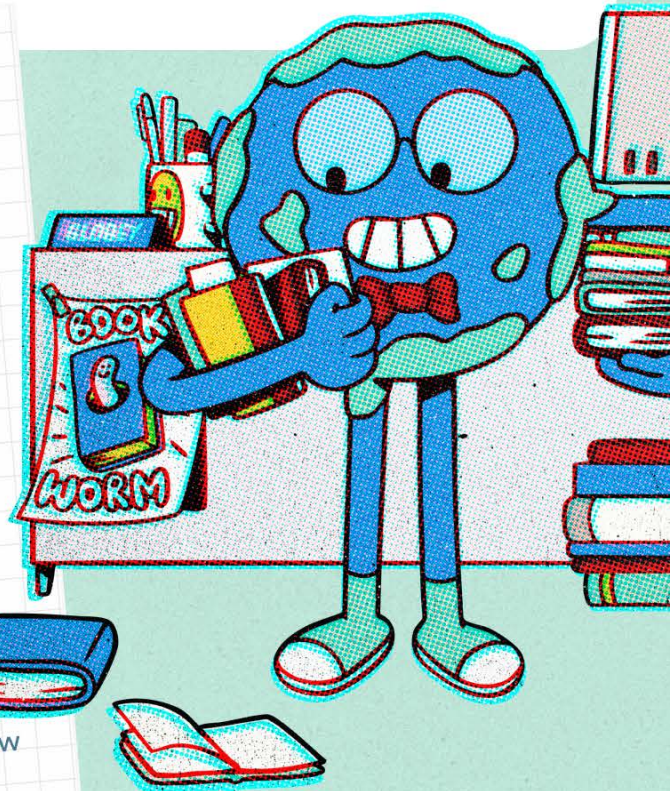
Overall, the librarian's role in gathering credible resources and teaching information and data literacy is now more critical than ever! As generative AI tools continue to evolve, librarians remain uniquely positioned to help patrons navigate these technologies responsibly, evaluate the quality of information, and apply research literacy skills across academic and professional contexts. As librarians, some of the key challenges we face are understanding which generative AI platforms to use.

Consensus serves as a powerful complement to traditional library databases by providing transparent access to peer-reviewed evidence, guiding patrons through structured research workflows, and supporting tasks such as literature reviews, evidence synthesis, and collaborative inquiry. When used intentionally, it strengthens the librarian's ability to teach information literacy, data literacy, and AI literacy in a unified way.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

This guide can support librarians in several core areas of practice:

1. **Conducting Reference Interviews**
Use the strategies in this playbook to help patrons articulate their research questions and identify the type of evidence they need. Tools like the Consensus Meter and Deep Research can support effective reference interactions.
2. **Teaching Reference and Instruction Sessions**
In classroom environments, this playbook provides examples and pedagogical strategies to teach patrons how to develop strong prompts, interpret evidence, refine searches, and organize findings. These skills support students across disciplines and degree levels.
3. **Collaborating with Faculty and Research Teams**
Consensus can assist with complex research processes such as literature reviews, systematic methodologies, and collaborative evidence synthesis. Librarians can use the features highlighted in this guide to demonstrate their expertise and support faculty in integrating AI tools into their research workflows.



Final Note

By combining traditional information literacy principles with the capabilities of AI-driven research tools, librarians can lead the way in helping students and faculty engage with scholarly evidence more efficiently, critically, and confidently. Consensus provides an opportunity to enhance—not replace—the librarian's professional expertise, offering new pathways to support rigorous, evidence-based inquiry.

About Consensus

Consensus is an AI-powered search engine for scientific research papers. Our mission is to make the world's best knowledge more accessible for all.

For more information visit
consensus.app



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