Creating a ResearchGate Profile

Today, we’ll help you master a major player in the scholarly social network space, ResearchGate. ResearchGate, which claims 5 million scientists as users, will help you connect with many researchers who aren’t on Academia.edu (especially those outside North America). It can also help you understand your readers through platform-specific metrics, and confirm your status as a helpful expert in your field with their “Q&A” feature.

Given ResearchGate’s similarity to Academia.edu, I won’t rehash the basics of setting up a profile and getting your publications online. Go ahead and sign up, setup your account (remember to add detailed affiliation information and a photo), and add a publication or two.

Basic profile setup

Logon to https://www.researchgate.net. If you’re a firm believer in keeping your professional online presence separate from your personal one, you’ll likely want to sign up using your university email address. Otherwise, you can sign up using your Google profile.

From here, you’ll be directed through the basic signup process.

Post a publication

How do you choose what to share? If you’re an established researcher, this will be easy: just choose your most “famous” (read: highly cited) paper. If you’re a junior researcher or a student, choosing might be tougher. A peer-reviewed paper is always a good bet, as-is a preprint or a presentation that’s closely related to your most current topic of research.

Got a paper in mind? Now comes the not-as-fun-but-incredibly-necessary part: making sure you’ve got the rights to post it. Most academics don’t realize that they generally sign away their copyright when publishing an article with a traditional publisher. And that means you may not have the rights to post the publisher’s version of your article on ResearchGate. (If you negotiated to keep your copyright or published with an authors’ rights-respecting journal like PLOS Biology, give yourself a pat on the back and skip the following paragraph.)

If you don’t have copyright for your paper, all hope is not lost! You likely have the right to post your version of the article (often the unedited, unformatted version). Head over to Sherpa/Romeo and look up the journal you published in. You’ll see any and all restrictions that the publisher has placed on how you can share your article.

If you can post your article, let’s upload it to ResearchGate. Click the green “Upload a paper” button and, on your computer, find the publication you want to upload. Click “Open” and watch as ResearchGate begins to upload your paper.
Once it’s uploaded, the title of your publication will be automatically extracted. Make any corrections necessary to the title, then click in the “Find a Research Interest” box below the title. Add some keywords that will help others find your publication. Click save.

Add your affiliation and interests to your profile
Adding an affiliation is important because it will add you to a subdomain of ResearchGate built for your university, and that will allow you to more easily find your colleagues. The site will try to guess your affiliation based on your email address or IP address; make any corrections needed and add your department information and title. Click “Save & Continue,” then add your research interests on the following page. These are also important; they’ll help others find you and your work.

Connect with colleagues
In this final step, you’ll be prompted to either connect your Facebook account or an email account to ResearchGate, which will search your contacts and suggest connections. Select and confirm anyone you want to follow on the site. I recommend starting out small, to keep from being overwhelmed by updates.

Congrats, you’ve now got an ResearchGate profile!
Got your basic profile up and running? Great! Let’s drill down into those three unique features of ResearchGate.

Finding other researchers & publications
Finding other researchers and publications on ResearchGate works a bit differently than on ResearchGate. Rather than allow you to specify “research interests” and find other researchers that way, ResearchGate automatically creates a network for you based on who you’ve cited, who you follow and what discipline you selected when setting up your profile.

So, key to creating a robust network is uploading papers with citations to be text-mined, and searching for and following other researchers in your field.

Searching for other researchers in your field is easy: using the search bar at the top of the screen, type in your colleague’s name. If they’re on the site, they’ll appear in the dynamic search results, as we see below with Impactstory Advisor Lorena Barba:
Click on their name in the search results to be taken to their page, where you can explore their publications, co-authors, and so on, and also follow them to receive updates.

ResearchGate also text-mines the publications you’ve uploaded to find out who you’ve cited; they add both researchers you’ve cited and who have cited you to your network, as well as colleagues from your department and institution.
Here’s how to explore your network: click the “Publications” tab at the top of your screen to begin exploring the publications that are in your network. You can browse the most recent publications in your area of interest, your network, and so on, using the navigation bar seen above.

If you find an interesting publication, you can click the paper title to read the paper or click on the author’s name to be taken to their profile, where you can explore their other publications or choose to follow them, adding a new colleague to your network in a snap.

ResearchGate Score & Stats
If you’re into metrics, the ResearchGate score and stats offer lots to explore. The ResearchGate score is an indicator of your popularity and engagement on the site: the more publications and followers you have, plus the more questions you ask and answer, all add up to your score. Check out Christoph Lutz’s ResearchGate score—one of the more diversely-sourced scores I’ve seen to date:
ResearchGate also helpfully provides a percentile (seen above on the right-hand side), so you know how a score stacks up against other users on the site. The score isn’t normalized by field, though, so beware that using the score to compare yourself to others isn’t recommended.

Some other downsides to be aware of: ResearchGate scores don’t take into account whether you’re first author on a paper, they weigh site participation much more highly than other (more important) indicators of your scientific prowess, and don’t reflect the reality of who’s a high-impact scientist in many fields. So, caveat emptor.

All that said, ResearchGate scores are fun to play around with and explore. Just be sure not to take them too seriously.

The stats are also illuminating: they tell you how often your publications have been viewed and cited on ResearchGate both recently and over time, what your top publications are, and the popularity of your
profile and any questions you may have asked on the site’s Q&A section. On your profile page, you’ll see a summary of your stats:

If you click on those stats, you’ll be taken to your stats page, which breaks down all of your metrics with nice visualizations:
A caveat: like Academia.edu stats, ResearchGate stats are only for content hosted on ResearchGate, so it can’t tell you much about readership or citations of your work that’s hosted on other platforms.

Q&A
Now that we’ve made some passive connections by following other researchers, let’s build some relationships by contributing to the Q&A section of the site.
On the Q&A section, anyone can pose a question, and if it’s related to your area of expertise, ResearchGate will give you the opportunity to answer. We’ll talk more about the benefits of participating in the Q&A section of the site in the coming days, but basically it’s a good opportunity to help other researchers and get your name out there.

Click on “Q&A” at the top of your screen and explore the various questions that have been posed in your discipline in recent weeks. You can also search for other topics, and pose questions yourself.

Two more cool ResearchGate features worth mentioning: they mint DOIs, meaning that if you need a permanent identifier for an unpublished work, you can get one for free (though keep in mind that they haven’t announced a preservation plan, meaning their DOIs might be less stable over time than DOIs issued by a CLOCKSSS-backed repository like Figshare). And you can also request Open Reviews of your work, which allows anyone on ResearchGate who’s in your area of expertise to give you feedback—a useful mechanism for inviting others to read your paper. It’s a feature that hasn’t seen much uptake, but is full of possibilities in terms of connecting other researchers to your work.

**Limitations**

Several readers have pointed out that Academia.edu and ResearchGate are information silos—you put information and effort into the site, and can’t easily extract and reuse it later. And they’re absolutely correct. That’s a big downside of these services and a great reason to check out open alternatives like PeerLibrary, ORCID, and Impactstory (more on the latter two services in the days to come).

Some other drawbacks to both Academia.edu and ResearchGate: they’re both for-profit, venture capital funded platforms, meaning that their responsibility isn’t to academics but to investors. And sure, they’re both free, which seems like an advantage until you remember that it means that you are the product, not the customer.

One solution to these drawbacks is to limit the amount of time you spend adding new content to your profiles on these sites, and instead use them as a kind of “landing page” that can simply help others find you and your three or four most important publications. Even if you don’t have all your publications on either site, their social networking features are still useful to make connections and increase readership for your most important work.

Two more things:

1. Be sure to check your ResearchGate notification settings to cut down on spam. They send more emails than most email-fatigued academics care to receive.
2. Make sure you’ve opted-out of sending invitations, so you don’t accidentally contribute to spamming others.

**Homework**

Set up your ResearchGate profile and at least three publications you think deserve attention. Next, search for at least 5 colleagues or well-known researchers in your field and follow each of them. Once
you’ve established a network, take 10 minutes to explore the “Publications” tab of ResearchGate, browsing publications that have been recently published in your network.