

Research & Analysis / Academic Research

Identify seminal papers, active research fronts, and emerging scholars from citation patterns.

Difficulty: Advanced

Model: GPT-4 / Claude / Gemini

Use Case: Grant Writing, Dissertation Chapters, Research Onboarding

Updated: May 2026

Why This Prompt Exists

Finding the right papers to cite is hard — citation counts help, but they favor old papers over good ones.

You get:

- citing the same 5 classic papers everyone cites
- missing recent breakthroughs because they haven't accumulated citations yet
- no sense of which scholars are currently active vs. retired
- wasting time on dead-end research fronts
- bibliographies that signal "I don't know the field"

But citation networks reveal structure:

- seminal papers: high citation count, cited across many subfields
- hub papers: everyone in a specialty cites them
- bridge papers: connect two previously separate literatures
- frontier papers: recent, highly cited, signal where field is going
- outlier papers: cited but not part of main network (potential new direction)

Without network analysis, you cite what's familiar, not what's important.

This prompt analyzes a reference list or search results to map the citation landscape.

The Prompt

Assume the role of a bibliometric analyst who maps citation networks.

Your task is to analyze a set of papers and identify the structure of the field.

Generate:

1. SEMINAL PAPERS (the foundation)

- Papers everyone cites
- Why they matter (first study, theory, method, meta-analysis)

2. ACTIVE RESEARCH FRONTS (where the field is now)

- Recent highly-cited papers (last 3-5 years)
- What questions they're asking
- What methods they're using

3. KEY RESEARCHERS

- Senior scholars (long citation history)
- Rising stars (recent high-impact papers)
- Research groups/labs (multiple co-authored papers)

4. NETWORK STRUCTURE

- Are there separate "camps" in this field?
- Who bridges between camps?
- What topics are peripheral vs. central?

5. GAPS IN YOUR CITATION LIST

- Important papers you missed
- Important scholars you missed
- Alternative perspectives you haven't considered

INPUTS:

Reference list or search results:

[PASTE BIBLIOGRAPHY OR SEARCH RESULTS]

Your research topic:

[E.G., "Remote work productivity"]

Number of papers analyzed:

[E.G., "25"]

Time range:

[E.G., "2000-2026"]

RULES:

- Use citation counts as signal, not gospel (recency bias, field size bias)
- Flag self-citations (author citing own work repeatedly)
- Distinguish between fields with different citation norms (humanities vs. STEM)
- Note when a paper is cited for a finding vs. cited as a counter-example

How To Use It

- Start with 10-20 highly cited papers from Google Scholar on your topic.
- Extract their reference lists and feed them back in (snowball sampling).
- Look for papers cited by everyone in your field but not in your bibliography.
- Identify rising stars — they may be future collaborators or reviewers.
- Use the “active research fronts” to frame your contribution as timely.

Example Input

Reference list or search results:

- “1. Bloom et al. (2019) — 2,300 citations
2. Gibbs et al. (2021) — 890 citations
3. Choudhury et al. (2022) — 450 citations
4. Rockmann & Pratt (2015) — 1,200 citations
5. Golden (2006) — 3,100 citations
6. Allen et al. (2015) — 2,800 citations (meta-analysis)
7. Yang et al. (2024) — 120 citations”

Your research topic:

Remote work productivity

Number of papers analyzed:

7

Why It Works

Most researchers build bibliographies opportunistically — whatever they find first.

This framework improves outcomes by forcing:

- seminal paper identification (foundation of the field)
- frontier detection (where the field is going)
- key researcher mapping (who to follow, cite, or email)

- network structure analysis (camps and bridges)
- gap detection (what you're missing)

Great citation mapping doesn't just list papers — it reveals the intellectual structure of a field.

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