



Student Guide to Open Educational Resources

Welcome to the Northern Essex Community College (NECC) Student Guide to Open Educational Resources (OER). This guide has been created to provide guidance and support for students who are taking a course that includes OER materials. If you would like to learn more about OER, we recommend visiting the [Open Educational Resources infoKit](#) site.

As for what is OER, we rely on this definition from [OER Commons](#):

“Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching and learning materials that you may freely use and reuse at no cost. Unlike fixed, copyrighted resources, OER have been authored or created by an individual or organization that chooses to retain few, if any, ownership rights. In some cases, that means you can download a resource and share it with colleagues and students. In other cases, you may be able to download a resource, edit it in some way, and then re-post it as a remixed work. How do you know your options? OER often have a Creative Commons or GNU license to let you know how the material may be used, reused, adapted, and shared.”

So what do I need to know about Open Educational Resources?

In this guide, you will find the following information:

- How to [access your course OER](#).
- How to [read, view, and listen to your course OER](#).
- Recommendations for [storing your course OER](#).
- Different methods for [printing your course OER](#).
- Answers to [frequently asked questions about OER](#).
- Additional [links on OER](#).

Accessing OER

This page identifies what a student will or may need in order to access their OER content in a given course. Where a student accesses OER will vary depending upon where the instructor has located or stored OER.

Internet Access

Most OER content requires students to have some access to the Internet since online is where most of the content is stored. However, students do not necessarily need Internet access at home or on their digital devices. For students who do not have Internet access at home, it is recommended that they use Internet-connected computers in the [NECC Library computer lab](#) to access their OER content. Students then may be able to download the OER content into their preferred storage space (such as a thumb drive). For more information about storing OER content, please consult the Storing OER section.

In some instances, students may not be able to download the content such as videos from YouTube. In these instances, students should make plans to watch the content in the computer lab or library at NECC or their local library if it has Internet-connected computers. If students need to watch content in a public environment, it is recommended that they bring a pair of headphones so as not to disrupt those in the immediate area.

Library Resources

Some materials that faculty use will be from Library databases and resources. In such instances, you will have to use the [NECC Library website](#) to find the resources you are looking for.

Blackboard Learn

Primarily, faculty will make OER available in the course environment on Blackboard Learn. Students will be able to go into their courses and access their course content. At this point, students may wish to download or save the materials so they can have quick access to them on their preferred devices. For more information on how and where to store your course content, check out the Storing OER section.

Google Sites

Some faculty may use Google Sites as a means of organizing their OER content into a manageable form. In these instances, the instructor will provide students with the link and it is useful to bookmark that link for quick access. The link is also likely to appear in the course syllabus.

Online

Depending on what kind of OER materials the instructor uses, students might be able to access such content online without using Blackboard Learn or Google Sites. This could include accessing places such as [YouTube](#), the [Internet Archive](#), [Wikimedia Commons](#), and other online repositories of digital content. It is useful to make note if the course OER resides on such websites since it means students

might be able to access it by going directly to these websites and searching for them, rather than accessing them through Blackboard Learn.

Using OER

How Do I Engage with OER in my Course?

OER can come in a variety of forms such as text, video, audio, and mixed media. Within each of these, there is an additional layer of variety. For instance, text could be a Microsoft Word document, a PDF, a web page or other types of text-based documents. Audio could come in the form of streaming sound or .mp3 files. Below, some tools have been identified for engaging with OER content along with recommendations about each tool.

Computer/Laptop

Where possible, students are encouraged to download OER onto their computers for quick reference. By downloading, the student may be able to annotate or manipulate and organize the content as he or she sees fit.

Note: Students using computers in the Library computer lab should save any content that is downloaded onto a thumb drive or consider other storing options, such as [Google Drive](#) or [Onedrive](#). Students are unable to save their materials on college computers.

Tablet and Mobile Devices

Students can download their content onto their tablets or mobile devices depending upon the storage space on the device. Students should be aware of what type of file formats the OER is in and which application is most likely to be useful. Most content should be accessible through a web browser, but, for annotating, note-taking, and editing OER for the student's own use, it might be a good idea to find the best app for the job.

Apps for Android

There are several apps for Android that are capable of eReading. The most noteworthy is [AIReader](#) which supports almost every book format imaginable. Again, finding the right app for the right format may require extra effort if AIReader does not meet your needs.

Apps for iPhone

iPhones have their own proprietary app known as [iBooks](#) which is capable of reading .pdf and .epub formats. Because the vast majority of eBooks are saved as pdf or epub, you should be able to access your content.

Note: If the tablet or device has a mobile data plan, it might be useful to download the OER content when you are on a wi-fi network (such as at home or at NECC) to avoid going over a download or data quota.

Physical Copies

When it comes to text-based material, students have a variety of options around getting the material

in physical form. Students are encouraged to take a look at the Printing OER section, although multimedia is much harder to turn into physical copies. While some audio and video content can be downloaded onto tablets and mobile devices, going beyond that to store the content would require the files to be burned into audio CDs or DVDs.

Storing OER

What Should I Do with OER Content?

Students can access the content from the web and not download it. However, many students choose to hold onto their course content so that they can come back to it and have ready access to it, rather than going through the Internet. Here are the best strategies for holding onto content for the duration of the course and beyond.

Note 1: Students using computers in the library computer lab should save any content that is downloaded onto either a thumb drive, [Google Drive](#), or [Onedrive](#) etc. College computers will not save the materials on the hard drive.

Note 2: Not all content will necessarily be stored as listed below. Content from library databases may vary in terms of what you can download or print. Please consult a NECC Librarian for further clarifications on specific content.

Bookmark

In some instances, the OER content will be material on a web site. In such instances, when the OER content is on a particular web site (outside of the Blackboard Learn environment), students can always use their browser's bookmarking tool (or whatever bookmarking tool students prefer to use) to keep track of the content.

Note: Students using computers in the library computer lab should not bookmark these materials using the computer's browser as these bookmarks will not be saved once they log off the computers.

Download

A lot of OER is available to download onto a computer, tablet, mobile device, or portable storage (a thumb drive or external hard drive). Students can download the content onto the storage of their choosing and organize the content in a way that is useful to them. We recommend that folders or tags are used to indicate which object goes with which week or learning unit and class.

Online Storage

Students can also elect to download the OER and then upload it to their own cloud storage. For more information about using Google Drive, [please consult this resource](#).

Print

In the case of text-based OER, students can print out their materials and organize them in a folder or binder. For more information about the best ways to print content, visit the Printing OER section.

Printing OER

How Can I Print my OER Text-based Materials?

There are various options for students to consider when looking to produce physical copies of their text-based OER. This page will identify the most common options that students can use as well as some strategies for getting the most out of printing.

Note: Not all content will necessarily be able to print as listed below. Content from library databases may vary in terms of what you can download or print. Please consult a NECC Librarian for further clarifications on specific content.

Buy the Physical Text

In some instances, the content has already been produced into the physical text. Students may be able to purchase the text from the NECC Bookstore or online. Please consult with your instructor to find out if that is an option prior to this.

Print at Home

Students can print at home if they have access to a printer. However, depending upon how many paper pages this requires, it may be useful to take advantage of some of the other options and ideas on this page.

Other Printing Options

Students might also consider using a third-party printing company to print their materials. For instance, Staples has a [customizable service](#) that allows for users to upload documents, arrange them, and print them at a store of the user's choosing or to be delivered for a reasonable cost. Students can look into such printing options, especially if they are taking more than one course with OER content.

Maximizing Printer Usage

In addition to the various printing options above, there are also some ways to manipulate documents in order to get more printing per page. Below are some common ways of getting more out of each page.

Font: Many documents default to 12 point sized font. Font size (and font type) can be adjusted be as small as 11 or 10 point. Some font types are naturally bigger than others. Text in Arial 11 point may be actually bigger than text in Calibri 11 point and may take up more space. Changing the font size or font type can increase the amount of words per page and make the document potentially shorter in its total page count. However, the trade-off will be smaller print that may be hard to read. This adjustment works best with word documents programs such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Works, Apple Pages, or Google Docs.

Margins: Many documents default to 1 inch margins all around the document. Margins can be adjusted to a 1/2 inch or smaller depending on the student's preference. This will increase the amount of space used on each page and make the document potentially shorter in its total page count.

However, the trade-off will be less margin space for students to jot down notes. This adjustment works best with word documents programs such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Works, Apple Pages, or Google Docs.

Spacing: Some documents will be double-spaced. When spacing can be adjusted, it could be reduced to 1.5, 1.15, or even single spacing. This will shrink the length of the document and potentially shorten the total page count. However, the trade-off will be that there is less space on the page to annotate and write notes. This adjustment works best with word documents programs such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Works, Apple Pages, or Google Docs.

2 Pages per Side: In addition to printing on both sides, many document programs allow the user to print 2 pages of the document on a single side of paper. By doing so, the student will be able to put 4 pages of the document onto 1 single piece of paper. However, the trade-off is that the print will be significantly smaller. Students might want to test print 1 or 2 pages like this before committing to print all their documents like this. This adjustment works well with web sites, PDF files, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Works, Apple Pages, Google Docs, and most other documents that can be printed.

Skip Pages: Some documents have unnecessary blank pages or pages that might not be entirely necessary to the student. It is worth looking over the document to determine if every page needs to be printed or if only certain ones are needed. This adjustment works well with any document program.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are Open Educational Resources (OER)?

OER are materials that have been developed for educational purposes that are entirely free and accessible for anyone to use. They can come in many different forms such readings, textbooks, audio and video recording, and other such learning objects. Material that is considered open has either a Creative Commons copyright license or is part of the public domain. Creative Commons copyright may come with some restrictions on how much one can legally copy, share, remix, or profit from the content and such limitations are usually delineated on the OER itself.

Q: Why is my instructor using them?

Your instructor may have decided to use OER content for several reasons. Faculty, like students, have become concerned about the significant rise in the cost of textbooks and see OER as an opportunity to provide rich learning content for students. Faculty also make use of OER content because they find OER to be great quality content made often by people they know or by individuals who teach and work in the related fields of study. Finally, faculty may also choose to use OER to help make the course current and fresh. Rather than relying on a book which might have old examples or references, faculty appreciate the flexibility to find newer content for their students.

Q: What is the difference between open educational resources and those described as affordable?

OER content are materials that are entirely free for the student to use, redistribute, and even remix. Affordable means that the cost of the learning materials has been substantially reduced and will fall under \$50. The instructor will always make the ebook available for free online. In this case, the ebook is considered an open educational resource. However, you may be able to purchase a copy online, which is categorized as affordable.

Q: Where can I find OER content?

There are many different places to find OER content. The first place that we recommend is NECC OER LibGuide: <http://libguides.northshore.edu/open>. You can also explore this resource which provides several different OER search engines: [Available Here](#)

Q: What can I do with OER?

Largely, whatever you want. Some OER content will be restricted according to what Creative Commons licenses it has, but you can easily look up the license here on the Creative Commons website: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/>. These materials are yours to keep at the end of the course and you are free to redistribute them as you wish.

Q: Do I need Internet access at home for my OER course?

No. However, you will need to plan out how you plan to access your OER content. This might mean printing all of the content in advance or downloading the content onto a storage drive. It will make it easier to have Internet access at home, but it is not necessary so long as you actively plan how to access your content at home.

Resources

[Creative Commons](#): This site offers explanations and resources around understanding Creative Commons licenses as a form of legal protection around copyrighted material, particularly material used for OER.

NSCC [Open Educational Resources LibGuide](#): This site is North Shore Community College's own guide to aid faculty and students in exploring OER. It identifies some of the best repositories for open and affordable content that instructors and students can use.

[Open Education Handbook](#): This handbook provides a wealth of information about the OER movement and its uses in educational environments across the world.

[OER Search Engines](#): This page provides links to different OER search engines so that users can look for content across several databases.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



Awarded the OER Badge for submitting this guide to [OER Week 2016](#).