

Understanding Open Access

Overview

What is open access?

“Open access” is a way of making copyrightable works available without all of the access barriers associated with the “all rights reserved” model. These barriers can take the form of price barriers (the financial cost to access a work) and permission barriers (the permission needed to further copy, redistribute, and/or adapt a work).

Open access typically comes in two forms. Gratis open access is the practice of making a work available online free of charge (also called public access). Libre open access (also called full open access) refers to the practice of making a work available online free of charge and with some additional reuse rights, typically granted through a Creative Commons license. Gratis open access removes price barriers, whereas libre open access additionally removes at least some permission barriers, allowing users to copy, redistribute, and/or adapt a work.

What are the benefits of open access?



Benefits to Authors

Increases discoverability and access, potentially leading to a bigger audience for a work and a greater number of citations.



Benefits to Readers

Makes it easier for students, teachers, researchers, practitioners, and others to access the information they need to learn, teach, research, and practice in their fields.



Benefits to Progress of Knowledge

Creates a more hospitable environment for future scientific advancements and cultural contributions.

What are open access policies and why are they adopted?

Many universities, government agencies, and other research funders are adopting open access policies that require works written by faculty or developed under agency or foundation sponsorship to be made openly accessible. For example, faculty at universities around the country have voted to pass open access policies at their institutions. Under these policies, faculty members typically grant to their universities the right to deposit faculty-authored works in institutional repositories. Under similar policies, many government agencies require grant recipients to deposit their research findings in repositories where they are available for free public access. And foundations that sponsor research are increasingly adopting policies that require research resulting from grant funding be made openly accessible.

Typically, open access policies are adopted by entities that view the communication and dissemination of funded works as an integral part of their mission. Universities, for example, further their educational missions by implementing open access policies that make scholarly works more widely available. Open access policies maximize the value of investment in research by ensuring that more readers can access research results and scholarship than if the works were available through restricted means alone.

How do I make my work openly accessible?

If you decide to make your work openly accessible, you will need to decide what rights you might want to give to the public, as well as what conditions you might want to place on the use of your work.

While you can help readers access your works by removing price barriers alone (for example, by putting it on the internet), readers will usually still need to ask for your permission to reuse, share, or adapt your work unless you affirmatively license these rights to them (or unless their use falls within a copyright limitation or exception). When you consider how you would like to allow others to access and use your work, consider the following two questions.

- **Do you want to allow others to share your work?** When you allow others to share your work, readers can distribute, copy, or perform your work without first having to get your permission or rely on a copyright exception (such as fair use).
- **Do you want others to be able to adapt your work?** When you allow others to adapt your work, readers can build upon or create new works based on your work without first needing to get your permission or rely on a copyright exception. This is sometimes referred to as allowing others the right to prepare “derivative works.” A translation of an article written in English into another language is an example of a derivative work.

Once you consider what rights you would like to share with the public, you can consider whether you would like to fine-tune your work's degree of "openness" by putting conditions on readers' reuse and derivative work rights. Some common conditions to consider are:

- **Attribution:** Those who reuse a work or create a derivative work must give credit to the author for the creation of the original work.
- **Share-Alike:** When readers create a new work based on the originally licensed material, they must distribute that new work under license terms identical to those the author imposed on the original work.
- **No Derivatives:** Readers are prohibited from adapting a work to create a new work. The right to create derivative works is reserved to the author, meaning that readers will be allowed only to distribute, reproduce, or perform a work as long as it is passed along unchanged and in whole.
- **Non-Commercial Use:** Readers are prohibited from making any reuse or derivative work available commercially.

If you are subject to an open access policy, you should check whether you are required to grant particular user rights or if you are limited as to what restrictions you can place on user rights.

To indicate how they want their work to be shared and what restrictions they are placing on the use of their work, many authors use a pre-drafted open access license from Creative Commons. Creative Commons allows authors to choose from among a menu of pre-drafted licenses depending on the rights they want to grant and the conditions they want to place on use of their works. For more about Creative Commons licenses, visit creativecommons.org.



How do you publish a work openly?

In addition to deciding how "open" you want to make your work, you will also need to decide where you will make your work openly accessible. Some options include:

- **Green Open Access:** Under the Gold Open Access model, an author works with an open access publisher, which then typically performs peer review and editing functions before publishing the work in open access form.
- **Gold Open Access:** Green Open Access refers to an author directly making her own work openly accessible on, for example, an institutional repository or a personal or group website (also known as “self-archiving”).
- **Working with a Conventional Publisher:** Conventional publishers may be amenable to including open-access-friendly terms in their contracts, either by default or upon negotiation with the author.

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