

An Introduction to Open Educational Resources

Open Educational Resources, or OER: what are they, and why should you use them in your courses? Today, we'll answer that question. But first, we have to ask why?

There's a problem in higher education today: the problem of high textbook costs. Students today are having a rough time affording all the costs of higher education, and textbooks are a big part of that. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, textbook costs have risen 88% over the last decade, more than three times the rate of inflation! These high costs can have a huge impact on students, causing them to drop classes and even majors! In fact, some students have reported not buying the textbook they need for a class, just because they know they can't afford it. It's not worth the cost.

So what's the answer to this problem? Well, one answer is Open Educational Resources. Open Educational Resources are educational materials like syllabi, workbooks, textbooks, and videos, that are openly licensed and freely available to use and reuse online. The open licenses used for OER give users more freedom to work with the resources than copyright law usually allows.

The most common open licenses for OER are Creative Commons Licenses. These customizable licenses show users what they are allowed to do with your resource. Can they edit it, sell an adapted version of it, combine it with other materials? These licenses make the answers clear.

Now you might wonder, do OER really help students? Well, having freely available resources removes the roadblock that high textbook costs place on education, and makes the materials more accessible for everyone.

And classes that use OER aren't too different from traditional classes either! Studies have shown that classes using Open Educational Resources have similar prep times, same or better test scores, and lower drop rates than classes using traditional textbooks. It just makes sense. If students aren't scared and worried about affording their course materials, they're able to put the time and effort into their classes that they need to succeed!

Now let's look at how you can use these resources. You have four options when you want to use an Open Educational Resource in your class: you can adopt it as-is, adapt it to fit your class better or to update the material, create something new to share with educators around the world, or combine multiple resources into one that really matches the needs of your class.

You can find OER on various online repositories, but one I really recommend is the Open Textbook Library. Here, you can find most of the open textbooks available online as well as reviews from faculty that have used them in their classes!

It's important to remember that you don't have to go into this blind. There is support out there. Other repositories, like OpenStax, have highly rated materials for introductory or General Education courses, like Astronomy, Physics, and Chemistry. And if your students prefer print books, OpenStax offers those too!

If you want to find supplementary materials or other resources you can use instead of a textbook in your course, sites like OER Commons provide a wealth of resources you can use and easy to use software for creating your own OER as well.

There are a lot of options out there, so go out and explore! Find OER in your subject area, read reviews, and figure out how you want to use Open Educational Resources in your classroom. If you get stuck, contact us! Your librarians. We can always help in some way.

That brings us to our final point: Library support. On average, Librarians are going to be the most knowledgeable people on your college campus about Open Educational Resources, and the most excited to talk about it! If your subject librarian doesn't know much about them, ask a scholarly communication librarian. Odds are, there is someone in the library who can answer your questions.