

A Brief Guide to Open Educational Resources

A BRIEF GUIDE TO OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed as an introductory resource to Open Educational Resources (OER). This booklet is part of our Tech Tutorial project for LIS 488: Technology for Information Professionals (Spring 2021) at Simmons University.

We hope you find this booklet helpful!

-Bailey Badger, Cece Lasley, and Rebekah Taylor

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WHAT ARE OERS?

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, defines OERs as, “teaching, learning, and research materials in any medium – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation, and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions.” The use of OERs allows educators and scholars to create, access, and share resources in a democratic and flexible way, regardless of access restrictions, including budgetary constraints.

OERs can be wonderful tools for self-publication (whether the creator is focused more on education or entertainment) and many OER platforms offer options for their creators to specify the level of ownership they wish to retain, in regards to rights and royalties.

If you’ve ever felt frustration at the cost of textbooks, worried about equal and equitable access and distribution of information, or wanted to self-publish a book, OERs are incredibly valuable tools – and there are many to choose from, so you can choose one that works for you.

THE VALUE OF OER

Let's talk about the value of OER technology. As mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, the OERs are easily accessible, affordable, and offer flexibility. This technology primarily benefits students, educators, scholars, and other educational professionals but are not limited to them. As an example, with our upcoming tutorial of Pressbooks, many OERs can be created and utilized by any individual and industry, such as writers or even the publishing industry.

How the content is created, distributed, and accessed are some of the fundamental differences that set OERs apart from other educational resources, such as textbooks. OERs allow flexibility for educators to create and customize their own material, giving them full control over type, quality, and content; rather than being confined by elements of traditional resources. The material can also be easily updated, improved, or edited eliminating the limitations traditional resources normally have, such as reprints or new editions.

Another advantage of OERs is how accessible they are. The material created and held within OERs can be accessed anytime, anywhere, and however many times needed. The distribution of material also circulates quickly and efficiently, reaching as many people as needed.

Lastly, and arguably the most important benefit of this technology, is affordability. According to a research study at Virginia State University, the cost of college textbooks increased by 73% since 2006, which is 4 times the rate of inflation. And according to the Chronicle of Higher Education, 7 in 10 students didn't purchase textbooks because they were too expensive. OERs break down these cost barriers that many students face, which can result in better grades and higher attendance and graduation rates.

When we talk about Pressbooks, our chosen OER for this tutorial, there are some user specific benefits that come when utilizing the technology, specifically for self-publishers, writers, and educators. Pressbooks enables the creation and easy distribution of both solo and collaborative projects such as ebooks, web books, and print resources. By affiliation, this technology also provides a network for those within the publishing industry, supplying a space for professionals to build relationships and connections.

OERS AND LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

This third and final section of this booklet will discuss the relevance of OER to libraries and archives. Much of the scholarly literature about OER relates to academic libraries, and as a result, for this chapter, the focus will be on academic libraries and OERs. This is not to say that archives and other kinds of libraries cannot or do not take advantage of this technology. For example, Harvard University's Archives has [a Scalar created by Dorothy Berry](#) on how to use its finding aids. The OER Commons also has resources about OERs and K-12 education (searching "OER Commons K-12" is the fastest way to access the different kinds of resources available).

One of the most popular applications of OER in academic libraries is through OER textbooks. As discussed in the previous chapter, utilizing OER textbooks increases classroom equity by making textbooks either free or low-cost, and they are often available online and in-print (Boschard and Magnuson, 2017, 8-10). [Colvard, Watson, and Park \(2018\)](#) found that classes that adopted OER textbooks saw higher rates of academic success (262, 268-269). [Stafford \(2020\)](#) points to Colvard, Watson, and Park's 2018 study as a critical

piece of literature for those interested in advocating for the adoption of OER at their institution (105).

Librarians are perfectly situated within academic institutions to advocate for the adoption of OER in classes as many librarians frequently work with faculty members and classes in designing course LibGuides, providing instruction sessions, or other resources for students. Boschard and Magnuson (2017) outline a strategy for liaison librarians to collaborate with faculty in finding OERs for their classes, and addressing other related issues, such as copyright questions or finding OER tools for faculty to make their own resource in their article “Library Leadership in Open Educational Resource Adoption and Affordable Learning Initiatives” (9-11). OER textbooks are just one example of how OERs increase access to information and promote equitable access, a key concept within the [ALA Code of Ethics](#).

In addition to OER textbooks, OER can also be used as a creative tool. As with this booklet, students could create their own OERs for projects. This would not only be a tool for students to create public-facing work, but also to learn more about the complex world of copyright licensing and open access. Kohout-Taylor and Scheaffer (2020) present a case study of library instruction sessions about copyright and open resources for a class working on their own multimodal projects at Clemson University (13-16). Librarians can use OER creation projects in classes as opportunities to expand their

information literacy instruction to include the complex, but important, topic of copyright.

OERs are part of the larger ongoing open education movement. Many librarians are already involved in other related initiatives, such as the open access movement in scholarly publishing, or the open education movement as a whole. [Mishra](#) has a fascinating discussion about OER and open education in his 2017 article, “Open educational resources: removing barriers from within.” In addition, Boschard and Magnuson (2017) stated that “27 states currently have OER initiatives or projects and some states also have legislation that supports reducing the cost of course materials for students” (2). While this statistic is four years old, it highlights the increasingly widespread adoption of OER initiatives and other efforts that work to make higher education more affordable for all. The Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), an organization heavily involved in advocating for open education initiatives, has created [OER Connect](#), a database that includes information about OER initiatives at North American colleges and universities, policies relating to OER, and more.

These are only a few examples of how OER can be used in libraries and archives, but, hopefully, this provides a sense of the ways in which OER can be utilized in libraries and archives.

RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

This chapter includes lists of resources to find and create OERs. Please see the Bibliography chapter for resources to learn more about OERs.

Select OER Repositories/Resources for finding OERs

- [Merlot](#): an OER repository initially created by the California State University Center for Distributed Learning
- [OpenStax](#): an OER textbook repository created by Rice University
- [OER Commons](#): an OER repository that also includes resources about using OERs, etc. that is hosted by a non-profit organization
- [Pitt OER LibGuide](#)
- [Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition \(SPARC\) Connect OER](#): a database of information about OER use at a range of North American institutions, current OER policies, and more
- [Simmons OER LibGuide](#)

- [SUNY Empire State OER LibGuide](#)
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Select resources for creating OERs

- [Scalar](#): an open-source tool that creates flexible websites hosted by The Alliance for Networking Visual Culture
- [Open Author](#): an open-source tool hosted by the OER Commons that creates ebook-like resources
- [ELGG](#): an open-source website and social media creation tool
- [OEDb listicle on OER tools](#)
- [Iowa State University Resource on OER Tools](#): this resource is created using Pressbooks, and is generally a great starting place for those interested in learning more about OER

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