



Open Educational Resources (OER) & Creative Commons Licensing

This guide provides an introduction to Open Educational Resources (OER) and educational material licensing. It also provides links to further articles for more information drawing from universities and organizations across Canada. To continue the conversation on this topic, visit the [Open Educational Resources Discussion Forum thread](#).

What are Open Educational Resources?

While there are institutional variations in wording, the core definition of OER is consistent. Here is a good example:

"One definition is that Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching and learning materials that are freely available online for everyone to use, whether you are an instructor, student or self-learner. Examples of OER include: full courses, course modules, syllabi, lectures, homework assignments, quizzes, lab and classroom activities, pedagogical materials, games, simulations, and many more resources contained in digital media collections from around the world."

From Dalhousie Libraries OER (CC-BY-SA)

How can I use OER in my classes?

When contemplating how to integrate OER into your classes, it is useful to consider the lessons learned and processes defined by others. Here is a clearly defined process to follow in exploring your OER options:

"The following steps illustrates a typical development process for adapting an existing OER or creating a new OER (adapted from [the OER Handbook for Educators](#)):

1. **Find:** Search and find OERs, including an existing open textbook or an individual resource. Locate OERs using search engines, repositories and individual websites.
2. Either:
 - **Adopt:** adopt an existing OER as-is, without making any changes, or
 - **Adapt:** adapt the resource to make it more useful to a particular situation. For example: adding contextual information specifically for the Canadian context etc. Or take two or more OER materials and remix them to form a new OER.
 - **Create:** create your own open textbook or individual OER
3. **License:** License the work using an open content licenses such as [Creative Commons](#) to enable re-use by others
4. **Publish and distribute:** publish the OER once it is finished and make it available to others to begin the life cycle again
5. **Re-Use:** the actual use of the new OER for your own teaching purposes

From Queen's - [Integrate OER in your teaching \(CC-BY-SA\)](#)

See Also:

[Waterloo - List of OER resources and repositories](#)

[University of Toronto - Open, Free and Affordable course materials](#)

How can I make the content I create Open?

To make content open, simply add an open license (a statement or icon from Creative Commons) to the work you wish to make open. The Creative Commons site does a great job [outlining licenses](#).

"An open license is one which grants permission to access, re-use and redistribute a work with few or no restrictions. These types of licenses, like Creative Commons, are generally developed under the 5Rs to allow users to do the following:

- **Retain** - the right to make, own, and control copies of the content (e.g., download, duplicate, store, and manage)
- **Reuse** - the right to use the content in a wide range of ways (e.g., in a class, in a study group, on a website, in a video)
- **Revise** - the right to adapt, adjust, modify, or alter the content itself (e.g., translate the content into another language)
- **Remix** - the right to combine the original or revised content with other material to create something new (e.g., incorporate the content into a mashup)
- **Redistribute** - the right to share copies of the original content, your revisions, or your remixes with others (e.g., give a copy of the content to a friend)

Essentially, open licenses allow for content to be used, modified and built upon.

The type of permissions given to a user of the openly licensed item, depends on the creator and the license they have assigned to their work. The benefit of open licenses are they allow the creator to select the permissions and restrictions according to how they would like their content used."

[From UBC - Open UBC \(CC-BY-SA\)](#)

Which license should I use?

The [Creative Commons site](#) does a great job of explaining the licenses and legend icons. If combining resources, this [license compatibility chart](#) provides an easy way to determine if this is possible, and what the resulting license will be.

Open vs. Free resources and copyright

"Open educational resources are and always will be free, but not all free resources are OER. Free resources may be temporarily free or may be restricted from use at some time in the future (including by the addition of fees to access those resources). Moreover, free-but-not-open resources may not be modified, adapted or redistributed without obtaining special permission from the copyright holder."

[From Doug Levin, with input from Nicole Allen, Layla Bonnot, Cable Green, Meredith Jacob and Lisa Petrides \(CC-BY\)](#)

Unless otherwise indicated, assume all work (including your own) is copyrighted with all rights reserved. The [NIST Chemistry Webbook](#) is an example of a free resource; students can access chemistry datasets. But unlike open resources, the "all rights are reserved" copyright notice at the bottom of the page prohibits copying or adaptation.

Examples of other free but not necessarily open resources:

- YouTube videos
- Training materials from trainings you have taken
- Book excerpts available online
- Pre-prints or other academic work available in your university online archival repository
- Simulation code available online

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