

A Guide to Open Access

Find out what open access means, how to publish research on an open access basis, and discover the resources and tools that enable free, online access to publications.

A Guide to Open Access

What is open access?

Open access means permanent, free access to research outputs for everyone. All types of outputs, including journal articles, monographs, textbooks, research data, software, code, reports, and recordings of performances and exhibitions, can be made available open access.

What's different?

The traditional publishing model only makes outputs available to individuals who purchase their own copies or have access to a library that purchases books or subscriptions to journals. If you don't have access, you'll encounter what's known as a paywall. Open access challenges this model.

Paywall: This normally takes the form of a login page which asks a visitor to login to their library account or purchase the content.

What's all the fuss about?

Research is undertaken in all kinds of organisations around the world, some with minimal budgets. For many people doing research, getting access

to publications is a serious problem. Open access lets the results of research be more widely read and built upon; researchers can do better research, and authors can get more credit for their work.

How to make your research open access

There are several options available for researchers to publish openly. First, check if your organisation or funder requires you to make your outputs available in a certain way.

Open access publishers

- A wide range of publishers enable open access to the final published versions of journal articles and books on their websites, often under a Creative Commons licence (see below)
- Some publishers charge authors or their institutions to publish open access on a per article or book basis, while others do not charge
- Some institutions have deals with major publishers to subscribe to packages of journals as well as enable their

authors to publish in them for free (known as read and publish deals).

These methods are sometimes known as 'gold' open access. A variety of open access journals are indexed on the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#).

Use an open access repository

Repository: A database of publications, which may also provide free access to full text. Social networking sites like ResearchGate and Academia.edu are not repositories.

Many publishers allow authors to upload a version of their journal article or a section of their book to a repository, even if the final published version is behind a paywall. The version available is often the author's accepted manuscript (the final, peer reviewed draft).

Some publishers may impose an embargo, which means the repository version may have to be locked for a period of time after publication (often 12 months) but can be opened after that point.

Publishers' policies on open access can be found on their

websites. [Sherpa Romeo](#) summarises these policies for individual journals.

Ask the publisher or research support staff at your organisation if you need more help.

Many organisations have their own repositories, such as the British Library's [shared research repository](#). There are also subject based repositories including [Europe PMC](#) in the life sciences, and general use repositories like [Zenodo](#). Many are listed on the directory [OpenDOAR](#).

[ShareYourPaper.org](#) can help you find the easiest way to make your work openly available.

Creative Commons licence

Open access materials will often remain under copyright but should be licensed for use by others with one of a range of Creative Commons licences. Rather than the typical 'all rights reserved', Creative Commons licences clearly state what someone can and cannot do with that material. In all cases the output should be permanently freely available to download. The more letters in the licence, the more restrictive

it is. A popular licence is 'CC BY (Attribution)' which means an output can be used for all purposes, as long as the original author(s) is acknowledged.

You can find out more about this in our guide on Copyright and Creative Commons.

Finding open access materials

[Open Access Button](#) is a web interface to help you find an openly available version of a particular article using its title, citation, DOI, or URL.

[Unpaywall](#) is a browser plugin which indicates whether a freely available copy of a work is available as you browse publisher webpages.

[Directory of Open Access Books](#) indexes tens of thousands of open access books from a large number of publishers, across all subject areas.

[EThOS](#) is a national record of doctoral level theses from UK institutions, many of which are openly available to read online.

[Open Access Theses and Dissertations](#) indexes millions of doctoral level theses from across the world.

[DataCite](#) offers a search interface to find all kinds of registered research outputs, including unpublished reports and datasets.

The British Library

Scholarly Communications Toolkit
Last updated: June 2021
DOI: 10.23636/g6fm-dx07

