



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



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# Guidance Note 2

## Sharing Open Educational Resources (OER) with Creative Commons (CC) open licenses

From the Report: Education for the most marginalised post-COVID-19: Guidance for governments on the use of digital technologies in education  
**ACT THREE (OF THREE): GUIDANCE NOTES**

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# Guidance Note: Sharing Open Educational Resources (OER) with Creative Commons (CC) open licenses<sup>1</sup>

## Context

Open Educational Resources (OER) are an important means through which governments and educators can promote, develop and share educational materials, resources and content beyond the traditional proprietary publishing model.

The sharing of content has a long history<sup>2</sup> and learning materials were being shared well before the term OER was coined in an online forum hosted by UNESCO on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries and Creative Commons released its open copyright licenses in 2002.<sup>3</sup> Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching, learning, and research materials that are either (a) in the public domain or (b) licensed in a manner that provides everyone with free and perpetual permission to engage in the 5R activities (retain, reuse, revise, remix, redistribute).<sup>4</sup>

OER are quality educational materials that are freely and openly licensed, and are available online to anyone, anytime. The creation of OER is usually funded by governments or donors and the resultant products are released under a Creative Commons open license or directly into the public domain.<sup>5</sup> OER may be developed by volunteers provided that all contributions are properly recognised.

OER are customisable or 're-mixable' which requires that the editable, underlying digital assets are made available to enable others to adapt the works.

## OER have benefits for governments since they:<sup>6</sup>

1. **Reduce student costs:** Textbook prices are rising rapidly and OER publishing models offer a way to contain such increases.<sup>7</sup>
2. **Support student success and retention:** OERs can help ensure that every student in a course has access to course material.
3. **Innovate teaching practices:** Adapting, adopting, or creating OER gives teachers the opportunity to customise course content, allowing them to provide innovative,

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1 Lead authors Paul West, Tim Unwin and Cable Green.

2 <https://www.ubiquitypress.com/site/chapters/10.5334/bbc.b/download/590/>.

3 <https://tinyurl.com/y9h8yfvf>.

4 See further below, and <https://creativecommons.org/about/program-areas/education-oer/>.

5 <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>.

6 Adapted from: Open educational resources (OER): OER benefits and challenges, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, <https://libguides.lib.umt.edu/oer>.

7 <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/28/textbook-prices-still-crippling-students-report-says>.

optimised learning experiences and environments for students. OER supports open pedagogy and open education. Examples include:

- Open pedagogy.<sup>8</sup>
- Open education group.<sup>9</sup>
- Read the *7 things you should know about open education: practices*<sup>10</sup>
  
- **Exercise academic freedom:** Teachers may edit, revise, and modify OER as they like. True OER permits adaptations (see the 5R's).<sup>11</sup>
- **Enrich scholarship:** If teachers share learning materials, simulations, tutorials, and textbooks, it gives fellow teachers more options for their own teaching and learning. The more pedagogical strategies and content available for teaching a topic, the stronger the teaching and learning can be.
- **Support for international policies:** UNESCO SDGs<sup>12</sup> (Goal 4 in particular), UNESCO OER recommendation<sup>13</sup> and the open government partnership.<sup>14</sup>

**What are the benefits of requiring open licenses on publicly funded resources?**<sup>15</sup>

1. Government increases the impact, reach and scalability of its grants and contracts.
2. Government creates conditions for maximum potential value created from all resources it funds, more efficiency and better stewardship of public funds.
3. The public has access to the educational resources it funded.
4. Innovative and entrepreneurial uses of openly licensed materials are enabled.
5. Resources are available for anyone to reuse and add value, including individual citizens, educators, scientists, public sector employees, entrepreneurs and commercial businesses.

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8 <https://opencontent.org/blog/archives/2975>.

9 <http://openedgroup.org/oer-enabled-pedagogy>.

10 <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2018/7/7-things-you-should-know-about-open-education-practices>.

11 <http://opencontent.org/definition/>.

12 <https://en.unesco.org/sustainabledevelopmentgoals>.

13 <https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-knowledge-societies/oer/recommendation>.

14 <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/how-open-educational-resources-can-help-ogp-initiatives/>.

15 <https://www.thecommonwealth-educationhub.net/oer/>.

## Guidance

When implementing OER in education, it is useful for governments to consider the following aspects:

1. Openly license and freely **share** all publicly funded works using Creative Commons licenses which are considered the global standard for open content licenses and are interoperable and make content remixable.
2. Work systematically to fulfil areas of action in the **UNESCO recommendation on OER** and the **5Rs**.<sup>16</sup>
3. Learn about and set a **default** Creative Commons (CC) license (usually CC-BY or CC-BY-SA) to be included on all shared works.<sup>17</sup>
4. Ensure all **CC licensed works** are appropriately attributed using the **TASL** format (Title, Author, Source, and License).<sup>18</sup>
5. Establish institutional **OER policies** that support educators using and sharing OER.<sup>19</sup>
6. Establish a process to approve a **more restrictive CC license** for a work should one be required.
7. Enforce the open licensing and sharing of all public and donor funded works.
8. Refer questions about CC open licenses, open education policies, and the implementation of the UNESCO recommendations on OER to Creative Commons: [cable@creativecommons.org](mailto:cable@creativecommons.org) and [info@creativecommons.org](mailto:info@creativecommons.org).

## A note on terminology

There are various definitions of OER that have evolved over the past approximately 20 years. A widely respected definition is provided by Creative Commons:<sup>20</sup>

Open educational resources (OER) are teaching, learning, and research materials that are either (a) in the public domain or (b) licensed in a manner that provides everyone with free and perpetual permission to engage in the 5R activities.

In particular, anyone must be able to perform all the following actions with OER:

1. **Retain** — make, own, and control a copy of the resource.
2. **Reuse** — use your original, revised, or remixed copy of the resource publicly.
3. **Revise** — edit, adapt, and modify your copy of the resource.
4. **Remix** — combine your original or revised copy of the resource with other existing material to create something new.
5. **Redistribute** — share copies of your original, revised, or remixed copy of the resource with others.

16 <http://opencontent.org/definition/>.

17 <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>.

18 <https://tinyurl.com/y9h8yfvf>.

19 <https://creativecommons.org/about/program-areas/education-oer/>.

20 [https://wiki.creativecommons.org/wiki/What\\_is\\_OER%3F](https://wiki.creativecommons.org/wiki/What_is_OER%3F).

## Examples

- OER policy registry: <https://oerworldmap.org/oerpolicies>.
- Open content: <http://opencontent.org/>.
- Open education practices: <https://tinyurl.com/y8oxyqqb>.

## Suggested further reading

- Policy brief on Open Educational Resources, <https://www.thecommonwealth-educationhub.net/oer/>.
- Government support for Open Educational Resources: Policy, funding, and strategies, <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1537/2481>.
- Creative Commons license compatibility, <https://creativecommons.org/faq/#can-i-combine-material-under-different-creative-commons-licenses-in-my-work>.
- Creative Commons Certificate course, <https://certificates.creativecommons.org/>.



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This guidance note is based on existing good practices, and advice received from participants in our consultations. Please feel free to use and share this information, but kindly respect the copyright of all included works and also share any adapted versions of this work.



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