

Open Access Publishing

What is Open Access?

Open Access (OA) is the free, immediate online availability of research articles.¹ Open access is facilitated by the growth of the internet and digital publishing, which provide mechanisms for distributing free content to global audiences. Despite some common misconceptions, open access publishing benefits authors, researchers, and the public by making research widely available and increasing its reach and impact.

Three of the most common forms of open access are known by the monikers “Green,” “Gold,” and “Diamond” and are described below:

- **Green Open Access:** A version of a piece of published content (e.g., a preprint²) is archived in a free, public repository. Works may be embargoed for a period of time and authors may not retain copyright to the work.
- **Gold Open Access:** The publisher makes the final version of the work freely and publicly available immediately. The author or their institution pays a fee (often called an Author Processing Charge or APC) to the publisher. The author retains their copyright to the work.
- **Diamond (or “Platinum”) Open Access:** The publisher makes the work freely and publicly available immediately at no cost to the author. The author retains copyright of the work.

¹ Open Access. (2007). Retrieved from <https://sparcopen.org/open-access/>

² A **preprint** is a version of an article that has not yet undergone peer review and formal publication in an academic journal. The preprint may be made available for free, often as a non-typeset version before or after the formal publication of the article.

Common Misconceptions about Open Access

Although Open Access publishing has been gaining momentum since 2000, there are many misconceptions about the quality and value of OA works. Dispelling these false ideas is important in encouraging scholars to participate in open access projects and to reap the benefits that open access provides.

Quality

Some people have been led to believe that OA journals are of poorer quality than those traditionally available through subscription. Others believe that open access content is not peer reviewed. On the contrary, Open Access is completely compatible with peer review and other trusted methods of vetting scholarship for publication. Furthermore, all major open access initiatives insist on its importance and the value of transparent, ethical practice in producing trustworthy, high quality research. The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ, <https://doaj.org/>) evaluates open access journals based on a set of rigorous criteria ensuring that all of their indexed titles subject works to appropriate quality control systems. They index over 14,000 journals from over 130 countries around the world.

Copyright

Another misconception is that authors whose work is published open access will lose copyright to their work. This is also untrue, as copyright is not intrinsically linked to the mode of publication, but is controlled by whether or not an author agrees to transfer their rights via an agreement like a publishing contract. The majority of open access journals permit authors to maintain copyright over their work as they focus on an ethical approach to publishing that values authors' ongoing rights to their own intellectual property.

Benefits of Open Access

Knowledge Equity

Open Access increases access to information by eliminating subscription paywalls. This means that anyone, whether or not they are affiliated with an institution that pays for access, can read a publication. This is especially important in increasing knowledge equity, reflecting a fundamental belief within the open access community that everyone is entitled to and can benefit from access to information.

Impact

Open Access also benefits authors by providing the widest possible readership for their work. Research has shown that authors whose work is published open access receive more citations than works published in subscription journals.³ This means that publishing Open Access is not only great for readers, but can also help authors to increase the impact of their research.

³Gargouri, Y., Hajjem, C., Larivière, V., Gingras, Y., Carr L, et al. (2010). Self-Selected or Mandated, Open Access Increases Citation Impact for Higher Quality Research. *PLOS ONE*, 5(10): e13636. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0013636>; Li, Y., Wu, C., Yan, E., Li, K. (2018). Will open access increase journal CiteScores? An empirical investigation over multiple disciplines. *PLOS ONE*, 13(8): e0201885. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0201885>.