



## Frequently Asked Questions

### OER for K-12 Educators

Answers to frequently asked questions about open educational resources (OER) for K-12 educators. Prepared with support from the [Consortium for School Networking \(CoSN\)](#), [Creative Commons \(CC\)](#), [Creative Commons – United States \(CC-USA\)](#), the [Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education \(ISKME\)](#), the [State Educational Technology Directors Association \(SETDA\)](#), and the [Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition \(SPARC\)](#).

#### 1. What are Open Educational Resources (OER)?

Open educational resources (OER) are teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. OER include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge.

## **2. How does OER help educators and students?**

Open educational resources give educators the ability to adapt instructional resources to the individual needs of their students, to ensure that resources are up-to-date, and to ensure that cost is not a barrier to accessing high-quality standards-aligned resources.

## **3. What is the difference between ‘free’ and ‘open’ resources?**

Open educational resources are and always will be free in digital form, 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 resources which may not be modified, adapted or redistributed without express permissions from the copyright holder are not OER.

## **4. Are all OER digital?**

Like most educational resources these days, most OER are “born” digital. But like traditional resources, they can be made available to students in both digital and printed formats (including in the form of a traditional ‘textbook’). Of course, digital OER are easier to share, modify, and redistribute, but being digital is not what makes something an OER or not.

## **5. How do I know if an educational resource is an OER?**

The key distinguishing characteristic of OER is its intellectual property license and the freedoms the license grants to others to share and adapt it. If a lesson plan or activity is not clearly tagged or marked as being in the public domain or having an open license, it is not OER. It’s that simple.

While custom copyright licenses can be developed to facilitate the development and use of OER, often it can be easier to apply free-to-use standardized licenses developed specifically for that purpose, such as those developed by Creative Commons or – for software – those approved by the Open Source Initiative.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note that Creative Commons (CC) licenses that include an ND clause (i.e., no derivatives) are not considered OER. For more information about CC licenses see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>. For information about Open Source Initiative-approved licenses for software, see: <https://opensource.org/licenses>.

## 6. What are best practices for hosting OER in online platforms?

Some schools and educators rely on third-party online lesson plan sharing services and sites to manage instructional resources for their classrooms. These tools offer an easy way to find and vet educational resources aligned to standards. Online platforms used to help create and share OER should make it easy for educators to:

- Easily and clearly attach an open license to their lesson plan or instructional resource;
- Be able to search for lesson plans and other resources and filter results by license type; and,
- Be able to download the OER hosted on the platform (in editable versions when available).



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