# Open Educational Resources and Accessibility Guide

## What OER is and why it's important

OER stands for open educational resources. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) describes OER as “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions." OER is important to us because it provides everyone access to knowledge regardless of financial status. Open and Accessible information is one of the biggest social justice issues that students may face.

## What does it mean to be accessible?

OER aims to bring education to everyone, that also includes people with disabilities of all different kinds. Universal design is an important concept when it comes to accessibility. According to [BCcampus](https://opentextbc.ca/accessibilitytoolkit/chapter/universal-design/) It means that your content is able to be used by the widest range of people in the widest range of situations. Here is BCcampus’s checklist for accessibility. If you are not sure if the materials you are creating/using are accessible, comb through the list and make sure you hit all the criteria. By hitting all the check marks you are also ensuring that it meets the universal design definition.

[BCcampus Checklist for Accessibility](https://opentextbc.ca/accessibilitytoolkit/back-matter/appendix-checklist-for-accessibility-toolkit/)

You may also use the ‘personas’ in the link below to help you further understand how someone with a disability will access your work.

[Using Personas](https://opentextbc.ca/accessibilitytoolkit/chapter/using-personas/)

## What is Public Domain?

According to the [Stanford University Library](https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/public-domain/), public domain “refers to creative materials that are not protected by intellectual property laws such as copyright, trademark, or patent laws. The public owns these works, not an individual author or artist. Anyone can use a public domain work without obtaining permission, but no one can ever own it.” Public domain works do not fall under anyone's ownership and can be used in any manner whether it is commercial or educational. Most works by the US federal government and works published before 1924 are in the public domain. Many works published between 1924 and 1989 are also in the public domain, but it’s more complicated to determine this.

## Creative Commons

The difference between public domain and creative commons is simply that public domain has no owner, while Creative Commons are a form of open license. This means there is a clear indicator of who the author or creators are. [Creative Common licenses](https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/licensing-examples/) may also have some restrictions (most require a specific form of [attribution](http://faq.openoregon.org/open-content-attributions)), while you are free to do whatever you please with public domain works.

Below is a link to an excellent guide where you can find websites that host public domain works and works with Creative Common licenses. Make sure to read the ‘Legal Stuff’ section as it explains what the different types of licenses are. Essentially if you follow the ‘guidelines’ (Creative Common license) of how you can use the creators work, you are free to use anything with a Creative Common license.

[Guide to exploring the public domain](https://publicdomainreview.org/guide-to-finding-interesting-public-domain-works-online/)

## Fair Use

If you wish to use a work that has a copyright or is not in the public domain use this checklist thoroughly to see if it applies. If you are still not sure it is probably better to find a different source or reach out to the author for permission. Because OER are shared with the whole world (this weighs against the fourth factor of fair use), it’s usually best to use open sources or materials you created yourself. Fair use is more often used when resources are shared with a smaller group of people.

[Fair Use checklist](https://copyright.columbia.edu/content/dam/copyright/Precedent%20Docs/fairusechecklist.pdf)

## Finding Sources

You may find many resources that are either incomplete or unusable. Look at step three, which highlights how to evaluate if the chosen material is of good quality. Think of these ideas when considering using materials that belong to a Creative Common license or a public domain work.

[How to find quality OERS](https://ctl.learninghouse.com/how-to-find-quality-open-educational-resources-oers/)



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