



Call to action for libraries: improve the discoverability of open textbooks. A step-by-step guide.

LIBER Educational Resources Working Group



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CALL TO ACTION FOR LIBRARIES: IMPROVE THE DISCOVERABILITY OF OPEN TEXTBOOKS.

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

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Introduction

[LIBER's Educational Resources Working Group](#) aims to support European librarians in their role to provide educational resources to staff and students. In the course of two years, from 2023-2024, the focus was on promoting and advancing the discoverability of open textbooks which are: "...licensed under an open licence and made available online to be freely used by students, teachers and members of the public. Many open textbooks are distributed in either print, e-book, or audio formats that may be downloaded or purchased at little or no cost" (for further details see the [working group report](#)).



How does your institution define "open content"?

The following checklist is a summary of the working group's actions and outcomes in connection with open textbooks and should not be regarded as a linear guideline, but can be approached flexibly according to your own knowledge and experience.

Note that the focus of these guidelines is on the *discoverability* of open textbooks - *not the creation* of open textbooks nor OER in general.

Step Zero: "Why open textbooks?" - Consider your starting point and national or other circumstances

We discussed the first draft of the guidelines in a workshop and learned that conditions for actions vary depending on local circumstances: some countries have strict rules on which textbooks to use, others have national guidelines on openness. Some institutions have their own repositories, or deals with textbook-creators/providers, while others have no funds whatsoever.

Depending on your starting point, find colleagues or regional networks first and familiarise yourself with policy documents or arguments about why open materials are beneficial and how to deal with concerns such as quality, etc.

As a first step look at the toolkit on [OER benefits provided by ENOEL](#) in 17 different languages.

The toolkit offers OER definitions and lists benefits for students, teachers, institutions and librarians such as: providing enduring access for students even after they finish their



studies, saving costs for students and libraries, supporting inclusion, and promoting diversification of learning. OER are accessible from every place at any time, they promote lifelong learning, allow adaptation and foster open pedagogies. (For more details have a look at the [toolkit](#).)

Step One: Include existing open textbooks into your collection

Open textbook collections can be integrated into local discovery systems or catalogues free of charge. In the following we exemplify this with Ex Libris Primo and EBSCO Discovery System as they are most widely used according to our non-representative [survey](#) "Understanding the open textbook landscape across Europe: a focus on discoverability".

- Find out which open textbook collections are already included in your library system. We have provided a list of collections in appendix 1, but other collections exist.
- Activate or add collections to your system that are beneficial for your users.
 - [Ex Libris Primo](#): Add the available collections from appendix 1 to your IZ (Institution Zone) or even suggest them to your NZ (Network Zone). In addition to the collections mentioned, you can find a complete list of available open access and paid collections in the [Alma Community Zone Collection List](#).
 - [EBSCO Discovery System](#): please find a step by step guide to including open access book collections [here, page 28-31](#).
 - If there are valuable open textbooks or open access book collections that are not available in your discovery system, suggest their integration to your discovery service providers.
 - Ask your management, collection management and open access teams to consider open access books in your library's collection development policy.



Are you making open content available as a default in your discovery search?

Step Two: Communicate within your institution

0. Library (if your library is new to the topic)

- Talk about open textbooks with your management team and colleagues – what priority can be given to the topic? How much time can be allocated to it? Which teams should be involved? Does the topic of open textbooks fit with your library's / institution's overall strategy, e.g. to reduce expenditure on textbooks, or to provide textbooks using sustainable models?
- Offer a workshop for your colleagues to discuss open education and its benefits, inform them about Creative Commons licences and agree on next steps for your institution.



- Become part of existing OER networks to profit from other people's experiences and knowledge ([ENOEL](#), [LIBER](#), the [Open Education Network](#)).

1. Networks

- Find like-minded people within your institution and find existing networks on open research / open science / open scholarship etc. In many cases national networks exist.
- You could also consider building up a network or a working group yourself if there are no appropriate networks in place. This often starts by meeting people one by one until you have enough people with a common interest to start meeting more formally.
- Use your network to offer training and workshops on open materials, their benefits, re-use, discoverability, and creation/publication.

2. Social Media

- Craft careful communications and find ways to reach your audiences through various channels.
- Repeat the message across different media.
- Deliver the message yourself but also invite stakeholders. Develop (video-) interviews ([examples here](#)), co-create blog posts and post in different blogs of your institution.
- Inspire champions (see below) to communicate on their own social media channels.
- Try print materials as well – posters in the library, postcards, stickers.
- Make it a 6-week campaign of awareness-raising without worrying about repetition.
- Share good practices from your institution or beyond.

3. Champions

- Start with an “alliance of the willing”. There are always early adopters and those who are hesitant. Put your energy into working with OER champions in your institution at first. ([See this video for inspiration.](#))
- Identify authors already publishing teaching materials openly. You could search for published OER / open textbooks of your institution on the web – in the open textbook collections from appendix one, in OER portals, your institutional open access repository or university press, but also on YouTube (use the filter option “Creative Commons”) or Google (use advanced search field “Usage Rights”).
- Determine which people within your institution (for example teachers, curriculum developers, instruction designers, learning technologists, faculty, sustainability or digital education experts, ...) could act as champions for OER and in which committees you could hold presentations or reach influential people. (For inspiration watch this [video](#), start at minute 34:00.)
- Reach out to the right people personally via email. Have a coffee or lunch with them.
- Inspire a faculty champion to communicate with faculty members.



Who would benefit the most?
Identify cases where particular departments or subject groups particularly benefit from open textbooks or are already engaged.



- Connect champions and get in touch with them to exchange ideas on the topic.
- Create events, workshops in your institution, where you invite champions to play an active role.

4. Talk about open textbooks with teachers that are not yet involved

- Familiarise yourself with frequent concerns when talking to faculty about switching to open textbooks. Concerns could be about quality or insufficient peer review.
- Acknowledge the concerns and adapt material e.g. from ENOEL to address them. (see also step 0).

In publishing houses there are established quality assurance processes. With open textbooks you can never know...

*Many aggregators etc. have quality control mechanisms in place: Faculty are invited to review an open textbook. Beyond the quality assurance of the publishing platform itself, around 60% of books in the discovery system "Open Textbook Library" have been additionally been openly reviewed.
[see Open Textbook Library FAQ for details.](#)*

*You might also want to track how often and where a certain resource is already used or if it is used in other classes. Check e.g. [open syllabus](#) – keeping in mind that it does not cover all courses worldwide.
[OER Mythbusting](#)*



Step Three: Support teachers

Support teachers to use open textbooks

- Target course leaders where an alternative open textbook could replace an expensive textbook. ([Open Syllabus](#) (free 30 days trial is available) could be helpful in identifying textbooks used in similar courses).
Positive Example: [CORE Econ](#) is gaining traction in Economics and more and more [teachers are using it](#) and starting to translate the content into other languages like [German](#).
- Increase reviews for open textbooks (members of [the Open Education Network / OTL](#)): communicate individually with single teachers and suggest a title, asking if they would write a review.
 - i) [see FAQ for details](#): “faculty are invited to review an open textbook. Around 60% of books in the Open Textbook Library have been reviewed.”
 - ii) [see FAQ for details](#): How do I post a review to the Open Textbook Library?
A: “Open Textbook Library reviews are submitted by faculty working at institutions and consortia that are members of the Open Education Network (OEN). Contact your OER Librarian or consortial lead for more information. If you’re interested in joining the OEN, [contact us](#).”
- Enhance metadata and filter options for Creative Commons licences to make open content more easily accessible through your system.
 - i) Engage with discovery service providers to introduce filter options by CC licence.
In [Ex Libris](#) a feature request exists. Vote it up and promote this idea with your colleagues. (Please register in order to vote.)
 - ii) Seek advice from metadata colleagues about the best method for handling licence information. See more in appendix two.

Example: [Finna Advanced Search](#) allows to filter for usage rights. ([Explanations](#))

Support teachers to improve the discoverability of books they have created or adapted

- Adjust your 'suggest a book for the library' forms to allow teachers to suggest open textbooks for the catalogue/discovery system. ([Example](#))
- Help improve the discoverability of your institutionally-created content. The content is probably published in your institutional repository or by your university press. Visibility could be improved by sharing it in your discovery system as well as on appropriate platforms:
 - e.g. in [DOAB](#) and/or [OER Commons](#)? Is there a collection in [OERSI](#)? Can you advertise individual textbooks through your social media channels?
 - Include authors of your institution's open textbooks in larger collections such as the Open Textbook Library. ([Submit to Open Textbook Library](#))



As a library community, how can we support the development of open textbooks in languages other than English? (Translations with AI-tools, adaptations, support?)



- Good engagement needs to demystify licensing so that educators understand the flexibility of open textbooks. The [license chooser tool](#) might be helpful.
- For OA or repository teams or if you create or are able to edit metadata: Adopt metadata standards such as OER Commons (based on IEEE-LOM). ([OER Commons metadata standards](#))
- If you are not from the open access team for scientific publications, connect with them for licensing, funding, and options or questions about publishing an open textbook.

There are no open textbooks in our national language.

Make a name for yourself, be the first one, your book will be heavily used, you will be known.

The great advantage of OER is that you are free to translate a given textbook into your own language or cooperate with faculty members to identify and translate relevant textbooks.

Step Four: Drive institutional change through monitoring and evaluation

Having a clear picture of how often people are using existing open textbooks and adapting or creating new open textbooks in your institution can be a persuasive argument for others to do the same. Data can also be used to strengthen the argument for support from institutional leaders. Here we suggest some methods for monitoring usage and using data to inform practice.

- Track usage of open textbooks in your institution:
 - if you have library colleagues who manage reading list software (such as Talis Aspire, Ex Libris Leganto) ask if they can search (e.g. by publisher such as OpenStax, or licence) to see whether teachers are recommending open content to students,
 - some reading list software (e.g. Leganto) provides analytics to show how much students engage with their reading,



- use the functionality within [OpenSyllabus](#) (free 30 days trial is available) to find popular open textbooks on other institutions' reading lists (or your own) and ask locally if teachers are using them.
- Approach local open champions / advocates (see step 2) and ask them to informally review one open textbook and indicate whether it is appropriate for your institution or other institutions in your country. Share recommendations with other institutions in your local / regional / national networks. If they can be persuaded to formally review the book and post a review in the Open Textbook Library, even better (see step 3)!
- Where teachers in your institution are adapting others' or creating their own open textbooks, guide them using best practice to demonstrate how they can measure the impact of their work, for example:
 - include a link to a feedback form in the open textbook and invite other teachers to say how they are using the book ([example here](#))
 - encourage authors and creators to select a publication platform that will provide usage statistics such as visitors, page views, downloads and a breakdown of users' geographical locations (see [Pressbooks blog post](#))
- For a full exploration of this topic see [this chapter](#) of the [Open Publishing Guide for Authors](#).
- For teaching/course evaluation, include a question about whether open material was used in the course and if it affected the learning outcome. In surveys to students, incorporate questions about their views on and use of open textbooks.
- Include metrics on OER usage in documents which inform strategic decisions, such as decisions around the use of open textbooks to complement or replace expensive commercially published textbooks.



*Will you need to track statistics on open content usage?
How can you do this?*

Open textbooks might not be distributed and used as widely as commercial textbooks.

There are open textbooks published by university presses etc. with a lot of usage: "Over 80K views, 17K downloads on the platform alone" slide 5 in [this presentation](#).

Pressbooks, for example, has elaborate data on usage.



Appendix 1: Examples for established collections of open (text-)books

- Open Textbook Library, Open Education Network: <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks> (Containing Open Stax and Open Ed BC Campus)
- Milne Open Textbooks - <https://milneopentextbooks.org/>
- Merlot <https://www.merlot.org/merlot/>
- JSTOR OA Books <https://about.jstor.org/librarians/books/open-access-books-jstor/>
- DOAB is useful but there is no filter for textbooks: <https://doabooks.org/>
- LibreTexts <https://libretexts.org/>

OERSI has a filter option for textbooks:

<https://oersi.org/resources?learningResourceType=%5B%22https%3A%2F%2Fw3id.org%2Fkim%2Fhcr%2Ftextbook%22%5D>

Find more lists and descriptions in:

Walters, W.H. **Finding Free OER Textbooks Online: Untangling the Web.** *Publications* 2024, 12, 32. <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications12040032>

Appendix 2: Metadata and Licence Information

“OCLC determined that a new cataloging standard would help improve this issue. OCLC, partnering with the German National Library, successfully passed a new MARC standard to aid in standardizing the identification of OA links in the 856 \$u field. This new standard enables each 856 \$u in a record to be paired with a \$7 which can be numerically coded to indicate when a link leads to a freely available resource. Once applied at a mass scale to the WorldCat database, or within library catalogs, this will greatly improve the ability to filter search results to OA content.” (see [here](#) and [here](#))

Further reading: SPARC's [OER Metadata Rosetta Stone](#)

Appendix 3: Further Reading

Discovery / Cataloguing / Metadata

- Banyas, K. & Cloutier, M. (2022). Cataloging Collaborations: Supporting Affordable Learning Initiatives. <https://serials.atla.com/tcb/article/view/3066/4011>.
- Burnett, B., Cannon-Rech, N., Hunnicutt, R. & Mortimore, J. (2023). OER Discovery: Ensuring that OER Rise to the Top. *Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education* 2(1), 222-242. <https://doi.org/10.13001/joerhe.v2i1.7879>.
- Faniel, Ixchel M., Brannon, B., Langa, L. A., Doyle, B., & van der Werf, T. (2024). Improving Open Access Discovery for Academic Library Users. Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research. <https://doi.org/10.25333/4xem-xr80>. [From OCLC, Enhancing the visibility and accessibility of open content <https://www.oclc.org/en/open-access.html>, 2024 Report].



- Pitt, R. (2023). Open Textbooks in Higher Education Teaching. In D. Otto, G. Scharnberg, M. Kerres, & O. Zawacki-Richter (Eds.), Distributed Learning Ecosystems: Concepts, Resources, and Repositories (pp. 97–113). Springer Fachmedien. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-38703-7_6.
- Sobotka, C., Wheeler, H., & White, H. (2019). Leveraging Cataloging and Collection Development Expertise to Improve OER Discovery. OLA Quarterly, 25(1), 17–24. <https://doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1971>.
- Walters, W. H. (2024). Finding Free OER Textbooks Online: Untangling the Web. Publications, 12, 32. <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications12040032>.

Student Savings

- Inside Higher Ed. (2017). Saving Students Money [Blogpost]. <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/06/28/report-saving-students-money-oer>.
- Wiley, D. (2018). OER Cost Savings and Adoption Rates: New Methodologies, New Data, and New Results [Blogpost]. <https://opencontent.org/blog/archives/5820>.
- Zaback, K. (2022). Toward convergence: Creating clarity to drive more consistency in understanding the benefits and costs of OER. Midwestern Higher Education Compact. [Research report]. <https://www.mhec.org/sites/default/files/resources/2022MHECOER-Toward-Convergence.pdf>.

Other important guidelines publications in this context

- UNESCO Guidelines on the implementation of the OER Recommendation Action Area 2: developing supportive policy: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389032>
- Recommendations for Open Access Books Policies: <https://operas-eu.org/projects/palomera/results/recommendations-for-open-access-academic-book-policies/>