

Open Access: Considerations for Accessing and Using Scholarly Literature

I am Rebecca Reznik-Zellen from the [Lamar Soutter Library](#) at the [University of Massachusetts Medical School](#). In my work, Open Access (OA) is an issue that I encounter regularly. But OA is becoming a familiar term to many. We hear it from publishers, funders, and research institutions about scientific and scholarly publication. For some, OA conjures ideals of democratizing access to research by removing subscription barriers that keep important findings away from public, industry, and government entities. For others, OA inspires concerns about article processing charges, predatory publishers, and inconvenient processes for bureaucratic mandates. Which inclination is correct?

By definition, OA is the free and unrestricted online access to scientific and scholarly work. It enables broad and rapid dissemination of research, informs the public, and expedites the scientific process. When research articles are available to be downloaded, read, and reused, they demonstrate greater impact than articles locked behind [subscriptions](#).

OA has been growing steadily since the [Budapest Open Access Initiative](#) and the [Berlin Declaration](#) defined and formalized it in the early 2000s. The [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) lists over 10,000 individual titles that publish research openly, comprising approximately one-third of all scholarly [publications](#). Members of the [Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association](#) agree, by virtue of membership, that OA is an established approach to scientific publishing.

But while OA has become more established, it is still a communication model undergoing transformation. Determining the actual [costs of publication](#) is more difficult than it might seem, so the article processing fees designed to recoup these costs are highly variable. [Unethical publishers](#) who take advantage of an author's desire to publish openly have emerged. And the complexities of complying with the NIH's Public Access Policy can detract from the perceived value of OA.

So, both characterizations of OA are correct: OA IS a democratizing force in an otherwise unbalanced scholarly publishing system, AND the practicalities of implementation are challenging. OA will improve only if the producers and consumers of scholarship participate. This means actively engaging in the publishing process, calling out predatory practices, and taking the time to comply with funder mandates. Open Access is a goal worth pursuing.

Rad Resources to learn more about Open Access:

- [UNESCO's OA Curriculum for Researchers](#)
- [Lamar Soutter Library's OA LibGuide](#)
- [Guide for Evaluating OA Journals](#)
- [SPARC Resources on OA](#)