

A Quick Guide to Open Access Publishing

How are academic publishing practices changing?

Currently most of us hand over our journal papers to publishers who charge users to access them. Open access publishing makes our work freely available in one of two forms. Gold access makes the article in the journal freely available to anyone. Green access means that you deposit a version of the paper permitted by your publisher in a recognized suitable electronic site, and may involve an embargo (usually a few months). That version is then publicly available. The Library has [an excellent quick guide](#) here, along with other resources, which explains all this in more detail.

Why does this matter?

There are serious equity issues with publicly funded researchers and thinkers locking their best thoughts away behind privately owned pay-walls. This applies to all of us, and is doubly serious if we receive further funds for our work. Read [George Monbiot on this](#) to get angry about it.

But Monbiot is odd, I read the Telegraph not the Grauniad and my research is far too sophisticated to be appreciated by a general audience.

Bad luck. [If we wish to submit journal articles to the next REF](#), then any which have been accepted for publication after 1st April 2016 must be available in green open access format. In addition, most major UK funding bodies (especially the RCUK councils) require that journal articles arising from funded research are published in either green or gold access format.

Don't threaten me.

Look at it this way. The more people who have access to your work, the more people who cite it and use it, the more you get to engage with people who are interested in your work and the better known it becomes. So also the easier it is to build the international reputation needed in many academic careers. Papers published in gold access format tend to be downloaded at least twice as frequently as those behind pay-walls. [The evidence for this](#) is compelling.

But it is a great deal of extra work

Not really. The library support for gold open access makes it remarkably easy. They handle much of the paperwork. Depositing papers for green access is relatively simple as [eScholar](#) is a recognized suitable site. Since we have to update eScholar with our publications anyway, adding the papers for deposit is not difficult. We just have to save the appropriate version and upload it, setting the required embargo period.

But why do we not just all do gold access?

It's expensive. There are lots of formatting, copy editing and production costs for journal publications. And publishers' profits to pay. But if you are publishing findings from research council funded research there are further funds to pay for gold access. All the payments are sorted out with assistance and support from the Library.

What's the catch?

You [will have to check that your chosen journals support the correct open access](#) publishing conditions. Most do, but not all. This may change some publication strategies. You have to understand creative commons licenses when using gold access. The Library has a [clear guide](#) as to the steps involved, and how to check your chosen journals open access policies.

But this still feels like a considerable change

It could be. If you want to make the best use of the potential that open access could unleash you will need to think about promoting its availability in social media and media releases, as well as on your personal websites. Open access allows anyone to read your work, but you can be proactive in letting people know where it is, and what digests of the argument are.

You'll be telling me not to publish anything next, just to blog it and as we all do that so it will add to the general drivel polluting the web

You mistake me. Should you drivel I do not want you to make that publicly available. But there is a change in the offing in publishing. For decades communities of peers have determined what counts as authoritative academic knowledge. That practice has been captured for commercial ends in ways which can interfere with the integrity of the process. The current situation restricts knowledge to richer institutions who can afford [outlandish subscription fees](#). It [impedes discovery](#), citizen science, co-production of knowledge etc etc. Now academic communities are resisting. [Nobel prize winners are boycotting top journals](#) for their distorting publishing practices. There are [credible calls to boycott whole publishing houses](#) with thousands of signatures. [Radical scholars are even publishing articles](#) about these boycotts, albeit in journals published by the boycotted publishers. There are increasing numbers of increasingly good quality journals which are entirely geared towards only open access publishing, particularly in [natural science](#), but also in some of the [best social science journals](#). Current moves to open access publishing are but one step in a much larger process.

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