

FAQs - Frequently Asked Questions ABOUT OER

In everyday teaching, it is common to use diverse lesson materials—showing a video, citing a book, using an illustration from a textbook, printing worksheets from the internet, listening to a podcast, or even using a newspaper article in class. Such practices should also be used with particular caution in order to avoid violating copyright law, which could lead to legal consequences. Teaching materials without an indicated author or licence cannot automatically be regarded as a free resource.

Relying solely on teaching materials purchased from publishers can limit flexibility and creativity in the classroom, as well as the ability to personalise the materials for the needs of your students and to suit specific educational contexts.

If you are wondering what you are allowed to use in your lessons without possible legal consequences, the answer is **Open Educational Resources (OER)**. These are teaching and learning materials that are freely available, allowing teachers to use, adapt, and share them legally.

OER can take many forms, such as multimedia resources (e.g., educational videos or audio recordings), classroom presentation slides, exercise sheets, or text-based materials. These resources are not only freely available but can also be adapted and shared again, depending on their licence.

What exactly are OER?

After the UNESCO definition, OER are materials “in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright but have been released under an open licence, permitting no-cost access, reuse, repurpose, adaptation, and redistribution by others” ([UNESCO, 2012, p. 1](#)).

What is meant by “licence”?

A licence defines what you and other teachers are allowed to do with the material. Licences specify whether materials can be reused, revised, remixed, or redistributed. The most commonly used licences for OER are Creative Commons licences, which provide clear and legally sound permissions for educators. OER are most commonly published under one of those open Creative Commons licences:



CC0 (Public Domain): The material can be used without restrictions and does not require attribution.



CC BY (Attribution): The material can be used, adapted, and shared, as long as the original creator is credited.



CC BY-SA (Share Alike): Similar to CC BY, but any adaptations must be shared under the same open licence.

And the best thing is that you can grant a Creative Commons licence **completely free of charge** and very easily.

How does it work? Simply go to <https://creativecommons.org/mission/downloads/>, download the icon of the licence you want for free and copy it onto your teaching material. That's it! You have now officially licensed your material. For further information on which licence to choose, see below: <https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/ccllicenses/>.

So, once I have found some material online, how can I check if it is under an open licence?

Look for a statement: check for a licensing statement in the material. It may be at the beginning, at the end, or in the metadata of digital files.

Search for symbols or logos: look for Creative Commons logos (e.g., CC BY, CC BY-SA) or phrases like "licensed under..." followed by a licence type.

Check the metadata: for online resources, check metadata (e.g., the file's "properties" or "info" tab) for licensing information. Some websites also specify licences in their footer, download or privacy policy sections.

I can see that it is useful to find online materials, but why should I share the materials I create for my classroom with other teachers?

By helping to expand the OER offering through the sharing of your materials, you could also benefit from a growing supply of free, suitable, and high-quality resources in your future searches.

The concept of OER thrives on the exchange of self-created or adapted teaching materials. Instead of storing materials on your computer and forgetting about them, why not share your valuable resources with other colleagues and students around the world? This will also give your hard work some recognition and visibility.

And why should I allow others to modify my material?

The possibility to revise existing materials is a form of quality assurance. For example, incorrect information can be corrected or updated by other teachers - not to question the quality of your work, but mistakes happen to all of us! This way, the quality of the materials will improve.

In addition, by adapting the materials and making them available again, the range of available resources expands, creating new and attractive teaching tools for other teachers.

So, in what format should I upload my material so that it can be edited?

Materials should be provided in an editable format, such as a Word file (e.g. .docx or .odt). This will not only allow typos to be easily corrected and the materials to be updated, but it will also allow teachers in an inclusive classroom to differentiate materials to meet the different needs of their students, either with and without disabilities.

Ensure that there are clear procedures/processes for end-users to submit/upload revised or adapted versions of downloaded OER. For example, you could use the eXeLearning authoring tool, as one of the main benefits of OER is their reusability.

Convinced! Now what? How do I share my material?

Upload them in repositories. These serve as storage systems or databases for educational resources, allowing users to save and access these materials. Effectively locating OER is crucial for their use by both students and teachers. Repositories can simplify the search for OER by filtering based on various criteria, including educational level, type of material, format, and aspects of accessibility and inclusion. Choose repositories that allow detailed descriptions of the material through tagging, to facilitate its subsequent localization. You can help teachers locate your OER that are accessible to all learners, including those with disabilities and those with diverse learning needs and preferences, by using metadata that includes criteria regarding accessibility or customisation.

...metawhat?

Metadata is information that describes the OER, making it easier to find, organize, and use. It typically includes details such as the **title**, **author**, **licence**, **subject**, **educational level**, and **keywords**. Good metadata ensures that OER are easy to search for and accessible to everyone.

An example of metadata is the following:

1. Basic Information:

- Title: "Introduction to Fractions"
- Author: Jane Doe
- Description: A worksheet with exercises on fractions for primary school students.
- Language: English
- Date of creation

2. Educational Information:

- Subject: Mathematics
- Educational Level: Primary Education (Grades 3-5)
- Learning Objectives: Understand basic fraction concepts and perform simple fraction operations.

3. Licencing Information:

- Licence Type: Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0)
- Rights Holder: Jane Doe

4. Technical Information:

- File Format: PDF
- File Size: 1.2 MB

5. Keywords/Tags:

- Keywords: Fractions, Math, Primary Education, Worksheet

6. Usage Information:

- Adaptation Allowed: Yes
- Accessibility Features: Text-to-speech compatible

Almost forgotten... How do I add an open licence to my material?

If you create a resource and share it online but do not specify the rights of use, other teachers cannot legally use it.

Adding an open licence is an invitation for others to use, reuse, edit, revise, distribute and republish the material you created. It might sound complicated to allocate a licence to your material but it is very easy.

1. Choose the right licence: For educational materials, [Creative Commons \(CC\) licences](#) are common. Decide what other people are allowed to do with your material:

- [CC0](#): If others are allowed to freely use, modify and re-upload your material without any restrictions, then CC0 is the perfect licence.
- [CC-BY](#): If you would like your name to be mentioned when using, modifying and redistributing your material, a CC-BY licence is recommended.
- [CC-BY-SA](#): If, in addition to attribution, you also want the adapted material to be republished under the same licence, then use a CC-BY-SA licence.

If you still can not decide on a licence, the Creative Commons Licence Chooser might be of help: <https://chooser-beta.creativecommons.org/>

2. Allocate the licence to your material:

- [Download the licence icon](#) of your choice and simply copy it onto the title page, into the footnote or at the end of your material.
- Fill in your information in the following sentence and just add it next to the licence icon:
[title of the material] by [your name] is licensed under a [select the licence you have chosen, e.g. [CC0](#), [CC-BY 4.0 International](#), [CC-BY-SA 4.0 International](#)].

3. That is it!

It is not yet clear how OER should support the creation of a more inclusive education.

Inclusive education relies on resources that support differentiation, foster varied pedagogical approaches, and facilitate flexible learning formats such as individual, partner, or group work for all students. Inclusive education requires materials that:

- enable differentiation;
- foster the implementation of a variety of pedagogical approaches based on level-oriented didactical models for central domains of learning;
- allow individual, partner and group work in versatile, prepared learning environments,
- offer a structure for the systematic selection of topics and levels;
- are open to the interests of the students;
- include creative learning processes (Prenzel, 2013).

Sounds familiar?

As already mentioned, a key advantage of OER is their adaptability. Since OER can be legally edited, they can be customised to the specific needs of individual classes, making them particularly valuable for inclusive education. For example, materials can be adapted to accommodate students with diverse first languages or special educational needs. High-quality

OER also allow for systematic topic selection, cater to students' interests and encourage creative learning processes.

OER enrich the variety of didactic possibilities, giving teachers more creative freedom in their lesson planning by expanding the range of available teaching tools. Moreover, OER promote equitable opportunities for learning by providing free access to high-quality educational materials. Ultimately, the adaptability, accessibility, and inclusivity of OER make them a powerful tool for improving education for all learners.

However, pedagogically meaningful digital materials are not always easy to identify. To address this, the EQui-T project team has developed a comprehensive criteria catalogue to help teachers assess the quality of OER from an inclusive perspective. This tool empowers educators like you to distinguish between high- and low-quality teaching resources, ensuring that the learning needs of every student are met.

References:

Prenzel, A. (2013). *Inklusive Bildung in der Primarstufe: Eine wissenschaftliche Expertise des Grundschulverbandes*. Grundschulverband e.V. <https://doi.org/10.25656/01:18827>

UNESCO (2025). *Open Educational Resources (OER)*. UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.at/bildung/unesco-schulen/lehr-und-lernmaterial/open-educational-resources-oer>