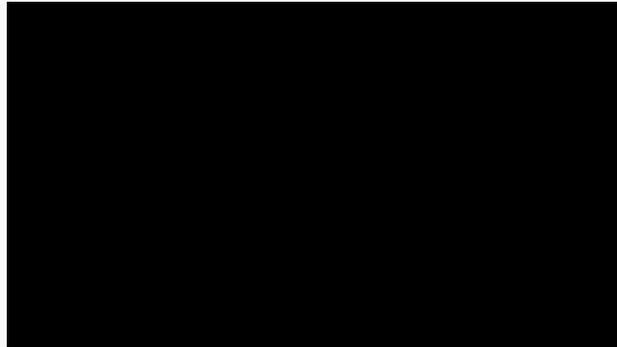# What are OERs?

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UNESCO defines OER as:

> "…any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. The nature of these open materials means that anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt and re-share them. OERs range from textbooks to curricula, syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, tests, projects, audio, video and animation."

Examples of subjects with open textbooks include: Psychology, Business, ESL, Microbiology. Examples of open learning resources, such as activities and handouts, include: Writing Your Essay, The Accounting Cycle – Problems, Mathematics (homework exercises).

OERs have been used in post-secondary education for decades as they allow faculty flexibility in their course materials. Faculty may be frustrated with a traditional textbook's inability to meet their course learning outcomes completely, or would like to use multi-modal components with their students. Many OERs are high-quality, having been developed by college and university professors, and include text-based content, videos, audio, case studies, question pools, homework problems and more. The content is then shared online, usually under a Creative Commons license, and can be reused and modified under certain conditions (such as non-commercial use).

OERs have been receiving a lot of attention in Ontario recently. In June 2017, the government of Ontario announced an investment of $1 million in open textbook development. Partnering with eCampus Ontario, the development would focus on high-enrolment first-year courses, and content for Indigenous studies, trades and technical skills, and for new Canadians, as well as French language content.

The trend towards making course materials more affordable and accessible for students is evolving for good reason. Two North American OER advocates, Rajiv Jhangiani and Robin DeRosa, cite some startling statistics about rising costs in their presentation, "Open Education: Serving Social Justice & Transforming Pedagogy":

- Ontario students now work 173% more than in 1975 to pay for post-secondary education.

- When debt reaches $10,000 program completion rates drop from 59% to 8%.

- The cost of textbooks has risen by 1041% since 1977, adjusted for inflation.

While affordability is important, evidence has also found OERs can benefit a student academically. In the same presentation, Jhangiani and De Rosa cite 13 peer reviewed studies with almost 120,000 students that found using OERs in class leads to the same or better result 95% of the time.

In spring 2017, Vice-President Academic, Laurel Schollen asked for an OER Committee to be struck to promote awareness and develop recommendations for the integration and sustainability of OERs across the Seneca curriculum. Exploration into OERs is part of the planning process for Seneca's Digital Learning Strategy (DLS). The purpose of the DLS will be to build capacity and support for technology-enabled/enhanced learning and to increase flexible learning opportunities at Seneca. Open education in its many forms, such as, open textbooks, open educational resources, open access, open research, and open data, is one of the considerations in the DLS.

This guide is meant to help you navigate the world of Open Educational Resources.

For more information about OERs, visit The Learning Portal's OER Toolkit.

tags : course-design, definition, oer, oer-definition, open-educational-resources, teaching, teaching-and-learning, teaching-and-learning-centre