Open Educational Resources: What and Why

As an educator, more and more we are often faced with challenges. Resources tend to be limited, collaborating is proving to be more and more difficult, and the range of students seeking higher knowledge is vast. There are other challenges outside of our control, like finances, location, access to reliable Wi-Fi, or even a lack of access to the most current information that you want to teach.

Luckily, with each challenge comes an opportunity. Open Educational Resources (OER) are a way to add more equity into the classroom and to make overcoming these obstacles a bit easier. OER are teaching and learning materials that come with additional permissions that let you modify, adapt, and even share your newly remixed materials. OER live on the internet but can be transformed into various formats to be offline or completely tech-free. They are free of cost—without any paywalls, subscriptions, or temporary access codes. Your students can keep them forever.

They are created and shared by the community working together toward a common set of values. By using OER, education reaches further—whether it's to rural or remote communities or to non-traditional learners across the globe—to provide access where there was none before. This community has been around since the 19th century, but after MIT put their courses online in 2002, there has been a surge of Open Educational Resources. So much so that there are whole photography and image galleries, music and video searches, textbook libraries, and courses from almost a thousand higher learning institutions worldwide that are free to use by anyone. And not "free gift with purchase" free—just free.

OER let you customize the works that exist while self-publishing your own—a bespoke course that's just for you, where every word and every resource you use is valuable. You can collaborate instantly with other instructors who can, in turn, utilize your resource right away while also getting feedback from academic colleagues, industry professionals, and communities across the globe.

Using OER also supports educational equity as it reduces the legacy barriers that make higher education inaccessible for many. Together, we can move toward reducing these legacy barriers that say education is for the financially privileged. We can't overcome these obstacles by gatekeeping information. Open education is a set of values, not a destination. It's like going for a ride in a hot air balloon—you wouldn't take it if you had a specific destination in mind. You go for the experience, to gain new perspective, and to share with others.

To learn more about OER or how you can begin to implement openness in your teaching, check out the links below or visit **ctl.ulberta.ca**, or send an email to **ctl@ualberta.ca**.