

Six Things That Researchers Need to Know about Open Access

From “Six things that researchers need to know about open access,” *SPARC Open Access Newsletter*, February 2, 2006.

<http://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/4739013>

When I was a graduate student, my elders never took me aside to pass on the secrets of academic publishing. I hope this failure isn't widespread, and simply reflects on my discipline, my school, my decade, or perhaps even my elders. Today's graduate students deserve a more effective rite of passage. But even if they're told all they need to know about in-journals and out-journals (at least by the standards of their elders), publishing contracts, submissions etiquette, turn-around time, referee behavior, citation politics, impact factors, and perishing, I know they're not told all they need to know about open access. Here's a brief attempt to remedy that. [...]

Readers of this newsletter shouldn't find anything new here. But if you want a short list of what your colleagues (junior and senior) need to know, I hope this will fit the bill. We'll know we're making progress if we can shorten this list every year until it disappears.

(1) What OA journals exist in your field?

When “presented with a list of reasons why they have not chosen to publish in an OA journal and asked to say which were important ... [t]he reason that scored highest (70%) was that authors were not familiar enough with OA journals in their field.” Alma Swan and Sheridan Brown, “Authors and Open Access Publishing,” *Learned Publishing*, July 2004, p. 220.

<http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/11003/>

There's no excuse not to know the OA journals in your field. Go to the DOAJ and browse by discipline.

<http://www.doaj.org/>

Some of the journals you find may not meet your standards for prestige or impact. But others might. According to the ISI's own studies, nearly every scientific discipline has an OA journal in the top cohort of impact factors.

<http://www.isinet.com/media/presentrep/acropdf/impact-oa-journals.pdf> (April 2004)

<http://www.isinet.com/media/presentrep/essayspdf/openaccesscitations2.pdf> (October 2004)

If you learn what OA journals exist in your field and decide against each of them, all right. At least you made an informed decision. But check the DOAJ again when you've written your next paper. Things are changing fast. Established OA journals are growing in prestige; some are getting impact factors; new OA journals are being launched; non-OA journals are converting to full OA or OA hybrid models; and non-OA journals are experimenting with different forms of OA.

If you don't publish in an OA journal, you can publish in a non-OA journal and self-archive the peer-reviewed version of your manuscript in an OA repository. About 70% of existing non-OA journals already permit this. More in #4 below.

(2) OA journals are not the whole story of OA. There are also OA archives or repositories.

When people hear about OA for the first time, they tend to take away that OA journals are the way to deliver it. Even when they hear a two-sided presentation that gives equal attention to OA journals and OA repositories, they tend to remember the part about OA journals and forget the part about OA repositories. Sometimes a policy proposal may be about nothing but OA repositories and some readers will still think it's about OA journals. Sometimes this happens even when the readers have with Ph.D.s.

This is puzzling and harmful. Part of the explanation is that we assimilate new ideas to older and more familiar ideas, and we already understand what journals are. But try to shake yourself loose from this assimilation—or shake your colleagues loose from it. There are two primary vehicles of OA, not just one. OA repositories don't perform peer review; they merely make their contents freely available to the world. But they can contain peer-reviewed postprints as easily unrefereed preprints. You can deposit a preprint at the time you submit it to a journal and then deposit the postprint after it's published. You can deposit your postprint in an OA repository even if you also publish it in a conventional or non-OA journal. Don't let the novelty of OA repositories make them invisible. Don't believe that if the concept is too good to be true then it can't be true.

The best places to look for OA repositories are the Registry of Open Access Repositories (ROAR) and OpenDOAR (Directory of Open Access Repositories).

<http://roar.eprints.org/>

<http://www.opendoar.org/>

Here's more detail on the distinction between OA journals and OA archives or repositories.

<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm#vehicles>

(3) OA archiving only takes a few minutes.

"Authors have frequently expressed reluctance to self-archive because of the perceived time required and possible technical difficulties in carrying out this activity, yet findings here show that only 20% of authors found some degree of difficulty with the first act of depositing an article in a repository, and that this dropped to 9% for subsequent deposits." Alma Swan and Sheridan Brown, *Open access self-archiving: An author study*, JISC, May 2005.

<http://cogprints.org/4385/>

Les Carr and Stevan Harnad studied two months of log activity at a much-used repository and found that the time required for deposit averaged 10 minutes per paper. Taking into account the rate at which authors had their work archived for them by others (co-authors, librarians, students, or assistants), authors who published one paper per month would spend less than 40 minutes per year on their deposits.

<http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/10688/>

If you haven't deposited papers in a repository yourself and worry about adding one more task to your schedule, at least trust the Carr-Harnad evidence more than any anecdotes you might have heard from colleagues. If you've deposited once but not twice, trust the Swan-Brown evidence that the time requirement plummets. (Compare the first time you used endnotes in a word processor with the second time.) If you're worrying about adding a new task regardless of the time required, then think about the many more time-consuming jobs you already do to make your work known to the world, such as keeping your c.v. up to date, mailing offprints, and sending your bibliography to deans and department chairs. Self-archiving takes less time and has more impact than any of these.

(4) Most non-OA journals allow authors to deposit their postprints in an OA repository. The best current estimate is that 70% of non-OA journals consent in advance to postprint archiving.

<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/statistics.php>

When you publish in one of these journals, you don't need further permission for self-archiving, even if you've transferred the copyright to the journal. These journals have already given permission. For this significant majority of peer-reviewed journals, the obstacle to OA is author failure, not copyright complexity or publisher opposition. Journals have opened the door and authors have to walk through.

SHERPA and Eprints both maintain online databases where you can look up a journal and find its policy on self-archiving.

<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/>

<http://web.archive.org/web/20060114082419/>

<http://romeo.eprints.org/>

Three notes on the 70% figure. First, it represents surveyed journals. Among unsurveyed journals, there are likely to be journals that do, and journals that don't, permit postprint archiving. We don't know their proportions yet. Second, the number represents journals that consent in advance to postprint archiving without requiring case-by-case requests. Many that do not consent in advance will still consent if asked individually, however. Elsevier routinely granted individual requests until mid-2004 when it decided to offer blanket permission instead. Third, it represents the journals that consent to postprint archiving, not preprint archiving. If we count the journals that consent to preprint or postprint archiving (or both), the figure rises to 93%.

Note the all-important consequence of this kind of blanket permission. OA archiving is compatible with publishing in most conventional, subscription-based journals. If the top journals in your field (by impact or prestige) are not OA, you can go for impact or prestige and still have OA. It's rarely a trade-off.

(5) Journals using the Ingelfinger Rule are a shrinking minority.

Some authors are afraid that depositing a preprint in an OA repository will disqualify it for subsequent publication. It's true that some journals refuse to publish papers that have previously circulated as preprints or whose results have been publicized. This is called the Ingelfinger Rule, named after a former editor at the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The rule is rare outside the field of medicine and in decline.

There are some very rare journals, like the *California Law Review*, that allow postprint archiving but not preprint archiving. But essentially all the journals that don't allow preprint archiving (i.e., that follow the Ingelfinger Rule) also bar postprint archiving. Only 7% of surveyed journals fall into this category. Don't let groundless fears deter

you from preprint archiving. If you worry about the Ingelfinger Rule, check out the policies of the journals where you intend to submit your work.

(6) OA enlarges your audience and citation impact.

This is the chief reason for authors to provide OA to their own work. OA increases the audience for a work far beyond the audience of any priced journal, even the most prestigious or popular journal. Studies in many fields show a correlation between OA and citation-count increases from 50% to 250%.

<http://opcit.eprints.org/oacitation-biblio.html>

There is almost certainly causation here as well as correlation, though this hasn't been nailed down yet. There are many hypotheses to explain the correlation. Some of it seems to arise from the fact that self-archived articles circulate sooner than journal-published articles (and have a head-start toward citations) and the fact that authors self-archive their best work (biasing the OA sample toward quality). But it's very likely that ongoing studies will show that much of the correlation is simply due to the larger audience and heightened visibility for the work among researchers who find the work useful, relevant, and worth citing in their own work.

These studies bring a welcome note of self-interest to the case for OA. Providing OA to your own work is not an act of charity that only benefits others, or a sacrifice justified only by the greater good. It's not a sacrifice at all. It increases your visibility, retrievability, audience, usage, and citations. It's about career-building. For publishing scholars, it would be a bargain even if it were costly, difficult, and time-consuming.

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Selected Writings on Open Access, 2002–2011

By: Peter Suber

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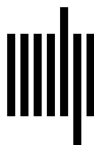
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