
Open Access

Myths, Facts, Actions

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ABSTRACT There are several pervasive myths around open access as a means of producing and disseminating scholarship. Some of these myths concern perceived low quality, expense for authors, and modes of dissemination. During this Listen and Learn session, several myths about open access were presented alongside facts dispelling those myths and proposed actions librarians and others can take to maximize the reach and impact of scholarship through open access.

MYTH *Academic research has impact and value only if published in traditional, subscription journals.*

FACT More than 76% of electronic scholarly documents are not freely available to the public. Further, as many as 50% of papers are never read by anyone other than their authors, referees and journal editors.¹ This is largely attributable to the traditional practice of locking academic research behind expensive paywalls created by for-profit publishers. Open access makes scholarly research available to anyone with an internet connection and thereby it is more discoverable by researchers, students, policy makers, and journalists, which can greatly enhance impact and reach. Open access also promotes retention of rights by authors and encourages the reuse and sharing of research.

ACT Use the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) to search for and identify open access journals in numerous subject areas, including theology and religion.² Journals listed in the DOAJ have been vetted for quality through a rigorous application process whereby journals must provide information on their editorial boards, publishing policies, and licensing.

MYTH *Open access journals are low quality and not peer reviewed.*

FACT All journals, whether traditional subscription-based journals or open access journals, should be evaluated for quality before a manuscript is submitted for review and publication. Most open access journals have rigorous editorial policies for peer review and selection. Many open access journals are affiliated with academic institutions, such as the *Journal of Religion & Society* published by the Kripke Center at Creighton University, and have rigorous editorial policies for peer review and selection.

ACT Utilize the resource “Think.Check.Submit.” to evaluate publication venues, regardless of open access status.³ This resource provides a simple checklist that potential authors can use to assess the credentials of a journal or publisher. Additionally, the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association maintains “Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing,” which further outlines journal policies and practices that authors should evaluate prior to submitting their works to any journal.⁴

MYTH *Open access journals do not have impact factors and therefore are irrelevant.*

FACT The more accessible that a work is to other researchers, the greater chance it will be discovered, read, and cited by peers, thereby increasing the impact that a piece of scholarly research has. Numerous researchers have investigated the increased impact of open access research.⁵ Further, the term “impact factor” is a proprietary term that applies only to journals indexed in the Web of Science databases managed by Thomson Reuters, now Clarivate. Not all scholarly journals are indexed in Web of Science; therefore, it is an incomplete measure of impact. Finally, alternative metrics, also known as altmetrics, measure impact through analysis of online interactions with an individual piece of scholarship. Altmetrics look at data such as how many times an article is downloaded or bookmarked and how often it is shared and discussed in the news or in social media outlets. Altmetrics complement traditional metrics to provide a more complete picture of the impact of a piece of scholarship within a body of research or upon a community of researchers or other interested persons.

ACT Learn more about altmetrics⁶ and consider creating a profile on ImpactStory.org to calculate the impact your research has beyond the impact factor. Further, anyone may freely download Harzing's Publish or Perish software to retrieve and analyze academic citations.⁷ Finally, the recently released Metrics Toolkit provides information and usage guides for the many available research metrics across disciplines.⁸

MYTH *Open access publications will not be respected by peers and thus not satisfy requirements of promotion and tenure.*

FACT If an open access journal has editorial policies that require rigorous peer review and reject manuscripts for research misconduct, the publication should satisfy the requirements of promotion and tenure. Librarians and faculty should advocate for revision of promotion and tenure guidelines to allow publication in open access journals or other forms of scholarship to be weighed similarly, if not equally, to traditionally published scholarship. Through education on open access and dispelling these myths, librarians contribute to the cultural change that needs to occur in academia with respect to evaluation of scholarly contributions.

ACT To demonstrate that open access scholarship is impactful and high quality, conduct a search on Google Scholar for an open access journal of interest and note the citation reach of articles published therein. Further, scan the names of authors publishing in that journal and make note of their employing institutions and whether they are peers for your home institution.

MYTH *Open access means only publishing in open access journals.*

FACT Open access can be accomplished in two ways: (1) by publishing in an open access journal or (2) by publishing in any journal and retaining the right in the publisher agreement to make a version of your work available in an open access repository.

ACT Authors should research publication venues prior to submitting their manuscripts, not only for determinations of a journal's quality but also to review its policies as to copyright and archiving. SHERPA/RoMEO collects and reports on the archiving and deposit policies of most journals.⁹ Authors also should deposit their article or a version of it as permitted by the author agreement they sign with the journal

in an open access repository, whether hosted by their own institution or maintained by another organization to collect and showcase scholarship on a particular subject. OpenDOAR maintains a listing of open access repositories. Users can search for repositories by subject or geographic region.¹⁰

MYTH *Open access deprives authors of their copyright and allows for reuse of a work without proper attribution.*

FACT Open access actively promotes the retention of copyright by authors as opposed to the traditional transfer of control to publishers. Most open access publishers utilize Creative Commons™ licensing, which requires full attribution of the author but allows authors to customize how their work may be reused and shared by others.

ACT Read publisher agreements carefully and negotiate or amend them to allow retention of rights. Consider using an author's agreement amendment, such as the one prepared by SPARC.¹¹

MYTH *Open access is only for STEM disciplines.*

FACT Open access is becoming a part of everyone's world and is the next wave of scholarly dissemination, regardless of the discipline. Funding agencies and organizations, including NEH, NEA, and Mellon Foundation, are adopting public access policies that require deposit of publications that are the product of funded research in specific open access repositories.

ACT Learn more about public funding agencies mandating open access at <https://sparcopen.org/our-work/2013-executive-directive/#plans>.

MYTH *Open access publishing is expensive for authors.*

FACT Not all open access journals charge article processing charges or APCs. Subscriptions are the traditional means of covering overhead costs, but most publishers are collecting these at a profit level that is not sustainable and at the cost of restricting research to only those who can afford to pay. Open access journals make all research free to read while covering overhead costs through nonprofit or funder backing. Some open access journals utilize APCs as a business model,

but authors can request a fee waiver in certain cases, cover the cost of APCs by utilizing institutional funds where available, or cover the cost through grants or other funding.

ACT Get the facts about APCs by reviewing the research on the frequency and rate of APCs charged by scholarly journals.¹² Further, faculty and others can investigate whether their employing academic institution provides support to cover APCs. SPARC maintains a list of colleges and universities that maintain funds, as well as other resources on campus-based funds.¹³

NOTES

- 1 Madian Khabasa and C. Lee Giles, “The Number of Scholarly Documents on the Public Web,” *PLOS ONE* 9, no. 5 (May 2014): e93949. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0093949>.
- 2 Directory of Open Access Journals, accessed August 9, 2018, <http://www.doaj.org>.
- 3 Think.Check.Submit., Accessed August 9, 2018, <https://think-checksubmit.org/>.
- 4 “Principles of Transparency and Best Practices in Scholarly Publishing,” Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association, accessed August 9, 2018, <https://oaspa.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing/>.
- 5 “The effect of open access and downloads (‘hits’) on citation impact: a bibliography of studies,” Open Citation Project, accessed August 9, 2018, <http://opcit.eprints.org/oacitation-biblio.html>.
- 6 “Altmetrics: A Manifesto,” Altmetrics, accessed August 9, 2018, <http://altmetrics.org/manifesto/>.
- 7 “Publish or Perish,” Harzing, accessed August 9, 2018, <https://harzing.com/resources/publish-or-perish>.
- 8 Metrics Toolkit, accessed August 9, 2018, <http://www.metrics-toolkit.org/>.
- 9 “Publisher copyright policies & self-archiving,” SHERPA/RoMEO, accessed August 9, 2018, <http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/index.php>.

- 10 “Directory of Open Access Repositories,” OpenDOAR, accessed August 9, 2018, <http://v2.opendoar.sherpa.ac.uk/search.html>.
- 11 “Author Rights: Using the SPARC Author Addendum,” SPARC, accessed August 9, 2018, <https://sparcopen.org/our-work/author-rights/brochure-html/>.
- 12 David Solomon and Bo-Christer Björk, “Article processing charges for open access publication—the situation for research intensive universities in the USA and Canada,” *PeerJ* 4 (July 2016): e2664. <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.2264>.
- 13 “Campus Open Access Funds,” SPARC, accessed August 9, 2018, <https://sparcopen.org/our-work/oa-funds/>.