

# Open Access: The Way Of The Future?

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As mentioned earlier in the article by Dr. Tieleman, Open Access is a relatively new development in the world of scholarly communication. Open Access, or OA, has the potential to greatly alter the journal publishing environment.

Traditionally, academics write articles for peer-reviewed journals produced by commercial publishers. These journals are sold to libraries, frequently at high and ever-increasing prices. Library budgets can usually ill-afford these growing costs, often leading to mass journal cancellations. In addition, authors often are required to sign away copyright, relinquishing control of their writings to the publisher.

Open Access presents a different situation. In OA, articles are made available over the Web free of charge. This takes care of the question of distribution; scholarly works are available widely, no longer restricted to the institutions and individuals who can afford subscriptions.

It has been estimated that roughly 5% of scholarly publishing is Open Access. OA journals retain most of the same features as non-OA journals, such as peer-review, but they are freely-accessible and usually do not require surrender of copyright.

The big question regarding OA publishing is how to pay for it. The most common strategy is to charge authors a submission fee. The Public Library of Science ([www.plos.org/](http://www.plos.org/)) charges \$1,500 US per submission while BioMed Central (BMC) ([www.biomedcentral.com](http://www.biomedcentral.com)) charges \$525 US. The difficulty is that some authors do not have the money to pay such tolls. Fortunately, methods are being developed to get around this problem; for example, some OA publishers have institutional memberships that allow scholars at a member university to submit articles free of charge (the University of Calgary Library does this for BMC; there is an issue of who should pay for such memberships). As well, granting agencies are looking at including publication costs in funding.

It is also possible to make individual articles available via repositories. Articles can be published in OA or non-OA journals but, as long as the author does not surrender the right to other uses, an article can also be placed in one of these repositories (as can many other types of scholarly production); this is known as author self-archiving. Many varieties of repositories exist ranging from

databases such as the physics pre-print server, arXiv ([arxiv.org](http://arxiv.org)) to the growing number of institutional repositories.

The Open Access world is constantly changing. Recent developments include:

- Funding agencies are looking at requiring research results be OA-compliant.
- Legislative bodies are applying pressure to make taxpayer-funded research publicly-accessible. The House Appropriations Committee in the US and a parliamentary committee in the UK have both made recommendations to this effect.
- Many societies and associations are investigating Open Access for their publications.
- Some for-profit publishers are dipping their toes into the OA environment. Many journals are now freely accessible prior to the most recent 6-12 months. A few commercial journals are now completely OA.

Open Access is a growing movement and is well worth investigating and supporting.