Open Access (OA) provides access to full-text, peer-reviewed materials without a fee in order to read, download, copy and distribute, or print the information (Bethesda Statement 2003).

How? “Gold” OA is delivered by journals, and usually supported by author fees as opposed to subscription fees. “Green” OA is delivered by repositories, and can be accomplished through federal or institutional mandates and/or self-archiving by the author.

When? OA started in the 1990s with the development of the internet, and organized in the early 2000s. Key concepts came from the Budapest Initiative, Bethesda Statement, and Berlin Declaration (referred to as BBB). This decade shows explosive growth in OA.

What? One study showed 18% annual growth in the number of OA journals per year, and 30% per year in the number of OA articles (Laasko et al, 2011). It’s here to stay.

Why? Benefits include: More scholarly networking on a global scale, wider and faster dissemination of research, highly accessible articles, and equalizing access to information for all. Federal agencies are starting to require researchers who receive federal grant money to deposit articles in repositories such as PubMed Central, making the research freely available to the taxpayers.

Why not? Many OA journals charge author fees to publish articles, which may cause information bias by impeding the ability of some authors to pay. Also, some predatory publishers are out to make money by offering new OA journals that are disguised to look legitimate but are not.

How do you evaluate the quality of an OA journal? Established OA journals have earned recognition and respect, such as those from the Public Library of Science (PLOS) and BioMed Central (BMC). New, unfamiliar journals require evaluation (see box for help).

Evaluating OA Journals

Journal website - evaluate as you would any site: is it accurate, current, objective, transparent, and do the creators and/or sponsors provide credentials and valid contact information?

DOAJ - the Directory of Open Access Journals only includes quality-controlled and/or peer-reviewed journals, so look to see if yours is here.

Databases - is the journal indexed in PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, or another trusted database? Most have strict journal inclusion criteria.

Journal Citation Reports - this database assesses journal impact factor, but many OA journals are too new to be here yet. Available from the Library.

Beall’s List of Predatory Publishers and List of Individual Journals - a blog that lists questionable OA journals and publishers. Make sure yours isn’t here: www.scholarlyoa.com

Still need help? Ask A Librarian :)

Open Access by Peter Suber (MIT Press, 2012) is a concise, easy-to-read short book about Open Access. Suber covers the varieties of OA, copyright, economics, the future, and clears up misconceptions while extolling its benefits. It can be read in a few sittings, so if you are curious about OA, check it out! Suber directs the Harvard Open Access Project and is considered to be one of the world leaders in the OA movement.

Available through the Library as an eBook