





Why CC BY?

Some guidelines on applying Creative Commons, and particularly CC BY, as the preferred licensing choice for your open educational resources (OER)

1. Use Creative Commons Licenses.

The industry-standard for open content licenses is the family of Creative Commons (CC) licenses. We recommend that you browse the ccLearn FAQ¹ to learn more about these important licensing choices in education. In brief, Creative Commons offers free, public licenses that contain combinations of the following conditions:

-  **Attribution.** You let others copy, distribute, display and perform your copyrighted work – and derivative works based upon it – but only if they give you credit. All CC licenses contain this condition.
-  **Non-Commercial.** You let others copy, distribute, display and perform your work – and derivative works based upon it – but for non-commercial purposes only. If they want to use your work for commercial purposes, they must contact you for permission.
-  **Share Alike.** You allow others to distribute derivative works but only only under the same conditions as you made your work available.
-  **No Derivatives.** You let others copy, distribute, display, and perform only verbatim copies of your work — not make derivative works based on it. If they want to translate, alter, transform, or combine your work with other works, they must contact you for permission.

Based on the combination of conditions you select, CC provides a license² that clearly states how other people may use your creative work. In addition, CC licenses are specifically designed to be easy to apply and simple for creators and users to understand. Their *standardized* terms and technical implementation mean that they can be used all over the world. Open Educational Resources (OER) published under CC licenses can become part of a large and growing pool of resources that collectively have a reach and impact that would not be possible if many different licenses were used.

This standardization means that people need only familiarize themselves with our small family of licenses. These permissions have been usefully condensed into *simplified and accessible deeds* with *universally recognizable icons* that give quick reference to the rights and conditions associated with any resource. In addition, CC licenses are *machine-readable*, which means that CC licensed resources can be searched for and aggregated using standard web-browsing tools (such as Google, Yahoo!, or CC's own search tools) that make discovery and dissemination of OER simple and effective.

2. Use the Creative Commons Attribution-only (CC BY) license whenever possible.

The CC BY license is the easiest way to ensure that your OER will have the maximum impact possible in terms of dissemination and reuse. Works licensed with CC BY can be redistributed and adapted without restriction other than attribution. This means the works can be translated, localized, incorporated into commercial products, and combined with other educational resources. CC BY allows these reuses by anyone for any purpose, all with credit to you, the original creator. In some situations it may seem important for you to be able to restrict what recipients can do with your OER. In such cases, you should

1 <http://learn.creativecommons.org/resources/faq/>

2 <http://creativecommons.org/about/licenses/>

carefully consider the consequences of those restrictions. Take, for example, a resource licensed to prohibit the creation of derivative works (such as CC's no derivatives (ND) licenses). Although the integrity of the work may be protected under a ND license, in the world of OER that limitation means the OER cannot be translated, adapted, or localized, all of which are critically important in an educational setting.

A second example is the non-commercial (NC) term, which prohibits commercial use. Your organization may wish to prevent commercial competitors from freely incorporating your materials into their own works and making money off your work. However, in some cases it may be difficult to determine whether an activity is "commercial" or not, which means that people may avoid resources with the NC term even though they were planning to engage in desirable and legitimate activities using your works. Indeed, there are many valuable ways in which commercial efforts will broaden the access to and impact of any OER. For example, for-profit publishers may be able to disseminate the OER into regions that lack network connectivity, or mobile phone companies may bundle the OER in communications packages that help them to sell phones, while also expanding the number of learners who can benefit from the resources. When considering whether to use the NC term, CC believes a key consideration is whether you intend to profit directly from (i.e., sell) your work. If the answer is no, please consider avoiding the NC restriction.

A third example is the share-alike (SA) term, which requires that any derivative works be distributed under the same conditions as the original work. This term is attractive to organizations that want to use their works to expand the corpus of open materials by requiring that any work based on those materials be open in turn, even at the cost of precluding many potential reuses. However, works with the share-alike condition are difficult or impossible to combine with other openly licensed educational resources, which can pose a barrier to students and educators in many cases.

Although some might look forward to a day when all OER are in the public domain, freely accessible and reusable for any purposes without condition, Creative Commons recognizes the importance to many of having some legal restrictions on OER they create. We recommend, however, imposing restrictions beyond attribution only when necessary and only when the cost of doing so can be fairly justified.

3. Ensure that you apply Creative Commons licenses correctly.

When properly applied to online resources, Creative Commons licenses are machine-readable, thereby facilitating their discovery. Improper or incomplete application of the licenses to the OER will lack this crucial feature, virtually guaranteeing that the discoverability and impact of your resources will be reduced³.

4. Verify that you are disseminating your products in formats that actually enable the behaviors (e.g., access, translation, re-mixing) that you have legally permitted.

If you have given permission to users to translate your OER, then you should also be sure to provide the OER in a format that allows users to do that easily. If you are worried about loss of fidelity or formatting issues, you can consider releasing the same OER in multiple formats so that any given user is likely to find a suitable version.

Questions?

This is a highly abbreviated document. For more information about these and related topics, visit Creative Commons (creativecommons.org) or send questions directly via email to ccllearn-info@creativecommons.org.

³ See [learn.creativecommons.org/productions/#Step by Step Guides](https://learn.creativecommons.org/productions/#Step%20by%20Step%20Guides) for more information.

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