Searching for Open Educational Resources (OER) & Conducting a Gap Analysis

Feel free to make a copy of this SLCC OER Search Worksheet to keep your work organized. You can also review this guide to help you in your search.

1. Define the course objectives and outcomes

Begin by clearly defining your course's learning objectives and outcomes. Answering the following questions will help:

- What do you want your students to achieve by the end of the course?

- Do you hope to avoid students needing to purchase a textbook to be successful in your course?

- Do you just want to find materials to supplement your current textbook or readings?

- Do you want to move away from using a textbook altogether?

Clearly understanding your objectives and outcomes will guide your search for OER materials.

Once you have reviewed your objectives and know what course materials you want to use or replace, you must conduct an OER materials gap analysis using national and local repositories and directories. The gap analysis will help you identify areas where existing resources are lacking and what materials have already been created that you can use or modify for your course.

2. Brainstorm search words for your course and/or topics of interest

Some topics might not have a lot of OER available. If you don't find anything, broaden your search by using different keywords.

Brainstorm and jot down terms to use to describe your full course. Use the course title but go further, for example, is your course titled a different name at other colleges and universities? Are there other ways to express your subject? Do any terms that you identified have spelling variations, for example, behaviour and behavior—you may need to search for both. You should also take a close look at your learning outcomes and your course content to come up with additional keywords and phrases you can use as you search. Include common synonyms (other phrases people in your field use to discuss the concept) and spelling variations as before.

3. Review and document existing OER materials within repositories and search tools

Begin your gap analysis by searching for OER materials related to your course topics by researching national and local repositories and directories that host OER materials. These can include websites, platforms, and institutions that curate OER content. Some popular national repositories include OER Commons, MERLOT, and OpenStax.

Think big - Look for complete open courses or full OER textbooks.

You can use (and modify!) an entire course, a portion of a course, or just the reading list -- whatever is relevant to your needs. If you don't find your exact course, look for something similar.

If you hope to replace your current textbook with one that is open and free for your students, you may find *complete* OER textbooks to review and use. If you don't find one for your exact course, look for something similar that you can pull from.

Think small - Look for smaller chunks of content.

Instead of focusing on the textbook that you would like to replace, focus on your course outcomes: what do you want your students to know or to be able to do? You may need to use several materials that address your different course components, especially if your course isn't a high-enrollment course nationwide.

Review ways to search

Each site or repository has different ways to conduct a content search. Start by reading through the Finding Open Content page. Explore the search features and filters that these repositories and directories provide. Understand how to narrow your search based on subject, format, and other criteria to efficiently find relevant materials.

Searching by keyword is just one option. Use the browsing function within each repository to locate resources that your keyword searches may have missed.

The following are great places to begin your search:

- Mason OER Metafinder (MOM), which cross-searches multiple repositories: https://mom.gmu.edu
- Open Washington's Compilation of OER , which links to Open Images, Open Textbooks, Open Course Material, Open Simulations, and Open Video and Audio
- Repositories and Search Tools, which links to "Best Bets," Federated Search Tools, Institutional Collections, and Subject-specific courses such as Chemistry, Chemical Engineering, Psychology, Geography, Engineering/Physics, CTE, Computer Science, and open access and cc-licensed media.
- TUS Midwest Library Guide, which sorts repositories by Art and Design, Biology, Business, Chemistry, Education, Languages, Math, Physics, Sociology, Statistics, and Open Courses.
- Colorado Mesa University, which curated links that include complete courses, multimedia, research articles, open access books, large repositories, course-specific OER, images, and artwork.

4. Once you have found an OER material, use or create a checklist or evaluation rubric

As you review OER materials, document a brief description and other details including title, author, and URL. Note which materials align well with your course objectives and which ones do not.

Review the materials you find, including textbooks, lecture notes, videos, and assessments. Pay attention to their quality, relevance, and alignment with your course objectives.

Use this downloadable [Virginia Tech Course Material evaluation worksheet](#) (Excel) to use as a guide to tailor to your needs. Or develop your own checklist or evaluation rubric to assess the OER materials' course suitability. To ensure these newfound materials align with your course's learning objectives, consider criteria such as content quality, currency, licensing, and accessibility.

Always consider the following in your evaluation:
- Identify gaps and needs: compare existing OER materials with your course objectives and your checklist criteria or rubric. Identify areas where there are gaps in the available resources or where existing materials do not meet your needs.
- Ensure accessibility and compliance: before using OER materials, ensure that they are accessible to all students, including those with disabilities, and that you comply with relevant copyright and licensing requirements. If you aren't sure, run part of the material through a [Readability Checker.](#)
- Consider the delivery format. Do students have to create a free login? Are there ads on the resource? If so, are the ads distracting? Are there media captions embedded within the resource?

5. Make a Plan

Based on your analysis, create a plan to integrate the selected OER materials into your course. Determine how you will present these resources to your students, whether it's through a learning management system, course website, or other means.

If you find gaps in the existing OER materials, consider collaborating with other faculty members or OER creators to develop or customize resources that meet your course objectives.