

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES Publishing Program

Newsletter
Spring 2022

WEB ACCESSIBILITY IN OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

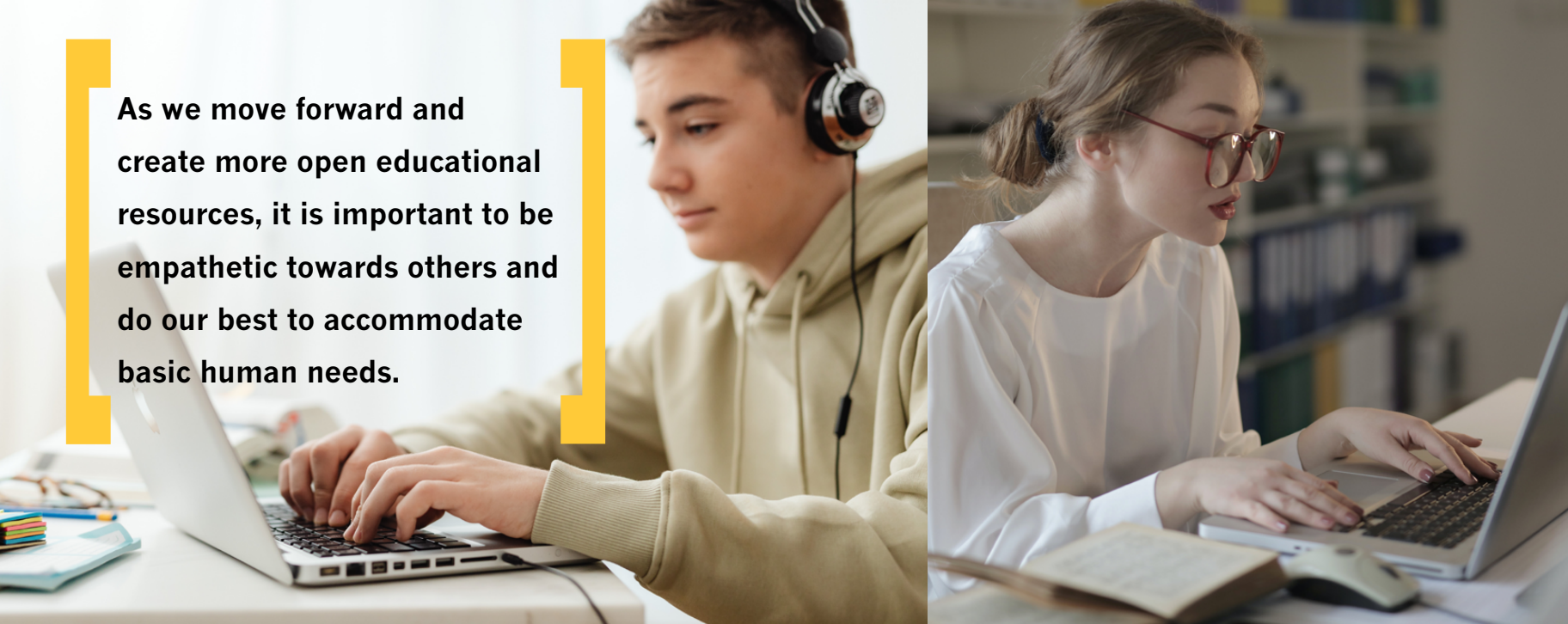
By Devon Blewett

When designing and creating educational content, it is very easy to overlook difficulties other people may have with using your material. This is especially the case when it comes to non-visible or uncommon disabilities, such as colour blindness or anxiety, simply because unless an author has personal experience with these barriers, they may forget about them, or not even be aware of their existence in the first place. These “minor” oversights can lead to major disadvantages for certain groups of students, or restrict their use of content altogether. Unfortunately, many of our courses and public websites have fallen victim to these oversights over time, creating artificial difficulties for some students. These issues include compatibility problems with outdated programs, unreadable colour themes, unusable navigation, expensive and difficult to obtain textbooks, and lack of flexibility. As an educational establishment, we need to focus on removing these barriers and providing equal opportunities for students to learn.

Fortunately, when it comes to web accessibility, many requirements are not only easy to implement, but are often common-sense changes that an average person would benefit from.



University
of Regina



As we move forward and create more open educational resources, it is important to be empathetic towards others and do our best to accommodate basic human needs.

Fortunately, when it comes to web accessibility, many requirements are not only easy to implement, but are often common-sense changes that an average person would benefit from. As part of our project to create updated lab pages for the computer science department, we researched what some of these requirements are, and implemented the following:

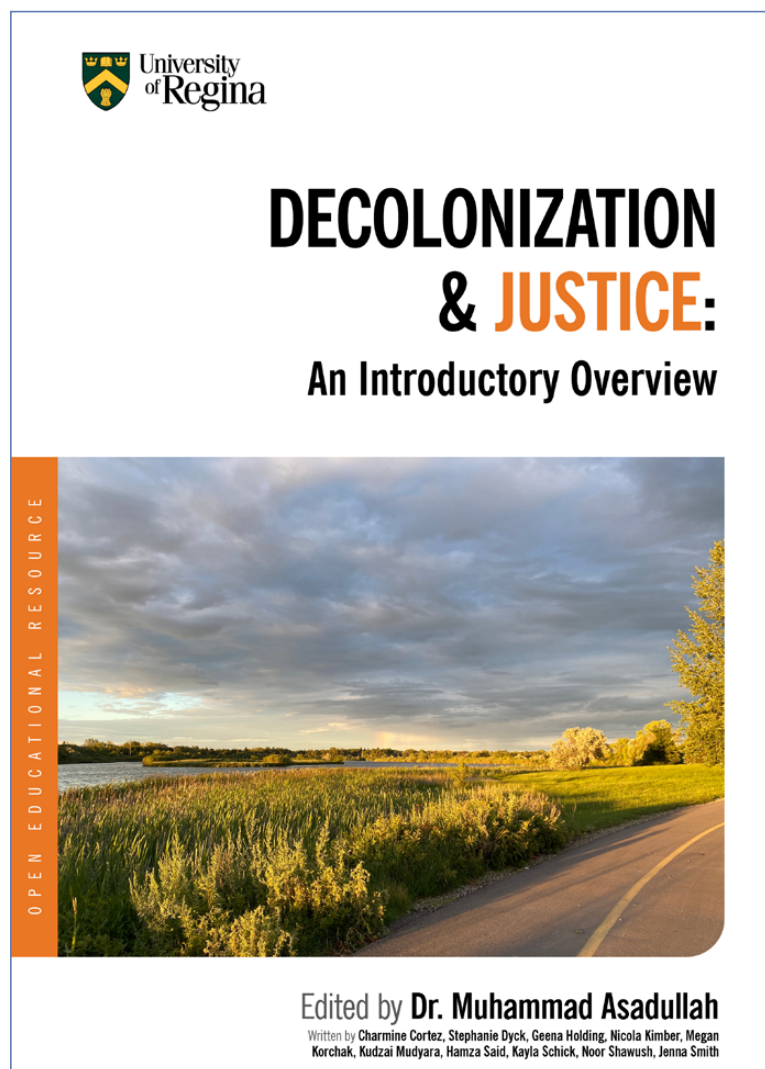
- 1. Colour themes** – Beyond just being a style preference, some students with colour blindness or sensitivity to light really benefit from having the option to change between light or dark theme. We implemented a colour option on our lab pages by creating separate stylesheets and a button in the header to change between them.
- 2. Simple Language** – Using simple words and sentence structures helps students with non-English backgrounds understand content. We rewrote our notes to have understandable and concise explanations, with terms or abbreviations carefully explained as they came up.
- 3. Subtitles or transcripts** – Recordings, both video and audio, should have subtitles or transcripts. Not every student is in an environment that lets them listen to the audio, and students with auditory problems rely on having accurate text to follow along. We made sure all the information in our videos can also be found on our lab pages, and that our notes and videos cover the same material in the same order.
- 4. Alt text on images** – Alt text is the text that will display when an image doesn't load properly. Screen readers also use the alt text of an image to describe what the image contains or is trying to convey to users who have vision trouble. We made sure we added informative alt text to all our images on the website.
- 5. Easy navigation** – Students should not struggle to find the resources they are looking for. When we redesigned our web pages, we made sure the pathways to the information we are presenting are short and intuitive. Links describe where they will go in the text instead of reading “click here,” and our notes are broken down into components with a clear purpose, so students don't have to navigate through several levels to find what they are looking for.

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DECOLONIZATION AND JUSTICE BOOK PROJECT

By Muhammad Asadullah



In the Winter semester of 2021 the students of Dr. Muhammad Asadullah's JS-419, an advanced seminar in criminal justice, found themselves with the unique opportunity to contribute to a book project on decolonization. The work of ten student authors would be selected to be published as chapters in what would become '*Decolonization and Justice: An Introductory Overview*'. This project encouraged students to choose an area of interest related to the justice system that they were passionate about, such as law, policing, courts, corrections, and even mental health; then, examine the topic's historical and present-day impact on colonization while also recognizing opportunities for decolonization in Canada's justice system. No relevant topic was discouraged as genuine student interest in the research was a key value in this project, allowing for students to pursue work they were passionate about.

In class, students gained invaluable insight from leading experts on decolonization from around the world through guest lectures. In these classes, students were able to ask questions, deepen their understanding of both what decolonization means, why it is so important to the criminal justice field, and hear about multiple perspectives and initiatives to decolonizing justice systems and societal institutions. Real-world examples of decolonial initiatives

and their successes were presented, and complex issues and barriers to implementation were discussed in well-rounded compassionate conversations. Students received valuable feedback and support at every step of the writing process allowing their ideas to solidify while making sense of one small part of an infinite and incredibly important issue and movement. A sense of community was fostered within the class allowing for support and important peer review of ideas and final papers. After the completion of the course, students gained experience working with a professional editor and continued refining their work before publication.

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This project was an example of experiential learning at its finest, allowing students to gain a deeper understanding of both the course material and the publishing process while taking ownership of and finding value in their work. One student author stated "My experience with Asad and this book project has been amazing. Even as an undergrad student I feel like I can contribute to this field of study. I feel much more passionate about this area having been given this opportunity and I am so thankful for it!". Another writing, "This book project has been an academically and personally rewarding experience. It is a rare opportunity for an undergraduate student to be a published author. It has been a long process of editing and tweaking the writing, however, it is well worth it in the end. I am grateful that I had the chance to be involved in the project!"

PERFECT TIMING – FROM MEMOIR TO TEXTBOOK

By Barbara Reul



Photo credits: B. Reul

My OER “story” is unusual in that I used the UR Pressbooks online platform to publish a semi-autobiographical account in December 2021. It was used by my colleague, Prof. Scott J. Wilson, as an assigned reading in his English 110 Critical Reading and Writing class on “Medicine and Mortality: Illness Narratives” at Luther College, University of Regina, in the Winter 2022 semester.

Perfect Timing is an educational, entertaining, and highly personal memoir that I wrote during the global pandemic. As a middle-aged, immigrant, and non-partnered academic living in a sunny Canadian prairie province, I provide an insightful snapshot of my occasionally bumpy yet spiritually transformative health journey. It began in late July 2020 with a sudden diagnosis of advanced cervical cancer.

Prior to February 23, 2021, when my book was “born”, I had never considered writing about myself. My focus as a [music history professor at Luther College](#) is on disseminating my research in peer-reviewed secondary sources.

Yet, I was woken up that night (at 2 am!) and given “a special task” by my inner guidance system. “Get up, turn on your computer, and start typing,” it said – and within 45 minutes, I had drafted a Table of Contents, specifically 15 of what would ultimately be 16 chapter titles. (Automatic or channeled writing as it’s called, is nothing new in my scholarly neck of the woods: I have benefitted from it as an academic for many years, but then my brain as a trained organist also works differently.)

Only two primary sources were required for this type of “autobiographical scholarship”: my memory, and a diary of sorts. I had started it after my surgery in mid-August 2020 and kept it up even though I hate journaling (!). My three main goals as an author were to educate and entertain my readers—no footnotes or bibliography required—and raise funds for cancer research.

My colleague, Scott J. Wilson, had another idea in early March 2021. My initial reaction to conceiving my book as a memoir-textbook was less than enthusiastic (“he’s crazy”). In contrast, “Dr. Barb”, my academic self, immediately recognized its power as an important therapeutic tool. It took me 14 long and arduous weeks, from February to April 2021, to



PERFECT TIMING:

Recollections of coping with
cancer during a pandemic



A memoir by **Barbara Reul**



chronicle my health journey, all the while coping with the aftereffects of six rounds of chemo and 28 radiation therapy treatments. The thought of letting perfect strangers into my head (and heart!) worried me throughout the writing process. I also wished to protect the privacy of other “characters” in my book. Consequently, only names of animals were included – like Winston, the adorable miniature Schnauzer, whose (academic advisor) mom let him snuggle with Auntie Barb anytime she needed to.

Thankfully, I did not struggle with identifying my target audiences: anyone whose life has been touched by cancer (cancer patients and survivors, caregivers, etc.) and health professionals as well as university students and other members of the academic community. For their benefit, my illness narrative weaves together elements of memoir writing and creative non-fiction. Using humour, I also touch on issues of interest to Women's and Gender Studies, Spirituality Studies, Religious Studies, and the Fine Arts. Finally, an appendix with "Leading Reading Questions" is intended to lighten the load of fellow professors.

...the best part about my first OER “experience” was that as the author-publisher I had complete control over **everything.**

In the late spring of 2021, I began wondering about to which smaller press in Saskatchewan I should offer my manuscript, and how long it would take to be published. That's when I realized that I cared most about impact – and it sealed the open access “deal” for me.

The final version of *Perfect Timing* includes a multitude of hyperlinks, many pictures, and even a recording of me playing the pipe organ (which I like to do on Sundays at a local church).

In hindsight, the best part about my first OER “experience” was that as the author-publisher I had complete control over *everything*. That was, however, also the worst part, as I had only myself to blame when things went wrong (and some did...).

I will keep that in mind as I, a proud cancer survivor, work on the sequel, *Right on Time*, in 2022.

MAINTAINING THE OPENNESS OF RESOURCES

By Isaac Mulolani

There are several definitions of open educational resources available. [Wikipedia](#) provides the following definition:

Open Educational Resources (OER) are freely accessible, openly licensed instructional materials such as text, media and other digital assets that are useful for teaching, learning and assessing, as well as for research purposes.

In all definitions, the focus is on teaching, learning and research resources released under open licenses that permit free use and repurposing.

The open licensing mentioned in the first definition involves the provision of 5 R activities/permission proposed by [David Wiley](#). **Open content is licensed in a way that grants users the permission to apply the 5 Rs.**



Figure 1.1 The 5 R Permissions of OER

The other specific item mentioned refers to the open licenses. While Figure 1.2 lists the Creative Commons (CC) licenses, one must be aware that there are many different types of open licenses besides these. For example, the [Open Source Initiative](#) has many different licenses listed on their site. Some of these licenses had their origins in the 1990s at the start of the open-source movement.







ICONS	DESCRIPTION	LICENSES
	Attribution alone	BY
	Attribution + NoDerivatives	BY-ND
	Attribution + ShareAlike	BY-SA
	Attribution + Noncommercial	BY-NC
	Attribution + Noncommercial + NoDerivatives	BY-NC-ND
	Attribution + Noncommercial + ShareAlike	BY-NC-SA

Figure 1.2 Creative Commons Licenses.

CREATIVE COMMONS VS OPEN-SOURCE LICENSING

The original definition of free software under the Open Source movement included four freedoms (See [Wikipedia Four Essential Freedoms of Free Software](#)). The key issue to note is that Freedom 1 and 3 require source code to be available because studying and modifying software without its editable source is impractical. This is a key element of the open-source movement – providing source code for each project so that others can modify as needed.

Creative Commons licenses do not provide such a stipulation. The creator of a resource allows some or all 5 Rs by choosing the appropriate CC license. This means a user can openly license a resource created using any technology tool (commercial or open-source) and then release it to the OER community. Unfortunately, this leads to potential problems with the openness of the shared resource. Commercial technologies often use proprietary file formats that place restrictions on editing.

OPEN AND PROPRIETARY FILE FORMATS

It is helpful here to digress to a brief conversation on file formats. All shared resources are provided in one or several popular file formats. The resource, [Modifying an Open Textbook: What You Need to Know](#) published through the Open Education Network provides details on file formats. When creating openly licensed resources, it is probably best to use open file formats so that a user does not need to own proprietary software for editing.

An OER creator needs to be careful with the selection of technologies and file formats so that once resources are shared, they truly remain open and editable for as many people as possible. This is not possible with many proprietary creation technologies and their accompanying file formats.

One common example of a file format used extensively throughout the OER community is Portable Document Format or PDF. While resources in this format are readable on all platforms, they are not editable in that format. Many OER users wishing to adapt resources from this format discover that PDF files are not editable without purchasing specific tools.

THE ALMS FRAMEWORK

While open licenses provide users with legal permission to engage in the 5R activities, many open content publishers make technical choices that interfere with a user's ability to engage in those same activities. The [ALMS Framework](#) provides a way of thinking about those technical choices and understanding the degree to which they enable or impede a user's ability to engage in the 5R activities permitted by open licenses. Here are the descriptions of acronym.

- Access to editing tools
- Level of expertise required to revise or remix
- Meaningfully able to edit
- Source-file access

For more details, the interested reader is referred to the resource, [Modifying an Open Textbook: What You Need to Know](#) by the Open Education Network.

References

Hilton, J., Wiley, D., Stein, J., and Johnson, A. (2010). The Four R's of openness and ALMS Analysis: Frameworks for open educational resources. *Open learning: The Journal of Open and Distance Learning*, 25(1), 37-44.

[Modifying an Open Textbook: What You Need to Know](#) by Open Education Network is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#), except where otherwise noted.

Tools for Creating OER: Selecting Digital Technologies by Isaac Mulolani is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#), except where otherwise noted.

TOOLS FOR CREATING OER: SELECTING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

The use of open education is growing especially the use of open educational resources (OER). In addition, the number of different technology tools used to develop these resources also continues to increase. These digital technologies include both commercial and open-source options.

This resource is intended to provide the OER community with a summary of some of the currently available digital technologies for creating open content. This guide is designed to provide a starting point particularly for instructors and faculty at post-secondary institutions. The guide should help prospective creators of OER pick both the most appropriate tool for their local context as well as their level of technical expertise.

Chapters 1 - 4 and 8 of this resource are accessible to all audiences. Chapters 5 - 7 contain more technical information related to open-source tools and may not be accessible for people either new to Open Education or with low to medium technical skill levels. This is normal since open-source tools require a high degree of technical expertise.

Resource access: opentextbooks.uregina.ca/toolsforcreatingoer



TOOLS FOR CREATING OER: Selecting Appropriate Technologies

