

# The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Technology

## Open-Access Journals in Educational Technology

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Open-access journals in educational technology are a specific type of academic journal focused on educational technology. The type of scholarship academic journals publish can range from traditional empirical studies to literature reviews, position pieces, and book reviews. Open-access journals differ from traditional journals in several ways, including that readers can view articles online without a subscription. This entry describes academic journals and notes some that focus on educational technology. The entry then explains the difference between closed-access and open-access journals, discusses the pros and cons of open-access journals, and details controversies over open-access journals.

Articles in academic journals are usually peer reviewed. Peer review is a process in which two or more peers review a manuscript. The reviewers provide feedback to the authors and the editor and recommend whether the manuscript should be published, revised, or declined. Typically, an editor makes the final publication decision. Peer review is usually one key difference between academic journals (e.g., *Educational Technology Research and Development*) and professional magazines (e.g., *Educational Technology*) in a field. Some academic journals publish both peer-reviewed and nonpeer-reviewed articles (e.g., *TechTrends*). The peer review process is generally believed to increase the rigor and prestige of a publication and to help further advance a field of study. Despite these perceived benefits, many academics are quick to point out problems with the typical peer-review process (e.g., innovative thinking can be suppressed, it relies on busy unpaid volunteers, it can slow the publication process).

The field of educational technology has more than a hundred different academic journals. Some of these journals have a traditional research focus, such as *Educational Technology Research and Development*, the *British Journal of Educational Technology*, and *Computers & Education*. These three journals, in particular, are some of the oldest and generally accepted as the most prestigious journals in the field. Other educational technology journals, such as *TechTrends*, are more practitioner oriented, focusing less on reporting traditional research and more on reporting emerging trends and practices in the field. Other academic journals focus on a specific aspect of educational technology such as distance education (e.g., *The American Journal of Distance Education* or *The Internet and Higher Education*) or on educational technology in a

specific context (e.g., the *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education* or the *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*).

## Open Versus Closed Academic Journals

Traditional academic journals use a subscription model in which to access a specific journal, people either have to pay, usually in the form of a subscription, or have access to an institution (e.g., a university library) that subscribes to the journal.

As the Internet grew, academic journals began to be published online. Many of these early online academic journals (sometimes called e-journals) were free for anyone to access. Generally, there were no subscription fees to read the articles in these journals. As a result, online journals that were free to access began to be labeled as *open-access journals*.

Open-access journals have since grown in popularity. Currently there are more than 70 different educational technology or educational technology–related open-access journals. Two reputable open-access educational technology journals are *Journal of Educational Technology & Society* (first issue published in 1998) and *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* (first issue published in 2000). Other long-standing open-access journals related to educational technology are *First Monday* (first issued published in 1996) and the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* (first published in 1995). [p. 555 ↓ ] Some open access educational technology journals are indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index (e.g., *Journal of Educational Technology and Society*, *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, and *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*). Over the years, some notable and respectable journals have chosen to become open access, such as the *International Journal of E-Learning & Distance Education*, and the *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, but other open-access journals have ceased publication.

Open-access journals may be perceived as free. However, open-access journals are usually subsidized by a group or institution (e.g., a professional organization such as the Association for Educational Communications and Technology [AECT] or the IEEE

Computer Society, a society of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) or by individual authors (e.g., through article publication fees) to cover publication costs.

For a number of years, a journal could clearly be identified as either open-access or not open-access (sometimes referred to as closed or as a closed-access journal). However, as demand for open-access to research has increased during the past decade, a number of variations of open-access have emerged:

*Complete open access* (sometimes referred to as gold open access): All articles are completely open access.

*Delayed open access*: Articles become open-access after a period of time (e.g., six months after publication).

*Hybrid open access*: Authors have the option to pay fees to make their article open access, or open access is allowed to members of a professional association.

A growing number of traditional publishers now offer some type of hybrid open access to authors.

## Pros and Cons of Open-Access Journals

Open-access journals offer a number of benefits for educational technology researchers and practitioners alike. The most notable benefit of open access is that removing barriers makes it easier for readers to access literature in the field. This is especially important for practitioners whose employer might not subscribe to academic journals. Other benefits include a possible faster time from submission to publication. Traditional academic journals can often take longer than a year to publish an article. Open-access journals have the potential to publish articles faster, although some traditional publishers now publish accepted manuscripts online immediately after acceptance. Another perceived benefit of open-access journals is that authors typically retain the copyright of their work rather than signing over copyright to their work to a publisher. Open-access journals also have the potential to increase the readership base for an

article. For instance, the *Journal of Educational Technology & Society* has published hundreds of articles, including four articles with more than 20,000 downloads. Open-access journals are also often cheaper and easier to start up than traditional journals. Finally, and directly related to educational technology, open-access journals—largely because they are online—have the ability to publish different types of educational technology scholarship, whether that is more creative works or more design-based research. For instance, the *International Journal of Designs for Learning* publishes multimedia cases along with traditional articles.

Despite these possible benefits, researchers and practitioners must be aware of some possible shortcomings of open-access educational technology journals. The primary shortcoming is that open-access journals, despite growing in acceptance and popularity, are still viewed by many as being less rigorous and less prestigious than traditional academic journals. This perception keeps some academics from publishing their research in open-access journals as well as from reviewing for or reading open-access journals. Another drawback with open-access journals is that they can cease publication because of lack of financial sustainability, leaving authors without a permanent record of their scholarship (e.g., *Innovate: Journal of Online Education* closed after a few years of operation). Many open-access journals are not indexed as traditional journals are, limiting their influence; further, the majority of open-access journals are not indexed in *Journal Citation Reports*, leaving them without the SSCI impact factor. Another drawback, specifically for pre-tenured faculty, is that some colleges and universities view open-access publications as being inferior to traditional publications. Finally, open-access journals are sometimes associated, or perceived to be associated, with predatory publishers who try to make money off of author processing charges.

## Controversy Over Open-Access Journals

Open-access journals and the larger open-scholarship movement continue to challenge traditional forms of scholarship. Although academics often resist change, the open-access movement has sparked a larger discussion about whether publicly funded research should be freely available to the public; some funding organizations have even begun requiring funded research to be published in an open-access format.

The rise of hybrid open-access options, in which an author can pay thousands of dollars to have his or her [p. 556 ↓ ] article published as open-access, has highlighted how much publishers can profit from the work of academics. Rather than pay what is perceived as exorbitant fees, some academics have chosen instead only to publish in open-access journals or those in which members of an association have open access with no author fees being charged. Other academics have chosen to self-archive their own work by placing earlier copies of their work on their own websites (called green open access) or by uploading their work to academic repositories (e.g., Academia or ResearchGate) or specifically to institutional repositories.

## Conclusion

There are proponents of, and detractors from, open-access journals. Some glorify the open-access movement, and specifically open-access journals, and question why anyone would ever read or publish in a closed journal; others question why anyone would waste his or her time reading or publishing scholarship in what they perceived as a low-quality journal.

The future of academic journals is unclear, but there appears to be a place for both open-access and closed-access academic journals. Both academics and practitioners value electronic access and a faster time to publication.

**See also** [Open Content Licensing](#); [OpenCourseWare Movement](#); [Open-Source Repositories for Learning and Instruction](#)

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Further Readings

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