

Open Access Publishing – Busting the Common Myths – Part 1

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Open access (OA) publishing works on a simple concept: ‘Unlimited access to scholarly work without fees or subscription for its readers’. OA research levels the scientific field for all the key players of the research ecosystem, ensuring fair play. These include independent scholars with limited research budgets, health professionals, medical practitioners, and policy-makers. It also reduces research duplication as peers are aware of what has already been studied. Further, it enables other researchers to build on existing research more quickly.

There still remains a lot of confusion and misconceptions about open access publishing in the academic community. Here, as we gear up to celebrate the 'Open Access Week 2020', let us bust the nine most common myths with facts and insights from our open access expert, Dr. Frauke Ralf.

Dr. Ralf is a renowned open access expert with over two-decade-long enriching experience in the STEM publishing industry. She has worked with leading publishers such as Thieme and IOP Publishing for the past 11 years. She has been actively involved in strategic growth, business development, and revenue generation for a portfolio of open access journals. Currently, she serves as a 'Consultative Manager' for SAM-Standards And More...GmbH & Co., an organization committed to providing the scientific and technical information that drives innovation.

We believe that the presented opinions and facts shall be instrumental in clarifying open access related misinformation.

Myth 1

Articles published in open access journals are not peer reviewed.

Dr. Ralf:

Untrue, OA journals undergo the same peer review process as established journals under the traditional subscription model.

Fact Check:

Similar to traditional fee-based journals, reputable OA journals also have a robust [peer review system in place](#). Two organizations namely [Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association](#) (OASPA) and the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) (DOAJ) are actively involved in safeguarding the standards and quality of OA journals. Moreover, they provide a well-monitored and curated list of reputable peer-reviewed journals that publish open access. Consequently, researchers who are skeptical about the peer review system of an OA journal may refer to their massive collection of journals for greater credibility.

Myth 2

I can publish an OA article only in an OA journal.

Dr. Ralf:

This is incorrect, as most well established traditional journals offer the option to make individual articles open access. This is referred to as a hybrid model, meaning in a

journal one will find a mix of articles open access and articles to be licensed for its usage.

Fact Check:

This misconception stems from the belief that there is just one – the gold open access route for OA publishing. Here the authors pay an article publication charge (APC) to cover the publishing costs. However, there are [several routes to publish](#) OA. These include ‘green’, ‘diamond’, ‘bronze’, and the ‘hybrid’ routes.

Green OA is the route where authors self-archive their work (usually a near-final version / accepted manuscript) in a general-purpose repository or on a personal website.

Diamond, also referred to as the platinum OA route is an innovative model that fits in between gold and green open access routes. In this route, the article is accessible immediately after publication and does not require the authors or the readers to pay the article processing charges (APC). Usually, it is published under the ‘CC BY’ license. The author retains the copyright to the article, but there are no barriers to reusing or sharing it.

The bronze OA route refers to the articles which are freely accessible on the publisher’s webpage but do not have an open license that permits reuse or sharing. The purpose of this model is to make the article free to access only for a brief period, usually immediately post-publication or in response to a calamitous event such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The hybrid OA route is a publishing model where traditional (subscription-model) journals offer authors to make individual articles gold open access immediately on payment of an APC.

Myth 3

Publishing in open access journals is a good thing but there is no benefit for me in it.

Dr. Ralf:

Well, think twice, open access to knowledge might be critical—especially during global climate or health emergencies. Indeed, the benefit is not only to the author but to the entire scientific and research community.

Fact Check:

As an author, you get a chance to accomplish your moral commitment to making scientific knowledge accessible to all. OA publishing [increases the global outreach of articles](#), irrespective of the author’s ethnicity or geographic location. Moreover, it attempts to decrease the inequities related to the dissemination of knowledge globally.

Most importantly, it leads to increased readership and public engagement. Of the most-discussed journal articles of 2016, tracked by Altmetric, [about 47% were either open access](#) or free to read.

Citation counts are paramount in tenure and promotion decisions. Several studies have demonstrated a [clear readership and citation advantage](#) over articles available only via subscription. Not just citations and a higher number of total downloads, OA articles have also demonstrated a sustained and steady download rate.

Several funding bodies require their grant holders to make data stemming from their work freely available post-publication. Therefore, publishing your work open access may also help you fulfill funder mandates.

Myth 4

Open access is only for basic work and not for reporting novel high-quality findings.

Dr. Ralf:

This might have been the case back in 1998 at the beginning of this paradigm shift, but has constantly evolved ever since. OA has developed into Open Science now incorporating the complete research life cycle.

Fact Check:

Give it a thought! What would a researcher gain by keeping novel high-quality results concealed behind paywalled subscription barriers? OA publishing can prove to be the best tactic to get your work out there! Furthermore, reporting unique, groundbreaking scientific findings in OA journals increase the chances of having higher citations. Moreover, open access publishing allows maximizing readership, engagement, and re-use of published work.

SPARC Europe, until 2015, maintained a list of studies to determine whether or not there is [a citation advantage for publishing OA](#). They found that out of 70 studies, 46 studies garnered a citation advantage.

Certainly, you must have enjoyed debunking these myths with us! Stay tuned for the [second part of this article series](#) where we bring you more such popular misconceptions.

Have you published your articles open access yet? What are your thoughts about open access publishing? Share your experiences in the comments section below!

You can also visit our [Q&A forum](#) for frequently asked questions related to different aspects of research writing and publishing answered by our team that comprises subject-matter experts, eminent researchers, and publication experts.

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