

**OPEN ACCESS TASK FORCE REPORT  
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**for North American Theatre and Dance Scholars  
prepared by members of ASTR, ATDS, ATHE, TLA, MATC, DSA, PSi, and  
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The purpose of this document is to introduce North American theatre and dance scholars and practitioners who seek to publish their work to the contours, pitfalls, and possible future(s) of Open Access (OA). The document is in two parts. Part 1 defines Open Access and outlines its major iterations. Part 2 discusses current issues related to OA, warning of stumbling blocks and suggesting some strategies as authors, the academy, libraries, and publishers move forward in OA waters that are being charted even as we travel. Each section includes links to resources for those who want suggestions for further reading.

A recent survey by Taylor and Francis revealed that a preponderance of scholars wanted their work to be available via open access to anyone who wanted to read it. A smaller number were willing to pay to be in reputable OA journals. An even smaller number expressed willingness to publish in completely OA journals, which are sometimes not peer reviewed and are regarded by some as predatory. For many scholars, especially junior scholars pursuing tenure, it is important not only to publish but to do so in prestigious—or at least recognizable—journals, so merely being open is not enough. (See [“Researcher Survey” 2019](#).)

**Part 1: Definitions and Major Iterations**

Open Access refers to free and unrestricted availability of scientific or scholarly literature on the Internet. Open Access provides several benefits, including societal impact, scholarly impact, greater immediacy, and research funding. (See [“Open Access Initiatives” 2020](#).) In the very simplest sense, material available via OA is just a few clicks away for anyone with internet access.

Open access provides access to those who cannot afford journal subscriptions or who do not belong to universities/libraries with institutional subscriptions. The reach of articles goes beyond economic and geographic barriers and allows for greater engagement with the public and with the business sector. (See [“Open Access Guidelines” 2019](#).)

Open access ensures greater immediacy. The research can be published digitally as soon as it is completed, which means that educators and researchers can access new knowledge quickly. This in turn stimulates new research, interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary engagement, and more opportunities for collaborative research on a global scale. (See [“Pros and Cons of Open Access Publishing” 2017](#).)

The impact of work published through Open Access can be easily traced through metadata harvesting. Access to data concerning views, downloads and citations can better support trackability and therefore the reach of new research. (See ["Benefits of Open Research" 2020.](#))

Open Access was born to counteract the model in which for-profit publishers take advantage of research conducted and funded by others (government, educational and research institutions, academics, etc.).

Of course, nothing is free. In general, OA is paid for by public funding bodies. University libraries pick up the tab via subscriptions to journals; granting organizations provide money directly to cover publishing costs for the outcome of research for which they have given grants; university funding sources offer support to faculty (often on a competitive basis), and faculty themselves may pay Article Processing Charges (APCs). (See ["Who Pays for Open Access?" 2020.](#))

There are several kinds of Open Access, determined by who pays for making the material available. The question of what is "free" concerns both authors (who may be asked to provide funds to make their work available to readers for free) and readers, who, of course, want free access to any and all materials they search but who may not fully grasp why some publications are just a click away and others are firewalled. (See ["Open Access Colours" 2020.](#))

**GREEN OPEN ACCESS** is free to authors, who may put a post-peer review and copy-edited, pre-layout version of their article on university and other open-access repositories. The article is then available for free to readers, but it will not be in final, typeset format with images. Also, it may take some fancy footwork to get to it.

**GOLD OPEN ACCESS** is free to all readers immediately upon publication in a given journal. It is usually paid for via an Article Processing Charge (APC). APCs can be paid for out of granting budget lines, but some universities leverage publishers to waive APCs for their scholars. Authors do not themselves pay the APC if their funding is raised from other sources such as grants.

**PLATINUM OPEN ACCESS** journals and book publishers do not charge APCs. Fees are covered by other means such as volunteer work, donations, subsidies, or grants. They are funded by university library consortiums, where libraries divert monies from subscription fees toward directly funding journal publication. (An example of this is [Érudit.](#))

**HYBRID** journals are "Green" in general but accept APCs from individual authors who need/want to pay for Gold access (Ex. because Gold OA is required by a granting organization).

**Predatory Journals** exploit the open access model, often by promising but not actually providing peer review and/or by charging authors to publish. (See ["Open Access & Predatory Publishing" 2020.](#))

## **Part 2: Current Issues, Stumbling Blocks, and Strategies**

**Where to Publish.** Authors need to know the OA policies of the journals with which they may want to work. An excellent tool is [Sherpa/Romeo](#), a database of Open Access policies for different journals. Publishers and Editors are often more willing to discuss options with authors than people realize. Sometimes, a conversation with an editor can lead to being allowed to publish Open Access when it would otherwise not be allowed. (See ["Creator and Author Rights" 2020.](#))

**Tenure and Promotion.** University Promotion and Tenure documents have overwhelmingly not incorporated "online," "digital," or "open access" publications, and departments are left to assess/argue for research impact. OA publications are not always counted in "traditional" demonstrations of quality. Discussions of OA often caution against publishing in OA venues, especially where OA is connected to predatory journals. On the other hand, OA publications can lead to additional citations, conference invitations, media interviews/requests for expertise, and other activities that are helpful for the promotion and tenure process. (See ["Rewarding Open Access Scholarship in Promotion and Tenure" 2016.](#))

**Intellectual Property.** Theatre and Performance Studies scholars work with complex intellectual property laws, and these issues are made even more complex by OA. Many scholars rely on third-party illustrative content. Image licensing rights, at times dependent on estate donation rules, photographer contracts, producers, and artists whose work is shown in the images, may limit or ban digital reproduction and/or charge additional webhosting fees. Also, derivative rights concerns arise from creative commons licensing that permits reuse. Copyright is typically owned by the author (who, in the case of a scenario arising in situations involving multiple rights holders, as described above, may need to go through multiple steps before securing full-fledged copyright) unless a university controls it; faculty must deposit their work with the university within twelve months of publication; this is done to ensure open access. But journals often pressure authors to sign over their rights. (See ["Open Access Literature is Digital, Online, Free of Charge" 2019.](#))

**Journal Funding.** If journals lose authors and subscribers to OA (that is, venues that are exclusively OA, distinct from journals that collect an APC to make an article available by Gold Open Access), they lose ownership and money. Journals are also threatened, as specialists more commonly only want individual articles, which means that readers will pay for the content they want but no longer support the cost of a full journal. Rejection rates are significantly higher in humanities, complicating OA funding models. Fee-based journals with high rejection rates charge higher fees. Publishing stipends are seriously limited. (See ["Open Access and the Humanities" 2014.](#))

**Regional Differences.** Worldwide, the prevalence, costs associated with, and attitudes toward OA vary by region. The majority of OA publishing is done in Europe and the UK but is becoming more prevalent in the US and Canada as well. Concerns

regarding OA vary by region and include concerns about issues such as funding, fees, prestige, access, copyright, and impact factor. (See ["Attitudes Towards Open Access" 2014](#).) Costs associated with OA differ widely. The UK and US are the most expensive, while low income countries have the lowest fees. Overall trends favor moving to OA publishing. Worldwide, more than 50% of papers are freely available online. (See ["Open Access in 2019"](#).)

**Disadvantages.** The biggest disadvantages to OA are financial and the two major sources of frustration are 1.) the confusing network of options and alternatives, and 2.) a general lack of knowledge about OA. This latter state is most pronounced in the United States and discipline-specific in the arts and humanities.

**Next Steps.** To address both these issues, a series of joint informational sessions at upcoming ASTR and ATHE conferences (planning is already underway) are intended to begin to educate our members and the authors who contribute to our journals.