

The Skeletons in Our Closets: Creating New Bones for OER Development

Open Educational Resources (OER) are taking education by storm and the dust is still settling for many instructors who may be confused about not only what OER is but also where to start. Understanding the current culture of instruction around textbooks, explaining what opportunities the “5Rs” (Retain, Reuse, Revise, Remix, and Redistribute) of OER open for instructors, and providing a new course material framework, or “skeleton,” for faculty can bridge these gaps and bring OER into more classrooms.

Everyone has “skeletons” in their closets—for educators, textbooks have traditionally been the skeletons that create a framework for a course. At present, course design unfolds with instructors reviewing course outcomes and competencies and then investigating textbook options that align with those goals. Once a textbook is chosen, instructors flesh out a course by integrating the textbook and other materials from the textbook’s publisher, and usually some additional supplementary materials. The action of choosing the textbook is an instructor’s current definition of instructional freedom. Through this method—combining the organized contents of the textbook with the orderly presentation of outcomes and competencies in the syllabus—there is an “unstated outline” that guides the instructor through the rest of the course design.

With OER, this unstated outline is replaced with the opportunity to construct a course that has infinite possibilities—some more closely resembling Frankenstein’s monster than a pre-packed skeleton. Since the unstated outline is not the default format when approaching course design with OER, adopting this approach may feel awkward at first but is ultimately an opportunity for more freedom of instruction. The 5Rs of OER can provide faculty with the ability to break down materials and then reconstruct them as they see fit for their classes. This affords more opportunity for innovation in course design, which provides faculty authentic instructional freedom.

Regardless if you are a new instructor or seasoned faculty, here are some suggestions to start creating new bones in which to build a course skeleton with OER.

Build Bones (Course Outline)

- Put aside any currently used materials and review course outcomes and competencies. In order to achieve those outcomes and competencies, ask yourself:

- What is the ideal presentation of this class and in what order?
- What type of class would I want to take?
- How can I draw students into course material, activities, and projects?
- Are exams necessary or can other forms of assessment work?
- Create a visual map to document all of these ideas.

Create a Skeleton (Framework)

- Construct a course timeline.
 - Note an order of topics, assignments, and assessments.
 - Note where each outcome and/or competency falls across those topics, assignments, and assessments to ensure that all are included.
 - Request a Development Shell to be created in the college’s LMS to start building the course.

Flesh Out a Course (The Details)

- Now start looking at OER materials, preferably with the assistance or guidance of librarian, an OER advocate, or an OER initiative contact.
 - First, note licensure type (Creative Commons, Open Access, or Public Domain) and verify materials (look for peer-reviewed material that validates the credibility sources).
 - Resources do not have to be able to cover an entire course but can instead be used for specific modules or assignments.
 - Some OER provide additional resources that may be worth exploring.
 - Some course material may need to be instructor created to complete the vision and viability of a course.

Building new bones, constructing skeletons, and bringing an OER course to life do not have to be difficult. Remember, you, the instructor, are the expert—materials and resources in your classroom are simply an extension of and supplement to your own knowledge. Using OER ushers in an opportunity to embrace authentic instructional freedom and the fluidity to change course design as needed—you just have to jump in.

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