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Developing an Open Educational Resource on Creative Commons licences in scholarly publishing

A case study from Umeå University Library

Abstract

This paper describes a project undertaken at Umeå University Library to develop an open online course aimed at helping researchers navigate the publishing landscape. The course focuses on key considerations when publishing and sharing research under a Creative Commons licence. The project aimed to create a resource that could complement existing email support and outreach activities at the library and serve dual functions as a streamlined resource for busy researchers seeking an introduction to the topic and as a reference for researchers with specific questions. It was designed to be intuitive and use interactive elements like videos and scenarios, while text sections were kept short and in plain language. The course was developed using a methodological step-by-step framework based on Constructive Alignment. The framework was created at Umeå University Library and designed specifically for librarians with limited pedagogical training. Key challenges in the project included creating interactive and engaging content, avoiding lengthy text sections, and ensuring the course fulfilled its dual purposes. Based on our experiences from the project, we recommend that similar projects use a pedagogical framework to guide content development and course design, involve pilot users in testing the course, and carefully consider how open for reuse they want the resource to be, both in legal and technical terms.

Keywords: Creative Commons, open educational resources (OER), scholarly publishing, research support, open access publishing, academic librarianship, ROAST framework

Introduction

With open access becoming the dominant publishing model in Sweden, researchers are navigating a publishing landscape that, while no longer new, remains highly changeable and complex (National Library of Sweden, 2024c). The complexity also impacts the roles of librarians. The profession has evolved to not only help users access knowledge but also to use, review and make it available (Eklund, 2024). In an effort to improve our support for researchers navigating the publishing landscape, the open access team at Umeå University Library (UUL) has developed an open online course. This course is designed to help researchers feel more confident in sharing their research findings through open access under a Creative Commons-licence and in using others' openly licensed work. In this paper, we will outline the process of developing the course, share the lessons we learned, and highlight considerations we believe might be useful for those looking to build similar resources. We hope our experience can provide some guidance on how librarians can enhance their support and delivery methods by creating open educational resources (OER) and by using a pedagogical framework as methodological support.

The setting

Umeå University has four faculties: the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science and Technology. The result is a wide range of research areas with various publishing traditions. The department of Scholarly Communication at the University Library offers support for researchers throughout the research process and, like most academic libraries, we engage with both the processes and the outputs of scholarship (Pinfield et al., 2017). For our small team dedicated to open access, this means supporting researchers in strategic and open publishing by helping them evaluate journals, interpret publishing agreements and check open access funding and requirements. We also help them disseminate outputs through self-archiving in our institutional repository, and through providing technical support and infrastructure for open access journals.

Most of our support for researchers is delivered via email and through scheduled lectures and workshops. Both types of support can be time-consuming and reach only a small proportion of the university's researchers. These challenges led us to investigate the possibility of building online resources we could both direct researchers to in our email support and use as a complement to our in-person sessions. At this time, UUL had just built its first OER for students, a basic course on information search, and we were inspired by its interactive and engaging course format, as well as the structured methodology used in its development. In essence, OERs are "learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others." (UNESCO, 2019, p. 5). Although the use of OERs in doctoral student training and research support is not a well-researched topic (de Sousa, 2024), there are indications that researchers would like to see, and could potentially benefit from, more accessible, intuitive, user-centred, and digital resources and services (Pinfield et al., 2017; Burman, 2024).

Several potential topics were considered for our first course, ranging from comprehensive courses on open scholarship to quick guides on avoiding predatory publishers. However, the project team quickly agreed on Creative Commons as a pilot topic. Creative Commons licences are widely used in open

access publishing today, including for a significant portion of Swedish research output. They play a crucial role in making research more accessible and reproducible. As Stodden argues, “a scientific contribution is considered valuable if, among other things, researchers can reproduce the results successfully (verifiability), and the work is built upon it, thus uncovering new scientific discoveries. Copyright stands in the way of both actions.” (2009, p. 36).

Based on our email support interactions, we could deduct that many researchers still feel uncertain about how to choose a licence for their own work and how to correctly use licensed material. Examples of questions we have received from researchers on the topic include:

I’ve read the publisher’s guide and believe I should choose CC BY-NC-ND, but just wanted to check with the library first...

I want to reuse my CC-licensed article, can I do that without asking the publisher for permission?

Creative Commons licences

Creative Commons licences are open licences that “give every person and organization in the world a free, simple, and standardised way to grant copyright permissions for creative and academic works; ensure proper attribution; and enable others to copy, distribute, and make use of those works.” (Creative Commons, n.d.-b). In other words, by applying a Creative Commons licence to your work you let others know what they can do with it without having to ask for permission.

Researchers need information about Creative Commons licensing in several scenarios: when they publish open access through a publisher and sign a licensing agreement; when they want to share self-published material; and when they wish to use both their own and others’ published material in new publications. Few existing resources have focused specifically on licensing for scholarly publishing, and those that do are not designed to include practical examples to show what real-life licence choices might look like (see for example the guide from the National Library of Sweden, 2024a). The resources that cover both aspects have not been targeted at Swedish researchers, but there are examples in other countries, such as Braak et al. (2024) which is a resource for researchers from the Netherlands.

Building the Course

UUL’s first online course was developed using the ROAST framework, created by our colleague Anna-Karin Åsander (2021). We applied the same framework in building this course. ROAST offers a step-by-step approach to creating an OER and has been specifically designed for those with limited pedagogical training.

ROAST uses Constructive Alignment as its methodological and theoretical foundation. As the name suggests, Constructive Alignment is based on constructivism: the idea that learners create knowledge through what they do, and alignment: aligning the intended learning outcomes, the learning activities and the assessments with each other. The alignment manifests itself through the recurring use of one or two active verbs for each learning outcome, for the activities learners practice in the course and for what they are intended to achieve. In this way, the learners have a chance to assess whether they have acquired the intended skills and knowledge. (Åsander, 2021; Biggs & Tang, 2011)

ROAST consists of four steps:

1. Ringa in området (Define the area)

2. Formulera learning outcomes (Formulate learning outcomes)
3. Skapa learning activities (Create learning activities)
4. Skapa assessment tasks (Create assessment tasks)

Before going through these steps, ROAST encourages you to check your starting points in terms of target audience, level, form and platform.

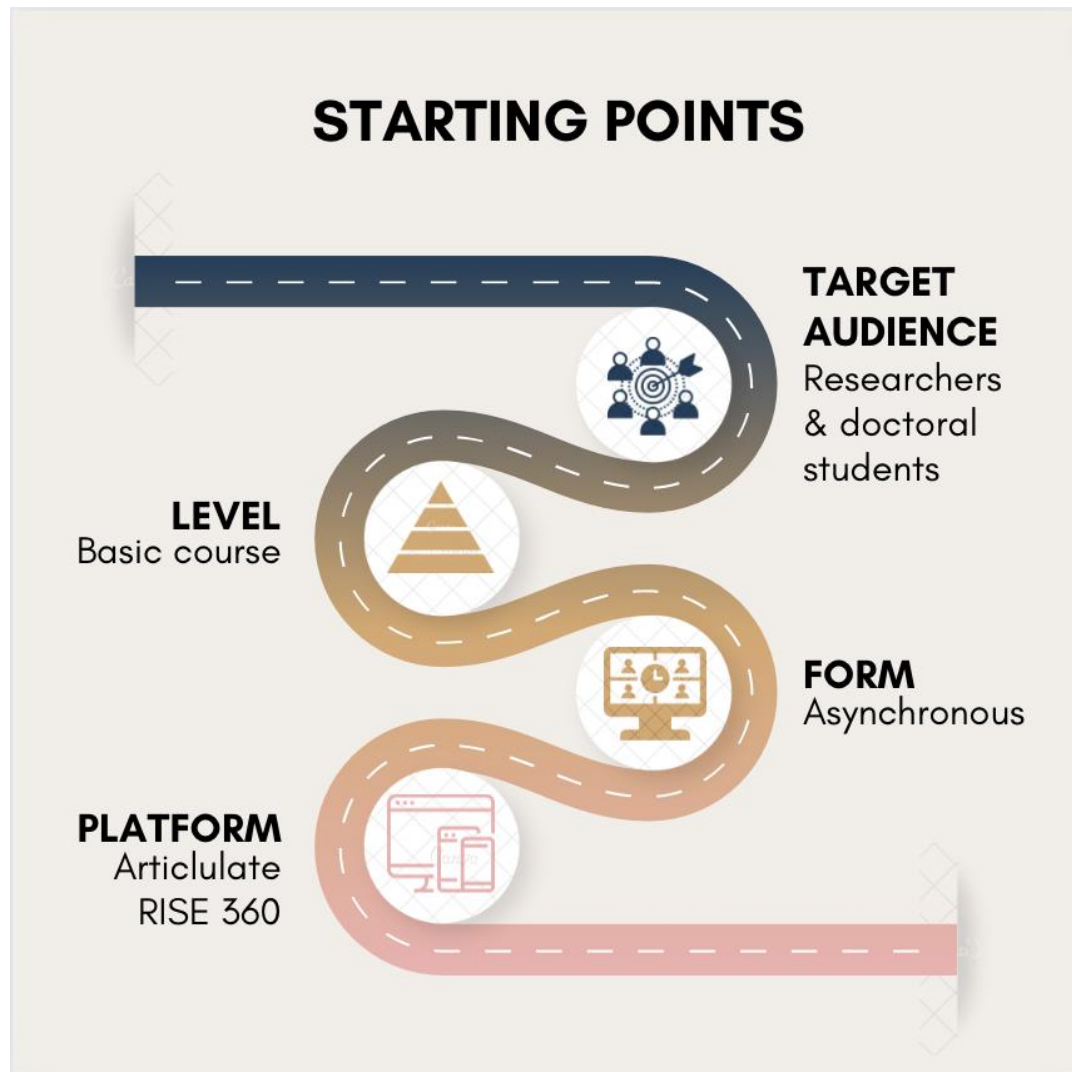


Figure 1. Starting Points with Examples from the Course

Figure 1 shows the starting points we chose for the course. We followed the same path as UUL's first OER in everything except the target audience. Doctoral students and researchers are the groups mainly engaged in scholarly publishing, so they are the audience for this course. Since Umeå University has doctoral students and researchers who do not speak Swedish, we decided to launch the course in both Swedish and English at the same time. We designed the course so that it would not require any previous knowledge about Creative Commons, and to be asynchronous, which means

that the participants would go through the course independently, at their own pace and outside of a structured classroom setting.

The course was built on Articulate Rise 360, an online course creation platform used both within and outside of academia (Articulate, n.d). The platform offers customisable blocks, including text, images, video and interactive elements, and allows multiple users to work collaboratively on creating and editing a course. Articulate Rise 360 had already been used for UUL's first online course and was selected based on requirements concerning interactivity, accessibility, design, export functions, and ownership of the created material (Åsander, 2021).

Step 1: Defining the Area

When defining the area, we concentrated on the choices and considerations involved in publishing and sharing research under an open licence. We wanted the course to serve dual functions: as a streamlined resource for busy researchers seeking an introduction to the topic, and as a reference for researchers with specific questions. In addition to Creative Commons licensing guidance, we wanted to include the basics of copyright as well as help to interpret a publishing agreement. The scope of the course was defined by questions regularly received by the library on these topics.

Steps 2-4: Learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment tasks

During these steps, we formulated learning outcomes and connected learning activities and assessment tasks to them. In figure 2, we show how an intended learning outcome can be coupled with a learning activity and assessment task.

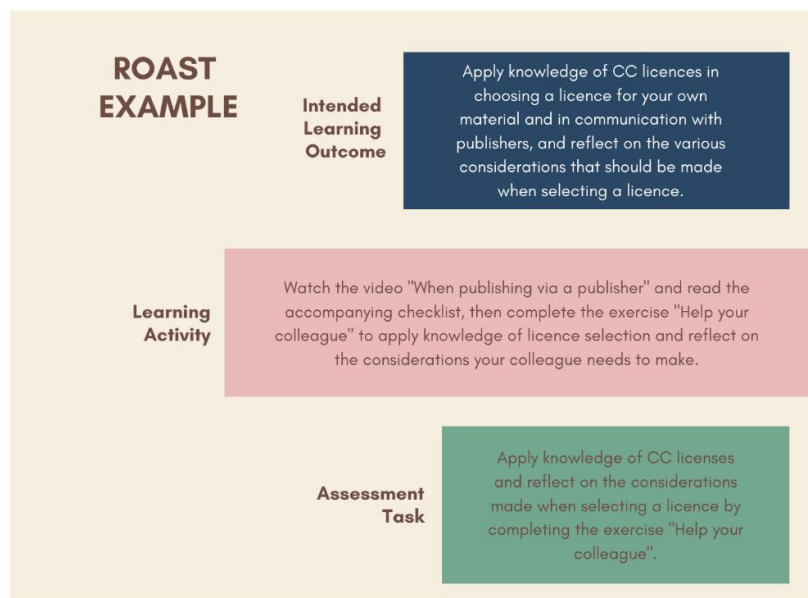


Figure 2. ROAST Example

With the content structure in place, we built the course on the Articulate Rise 360 platform. During this phase, we discovered and worked on several important aspects: which parts were better suited as videos than as text, how to divide the information into sections, and where interactive elements were needed to break up or replace text-heavy lessons. Once the first version of the course was

completed, we had pilot testers (researchers and librarians) try it out and provide feedback. Several lessons were further developed based on their input.

Finding the time to work on a project like this one is not always easy. However, thanks to flexibility in the scheduling of our outreach and other projects we were able to include course design in our regular routines. The project was initiated in 2022, and the first version of the course was available on the web in 2023.

The Result

When we launched the course in May 2023 it consisted of three sections with a total of 17 lessons. The lessons can all be traced back to the learning outcomes. As an addition to the three original sections (The Creative Commons licences, Publishing with a Creative Commons licence and Using material with a Creative Commons licence) a fourth section (An in-depth look at publishing with a Creative Commons licence) was added in a 2024 update of the course (see Figure 3).

THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCES	
☰ Section 1: The Creative Commons licences	
📖 Creative Commons licences: a guide for researchers	
🔍 What do the different elements mean?	
☰ When the licences are written in plain text	
🔍 That's almost all for section 1 – time to test your knowledge!	
PUBLISHING WITH A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE	
☰ Section 2: Publishing with a Creative Commons licence	
☰ A brief history	
☰ How licences work in scholarly publishing	
☰ What research funders say	
📖 When publishing via a publisher	
🔍 You've almost finished section 2 – but first, help a colleague!	
☰ Choose how you want to proceed in the course	
SECTION 3: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT PUBLISHING WITH A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE	
☰ Section 3: An in-depth look at publishing with a Creative Commons licence	
☰ How to license a publication yourself	
☰ When you want to license a preprint or postprint	
☰ When you want to license your thesis	
☰ When you are the publisher of a publication	
USING MATERIAL WITH A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE	
☰ Section 4: Using material with a Creative Commons licence	
☰ How to find Creative Commons licensed material	
☰ How to use Creative Commons licensed material	
🔍 That's almost all for section 4 – time to test your knowledge!	

Figure 3. The Four Sections of the Course

In order to make the course easy to follow, we focused on including one idea per sentence, using informative headings, and keeping the reader present as a “you” with an associated active verb as often as possible (Plain Language Association International, 2024). The snapshot of the lesson How licences work in scholarly publishing (Figure 4) includes examples of all these plain language practices.

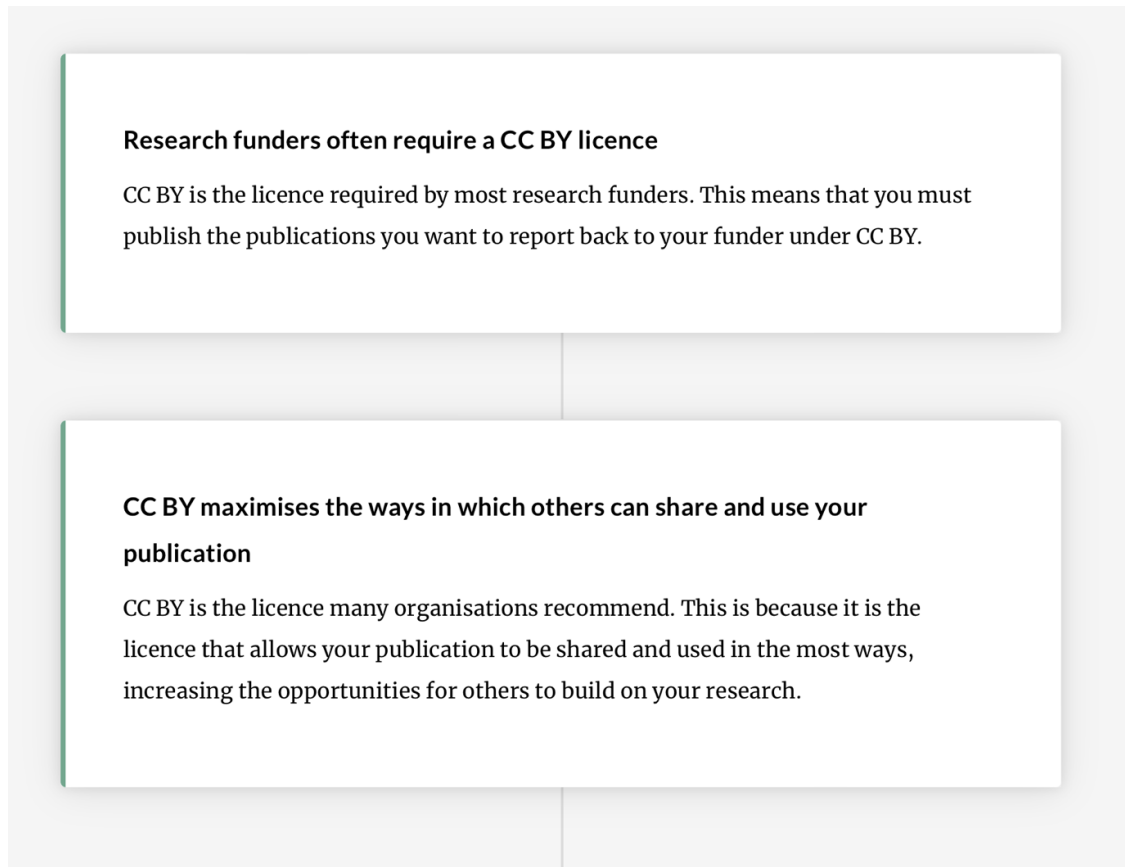


Figure 4. Snapshot of the Lesson “How Licences Work in Scholarly Publishing”

We have tried to keep the course engaging by including a variation between texts, films and interactive elements. Some interactive elements also serve as assessment tasks in the form of quizzes and scenarios. We turned two of our longer lessons into films. One of them was storyboarded by us and animated by the university’s internal film and photography service Inhousebyrån, and the other one was made entirely by us.

As mentioned earlier, we added a new section for special cases in a 2024 update to the course. In this section we address the licensing of preprints, postprints and doctoral theses and licensing for journal editors. At the end of section two, learners are presented with two buttons, allowing them to choose between entering this third, more in-depth, section or proceeding directly to section four. This solution aims to balance the desire to keep the course concise while still providing guidance for a variety of publishing situations.

Licensing the OER

OERs are listed as one of the six focus areas in the Swedish national guidelines for open science, which also state that open licences should be taken into consideration for OERs (National Library of Sweden, 2024b). Many in the OER community use David Wiley’s (2024) definition of an OER as either being in the public domain or licensed in a way that allows the 5R activities (retain, revise, remix, reuse, redistribute). According to Braak et al. (2024), OER licences should permit adaptations, as CC BY does,

potentially in combination with the elements NC and/or SA. However, the debate regarding whether the inclusion of NC and SA elements is compatible with the principles of a truly open educational resource remains ongoing (Wiley, 2024). The first OER created by UUL was released under a CC BY-NC-SA licence and after some deliberation, we opted for the same licence for this course. Scholarly publishing is a highly commercialised area, and we wanted to make sure this course or any course built on it was not used for commercial purposes.

Our choice of platform does not allow easy editing by others, potentially making the technical barriers to reuse more significant than the legal ones (Wiley, 2024). Given that the Articulate Rise 360 platform was already implemented in our organisation and that we found it to be very user-friendly, with an intuitive, inviting design for both creators and users, we did not explore other options at this time.

Reception and Feedback

So far, we have used the course primarily as a resource to recommend for further learning after lectures and in our email support. The course has proved to be a popular resource among colleagues, and librarians in Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Iceland have both taken the course for their own benefit and incorporated it in their doctoral courses and guides.

Examples of feedback for the course from anonymous participants include:

This is great! Wish my university had a guide like this.

Incredibly educational approach and fun course to take! I didn't know before that Creative Commons could be such an interesting topic.

You have worked so well with inclusion in your examples! I don't think I have ever seen a more diverse group of examples.

Your CC course is very nice and I have also shared it with colleagues – who were enthusiastic about both content and platform.

We are not currently gathering any statistics on the number of learners who access or complete the course.

Discussion

The following discussion explores the challenges and benefits of developing a course without pedagogical training, the dual-purpose design of the course as a resource both for training and for specific questions, considerations around usage statistics and evaluation, and our future directions for creating and improving OERs.

We chose to build the course ourselves in order to keep the project manageable within a fairly short time frame. It was determined that the associated benefits were worth the risks that could result from a lack of pedagogical training in the developing team. Indeed, mistakes were made in early drafts, such as creating learning outcomes with vague verbs (like “understand” or “be familiar with”) rather than more assessable ones (like “assess” or “describe”). Involving someone with pedagogical training could likely have improved certain aspects of the course.

We aimed to create a course that could be used in doctoral and researcher training, while also serving as a resource for specific questions. In hindsight, this dual purpose is probably not the most effective long-term solution. The platform currently lacks a way to search within the course or to ask questions

and receive direct responses. We are exploring the use of AI to develop a more interactive ask-and-answer service, aimed at providing researchers with quick and specific answers and input.

For this pilot resource, we chose not to collect usage statistics, as the way in which we share the course on our website does not allow this. We also decided against performing a systematic evaluation of the learning outcomes. We found it challenging to evaluate a resource which is not used in a formal teaching setting, and which is primarily consulted by researchers seeking quick information. Any feedback they provide is voluntary and mainly used to identify any issues or areas for improvement. For future resources, we plan to develop a more structured approach to tracking usage and evaluating outcomes.

In recent years, colleagues at UUL have developed several new OERs for students and teachers and the library is now offering guidance to other university departments on how to create them. The open access team has developed a microlearning resource for researchers – a bite-sized module that takes around 5-10 minutes to complete (Coursera, 2024) – on creating a strategic open publishing strategy. The resource has received positive feedback from our doctoral students and there have been requests for more resources on predatory publishing. Before we build any further resources, we want to discuss their focus and design with doctoral students and researchers. Overall, we are continuously exploring the development of OERs in various forms: as stand-alone courses and microlearning blocks; as modules to integrate into doctoral and researcher courses; and as interactive resources for addressing specific questions.

The project team at Umeå University Library consisted of Marika Lundqvist, Therese Nilsson and Johanna Österåker.

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The course

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