

Guide 3: Open Access Compared to Traditional Publishing

What is Open Access?

The now-common usage of the term "open access" means freely available for viewing or downloading by anyone with access to the internet. Sometimes a distinction is made for "limited open access" meaning that material is available free of charge to a limited group of authorized users. Our usage of "open access" means the former; that is, dissertations and theses published for Open Access with ProQuest/UMI will be available at no charge for viewing or downloading by anyone with access to the internet, indefinitely.

What is Traditional Publishing?

Traditional publishing at UMI® corresponds with the model that generated the publishing industry as soon as mass-reproduction of printed material was possible. That is, the owner of intellectual property and author of the work contracts with the publisher to reproduce, distribute, and sell copies of the work. The publisher pays the author a certain portion of the revenue thus generated. That is why we also refer to our Traditional Publishing model as the "copy sales and royalty payments" model. It's been our business model since 1938, and we've paid out hundreds of thousands of dollars in royalties to the authors of dissertations and theses over the decades.

Why do we offer both options for publishing your work?

Just as the modern printing press stimulated the modern publishing industry, technology and the ubiquity of the worldwide web have revolutionized the dissemination of intellectual property—including graduate works. The scholarly community in particular has benefited as more and more of its reference materials and the latest literature in every discipline becomes available online—especially when it's free whether or not you or your institution subscribe to the publication. The primary literature is accelerating toward open access as scholarly publishers work to create new business models that will support this demand while sustaining the quality of their product. Where the primary literature goes, so does ProQuest/UMI, because we believe graduate works are primary literature.

At the same time, society is rapidly altering its notion of intellectual property, as access to information becomes a mouse click rather than a trip to the library or bookstore. There is a strong and growing notion that information should be free to all members of society. While academia has long argued that there is a difference between information and intellectual property, it is clear that the distinction becomes ever more blurred as the Web grows and search engines become increasingly intelligent and powerful. The notion that information is a global commons, that society has a right to access the results of research that it supports, and the increasing call for academic accountability are together generating powerful forces that will affect how you publish as a scholar from this point forward. For example, search the internet under the term "Federal Research Public Access Act" and you will see that Congress may soon require the published results of all federally funded research to be held in open access repositories. This is why ProQuest/UMI offers an open access publishing option to the authors of graduate works.

So why will we continue to offer the traditional copy-sales and royalties publishing option? The landscape of scholarly publishing is evolving—not changing overnight—so we are evolving with it by offering a range of options to suit the best interests of all graduate student authors.

How do you choose between Open Access and Traditional publishing?

- Check in with your graduate school or its equivalent first. Your university may require that you publish for Open Access, particularly if your research was supported by federal funds.

- Check into any restrictions imposed by a funding source. If your work was funded by industry or a corporate interest, as part of their research and development efforts, there may be some restrictions on the dissemination of all or part of your published dissertation or thesis.
- If you have a patent pending, or there is patentable work in your dissertation or thesis, you should already be working with your institution's technology transfer office or higher-level research office. If this is the case, see [Guide 4: Embargoes and Restrictions](#) and take appropriate steps to ensure that any patentable rights are protected.
- Next, check in with your advisor, committee chair, and any trusted mentors in your field. Your disciplinary community may share strong sentiments either for or against open access publishing. In some disciplines, open access is seen as a threat to the peer-review system because of the financial stress it causes for non-profit scholarly societies who publish journals. Other fields share a common and strong ethic *for* open access, particularly if its contributions are important to individual and societal decision-making. While you may not wish to have your decision governed by the norms of your discipline, you should at least be aware of any strong culture for or against open access in your field. Your mentor should also be able to advise you on whether or not your work is commercially viable in and of itself. If, for example, it is likely that your dissertation or thesis would sell well, you may not want to forgo earned royalties. Finally, your mentor should be able to help you decide if there is content in your work that should remain within academic circles, at least for a while. In such cases, you could still choose to publish for open access, but delay the release of your work for a fixed time (see [Embargoes and Restrictions](#)).
- Lastly, check in with your own value system and your professional goals. Do you believe that society will benefit from your research? Was your graduate work supported by public funds or by a charitable source with a strong social mission? If so, you may feel like giving back by making your work free to anyone who wants or needs it. Are you on your way to a career in the fine or performing arts? If so, you may not want to give away the unique platform you've built through your graduate work, and prefer to let interested readers or viewers pay for the privilege. Did you create or develop something with tangible value to industry or business? Again, perhaps you should start requiring payment for your expertise now. In the end, there is no right or wrong to either open access or copy sales and royalties as a basis for disseminating your work. We have developed the means for you to choose the model that best serves your professional and personal interests.

Open Access graduate works will be maintained in the PQDT Open database, comprising the subset of our collection for which authors have paid the one-time fee for open access. For more information on PQDT Open and Open Access Publishing with ProQuest/UMI, go to <http://www.proquest.com/en-US/products/dissertations/epoa.shtml>.

What about Copyright and Open Access publishing?

We have been asked whether there is any benefit in retaining your copyright or registering your claim to copyright with the U.S. Copyright Office if you publish anything for open access. There certainly is good reason, if not more reason to retain and protect your copyright if you publish open access, though you must decide for yourself about registering your claim (see the following section). By giving open access to your work, you are inviting people to read, reference, think about, build upon, refute, and perhaps even enjoy your work. You are NOT granting the right to take your work as one's own and/or to use it as one's own and/or to use it for commercial purposes without your permission. That is a copyright infringement.