Quality Standards for

Open Educational Resources

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# Introduction

The Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG) Quality Standards for Open Educational Resources (OER) were created in response to the [2018 University System of Georgia (USG) Survey on Open Educational Resources](https://affordablelearninggeorgia.org/documents/2018_USG_OER_Survey.pdf), a pivotal needs assessment document for planning the future of the Affordable Learning Georgia initiative within the USG. In this survey of over 1,700 faculty and professional staff throughout the system, respondents indicated that the most high-priority barrier to the adoption of OER was the lack of high-quality resources.

Quality is a broad and often-debated term within educational resource fields, and individual faculty across the globe have multiple ways of defining quality within the context of their own teaching methods. Because of the ambiguity inherent in determining the quality of resources, individual faculty are often left to provide their own definitions of quality. The European Union’s [Practical Guidelines on Open Education for Academics](https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/practical-guidelines-open-education-academics-modernising-higher-education-open-educational), in response, recommends that higher education institutions establish a set of quality standards to clarify specific targets when addressing OER quality.

## Quality as Defined by Faculty in the USG Survey on OER

The USG Survey on OER saw many open-ended responses which contained individual criteria for what constitutes a high- or low-quality resource. These criteria included:

* Accuracy or typographical errors: “Many OER lower-level mathematics textbooks are riddled with errors. There is no pressure to improve their quality. This is bad for students.”
* Differences in the scope of content covered from an instructor’s specific set of learning outcomes for a course: “[The open textbook I reviewed was] lacking in cultural diversity, current information, examples, and missing the mark for information beyond the U.S.”
* Image clarity and availability: “The imagery in OER's is usually poor and thus it requires relying on other public domain imagery.”
* Lack of supplemental materials or low-quality supplemental materials: “They lack the supplemental material to instructors and students that traditional publishers compete with each other to provide.”
* Lack of an external vetting process such as peer review or editorial oversight: “I do not want to use Open Educational Resources because I cannot ensure that the quality is peer reviewed and meets scientific standards.”

With the insights from the survey, along with lessons learned throughout four years of OER adoption, adaptation, and creation grants throughout all categorizations of USG institutions and the creation of new open textbooks through a partnership with the University of North Georgia (UNG) Press, Affordable Learning Georgia is defining a system-wide set of OER quality criteria below within two types of materials: open textbooks, which are comprehensive resources meeting the standard scope and sequence of a course; and non-textbook materials, which are all other resources including ancillary materials to accompany open textbooks.

These criteria also adapt information from the [QM Higher Education Specific Review Standards](https://www.qualitymatters.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/StandardsfromtheQMHigherEducationRubric.pdf) and the [BCcampus Self Publishing Guide](https://opentextbc.ca/selfpublishguide/chapter/textbook-reviews/) (CC BY 4.0). In order to maintain a focus on quality within these standards, the openness of the materials (such as the Creative Commons license applied to the materials or whether they reside in the Public Domain) is not included within the quality criteria.

# Open Textbook Quality Criteria

## Criterion 1: Scope and Sequence

1.1: Textbook contains a comprehensive standard scope and sequence for a particular college course or set of courses.

1.2: Textbook is easily divisible into smaller sections, with text that is not overly self-referential in order to enable modularity as much as possible.

## Criterion 2: Content Accuracy

2.1: Textbook contains accurate content without factual errors.

2.2: Content is presented with no or minimal bias or slant, taking into account the context of the particular subject being addressed.

2.3: Content is up-to-date and avoids presenting information that will make the text obsolete quickly, taking into account the particular subject being addressed.

2.4: Content has been reviewed by subject matter experts through a peer review process – preferably, but not restricted to, double-blind peer review.

## Criterion 3: Instructional Design

3.1: Textbook contains a variety of instructional materials, including reflective questions, learning activities, and other features which promote learner engagement and active learning.

3.2: The relationship between the use of the textbook and fulfilling particular learning outcomes is clearly explained.

## Criterion 4: Text Clarity

4.1: Content is written in accessible and internally-consistent prose for the intended reader.

4.2: Textbook contains a structured, clear, and logical progression of topics.

4.3: Textbook contains no grammatical, spelling, or other typographical errors.

## Criterion 5: Visual Clarity and Fidelity

5.1: Textbook does not contain distorted images or charts, and does not contain any other display features that may distract or confuse the reader.

5.2: Image resolution is up to the current standard for all viewing devices.

## Criterion 6: Accessibility and Inclusive Design

6.1: Textbook provides accessible and structured text and images to meet the needs of diverse learners.

6.2: Textbook reflects diversity and inclusion regarding culture, gender, ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, education, and religion, whenever possible, taking into account the context of the particular subject being addressed.

## Criterion 7: Ancillary Materials

7.1: Textbook has high-quality ancillary (supplementary) materials which aid the instructor in the teaching process.

# Ancillary Materials Quality Criteria

## Criterion 1: Content Relevance

1.1: Ancillary materials contain content which fully addresses the targeted learning outcome(s).

## Criterion 2: Content Accuracy

2.1: Ancillary materials contain accurate content without factual errors.

2.2: Content is presented with no or minimal bias or slant, taking into account the context of the particular subject being addressed.

2.3: Content is up-to-date and avoids presenting information that will make the material obsolete quickly, taking into account the particular subject being addressed.

2.4: Content has been reviewed by subject matter experts through a peer review process – preferably, but not restricted to, double-blind peer review.

## Criterion 3: Instructional Design

3.1: The overall set of ancillary materials contain a variety of instructional methods and activities which promote learner engagement and active learning.

3.2: The relationship between the use of the materials and fulfilling particular learning outcomes is clearly explained.

## Criterion 4: Technical Usability

4.1: Ancillary materials are in standard file formats or markup languages and easily adaptable to other formats.

4.2: [For ancillary materials based on coding and/or software platforms] Ancillary materials are free of technical errors and glitches.

## Criterion 5: Clarity and Fidelity

5.1: Ancillary materials do not contain distorted images or charts, and do not contain any other display features that may distract or confuse the student.

5.2: Audio, video, and image quality are up to the current standard for all devices used to access the materials.

## Criterion 6: Accessibility and Inclusive Design

6.1: Ancillary materials provide accessible and structured text and images to meet the needs of diverse learners, or provide alternative means of access to multimedia content in formats that meet the needs of diverse learners when applicable.

6.2: Ancillary materials reflect diversity and inclusion regarding culture, gender, ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, education, and religion, whenever possible, taking into account the context of the particular subject being addressed.