

Free/Libre Scientific Publishing

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Many scientists now recognize the harm done by restrictive scientific publishers that control use of the scientific literature. In 2002, the Budapest Open Access Initiative called for applying two principles in scientific publishing: access for everyone at the main publication site, and freedom for everyone to redistribute them as well.

The second principle is stronger. In practice, it gives us the first: if everyone has the freedom to redistribute copies of articles, university libraries will mirror the articles, making them accessible to everyone. However, the term "open access" refers explicitly to the weaker first principle and not to the second. That makes it a weak term.

I had misgivings about the term "open access", seeing as how the advocates of "open source" used the word "open" to downplay the Free Software Movement's concerns about freedom for software users. I put them aside because the substance of the position was correct, and signed the BOAI statement.

Alas, my misgivings have proved valid. Policies advanced today often drop the more important second principle; they talk about accessibility but don't mention the freedom to redistribute them and reuse them in other ways. For instance, a US bill in 2013 [proposes gratis access to papers from government-funded research, but fails to require freedom to redistribute](#). It would be a step forward, but the principal point was dropped, evidently because the campaign was for "open access". A [California bill](#) has the same flaw. "Open" has put society on the wrong track.

Meanwhile, Michael Eisen of the Public Library of Science convinced me in 2012 that modifying and combining scientific papers is important for science. Previously I had believed that redistribution of exact copies was sufficient for these works, but now I believe they must be free/libre — free as in freedom, that is, with the same [four freedoms that define free/libre software](#).

We must insist on "free (or libre) scientific publishing", using words that focus on the stronger principle of users freedom, and thus resist the tendency to weaken the goal. Please don't let your efforts be diverted into activities that aim for merely "open".