Attribution Statements for Remixed OER Content

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One of the great advantages of using OER is the freedom to choose high quality materials and recombine them for your own instructional purposes. So long as you properly attribute sources licensed to share and edit, you can publish and distribute these remixes to your students.

But wait. How do you properly attribute sources that have been remixed, mingled, and mashed up?

This guide will help you attribute combined materials following attribution standards established by Creative Commons, while maintaining readability and usability for your students. We will also look at accessibility issues for students who require screen readers.

Basic Attribution Statements

Before we can attribute remixed content, we need to create proper attribution statements for the individual items we are going to remix. If you have not already, please consult MHCC’s Attributions tab of the Textbook Affordability libguide at http://libguides.mhcc.edu/oer/attributions. That will give you some good rules of thumb and some guidelines in creating OER attributions.

Digital OER

The most common type of OER is published and distributed on the Internet in digital formats. This includes web sites, web pages, PDFs, online tools, videos, etc. As such, the attribution for a digital OER is the most common type of attribution you will find and makes a good introduction to creating attributions. It is simple and contains essential elements: title of the work, author/creator statement, license statement, and the appropriate license symbol.
Below is an attribution made with the very handy Open Attribution Builder created by the great folks at OPEN Washington. Here I used the tool to create an attribution for the tool itself. (Very “meta”, eh?).

"Open Attribution Builder" by OPEN Washington is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Note that the title, author/creator and license included hyperlinks to their respective sites. Most OER appears on the Web or in digital formats with hyperlinking functions; so most likely you will share these resources with your students in the same way.

Print OER

If you are publishing OER materials in print formats (books, posters, etc.), you will need to remove the hyperlinked text. However, it is good practice to spell out the link to the original source, as in this example:

"Open Attribution Builder" by OPEN Washington is licensed under CC BY 4.0 Available at http://www.openwa.org/attrib-builder/

Attribution Challenges of Remixed OER: visual flow, ADA accessibility, and web design speed bumps

As noted in the above examples, these attributions are simple and straightforward. But once we start using different OER and combining them, properly attributing these multiple sources can create problems.

For example, let’s look at a typical Philosophy 101 topic: Socrates. Following Creative Commons guidelines for attributing multiple sources, we’ll combine some biographical information from an open Philosophy 101 lecture with a public domain image of Socrates that would beautifully illustrate the great philosopher’s biography, followed by appropriate open license attributions. (See the example on the next page.)
There is no historical doubt that Socrates was a real actual person who lived in Athens from 470 to 399 BC, and who was a well-known character in town. Tradition has it that in his youth he worked as a stonemason, did some stone sculpting, and even had a showing of his sculptures at one point. He eventually married a young woman, Xanthippe, who tradition tells us had had quite a reputation for shrewishness even from her early childhood (poor Xanthippe has gotten such bad press from tradition). They had at least two children, sons, one of whom (according to Plato's *Phaedo*) was young enough to be "on his mother's knee" when Socrates was in jail at age 69 or 70.

In this example, the text and image work well together. However, their attribution statements as presented visually break the flow of reading. In most cases this lecture would appear as content in an online learning environment, on an instructor’s webpage, or in a Word or PDF file for students to read. So, for students who require the assistance of screen reading devices, these attribution statements can be disruptive. A typical screen reader reads aloud everything written on the page, as well as reads the visual descriptions and captions for media such as embedded videos and images. As you can imagine,
hearing a robotic voice read aloud attribution statements immediately after every source in a remixed OER would be monotonous, distracting and probably a little irritating.

The accessibility challenges posed by different media are beyond the scope of this guide, so for further reading on the subject, see these excellent articles and presentations from Community College Consortium on OER and Merlot. Open Washington’s guidelines are also excellent. These sites provide guidelines and instruction, as well as helpful links, on preparing accessible OER for your students. MHCC’s Disability Services Office will have institution specific guidelines (and helpful staff) that will assist you, too.

**Attributions for Multiple Sources**

In most cases, instructors using multiple sources to create OER will not remix them. It is easier to provide links to videos, chapters of online texts, and so on, than to recombine these elements. However, instructors who seek to “mash up” several sources, will find the Creative Commons guidelines for attributing multiple sources useful. In the following examples, we will look at different ways to attribute multiple sources individually that can be used to attribute remixed OER.

**Link List with Terms of Use Statement:** As shown on the Creative Commons Wiki, the best practices for properly attributing multiple sources is to list links to each source, describe them and provide a terms of use statement after each one. In the example (Figure 1) CC Wiki provides, the instructor has listed the sources individually, clearly indicates title and author, links directly to the source she wants students to read or to use, and gives clear instructions. CC Wiki uses a green box to highlight the terms of use statement, which describes the CC license, identifies the original authors, and links to the original version.
Put it in the Syllabus: If your remixed OER makes significant usage of a few resources, it’s a good idea to make note of it upfront in the course syllabus. This should not be your only attribution statement, but it will make it clear to the reader where the original source material is from. The Philosophy 101 course syllabus at the Saylor Academy provides an excellent example (Figure 2).
Figure 2

Here, the syllabus lists the OER sources and links to them. You can view the full syllabus at
https://legacy.saylor.org/phil101/Intro/

Attributions in the Body of Remixed OER

In both of the above examples, the attributions appear before the body of the work itself. Let’s take a look at how we can properly attribute sources in a remixed OER by using either standard citation formats, or standard notation. I should emphasize here that using OER in academia is still in its infancy, and so far there are no official, standardized guidelines have been established to handle attributions for remixed content. This is precisely the reason I’m writing this document! I propose we use established sourcing methods in new ways to respect the intellectual work of OER creators in accordance with Creative Commons License practice.

Use Standard Citation Formats: As scholars, we make attribution statements regularly through standard citation formats such as Modern Language Association (MLA) and American Psychological Association (APA) styles. (So do most standard and OER textbooks; e.g., Introduction to Sociology 2e by Open Stax)

Adapting this method to remixed OER can simplify the attribution process. By using the signal phrases used in scholarly citation, you can indicate a fuller attribution on a separate list of attributed works (traditionally known as a bibliography.)

For example, in the PHI 101 OER sample seen above, we can attribute it like so:
There is no historical doubt that Socrates was a real actual person who lived in Athens from 470 to 399 BC, and who was a well-known character in town. Tradition has it that in his youth he worked as a stonemason, did some stone sculpting, and even had a showing of his sculptures at one point. He eventually married a young woman, Xanthippe, who tradition tells us had had quite a reputation for shrewishness even from her early childhood (poor Xanthippe has gotten such bad press from tradition). They had at least two children, sons, one of whom (according to Plato's *Phaedo*) was young enough to be "on his mother's knee" when Socrates was in jail at age 69 or 70. (*Kerns*, n.d.)

Note that here the signal phrase links to the original web page of the source. On the bibliography page, you could list the attribution statement after the citation.


"Lecture: Who is Socrates? " by Dr Tom Kerns, North Seattle Community College is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0).
However, this is pretty cluttered and redundant. It will be simpler to use only the signal phrase as a listing element, followed by the attribution statement.

Kerns, Tom. "Lecture: Who is Socrates?" by Dr Tom Kerns, North Seattle Community College is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

As you can see, I have mashed up MLA citation with Creative Commons attribution to create something simpler, clearer, and respectful of CC licensing. As mentioned at the start of this section, this method is not common practice, but a proposed “work-around.”

Also note that I kept the attribution statement for the painting of Socrates in the caption. The common practice in publications – whether in newspaper, magazines, or books – has been to use the caption to provide proper credit to the creator or owner of the image. In OER there does not seem to be any reason to stray from this practice. However, because students with visual disabilities will use screen readers for online OER, I have placed the attribution in parentheses and preceded it with “image credit” to make clear the attribution is for the painting.

As noted earlier, screen readers read everything that is on the screen, so it is important to choose carefully how much information to provide it to read. The work-around I have created here might make listening to the screen reader annoying, as it announces every signal phrase, and could distract the student from learning. In that event, it might make more sense to use footnotes (provided a screen reader is set to read them), as described in the next section.

**Use Footnotes** (or Endnotes): Another time-tested approach scholars have used is citing sources with footnotes (or endnotes, if you prefer.) For OER we don’t have to worry about adhering to strict rules in, say, The Chicago Manual of Style. But in this example I will rely upon the Notes And Bibliography (NB) system for coherence and consistency. The NB system has been used traditionally to protect authors from plagiarism; for OER, we can use this system to respect the CC licenses of OER originators.

Here is the Socrates example (abbreviated, and without the Socrates painting, for which the caption attribution would remain the same), using the NB System.
They had at least two children, sons, one of whom (according to Plato's *Phaedo*) was young enough to be "on his mother's knee" when Socrates was in jail at age 69 or 70. ¹

Using superscripts may be the simplest and clearest way to incorporate attribution statements in remixed OER. Of course, we have been discussing text-based OER in these examples. In the following section we will look at how attributions can work in visual media, such as videos and images.

**Attributions in Remixed OER in Visual Media**

As we saw in the example of the Socrates painting, captions remain a reliable way to provide the creators or owners of an image proper credit, while also using CC license attributions. However, what about other forms of visual media, such as PowerPoint Presentations? Or using text and images in YouTube videos?

I should also caution here that images present intellectual property challenges. The Internet abounds in images that users have appropriated with little or no regard for their original creators (photographers, illustrators, cartoonists, etc.), stripping image credits and copyright notices from the original image file before altering and reposting. This can make it difficult to determine the original creator of an image you want to use. Similar problems arise with trademarked images (think Grumpy Cat) and likenesses (Kim Kardashian West). In the U.S., the debate over the power of copyright to limit freedom of expression (or vice-versa) is long, deep, and thorny. In most cases, artists and educators are protected by Fair Use exceptions that allow for creativity, teaching, and significant modification. Parsing those cases is beyond the scope of this discussion, but I recommend consulting your college librarian to determine how best to legally incorporate visual information/content under Fair Use.

Most open source images fall in the public domain, where all things past their copyright expiration date go to pasture. This means Monet’s water lily paintings are yours to do with what you see fit. Yet there are good reasons to attribute an open source image, such as our painting of Socrates. It is good scholarly communication (citing sources for readers to find on their own). And while Claude Monet has long ceased to exist, many creators of open source images are still thriving and have generously provided their work to the public to use. They deserve credit for their work.

¹ "Lecture: Who is Socrates? " by Dr Tom Kerns , North Seattle Community College is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
Let’s take a look at attributing sources in different visual media.

**Slide Presentations**: Presentation software such as PowerPoint provide instructors with creative ways to remix open resources. The slides themselves actually make it pretty easy to attribute those sources. Below see two slides using our Socrates example. In the first slide (Figure 3), the caption provides the attribution for the image, much as it would in a text-based document. On the second slide (Figure 4), I have taken only the essential information from Kern’s lecture and put them in bullet points. Nonetheless, I have given him proper credit using the same attribution statement I created with the OPEN Washington attribution builder.
Facts About Socrates

- lived in Athens 470 - 399 BC
- Stonecutter
- Married to Xanthippe
- Two children

Online Videos: Videos are a great way to provide lectures to students, and with the ability to directly export a PowerPoint Presentation to YouTube, a very easy way, too. Indeed, our slide presentation example above demonstrates a simple method of putting attribution statements into videos using remixed OER. If I were to turn my Socrates slide presentation into a video, the attribution statements are already included.

Captioning is one way. Another is to put the attribution statement at the end of the video. In this video by Creative Commons, at the 1:52 mark a slide states that “All images and music used to create this work were licensed under Creative Common licenses” (Figure 5). Afterwards subsequent slides list the originators alphabetically.

Another thing to keep in mind: When you upload a video to YouTube, you have the option of selecting the license type, one of which is a Creative Commons license. For good examples of this practice, take a look at the videos on the Open Oregon channel on YouTube. You can find the license statement in the “about” box under the video (Figure 6).
Conclusion

Creating OER learning tools by taking relevant pieces of content from several other OER sources and remixing them into a coherent whole is a great way to make affordable learning tools available to your students that resemble more closely your own pedagogy, as opposed to using a single OER source, or a traditional textbook where publishers make these pedagogical decisions for you and overcharge your
students for it. However, the task of remixing relevant OER resources into a single teaching material becomes more complicated by the fact that OER sources can have different types of Creative Commons (CC) licensing. Therefore, it is very important to keep track of the different Creative Commons licenses your original sources display. While keeping track of all the different CC licenses can be confusing, creating attribution statements for your remixed learning tools, once all the different CC licenses from the original sources have been accounted for, is very simple. For help in this area, consult the CC License Compatibility Chart.

Besides accounting for and abiding by all the different licenses used for your remixed learning tool, one has to keep in mind accessibility issues, specifically, how the placement of attributions within your remixed learning tool can affect the students’ experience using it. The presence of hyperlinks, non-friendly URL’s, and other non-syntactic text within your teaching materials’ content can affect greatly the overall user experience, especially when the student uses accessibility tools like screen readers. It is for this reason that I recommend listing attribution statements in places other than within the body of your learning tool’s content. Attribution statements can be included at the end of the document, linked to outside the learning tool in the syllabus, as an MLA or APA-style works cited or bibliography, or as footnotes or endnotes. Following the recommendations above will ensure your students will have an accessible and affordable learning tool that properly attributes and credits each of the sources contributing to your remixed learning tool.
References and Further Reading

