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Gold, Green, or Diamond: Which is Best?

Gold, Green, or Diamond: Which is Best?

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With the advent of open access publishing a new terminology has arisen to help people understand the various ways to get their works into print. What are these routes, how do they differ, and how do we decide among them? In the new parlance, these routes are being called “green,” “gold,” and “diamond.” But first, how did we get here?

OPEN ACCESS

The concept of [open access](#) is a direct result of the Internet. Open access means that anyone can read a published piece of work—or view, for example, piece of art online—free of any restrictions such as having to pay to view it and, often, without any restrictions on how that published piece of work may be used (provided it is acknowledged properly). When something is published open access, the copyright

to that piece of work belongs to the creator and they can allow anyone to see it and use it. This is very different from how things used to be in the pre-Internet age.

GOLD ROUTE

In the beginning, the only way that an academic piece of work could be published was in, what we now call, “hard copy” or print. The Internet age has necessitated the evolution new terminology. The term hard copy was only necessary to distinguish something from its electronic version, soft copy. To obtain hard copy of a publication, money had to change hands. Either the reader paid to obtain a copy or they obtained a copy through an organization, typically a library, which had paid the publisher to make the publication available to the public. Nevertheless, even though freely available, the publication could not be used as the reader or the library wished. For example, neither could copy the work and distribute by other means; the publisher usually held the copyright which restricted use and re-use of the publication. Following to the invention of the Internet and the recent appearance of open access, this has become known as the [gold route](#) to publication.

GREEN ROUTE

In parallel to the gold route to open access, the [green route](#) has evolved. Essentially, the green route is one whereby—legitimately—a version of a published article may be made available free to read and without the author paying for this without contravening publisher copyright. However, not every publisher permits green route to open access for their articles and when they do they are normally restrictions. It is common for publishers to impose an embargo period which can vary between 6 months to 2 years, depending on the subject matter of the journal. With very few exceptions authors are not permitted to make the final published version of their article available by the green route. The green route to

publication—free to authors and readers—is not “free,” of course. Online platforms for open access must be created and maintained and this is usually done by universities and research institutes creating online digital repositories.

DIAMOND ROUTE

The most recent invention in terminology related to open access is the [diamond route](#) (sometimes referred to as the [platinum route](#)) and, until now, I am sure that most readers have not encountered this method. Until I recently became involved with a journal that operates via the diamond route I also had not heard of it. The journal with which I am involved as an editor is the [WikiJournal of Medicine](#) and this is described as operating the diamond route because no money changes hands at any stage of the publication process. The author does not have to pay to make their article open access and the reader does not have to pay. Nevertheless, nothing is free and somewhere in this process the platform for open access and some other parts of the process are financed. In the case, or example, of the *WikiJournal of Medicine* the platform for the journal is Wikipedia and some financing is made available from the [Wikimedia Foundation](#). The list of diamond route open access journals is not big; in fact, only one appears to be listed under the [Alliance of Diamond Open Access Journals](#) (*WikiJournal of Medicine* not listed) but this is under the auspices of the [Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association](#) which includes some prestigious publishers.

CONCLUSION

I posed the question “Which is best?” in the title but this is a question to which there is no clear answer. If you can afford to pay then the gold route affords immediate, unrestricted open access to the final published article in a range of reputable journals; this could be the best—but it can cost thousands of dollars. Green route is open to most people and with the growth of compulsory open

access to publicly funded research in Europe and Australia, there has been a significant growth in university repositories. It is early days for diamond route access and many may confuse this with the massive growth in recent years of the [predatory publishers](#) who often appear to offer very cheap or free open access publishing. Diamond route yet has to become established as an acceptable way to publish. From my perspective as an editor-in-chief of a “traditional” pay-to-view journal (which does offer gold route), editor of an open access journal, and now an editor of a diamond route journal I can see room for all these models. I fully expect the diamond route to become more popular in the coming months and years. Witness, for example, the growth of [Wikipedia](#); often dismissed as an unreliable open source of evidence, it is now the largest encyclopaedia in the world.

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