

# Open Access needs terminology to distinguish between Gold OA funding models

by Blog Admin

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*Shedding further light on the wider open access debate, [Martin Eve](#) calls for a more precise terminology for the variety of Gold OA business models that currently exist to help correct the false assumption in many academics' minds that Gold OA necessarily requires an Article Processing Charge (APC).*



In the wake of the Finch report, one of the most frequent cries from academics, particularly at the early career phase, was one of despair. The endorsement of Gold OA meant, mostly to them, that they would have to budget for publication funds in their applications. In short, Gold meant gold; currency.

This is, of course, not what the terminology means in the traditional [Budapest initiative model](#). As Peter Suber puts it: "There are two primary vehicles for delivering OA to research articles, OA journals ("gold OA") and OA repositories ("green OA"). The chief difference between them is that OA journals conduct peer review and OA repositories do not. This difference explains many of the other differences between them, especially the costs of launching and operating them."

Furthermore:

*Some OA journal publishers [are] non-profit (e.g. Public Library of Science or PLoS) and some are for-profit (e.g. BioMed Central or BMC). OA journals pay their bills very much the way broadcast television and radio stations do: those with an interest in disseminating the content pay the production costs upfront so that access can be free of charge for everyone with the right equipment. Sometimes this means that journals have a subsidy from a university or professional society. Sometimes it means that journals charge a publication fee on accepted articles, to be paid by the author or the author's sponsor (employer, funding agency). OA journals that charge publication fees usually waive them in cases of economic hardship. OA journals with institutional subsidies tend to charge no publication fees. OA journals can get by on lower subsidies or fees if they have income from other publications, advertising, priced add-ons, or auxiliary services. Some institutions and consortia arrange fee discounts. Some OA publishers (such as BMC and PLoS) waive the fee for all researchers affiliated with institutions that have purchased an annual membership. A common misunderstanding is that all OA journals use an "author pays" business model. There are two mistakes here. The first is to assume that there is only one business model for OA journals, when there are many. The second is to assume that charging an upfront fee is an "author pays" model. In fact, most OA journals (70%) charge no author-side fees at all. Moreover, most conventional or non-OA journals (75%) do charge author-side fees. When OA journals do charge fees, the fees are often paid by author-sponsors (employers or funders) or waived, not paid by authors out of pocket.*

While the figures here are substantially shifting already, to qualify the vast range of business models, and therefore author impacts, subsumed under the category of Gold OA, it seems clear that new terminology is needed. At the moment, regardless of its formal correctness, in most academics' minds, Gold OA = author pays.

There has been a suggestion that "[Platinum OA](#)" could be the term used to fix this. The problem is, as [Steven Harnard](#) has pointed out, this terminology is situated at the wrong level in the typology. However, I

absolutely agree with [Jeffrey Beall](#) that “the distinction between gold (author-pays) and platinum open access is significant and the distinction between the two worth maintaining.”

What we need, then, is a terminology that makes this formal distinction. Ideally, for the typology to be consistent, a modifier is needed: Gold APC vs. Gold NON-APC. In reality, Platinum OA may more accurately break down, in the public academic consciousness, the assumptions about Article Processing Charges that now pervade the Gold model.

*Note: This article gives the views of the author(s), and not the position of the Impact of Social Sciences blog, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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