**ALTO Open CourseBook Background and Rationale**

**About this ALTO Open Course Book**

We have devised the Open Course Book format to represent and share our course learning resources. We have taken the open textbook format[[1]](#footnote-1) as a starting point (for the same reasons it is used in the USA, Africa and elsewhere) – simplicity and effectiveness and adapted it to allow us to easily publish our course content as OpenCourseWare, as pioneered by MIT and others[[2]](#footnote-2). Unlike MIT, we do not have access to sophisticated web publishing platforms[[3]](#footnote-3). In order to meet our needs, we have created this hybrid format that mixes an open textbook with OpenCourseWare, we call this an ‘Open Course Book’. Our aim is to keep things as simple as possible.

Our contact with open education projects around the world like the open textbook movement in the USA and OER Africa (<http://www.oerafrica.org/>) has taught us about the importance of designing our resources for easy delivery into very different learner contexts. Contact with teachers and students in our partner institutions has also been crucial in helping us to understand the real-life learning and teaching environments they work in. So, simplicity has become our guiding principle.

**Rationale**

Distributing our open course books in a PDF format along with an option to download all the original files has many benefits: PDF files can be read by nearly all personal computers, smart phones, and tablet devices. Not everyone has constant access to the internet all the time – even in the developed world, and of course some people will want to print the book to read and share. Including an option to download all the original files makes reuse and adaption by others easier. Our authors use a simple and consistent word processing template, to make it technically easier to create our learning resources – an approach we think is more likely to be sustainable in the long-term.

The broad aim of the ALTO project is the creation of Open Educational Resources (OERs) in art, design, media and related subjects for staff, students and lifelong learners in the UK and elsewhere. Engaging with OER creation and sharing presents challenges to our community where there is a strong tradition of studio-based practice and learning, often with individually negotiated learning outcomes. Traditional learning resources such as lecture notes etc. can be scarce in these subject areas, with the result that there can be ‘gaps’ when trying to create OERs along the lines pioneered by [OpenCourseware](http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm) at MIT and [OpenLearn](http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/) at the OU. This open course book is our response to these challenges, it gives us a relatively easy way to create and share representations of our courses for people outside our institutions, and where possible we use video, images, audio and text to describe the learning and teaching processes in our courses.

**Using this ALTO Open Course Textbook**

This ALTO open course book is intended to provide useful learning resources to independent learners and also to teachers of the subject. It gives an overview of the course and its structure as well as available learning resource content files, it is also presents an insight into how the subject is taught as well as the learning activities and processes that the students are involved in.

**Future**

We are developing a HTML5 version of this template in an easy to use authoring app, due for prototyping in late 2012.

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_textbook> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [http://en.wikipedia.orgWwiki/Open\_Courseware\_Consortium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Courseware_Consortium) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)