OSPO Explainer Transcript: What is an Open Source License?

URL:

Slide 1: Hello, and welcome to the Johns Hopkins University Open Source Programs Office Explainer Series, a collection of bite-sized videos tackling a variety of open-source essentials. New topics are added regularly, check out ospo.library.jhu.edu to see what's coming up, or drop us a line at ospo@jhu.edu to make a request. Today's explainer? What is an Open Source License?

Slide 2: Open-source software is software with publicly available source code that is licensed to allow use, inspection, modification, and distribution by anyone.

Source code is the human readable instructions that tell a computer what to do. Source code is written in a programming language, such as Python, Java, or C++.

Slide 3: The rights to use, inspect, distribute, and modify source code are granted by the open source license, an intellectual property license and legal agreement.

Slide 4: It's a common misconception that if you don't add a license to your code, then it's free for others to use. In fact, the opposite is true!

Slide 5: Copyright law in the United States grants you copyright protection for your code as soon as you create it. Others may not use your code without permission.

Sharing code on a platform with terms of service might grant certain rights, even without a separate license. For instance, GitHub's terms allow others to view and copy your code.

Slide 6: There are two primary types of open source licenses.

"Copyleft" or "reciprocal" licenses require users to release any modifications made to the software under the same license. Examples include the GPL and AGPL licenses.

"Permissive" licenses allow significant freedom to use the software for a variety of purposes, including within commercial products. Examples include the Apache, BSD, and MIT licenses.

Slide 7: It's not recommended to try and create your own open source license or use licenses that weren't intended for code, such as Creative Commons.

A good starting point for choosing an open source license is the website https://choosealicense.com.

A more complete list of open source licenses approved by the Open Source Initiative can be found via https://opensource.org.

Slide 8: Which license you choose depends on your project, and how you want others to be able to use, modify, and distribute your code.

- If you'd like as many people as possible to use your project, consider a permissive license.
- If it's more important to you that the code and any derivatives or modifications remain open source under the same terms, consider a reciprocal license.
- Is your project part of an existing community? It's often easier to stick with the license the community has already adopted.
- Check if your funder or publisher recommends a specific license.

Slide 9: If you'd like to restrict use of your code to non-commercial applications, consider licenses such as the Johns Hopkins University Academic Software License or the Business Source License (BUSL).

These licenses are considered "source-available," not open source.

Slide 10: Make sure that everyone looking at your code repository knows which license you chose. Follow the steps below or search the documentation for your version control platform for instructions. If you're using GitHub, you can add a known license file when creating a new repository.

- Create a license file named LICENSE or LICENSE.md and place it in the root director of your repository.
- Copy and paste the license text into your LICENSE file.
- Commit the new file to your repository and push the changes.

Slide 11: Still have questions? The OSPO has an extensive Licensing FAQ on its website: https://ospo.library.jhu.edu/licensing/ or you can reach out to ospo@jhu.edu to schedule a time to talk through your projects with an OSPO staff member.

Concepts like trademarks, copyrights, licenses, and patents are complex. Johns Hopkins Tech Ventures (JHTV) can provide specific legal guidance if needed: https://ventures.jhu.edu.

Slide 12: Questions about anything you've just learned? Get in touch with the OSPO at ospo@jhu.edu, or visit our website at ospo.library.jhu.edu.