What is a standard?

A standard is a set of rules on which people agree. An explanation of those rules is gathered into a document, called a specification. Different groups and companies then use the specification as a guide book for designing systems that support the standard, and can communicate with each other.

For example: Jane writes a sentence in English. John, who speaks English, wants to read it.

If John is to understand Jane’s sentence, it must respect rules of the English language:

- Each word must be separated by a space
- Words must be ordered from left to right on the page
- Sentences must appear beneath one another

Without these rules, Jane’s sentence would look to John like a random collection of letters, and he wouldn’t understand Jane’s intended meaning.

Technological standards serve the same purpose; they describe ways to consistently organise information so that it can be understood and used by multiple independent applications. Standards which are used for information storage are called ‘formats’, and those for transmitting it are called ‘protocols’.

By fixing the rules that apps use, and making them available to everyone, Open Standards provide cooperation and interoperability.
What are they?

Open Standards are the foundation of cooperation and modern society: train tracks, power sockets, and natural languages are all examples of specifications that we all rely on and take for granted. They are also crucial in the digital world.

Open Standards are technologies that are used and developed by individuals and organisations together.

The specifications of these technologies are freely available.

They can be implemented in any software, enabling interoperability and preventing lock-in.

Why are they important?

Many parts of our lives are digital:

- Documents
- Communication
- Artwork
- Photos
- Music
- Encryption

Our ability to use and enjoy the data we create should not be constrained, therefore the ways in which the information is stored must be shared, not kept secret and closed.

Closed standards are used to manipulate markets and allow companies to charge people large fees for accessing works which they have made.

To protect your documents, files and choice of communication, choose Open Standards.

What can I do?

- **Use** apps that use Open Standards. Your choices form a vote: are you for freedom or frustration? Stay compatible with friends in future.

- **Insist** on Open Standards: don’t let your government, university or employer push you into using locked down formats – explain to them why this is important.

- **Join** thousand of activists around the world to celebrate Open Standards and information accessibility every final Wednesday in March. Join in with Document Freedom Day

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