

The Field Guide to Spotting Enclosure

*Seven steps, seven questions. A pocket tool for seeing the
fence go up while the gate is still open.*

HOLD IN COMMON

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How to use this guide

Enclosure is the conversion of something shared into something privately owned, usually through paperwork rather than force, with ordinary people left paying the toll. It follows a consistent seven-step pattern. Once you can name the steps, you can see the pattern running on land, water, energy, food, seed, medicine, and knowledge.

This guide gives you, for each step, what it looks like in the wild and the one question that exposes it. Keep it handy. The next time a price climbs, a rule changes, or a familiar thing suddenly costs money, walk the seven questions. You will usually find a fence.

Step 1 **TARGET**

Someone notices a valuable thing that many people share and no one yet owns: a resource, a practice, a piece of common knowledge.

Ask: What did this used to be, before anyone owned it?

Step 2 **REFRAME**

The shared thing is recast as a problem: inefficient, unsafe, wasteful, doomed. Private ownership is offered as the cure.

Ask: Who is calling this a problem, and what are they selling as the fix?

Step 3 **ABSTRACT**

The living, messy thing is flattened into a standardized, countable unit: a parcel, a patent claim, a kilowatt-hour, a license.

Ask: What real thing is being turned into a number, and who does the counting?

Step 4 **TITLE**

Paperwork vests the units in a private owner: a deed, a patent, a contract, a terms-of-service you click through.

Ask: Whose name is on the paperwork now, and who wrote the rule?

Step 5 **INVERT**

The old custom is turned into an offense. What everyone did freely yesterday is, today, against the rules.

Ask: *What did people freely do yesterday that is now not allowed?*

Step 6 TOLL

A gate is placed between people and the thing they need, and a fee is charged to pass. The cost is pushed onto those least able to object.

Ask: *Who pays to pass, who collects, and who absorbs the cost out of sight?*

Step 7 NATURALIZE

The new arrangement is made to look permanent and normal, so the fence seems like it was always there.

Ask: *Are we being told this is just how it is, and who benefits from us forgetting it was ever different?*

The loop

Enclosure pays for itself. The rent collected at one fence funds the lawyers, lobbying, and the next reframe, so the pattern repeats on a new commons. That is why it is not history repeating, it is an algorithm iterating, faster each time.

The counter-move

An algorithm can be interrupted, and this one has a known inverse. Re-narrate (shared things can be governed well, and have been, for centuries). Re-legalize the custom (the right to repair, to save seed, to generate and share your own power). Title to the commons, not away from it (open licenses, cooperatives, community trusts, public-interest nonprofits). Cap or remove the toll (public options, co-ops, municipal utilities). And the simplest step of all: remember out loud, so the last instruction of the program, forgetting, can never finish.

What you can do this week

- > Walk the seven questions on one thing that has gotten more expensive or more restricted in your life.
- > Name it out loud to one other person. Naming the fence is how it stops being invisible.
- > Move one dollar toward an open alternative: a local producer, a cooperative, a public option, a commons project.
- > Share this guide. The counter-move runs on enough people paying attention at the same time.

This guide is free. If it was useful and you can, support the work at holdincommon.org so it can continue, and help seed a nonprofit dedicated to keeping the commons public.

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