

Editorial: Preprints and peer-reviewed journals

Preprints are a means of scholarly communication that have attracted special attention in relation to COVID-19 research (Fraser *et al.*, 2021; Brierley *et al.*, 2022; Puebla *et al.*, 2021). They allow researchers to share their findings and data at the point the research is completed, ahead of peer review. In the biomedical field, preprints are usually completed research, written up as a full paper that can be submitted to a journal. Most preprints do not change substantially between preprint and published version (Brierley *et al.*, 2022). But even before the pandemic, preprints have been defined as an important feature of modern scholarly communication in life sciences (Berg *et al.*, 2016).

Major motivations for the use of preprints are early discovery; free access; immediate feedback from the scientific community (Maggio *et al.*, 2018); increased citations and media mentions (Fraser *et al.*, 2020). Though it has changed during the pandemic, still the standard advice is that the press should not report on preprints, and institutions should not promote preprints to the press (Fox, 2020). Specialists in scholarly communication have also discussed issues concerning the potential risks related to this format: lack of longer-term financial sustainability of some preprint servers, jeopardizing the role of scientific journals in academia, risking the scientific integrity and soundness, erroneously claiming of authorship and stewardship, scooping of research, financial transparency and grant contracts, copyright ownership, intellectual property rights, public disclosures and patent applications, and journal and institutional policies conflicts (Chalepliglou and Koulouris, 2021). Still, many of these perceived risks are similar to issues with the existing journal system, and there is no current evidence that the situation will worsen with preprints: “In practice, these tendencies are mitigated by the powerful driving force of scientists to develop and maintain a good reputation within the scientific community. Reputation is the single most important factor for developing a sustained career in the sciences” (Preprint FAQ <https://asapbio.org/preprint-info/preprint-faq#qaef-643>).

Among the new trends related to preprints in life sciences are a growing number of preprint platforms operating under different models of ownership and governance (over 50 platforms); a closer integration of preprint servers with journal workflows; a continuous increase of papers posted as preprints and use of preprints in policy documents (Puebla *et al.*, 2021, Fraser *et al.*, 2021).

Though the vast majority of peer-reviewed journals in the life sciences encourage or allow preprints, it is always recommended that researchers check the journal’s publication policy prior to depositing their preprints, as the compatibility of publishing a preprint in a peer-reviewed journal could meet three types of restrictions: by the server type (for profit or non-for-profit, commercial or not), the paper version (posting of the revised manuscript) and the licence of preprint distribution (Chalepliglou and Koulouris, 2021).

Similar approach is applied by the journals from the Emerald Publishing (now part of the Cambridge Information Group). When you submit your article to us, we ask you to confirm that your work is original, previously unpublished and is not currently under submission elsewhere, with the exception of some preprints, conference papers and theses (Emerald Publishing policies <https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/publish-with-us/author-policies/pre-prints-conference-papers-policies>). If you have already uploaded your research to a non-commercial preprint server, you may still submit the article to an Emerald journal and we will not consider it as prior publication, provided you meet the following criteria: you



make it clear to the editor of the journal on submission that the work is already hosted on a preprint server and you have not assigned copyright or signed an exclusive licence when posting your work to a preprint server. Later, the existing preprint should be referenced in the Acknowledgements of the published article; this will be very helpful to our readers.

Last year, we had to decline to consider several potentially interesting submissions for publication in the *IJHG* as the authors did not confirm with this policy. To avoid running into such problems, we recommend our future authors before posting their work to a preprint server to consult with the journal's author guidelines. It is also advisable to consult with medical librarians as they "have a potential role in helping researchers . . . when they make decisions on how to communicate their work, and in reporting outputs for research assessment. They are also interested in contributing to open science and supporting new business models and community-based initiatives" (Puebla *et al.*, 2021). Librarians' advice could be also of value when you decide to deposit the post-print version of your paper in your institutional repository or relevant not-for-profit subject repository or post it on your private or corporate website (green open access).

The preprint landscape is constantly changing, so if, having read our policy, you still have an outstanding query about whether you can submit your paper, please contact us.

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Additional resources

ASAPbio (Accelerating Science and Publication in Biology), Preprint Server Directory, available at: <https://asapbio.org/preprint-servers>.

Avissar-Whiting, M. (2022), “Downstream retraction of preprinted research in the life and medical sciences”, *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 17 No. 5, e0267971, doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0267971](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0267971).

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