

Preprints: A primer from UKRN



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What are preprints?

A **preprint** is an early version of a scholarly article that has **not necessarily undergone peer review**. Updated versions of a preprint can include changes made by the author and that may have resulted from open or closed commenting, i.e. during the revision process. The preprint can be the same as the version of the work submitted to a journal. A preprint may not end up being submitted to a journal for publication.

A **preprint server** is an online service that allows authors to upload, describe and disseminate preprints. Most disseminate works as freely available **open access (OA)** files with no barriers to access. The servers commonly **do not charge fees** to either authors or readers for using their service. They may be supported by an institution and/or the user community, but there are examples of servers owned and operated by commercial companies.

Why would I use a preprint server?

Researchers use preprint servers for a variety of reasons:

- **High visibility** through OA can **increase readership and citation**, although authors should be mindful of potential non-expert interpretations of their pre-review findings (e.g., in medical disciplines).
- Preprinting establishes the **priority of new ideas** with publicly time stamped certification and registration. **Rapid dissemination** and **timely sharing** of research findings address the problem of delay between submission and publication. It is increasingly common for a preprint repository to be the 'go to' location to **discover new research**.
- Preprints on some servers are open to **comments and feedback** which can assist the author in **improving their manuscript** and may lead to **collaborations**. It is often possible to **track the versions** of a manuscript because the server retains previous versions. Some servers (e.g., PeerJ) use preprints for comments and/or open peer review.
- Most **journals will accept manuscripts** that have previously been disseminated on (usually not-for-profit) preprint servers (e.g., Royal Society of Chemistry journals): check journal permissions using [SHERPA/ROMEO](#). Some preprint servers automatically add a **link from the preprint to the published version** after publication.

Choose your server

Choose an appropriate preprint server for your discipline:

Server	Disciplines [host organisation]
arXiv arxiv.org	Physics, mathematics, computer science, quantitative biology, quantitative finance, statistics, electrical engineering, systems science economics [Cornell University]
bioRxiv biorxiv.org	Biology [CSH]
ChemRxiv chemrxiv.org	Chemistry [ACS , GDCh , RSC]
LawArXiv lawarxiv.info	Law [OSF]
medRxiv https://www.medrxiv.org/	Medicine and health sciences [CSH , BMJ , Yale]
PsyArXiv psyarxiv.com	Psychological sciences [COS]
SocArXiv osf.io/preprints/socarxiv	Social and behavioural sciences, arts and humanities, education, law [COS]
OSF Preprints osf.io/preprints	Interdisciplinary [COS]
PhilPapers philpapers.org	Philosophy [University of Western Ontario , PDC , IOP]
SSRN ssrn.com	Applied sciences, health sciences, humanities, life sciences, physical sciences, social sciences [Elsevier]
RePEc repec.org	Economics [various hosts]

How do I submit a preprint?

Consider your target journal

- Some journals offer **automatic preprint submission** (e.g., PLoS). For these journals simply follow the journal submission process.
- Some journals still consider preprint dissemination to be prior publication. You can check your target journal using [SHERPA/RoMEO](https://sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/).
- Some journals use **double-blind peer review**, in which case you should wait until after review to submit your preprint.

Specific instructions for the submission process will be found on the server's website, but the general process is outlined below.

Sign up

All the preprint servers listed above accept submissions only from **registered** authors. However, individual authors can freely register to a server using simple **sign-up** verification procedures (basically a verified email and a password). It is also advisable to register for a free [ORCID](https://orcid.org) so that the records in different servers (and possibly across different disciplines) can all be linked up, and searched, at the level of the same individual author.

Prepare and submit your manuscript

Some servers (e.g., arxiv.org) aim to store preprints in formats that are highly portable and stable over time (e.g., [TeX/LaTeX](https://www.latex-project.org/)). However, all servers listed above also accept manuscripts submitted as **PDFs**. In some servers (e.g., [bioRxiv.org](https://www.biorxiv.org)), authors can also directly upload a **Word** file and separate figure files to create a single PDF. There are usually no further formatting requirements for the PDF. However, preprints included in some servers (e.g. [RePEc.org](https://www.repec.org)) need to be prepared using the formats requested by the specific **working paper series** of the institution to which they have been submitted.

Each server has specific instructions for the **title and abstract**, to make them fully **searchable** and easy to circulate via announcements mailing lists, RSS feeds, Twitter, and other social media. Submitting authors must agree to the server's **terms and conditions**, which usually include granting the server a non-exclusive and irrevocable **license to distribute** the preprint. Some servers (e.g., [bioRxiv.org](https://www.biorxiv.org)) require authors to explicitly choose a category for their preprint (e.g. *New Results*, *Confirmatory Results*, or *Contradictory Results*).

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More information

- Bourne, Polka, Vale and Kiley (2017). **Ten simple rules to consider regarding preprint submission**. PLoS Computational Biology. 2017 May 4.
doi: [10.1371/journal.pcbi.1005473](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1005473)
- ASAPbio (2018) **Preprint licensing FAQ**. <https://asapbio.org/licensing-faq>

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