

# MOORE ABOUT.. PREPRINTS



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# PREPRINTS

## What are preprints?



Preprints are versions of a manuscript which are shared before peer review. This is common in disciplines across the physical sciences and offers a way for authors to get fast feedback from their peer community on both their ideas and their paper. This feedback can be incorporated into future drafts to improve the final paper. Preprints have been popular in the physical sciences for a number of years, first in paper and now digital form. In areas where information changes so rapidly, waiting for formal publication can delay the spread of ideas and preprints are used as a way to aid the rapid dissemination of research.

Preprints are hosted on dedicated preprint servers such as [arXiv](#), [ChemRxiv](#) or [engrXiv](#). These sites allow authors to upload their work and often provide other benefits such as assigning a DOI. There is no cost to the researcher for publishing a preprint and these outputs are often indexed by search engines. Because preprints are public so is their review. This helps to increase the transparency of the peer review process and encourage wider discussion within the discipline.

## Manuscript versions

There may be many different versions of a manuscript and this can lead to confusion about which one a researcher is allowed to share at different stages of the publication process.

- **Preprints** – the working draft of a manuscript which is shared with the community before submission for formal publication. The content of this version will differ from the author accepted manuscript.
- **Author accepted manuscript** – the version of the manuscript which a journal has agreed to publish. This manuscript will have been through peer review and is the version likely to be shared in an institutional or other repository under green open access.
- **Version of record** – the final version of the manuscript as produced by the publisher. It will be typeset and look like a journal article. There is no difference between the content of this and the author accepted manuscript. Researchers may not be able to share this version due to copyright restrictions.

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## Benefits of preprints

### Preprints as an author

Sharing draft versions of work on a preprint server can have a number of benefits for authors. It allows them to showcase their ideas to the community and obtain useful feedback from their peers. They can use this to improve the paper so that there is less to pick up on when it is submitted for formal peer review and publication. Using a preprint server can also help to date stamp a piece of research which can help to protect against plagiarism. Preprints are often a great way to share the outcome of research that may not be published any other way. For example, many researchers and journals are reluctant to publish negative results but these can be very valuable for others working on similar topics.



Some researchers worry that publishers will not accept outputs which have been shared on preprint servers. In many disciplines across the physical sciences, use of preprint servers is long established, and publishers will understand why authors have shared their work in this way. It may also help them to evaluate the work and the potential reaction to a finished paper. If researchers are thinking about using a preprint server it is always a good idea to check the policy of the journal they are aiming to submit to in the future to make sure there are no conflicts around publication and licensing.

### Preprints as a reader

Preprints offer a lot of advantages for researchers wanting to find information. They offer a useful way to see the latest research outputs on a topic without having to wait for the traditional publication process. This can be helpful for spotting trends or learning about the developing arguments on a topic. However, readers should remember that preprints have not been formally reviewed and so could contain mistakes and other issues and should be treated with appropriate caution. If a preprint is a few months old it's a good idea to search for a published version which will be authoritative.

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## Academic social networks and preprints



Many researchers use sites such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu to share news and updates on their projects. These sites were originally developed as a way for researchers to connect with people interested in their work and find potential collaborators but this has evolved over the years to include sharing research outputs.

Any researcher using these sites should be aware that they are commercial social networking sites not open access repositories or preprint servers. They do not meet the conditions for access and preservation and sharing versions of your work may violate copyrights. The best advice for sharing outputs on these sites is to always link to a legal online version of the work.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Preprints can have lots of benefits for researchers when it comes to sharing and accessing the latest research. Find out more about preprints at the links below:

- [What Are Preprints?](#)  
Short video from iBiology explaining preprint servers and their background.
- [Open Research Handbook: Preprints](#)  
Excellent introduction to the essentials of preprints including 5 reasons to publish.
- [What is the Author Accepted Manuscript \(AAM\)?](#)  
Easy to understand graphic illustrating the different versions of a manuscript.
- [Sherpa Romeo](#)  
Check publisher open access and self-archiving policies with this handy database.
- [arXiv.org](#)  
Preprint server with articles from physical science disciplines.

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