Open Scholarship at the University of Melbourne

Preprints

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# Introduction

Welcome to this video on preprints.

In this video, we'll look at what preprints are, the benefits preprint sharing offers, and the role of preprint servers. We will also consider how publisher policies deal with preprints, and how they're viewed by the ARC and NHMRC, our two major Commonwealth grant funders.

Let's begin...

# What are Preprints?

To understand what preprints are, it's helpful to consider where they fit in the research publication process.

Imagine a simplified submission and publication workflow for a traditional journal article. First, the researcher writes a manuscript and submits it to the journal where it undergoes editorial and peer review. If it's accepted, and perhaps revised, it will eventually be published. This process, however, could take many months.

Preprint sharing offers an alternative.

Today, a researcher may decide to upload their manuscript to a preprint server, where it could be accessed by the public in a matter of hours or days, depending on vetting processes. This can be done before, alongside, or after submission to a journal.

Once available on the preprint server, the manuscript, now a preprint, will be open to community review.

Preprints are thus early versions of research papers that have not yet been peer reviewed. They're typically shared openly on preprint servers, where they may use open licences.

# Why Share Preprints?

If you're a researcher, there are many benefits to sharing your work as preprints.

You'll be providing free and open access to your early work, rapidly disseminating your findings.

This allows your findings to get into the hands of policy makers, practitioners, other researchers, and the general public much faster.

In doing so, you can establish your area of research early on.

This, in turn, might allow you to connect with potential collaborators working in the same field who come across your work in preprint form.

Another benefit to sharing preprints is that you might receive feedback on your work prior to formal peer review, allowing you to undertake revisions.

Sharing and inviting scrutiny of your early work, and being open to undertaking revisions, also means greater transparency of how your paper develops.

Finally, sharing preprints means that you can point to your early work in job and grant applications -you don't have to wait until they have been accepted and published in a journal.

# Rapid Growth in Preprints

Recent years have seen a significant growth in the sharing of preprints.

As [data from ASAP bio shows](APAPbio.%20https:/asapbio.org/preprint-info/biology-preprints-over-time), the number of biomedical preprints being shared each month has been increasing rapidly since the mid-2010s.

2020 saw a massive increase in preprint sharing driven by COVID-19 research, which in turn led to a wider awareness of preprints and the role they play in research.

# Publisher Policies

Historically, there has been some nervousness around sharing preprints, with concern that having an early version of the paper freely available online would impact publication prospects.

But this is no longer the case, and most academic publishers and journals welcome the submission of manuscripts that are already available as preprints. Journals usually only require that the authors provide details of the preprint upon submission, that the preprint has not undergone formal peer review elsewhere, and that the preprint record will be updated to link to the published version, preferably by DOI.

Most publishers will also allow submitted manuscripts to be shared at any time on preprint servers, but it's always worthwhile checking publishers' preprint policies prior to submission or deposit, as certain open licences may be discouraged.

# Commonwealth Research Grants and Preprints

Finally, let's consider how Commonwealth research grant providers view preprints, which has been the focus of some attention in recent years.

In 2021, the Australian Research Council (ARC) rejected 32 grant applications for citing preprints. After widespread backlash, they adopted a new position allowing the referencing and inclusion of preprints in any part of a National Competitive Grant Programme Grant Application. See: ARC. Adjustments to the ARC’s position on preprints. 14 September 2021. <https://www.arc.gov.au/news-publications/media/communiques/adjustments-arcs-position-preprints>

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) will likewise accept preprints as publications for track record assessment in grant schemes. See: NHMRC. Publication assessment in track record. <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/node/7855>

It's worth noting that the ARC and NHMRC open access policies do not apply to preprints - there is no obligation on researchers to make preprints available or use any particular licence when sharing them.

# Preprint Servers

Here are just a few of the more commonly used preprint servers, both discipline-specific ones and general multi-disciplinary ones:

***Science & Medicine***

arxiv.org

medRxiv

bioRxiv

PsyArXiv

ChemRxiv

Earth ArXiv

***Business & Economics***

RePEc EconPapers

arXiv.org

***Humanities***

Soc ArXiv

EdArXiv

Humanities Commons

***General / Multidisciplinary***

Research Square

SSRN (Social Science Research Network)

OSF Preprints

Zenodo

ArXiv.org is one of the longest-running preprint servers and specialises in scientific disciplines, particularly physics and mathematics. It has numerous descendents, including bioRxiv and medRxiv.

Although often associated with STEMM disciplines, there are also preprint servers in other fields, such as RePEc EconPapers in business and economics, and Soc ArXiv and EdArXiv in the humanities.

Prominent general preprint repositories include Research Square, SSRN, OSF Preprints, and Zenodo.

# Example Preprint in bioRxiv: [“Using long-read sequencing to detect imprinted DNA methylation”](https://doi.org/10.1101/445924)

Here's an example of a preprint on bioRxiv. Using this record, we can identify some of the features of a quality preprint server.

First, it's clearly stated that the paper has not been formally peer reviewed, and the record has been timestamped with when the preprint was posted.

The server has created a DOI (digital object identifier) for the preprint to enable easy sharing and citing.

It also links out to the final published version of the paper.

In the record's Info/History tab, we see that the platform supports version tracking and archiving, and indeed we can view an earlier version of the paper.

Finally, a clear copyright statement displays the author's chosen licence - in this case, a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives (CC BY-NC-ND) 4.0 International licence.

# Outro

Thank you for joining us for this video on preprints.

If you'd like to find out more about this topic, you can visit our [Open Research guide](https://unimelb.libguides.com/openresearch/) or [Open Scholarship website](https://library.unimelb.edu.au/open-scholarship/).

And if you have any questions, please feel free to contact your faculty or subject liaison librarian, or reach out to the Scholarly Communications team.

# Contact a librarian

For enquiries relating to open scholarship, including open access, open research, and open educational resources (OERs), please email your discipline's [Liaison Librarians](https://library.unimelb.edu.au/liaison), or arrange a time to [consult a librarian](https://unimelb.service-now.com/student?id=sc_cat_item&sys_id=6398b1e1dbc763c00032cae43a961971&category_id=2768ae9d4fae22807861a90f0310c7f0).

Alternatively, you can [contact the library](https://library.unimelb.edu.au/contact_the_library) by emailing [library-enquiries@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:library-enquiries@unimelb.edu.au).