

Charting the Dimensions of Preprint Policies



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The growing practice of **preprinting** (that is, publicly sharing manuscripts via online servers prior to the completion of journal-organized peer review) is accelerating the dissemination of scholarly research in many fields. While multiple factors contribute to researchers' comfort levels with the practice, journal policies influence many authors' decision to submit a preprint (Figure 1).

Fortunately, many journals are now changing their policies to allow or even encourage preprint posting, but navigating journal websites to find this information can be difficult and time-consuming. The [SHERPA/RoMEO](#) database provides a fantastic way for authors to rapidly check whether a particular journal allows preprint

archiving. However, policies themselves are often much more complex than their representation in SHERPA/RoMEO, including clauses about versions of the manuscript that may be posted, acceptable servers, licenses that can be applied to preprints, and what media coverage is acceptable. In the following sections, we provide a sampling of the variation among journals (emphasis ours).

Version of Preprint That Can Be Posted

- At the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, “no revisions should be posted to the preprint server during the manuscript’s peer review process.” ([JCO Journal Policies](#))
- “Posting a manuscript to a preprint server while under consideration for *eNeuro* is allowed up until the point of acceptance.” ([eNeuro General Information for Authors](#))

Types of Servers That Can Be Used

- The Royal Society of Chemistry journals allow deposition with “**non-commercial repositories**” such as ArXiv and ChemRxiv. ([RSC Processes and Policies](#))
- *Development* “supports authors who wish to post primary research manuscripts on **community preprint servers** such as bioRxiv.” ([Development Journal Policies](#))

If a subset of journals do not accept work that has appeared as a preprint, is this a significant disincentive for you to submit a preprint?

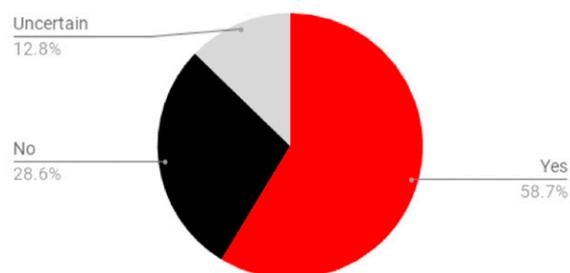


Figure 1. Survey question regarding influence of journal policies on authors' preprint behavior. Survey conducted in early 2016 with 392 responses. More details at asapbio.org/survey.

- *Biophysical Journal* “will consider for publication manuscripts that have been posted informally **on a private website or on arXiv or bioRxiv**, but will **not** consider manuscripts that have been posted on other preprint servers or ‘virtual journal’ websites.” ([BJ Author Guidelines \[PDF\]](#))

Preprint Licensing Policy

- The Institute of Physics say that authors may post the preprint, provided that “[i]t is **not** made available under any open access or Creative Commons Licence.” ([IOP Publishing Support](#))
- With *FASEB Journal*, preprint “submissions posted to preprint servers with an open access license [Creative Commons licenses] are allowed, but authors will be required—without exception—to pay the Journal’s open access fee as a condition of acceptance.” ([FASEB Journal Editorial Policies](#))

The vast majority of journals place no restrictions on preprint licenses, and some journals (e.g., *PLOS ONE*) select a CC BY license for users posting to bioRxiv via the journal. See ASAPbio’s [FAQ on preprint licensing](#) for more information.

Community Feedback Policy (Will Comments on the Preprint Be Considered by Editors?)

- *FASEB Journal* “reserves the right—but is not obligated—to consider the comments made to manuscripts posted to preprint servers and factor these comments into final decisions at any stage of the peer review process.” ([FASEB Journal Editorial Policies](#))
- At *eLife*, “Editors will primarily base their decision on the content of your submission, but public feedback on the work (positive or negative) might be taken into account. If a full submission is invited, you are advised to be open about the existence of such feedback in your cover letter.” ([eLife Author Instructions](#))
- “PLOS encourages editors to consider comments and feedback available on the preprint record to inform their editorial decision, and where relevant, editors may incorporate those comments in their editorial feedback to authors.” ([PLOS ONE “Preprints” page](#))

Most journals do not list any such policy.

Preprint Citation Policy

- In the example references they provide, *Nucleic Acids Research* includes the wording “pre-print: not

peer-reviewed” at the end of a sample preprint reference listed. ([NAR “Preparing Your Manuscript”](#))

- For Nature Research journals, “Preprints may be cited in the reference list.” ([Nature Research journals’ policies on preprints and conference proceedings](#))

Many journals do not list a formal policy.

Does the Journal Link to the Preprint Version?

- “Now, to document and help readers trace the complete publication record, authors are invited to voluntarily provide a footnote for their [*Biophysical Journal*] article referencing their preprint in bioRxiv or arXiv, including the DOI number and the date the initial manuscript was deposited.” ([BJ editorial on changes as of 2017](#))
- “If a manuscript with a concurrent bioRxiv preprint is accepted for publication in *PLOS ONE*, the preprint and published article will link to each other when the article appears online.” ([PLOS ONE “Preprints” page](#))

Most journals do not list any such policy.

Media Coverage of Preprints

- The Royal Society journals say they “employ a strict embargo policy where the reporting of a scientific article published in one of our journals by the media is embargoed until the day of publication. The media should not report on a preprint or postprint article if it is under consideration or accepted for publication by one of our journals until the day of official publication.” ([Royal Society “Preprints, Postprints and Embargoes” policy](#))
- “PLOS does not embargo work that has been made available as a preprint. Authors may address questions about the preprint from the media before publication in *PLOS Medicine* but are asked to stress that the work is undergoing peer review and may change as a result. Authors should not disclose the journal where the work is under consideration until the work has been accepted for publication and assigned a publication date. We advise authors and institutions against seeking publicity and press coverage at the preprint stage. Conclusions may be toned down as the result of peer review and premature coverage may inaccurately reflect findings. In addition, while prior publicity in the media will not affect decisions to publish work in a PLOS journal, it may affect decisions to publish in another journal. We recommend that authors and institutions distribute press releases for work posted as a

preprint at or after the time of publication of the article.” (*PLOS Medicine* “Press and Media” page)

- “Authors of papers under consideration at *Development* who have posted their paper to a preprint server are welcome to engage in community discussion about their paper (through commenting on the preprint server or, for example, the Company’s preprint highlighting service preLights). Preprinted articles accepted for publication in *Development* can still be highlighted through press releases, but can not be subject to press embargo.” (*Development Journal Policies*)

Scooping Protection Policy

- “Scooping Protection has now been extended to also apply from the day of posting a manuscript on a recognized preprint server in the same form as the manuscript submitted to *The EMBO Journal*, provided the manuscript is submitted to the journal within 4 months of posting.” (*EMBO Journal Author Guidelines*)

Most journals do not list any such policy.

The above examples paint a complicated picture, but the exercise of structuring this information permits the survey,

quantification, and comparison of the full range of policies in each specific area, offering benefits to many stakeholders.

Editors and publishers can use structured policy information to survey and compare the approaches of journals in their own subfield, gain inspiration for establishing or revising their instructions to authors, and unify the policies across their own journals. The exercise may also bring to light common policy categories and help to highlight considerations more at the fringe of what an author would otherwise be aware of (for example, scooping protection).

For the reasons outlined above and in Figure 2, we want to see this kind of information available and easily searchable for every journal. Toward that end, we collaborated with others to initiate **TRANSPOSE**, a grassroots effort to build a database of journal policies in these and other areas, including policies on co-reviewers and which elements of the peer-review process are open to public evaluation. The current state of collected policies on preprints can be seen on an ASAPbio-hosted **TRANSPOSE preprint policy records page** (note that some rare policy columns are hidden by default). We plan to make these easy to search, so that confusion around journal policies is no longer a barrier to preprinting. And to make policies easier for authors to understand and comply with, we plan to develop a resource of suggested wording or model preprint policies that editors

Who needs a database of detailed preprint policies?



As an author, I want to quickly check the list of preprint servers approved across journals so that I do not waste time submitting to a journal where my preprint posting would go against a journal’s restrictive prior publication policy.



As a journalist, I want authors to know the media coverage policy for preprints for journals they’ve submitted to so that I can write about preprints without causing a paper to be rejected.



As a librarian, I want an easy way to look up journal policies across publishers and fields so that I can better advise researchers.



As a preprint server administrator, I want to know preprint policies across journals so that I can be a reliable resource to researchers asking which journals they can submit to.



As an institutional administrator trying to promote open science, I want to know the journals that allow preprints so that I can include them in a list for my researchers.



As an advocate, I want to know journal policies across fields so that I can monitor the adoption of certain policies over time.

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transpose-publishing.github.io 

Figure 2. Rationale for an easily searchable database of journal policies on peer review and preprinting.

can use or adapt to keep their own practices on the cutting edge.

Anyone can contribute to expand the TRANSPOSE database and help researchers make quick yet informed decisions about the submission of their manuscript. Please feel free to add your own journal's policies to the

[crowdsourced data form](#). If you are interested in developing your journal's preprinting policies, please email us at transpose-publishing@googlegroups.com. We also welcome feedback on the project and suggestions for how to share the information in a way that would be useful to you.

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