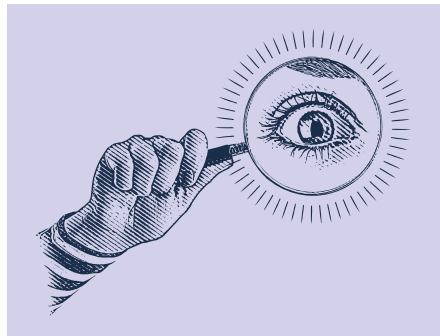


# Post a preprint of your next research paper



**Fewer than one in ten research articles are posted as preprints. Yet sharing research on public repositories comes with many advantages and few caveats. At *Nature Human Behaviour*, we encourage researchers to embrace preprints to jumpstart the communication of research findings.**



**W**e – along with all other Nature Portfolio journals – encourage the posting of preprints for research articles, as we believe that they have a functional role in the science ecosystem and can benefit both researchers and the public. Yet, fewer than 10% of the research articles published in *Nature Human Behaviour* in 2022 had a preprint associated with them.

Preprints are preliminary versions of manuscripts that are posted on public servers before peer review and publication in academic journals. They are freely available to the scientific community and part of a permanent record, being citable with their own unique digital object identifier (DOI) and indexed by Google Scholar and Altmetric. The practice of sharing research findings via preprints began in 1991 with [arXiv](#), gained popularity in the 2010s with the introduction of new digital archives (for example, [bioRxiv](#) in 2013, and [PsyArXiv](#) in 2016) and surged during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>. However, a 2021 study (posted as a preprint) found that – despite an exponential rise over the past 30 years – preprints across disciplines and preprint servers accounted for only 4% of research papers<sup>2</sup>.

Preprints bring substantial value to the scientific enterprise. According to [two opinion pieces](#) from a recent multi-author feature article on the future of academic publishing, published in our pages, preprints alleviate many of the current systemic issues in academic publishing (including publication delay and bias, access inequality and predatory journals), and in some laboratories they already constitute the substance of day-to-day academic discourse<sup>3</sup>.

From the perspective of the researcher, preprints present several opportunities and benefits – especially for early-career researchers (ECRs)<sup>4</sup>. They increase the speed of research dissemination (a marker of academic productivity). They also enable researchers to gain early feedback on their work, create a more equitable and diverse [forum for open discussion](#), and promote collaboration among early-career researchers<sup>5</sup>.

Most importantly, preprints increase the visibility (including to editors and journals) and accessibility of the research. According to a recent meta-analysis<sup>6</sup>, published papers that are first posted as preprints have higher Altmetric scores and [receive more citations](#) for at least three years after journal publication<sup>7</sup>. From the perspective of the editor, scouting on preprint servers can be a way of keeping up with the most recent trends and cutting-edge research, and discovering new potential authors from underrepresented countries or backgrounds. This is something we regularly do as a journal team.

We recognize that the use (or misuse) of preprints can have potentially serious downsides, which include the spread of misinformation (poor-quality, premature work being taken as conclusive evidence), ‘[scooping](#)’, and increased stress and anxiety for researchers (for example, based on the fear of receiving negative comments publicly without the benefit of confidential peer review). Although concerns around these downsides are understandable, there are [mechanisms to mitigate](#) them. For example, many preprint servers include a disclaimer about the fact that preprints have not been peer reviewed,

and more and more authors include the disclaimer in their preprints. And public commenting by experts can inform readers about the level of scrutiny that the posted research has received<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, posting a preprint does not appear to lead to widespread scooping<sup>9</sup>. Overall, we feel that in the current landscape, these potential concerns do not outweigh the benefits that preprints can bring.

Yet, perhaps partly because of these concerns, preprints have become more popular in certain fields than in others<sup>10</sup>. This is also our experience as editors: we see more preprints in areas such as genetics, neuroscience and psychology than we do in public health and political science. Regardless of the specific discipline, it is clear that there is potential for a substantial increase in the number of preprints, as popularity grows and new preprint servers continue to appear.

In fact, if funders answer [calls to mandate preprint posting before peer review](#)<sup>11</sup>, it is likely that preprints will have an increasingly prominent role in scientific publishing. Preprints are not a threat to peer-reviewed journals, but rather serve a complementary function. Where preprint servers provide an accessible way to share and highlight findings quickly, journals provide much needed quality control through the editorial and peer-review process. Preprints and journals can work in synergy to [complement and support each other](#). At *Nature Human Behaviour*, we welcome and encourage researchers across all the fields that we cover to take advantage of this opportunity.

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