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Preprints and Postprints: Tools for Expanding Research Visibility[1]

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Introduction

In today's fast-paced research environment, timely examination of research findings is essential for advancing knowledge and supporting evidence-based decision-making. Many researchers find that preprints and postprints are excellent tools to share work early and increase accessibility and the potential impact of the paper later on. This guide explains how preprints and postprints fit within the publishing process and provides information for researchers who want to learn how to use these tools to help their work have a greater impact.

This guide contains a practical overview tailored to the land-grant research community, but researchers beyond these institutions may also find the discussed tools helpful.

Purpose

This publication aims to clarify what preprints and postprints are and how they can be used efficiently and appropriately.

Target Audience

This publication's primary audience consists of the following.

- University faculty, graduate students, and researchers.
- Extension professionals seeking to understand open access options.
- Research administrators and librarians supporting scholarly communication.

Relevance to Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Land-Grant Institutions

Land-grant institutions are leaders in agricultural and natural resources research. Disseminating research findings quickly and widely is critical for affecting practice, influencing policy, meeting funding mandates, sharing findings with stakeholders, and more.

What Are Preprints and Postprints?

Published journal articles often exist in multiple forms and versions before final publication. *Preprints* are early versions of these manuscripts that have not yet undergone peer review. Authors often post these drafts publicly online to increase visibility. In contrast, postprints are the peer-reviewed versions that have been edited but have not received journal formatting. Readers may find preprints or postprints on platforms such as AgriRxiv or arXiv. Platforms like these make papers easily viewable. Authors may choose to post their work on these and other websites to ensure their work is widely available so they can receive early feedback for future revisions. In some cases, funders require these papers to be published in a preprint.

In the case of Extension work and sponsor-funded investigations, researchers sometimes post their work so that stakeholders (such as farmers, Extension agents, professionals, and policymakers) can view and apply their research without needing to pay journal fees. In cases like these, research findings can be made easily accessible and actionable in a much faster way than going through a lengthy journal publication process. These practices are part of the broader open access movement, which encourages the sharing of research with minimal barriers to public access.

Definitions (Adapted from NISO/ALPSP JAV Technical Working Group, 2008)

- **Preprint**: The version of a scholarly work *before peer review*, typically the original manuscript submitted to a journal.

- **Postprint (Author Accepted Manuscript)**: The version *after peer review* but *before journal formatting*, incorporating reviewer feedback.
- **Version of Record**: The final published version, formatted and typeset by the journal.
- **Embargo Period**: A time delay set by publishers before authors may publicly share postprints (NISO/ALPSP JAV Technical Working Group, 2008).

Benefits of Using Preprints and Postprints

Preprints and postprints provide key benefits to researchers and stakeholders. They allow for faster dissemination of findings, helping authors to share results months or even years before formal journal publication. This can quickly impact future project rollouts and influence timely decision-making. This speed helps stakeholders such as farmers, Extension agents, professionals, and policymakers put the knowledge to use before the journal publication. This is important because the research will typically come with an embargo period after submission to a journal, and thus prevent accessibility to the wider academic community.

Preprints and postprints can also contribute to increased visibility and citations when deposited in open access repositories. These repositories make research freely available online, while academic search engines, such as Google Scholar, can index these manuscripts and make them easier for researchers and the public to discover. Persistent identifiers, such as digital object identifiers (DOI), make preprints citable and ensure they remain accessible in the scholarly record.

The final benefit is funder compliance, because many grants now have requirements regarding the open dissemination of results. Many research funders, such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF), and international organizations such as Horizon Europe now require that results from publicly funded research be made public and openly accessible within a reasonable time frame. Altogether, these benefits make preprints and postprints powerful tools for ensuring access, credibility, and influence of research (NIH, 2008).

Legal and Policy Considerations

It can be difficult to navigate the legal landscape of preprints and postprints. If researchers post a version of their work that is found to be in violation of a publisher's copyright agreement, there can be takedown requests or even withdrawals of the manuscript for publication. In extreme cases, limits might be placed on an author's ability to publish in the future. Because of these risks, it is very important to avoid violations of copyright and journal policies. Below are a few examples that may be relevant to land-grant university researchers.

Publisher Self-Archiving Policies

A self-archiving policy is the publisher's set of rules about how, when, and why authors can share versions of their articles outside of the journal's website. Some journals allow uploads of preprints and postprints. Depending on the journal, there may be an ability to share the article after an embargo period. Prior to uploading a preprint or postprint, a review of the journal's self-archiving policy is recommended.

To help researchers navigate these rules and find information on a journal's policy, the Jisc's Open Policy Finder (formerly SHERPA/RoMEO) can be an extremely useful database. This database summarizes the self-archiving policies for thousands of journals and publishers and is a go-to resource for many attempting to determine which journal is right for them. Search the journal's title to find whether preprints and postprints can be shared or posted, and what the embargo agreement stipulates (Jisc, n.d.).

Example: A UF/IFAS researcher wants to submit work to Elsevier's *Agricultural Systems* journal. They find out that the publisher *does* permit the posting of the accepted manuscript (i.e., the postprint) after a 12-month embargo in an institutional repository (Elsevier, 2025).

Embargo Periods

Many journals allow postprint archiving only *after* the embargo period (typically around 6 to 12 months). As stated above, violating journal rules may result in takedown requests and legal repercussions involving an author's ability to publish in the future.

Preprint Disclosure during Submission

Many journals require the author to disclose if a preprint of the manuscript already exists, especially if it is hosted somewhere easily accessible such as AgriRxiv or arXiv.

Consent and Institutional Guidelines

A researcher submitting to a journal must confirm the approval of all co-authors to post a preprint or postprint.

This ensures that every author is comfortable sharing an early or accepted version of the work.

Some journals may post a preprint or postprint themselves within their own repositories. In this case, it is still recommended to confirm with all authors on the paper that everyone is comfortable and has given consent. It is also recommended that co-authors review the journal's guidelines and policies.

Licensing Considerations

Many repositories allow the submitting author to select a license (e.g., CC BY; CC BY-NC). These licenses typically determine how others can utilize, share, or build on your work. One such example is the CC BY license, which permits anyone to reuse your work as long as they give you proper credit. A CC BY-NC license, by contrast, allows most to reuse your work as long as it is not for commercial purposes.

Selecting a Repository for Preprints and Postprints

Selecting the appropriate repository is crucial in the responsible sharing of manuscripts. Researchers should identify a repository that matches the discipline(s) of the manuscript.

Recommended Tools for Finding Repositories

1. One of the most commonly used resources is the Registry of Research Data Repositories, which includes over 3,000 repositories by discipline. Researchers can filter by subject area (e.g., agricultural sciences, environmental sciences, etc.), data type, country, and repository type.
2. Another widely used resource is the Directory of Open Access Repositories. This resource is managed by Jisc (a UK nonprofit organization that provides digital solutions and infrastructure for higher education and research), and it hosts a wide variety of open access repositories. It is especially useful for finding the right place to submit a manuscript within the open access principles (i.e., research outputs should be made freely available online with minimal restrictions on reuse and redistribution).

Best Practices

In ensuring ethical and effective dissemination of research through preprints and postprints, researchers should follow a basic set of guidelines prior to making any decisions about preprints and postprints. Authors are encouraged to review the guidelines set by leading organizations such as the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), which discuss in detail how authors can publish ethically and legally. Note that the author should always verify the self-archiving policies of the target journal using reliable tools such as Jisc's Open Policy Finder as well as the journal's website itself. While Jisc's Open Policy Finder is often correct in its summaries, it is no replacement for reviewing the actual journal's policies.

Oftentimes, options such as one's institution or trusted disciplinary repositories can yield better long-term visibility for the author. It is also essential to label the versions as "preprints" or "author accepted manuscripts," which are different from the final published versions. Researchers should also include a clear version history as well as a label that the paper has not undergone peer review and may be subject to change.

The American Psychological Association's internet posting guidelines suggest authors can distribute or post unpublished manuscripts online prior to formal publication with some stipulations. APA indicates that these prepublication versions must be clearly labeled and appropriately linked to the final published work once available. This does mean going back and relabeling the prepublication version once the actual journal article is released. Properly adhering to practices of transparency and version control reinforces the idea that preprints are ethical and can be legally shared.

As mentioned above, consent from co-authors is also key. For a preprint, postprint, or the actual journal article itself, it is important to obtain all co-authors' consent prior to submission.

Lastly, ethical transparency is crucial when sharing manuscripts. Researchers should disclose any potential conflicts of interest that could influence how their findings are interpreted. They should also follow ethical standards regarding authorship, data sharing, and research integrity.

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