



Letter to the editor

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Most Preprint Servers Allow the Publication of Opinion Papers

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Abstract: Preprints are not only a raw form of research presentation, but also increasingly used as a gateway of entry into peer-reviewed journals. Several preprint servers are in existence, and some serve specific thematic groups or specialties, while others have a broader thematic scope. In this letter, we examined 36 preprint servers in March of 2023, noting that the majority (27/36 or 75%) accept opinion papers, two have an unclear, unstated, or unknown set of policies, while seven, including some of the most popular (biorXiv, medRxiv, Research Square), do not explicitly accommodate opinion papers. We opine that it would be in the interests of those preprint servers that do not publish opinion papers or evidence-based opinion papers to modify their scope of manuscript types in order to expand their user base and attract more participating scientists, but also to provide a more holistic set of scientific publishing objectives that accommodates a wider and more inclusive range of views.

Keywords: peer-reviewed journals, predatory publishing, reliable evidence, risks

Dear *Open Information Science* Editors,

An open and liberal debate between and among academics can only take place when there exists a platform for the expression of ideas in the form of opinions, but these might be limited or suppressed, especially if they are controversial.¹ It has been argued that, especially in the COVID-19 era, journals need to allow authors to publish letters to the editor (LTEs) and opinion papers alongside research papers to express their concerns and/or disagreements with findings (Teixeira da Silva, 2021). Such LTEs allow a liberal ethical debate to develop around a specified topic (Daly, 2023). Authors can thus express their ideas via LTEs, and editors can express theirs via editorials. Despite this, not all journals have the option of “opinion” or “evidence-based opinion” papers as a manuscript category type for submission, even though their editors might have the option of “editorials.” We believe that such an alternative form of publication as a preprint allows scientists to join the discussion in much the same way as other alternative channels in

¹ As one example, we note the highly controversial (or culturally sensitive) issue of China and Taiwan. In this case, which actually spurred the development of this letter, the first author attempted to publish those ideas as a preprint in two preprint servers (Research Square and Preprints.org), where it was rejected, precisely for being an opinion and highly sensitive material, respectively, but was ultimately published as a preprint in OSF's SocArXiv (<https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/cmydz>). Two other currently highly controversial ideas are related to the Russo-Ukrainian war and the source of the COVID-19 pandemic or of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

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Table 1: Inclusive/exclusive policies of different preprint servers regarding opinion papers¹

Preprint server name (alphabetic listing)	Manuscript type guidelines URL(s)	Opinion papers allowed? ²
Advance: a SAGE Preprints Community	https://advance.sagepub.com/f/submission-guidelines	Accept
AgriRxiv	https://www.cabdigitalibrary.org/journal/agrirxiv/scope-coverage	Not accept
arXiv	https://arxiv.org/help/submit ; https://arxiv.org/help/policies/instructions_for_submission	Accept
Authorea	https://support.authorea.com/en-us/article/what-kinds-of-content-can-i-publish-zklmd9/	Accept
bioRxiv	https://www.biorxiv.org/about/FAQ	Not accept
BodoArxiv	https://bodoarxiv.wordpress.com/faqs/	Accept
Cambridge Open Engage	https://www.cambridge.org/engage/coe/submission-information?show=author-faq	Accept
ChemRxiv	https://chemrxiv.org/engage/chemrxiv/submission-information?show=author-faq	Not accept
EarthArXiv	https://eartharxiv.github.io/moderation.html	Not accept
EcoEvoRxiv	https://www.ecoevorxiv.com/policy.html	Accept
ECSarXiv	https://www.electrochem.org/ecsarxiv/#posting	Accept
EdArXiv	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vz0zkYoCc9TsbeBUU3rL5x_QYhqnZvfP/view	Unknown
E-LIS	http://eprints.rclis.org/policies.html#01	Accept
engRxiv	https://engrxiv.org/faq#what-can-post	Accept
ESSOAr	https://essopenarchive.org/users/3/articles/586003-faqs	Accept
HAL	https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/	Accept
LIS Scholarship Archive	https://lissarchive.org/faq/	Accept
MarXiv	https://zenodo.org/communities/marxiv/about/	Accept
MediarXiv	https://mediarxiv.com/	Accept
MedRxiv	https://www.medrxiv.org/about/FAQ	Not accept
MetaArXiv	https://osf.io/preprints/metaarxiv/	Unknown
MindRxiv	https://www.mindandlife.org/media/mindriv/	Accept
MitoFit Preprint Archives	https://www.bioblast.at/index.php/MitoFit_Preprints#Manuscript_types	Accept
OSF Preprints ³	https://help.osf.io/article/230-preprint-faqs	Accept
PaleorXiv	https://paleorxiv.github.io/submission_guidelines.html	Accept
PhilArchive	https://philarchive.org/help/faq.html	Accept
PhilSci-Archive	http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/policy.html	Not accept
Preprints.org	https://www.preprints.org/instructions_for_authors	Accept
PsyArXiv	http://blog.psyarxiv.com/about-psyarxiv/	Accept
Research Square	https://www.researchsquare.com/legal/editorial	Not accept
ResearchGate	https://explore.researchgate.net/display/support/Preprints	Accept
SocArxiv	https://socopen.org/frequently-asked-questions/	Accept
SSRN	https://service.elsevier.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/34348/supporthub/ssrn/kw/type/	Accept
TechRxiv	https://www.techrxiv.org/f/faqs	Accept
ViXra	https://vixra.org/submit	Accept
Zenodo	https://about.zenodo.org/policies/	Accept

¹ See Supplementary file for more details; only preprint servers that assign a digital object identifier to preprints are included; we recognize that there are dozens of preprint servers (<https://doapr.coar-repositories.org/functions/metrics/>), so only a few selected are represented, based on the ASAPbio list of preprint servers (<https://asapbio.org/preprint-servers/>); we decided to exclude repositories of funding organizations, open access publishing platforms, and national projects, because content policy of their preprint servers may have their own specificity for “objective reasons.” ² Many policies do not contain a separate mention of opinion papers, but simply indicate that they accept all types of documents. In this case, we considered these as “Accept.” ³ General Policy of OSF Preprints (<https://osf.io/preprints/>). OSF Community Preprint Servers are covered separately.

the system of scientific communication, such as blogs or social networks (Collins, Shiffman, & Rock, 2016; Sugimoto, Work, Larivière, & Haustein, 2017).

There are a number of preprint servers that accommodate a wide range of academic and scientific work and disciplines, and we provide the 36 most popular active international preprint servers based on the ASAPbio list of preprint servers in Table 1. Some preprint servers offer a thematically narrow scope to accommodate preprints from a specific field of study, such as bioRxiv for biology, medRxiv for medicine, Advance for social science or humanities, while others such as Preprints or Research Square are multidisciplinary. We were interested in understanding which preprint servers allow for the publication of data-free opinion papers or data-containing evidence-based opinion papers, and which had specific statements in their submission guidelines that explicitly allowed or disallowed the submission of such papers. Our analysis (initially on December 10, 2022, with a verification on March 10, 2023) shows that 27 preprint servers (or 75%) accept opinion papers, 7 do not accept this category while 2 (6%) do not have a content policy. Thus, despite the fact that the democracy of the publication process is referred to as one of the main advantages of using preprint servers (Smart, 2022), 19% of the preprint servers we analyzed do not accept this type of paper, which are important for open research communication (Supplementary file).

Preprints are becoming an increasingly used form of publication, but their effective integration as a precursor of peer-reviewed journals is still hampered by inconsistent submission and ethical policies, since different preprint servers have different policies while different journals and publishers have their own policies toward the acceptance, or not, of preprints (Malički et al., 2020). In order to iron out policy-related inconsistencies, greater ethical rigor must be adopted for preprints as equally it is adopted for peer-reviewed journals (Teixeira da Silva, 2022).

We believe that preprints could be further popularized if moderated opinion papers are allowed to be published, thereby also attracting a greater participation by a wider group of academics.

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