

# Guiding principles for preprint servers to aid the responsible media reporting of research posted as preprints.

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## Definitions

**Preprint:** A form of scholarly communication that has been made publicly available by its authors. Most preprints are deposited on preprint servers and are generally permanently available. They are accompanied by metadata such as a list of authors and date of posting. Many preprint servers allow preprints to be versioned and some offer more advanced functions, like commenting, community endorsement, and direct submission of preprints to scholarly journals.

**Preprint server:** A digital archive for preprints.

Most preprint servers screen preprints for adherence to straightforward criteria before they are posted. While meeting these criteria is not an indication of scientific validity, posting a preprint on a preprint server can facilitate its scrutiny by the scientific community. The level of such scrutiny for a given preprint can vary from none at all to extensive impartial evaluation by a number of experts in the field; it can vary between preprints on the same server.

**Peer review:** The formal invited assessment of the scientific validity of a piece of research by independent experts in the field.

**Community review:** Public feedback on a preprint.

**Published:** In this document, ‘published’ refers to a version of work that is made publicly available in a journal after it has undergone peer review.

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## Introduction

Any document that looks like a scientific article can be disseminated publicly and could be used to inform other research, policies, reporting, or public behavior. Although there are benefits to this sharing of research, such as encouraging pre-publication peer discussion of the research, there are also real-world dangers if apparently scientific content is accepted without peer review or community review.

Importantly, the scientific appraisal of original research and its public availability are often uncoupled. It is in the interest of public trust to be transparent about when an article is known to have been assessed by experts and when this is not known.

Here, we present guiding principles for preprint servers on the transparent labelling of preprints. This document is one of a set developed via the collective efforts of preprint servers, researchers, institutions, scientific journals, journalists, and science writers to encourage responsible science reporting and mutually complementary best practice across these fields.

## Guiding principles for preprint servers on preprint labelling

Preprint servers should, on a page dedicated to describing server policies:

1. Make transparent and noticeable the criteria used to determine what content is posted on that preprint server.
2. Highlight that the server does not conduct peer review and that readers should not assume that a preprint has been peer reviewed unless stated otherwise.
3. Highlight that, as with all research, readers should use their own judgement and seek expert opinion themselves before using the research posted to inform their own research, writing, reporting or behavior.
4. Include additional disclaimers relevant to specific disciplines. For example, for clinical research, state that the content of the preprint should not be used to inform clinical practice.

The information described in points 1 to 4 should be designed to be easily noticeable and understandable by readers.

On individual preprints, the html page should:

5. State clearly that it is a preprint and show the server name or logo.
6. Display a brief statement about the criteria used to screen preprints in advance of posting and recommended cautions for readers, if applicable. For example:
  - a. [Server] does not conduct peer review prior to posting manuscripts. The presence of a manuscript on this server should not be interpreted as an endorsement of its validity or suitability for dissemination as established information or for guiding clinical practice.
  - b. Clearly link to a page displaying the server policies, the full set of screening criteria and a statement of what the server does not do (eg peer review), and recommended cautions as appropriate.
7. Label withdrawn or removed preprints as described in the ASAPbio report '[Building trust in preprints: recommendations for servers](#)'.
8. Show version information about the preprint as described in the ASAPbio report '[Building trust in preprints: recommendations for servers](#)'.
9. Clearly indicate when a preprint has been published in a peer reviewed journal when that information is available and link to the published article.