

EDITORIAL

Introducing preLights: preprint highlights, selected by the biological community

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We are excited to announce the launch of preLights (<https://prelights.biologists.com/>), a new service from The Company of Biologists. preLights is a community platform for selecting, highlighting and commenting on recent preprints from across the biological sciences. With this service, we aim to help researchers discover the most interesting and relevant preprints from the growing archive of manuscripts deposited on bioRxiv and other preprint servers.

So what is the rationale behind preLights, and how will it work? While preprints have been around for a long time in the physics community, it was only when bioRxiv (<https://www.biorxiv.org/>) came on the scene in late 2013 that they began to take off in the biological sciences. Since then, we have seen an almost exponential growth in the number of preprints posted, as more and more researchers recognise the value in making their research available at an early stage, and as journals become increasingly open to considering papers that have already been posted on a preprint server. Here at Development, we quickly changed our policy on preprint deposition after the launch of bioRxiv, and have allowed authors to submit papers that were already available on preprint servers since Spring 2014. Since early 2016, all of the Company's journals have been open to considering manuscripts deposited as preprints. Not only that, but we actively facilitate posting of submitted manuscripts through our bidirectional transfer portal with bioRxiv (see <http://dev.biologists.org/content/news#biorxiv> for more details). Overall, The Company of Biologists and Development see a synergy between preprint servers and the more traditional peer review and publishing model we operate. Preprints allow authors to get their work out quickly and readers to access the latest research, pre-publication peer review helps to ensure the rigour and quality of the work, and publication in a field-specific journal like Development helps the community find and digest the most relevant research in their area in an accessible format.

Since 2016, our community blog the Node has played an active role in helping developmental biologists find the most relevant preprints – providing a monthly round-up of the latest preprints in developmental biology and related fields (see <http://thenode.biologists.com/tag/preprints/>). This initiative has proved hugely popular: the post is generally our most-read post each month, and many people have told us how valuable they find the listing. Moreover, the list is getting longer each month, and is in danger of becoming unwieldy, even with the careful curation from our community manager. Given these trends, we started thinking about what more we could do to help people to navigate the ever-growing preprint literature – across the range of fields covered by the Company's journals.

From these discussions, the idea of preLights was born. At its heart, preLights is a community of around 80 researchers, mainly (but not exclusively) postdocs and early stage PIs, many of whom have been nominated by our editors or editorial board members. Their research interests span the range of fields covered by our journals and beyond – from morphogenesis to neuroethology, from autophagy to cancer immunology. Our preLights team members will be selecting each month the preprint or preprints that they feel most worthy of comment, and will provide a personal perspective on why they have chosen each article. Through our online platform, we also hope to encourage other members of the community to comment on those preprints selected by our team, and to engage the authors of the selected preprints in the discussion as well – thus facilitating the exchange of ideas and opinions. Hopefully, this will also help authors improve and revise their papers as they make their way towards formal publication. Although the platform has been designed and will be hosted by The Company of Biologists, we see preLights as a community-run service, where we provide logistical support, but the content is driven by our team of selectors and the broader community.


Posts will be categorised and tagged by topic to make it easy for you to search for those preprints most relevant to you, and we'll also highlight the most popular posts across all fields to give you a flavour of the latest work that's attracting attention. We're also planning to feature content from the preLights site in the journal, further helping the developmental biology community to discover the newest research in the field. And to reassure those of you who have become used to browsing the Node's monthly list, we're not planning to stop doing this. Finally, an additional aim is to support and promote our team of selectors – giving them the platform and profile to get their opinions 'out there' and helping them to expand their networks, both within their specific fields and beyond.

We are of course aware that commenting on preprints and papers has not really taken off in a big way in the biological sciences. preLights is therefore something of an experiment, but we've been hugely encouraged by the enthusiasm with which the idea was met by those we approached as potential contributors. While we hope that preLights will provide a venue where such discussion can happen more freely, we also believe that there is significant value in the selection and highlighting of a subset of preprints that will be of particular interest to our communities. Over time, we expect that the preLights site, and the team of selectors, will evolve – and we welcome your suggestions and feedback on how we can make it better. For now, though, we invite you to browse the first set of posts on preLights and to join in the discussion there. We hope you find this new initiative valuable!

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