

GUEST EDITORIAL

Understanding the Differences Between Preprint, Ahead of Print, and Open Review

Manoharan PS^a

Open access literature enables researcher to have advantage of broad citation, easy access to scientific evidence, funding opportunities, potential collaborators and job opportunities owing to the visibility of research work.^{1,2} With the evolution of peer review process there are different ways in which the process can occur, all with an intent to advance science to quality material to be made available in the literature.³ The academic publishing landscape is constantly evolving, and researchers and readers frequently encounter terms like "preprint," "ahead of print," and "open review." While these concepts may seem similar, they serve distinct purposes in the dissemination and evaluation of scientific knowledge. Understanding these differences is essential for authors, reviewers, and readers alike.

Preprints: Early-Stage Research Sharing

Preprints are early versions of research papers made publicly available before undergoing formal peer review. Platforms such as arXiv, bioRxiv, and medRxiv allow researchers to share findings rapidly, encouraging immediate feedback from the scientific community. This process accelerates knowledge exchange and reduces delays in traditional publishing.⁴ However, since preprints have not yet undergone peer review, their credibility depends on the author's reputation and informal evaluations by the scientific community. Researchers should interpret preprints as promising but unverified contributions to their field.

Several dental journals acknowledge preprints in their submission policies:

Journal Name	Preprint Policy Features
Dentistry Journal (MDPI)	Accepts preprints if not peer-reviewed; authors must disclose preprint postings.
Essentials of Dentistry	Allows sharing on non-commercial preprint servers; requires deposition link and DOI.
The Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA)	Accepts submissions previously available on preprint servers.
Journal of Periodontology	Accepts preprints and allows authors to post submitted versions.
World Journal of Dentistry (WJOD)	Permits preprints; requires preprint server and DOI in title page.

Since journal policies may evolve, authors should consult specific guidelines before submitting their work.

Ahead of Print: Peer-Reviewed, Yet to Be Assigned an Issue

"Ahead of print" refers to articles that have successfully undergone peer review and editorial approval but have not yet been assigned to a specific journal issue. These articles appear online in their final form but may lack volume and issue numbers. This model ensures early access to validated research while providing flexibility in publishing workflows. Readers can generally trust ahead-of-print articles as credible sources, though minor editorial adjustments may occur before final publication.

Several dental journals follow the ahead-of-print model, including:

^a Professor and Head, Department of Prosthodontics, Crown and Bridge, Saveetha Dental College and Hospitals, Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Chennai

Journal Name	Ahead-of-Print Policy Features
The Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA)	Publishes peer-reviewed research before formal issue assignment.
Tanta Dental Journal	Allows citation with DOI before issue allocation.
Journal of Pediatric Dentistry	Features an ahead-of-print section with accepted articles.
The Journal of Dental Panacea (JDP)	Publishes ahead-of-print articles immediately upon acceptance.
Dental and Medical Problems	Provides ahead-of-print access before volume and issue assignment.

While many journals support ahead-of-print publication, authors should check journal policies to confirm their specific procedures.

Open Review or Post Publication review: Enhancing Transparency in Scholarly Publishing

Open review is a growing movement aimed at making the peer review process more transparent. In this model, reviewer comments, author responses, and even reviewer identities may be publicly available. Platforms like F1000Research and eLife provide open peer review, allowing readers to access critiques and revisions that shape the final publication. This process fosters accountability, minimizes bias, and offers valuable learning experiences for early-career researchers. However, challenges such as potential reviewer reluctance to provide critical feedback openly and concerns about bias remain.

The adoption of open review in dentistry remains limited, but some medical journals have embraced this model:

Journal Name	Open Peer Review Policy Features
Journal of Medical Internet Research (JMIR)	Allows users to sign up as peer reviewers, enhancing transparency.
BMJ Open	Publishes reviewer reports and prepublication histories.
PLOS Journals	Offers open peer review with disclosed reviewer identities and comments.
F1000Research	Uses post-publication peer review with transparent reviews.

Telehealth and Medicine Today (THMT)	Provides optional open peer review with disclosed reviewer identities and comments.
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Researchers should verify journal-specific policies to understand how peer review is conducted.

Why These Distinctions Matter?

Understanding these publication models helps researchers, policymakers, and the public assess the reliability of academic work. During crucial situations as COVID 19 pandemic, preprints allowed for rapid knowledge-sharing but on the other hand it should be interpreted critically due to their lack of peer review.⁵ However, if the pre-print policies are transparent and clearly aligned to the process, genuine research of value would be disseminated to readers with critical acumen.⁶ Pre print articles need not be always be accepted by the journal although some of them may eventually get published after peer review process. Ahead-of-print articles provide access to validated research before formal issue assignment. This would benefit the researchers who has to wait for untoward publication delay because of the increasing load of quality submissions.⁷ Open review enhances transparency and accountability in publishing thus overcoming the disadvantage and criticism of peer review gatekeeping and inability to recognise a fraudulent research.^{8,9} Apart from the above terminologies, collaborative review is yet another process, where the author and the reviewers are in constant discussion throughout the process and make it constructive. Another contentious question here is that open review and collaborative review can provide means of intellectual property theft.³ In an era where misinformation spreads quickly, distinguishing between these models ensures that researchers and readers engage with scholarly work responsibly and effectively.

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Corresponding Author Details: Manoharan P S, Address: Professor and Head, Department of Prosthodontics, Crown and Bridge, Saveetha Dental College and Hospitals, Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Chennai,
E-mail address: manodent_2000@yahoo.com Ph no: 9865019673,

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