

## EDITORIAL

# An interview with the preLights community manager, Máté Pálffy

Máté Pálffy (preLights Community Manager) and Sharon Ahmad (Executive Editor)

The posting of unreviewed manuscripts on preprint servers has been common practice in the physics community for nearly three decades, but it has only been in the past few years that it has become popular with the biological research community. Journal of Cell Science and its sister journals at The Company of Biologists have preprint-friendly policies, welcoming the submission of papers that have been posted on preprint servers, and facilitating the process by offering two-way integration with bioRxiv: authors who have posted their manuscript on bioRxiv can transfer it directly to one of our journals, and authors who submit to one of our journals can deposit their manuscript directly to bioRxiv with a single click.

Since the launch of bioRxiv by Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in late 2013, the number of preprints posted by biologists has risen quickly. Although preprints facilitate the rapid dissemination of research ideas, our communities have told us that it can be difficult to sift through the volume of preprints to find those most interesting and/or relevant. Enter preLights.

preLights (<https://prelights.biologists.com/>) is a new preprint highlighting service, launched by The Company of Biologists earlier this year. preLights has a dedicated team of scientists from the community who regularly select, highlight and comment on preprints that they feel are of interest to the biological community. We caught up with Máté Pálffy, the community manager of preLights, to talk about this service and his role in overseeing it.

**You joined as the community manager for preLights, coming directly from the bench. Can you tell us a bit about your background and why you wanted this role?**

I studied biology at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, and did a research year for my Master's in cell biology in the Dammermann lab at the Max F. Perutz Laboratories in Vienna where I looked at the role of the ciliary transition zone in *C. elegans*. From the beginning of my biology training, I've had a deep interest in gene regulation, so for my PhD I decided to join Nadine Vastenhouw's lab at the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics in Dresden, Germany. I just recently defended my PhD in which I investigated the mechanisms that regulate the activation of the zygotic genome, using the zebrafish embryo as a model.

I've always been excited about reading and discussing the most recent research and interacting with scientists. I also enjoy writing and greatly value openness in science – at my former institute (MPI-CBG) they take this issue very seriously, so I was definitely influenced in a positive way there. I posted part of my research on bioRxiv as well, and like sharing and discussing the latest research coming out as preprints on Twitter. So becoming a community manager for preLights was a great opportunity for me to do many of the things that I love about science.

**What was the main motivation behind launching preLights?**

Ever since bioRxiv arrived on the scene, the number of preprints in the life sciences has been exponentially growing. This makes it more



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challenging for researchers to keep up with the preprint literature – and it is already very difficult to keep up with the literature in journals! The Company of Biologists considered various preprint-friendly policies early on, and realized that there was a need to create a platform that highlights and enables discussion around preprints from various fields. The Node (<http://thenode.biologists.com/>; the community website for developmental biology run by Development, another journal published by The Company of Biologists) had already created a very popular monthly list of curated preprints. When the Company team started thinking further about how, as a publisher, they could support preprints, the idea of preLights was born.

**Who are the scientists who write the preprint highlights for preLights?**

We have a large group of mostly early-career scientists (the 'preLighters') who contribute the content for preLights. They come from different fields and select the preprints that they find most interesting. Many of the launch team were recommended by the Editors and Editorial Advisory Board members of Journal of Cell

Science and the Company's other journals, but we are now ready to expand, and have made an open call to recruit new team members (<https://prelights.biologists.com/news/call-new-prelighters/>).

**For our readers who haven't had a look at the preLights site yet, could you explain what a preprint highlight looks like?**

In the posts, our preLighters generally briefly introduce the topic of the preprint they selected, summarize the main findings of the preprint, and often provide an outlook, discussing future directions for the field. What is really interesting is that they also give their personal opinion on the work and why they selected that preprint to highlight. The style and format of posts can be fairly flexible, and we have also had joint posts and even a lab writing a preLights article together. Our preLighters can easily coordinate and discuss the preprints they highlight through the Slack workspace that we have set up for them.

Another unique feature of the posts is that the preLighters engage the preprint authors by addressing questions to them about their work. The response from the preprint authors is posted together with the highlight, and we hope that this will facilitate discussions around the highlighted preprint. We are also happy that preLights has been added as a preprint discussion site to bioRxiv, so a link to the preLights posts appears next to its related preprint on the bioRxiv feed.

**How is preLights different from other initiatives that support preprints?**

Importantly, the aim of preLights is not to provide peer review for preprints, but rather to showcase interesting preprints from diverse fields in the form of 'news-and-views' type of articles. Although preLights is unique as a preprint-highlighting platform, there are other excellent initiatives such as PREREVIEW or biOverlay, which provide peer review for preprints. However, the common feature in all these services is that they add value to preprints prior to publication in a journal.

**It's still early days, but how has the preLights project been received by the scientific community so far?**

We have been very pleased with the amount of positive feedback and attention coming from the life science

community! It is always great to hear about the excitement of preprint authors when their work has been selected for preLights. As we also expected, a large part of the interactions with preLights posts has come through social media, and especially Twitter. We only launched 4 months ago, so there is plenty of room to grow and evolve our service, but we are excited to see what role preLights will have in the current revolution in scientific publishing.

**What is the most enjoyable aspect of your role as a community manager for preLights?**

I really like giving feedback to preLighters on their posts – this also makes me read exciting science in a very wide range of fields and topics, many that are also completely new to me. But probably what I have enjoyed the most so far is interviewing the preLighters [these are also posted on the preLights website under <https://prelights.biologists.com/news/>]. It's just really inspiring to talk with bright and enthusiastic scientists about their research or about their views on topics like preprints and openness in science. Many of our preLighters have published preprints themselves, and it's interesting to hear their experiences; almost all of them have emphasized a different aspect of what advantages preprints have and what their motivation to post their work was.

**Finally, what would be your message to early-career researchers who are thinking about joining the preLighter community?**

I think becoming a preLighter is an excellent way for young researchers to get more practice in scientific writing, and we are happy to give you feedback on your posts. It's good motivation to stay up-to-date with the preprint literature, and to sometimes step out of your comfort zone and read preprints that are outside your narrow field. And maybe most importantly, preLights is also about building connections and interactions – which you might have guessed by seeing the image of the neurons in our logo. Becoming a preLighter is a great way to build your scientific network, and it's really important for us as a community to promote and support our early-career researchers.