

# ACL Policies and Guidelines for Submission, Review and Citation

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This is the report of a working group appointed by the ACL Executive Committee to review policies and guidelines for conference submissions. More precisely, the committee was given the following charge:

1. The working group shall submit a proposal for policies and guidelines that can be adopted for the 2018 conferences no later than October 1, 2017. The proposal shall specify under what conditions preprint papers (and other papers that have already been published in some form) can be submitted to \*ACL conferences.<sup>1</sup> It shall also provide guidelines for the citation of such papers and for the review of the papers themselves as well as papers that cite or fail to cite them.
2. The working group may in addition propose actions to be implemented as part of a long-term strategy to evolve our publishing and reviewing models over time.

The report starts with an executive summary of our recommendations, which is meant to be complete and self-contained but only gives minimal motivation for the recommendations. This is followed by a background section outlining the points of departure for the committee's work, a short section with definition of key concepts, and a longer section explaining the rationale behind our recommendations concerning submission, review and citation, respectively. We conclude with recommendations for future work to improve publishing and reviewing processes. In an appendix, we draft guidelines for authors and reviewers that are consistent with the proposed policies.

## 1 Executive Summary of Recommendations

The recommendations of the committee are based on the view that submission and reviewing for \*ACL conferences and TACL<sup>2</sup> should be organized in such a way that double-blind review is maintained and protected without sacrificing the positive effects of preprint publishing. This view leads us to the following recommendations:

- **Submission:** \*ACL conferences and TACL require that submissions be anonymized. A submission will *not* be considered anonymized if the authors post (or update) a non-anonymized preprint version<sup>3</sup> within an *anonymity period* lasting from 1 month before the submission deadline until the time of notification (or withdrawal). Submissions will be rejected if not properly anonymized.
  - *Anonymized* preprints within the anonymity period are allowed. This is currently only possible on certain platforms<sup>4</sup> but ACL may consider using such a platform for all submissions in the future.<sup>5</sup>
  - Non-anonymized preprints *before* the anonymity period are allowed, although we encourage authors to wait to post them until *after* the anonymity period.

If a non-anonymized preprint version exists, authors must declare its existence at submission time but should not cite it and are asked not to publicize it further during the anonymity period – the submitted paper should be as anonymous as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> This primarily includes ACL, NAACL and EACL, but the policies and guidelines can of course be adopted by other conferences and workshops in the field as well. Policies for ACL SIG events are decided by the respective SIG. This includes the EMNLP conference, which is organized by SIGDAT.

<sup>2</sup> TACL was not originally in the purview of the committee, but the editors in chief have expressed support for a uniform policy for TACL and \*ACL, so we have decided to include it in our recommendations.

<sup>3</sup> The notion of preprint is understood broadly to refer to any non-refereed paper posted online, including but not limited to preprint servers such as arXiv (see definitions in Section 2). Note that the rule applies only to preprints that authors post themselves, so it does not apply to (say) non-refereed proceedings volumes. The restriction on updating is to prevent authors from circumventing these rules by “flag planting” with a placeholder version over 1 month in advance.

<sup>4</sup> OpenReview.net is one such platform.

<sup>5</sup> Whether such preprints should be de-anonymized at notification time is a complex issue that we briefly discuss in Section 3, but the policy makes no specific recommendation on this issue.

- **Review:** To preserve the merits of double-blind review, reviewers for \*ACL conferences and TACL should be instructed not to actively try to discover the identity of the authors and not to let any suspicion or knowledge of author identity affect their judgment of the paper. This should not prevent them from searching for related work, but they should take special care and postpone such searches until after they have read the paper completely and formed an initial impression of it. If a reviewer nevertheless uncovers the identity of the authors (or believes they can identify the authors for other reasons), they should inform the area chair or action editor (but not other reviewers) so that this information can be taken into account when making the final acceptance decision. To be able to track how often this happens, we also recommend adding a question to the review form about whether reviewers think they can identify the authors and who they think the authors are.
- **Citation:** Papers submitted to \*ACL conferences and TACL should in principle cite and compare to all relevant prior work, regardless of when and how that work was presented to the community,<sup>6</sup> and must credit work that influenced them.<sup>7</sup> To this general rule there are two important qualifications:
  - For citation, refereed publications take priority over preprints. Specifically:
    - Authors are expected to cite all refereed publications relevant to their submission, but may be excused for not knowing about all unpublished work (especially work that has been recently posted and/or is not widely cited).
    - If a preprint has been superseded by a refereed publication, the refereed publication should be cited in addition to or instead of the preprint version.<sup>8</sup>
  - For comparison, papers (whether refereed or not) appearing less than 3 months before the submission deadline should be considered contemporaneous to the submission. This relieves authors from the obligation to make detailed comparisons that require additional experimentation and/or in-depth analysis, but they are still expected to cite and discuss contemporaneous work to the degree feasible.

It follows from our recommendations about citation and comparison that failure to cite relevant prior work or failure to compare to (non-contemporaneous) empirical results may affect the assessment of a submission regardless of how the prior work was published. However, reviewers should be instructed to give authors the benefit of the doubt in cases where the work appears in preprints with no corresponding refereed publication, especially preprints that are recent and/or not widely cited. In such cases, reviewers should point authors to the non-cited work (so that they can discuss it in the camera-ready version) but not penalize the authors for missing the citation.

Each of these recommendations is further elaborated on and motivated in Section 3.

## 2 Background

There has been a lot of discussion recently about the role of preprint publishing in our field and the way it interacts with our double-blind conference reviewing.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that opinions diverge on the pros and cons of preprint publishing and of our current reviewing model, but there seems to be general agreement that our current policies and guidelines need to be at least clarified and possibly revised. In order to gather more information on current practices and opinions, the ACL Exec organized a survey in the community. The full report on the survey is available in the ACL Portal,<sup>10</sup> but here are the main conclusions that we draw from the survey:

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of relevance is here taken to imply soundness, so major flaws in prior work can make it irrelevant despite being on topic. This is again in principle independent of how the work was disseminated, but we expect major flaws to be less common in refereed publications.

<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is unethical to take ideas from a preprint without acknowledging the preprint as the source.

<sup>8</sup> It is hard to give general rules for when to cite a preprint in addition to a later refereed publication, but it may be relevant, for example, if the refereed publication appears much later than the preprint.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the discussion on the ACL 2017 PC Chairs Blog:

<https://acl2017.wordpress.com/2017/02/19/arxiv-and-the-future-of-double-blind-conference-reviewing/>,

<https://acl2017.wordpress.com/2017/03/02/arxiv-and-double-blind-reviewing-revisited/>.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.aclweb.org/portal/sites/default/files/SurveyReport2017.pdf>.

1. There is strong support for maintaining double-blind reviewing for \*ACL conferences (and for doing what we can to protect its integrity by discouraging preprints).
2. There is only weak support for completely banning preprints from being submitted to \*ACL conferences (although a majority say they are prepared to live with it).
3. Many people think that the situation would be improved if preprints could be temporarily anonymous while they are under review.
4. Many people are concerned about the quality of our review process and think that (among other things) journal-style reviewing with a rolling deadline would improve the situation.
5. Many people think the policies and guidelines for submitting, reviewing and citing preprint papers need to be clarified.

From (1) and (2) we conclude that our long-term strategy should aim for a harmonious co-existence of preprint publishing and double-blind reviewing, where we can get the best of both worlds. The possibility of having anonymous preprints (3) is an interesting option, and lobbying to make this a standard feature of preprint servers could be part of our long-term strategy. OpenReview has already implemented this option for ICLR, and ACL has initiated a discussion with the scientific board of arXiv. However, it is clear that anonymous preprints will not solve all problems,<sup>11</sup> and we should not make ourselves dependent on its possible realization in the future. In addition to finding a good balance between the use of preprints and double-blind reviewing, we need to investigate ways of improving our review processes in general (4). This may involve moving to a more TACL-like review process for conferences and/or move to some kind of open reviewing. In general, the working group recognizes the need to steer the reviewing process in the direction of finding papers that excite and interest some people and away from being too dominated by rejecting papers that have enumerable flaws. Working out these strategies will take some time, and in the meantime we need a workable set of policies and guidelines (5), but the working group has nevertheless tried to come up with recommendations that are not just an interim solution but are consistent with a sound long-term strategy for evolving our submission and review procedures.

### 3 Definitions

Before we turn to a discussion of the policies and guidelines for submission, review and citation, we need to define some basic terms that will be used in the following.

- By “paper” we understand a written report such as a scientific article or abstract, regardless of how it is disseminated.<sup>12</sup>
- By “refereed publication” (sometimes “peer-reviewed publication”) we mean a paper that has been peer-reviewed in full prior to publication in journals like CL or TACL, or in archival conference proceedings like ACL, NAACL, EACL or EMNLP.<sup>13</sup>
- By “preprint” we mean any paper that is not a refereed publication. This includes papers posted on preprint servers like arXiv or ResearchGate, but also non-refereed workshop/conference papers, technical reports, blog posts, and papers that are simply posted on a personal web page, provided that they are accessible to the entire community.<sup>14</sup>

Most preprints can be characterized as *self-posted*, meaning that the authors can basically decide themselves when and where the paper will become publicly available. The main exception is found among non-refereed workshop/conference papers, which are normally subject to selection and publication by a separate organization.

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the post by Charles Sutton at <http://www.theexclusive.org/2017/09/arxiv-double-blind.html>.

<sup>12</sup> The term “paper” naturally applies to shorter written reports (normally less than 50 pages) but should here be taken to include also longer monographs, including dissertations, as well as texts that have a similar content but a different form, such as technical blog posts.

<sup>13</sup> The term “archival” implies that the paper is preserved for posterity and will remain retrievable through libraries or other organizations.

<sup>14</sup> This excludes, for example, manuscripts that are distributed only to a closed circle of colleagues.

## 4 Rationale for Our Recommendations

The working group started out by discussing a broad set of issues pertaining to publishing, reviewing, citation, credit awarding, and scientific communication in general. After setting the scene in this way, most of the discussion has focused on two basic issues concerning the role of preprints in the scientific community:

- How can we mitigate the negative effects of non-anonymized preprints on double-blind reviewing without sacrificing the positive effects of promoting open and rapid communication of scientific results and ideas?
- What status should we give to preprints as prior work and what does this entail in terms of recommendations for citation of preprints and review of papers that cite or fail to cite preprints?

The first issue concerns what policies to adopt for submission to \*ACL conferences and TACL and how to relate the existence of non-anonymized preprints to other ways in which anonymity may be violated or compromised for submissions. On the one hand, we need policies that encourage authors to facilitate double-blind reviewing and discourage them from misusing preprints. This is discussed in Section 4.1. On the other hand, we need to set up the review process and instruct reviewers to protect the integrity of double-blind reviewing and mitigate the negative effects of preprints. This is discussed in Section 4.2. The second issue, which is related to the more general question of how to cite and compare with prior art, is discussed in Section 4.3, from the perspective of authors as well as reviewers.

### 4.1 Submission

First of all, it has to be observed that the occurrence of preprints, in the wide sense that includes technical reports and unpublished manuscripts of various kinds, is not a new phenomenon. Nor is it the only way in which the anonymity of an author can be compromised. However, the increasing volume of preprints that are easily accessible on servers like arXiv, their increased visibility via newsfeeds and social media, and their increasing impact on the field via association with prestigious subcommunities have radically changed the conditions for publishing and double-blind reviewing. The new situation calls for new policies as well as clarifications of how old policies apply in the new situation.

Opinions clearly diverge on the merit of using preprint servers, but most people agree that there are both advantages and drawbacks. On the positive side, it provides an open and democratic platform for researchers that are not so well connected and for non-mainstream work that may not quickly get through the competitive and conservative peer review of our large conferences and journals. It could also allow researchers to practice “open science” by posting early drafts of their work to attract public feedback and collaborators. On the negative side, it may lead to a race to publish ideas and results (without review) before they are mature, and it may increase author bias in (supposedly) double-blind review processes to the benefit of famous authors and institutions. In general, we therefore want to discourage authors from posting preprints when the negative effects (especially for double-blind review) outweigh the positive effects, which seems especially clear for preprints that are posted just when they are about to be reviewed.

The working group has considered many alternative policies, but most of them are variants of the following three main proposals:

- **Proposal A:** If a non-anonymized preprint exists, the paper must be submitted to the CL journal, which uses single-blind reviewing, instead of (directly) to a \*ACL conference or TACL. If the paper is accepted, it also gets a conference presentation (talk or poster), unless it is an extension or collation of already presented publications.
- **Proposal B:** In order to maximize fidelity to the spirit of double-blind review, authors may not post (or update)<sup>15</sup> a non-anonymous preprint of a paper that is submitted to a \*ACL conference or TACL during an *anonymity period* starting 1 month before the submission deadline and lasting until an acceptance/rejection decision is issued or the submission is withdrawn from consideration, whichever

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<sup>15</sup> Note that the restriction applies only to preprints that the authors can post (or update) themselves, so it does not apply to (say) non-refereed proceedings volumes.

comes first. If such a preprint is found, the paper will be rejected, as for other cases of non-anonymous submission.

- *Anonymous* preprints within the anonymity period are allowed. (OpenReview.net is an instance of software that allows distribution of anonymous papers, and the ACL may consider using it or require use of it.)
- If a non-anonymous preprint was made available before the anonymity period, the paper can still be submitted to a \*ACL conference or TACL and reviewed together with other submissions.<sup>16</sup> Authors must declare the existence of the preprint but should not cite it – the submitted paper should be as anonymous as possible.

In addition, we may consider further measures to encourage people not to post non-anonymized preprints:

- Publication stamp: Papers for which a non-anonymous preprint existed during review get a special “stamp” indicating that the review may not have been fully double-blind, whereas papers for which this was not the case get the opposite special stamp.
- CFP wording: A sentence such as the following is included in the CFPs:

*While you are not prohibited from having posted a non-anonymous version of your paper outside the anonymity period, this does make double-blind reviewing more difficult to maintain, and we therefore encourage you to wait until paper acceptance before making your paper available, or consider sending your submission to the Computational Linguistics journal, which uses single-blind reviewing and has a track for “short” (i.e., conference-length) papers.*

Authors can also be asked not to advertise non-anonymous preprints on social media or take other actions that would further compromise double-blind reviewing during the anonymity period.

- **Proposal C:** If a preprint exists, the paper cannot be submitted at all, but \*ACL conferences can invite influential preprints to a special track with a separate review process.

Proposal A has the advantage of simplicity, both for authors and reviewers. If a paper exists as a preprint, it can only be reviewed single-blind, so the authors can publicize their paper freely and reviewers are not at all restricted in their search for information. The main drawback is that fewer papers go through double-blind review, which could increase author bias instead of reducing it since it will be easier for authors to opt out of double-blind review if they think it will be advantageous. In addition, some authors may be concerned that this model slows down the publication of these papers. Finally, there was some support in the working group for further reducing bias by making the Computational Linguistics journal double-blind, which would be incompatible with proposal A.

Proposal B can be described as *double-blind(ish)* review, since it attempts to preserve double-blind review as far as possible but acknowledges that it will not always be perfect. This is a model that received strong support in the ACL survey, where two thirds of the respondents were in favor of either the status quo or a similar model that discourages pre-notification preprints. The survey also indicates that an anonymity period of one month could be quite effective, as 54 respondents said they posted their papers after submission but before notification, while only 25 people said they posted them as soon as a first draft was ready. The added measures (citation stamp and/or CFP wording) can provide further discouragement, but it is unclear how effective they would be after preprints during the anonymity period have been eliminated. The main drawback of this proposal is that double-blind review may be compromised by preprints posted before the anonymity period – the “ish” in double-blind(ish) – so we need to provide clear instructions to reviewers about how to handle such cases.

Proposal C effectively means banning preprints from being actively submitted to \*ACL conferences and TACL, an option that does not really seem to have support in the community. The idea of inviting presentations of influential

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<sup>16</sup> In the case of preprints that are not self-posted, notably non-refereed workshop/conference papers, there may be a significant delay between the submission of the final version and its actual appearance in a proceedings volume. Provided that the expected existence of the preprint has been declared, this will not constitute a violation of the policy even if the public appearance falls *within* the anonymity period, because the authors have not actively posted anything during this period.

preprints may be worth pursuing further, but it is not clear how it would work in cases where authors prefer to actively submit their papers elsewhere.

The working group has not been able to reach a complete consensus on this issue, but a very clear majority of the group is in favor of Proposal B as the best way forward. This proposal aims to preserve double-blind reviewing as far as possible for papers accepted to \*ACL conferences and TACL and it improves on the current situation (a) by eliminating preprints that directly compromise double-blind reviewing and where the only inconvenience for the authors is that they have to wait a short time before posting it, (b) by clarifying how reviewers should deal with the existence of preprints (see Section 3.2), and (in case the additional measures are adopted) (c) by providing additional incentives for authors to refrain from posting preprints even outside the anonymity period. It is also easily adaptable to a system where only anonymous preprints are allowed, in case this should become a standard feature of preprint servers in the future. This is therefore the recommendation of the working group, as stated in the executive summary in Section 1 and reflected in the author guidelines in the appendix. We also recommend using the CFP wording (but not the citation stamp) as additional measures to ensure fair reviewing.

One thing that needs to be clarified in the recommended policy is what it means for a preprint and a submission to be *versions* of the same paper, as this is crucial in deciding whether a non-anonymized preprint posted during the anonymity period violates the policy or not. The basic idea is that they should be *essentially* the same paper, so that authors cannot circumvent the rules by making minor modifications such as changing the title or rephrasing the introduction or conclusion. Here we can appeal to standard norms for determining whether two papers are sufficiently different to both count as “original unpublished work” given the existence of the other. However, since the purpose of the anonymity period is to protect double-blind review, we think the notion needs to be extended also to cases where the two papers differ in length. In particular, we want to rule out the possibility of authors “advertising” their anonymous submission by posting a non-anonymous *abstract* on a preprint server. We therefore recommend that an abstract be regarded as a version of the paper that it summarizes.

Before we leave the topic of anonymous submissions and double-blind reviewing, it is worth commenting on a question that was raised in connection with ACL 2017, namely whether it is reasonable to reject papers without review because the authors have failed to anonymize them properly and at the same time allow authors to submit papers that have been posted non-anonymously as a preprint. It was argued that this is possibly also a diversity/inclusiveness issue, since many of the papers that get rejected without review for not being anonymized come from regions that are not well represented in the ACL community (while many of the authors that “bypass” anonymization by posting preprints are from more influential sub-communities). The working group considers this issue important but independent of the issues concerning preprints. We propose to give better support for authors (a) by giving a more detailed checklist for anonymization and (b) by implementing more automatic checks.<sup>17</sup> If a non-anonymized paper nevertheless slips through and makes it to the reviewers, it will have to be rejected. Given our new recommendations, this puts such papers in the same category as those where a preprint posted within the anonymity period is discovered, which seems appropriate.

Another issue that was discussed briefly in the working group was whether anonymized preprints posted during the anonymity period should be de-anonymized after notification even if the submission is rejected. For the time being, this is entirely up to the authors, who are free to decide whether they want to preserve anonymity to be able to resubmit to another conference in the near future, or whether they prefer to give up this option and instead make the paper available for non-anonymous citation. The issue may have to be reconsidered in the future if ACL decides to handle submission and reviewing through an anonymizing preprint service.

## 4.2 Review

The policy in recent years has been to require authors to declare the existence of (non-anonymized) preprint versions of submitted papers (a policy that will be retained for preprints outside the anonymity period). Reviewers of these submissions have then been informed that a preprint exists, but there have been no clear instructions about

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<sup>17</sup> The program co-chairs for NAACL 2018 and ACL 2018 are committed to working on (a) and (b). The program co-chairs for NAACL 2018 have in addition decided to let area chairs handle desk reject decisions and give authors the benefit of the doubt and a chance to resubmit when possible. They will report on the outcome of this experiment.

how to handle this information. A natural interpretation is that reviewers should refrain from looking for the preprint in order to protect double-blind reviewing, but it has also been claimed that this is incompatible with thorough reviewing, which should involve an active search for related work. Moreover, it is often impossible for a reviewer to avoid knowing, because they may already have seen or read the paper if they subscribe to a news feed from a preprint server. An additional reason sometimes given for informing reviewers about the existence of a preprint version is so that they can know that it is likely not a case of plagiarism if they happen to find the preprint paper.<sup>18</sup>

The working group is of the opinion that the responsibility for upholding double-blind reviewing is shared between authors and reviewers in the community. Authors have a responsibility to anonymize their submissions, to declare the existence of non-anonymized preprints (outside the anonymity period), and to avoid publicizing their work in a way that jeopardizes the integrity of double-blind review. Reviewers have a responsibility not to actively try to discover the identity of the authors and not to let any suspicion or knowledge of author identity affect their judgment of the paper. This responsibility should not prevent them from searching for related work, which is an essential part of thorough reviewing, but when they have been informed that a non-anonymized preprint exists, they need to exercise special care. They may, for example, refrain from using the exact paper title as the query of a web search. In addition, they should always postpone searches that risk compromising the anonymity of the authors until after they have read the paper completely and formed an initial impression of it.

If a reviewer nonetheless uncovers the identity of the authors (or believes they can identify the authors for other reasons), they should inform the area chair or action editor (but not other reviewers) so that this information can be taken into account when making the final acceptance decision. To be able to track how often this happens, we also recommend adding a question to the review form about whether reviewers think they can identify the authors and who they think the authors are. The considerations discussed in this section form the basis of the recommendation stated in the executive summary in Section 1 and reflected in the reviewer guidelines in the appendix.

### 4.3 Citation

The status of preprints as prior work was one of the issues that most respondents commented on in the ACL survey. One extreme view is that preprints should not be cited at all because they are not refereed publications, and the other extreme is that preprints should be considered equal to refereed publications. Most people appear to hold an opinion in between, saying that we should cite preprints if they are relevant, just as we have always cited working papers if relevant, but that we should give priority to refereed publications. It is clear from the survey that people would like to see some guidelines.

The working group has tried to work out guidelines that codify what we take to be best practice in the scientific community. One of the difficulties has been to define precisely when and how refereed publications should be given priority over preprints and to what extent authors can be excused for not citing the latter. Our final recommendation (copied here from Section 1) is a compromise that tries to avoid subjective criteria like quality and significance in favor of reasonably objective criteria like recency and number of citations:

- Papers submitted to \*ACL conferences and TACL should in principle cite all relevant prior work, regardless of when and how that work was presented to the community, and must credit work that influenced them. However, refereed publications take priority over preprints. Specifically:
  - Authors are expected to cite all refereed publications relevant to their topic, but may be excused for not knowing about all unpublished work (especially work that has been recently posted and/or is not widely cited).
  - In cases where a preprint has been superseded by a refereed publication, the refereed publication should be cited in addition to or instead of the preprint version.

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<sup>18</sup> As long as submissions are anonymous, reviewers strictly speaking cannot tell whether the paper they have found is the existing preprint or a different paper that either plagiarizes or is plagiarized by the existing preprint, so they will still have to inform the area chair or action editor about a possible case of plagiarism. Nevertheless, knowing that a preprint exists alleviates some of the immediate concern of plagiarism, and this has therefore been considered a useful practice.

It is hard to give general rules for when to cite a preprint in addition to a later refereed publication, but it may be relevant, for example, if the refereed publication appears much later than the preprint. In this case, citing only the refereed publication may give a misleading impression about when the idea or result was first presented.

Note also that the notion of relevance is taken to imply that the work is sound. In other words, major flaws in prior work can make it irrelevant despite being on topic. This can happen regardless of how the work was disseminated, but we should in general expect major flaws to be less common in refereed publications, which is the main reason for giving them priority.

In addition to recommendations for citation, the working group felt that it was important to say something about when authors are expected to make more detailed comparisons with papers that present similar ideas or results. In general, authors should cite and discuss sound and relevant prior work to the extent that this is feasible, and must disclose any influence of prior work on the submission. However, in the case of very recent work, it seems unreasonable to expect a comparative discussion that requires extensive experiments and/or analysis. To make this more precise, we define work to be *contemporaneous* to a submission if it has appeared less than 3 months before the submission deadline and say that authors are not required to make time-consuming comparisons with contemporaneous work.

Defining a window of contemporaneity could also have a mitigating effect on the race to publish ideas and results that many people see as a negative effect of the increased use of preprints. For example, it seems entirely reasonable that reviewers, when evaluating the *novelty* of a submission, should disregard contemporaneous work that did not influence the submission.<sup>19</sup> In this way, a paper submitted for peer review by researcher A would not be blocked from publication on grounds of originality just because researcher B was quick to post a preprint, provided that the two papers are independent and can be regarded as contemporaneous in the sense just defined. In a similar vein, if A's paper is accepted for publication, it later seems appropriate to cite both papers and give them credit for the original idea or result. In line with our general recommendations, A's paper should be cited because it is the earliest refereed publication, but B's earlier preprint should normally also be cited unless it is found to be irrelevant because of major flaws.<sup>20</sup>

It follows from our recommendations about citation and comparison that failure to cite relevant prior work or failure to compare to (non-contemporaneous) empirical results may affect the assessment of a submission regardless of how the prior work was published. However, reviewers should be instructed to give authors the benefit of the doubt in cases where the work appears in preprints with no corresponding refereed publication, especially preprints that are recent and/or not widely cited. In such cases, reviewers should point authors to the non-cited work but not penalize the authors for missing the citation.

## 5 Recommendations for the Future

The policies proposed in Section 1 and elaborated in Section 3 are designed to be consistent with a long-term strategy where we evolve our models for publishing and reviewing to take advantage of new technology while remaining faithful to the ideals of double-blind reviewing and sound scholarly principles. We have deliberately avoided making this strategy dependent on specific future developments that we cannot control ourselves, such as the enabling of anonymous preprints on platforms like arXiv, but we have tried to make the strategy compatible with such developments. To flesh out the strategy, it is important that ACL continues to gather information and explore different ways of improving the review process. Specifically, we recommend the following:

- Gather information from authors (in the submission form) and reviewers (in the review form) about how the guidelines are perceived and what effect they have. For instance, authors who do not declare the existence of a preprint can be asked whether they had considered it and consciously refrained from doing so, and if so, why. Similarly, reviewers can be asked whether the new guidelines on citation of preprints

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<sup>19</sup> Similar ideas have recently been discussed as “scooping protection” in the field of biology; see <http://science.sciencemaq.org/content/357/6358/1344.full>.

<sup>20</sup> The motivation for citing the preprint in addition to the refereed publication is clearly stronger when different authors are involved, for reasons of credit awarding, than in the case discussed earlier with two different versions of the same paper (and, hence, with the same authors).



influenced their reviews. In addition, authors can be asked whether they think reviewers might know who wrote the paper (and why) and reviewers whether they think they know who wrote the paper, how they found out, and how it affected their review.

- Consider alternative reviewing models for \*ACL conferences. This includes models for open reviewing in collaboration with preprint servers such as OpenReview.net, possibly in combination with journal-style reviewing with a rolling deadline as done by TACL.
- Lobby preprint servers to enable anonymization of preprints while under review. This is not a crucial development for the current policy to work, but it gives authors more flexibility when deciding when to post preprints, as anonymous preprints are allowed also during the anonymity period surrounding a specific submission deadline and corresponding review period.

## Appendix: Guidelines for Authors and Reviewers

To implement the policies proposed in Section 1, we present a draft of guidelines to authors and reviewers, which can be used by \*ACL conferences and TACL. These are meant to cover only the issues surrounding anonymity and double-blind reviewing, as well as principles for citation, and need to be supplemented for each specific venue by guidelines covering other aspects of the submission and review processes.

- **Guidelines for Authors:**

- Preserving Double Blind Review*

- The following rules and guidelines are meant to protect the integrity of double-blind review and ensure that submissions are reviewed fairly. The rules make reference to the *anonymity period*, which runs from 1 month before the submission deadline up to the date when your paper is either accepted, rejected, or withdrawn.

- You *may not* make a non-anonymized version of your paper available online to the general community (for example, via a preprint server) *during* the anonymity period. By a *version* of a paper we understand another paper having essentially the same scientific content but possibly differing in minor details (including title and structure) and/or in length (e.g., an abstract is a version of the paper that it summarizes).
    - If you have posted a non-anonymized version of your paper online before the start of the anonymity period, you *may* submit an anonymized version to the conference. The submitted version must not refer to the non-anonymized version, and you must inform the program chair(s) that a non-anonymized version exists. You may not update the non-anonymized version during the anonymity period, and we ask you not to advertise it on social media or take other actions that would further compromise double-blind reviewing during the anonymity period.
    - Note that, while you are not prohibited from making a non-anonymous version available online before the start of the anonymity period, this does make double-blind reviewing more difficult to maintain, and we therefore encourage you to wait until the end of the anonymity period if possible. Alternatively, you may consider submitting your work to the Computational Linguistics journal, which does not require anonymization and has a track for “short” (i.e., conference-length) papers.

- Citation and Comparison*

- If you are aware of previous research that appears sound and is relevant to your work, you should cite it even if it has not been peer-reviewed, and certainly if it influenced your own work. However, refereed publications take priority over unpublished work reported in preprints. Specifically:
      - You are expected to cite all refereed publications relevant to your submission, but you may be excused for not knowing about all unpublished work (especially work that has been recently posted and/or is not widely cited).
      - In cases where a preprint has been superseded by a refereed publication, the refereed publication should be cited in addition to or instead of the preprint version.
    - Papers (whether refereed or not) appearing less than 3 months before the submission deadline are considered contemporaneous to your submission, and you are therefore not obliged to make detailed comparisons that require additional experimentation and/or in-depth analysis.

- **Guidelines for Reviewers:**

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- Reviewing may involve an online search for related work. However, do not set out to uncover the identity of the authors and try not to let any suspicions regarding author identity affect your judgement. To reduce the risk of bias, it is a good idea to read the paper and draft an initial review before you carry out any online searches that risk discovering authorship. You should be especially careful if an area chair has informed you that a non-anonymized version of the paper is available online.
- If you do become aware of the authors' identity (by whatever means), let the area chairs (but not your fellow reviewers) know.
- If you come across a preprint or paper that has a substantial text overlap with the submission, report this to the area chairs even if the existence of a preprint has been declared, since you do not know whether the authors of the discovered paper are the authors of the submission under review, and so the possibility of plagiarism needs to be considered.

*Citation and Comparison*

- Evaluate papers based on your knowledge of the subject, regardless of where you gained this knowledge. If you are aware of relevant publicly available research that has not been cited in the paper you are reviewing, you should bring it to the attention of the authors, irrespective of whether it is described in a preprint or a refereed publication. However, if the work appears only in a preprint, especially one that is recent and/or not widely cited, you should in general give authors the benefit of the doubt and not penalize them for the missing citation.
- Papers should include appropriate discussion of related work, potentially including both preprints and refereed publications. However, it is not reasonable to expect a time-consuming empirical comparison with work that has appeared *less than 3 months before the submission deadline*. In this situation, the two papers are considered to be *contemporaneous*. Contemporaneous papers may affect your perspective on the *quality* of a submission, but should be disregarded when evaluating the *novelty* of the submission, unless there is evidence that they have influenced the submission.