

Archiving, but not really

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Abstract

Mike Taylor wrote up a post about the various things a journal article is doing, the first being a scientific report. We put a lot of money in establishing a scientific track record. In the past 30 years how we publish our research and how we archive it has changed significantly. If you read my blog more often, you know I have been critical of the performance of many publishers.

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Mike Taylor wrote up a [post](#) about the various things a journal article is doing, the first being a *scientific report*. We put a lot of money in establishing a scientific track record. In the past 30 years how we publish our research and how we archive it has changed significantly. If you read my blog more often, you know I have been critical of the performance of many publishers. Springer Nature was so disappointing that after 5 years I [stepped down](#) as Editor-in-Chief (of two) of the [Journal of Cheminformatics](#). There is so much that must be [done better](#).

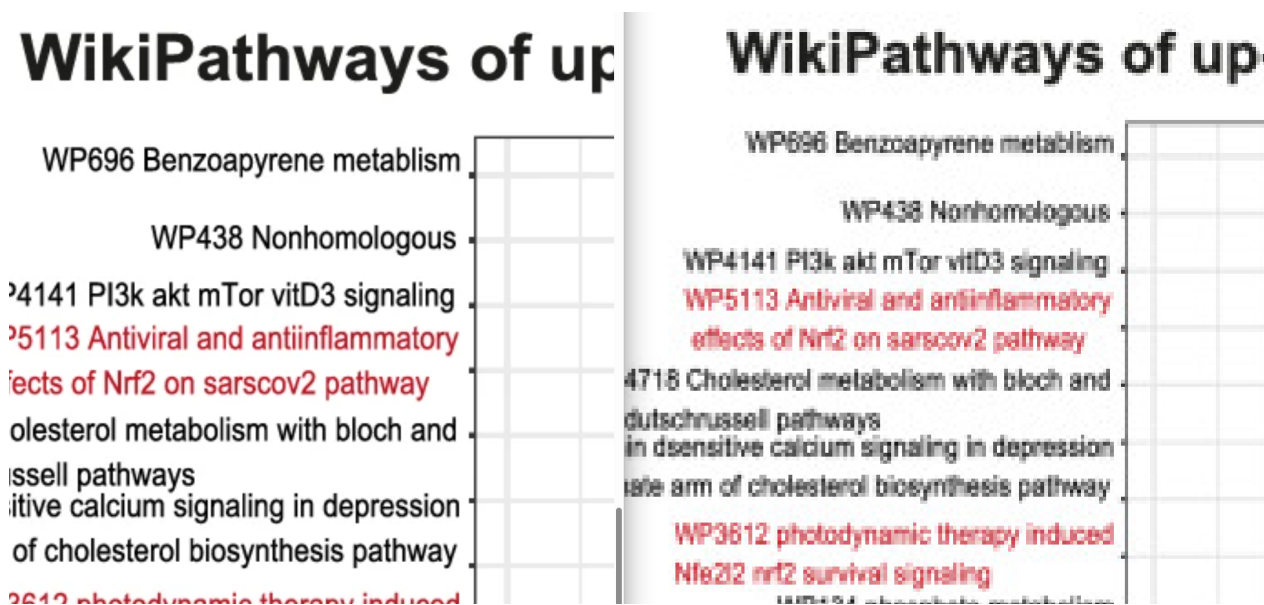
But in the most recent iteration, triggered by some work for [WikiPathways](#), I was using [Europe PMC](#) to find articles that mention *WikiPathways* and then search in the full text for the string **WP**, as a trigger for the possible mention of WikiPathways pathway identifiers, which look like **WP4846**. The use of *compact (resource) identifiers* (see doi:[10.1038/sdata.2018.29](https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2018.29)) is minimal, but at least some articles use identifiers.

That allows me to extend our WikiPathways knowledge graph of [articles citing specific pathways](#). At the time of writing, we collected 2509 citations from 440 different articles to 883 different pathways. Now, I want to blog about that more, but it's related to an observation.

Information loss

Now, back in the late nineties I learned about GNU/Linux and after playing with Red Hat and Suse, I settled for Debian. One of the things I learned is that, generally, information corruption (like data loss) is an absolute red flag, a no-go, a total showstopper.

And then we have this in publishing, the one area where data corruption must also be a no-go:



In this image, the left side shows a screenshot of the publisher version of the article and on the right side the version in [Pubmed Central](#) (PMC). PMC has been an important project to archive full text versions of articles:

11.2 million articles are archived in PMC.

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So, this is **really bad!** The archived version is not really useful. As a human I already struggle to read the degraded image, let alone an algorithm.

Does that matter? Yes, projects like the awesome [Pathway Figure OCR](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13059-020-02181-2) (see doi:[10.1186/s13059-020-02181-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13059-020-02181-2)) depend on images to be FAIR enough to extract information. (Side note: yes, these images should be vector graphics, but commercial publishers decided about twenty years ago that they could not care enough.)

At this moment, I do not know where the information is lost. Maybe PubMed Central is storing the images in a low resolution. Maybe the publisher provides PMC with a low resolution image. But to me, this must be solved as soon as possible. This is utterly unacceptable.

I wonder what the authors of the article (doi:[10.1186/s13287-025-04166-z](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13287-025-04166-z)) I took as example think of this.