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This special edition of NAR contains a collection of reviews that describe this exciting field, its recent progress, and its impact on the understanding of basic cellular processes.

*An excerpt from the accompanying editorial by Patrick Linder and Steve Kowalczykowski:*

Since the discovery of the structure of DNA we have known that nucleic acids can exist in a complementary, base-paired form, and that these double-stranded molecules must first be unwound in order that replication, repair, transcription, translation or degradation may occur. These many different processes require a variety of different machines that use NTP to perform their work, either to unwind

the double-stranded molecule or to translocate along its length. [The reviews in this collection cover] machines from a variety of organisms, including DNA replication, recombination, transcription and restriction, as well as RNA metabolism. The methods used to study the enzyme components of these machines range from genetic analysis to sophisticated

biochemical investigation, and from structural examination to analysis of single molecules. The organisms studied range from bacteriophages and bacteria to eukaryotes both simple and complex and including humans. Remarkably, these seemingly different enzymes from disparate sources and pathways were very often found to function according to highly similar or unified mechanisms.

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