Verifiability and Notability Tutorial

Wikipedia strives to publish verifiable information about notable subjects.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

Verifiability

important because the encyclopedia is a source of information and knowledge, but can be edited by anyone. Citation of reliable sources allows people to verify the information.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

What requires citations?

- Any fact in dispute, or likely to be challenged.
- All quotations must be attributed, with citations.
- Facts regarding honors (awards, prizes) or top achievements
- Description of criminal convictions
- Numbers and statistics
- Other facts may or may not have citations.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

Examples requiring citations

- Buhari is the president of Nigeria
- "Be the change you want to see in the world"
- Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State
- She won the Booker Prize in 2014
- India controls 43% of the territory of Kashmir

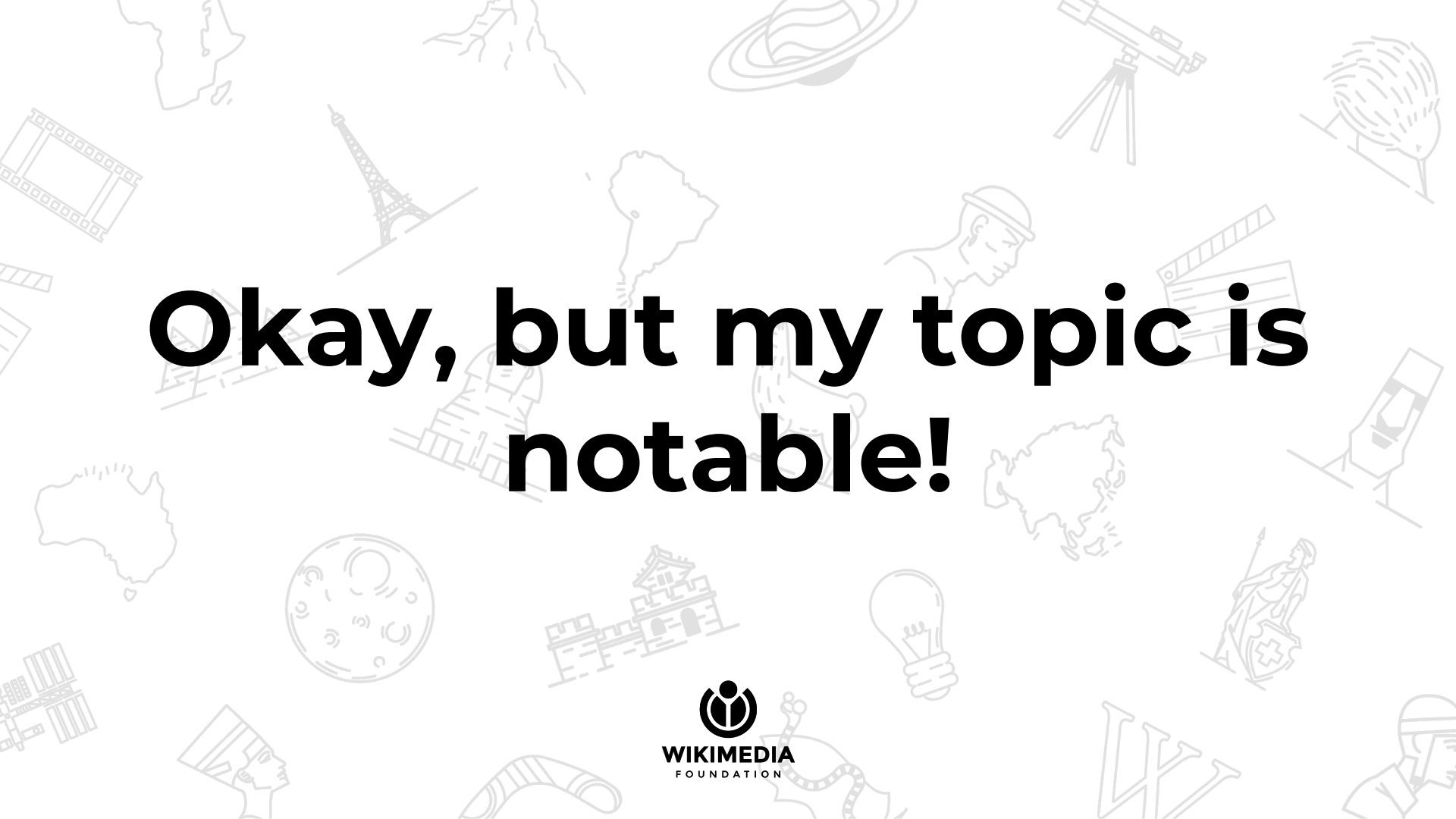
WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

Notability

important because the encyclopedia is not a phone book, and documenting absolutely everything, rather than everything notable, would cost too much effort.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

Okay, but my topic is notable!



How do you know?

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

How does English Wikipedia determine notability?

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

by guidelines!

And through community discussion

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

A general guideline...

...and some topic-specific guidelines

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

The General Notability Guideline

"If a topic has received **significant coverage** in **reliable sources** that are **independent of the subject**, it is presumed to be suitable for a stand-alone article or list."

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:GNG]]

"Significant coverage"

Signifcant coverage of X means that X was the subject (or one of the main subjects) of the source, and addresses it directly and in detail, and not just mentioned in passing.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

"Significant coverage" examples

An interviewed politician mentioning a band she enjoys listening to is not "significant coverage" of that band.

A major newspaper feature article on the band is significant coverage.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

"Significant coverage" examples

A memoir mentioning a person used "an IBM computer" is not significant coverage of IBM

A book-length study of IBM, or biography of its founder, is significant coverage of IBM

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

"Reliable sources"

- The reliability of sources can depend on a number of factors:
  - The work itself (genre, scope, method)
  - The author(s) (credentials)
  - The publisher (methods, reputation, affiliation)

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:RS]]

"Reliable sources"

- Sources should be "published"
- Sources do not have to be in English. English is preferred on English Wikipedia, but any language is acceptable.
- Sources do not have to be available online. Online sources are convenient.

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:RS]]

"Reliable sources"

- Context matters: Sources should directly address the topic.
  - E.g. An authoritative book on African art may be a good source on African art, but provide a mistaken date for Nigeria's independence in a side comment.

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:RS]]

"Reliable sources"

Context matters: Even generally-biased sources may be useful to cite.

- A Marxist Web site may have a strong point of view on economics, but can probably be cited for the names of books published by its editor.

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:RS]]

"Reliable sources"

- Time matters: 19th century sources on literature are valuable. 19th century sources on physics are not.
  - Sources can be too new, too

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:RS]]

"Reliable sources"

- The best sources are generally academic sources reviewing, discussing, studying, criticizing the articles topic.
- Serious news sources are good sources for current events
  - (eventual) academic works on current events are better sources

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:RS]]

"Reliable sources"

- The rest depends on context (e.g. sports statistics sites; government data; etc.)
- Source lists exist:
  - [[Wikipedia:Current science and technology sources]]

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:RS]]

"Independent of the subject"

- For a source to be independent of the subject, it needs to be outside the subject's control, not just formally, but in practice.
- It also needs to not be related to the subject strongly, e.g. relations of kinship, debt, employment, etc.

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:IS]]

"Independent of the subject"

- A musical band's official Web site is not independent. (May still be a reasonable source for some things.)
- A newspaper is not a reliable source for the business deals and interests of its owner

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:IS]]

"Independent of the subject"

Topic	Independent	Non-independent
Business	News media, government agency	Owner, employees, corporate website, sales brochure, competitor's website
Person	News media, scholarly press book	Person, family members, friends, employer, employees
City	National media, scholarly book	Mayor's website, local booster clubs, local chamber of commerce website
Book, movie, etc.	Newspaper or published magazine review, scholarly press book (or chapter)	Production company website, publishing company website, website for the book/album/movie

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:IS]]

Remember:

- Not every source you site has to be independent, disinterested, and free of conflict-of-interest.
- But the sources used to establish notability **do** have to be independent, disinterested, and free of CoI.

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:IS]]

And those topic-specific guidelines?

- Several topics have specific notability guidelines in English Wikipedia:
- Films, books, music, academics, events, organizations, astronomical objects, …
- Full list here: [[Category:Wikipedia notability guidelines]]

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

[[WP:IS]]

Sources in the African Context

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

The Bad

- Not enough sources
- Great gaps in secondary sources on even very important topics
- Lack of easy/free access to sources that do exist
- Notability arguments and deletions cause bad experience to newbies. Some are lost forever.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

The Good

- Things are improving
- A lot (more) can be done with there is
- A little education/help goes a long way
- While short-term solutions are scarce, investment in long-term solutions, such as documentation projects and digitization efforts, will pay off.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

Meanwhile... here are sources!

Recommended by African editors

- premiumtimesng.com
- allafrica.com
- thisdaylive.com
- news24.com
- punchng.com
- saharareporters.com
- tribuneonlineng.com
- guardian.ng
- bellanaija.com
- pmnewsnigeria.com
- sunnewsonline.com
- businessdayonline.com

Remember: context matters! These are not necessarily reliable, and not necessarily appropriate for every topic.

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

A word about oral citations

- We strive to share **"all human knowledge"**. Not all human knowledge is written and published in peer-reviewed journals.
- Oral knowledge may contradict other knowledge
- Not everyone with an opinion is an oral knowledge bearer.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

Okay, *two* words about oral citations

- Oral citations *can* become a part of standard Wikipedia practice.
  - Meeting the "published" criterion.
  - Meeting the "relevant" criterion.
  - Careful experimentation is needed. Again and again.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

The Ugly

- Wikipedia is edited, and monitored, by humans
- Some humans are mean. Or rude.
- Some just have a bad day, or lost their patience after defending Wikipedia from 100 spammers and vandals in the last two hours.
- Some are downright bigoted.
- But really, most people who are *inappropriately* obstructive of work on African topics, do so only out of ignorance or weakness, not with bad intent.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

A word about conflict

- Wikipedia can get frustrating. Even infuriating.
- Don't overdo it. It's just an encyclopedia. If you're getting worked up, stop, step away from the screen, get some air. Come back another day. Or week.
- Take criticism as a learning opportunity. Filter out the noise or inappropriate tone; focus on the substance and the learning for yourself.
- Wikipedia always wins. Don't bet against Wikipedia.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

Okay, *two* words about conflict...

- If you see yourself editing Wikipedia for a long time, get ready to lose some arguments. Take it in stride.
- The important thing is sharing free knowledge. Not your ego. (Nor *that* person's ego, but if *you* realize it, you can step away even if they don't.)
- Talk to others. Ground yourself in the opinions and advice of peers you appreciate. Let them convince you.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

Can we get back to the Good part?

- Sure!
- Invest in:
  - Careful newbie training (more prep! more focus!)
  - Excellent training materials; experienced and competent trainers
  - Digitization (either directly or through advocacy and partnership with bigger orgs)
  - Partnerships (GLAM, gov't content donations, …)

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

Verifiability Exercise

1. Reliable or not?

Determine whether the named source can be considered reliable for the particular fact:

- A band's official Web site for the names of the members of the band
- A library catalogue for the names of a band's albums
- A news site regarding a terrorist attack
  - Which? When?

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

1. Reliable or not?

Determine whether the named source can be considered reliable for the particular fact:

- An artist's blog for the sales figures of their albums
- A politician's official Web site for her date of birth
- A politician's official Web site for his accomplishments for his constituency
- The Lagos Times for a decision made by Lagos State
- The Lagos Times lifestyle section for the efficacy of diet pills

1. Reliable or not?

Determine whether the named source can be considered reliable for the particular fact:

- A TV news segment on YouTube for casualties in a disaster
- The national bureau of statistics for the incidence of infant mortality in the country
- A surgeon's professional Web site on the beneficial effects of plastic surgery

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

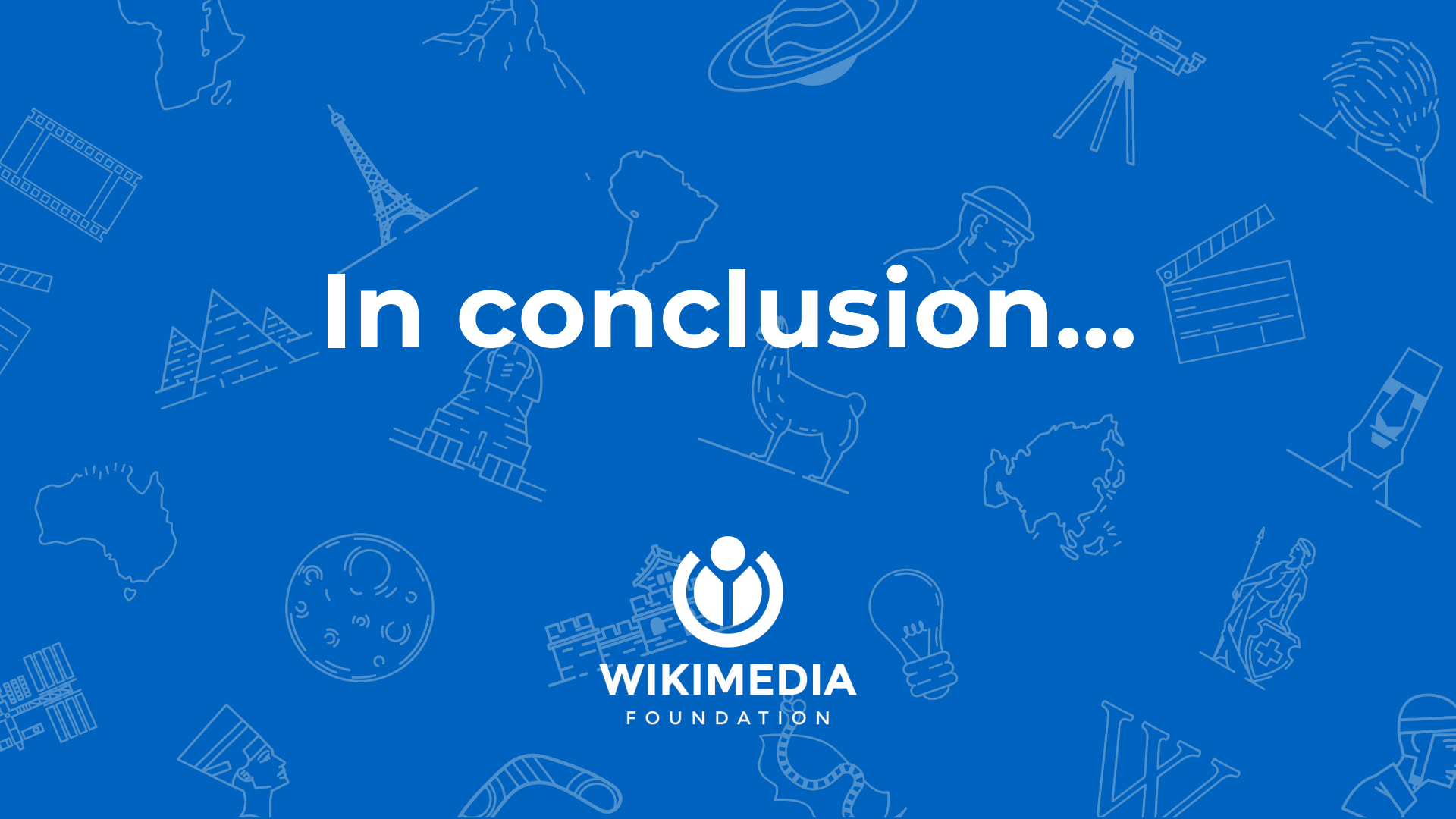
Notability Exercise

1. Notable or not?

Review available information about a local politician or artist, and determine whether they are notable or not. Explain your determination.

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION

In conclusion...



In conclusion, remember...

- Use reliable sources to establish notability and support your (neutral point of view) article text.
- If you're not sure a source is reliable, ask for help [[WP:RSN]]
- If you can't find sources, ask for help [[WP:FACT]]
- If you still can't find sources, don't write the article. (Perhaps you can encourage the creation of sources.)
- You will make mistakes. It is generally enough to apologize, undo (delete/remove), and do better next time.

WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION

THANK YOU

Keep in touch!

asaf@wikimedia.org

WIKIMEDIA
FOUNDATION