

Environmental sciences



Editing Wikipedia can be daunting at first, especially for a student editor contributing to Wikipedia for the first time in a class assignment. This guide is designed to help you add content about the environmental sciences to Wikipedia.

Make a difference

You're contributing to a resource millions of people use to inform themselves about the world and their environment. Your work for this class will be read by thousands of people, so it's important to be accurate.

By documenting and sharing your knowledge about one or more of the environmental sciences, you'll help Wikipedia present a wider spectrum of information about the world. With great power comes great responsibility!

Understand the guidelines

Take time to read and understand the suggestions here to make the most of your contributions to Wikipedia. If you post something that doesn't meet these guidelines, fixing it may take up valuable volunteer time that could have been spent making your contributions, or other content, better.

If you aren't comfortable working within these guidelines, talk to your instructor about an alternative, off-wiki assignment.

Engage with other editors

Part of the Wikipedia experience is receiving and responding to feedback from other editors. Don't wait until the last day to make a contribution, or you may miss comments, advice, and ideas. Volunteers from the Wikipedia community might respond or ask questions about your work. If they do, make sure to reply. Thank them, and work with them to improve the article. Discussion is a crucial part of the Wikipedia process.

Watch out for close paraphrasing

Use your own words. Plagiarizing by copying-and-pasting, or close paraphrasing — when most of the words are changed, but the structure and meaning of the original text remains — will be caught by other editors, and there will be a permanent online record of it tied to your account. It's likely also a violation of your school's honor code.

Even standard resources or authors, such as educational resources from environmental organizations, are under copyright and should never be directly copied.

The best way to avoid this hassle is to make sure you really understand the material, and write about it in your own words. Your Sandbox, rather than the article itself, is the ideal place to work on getting your wording just right. If you aren't clear on what close paraphrasing is, contact your university's writing center.

Be bold!

Take the time to understand the rules and guidelines, and soon you'll be contributing important knowledge to a resource you and millions of other people use every day.

Getting started

Choosing your topic

- Choose topics with plentiful and interesting literature in peer-reviewed journals, other science periodicals (such as *Scientific American*), or books, but not on Wikipedia.
- You may wish to search for interesting and plentiful sources first, then choose a Wikipedia article based on what you find.
- Check the article's rating on its Talk page. "Start-class" or "stub" articles need your help! Avoid "featured" or "good" articles.

What are your goals?

Is your goal to motivate people to change their behavior or support some cause? If so, then you might be on the wrong track. Wikipedia articles should have a neutral point of view. It's OK to write an article on a topic you care about, but be sure to present the facts without aiming to persuade readers to a conclusion.

What's notable?

Remember that not every group doing good work on an environmental issue is notable enough for Wikipedia. Don't rely on an organization's own website. Instead, rely upon what others have said about your topic.

What is the lead section?

The *lead section* is the first section of a Wikipedia article. A good lead will summarize the entire article in 1–4 paragraphs, providing context and briefly covering all of the important aspects of the topic. The first sentence — which usually starts with the **name of the topic** in bold — is a definition of the topic and indicates why it is important.

Consider writing a lead section first, which you can use as an outline for the rest of the article. Revise it as you go to make sure it accurately summarizes the body of the article.

Seek balance

Environmental issues are often controversial, and can create heated discussions on Wikipedia. Look at an article's Talk page to see if the article is locked in disagreements. If so, consider suggesting updated references for the article, or seek out related content that may be missing. If all else fails, consider another topic.

Organizing your article

Every article will be unique. Add, remove, or reorder these suggested sections as needed.

Writing about groups, organizations, or programs

- **Lead section:** A scaffolding paragraph that summarizes the article.
- **Activities:** What does it do? Who are the key people involved? You can make new sections for individual campaigns or projects.
- **Governance:** How does the project sustain itself? What is the size of the organization? Who funds it?
- **Leadership:** Briefly discuss the organization's leadership. Do not dwell on biography unless directly relevant to the work discussed.

For good examples, see articles for *Seacology*, *Anti-nuclear movement in Australia*, or *Restoration of the Everglades*.

Writing about environmental concerns

- **Lead section**
- **Background:** Provide context for the concern. What is at risk?
- **Causes:** What is the source of the concern? Discuss social, ecological, and/or human effects, and their implications. Write in a neutral fashion, using high-quality sources.
- **Effects:** What are the costs? Discuss economic, but also ecological costs.
- **Efforts:** Outline the efforts being made to counteract the problem — describe challenges and solutions.

For good examples, see articles on *Draining and development of the Everglades*, *Conservation of slow lorises*, and *Retreat of glaciers since 1850*.

Finding sources

Think critically

How do you know if a source is appropriate for your Wikipedia article? Your sources should be published, and reviewed by neutral third parties (an editor, a peer review) for accuracy.

Use reliable sources

Reliable sources have a reputation for fact-checking, and don't have an agenda to advance by presenting facts in a certain light.

What makes a source trustworthy and accurate? It's not about *agreeing* with it. Instead, be sure the information you draw from is put forward without an agenda. Ask yourself, "Why is this being published? Who is publishing it? Are they trying to convince me of something?"

Good sources include:

- **Best source:** Current books, textbooks, and peer-reviewed work in scientific journals from reliable publishers, written by experts in environmental sciences. Consider these the gold standard!
- **Second best source:** Articles in mainstream newspapers and magazines that fact-check their stories and post corrections. You'll want to find a few stories that put forward the same information.

Do *not* use:

- Blog posts (even from most news sites).
- Anything from an involved organization, such as material presented on their website.
- Opinion pieces or editorials.

For more about finding sources, check out

| *shortcut* WP:RS

What's a shortcut?

The text WP:RS is what's known on Wikipedia as a *shortcut*.

You can quickly type shortcuts like this into Wikipedia's search bar to pull up specific pages.

Keep it neutral

Make sure your language isn't promotional. A local non-profit that has supplied water filtration systems to a city with a lead-contaminated water supply is probably doing amazing work, but Wikipedia should never say the work is "amazing." Show, don't tell. A group's achievements should stand for themselves.

Think carefully about adjectives. For example, the word "innovative." An environmental group's national award win for innovation belongs in an article. Having an "innovative and groundbreaking strategy" doesn't.

Depict information accurately

Unlike most school assignments, Wikipedia doesn't permit original research. A Wikipedia article should cover what the literature says, not your interpretation.

Process information from carefully selected sources, and describe that information in your own words. Apply the same critical thinking you apply to other's writing to your own writing. That way, you can be certain that the information you contribute to Wikipedia is accurate, factual, well sourced, and valuable.

For example, it's perfectly acceptable to say that a species of lizard has been in decline since 1989. It's also acceptable to say that runoff from a local factory has been found in that lizard's habitat since 1989. But you should not present these facts as related unless you can cite a reliable source that has connected these dots. Otherwise, it is *original research*, that is, presenting your own conclusions rather than neutral reporting.

For more details about avoiding original research, try | *shortcut* WP:NOR

Writing your article

As you start writing, remember to keep these guidelines in mind:

- Be sure you're writing impersonal, fact-based encyclopedic content, not an essay or blog post. See the *Editing Wikipedia* guidebook linked from your course page if you need a refresher on the difference in tone.
- Give appropriate weights to different aspects of the topic, guided by how deeply your sources cover them.
- Introduce technical terms only when it's important that the reader understand them. Always provide a short, plain-English explanation in parentheses.
- Let the facts speak for themselves. Respect your readers and recognize that the same data doesn't always lead two readers to the same conclusion.

Final thoughts

- Don't procrastinate! Writing good, reliable Wikipedia articles takes time. Don't wait until the last minute. If you get stuck, always ask your instructor for extra time rather than adding content to Wikipedia that doesn't meet these guidelines.
- If you have additional questions about contributing to Wikipedia, you can ask the Wikipedia Content Expert listed on your course page, or post a question at the Teahouse. To find the Teahouse, type | *shortcut* `WP:TH` into the search bar.
- Check back on your page! Not only can it be interesting to see how your article grows, you may also have comments and suggestions from other editors, and want to get involved in new directions and developments.



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