Learning to edit Wikipedia

WMF Design Research | Abbey Ripstra, Daisy Chen, Jonathan Morgan | June 2015

Goals

- Better understand the first time and new editing experience
- Make recommendations to support new contributors in being successful and confident contributors. (Also to welcome them to the collaboration)
- inform editing roadmap for new contributors

Methods

Remote moderated Interviews

- 8 brand new editors / 8 casual editors (people who have done some editing in the past, but are not regular contributors) *
- some with high tech comfort, some with low tech comfort

* One of the participants reported in our screener survey, that he had done less than 5 edits, qualifying him as a "causal contributor" for this study. However, when we met him, he revealed he makes a few edits each day (for some years now), so he was our most experienced contributor who participated.

High Level Findings

Need for Educating New Contributors

Confusion about citation and links

In general, it is apparent that there is confusion between links and citations, and the various ways to support assertions within Wikipedia, and when and how to use them appropriately.

- **7 of the 8** new (first time) contributors and **3** of the casual contributors were not clear on the differences between links and citations.
- Also, we observed many people going right to the "insert" menu when trying to add a citation.

Recommendation: Provide in context education for new contributors, and make it findable for those who may skip a walk through and might need the information later. Describe how, when and why links (internal and external) and references are used appropriately in Wikipedia to new contributors.

Maybe remove "basic cite" from the "insert" menu, as it is inconsistently placed.

Seeking help is hard

Participants say and show us that they need help to accomplish some basic editing tasks, but some don't find the wiki help system useful or sometimes they don't use it at all.

Participants are sometimes very patient and use help on Wiki. Many, however, default to Google. (We have seen people default to Google for help in other testing too.)

Recommendation: Fixing help is a giant project (there are some good ideas). in the meantime, let's provide the most important things newbies need to know to get started by providing **in context education for the basics.**

Utility of edit comments not clear

Some participants in this research (4 new contributors) did not add comments nor did they always understand why they were adding edit comments if they did. Some did not even pay attention to edit comments and skipped it all together.

Recommendation: In context education - even just an explanatory line of text or a tool tip somewhere in the context of the edit comments about what edit comments are and why they are useful. This information will help new contributors connect to community and begin to understand how to collaborate on editing.

Wiki Syntax in visual editor is confusing

Also, it is confusing for people to see "/*section title */" in the visual editor comment box. It is wiki syntax and not familiar to new contributors using visual editor.

Recommendation: Remove "/*section title */" in the visual editor comment box and replace it with "describe what you cnaged in the section _____" (naming the section that was edited in instead of the blank spot.
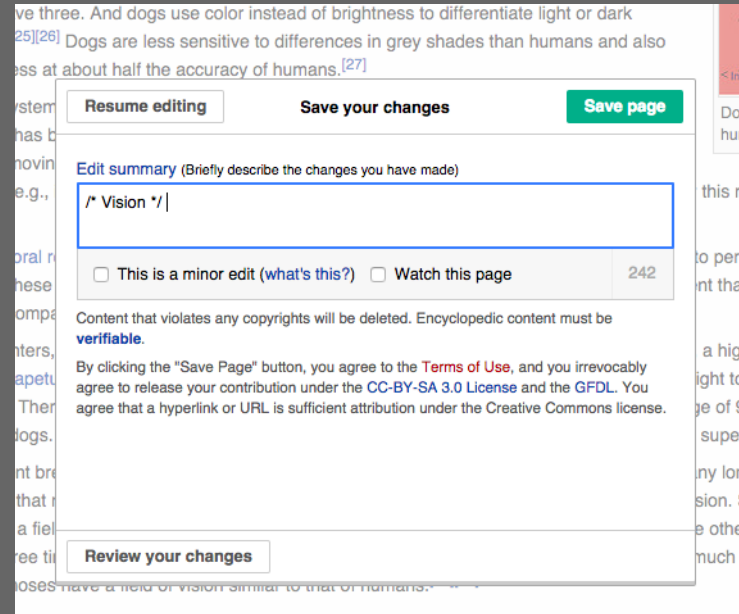
Utility of review changes not clear

Some participants (if they investigated review changes) did not understand why it is there, how to use it.

If new contributors discovered the review changes function, they were not sure what it was telling them. One casual editor noted that *"there are no directions there"* (he teaches his university students how to edit Wikipedia

Recommendation: Provide in context education about review changes. Even just an explanatory line of text or a tool tip somewhere near the "review changes" button, about what review changes is and why they are useful. would suffice Will help newbies see their impact and have confidence to save or go back and fix something.

Wiki syntax in visual editor is confusing

If new contributors discovered the review changes function, they were not sure what it was telling them.

Recommendation: it is confusing for people learning to edit via the visual editor to see wikitext in review changes. Is it possible to show diffs in a WISYWIG instead of wikitext?

Testing the "walk through"

We have tested a few iterations of the walk through (new user education about links and references and saving) a few different ways.

A usertesting.com survey about one iteration of an early walk through.

Showed some of the participants in this research the walk through.

So far, the findings indicate that new users would appreciate the information provided.

Also, some will want to skip a walk through (as it is annoying or distracting), but might refer to the information later if needed.

One person said seeing this before editing would:

"remove some of the nervous hesitation about ruining something or doing something wrong". N17

Recommendation: Provide in context education (specifically about references and links and saving, to new contributors, and make it so people can find it later to refer to if it is in their way when they first see it. There are more concepts and iteration on the concept we tested here.

Contextual Confusion

Not Thinking to Save / or press edit

4 participants did not press save when intending to complete their edit. This most likely has to do with strong mental models of using other software (google and microsoft) that auto saves.

Also, 3 participants attempted to start editing without pressing the edit button. This is also most likely due to software, like google docs and microsoft word that is always editable (unless settings are set to prevent editing).

Recommendation: Highlight the save button for new users specifically. This is a learnable action, so it can be addressed by making the save button more discoverable as people are learning about contributing.

[Edit] and [Edit Source]

There were several comments from new contributors about "edit source".

- One participant, when asked "what do you see here?" responded: "well that is the source code (maybe riffing off 'edit source') I wouldn't dare edit that"
- Two new contributors thought "edit source" referred to adding sources to an article.
- One casual contributor said "'edit source' is not the name of the previous edit tab, and explained editros will be confused"
- One other casual contributor thought "edit source" was where you go to make "sophisticated edits"
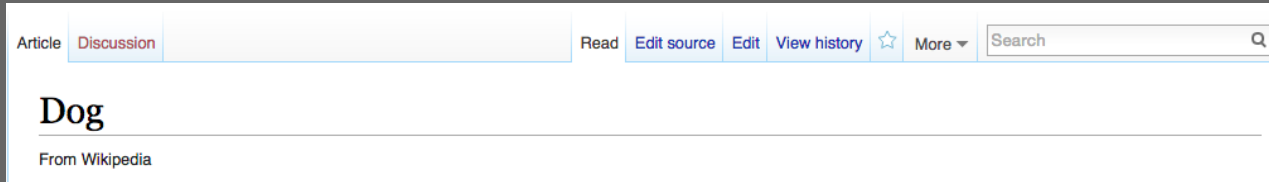
Recommendation: Considering that changing the names on the two edit tabs is something that might take a protracted conversation with community, we need to think ahead about this and start the process to make the names more clear. (Coms has recommendations here).

Citations / references not in preview

A few participants, (new contributors) were trying to verify that they added a citation or a reference in the external reference section correctly before they saved their edit in the visual editor. Because the reference had not been generated yet, they were not sure they had done it correctly. This caused some hesitancy. Once they pressed save, they saw the reference in place.

This is particularly for brand new contributors as they learn. They could use some information about what is happening and why they can not see the reference.

Recommendation: If it is possible, add a preview of the reference. If not, potentially add a note about references being generated post save.

ToC not in VE while editing

ToC is a useful tool for navigation. Especially in long articles. When editing in the visual editor, the ToC does not appear. This causes people to have to do a lot more scrolling and manual navigation which can be OK in short articles, but in long articles, it is a pain.

A few participants mentioned missing the ToC while using the visual editor.

Recommendation: Show the ToC in the visual editor while editing is happening and allow it to be used as a navigation tool.

Lack of Mapping

Some participants noted that they would use both the visual editor and the wikitext editor. We know that some things are not possible in the visual editor quite yet, and also that some things are easier in the visual editor. So, it is most likely that people will be going back and forth between the two editors. The adjustment to one editor from the other creates an unnecessary cognitive load on contributors.

Recommendation: This is not a show stopper, but something to consider as we move forward with improving the editors. We can map the various activities in each editor and perhaps create more location and visual consistency to reduce the cognitive load.

Mapping WTE to VE and Back

Next steps

Next steps

- walkthrough features need iterative testing and implementation
  - Provide education, specifically on links and citations (when, why and how to use them) and highlight the save button.
  - A few concepts to provide education to new users have been built, let's test and decide which is best to move forward with.
- Add in context tool tip or message to edit comments to describe utility of function.
- Remove "/*section title */" in the visual editor edit comments box and replace it with "describe what you changed in the section _____"
- Provide in context education about the use of review changes.

Next steps

- Highlight the save button to increase awareness of the need to use it for learning contributors.
- Be cognizant that there may be confusion to new contributors about edit and edit source, and start the process to change the names of the two edit tabs to something more clear.
- Consider if it is possible to reveal a reference while previewing (in visual editor) or provide an explanation as to why it does not show up. Not a show stopper, but would reduce some hesitation.
- Consider showing the ToC in the visual editor while editing is happening and allow it to be used as a navigation tool.
- Consider creating more consistency in placement and visual representations of actions and in experiences in the two editors to reduce cognitive load of lack of mapping between the two editors.

Appendix

Recordings of research sessions

(of participants willing to share widely, the rest of the participants chose to share only inside the Wikimedia Foundation.

New Editor 1

New Editor 2

New Editor 6

New Editor 13

New Editor 17

Casual Editor 7

Casual Editor 9