

Neutral Point of View (NPOV) Tutorial



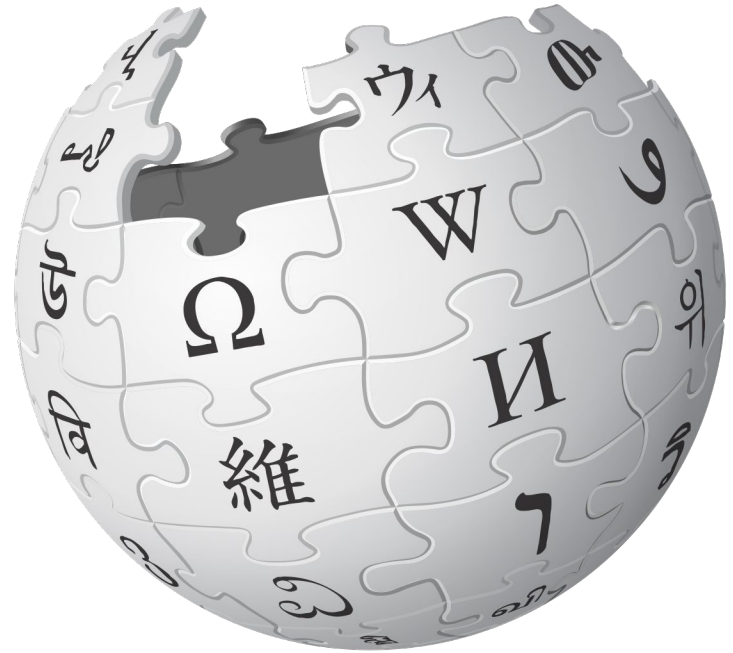
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**Wikipedia is written
from a Neutral Point
of View (NPOV)**

What is a neutral point of view?

Wikipedia's Voice

The encyclopedia's voice
is precious.
We must guard it.



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Wikipedia's Voice

"The Federal Republic of Nigeria, commonly referred to as Nigeria, is a federal republic in West Africa, bordering Benin in the west, Chad and Cameroon in the east, and Niger in the north. Its coast in the south lies on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. It comprises 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, where the capital, Abuja is located. Nigeria is officially a democratic secular country." --[[Nigeria]]

**Q: Who is the best
football (soccer)
player ever?**

**A: Wikipedia doesn't
have an opinion.**

**So would all football
players be described
the same way on
Wikipedia?**

"Real Madrid [...] former player, [Alfredo Di Stéfano](#), opined: 'The best player ever? Pelé. [Lionel Messi](#) and Cristiano Ronaldo are both great players with specific qualities, but Pelé was better'. ^[91]" --[[Pelé]]

So how do we achieve a Neutral Point of View?

1. Be fair and accurate

1. Be fair and accurate

- Avoid stating opinions as facts: Wikipedia's voice should be reserved for facts.
- Significant opinions and assessments of the article's topic **can** belong in the article, but only with attribution and an accurate citation.
- Even reliable sources may include bias; we need to at least present them without bias.

1. Be fair and accurate

- Avoid 'puffery' (e.g. 'great', 'iconic', 'legendary', 'celebrated', 'famous', 'renowned', 'cutting-edge'...)
- Avoid emotive language (e.g. 'horrible', 'wonderful', 'exciting')
- Avoid editorializing (e.g. 'surprising', 'obviously', 'unfortunately', 'interestingly')
- Avoid giving grades (e.g. 'best', 'worst')

Example: avoiding 'puffery'

- **Peacock example:**
 - "[Bob Dylan](#) is the defining figure of the 1960s counterculture and a brilliant songwriter."
- **Removing all puffery:**
 - "Bob Dylan is an American singer-songwriter."
- **Expressing the importance, with just the facts:**
 - "Dylan was included in [Time's 100: The Most Important People of the Century](#), in which he was called "master poet, caustic social critic and intrepid, guiding spirit of the counterculture generation". By the mid-1970s, his songs had been covered by hundreds of other artists."

Example: [[Genocide]]

Genocide is intentional action to destroy a people (usually defined as an ethnic, national, racial, or religious group) in whole or in part. The hybrid word "genocide" is a combination of the Greek word *génos*("race, people") and the Latin suffix *-cide* ("act of killing").^[1] The United Nations Genocide Convention, which was established in 1948, defines genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group".^{[2][3]}

The term genocide was coined by Raphael Lemkin in his 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*;^{[4][5]} it has been applied to the Holocaust, and many other mass killings including the genocide of indigenous peoples in the Americas, the Armenian Genocide, [...], and the Rwandan genocide.^[a]

The Political Instability Task Force estimated that, between 1956 and 2016, a total of forty-three genocides took place, causing the death of about 50 million people. The UNHCR estimated that a further 50 million had been displaced by such episodes of violence up to 2008.^[6]

1. Be fair and accurate

Avoid unsupported attributions ("**weasel words**"), e.g. "many say", "it is widely believed", "experts agree", "research has shown".



1. Be fair and accurate

- Avoid implying doubt or truth when reporting:
 - "said", "wrote", "commented", "according to" are neutral
 - "clarified", "found out", "exposed", "insisted", "observed", "claimed", "confessed", "admitted", "speculated" are usually not neutral
 - But this is okay: "Robert Brown speculated that molecules cause dust to move in water. Einstein later proved it using statistical analysis."

1. Be fair and accurate

- Avoid euphemisms:
 - "passed away" (died), "eternal rest" (died), "tied the knot" (married), "collateral damage" (civilian casualties)
- ...and idioms/clichés:
 - "tip of the iceberg", "ace up the sleeve", "at the end of the day", "white elephant"

1. Be fair and accurate

- Avoid contentious labels:
 - "cult", "terrorist", "fundamentalist", "extremist", "myth", etc.

**2. Wikipedia does not
take sides:
Describe controversies,
don't engage in them**

2. Wikipedia does not take sides

- Many things are contentious in this world. Sometimes even the basic facts of a conflict are disputed.
- The Wikipedia way is to transcend the conflict rather than participate in it: to take a step back and describe the different serious, well-sourced points of view.

Example: [[Kashmir]]

Kashmir is the northernmost geographical region of the [Indian subcontinent](#). Until the mid-19th century, the term "Kashmir" denoted only the [Kashmir Valley](#) between the [Great Himalayas](#) and the [Pir Panjal Range](#). Today, it denotes a larger area that includes the Indian-administered territory of [Jammu and Kashmir](#) (which includes the region of [Jammu](#), [Kashmir Valley](#), [Ladakh](#) and [Siachen](#)), the Pakistani-administered territories of [Azad Kashmir](#) and [Gilgit-Baltistan](#), and Chinese-administered territories of [Aksai Chin](#) and the [Trans-Karakoram Tract](#).^{[1][2][3]}

In the first half of the 1st millennium, the Kashmir region became an important centre of [Hinduism](#) and later of [Buddhism](#); later still, in the ninth century, [Kashmir Shaivism](#) arose.^[4] In 1339, [Shah Mir](#) became the first [Muslim](#) ruler of Kashmir, inaugurating the *Salatin-i-Kashmir* or [Shah Mir dynasty](#).^[5] Kashmir was part of the [Mughal Empire](#) from 1586 to 1751,^[6] and thereafter, until 1820, of the Afghan [Durrani Empire](#).^[5] That year, the [Sikhs](#), under [Ranjit Singh](#), annexed Kashmir.^[5] In 1846, after the Sikh defeat in the [First Anglo-Sikh War](#), and upon the purchase of the region from the British under the [Treaty of Amritsar](#), the Raja of Jammu, [Gulab Singh](#), became the new ruler of Kashmir. The rule of his descendants, under the *paramountcy* (or tutelage) of the British Crown, lasted until the [partition of India](#) in 1947, when the former [princely state](#) of the [British Raj](#) was claimed by both [Pakistan](#) and [India](#).

Since 1947, the [greater region of Jammu and Kashmir](#) has been embroiled in a [territorial dispute between India, Pakistan and China](#) — with India controlling approximately 43% of the land area of the region and 70% of its population. Pakistan controls roughly 37% of the land, while China controls the remaining 20%.^{[7][1][2]} Kashmir is widely regarded as the world's most militarized zone — the region has witnessed [three major wars between India and Pakistan](#), another limited war between India and China, numerous border skirmishes, [high mountainous warfare](#), an [ongoing insurgency](#), a mass [Hindu exodus](#) and internal civilian unrest.^[8]



Example: [[Spratly Islands dispute]]

The **Spratly Islands dispute** is an ongoing [territorial dispute](#) between [China](#), [Taiwan](#), [Malaysia](#), the [Philippines](#) and [Vietnam](#), concerning "ownership" of the [Spratly Islands](#), a group of islands and associated "maritime features" (reefs, banks, cays, etc.) located in the [South China Sea](#). The dispute is characterised by diplomatic stalemate and the employment of military pressure techniques (such as military occupation of disputed territory) in the advancement of national territorial claims. All except Brunei occupy some of the maritime features.

There has been a sharp rise in media coverage owing mainly to China's increasingly vocal objection to the presence of American naval vessels transiting the area in order to assert the right to freedom of navigation within international waters.

Most of the "maritime features" in this area have at least six names: The "International name", usually in English; the "Chinese name", sometimes different for PRC and ROC (and also in different character-sets); the Vietnamese, Philippine and Malaysian names, and also, there are alternate names (e.g. Spratly Island is also known as Storm Island), and sometimes names with colonial origins (French, Portuguese, Spanish, British, etc.).^[1]



3. Write to the world

3. Write to the world

- Write for a general reader, and do not assume nationality, religion, culture, etc.
 - Contextualize! E.g. "According to the Christian gospels, ...", or "in Hausa folklore, ..."
- Avoid relative place/time references ("here", "recently", "last year", "soon", "in this country"). Use concrete, fixed references ("in 2005", "in Nigeria").

4. Avoid undue weight

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- "Some people consider the Earth to be round; others consider it to be flat." -- neutral?
- Depth, quantity, placement of detail can all lead to **undue weight**
- Articles should reflect majority views **in reliable sources**.
 - E.g. millions of people believe one can contract HIV from kissing. But medical sources all agree one cannot.

Neutral Point of View Exercises



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1. Neutral or not?

Determine whether each of the following words or phrases is generally neutral (i.e. appropriate for the encyclopedia's voice) or not:

- Severe
- Freedom fighter
- Wonderful
- Died
- Impressive
- [a] leading [...]
- groundbreaking
- Interestingly
- Worst
- Evil

1. Neutral or not?

- ... cannot be overstated
- According to Prof. X, ...
- Universal acclaim
- Topped the 2014 US Billboard chart
- Nobel prize winner X
- Opposition leader X
- Eloquent parliamentarian X
- Beautiful Paris
- Medieval-era streets
- Award-winning

2. Rewrites

Rewrite the following sentences to be neutral:

- Fela Kuti is the greatest musician from Nigeria. His work met with astounding success over the years, conquering all of west Africa and beyond.
- Pilate ordered his men to search for Jesus. Unfortunately, Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot. He was caught and crucified and died for our sins.



2. Rewrites

Rewrite the following sentences to be neutral:

- South Africa breathed a sigh of relief as President Jacob Zuma announced he will be stepping down. His corruption brought about his downfall.
- Horrific drought conditions in illegally-occupied Kashmir threaten to take innocent lives.

3. Composition

Without looking at the current Wikipedia article (if there is one), compose a neutral opening paragraph for an article about your favorite(!) musician, politician, or athlete.

Add "[cite]" as a place-holder where you would include a source to support something you wrote.

In conclusion...



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In conclusion, remember...

- The encyclopedia doesn't have opinions, likes and dislikes, favorites, or national/religious affiliations.
- and...
- Nobody was born naturally composing NPOV prose
- It's a skill: it's learnable, and practice makes perfect
- Criticism = learning opportunity; appreciate it, learn from it, fix what you can, and do better next time.



THANK YOU

Keep in touch!

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