

Art history



Editing Wikipedia can be daunting for a newcomer contributing to Wikipedia for the first time. This guide is designed to assist students assigned to add art history content to articles on Wikipedia. Here's what other editors will expect you to know.

Be accurate

You're editing a reference resource that millions of people use as a first stop to learn about the world, draw conclusions about human behavior, and make sense of their culture and those of others.

By documenting and sharing accurate and objective content about art history, you will help people around the world have free and open access to a wide spectrum of human knowledge.

Understand the guidelines

Wikipedia editors who edit art history topics have developed these guidelines for contributing to art history-related articles. Take the time to read and understand the suggestions here to make sure you meet expectations when you edit Wikipedia. When articles don't meet these guidelines, fixing mistakes diverts valuable volunteer time that could have been spent improving content.

Engage with editors

A crucial part of the Wikipedia experience is receiving and responding to feedback from other users. It's likely that experienced users will read your work, comment on it, or ask about it. Don't wait until the last day to make a contribution, as you may miss these opportunities to improve your work. If you get a comment, make sure you respond to it.

Avoid close paraphrasing

Wikipedia articles must be written in your own words. Copy-and-pasting and close paraphrasing (when most of the words are changed, but the structure and meaning of the original text remains) are forbidden on Wikipedia just as they are in other work for your university. Plagiarism will be caught by other editors, a permanent record of plagiarism will be tied to your account, and your instructor will be notified.

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to make sure you understand your material, draw from a number of different sources, and write about your topic in your own words. Always cite a source when you can, even if you do not quote it directly.

Also avoid uploading copyrighted images to Wikipedia's sister site, Wikimedia Commons. Start by assuming that any image that you didn't make is copyrighted. Make sure you take the *Contributing images and media files* training to understand the distinction between copyright and an open license.

Don't be scared. Be bold!

Everybody on Wikipedia wants to make it the best it can be. Take the time to understand these guidelines, and soon you'll be contributing important knowledge to a resource millions of people use every day!

Getting started

Finding a topic

Make sure you have access to more than one good source that deals directly with your subject before you commit to it. If you decide to create a new article rather than improve an existing one, review notability guidelines at | shortcut [WP:N](#).

What's a shortcut?

You can type text like this into Wikipedia's search bar to pull up specific pages that might otherwise be hard to find.

Consider creating or expanding articles about:

- A notable artist (women and artists of non-canonical identities tend to receive less coverage)
- An artistic period
- A work of art (sculpture and the decorative arts tend to receive less coverage on Wikipedia than painting does)
- A non-Western work of art or artist
- An art motif or technique

For more guidance, see the *Finding Your Article* training: wikiedu.org/finding-articles

Depicting information accurately

On Wikipedia, your job is to present the facts. It is not to discuss your own interpretation of an artwork or an artist's choices. Instead, summarize what scholarly sources have already said and cite those sources. Be sure to give appropriate weight to aspects of your topic as reliable sources cover it. And resist the urge to connect multiple sources together to form an argument. See | shortcuts [WP:NPOV](#) and [WP:NOR](#).

Using reliable sources

Unlike many academic papers you've written, a Wikipedia article calls for the use of secondary sources, rather than primary sources. The article you work on will provide a balanced overview of the scholarship around your topic. Before you spend too much time working on a *new* article, it's important to establish whether the subject has been covered by many reliable, secondary sources.

Use these sources, if possible:

- Books and textbooks about art history and related topics;
- Peer-reviewed journals found in databases like *JSTOR*, *Project Muse*, *Art Full Text*, or *Oxford Art Online*;
- Exhibition catalogues from well-known museums or galleries;
- Critics' reviews in national publications with a reputation for accuracy like *Artforum*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Arts Journal*, or *The New York Times*.
- Peer-reviewed art history websites such as *Smarthistory.org* or the Met Museum's *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*.

Do not use these sources:

- Social media posts
- Blogs
- Press releases

If you're unsure about your sources, ask your instructor for help or review the training: wikiedu.org/evaluating-articles

Detailed information about Wikipedia's sourcing guidelines is also available at | shortcut [WP:RS](#).

Structuring your article

Organizing your article

Every article will be unique, but there are some general sections that readers and other editors will expect to see. Add, remove, or reorder these suggested sections as needed. The organization of your article might be affected by the type of art or artist you are writing about, the amount of resources and images available, and whether you are writing on a premodern or contemporary topic.

Writing about an artist

- Lead section (see [WP:LEAD](#) for help)
- Historical background and artistic training
- Well-known artworks
- Critical reception and exhibitions
- Interactions with or influence on other artists

Consult our handout about writing biographies, available at wikiedu.org/biographies

Writing about a work of art

- Lead section
- Visual analysis and subject matter
- Composition/style/material
- Historical background (details about its commission, production, and the artist)
- Reception

See | *shortcut* [WP:VAMOS](#) for a style guide, and the article for *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* for a good example.

What is an infobox?

An infobox provides a helpful overview of a topic. You've probably seen them at the top-right area of articles. It is not necessary to add an infobox, but if you want to do so, edit the page and select **Insert > Template**. Type "Infobox artist", "Infobox artwork", or another template and fill in as many fields as you can. For more information, search *Template:Infobox artist* on Wikipedia.

Uploading images of artwork

High-quality images of relevant artwork can greatly enhance the value of your article for readers. Keep in mind, however, that most art is copyrighted for several decades after the death of the artist. Older works of art are generally free of copyright, and there is an enormous selection of images available for use on Wikipedia's sister site, Wikimedia Commons.

Images of two-dimensional art (such as paintings and photographs) that are "in the public domain" are themselves free of copyright for Wikimedia purposes. Images of three-dimensional art (such as sculpture) have a different copyright created by the photographer. You can't publish a photo of artwork that is still in copyright (or sell a copy) without the explicit permission of the artist. However, many museums have released their photographs under free licenses.

Conventionally copyrighted images have a place on Wikipedia in cases of *fair use*, meaning:

- The work is historically significant and the image adds value to the article that words wouldn't.
- Use of the copyrighted work is for educational purposes only (i.e. not to sell something).
- Inclusion of the image adds valuable information to the article.
- The image is a low resolution version of the original.

Freely licensed images are uploaded through Wikimedia Commons. But when contributing non-free content to an article, you must upload directly through Wikipedia. For guidelines, see [WP:NFCC](#).

When uploading an image, add a caption that identifies the artist (if known), the title of the artwork, the date, the materials and measurements, and its present location.

Wrapping up

Key points

As you start writing, keep these guidelines in mind:

- Resist the urge to add your own analysis. A Wikipedia article should cover what the literature says, not your interpretation.
- Give appropriate weight to aspects of the topic as the literature covers it.
- When mentioning technical terms for the first time, provide a short plain-English explanation in parentheses or wikilink to a related article if possible.
- Write in your own words, and be clear and direct. To avoid close paraphrasing and copyright issues, thoroughly understand your material and cross reference your understanding with a variety of sources.
- Before uploading images, make sure you understand copyright and the licenses that Wikipedia can accept.

Final thoughts

- Don't procrastinate! Writing good, reliable Wikipedia articles takes time. If you get stuck, talk to your instructor 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 Expert listed on your course page.
- Read through what you have posted, and correct as necessary.
- Take pride in your contributions! You're bringing depth to the public coverage of art and sharing that knowledge with the millions of people who use Wikipedia every day.
- Check back on your page. It can be interesting to see how your article grows. You may also have comments and suggestions from other users, and want to get involved in new developments.



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