

Editing Wikipedia articles about Books



Editing Wikipedia can be daunting for newbies, especially as a student editor contributing to Wikipedia for the first time in a class assignment. This guide is for students assigned to contribute to articles about books to Wikipedia.

Be accurate

Wikipedia is a resource millions of people use to inform themselves. Reasons for reading about a book on Wikipedia are as diverse as books themselves. By documenting and sharing accurate and objective content about books, you will help to ensure that people around the world have access to a wider spectrum of human knowledge.

Understand the guidelines

Take time to read and understand the suggestions in this guide to maximize the value of your contributions to Wikipedia. If you post something that doesn't meet these guidelines, resolving it may take up a lot of extra time and effort.

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

Engage with 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 important feedback.

If volunteers from the Wikipedia community have questions or comments about your work, be sure to reply. Thank them, and work with them to improve the article. If they make changes or remove your work because it does not follow these guidelines, don't just add it again! Ask them why they did so and what you can do to improve it. Repeatedly making a change that others have undone is called "edit warring," and can lead to your account being blocked or banned.

Avoid close paraphrasing

Use your own words. Plagiarizing by copying-and-pasting or by close paraphrasing — when some of the words are changed, but the structure and meaning of the original text remains — is against the rules.

Plagiarism is a violation of your university's academic honor code. Plagiarism on Wikipedia will be caught by other editors or automated plagiarism-detection tools. When that happens, some or all of your work will be deleted and there will be a permanent online record of the plagiarism tied to your account. Even standard resources like textbooks are under copyright and should never be directly copied. The rules for plagiarism apply everywhere on Wikipedia, including articles you're working on in sandboxes.

The best way to avoid this hassle is to make sure you really understand your material, and write about it in your own words. If you don't know how to avoid close paraphrasing, contact your university's writing center.

Make a difference

Take the time to understand the rules and guidelines. They may seem intimidating now, but soon you'll be contributing your knowledge and judgment to a resource you, and millions of other people, use every day.

Getting started

Picking the right book

Wikipedia has strict rules about what books can have an article. If a book doesn't already have an article, that may be because it doesn't meet Wikipedia's "notability" criteria. In general, you should only create articles on books that:

- Have already been published
- Have been the primary topic of at least 2 high-quality articles or reviews that meet Wikipedia's sourcing standards, as described below (2 is the bare minimum; it's a good idea to make sure there are at least 3 or 4)

For more detailed information to help you determine which books are notable, see this

| shortcut

[WP:NBOOK](#)

Do not cite these:

- Social media posts
- Personal websites
- Amazon reviews
- Goodreads
- Press releases
- Blurbson the book's dust jacket (but sometimes these come from published reviews you can locate and cite directly)

If you're unsure about your sources, review the Dashboard training module on "Sources and Citations" or ask your instructor for help. Detailed information about Wikipedia's sourcing guidelines is available at

| shortcut

[WP:RS](#)

What's a shortcut?

The text [WP:NBOOK](#) is what's known on Wikipedia as a shortcut.

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

Choose sources wisely

Articles must be written using reliable sources that are independent of the authors and publishers.

Use these sources, if possible:

- Nationally known professional critics' reviews in publications with a reputation for accuracy and integrity (e.g., *New York Times* or *The Guardian*)
- Articles in peer-reviewed academic journals

Databases like Book Review Digest, Book Review Index, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and JSTOR can be helpful starting places when looking for high-quality sources. Talk to your instructor or librarian if you're unsure how to access such databases.

Article framework

Articles about books tend to follow a fairly standard format. Starting with these sections in mind can help you to organize your work, but keep in mind that it's very rare that an article will include all of them — you should add, remove, combine, or reorder sections as appropriate. It may help to keep in mind that a Wikipedia article about a book can be just as much about the physical book itself as it is about the words and ideas it contains.

There's a lot of flexibility, but if you deviate too much from the basic framework, your work may look less credible to other Wikipedians. When an article looks "wrong," other editors may assume there are other mistakes, and be more critical of your contribution. Of course, following the guidance in this handout doesn't mean you won't make mistakes or receive criticism. Proper layout is never a substitute for accurate, well-written content based on good sources.

Structuring your article

- **Lead section:** Every article starts with a lead section, which provides basic information about the book and summarizes the entire article.
- **Background:** Information and context about how the book came to be. When was it written? Where does it stand in the author's body of work? Was she responding to a particular event or experience? The background doesn't include criticism, interpretation, or any details that sources haven't directly tied to the writing of the book. Independent sources are typically preferred, but author interviews can be useful for this section.
- **Summary:** A concise summary of the book's content. For a non-fiction book this might also include the overall organization. For a novel, the summary will probably be a plot synopsis. Don't add interpretations, analyses, or judgments to this section — just a straightforward summary. Don't write for dramatic effect; err on the side of dry description and don't try to avoid spoilers. Some basic elements of the synopsis can be sourced directly from the book itself if not properly summarized in the secondary sources.
- **Genre (or Style):** Fiction or non-fiction? A scholarly work, or a how-to book? How does the style compare to the author's other work? Do the sources draw connections between the style of this book and the style of other books or authors?
- **Analysis:** What was the impact of the book's ideas? Was the book subject to scholarly analysis? Did reviewers extract key points and arguments? Did critics evaluate or build upon the ideas?
- **Publication:** When was the book published? By whom was it published? Include information about formats (hardcover, paperback, ebook, audiobook), cover art, and translations into other languages. Information in this section can be sourced to interviews with the author as long as they're in reliable publications.
- **Reception:** What did reviewers think about it? Try to provide a balanced picture of the book's reception. Include major awards or distinctions it received. Paraphrasing is preferred, but you can use short quotes if critics' words are particularly informative or interesting. For additional advice about reception sections, see the | shortcut [WP:RECEPTION](#)
- **Others:** If there's a lot to say about any of the above topics, a sub-section or additional section may be appropriate. For example, "title" if a book's title has been the subject of a lot of discussion, "awards" if it won many awards, or "adaptations" if it has been adapted to another medium, like a film. Sections should be based on how prominent different aspects of the subject are discussed in the source material — if it's hardly mentioned in the sources, it shouldn't have its own section.
- **Infobox:** An infobox provides a helpful overview of the book. You've probably seen them at the top-right area of other Wikipedia articles. To add an infobox, edit the page and select **Insert → Template** then type in "Infobox book" and fill in as many fields as you can. For more information about the infobox, visit [Template:Infobox book](#) on Wikipedia.

For more detailed information about the structure and style of articles about books, see the page at | shortcut [WP:BOOKS](#)

Wrapping up

Key points

As you start writing, keep these guidelines in mind:

- Unlike most school assignments, Wikipedia doesn't permit original research. Your article should cover what the sources say, not your own interpretations or opinions.
- Write for a general audience. Don't assume people have read the book or are familiar with its subjects. Avoid jargon, and briefly explain complicated concepts.
- Summarize what the sources say in your own words. Aside from including a small number of short quotes from reviewers/critics, you should avoid copy/pasting text.
- Stick to the structure presented in this guide, but use your judgment about when to rename, combine, add, or remove sections.
- Be sure to write in an impersonal, fact-based, encyclopedic style. Don't approach a Wikipedia article like a blog post or personal essay. See the *Editing Wikipedia* brochure linked from your course page if you need a refresher on the difference in tone.

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.
- Check back on your article. It can be interesting to see how your article grows, and to see how other readers and editors respond to your work.
- Remember to link to other pages on Wikipedia so readers can learn more about topics you mention.
- Give appropriate weight to aspects of the topic as the sources cover it.
- It's normal to have questions. If you're not sure what to do at any point, a good place to find guidance is the [Get Help](#) button near the top of your course page on the Dashboard.



The content and images contained in this publication are available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License v4.0 unless otherwise stated.

The trademark of the Wiki Education Foundation is pending registration. The Wikipedia logos and wordmarks are registered trademarks of the Wikimedia Foundation. Use of these marks is subject to the Wikimedia trademark policy and may require permission (https://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Trademark_policy). For questions about the Wikipedia trademarks, please email trademarks@wikimedia.org

Thanks to Wikipedia editors User:Czar, User:Hoverfish, User:MarnetteD, User:Mike Christie, User:NinjaRobotPirate, and User:Ronz for their valuable help with this guide.