
Writing a Wikipedia manual

Helping new editors not to hit brick walls

Lodewijk Gelauff - Cape Town, 20 July 2018



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- Wikimedia Nederland: many new users, have a hard time to settle
 - Use manual/documentation to help them

The smallprint

- Every community is different
 - Needs may be different in other countries
 - I'm not trying to discredit any other efforts.
 - I'm probably over simplifying things
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Straight forward?

Active since 2005, many edits and articles.

Still some challenges.



Finding help

Existing documentation: not doing the trick

- There's MUCH of it
- Focus on the complexities, not on solutions.
- Audience: new Wikipedians don't need to know the boundaries of the permissible, but how to do it 'right'.

For example: how does the deletion process work?

- Navigating to a help page, the new #WikipediaGame



Design choices

- Modular, but 'complete'
- Structured
 - people should be able to look stuff up
 - Not a text book
- How-to
- Tangible examples

Goal: 80% of the people gets through 500 edits without serious trouble



What a welcome

If you look at the 'welcome for newcomers' on Dutch Wikipedia, you see:

- Lots of links: down the rabbit hole
- Vagaries
- Perspective of source code editor
- Out of date



We focus a lot on "don't"

Sometimes step-by-step 'safe' recipes are helpful. Users will add a pinch of pepper and salt to taste later.

- How to register an account and activate all 'must have' tools
- How to add an infobox
- How to add a category
- How to start or respond to talkpage contribution
- How to edit an article
- How to start a new article
- Checklist for a 'decent article'
- How to add a helpful footnote/reference

Wikipedia is a unique style of writing

You might be used to writing five-paragraph essays, research papers, or persuasive arguments. Wikipedia is a different style of writing. Keep to the facts, and let your writing be clear, formal, and impersonal. You aren't trying to convince readers to agree with you. You'll want to make sure they trust the information you're sharing.

Here's a poorly written Wikipedia article:

Britannica and the Future of Encyclopedias

Encyclopædia Britannica, although a celebrated and historically significant encyclopedia, has little relevance in modern society. Instead, most experts agree that the future of the encyclopedia genre belongs to Wikipedia and other wiki encyclopedias — created by regular folks like you and me. Ironically, while it was a great influence on Jimmy Wales and the intrepid new generation of amateur encyclopedists who created — and continue to create — Wikipedia, *Britannica* in recent years has come to symbolize everything wrong about the old ways of creating and distributing knowledge: top-down control, unaccountable gatekeepers who decide what does and does not merit coverage, copyright restrictions and high prices that limit access to the wealthy, and — in its current online form — intrusive advertising that undercuts the reliability and usability of its content.

Here's why:

This title is too much like an essay. Who can factually talk about the future?

Has "little relevance" according to whom? Don't make any original arguments.

Don't use "weasel words" (like "most experts agree" or "some people say").

Avoid casual language and slang, or any references to yourself or the reader.

Don't use "fluff terms" (like "great", "extraordinary", or "intrepid").

Don't inject your opinion into the article.

Don't use overly complex language and sentence structure.

Here's a better article:

Since the early 1990s, the *Britannica* has faced new challenges from digital information sources. In rapidly changing fields such as science, technology, politics, culture, and modern history, the *Britannica* has struggled to stay up-to-date, a problem first analyzed systematically by its former editor Walter Yust.^[1] Although the *Britannica* is now available both in multimedia form and over the Internet, its preeminence is being challenged by other online encyclopedias, such as Wikipedia.^[2]

Here's why:

- It's short and to the point, with plain language.
- It cites sources for factual claims. One citation per statement is the minimum expectation.
- It attributes viewpoints to the people who hold them.
- It states a conclusion, but attributes it to a specific source.

From: 'Editing Wikipedia' brochure.
 Wikimedia Foundation, Wiki Education
 Foundation, EXBROOK (CC BY-SA)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Editing_Wikipedia_brochure_\(Wiki_Education_Foundation\)_\(2016\).pdf](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Editing_Wikipedia_brochure_(Wiki_Education_Foundation)_(2016).pdf)

Finding good examples is harder than you'd think

- Optimal length
 - Readable, fits on the page (not too long)
 - Shining example (not too short)
 - Good sources, perfect layout
 - Suitable topic
 - Not a likely controversial or likely to change a lot
 - Not too mainstream <express the variety>
 - Not too obscure <obviously relevant>
 - Has all elements that you want to explain
 - Infobox
 - Image
 - Introduction and topics
 - Good writing
 - Ideally a community effort
 - Not with you as a main author
 - Not written or edited for the purpose of the example!
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We have so many buttons!

Balance between explaining everything and guiding them through the process

Een artikel – niet ingelogd.

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for 'Sukade'. The top navigation bar includes 'WIKIPEDIA De vrije encyclopedie' and a search bar. The article title 'Sukade' is prominent. The main text describes 'Sukade' as a traditional Indonesian dish. A blue box highlights the 'Anmelden:' section, which explains that users can log in to edit and track their contributions. Another blue box highlights the 'Zoekbalk:' section, which provides instructions on how to search for articles. A third blue box highlights the 'Knoppen:' section, which lists various actions like 'Bewerken' and 'Gebruik' that users can perform on the article. A fourth blue box highlights the 'Zijbalk:' section, which contains a list of related articles and categories. A fifth blue box highlights the 'Artikelttekst:' section, which shows the main body of the article. A sixth blue box highlights the 'Hulpmiddelen:' section, which provides tools for editing and managing the article. The page also features a sidebar with 'In andere talen' and 'In andere versies'.

Een artikel – ingelogd.

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for 'Herbarium'. The top navigation bar includes 'WIKIPEDIA De vrije encyclopedie' and a search bar. The article title 'Herbarium' is prominent. The main text describes 'Herbarium' as a collection of dried plant specimens. A blue box highlights the 'Gebruikersbalk:' section, which explains that users can log in to edit and track their contributions. Another blue box highlights the 'Knoppen:' section, which lists various actions like 'Bewerken' and 'Gebruik' that users can perform on the article. A third blue box highlights the 'Knoppen:' section, which lists various actions like 'Bewerken' and 'Gebruik' that users can perform on the article. A fourth blue box highlights the 'Knoppen:' section, which lists various actions like 'Bewerken' and 'Gebruik' that users can perform on the article. A fifth blue box highlights the 'Knoppen:' section, which lists various actions like 'Bewerken' and 'Gebruik' that users can perform on the article. The page also features a sidebar with 'In andere talen' and 'In andere versies'.

De knoppen bovenaan het artikel – niet ingelogd.

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Wikipedia article for 'Sukade'. The navigation bar includes 'WIKIPEDIA De vrije encyclopedie' and a search bar. The article title 'Sukade' is prominent. The main text describes 'Sukade' as a traditional Indonesian dish. A blue box highlights the 'Anmelden:' section, which explains that users can log in to edit and track their contributions. Another blue box highlights the 'Registreren:' section, which explains that users can create a new account. A third blue box highlights the 'Niet aangemeld:' section, which explains that users can view the article without logging in. A fourth blue box highlights the 'Gediedenis:' section, which provides a history of the article. A fifth blue box highlights the 'Bewerken:' section, which provides a list of users who have edited the article. The page also features a sidebar with 'In andere talen' and 'In andere versies'.

Anmelden:
Als je al een gebruikersnaam hebt, kun je hier inloggen.

Registreren:
Als je nog geen gebruikersnaam hebt, kun je hier aanmaken.

Niet aangemeld:
Als je niet ingelogd bent, zie dat hier. Als je toch bewerkingen doet, wordt je IP-adres als gebruikersnaam gebruikt.

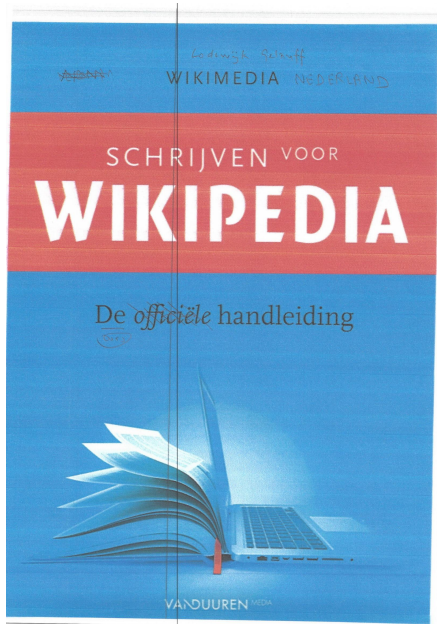
Gediedenis:
Hier vind je alle bewerkingen aan het artikel terug, met de bewerker en de datum van de bewerking.

Bewerken:
Ook als je niet bent ingelogd kun je artikelen bewerken. Let op: veel openbare IP-adressen (zoals op bedrijfsnetwerken of op de Nederlandse scholen en bibliotheken) worden als gebruikersnaam gebruikt.

We contradict ourselves

- We love to explain, write essays and elaborate.
- Wikipedians are help page hoarders
- For example, citation pages still mentioned Harvard style footnotes as the main referencing method (Kleparz et al., 2006-2016), which is actually rarely in use.

Klepartz, Sander Spek, Dleven, Jan Arkesteijn and others,
2006-2016



Publishing

3 months: 1500 views

Demand: publisher wants to publish

- CC BY
- Royalties WMNL
- Exposure

CC publishing agreements are possible, but require some.. thinking.

Questions?

The manual:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HandleidingWikipediaversie1_2017.pdf
