

Building a Biography Page: Preparing to Edit

Creating a page for a person on Wikipedia is extremely satisfying. Here are some tips on how to get started & create a biography article that's as informative and helpful as possible!

Creating an account is the best way to begin, as it makes it easier to keep track of your edits and to interact with other Wikipedians (e.g. ask for help!). The “Create account” button is on the top right of the page. Typing in your email means that you can recover your password if you forget it! Once you've created an account, click on your username (in red at the top of the page) to create a *User page* and write a little about yourself such as that you're new to editing, & what you're interested in editing on (e.g. women engineers). Complete an *Edit summary* (tell people what you did, e.g. Created page) and press save!

If you ever need help with Wiki, you can go to your own Talk page (the Talk tab on your User page), click Edit and write: `==Request for help== {{Help me}}` Delete this bit and replace it with your question? ~~~~

Set your Preferences next, so that you can easily choose how you edit. Click “Preferences” on the top right, then go to the “Editing” tab, and where it says “Editing mode”, choose “Show me both editor tabs” from the dropdown box. Now, when you look at any Wiki-page whilst logged in, you'll see “Edit” and “Edit source”. The *Visual editor* (“Edit” button) is just like using Microsoft Word, and is great for getting started.

Explore History and Talk tabs on articles. The History tab shows you every edit ever done to a page, and who it was done by, and when. This is why edit summaries are important – they make it clear what each editor has added, removed, corrected, etc. The Talk tab is where Wiki-editors discuss what should be included on a page (it's where you can see whether any groups keep an eye on the page's quality, and also if there's any controversy on a topic). If a page already exists and you'd like to edit it, it's good to leave a message on the talk page explaining what you're hoping to improve and telling others that you're new to editing so would welcome their help.

A quick check of Wikipedia is the next step. Check whether the person you'd like to edit on has a page already. If so, you can add to it in a moment! If not, double check that your person meets Wikipedia's *Notability criteria*: “they have received significant coverage in multiple secondary sources that are reliable, intellectually independent of each other, and independent of the subject.” You can read more about notability by typing “Wikipedia:Notability (people)” into the Wikipedia search box or a search engine.

Gathering your sources is the final step in preparing to edit. Once you've found a page, or satisfied yourself that the person is notable, find some good sources to give you some information on the person. As the notability criteria says, the source should give the person significant attention (more than just a few sentences!), and should be a published piece (not someone's unpublished notes or somebody's blog!). You can use autobiographies to add some details to an article, but your article should *mainly* be built up from information from elsewhere (e.g. newspapers, journals, books, & academic websites/blogs) so as to have a more *Neutral point of view*.

You're now ready to dive in! Over the page is more information on the component parts of a Wikipedia article to help guide you in your editing, and to the right is a checklist you can tick off as you go along – happy editing!



Biog-edit Checklist

I have...

- Created account & logged in.
- Searched to see if the page already exists (& checked they are notable if not).
- Located at least 3 sources to give me information on the person and add references.
- Opened up my Sandbox to edit in (for new pages) or clicked “Edit” (for existing pages).
- Written/improved a lead section making it clear who the person is/was and why they are notable.
- Added more information about their life and work (putting everything in my own words).
- Referenced where I learned that information using the Cite button.
- Made wikilinks.
- Created an infobox (where needed).
- Considered adding a picture.
- Added categories.
- Added external links and/or templates to wiki sister sites (where needed).
- Written an edit summary & pressed save (if it existed already), or clicked the big blue submit button!

Building a Biography Page: Page Elements to Include

Title: this is usually just the name of the person, though sometimes an occupation is included in brackets if there's more than one person with that name.

Contents: the table of contents automatically appears when you have 3 or more headings. It is made up of the heading text. You won't be able to see it until you press save.

Headings: most biographies are organised somewhat chronologically, with headings to divide the information into easily navigable chunks. Most begin with early life and education, then work, and end with a section on later life/death/commemoration. Headings should have the first word capitalised and subsequent words should have small letters. There are also subheadings, if you need to subdivide a section.

References: articles should be thoroughly referenced (aim for at least 3 references). Reference using the *Cite* button. Wikipedia will help you to automatically generate references, or to use templates. You can also click on existing references to reuse them.

If you create a heading for references, then add the `{{reflist}}` template on a new line, references will automatically appear tidily at the end of your article.

External links: you don't have to include external links, but if you would like to point people towards substantial sources of further reading on a person then you can do so in this section. Links here should specifically be about the article subject or one of their works.

Authority control: helps to specify the identity of the person that you're writing about. For example, there might be many Jane Smiths, so authority control helps to specify which Jane Smith. You can add this by simply inserting the template at the bottom of your page.

Categories: are a way that people find pages, sort of like an index. Putting your person into categories will help others to find them. Be as specific as possible (e.g. "English electrical engineers" rather than just "engineers"). To find categories that you could use, try looking at the categories on the page of another person who did similar work.

Lead paragraph: is where you summarise key points in a few sentences. The name (in bold) comes first, then any letters (e.g. FRS, OBE), then date of birth (and death) in brackets, followed by a short description of what the person is best known for.

Pictures: make pages more exciting. You can search for pictures already on Wiki-Commons and then add them either in the Infobox (see below) by pasting in the image title in the "Picture" field, or elsewhere in the article by clicking "Insert" and then "Media". See Commons for information on uploading images.

Infobox: this is a template that helps readers to find key facts at a glance. As well as the general template, there are specific infoboxes for different occupations, e.g. infobox scientist. These will have different fields, e.g. thesis title and notable students. Whichever template you choose, there will be many fields that you can include, so choose the ones you think are relevant to the person that you're writing about.

Article text: should be written from a neutral point of view. Steer clear of adjectives that make someone sound either great or terrible, and instead simply report what they did so that readers can see for themselves what sort of person this is/was. Put everything in your own words to avoid plagiarism, and fully reference your writing to show where the information comes from (see References, left).

When writing about women, there are a few particular things to watch out for:

- ◆ Avoid labelling a person as a "female" (e.g. female engineer, woman scientist) unless gender is particularly relevant to the point you're making in the sentence where you use the word.
 - ◆ Use surnames to refer to the person so they sound more serious and respectable.
 - ◆ Focus on your subject's own notable roles or accomplishments first before discussing their relations and relationships. If and when those do come up, think about how you can use phrasing to keep your subject in the foreground (e.g. "Smith is married to John Smith", rather than "Smith is the wife of John Smith").
- You can search "Wikipedia:Writing about women" to read more advice on this particular topic.

Wikilinks: are blue words that link to other Wikipedia pages. Use the button that looks like a chain *Link* to link and help people who are looking to go one step up or down the knowledge ladder (find simpler explanations or further reading). For example, "Parity (physics)" is a good next step to more detailed knowledge and "Nuclear physics" is a good explainer, but "Science" is too broad and "Representation theory of SU(2)" is likely to be a bit too technical!

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for Hertha Ayrton. Blue arrows point from various parts of the page to explanatory text blocks:

- Title:** Points to the article title "Hertha Ayrton".
- Lead paragraph:** Points to the first paragraph of the article.
- Contents:** Points to the table of contents.
- Headings:** Points to the "Early life and education" heading.
- References:** Points to the "References" section.
- External links:** Points to the "External links" section.
- Authority control:** Points to the "Authority control" section.
- Categories:** Points to the "Categories" section.
- Sister project links:** Points to the "Sister project links" section.
- Pictures:** Points to the image of Hertha Ayrton in the infobox.
- Infobox:** Points to the infobox template.
- Article text:** Points to the main body text of the article.
- Wikilinks:** Points to blue hyperlinks within the article text.

Sister project links: these templates help people to find more open content on your subject. There might not always be relevant material on the other wikisites, but if there is then you can link to it by inserting a template at the top of the last section in the article.