Improving the Wikipedia desktop experience

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We’re Olga and Alex from the Readers Web Team at the Wikimedia Foundation and we’re here to talk about improving the desktop experience.
Session agenda

This is a 40 min session

- Looking back: how has the desktop site improved over time?
- How can we continue that trajectory of improvement to meet the new challenges we face?
- 5 min brainstorm
- 15 min discussion
A history of improvement

2002
Classic

2004
Monobook

2010
Usability initiative
Vector

Ongoing
Beta features, gadgets, user scripts

(focus on mobile)

2020
What's next?

2014
Winter

2016
Timeless

2019
AMC
A solid starting point, the DNA of which still remains today. This is the initial appearance of MediaWiki, before skins were introduced.
The first MediaWiki skin. Attempting to ensure that key elements are prominent, showing messages and alerts, and article titles are clear. Also behind the scenes work on templates and HTML/DOM structure[1].
Following the Usability Initiative, the goal of Vector was to increase the usability of Wikipedia for new contributors by reducing barriers to public participation. Improve visibility of common navigation elements and reduce visibility of less common ones\(^2\)[3].
Tightly couple page actions and views to the page content itself, reduce interface clutter to focus on content, make search available at all times, synchronize design direction across devices and platforms⁴.
Intended to be a fully featured skin that emphasises both content and editing tools. Timeless is responsive and was based on Winter\textsuperscript{[5]}. 

- 2002 – Classic
- 2004 – Monobook
- 2010 – Vector
- 2014 – Winter
- **2016 – Timeless**
- 2020 – What’s next?
What's next?

How do we continue the trajectory of improvement to meet new challenges and new audiences?
New challenges & changing context

- **Diversity and inclusion:** more people are using Wikipedia from all over the world

- **Mobile + desktop:** desktop is still approximately 49% of the 19.9 billion page views each month

- **Welcoming new editors:** we need to welcome editors from all backgrounds

- **New patterns:** new web patterns and capabilities are available to us (e.g. responsive web)
How can we continue to improve?
Imagine you’re reading or editing a Wikipedia article on desktop for your first time...
Where's the search bar?

What are all these links?
Make Wikipedia feel more welcoming

Currently:

- The experience **does not match current expectations** of the modern web
- It feels **disorienting and disconnected** to people who are not used to Wikipedia
- This can cause readers and editors to have **less trust in Wikipedia** and to use the site less

Focusing on making Wikipedia more welcoming will allow new readers and editors to join our movement and contribute to the projects
Can you think of usability improvements that would help readers and editors alike?
I wonder if I can read this article in Hindi?

The table of contents would be helpful right now.

I want to search without scrolling all the way back to the top.

I want my user tools.
Make Wikipedia easier to use

If you’re a newcomer or a casual reader:

- Basic functions can be difficult to find (e.g. switching languages)
- Important features are not highlighted while less important features are prominent
- The structure of the navigation distracts from the content itself

If you’re a new or experienced editor:

- Basic features like creating an account or viewing important article information are difficult to find
- Features that are important do not always have the visibility they deserve
So, how do we improve it?

What we want to do:

- Focus on the content
- Provide easier access to everyday actions (e.g. search, language switching, edit)
- Put things in logical and useful places
- Increase consistency in the interface with other platforms - mobile web and the apps
- Eliminate clutter

What we don’t want to do:

- Redesign the site
- Change the layout
- Touch the content
- Remove any functionality
A helpful metaphor

As any good librarian would keep their library well-organized as it grows, so must we with our website. This gives us a better foundation on which we can continue to grow and introduce new features.
What might this look like?

(we’re not sure...but here’s some thoughts)
The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA, /næsə/) is an independent agency of the United States Federal Government responsible for the civilian space program, as well as aeronautics and aerospace research.\[^1\]

NASA was established in 1958, succeeding the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA). The new agency was to have a distinctly civilian orientation, encouraging peaceful applications in space science.\[^7\]\[^9\]. Since its establishment, most US space exploration efforts have been led by NASA, including the Apollo Moon landing missions, the Skylab space station, and later the Space Shuttle. NASA is supporting the International Space Station and is overseeing the development of the Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle, the Space Launch System and Commercial Crew vehicles. The agency is also responsible for the Launch Services Program which provides oversight of launch operations and countdown management for unmanned NASA launches.

NASA science is focused on better understanding Earth through the Earth Observing System;\[^10\] advancing heliophysics through the efforts of the Science Mission Directorate's Heliophysics Research Program;\[^11\] exploring bodies throughout the Solar System with advanced robotic spacecraft missions such as New Horizons;\[^12\] and researching astrophysics topics, such as the Big Bang, through the Great Observatories and associated programs.\[^13\]
Easier access to everyday actions: search

History

Like the classical planets, Uranus is visible to the naked eye, but it was never recognised as a planet by ancient observers because of its dimness and slow orbit.[20] Sir William Herschel announced its discovery on 13 March 1781, expanding the known boundaries of the Solar System for the first time in history and making Uranus the first planet discovered with a telescope.

Discovery

"34 Tauri" reddens here. For the Firefly Verse, see List of Firefly planets and moons.

Uranus had been observed on many occasions before its recognition as a planet, but it was generally mistaken for a star. Possibly the earliest known observation was by Hipparchus, who in 128 BC might have recorded it as a star for his star catalogue that was later incorporated into Ptolemy's Almagest.[22] The earliest definite sighting was in 1650, when John Flamsteed observed it at least six times, cataloging it as 34 Tauri. The French astronomer Pierre Charles Le Monnier observed Uranus at least twelve times between 1750 and 1769,[23] including on four consecutive nights.

Sir William Herschel observed Uranus on 13 March 1781 from the garden of his house at 19 New King Street in Bath, Somerset, England (now the Herschel Museum of Astronomy).[24] He initially reported it (on 25 April 1781) as a comet.[25] With a telescope, Herschel *engaged in a series of observations on the parallax of the fixed stars.*[26]

Herschel recorded in his journal: "In the quarter near ζ Tauri ... either a Nebulous star or perhaps a comet."[27] On 17 March he noted: "I looked for the Comet or Nebulous Star and found that it is a Comet, for it has changed its place."[29] When he presented his discovery to the Royal Society, he continued to assert that he had found a comet, but also implicitly compared it to a planet.[28]

The power I had on when I first saw the comet was 227. From experience I know that the diameters of the fixed stars are not proportionally magnified with higher powers, as planets are; therefore I now put the powers at 460 and 532, and found that the diameter of the comet increased in proportion to the power, as it ought to be, on the supposition of its not being a fixed star, while the diameters of the stars to which I compared it were not increased in the same ratio. Moreover, the comet being magnified much beyond what its light would admit of, appeared hazy and ill-defined with these great powers, while the stars preserved that lustre and distinctness which from many thousand observations I...
Easier access to everyday actions: Edit & Languages
Putting things in logical & useful places
Increase consistency in the interface with other platforms - mobile web and the apps.
### Other considerations and constraints

How do we approach defining and building these updates? What social and technical considerations should we think about?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Considerations</th>
<th>Technical Possibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Not altering the experience on existing skins</td>
<td>• Creating a new skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staying true to our roots, improving while staying recognizable</td>
<td>• Making gradual tweaks to Vector (current default desktop skin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be considerate of the needs of various audiences: newcomers, experienced readers, new editors, experienced editors</td>
<td>• Making gradual tweaks to Minerva (current default mobile skin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Something else...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Breakout groups (10 min brainstorm/feedback)

**Group 1:** how might we make Wikipedia more welcoming?

**Group 2:** how might we make Wikipedia easier to use?

**Group 3:** how do we work with the social and technical constraints and considerations around these ideas?

- Please be positive, constructive, and respectful
- Prioritize generating ideas and questions over having conversations
- Write *everything* down on post-its
Q&A
Our roadmap

Stage 1: Research & requirements

Stage 2: Prototyping & technical planning

Stage 3: Development, deployments, & analysis

Stage 4: Finishing touches and final deployments
Get involved

Project page
(tbd)

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Q&A
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