

Medicine

Editing Wikipedia can be daunting for newbies, especially if you're contributing to Wikipedia for the first time as a class assignment. This guide is designed to assist students who have been assigned to contribute biomedical-related content to Wikipedia. Here's what other editors will expect you to know.



Be accurate

You're editing a resource millions of people use to make medical decisions, so it's vitally important to be accurate. Wikipedia is used more for medical information than the websites for WebMD, NIH, and the WHO. But with great power comes great responsibility!

Understand the guidelines

Wikipedia editors in the medicine area have developed additional guidelines to ensure that the content on Wikipedia is medically sound. Take extra time to read and understand these guidelines. When you edit an article, ensure your changes meet these special requirements. If not, your work is likely to be undone by other editors as they clean up after you. That takes valuable volunteer time away from creating content. If you're not comfortable working under 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. Do not submit your content on the last day, then leave Wikipedia! Real human volunteers from the Wikipedia community will likely read and respond to it, and it would be polite for you to acknowledge the time they volunteer to polish your work! Everything submitted to Wikipedia is reviewed by multiple, real humans! You may not get a comment, but if you do, please acknowledge it.

Watch out for close paraphrasing

Plagiarizing or close paraphrasing is never okay on Wikipedia and is a violation of your university's academic honor code. It's even worse on Wikipedia, as valuable volunteer time that could be used to create good content is instead used to clean up plagiarized work.

If you plagiarize or too closely paraphrase on Wikipedia, it is extremely likely that you'll be caught by other editors and there will be an online record of your plagiarism tied to your permanent online record.

Note that even educational materials from organizations like the WHO and abstracts of articles in PubMed are under copyright and cannot be copied. Write them in your own words whenever possible. If you aren't clear on what close paraphrasing is, visit your university's writing center.

Scared? Don't be!

Everybody on Wikipedia wants to make the best encyclopedia they can. Take the time to understand the rules, and soon you'll be contributing to a valuable resource you use on a daily basis!

Getting started

Choosing an article

Generally, follow these guidelines when determining which medicine article to improve:

- Choose a topic that isn't already well-developed on Wikipedia (look for what are known as “stub” or “start-class” articles — check the talk page for an article's rating).
- Choose a topic for which there's a lot of literature in peer-reviewed journals and books. Some articles are short because there isn't enough literature to expand them. Remember that Wikipedia's sourcing requirements in medicine are strict.
- If you're not familiar with research literature, you may wish to find interesting sources first, then choose a Wikipedia article to develop.

Organizing your article

Every article will be unique, but there are some general sections that readers and other editors will expect to see in your article. Here is an example of a general outline for articles on diseases. For outlining topics other than a disease, check | *shortcut* [WP:MESECTIONS](#) for guidelines. Otherwise, you could look through the list of Good Articles in biology and medicine to see how other editors have organized articles on related topics.

Writing about diseases, disorders, or syndromes:

- Classification, if relevant. May also be placed as a subheading of diagnosis.
- Signs and symptoms or characteristics.
- Causes: Includes risk factors, triggers, genetics or genome, virology, (e.g., structure/morphology and replication).
- Mechanism: For information about pathophysiology.
- Diagnosis: Includes characteristic biopsy findings and differential diagnosis.
- Prevention or screening.

Writing about treatment or management:

- This might include any type of currently used treatment, such as diet, exercise, medication, palliative care, physical therapy, psychotherapy, self care, surgery, watchful waiting, and many other possibilities.
- Consider discussing treatments in a plausible order in which they might be tried, or discussing the most common treatments first. Avoid experimental/speculative treatments and preventive measures (e.g., prophylactic vaccines or infection-avoidance techniques).
- Wikipedia articles should not be written in a “how-to” style, but this does not prevent adding official guidelines of treatments or managements if these can be presented in an objective manner and with medically reliable sources.
- Outcomes: For the prognosis. May also be labeled “Possible outcomes” or “Outlook”
- Epidemiology: factors such as incidence, prevalence, age distribution, and sex ratio.

Other topics to consider:

- History: Early discoveries, historical figures, and outdated treatments (not patient history).
- Society and culture: This might include stigma, economics, religious aspects, awareness, legal issues, notable cases.
- Research directions: Include only if addressed by significant sources. Avoid useless statements like “More research is needed”. Wikipedia is not a directory of clinical trials or researchers.
- Special populations, such as geriatrics, pregnancy or pediatrics.

Also see | *shortcut* [WP:MESECTIONS](#) .

Using references

Evaluating sources

Secondary sources

These are ones that summarize one or more primary or secondary sources, usually to provide an overview of the current understanding of a medical topic, to make recommendations, or to combine the results of several studies.

Types include:

- literature reviews or systematic reviews found in reputable medical journals
- academic and professional books written by experts in the relevant field, from a respected publisher
- medical guidelines or position statements from nationally or internationally recognized expert bodies

Don't use these sources:

- Primary sources, that is, where authors directly participated in the research or documented their personal experiences (examining patients, for example).
- nearly all papers published in medical journals
- Popular press articles
- Blogs
- Any other non-peer-reviewed source

Have questions?

For detailed questions about whether a source is okay or not, see | *shortcut* [WP:MEDRES](#) .

You can also ask at | *shortcut* [WP:RSN](#) .

What is a shortcut?

The text WP:RSN is what's known on Wikipedia as a shortcut.

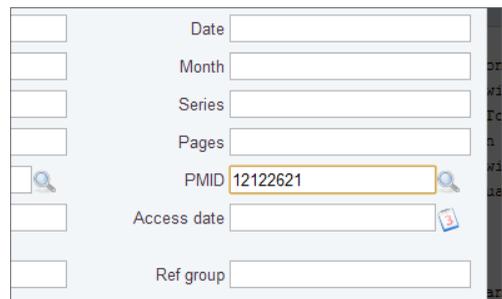
You can type shortcuts like this into the search bar to pull up specific pages. We designate shortcuts this way: | *shortcut* [WP:RSN](#) .

Cite your sources

You must have the PubMed ID (PMID) or Digital Object Identifier (DOI) for every journal article you cite, and the ISBN and page number of any book you cite. This enables other editors to verify the accuracy of the information you added.

To add a citation using wiki markup:

1. Move your cursor to the end of the first sentence you want to cite that source for.
2. Click the “Cite” tab in the top of the edit box.
3. In the dropdown Templates menu, select “Cite journal” or “Cite book”, as appropriate.
4. Type in the PMID, DOI, or ISBN with the page number/s, and then click on the magnifying glass icon (as shown below). The cite tool will automatically process the details.



5. Perhaps 5% of the time, the Wikipedia tool will not work. In that case, try putting a DOI into the DOI Wikipedia reference generator at: reftag.appspot.com/doiweb.py

To add a citation using VisualEditor:

1. Move your cursor to the end of the block of text you want to cite a source for.
2. Click “Cite” in the toolbar.
3. For a book, add the ISBN. For an online source, add the URL. (There are options for sources with neither an ISBN nor a URL.)
4. Add any other key information, such as the page number(s) for a book, and insert the citation.

Writing your Medicine article

Start writing

As you start writing, remember to keep these guidelines in mind:

- Don't appear to offer medical advice; you're writing fact-based descriptions of medically accepted information.
- Unlike most school assignments, Wikipedia doesn't permit original research. A Wikipedia article should cover what the literature says, not your own thesis.
- Be sure you're writing fact-based encyclopedic content, not an essay. See the Editing Wikipedia brochure linked from your course page if you need a refresher on the difference in tone.
- Give appropriate weight to aspects of the topic as the respected literature covers it.
- Remember, your audience isn't studying medicine like you are! When mentioning technical terms for the first time, provide a short plain-English explanation in parentheses if possible.
- Remember your audience is global. If your coverage relates only to your own country you need to say that. Try to find sources from other parts of the world in English, and reflect any significant differences in recommendations, and also terminology.

Final thoughts

- Don't procrastinate! Writing medically sound Wikipedia articles takes time. Don't wait until the last minute, but if you get stuck, always ask your instructor for extra time rather than adding content to Wikipedia that doesn't meet these guidelines.
- More information on writing medicine-related articles can be found at | *shortcut* [WP:MEDHOW](#)
- If you have additional questions about contributing to Wikipedia, post a question at the Teahouse. You can find the Teahouse by entering | *shortcut* [WP:TH](#) into the search bar.
- Thanks for your contributions! Your hard work is providing the millions of people who use Wikipedia every day more information about topics that are important to them.

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