Wikipedia as a Teaching Tool:
Guidelines for Assignment Design for Wikipedia Teaching Fellows

Editing Wikipedia is an opportunity for students to write for a real-world audience of thousands of readers and to gain immediate feedback from the large community of Wikipedia editors. Students will also learn how to follow strict editorial policies and how to collaborate with other editors on the internet in a free content community. In order to optimize Wikipedia as a teaching tool and assist you as an instructor, we suggest the following guidelines for your assignment. They have been developed by teachers and Wikipedians in collaboration after experience with classes using Wikipedia as a teaching tool.

Before you start

Wikipedia's software permits real-time collaboration among editors. The Wikipedia editorial policies are designed to assist editors in constructively building content together, even when they disagree on how to approach the material. Below is a list of materials that will explain some of Wikipedia's most important tools and policies:

- Read the "Wikipedia as a Teaching Tool" guide before you create your assignment.
- Create your own user account and userpage, and learn the basics of editing so you can answer students' basic questions. Consider completing the Wikipedia Tutorial.
- Study the strengths and weaknesses of Wikipedia coverage in your course's topic area by looking over some articles, and observe the editing patterns and disputes that arise in the topic area by reading the articles' talk (discussion) pages.
- Review Wikipedia's core content policy pages: "Neutral Point of View," "Verifiability," and "No original research." These policies, which you as the instructor should emphasize in class throughout the term, are the backbone of Wikipedia. They work together to enable the collaborative creation of "encyclopedic" content.
- Review Wikipedia's core behavior policy pages, "Civility" and in particular "Consensus." While it is obvious that students should be civil to others online, the consensus policy explains how Wikipedians make decisions.

Crafting your assignments

For a more detailed explanation of suggested exercises and assignments, see the sample syllabus and the "Wikipedia as a Teaching Tool" guide. The following are general assignment guidelines and broad assignment categories; you should choose specific exercises and assignments to fit the learning objectives for you course.

- Spread Wikipedia assignment milestones throughout the term.
  - Students will be more engaged in the assignment and will not try to do the entire assignment at once. They will also have the chance gradually to gain fluency with Wikipedia's software and policies. We have found a gradual timeline to be essential to the students' positive experience.
  - The more regularly students edit, the more opportunity they will have to collaborate with other editors. Wikipedians typically check check for developments in the articles they

are editing on a daily basis. The feedback cycle is part of what makes a Wikipedia assignment unique, and you will want your students to experience it.

Preliminary exercises

- Students should create accounts and userpages and list themselves on the course page near the start of the term.
- Subsequent exercises and readings should familiarize students with how to use wiki markup, how Wikipedia works and what its core policies are, and how to contribute effectively.
- Students should communicate with other editors via talk pages, such as by requesting mentors (see below).

Main exercises

- Ask students to perform a critical analysis of existing articles, posting comments and suggestions to article talk pages.
- Ask students to make minor improvements to existing articles.
- Ask students to create new articles or make major expansions/improvements to existing articles.

Amount of output per student

- Every student should be involved in editing Wikipedia.
- Students are expected to make substantive contributions to Wikipedia, equivalent to a term paper or other large writing assignment. For example, students could:
    - Create a substantial article from scratch or expand a stub/subsection into a full article.
    - Start several small articles on related topics.
    - Undertake a major rewrite of a large article, using the best sources available for the topic.
- Rule of thumb: at least 10-20 paragraphs (~1500 words) per student or team of students.

Duration of assignments

- Assignments should be integrated throughout as much of the term as possible.
- At a minimum, Wikipedia should be a key focus of assignments for half the term.

Selection of mentors

- Students should pair up with Online Ambassadors as mentors, using one of the following methods:
    - The ambassadors program can assign mentor-student pairings. This method is easier, and lets us make sure all students are matched up with mentors in a timely manner.
    - Each student can select an Online Ambassador as a mentor and contact them soon after account creation. This has the benefit, in some cases, that students can find ambassadors with interests relevant to what they will be working on.
- Please note on your course page which method is selected.

Communication expectations

- Plan Wikipedia assignments and create a course page describing the assignments and the timeline for them before the term begins.
- In cooperation with your Campus Ambassador, keep your course page up to date.
- Communicate regularly with Campus Ambassadors about the progress of the students, student questions, excitement, uneasiness, etc., through in-person meetings, email, phone, and/or other means. As much as possible, meet with Campus Ambassadors before classes begin.
- Post problems, success stories, and feedback in general in a timely manner, to Online and Campus Ambassadors.
- Respond in a timely fashion to email and phone inquiries from WMF staff.
- Alert Wikimedia Foundation staff if you get contacted by media.
- Encourage students to communicate freely and frequently on Wikipedia talk pages. When problems arise, students should communicate with their mentor and the editing community (particularly editors writing on talk pages of articles that they are working on) as a first resort.