

# Political science



*Editing Wikipedia can be daunting for newbies, especially as a student editor contributing to Wikipedia for the first time in a class assignment. This guide is for students assigned to add content related to political science to Wikipedia.*

## Be accurate

Wikipedia is a resource millions of people use to inform themselves about the world, guide policy decisions, or make sense of their culture, laws, and society.

By documenting and sharing accurate and objective content about political science, you will help Wikipedia present a wider spectrum of human knowledge. You will ensure that people around the world have access to high-quality information about laws, governance, and political theories.

## Understand the guidelines

Take time to read and understand the suggestions here to maximize the value of your contributions to Wikipedia. If you post something that doesn't meet these guidelines, resolving it may take up valuable time that could have been spent improving content.

If you aren't comfortable working within 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. Don't wait until the last day to make a contribution, or you may miss important comments, advice, and ideas. Volunteers from the Wikipedia community might respond or ask questions about your work. If they do, make sure to reply. Thank them, and work with them to improve the article. Discussion is a crucial part of the Wikipedia process.

## Avoid close paraphrasing

Use your own words. Plagiarizing by copying-and-pasting, or close paraphrasing — when most of the words are changed, but the structure and meaning of the original text remains — is against the rules.

Plagiarism is a violation of your university's academic honor code. Plagiarism on Wikipedia will be caught by other editors, and there will be a permanent online record of it tied to your account. Even standard resources like textbooks are under copyright and should never be directly copied.

The best way to avoid this hassle is to make sure you really understand your material, and write about it in your own words. If you aren't clear on what close paraphrasing is, contact your university's writing center.

## Make a difference

Take the time to understand the rules and guidelines, and soon you'll be contributing your knowledge and judgement to a resource you, and millions of other people, use every day.

# Getting started

## Choosing an article

- Choose topics with plentiful and interesting literature in books or peer-reviewed political science publications (such as *the American Journal of Political Science* or *Political Analysis*). Look to sources such as literature reviews, or the *Handbook of Political Science*, before claiming a theory is widely used.
- Choose a topic that isn't already well developed on Wikipedia. Look for a “stub” or “start-class” article — check the talk page for an article's rating. To find a stub in a field that interests you, type this “shortcut” in the Wikipedia search bar | *shortcut* `WP:STUBS`

### What's a shortcut?

The text `WP:STUBS` is what's known on Wikipedia as a *shortcut*.

You can type shortcuts like this into Wikipedia's search bar to pull up specific pages.

### What's a lead section?

A good lead section isn't an introduction to an article. There's no need to persuade your reader of the importance of your topic.

The lead is more like a mini-article, summarizing the longer article in 1–4 paragraphs.

The first sentence — which usually starts with the **name of the topic** in bold — defines the topic and why it is important. For example:

“The **iron law of oligarchy** is a political theory first developed by the German sociologist Robert Michels in his 1911 book, *Political Parties*.”

## Organizing your article

Every article will be unique, but here are some suggestions for what to include in your article. You can add, remove, or reorder sections as appropriate for your topic.

### An article on a political theory

- **Lead section:** A scaffolding paragraph that summarizes the article.
- **History:** Describe how the theory was developed. Note socio-economic conditions, if applicable, and any earlier work or events that contributed to it. This should be just enough to provide context. Focus on your topic, and wikilink articles that explore theorists and tangential concepts in greater detail.
- **Theory (or Model):** A brief explanation of the theory itself, using your own words. Section headings can be created to address specific claims or elements of the model.
- **Reactions:** How did people build on or argue against the theory? Summarize and attribute perspectives reflected in academic literature.
- **Impact:** Describe effects attributed to the application of the theory.

For good examples, see the articles on *voter turnout*, *liberalism*, or *iron law of oligarchy*.

### An article on a law

- **Lead section:** A scaffolding paragraph that summarizes the article.
- **Background:** Describe any important historical context and the real or perceived problem that the law was intended to solve.
- **Provisions:** Summarize the law in your own words, rather than use direct quotations.
- **Reactions:** Explain the impact of the law and how people responded to it.
- **Repeal:** If applicable, describe problems with the law that led to its repeal, identifying any key players and events.

Good examples include: *Voting Rights Act of 1965*, *Limitation Act 1963*, and *Chancery Amendment Act 1858*.

# Writing your article

## Think critically

How do you identify sources you can use to build your Wikipedia article? Your sources should be reliable, published, and generally, reviewed by a third party for accuracy. Readers are trusting you to represent a topic fairly -- that means researching to find underrepresented views and being skeptical of extreme or sweeping claims.

## Think globally

Wikipedia is read by millions of people around the world. Write your article with this in mind. Describe the theory or law as if your reader is from outside of your own country. Draw from sources outside of your home country when appropriate, and avoid comparisons to your home country.

## Evaluate your sources

Learning to evaluate sources is a core component of engaging critically in your field and on Wikipedia. Consider:

**The author:** The ideal author is a recognized authority in the field, and does not have a personal connection to the subject that would affect her neutrality.

**The text:** Looking at popular press coverage like newspapers can be useful for providing historical context, but they aren't always appropriate for analysis or interpretation. Pay close attention to context when determining if a text is reliable, and when in doubt, check its primary source material, such as the law.

**The publisher:** Work cited should come from a reliable, academic publisher. Often, think tanks and NGOs will have a specific point of view. It's important to read through the material to identify such points of view and ensure you report it on Wikipedia without bias. Draw from independent summaries when possible.

For more on finding good sources, see | *shortcut* [WP:RS](#)

## Identify your audience

Before you start writing, think carefully about your audience. You're communicating with millions of readers around the world! It's important to write in a way that helps them *understand* the information you're trying to convey, while still maintaining an encyclopedic tone.

Avoid political or legal jargon. If you must use a term a layperson wouldn't understand, briefly describe it and/or wikilink to a relevant Wikipedia article.

## Write neutrally

Wikipedia is not a place for crafting compelling critiques of culture or society. It *is* for sharing the knowledge that informs those critiques. Crafting well-researched, balanced information on laws and political science topics is an essential public service. That means portraying all sides fairly, even when you disagree.

Wikipedia's neutrality guidelines encourage "representing fairly, proportionately, and, as far as possible, without bias, all of the significant views." Articles should "indicate the relative prominence of opposing views." Good contributions will incorporate a variety of viewpoints, but cannot advocate for any of them.

While Wikipedia requires a neutral tone for articles, it does not require neutral sources. Human rights groups, regardless of their "neutrality," may illustrate a particular viewpoint well. That can be useful for establishing context. Cite these texts, but acknowledge the perspective if it is relevant. For example, "*According to Russian human rights group Memorial...*," or "*humanitarian group Doctors Without Borders reported that...*"

For more on Wikipedia's Neutrality guidelines, see | *shortcut* [WP:NPOV](#)

# Wrapping up

## Writing tips

- Let the facts speak for themselves. Respect your readers and recognize that two people reading empirical data might not come to the same conclusion. Consider what this means about your own interpretations of data.
- Unlike most school assignments, Wikipedia doesn't permit original research. Your article should cover what the literature says, not your interpretation.
- For help with the stylistic aspects of legal articles, see | *shortcut* [WP:MOSLAW](#)
- Wikipedia articles are written for the general public, not scholars in your field. Avoid jargon, and briefly explain academic terms in simple English when you use them.
- However, be sure you're writing impersonal, fact-based encyclopedic content, not an essay or blog post. See the *Editing Wikipedia* brochure linked from your course page if you need a refresher on the difference in tone.

## Final thoughts

- Don't procrastinate! Writing good, reliable Wikipedia articles takes time. Don't wait until the last minute. If you get stuck, always ask your instructor for extra time, rather than adding content to Wikipedia that doesn't meet these guidelines.
- Check back on your page. It can be interesting to see how your article grows, but you may also have comments and suggestions from other editors, and want to get involved in new developments
- Rather than summarizing or creating new sections to give background on your topic, create a wikilink.
- Give appropriate weight to aspects of the topic as the literature covers it.

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