Instructor Basics:
How to use Wikipedia as a teaching tool

Wiki Edu

Wikipedia is the free online encyclopedia that anyone can edit. One of the most visited websites worldwide, Wikipedia is a resource used by most university students. Increasingly, many instructors around the world have used Wikipedia as a teaching tool in their university classrooms as well. In this brochure, we bring together their experiences to help you determine how to use Wikipedia in your classroom.

We've organized the brochure into three parts:

Assignment planning
Learn key Wikipedia policies and get more information on designing assignments, with a focus on asking students to write Wikipedia articles for class.

During the term
Learn about the structure of a good Wikipedia article, the kinds of articles students should choose to improve, suggestions for what to cover in a Wikipedia lab session, and how to interact with the community of Wikipedia editors.

After the term
See a sample assessment structure that's worked for other instructors.

Understanding key policies

Since Wikipedia started in 2001, the community of volunteer editors – "Wikipedians" – has developed several key policies designed to ensure Wikipedia is as reliable and useful as possible. Any assignment you integrate into your classroom must follow these policies. Understanding these cornerstone policies ensures that you develop an assignment that meets your learning objectives and improves Wikipedia at the same time.

Free content

"The work students contribute to Wikipedia is *free content* and becomes part of the commons. It may be edited and reused by others under a free license. All writing on Wikipedia must be original. It's not appropriate to copy and paste from other sources."

— User:Lechatjaune

photo CC-BY-SA 3.0 by User:Lechatjaune

Reliable sources

"The most *reliable sources* on Wikipedia are secondary sources with a reputation for fact-checking, such as books published by academic presses, peer-reviewed academic journals, and international newspapers. You should avoid citing blogs, press releases, and other less formal sources. Students should be using sources that represent significant viewpoints, rather than one-off studies or fringe work."

— User:Mariana Jó

photo CC-BY-SA 3.0 by User:Mariana Jó
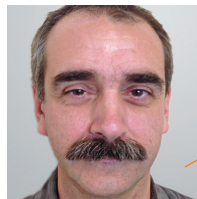
Neutral point of view

"Everything on Wikipedia must be written from a *neutral point of view*. Wikipedia is not the place for argumentation or advocacy. All information must be presented accurately and without bias, describing all the significant viewpoints published by reliable sources. You should explain different opinions on a topic, not argue for one or the other."

— User:GorillaWarfare

photo CC-BY-SA 3.0 by User:GorillaWarfare

Notability

"We use the concept of *notability* to determine if a topic merits an article. In general, we consider a topic notable if there has been third-party coverage of the topic in reliable sources. If your students are starting new articles, they should find several independent reliable sources on the topic before they start."

— User:Mohamed Ouda

photo CC-BY-SA 3.0 by User:Faris knight

Good faith

"Everyone who edits Wikipedia, including students, should *assume good faith* when interacting with others. That means we treat each other with respect and assume that everyone is operating with the same goal: to improve the content on Wikipedia. We value civility when interacting about contentious topics. Remember to always discuss the content being edited, and not the person editing, and refrain from personal attacks."

— User:Mike Christie

photo CC-BY-SA 3.0 by User:Mike Christie

Designing your assignment

Wikipedia offers many options for assignments, based on your learning objectives. Consider your students' skill sets, how much of a contribution you want your students to make to Wikipedia, and how much time you have in the course to dedicate to the assignment.

In this brochure, we feature an assignment which asks students to write an article on a course-related topic, one of the most common assignments instructors use.

1

Assignment: Write an article

In the "Write an article" assignment, you ask your students to expand an existing article or create a new article on a course-related topic. Using reliable sources, students document information about the topic. Often, instructors feature this assignment in conjunction with a longer analytical paper offline; students' Wikipedia articles form the literature review sections of their papers.

Alternative assignments:

Translate an article
Language instructors find this to be a very practical assignment. Your students take high quality articles from the Wikipedia of the language they are studying that are not currently available on their native language Wikipedia, and translate those articles into their native language.

Add illustrations to an article
This can be a great way of contributing to Wikipedia in a non-textual way. In the past, students have photographed local monuments that had no photos illustrating the articles, designed infographics to illustrate concepts on Wikipedia, and created videos that demonstrate audiovisually what articles describe in words.

Copyediting
Since Wikipedia is a user-generated resource, you'll find plenty of typos and much room for improvement in the prose. Asking students to improve the grammar of an article is a good way for them to learn copyediting skills and think critically about how good writing is done in your discipline.

A complementary brochure, "Case Studies: How instructors are teaching with Wikipedia," includes links to syllabi and assignment descriptions instructors have used around the world. A few common assignments are listed above, but you are encouraged to consult the Case Studies brochure for more ideas. Find it at wikiedu.org/for-instructors.

2

Learning objectives

Asking students to write a Wikipedia article generally meets the following learning objectives well.

Writing skills development

Students learn how to write for a diverse and interested readership that represents a significant percentage of the worldwide online population. Furthermore, with Wikipedia's emphasis on verifiability and "no original research," students gain a greater understanding of the difference between fact-based and persuasive writing styles.

Media and information literacy

Wikipedia's transparent and collaborative content development process allows students to gain a deeper understanding of how information is both produced and consumed. This provides an excellent opportunity for students to reflect on available sources and their appropriate usage.

Critical thinking and research skills

Students learn to critically analyze Wikipedia articles to determine how well an article covers the topic, to assess what information is missing, and to evaluate to what extent the article is documented with reliable sources. In the larger context, the evaluation of Wikipedia articles helps your students learn how to evaluate different sources, not only Wikipedia. The process of assessing an existing article and deciding what information is missing is very similar to the literature review process that is crucial in scholarly research.

Collaboration

Students learn first-hand how to collaborate with a community of active volunteer editors (including their fellow students) in the development of encyclopedic content. They often receive feedback on their work and learn to negotiate with other editors in building consensus on content.

3

Syllabus design

Experienced instructors say it is crucial for students who are going to be editing Wikipedia to become comfortable not only with the markup, but also the community. Requiring tiny assignments early in the term, such as those listed below, will acclimate them to the site. Instructors who do not set up these milestones throughout the term usually have bad experiences with their assignments.

These simple tasks prepare students for a longer Wikipedia assignment by introducing students to skills they will need later.

› Students should create a user page, adding a sentence or two about themselves and adding an image from Wikimedia Commons (Wikipedia's image repository).

› Encourage students to upload a photo to Wikimedia Commons that they've taken themselves.

› Ask students to improve the clarity of a sentence or two in an article related to the class.

› Students could use a reading from the course to add a reference to an article.

› Once they've selected a topic to write on, students should post a message on that article's talk page with some proposed sources.

› Ask students to post an outline of their proposed changes to the talk page before they start writing.

Once students have accomplished these milestones, they'll be more comfortable with working on Wikipedia. Students procrastinate, so it's better to use these as early milestones that will be completed before they start writing.

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Our Assignment Design Wizard web tool can help you pick and choose components to generate a flexible syllabus for your course. You can find it at wizard.wikiedu.org.

Choosing an article

Determining what articles students should work on can be a challenge. Some instructors create a list of articles and ask students to pick from the list; others require students to propose topics. If you would like your students to create new articles, rather than improve existing articles, make sure they have read Wikipedia's notability guidelines and are confident the topics are notable — that is, well-covered by reputable third-party sources in your field.

Just what makes a good Wikipedia article? Make sure you and your students familiarize yourselves with the structure of a typical Wikipedia article in your discipline, so students know what types of sections they will be expected to contribute. Most students will have never thought about the structure of an encyclopedia article before, so spending a few minutes in class clarifying how information is structured in encyclopedias is important.

Do's

› Ask your students to choose a topic that is well established in the discipline, but only weakly represented on Wikipedia. If there is a lot of literature available on the topic, but only a small amount of that information exists on Wikipedia, that is the ideal situation.

› Look for articles rated "stub" or "start" class on Wikipedia's internal assessment process. You can see an article's assessment by visiting its talk page.

› Before creating a new article, do an in-depth search of related topics on Wikipedia to make sure your topic isn't already covered. Often, an article may already exist under another name, or the topic may be covered as a subsection of a broader article.

Don'ts

› Avoid trying to improve articles on very broad topics (e.g., law) or articles that are already of high quality on Wikipedia ("Featured Articles" and "Good Articles"). These topics are more challenging to improve effectively.

› Don't try to improve articles that are highly controversial, like "Israeli–Palestinian conflict", "Abortion", or "Scientology". These topics often lead to fights on Wikipedia. However, narrower sub-articles — for example, "Climate change in Montana" rather than the main "Global warming" article — tend to be less contentious, and may be appropriate for advanced students.

› Avoid working on topics that are only sparsely covered by literature. Students will have a difficult time providing enough reliable sources to create a Wikipedia article.

› Don't start articles with titles that imply an essay-like approach, such as "The Effects that the Recent Sub-Prime Mortgage Crisis has had on the US and Global Economics" instead of "Subprime mortgage crisis." Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, and essays are not appropriate.

Typical structure of a Wikipedia article

A quality Wikipedia article is the result of a well-defined structure, encyclopedic content, and an active community.

Lead section
A lead section should summarize the key points covered in the article. Note that the lead section is without a heading. The first sentence should provide a definition of the topic of the article.

Infobox
Many articles contain an infobox that describes key elements of the topic. Find an article on a similar topic to yours and copy the code for the infobox to add one to your article.

Body of the article
Headings clearly delineate appropriate sections. In the case of this article, the body covers the history of the hurricane as well as its impact.

Images
Freely licensed images can be added to Wikipedia articles from Wikimedia Commons.

Appendices and footnotes
After the content comes a section with other related Wikipedia articles ("See also"), the sources used in the article ("References"), and a list of other websites people could consult for more information ("External links").

Create account   Log in

Article   Talk   Read   Edit   View history   Search

Hurricane Irene (2005)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

This article is about the Atlantic hurricane of 2005. For the 2011 storm, see Hurricane Irene (2011). For other storms of the same name, see Tropical Storm Irene (disambiguation).

Hurricane Irene was a long-lived Cape Verde-type Atlantic hurricane during the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season. The storm formed near Cape Verde on August 4 and crossed the Atlantic, turning northward around Bermuda before becoming extratropical southeast of Newfoundland. Irene persisted for 14 days as a tropical system, the longest duration of any storm of the 2005 season. It was the ninth named storm and fourth hurricane of the record-breaking season.

Irene proved to be a difficult storm to forecast due to oscillations in strength. After almost dissipating on August 10, Irene peaked as a Category 2 hurricane on August 16 before being absorbed by a larger extratropical system late on August 18. Although there were initial fears of a landfall in the United States due to uncertainty in predicting the storm's track, Hurricane Irene never approached land and caused no recorded damage. However, swells up to 8 ft (2.4 m) and strong rip currents resulted in one fatality in Long Beach, New York.

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1 Meteorological history
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Hurricane Irene
Category 2 hurricane (SSHS)

Hurricane Irene on August 15, 3 days before dissipating

Formed	August 4, 2005
Dissipated	August 18, 2005
Highest winds	*1-minute sustained:* 105 mph (165 km/h)
Lowest pressure	970 mbar (hPa); 28.64 inHg
Fatalities	1 direct
Damage	None
Areas affected	East Coast of the United States

Part of the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season

[edit]

Meteorological history

A vigorous tropical wave moved off the west coast of Africa on August 1, initially weakening due to cooler sea surface temperatures. It moved westward and passed near Cape Verde, where convection started to increase. The system became more organized and developed into Tropical Depression Nine on the afternoon of August 4, 690 miles (1100 km) southwest of the Cape Verde Islands.[1] Early on August 5, the depression abruptly turned to the northwest into an area of higher wind shear, causing some computer models to predict that the depression would dissipate, while others predicted steady strengthening. The sudden threat to the storm's existence prompted National Hurricane Center (NHC) forecaster Dr Lixion Avila to comment, "How little we know about the genesis of tropical cyclones."[2] Despite the unfavorable conditions in its vicinity and its poor organization, Tropical Depression Nine continued to strengthen, becoming Tropical Storm Irene on August 7.[1]

Storm path

Because Irene was in an environment laden with dry air and high shear, it soon weakened to a tropical depression, on August 8.[1] On the morning of August 10, as it was passing north of the Lesser Antilles, Irene nearly dissipated into a remnant low, but forecasters predicted with "very low confidence" that the storm would survive.[3] However, warmer waters and less wind shear allowed Irene to become gradually more organized while south of Bermuda, and it became a tropical storm once again early on August 11.[1]

Due to uncertainties about how the region's subtropical ridge would interact with Irene, the models continued to give unclear signals of the storm's future. Some of the models predicted that Irene would make landfall in North Carolina, while others continued to anticipate that Irene would dissipate.[4] The uncertainty ended when a weakness in the subtropical ridge allowed Irene to turn sharply northward, which caused the storm to pass midway between the Outer Banks of North Carolina and Bermuda on August 15. Soon after, upper-level shear weakened greatly, and Irene rapidly intensified, first to a hurricane, then to its peak strength as a 105 mph (170 km/h) Category 2 hurricane on the afternoon of August 16, while located 350 miles (560 km) northeast of Bermuda; at the same time it also attained minimum pressure of 970 mbar.[1] Though NHC meteorologists thought it was likely that Irene would become a hurricane, they were not expecting an intensification of such a magnitude.[5]

Irene as a tropical storm on August 12

Irene entered a region of increased wind shear and began to weaken, and as a result it was downgraded to a tropical storm early on August 18, when it was 520 miles (830 km) south of Cape Race, Newfoundland. Tropical Storm Irene finally became extratropical on August 18 after moving over much cooler waters, and was absorbed by a larger extratropical system later that day.[1] Irene lasted for 14 days as a tropical system, the longest duration of any storm of the 2005 season.[6]

Impact, records and naming   [edit]

As Hurricane Irene stayed well away from land, no coastal warnings or watches were issued for it. Despite Irene's long life there were no reports of tropical storm force winds affecting ships. There were no damage or fatalities as a result of Irene.[1] However, the hurricane generated strong waves and increased the risk of rip currents along the East Coast of the United States. Many beaches in New Jersey restricted swimming activities, and lifeguards at one beach performed more than a hundred rescues over a three-day period.[7] Waves along the coastline of New York reached 4 to 8 ft (1.2 to 2.4 m).[8] On August 14, a 16-year-old boy drowned after being caught in a rip current near Long Beach, New York on August 14.[8][9] His body was recovered on August 16 after washing ashore.[8]

Satellite image of Tropical Storm Irene on August 14 off the coast of the United States

When Tropical Storm Irene formed on August 7, it was the earliest date for the formation of the ninth tropical storm in an Atlantic hurricane season, beating the previous record held by a storm in the 1936 season by 13 days. This storm also marked the fifth occasion the name "Irene" had been used to name a tropical cyclone in the Atlantic.[6] Due to the lack of effects on land from Hurricane Irene, the name was not retired by the World Meteorological Organization and was reused in the 2011 Atlantic season.

See also   [edit]
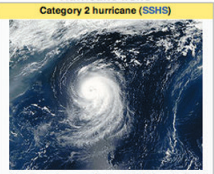
- List of 2005 Atlantic hurricane season storms
- Timeline of the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season
- List of New Jersey hurricanes

Tropical cyclones portal

References   [edit]

1. ^ *a b c d e f g* National Hurricane Center. "Tropical Cyclone Report: Hurricane Irene" (PDF). NOAA. Retrieved April 24, 2006.
2. ^ National Hurricane Center. "Discussion for Tropical Depression Nine, 11:00 a.m. EDT, August 05 2005". NOAA. Retrieved April 24, 2006.
3. ^ National Hurricane Center. "Discussion for Tropical Storm Irene, 5:00 a.m. EDT, August 10, 2005". NOAA. Retrieved April 24, 2006.
4. ^ National Hurricane Center. "Discussion for Tropical Storm Irene, 11:00 a.m. EDT, August 11, 2005". NOAA. Retrieved April 28, 2006.
5. ^ National Hurricane Center. "Discussion for Tropical Storm Irene, 5:00 p.m. EDT, August 14, 2005". NOAA. Retrieved April 24,

2006.
6. ^ *a b* National Hurricane Center; Hurricane Research Division; Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory (April 2012). "Atlantic hurricane best track (Hurdat)". United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Oceanic & Atmospheric Research. Retrieved 2012-04-19.
7. ^ Associated Press (August 16, 2005). "Hurricane Irene Affecting Jersey Shore". 6ABC. Retrieved May 10, 2006.
8. ^ *a b c* Richard Weir and Michael White (August 16, 2005). "Lost Boy's Body Found On Shore". New York Daily News. Retrieved December 29, 2009.
9. ^ "NCDC Event Report: New York Rip Current". National Climatic Data Center. 2005. Retrieved April 13, 2009.

External links   [edit]

- National Hurricane Center's archive on Hurricane Irene
- National Hurricane Center's Tropical Cyclone Report on Hurricane Irene
- Photo gallery of surf from Hurricane Irene in North Carolina
- NASA article on Irene's rainfall

Wikimedia Commons has media related to: *Hurricane Irene (2005)*

v · t · e

Tropical cyclones of the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season

Teaching wiki basics to students

In the first few weeks of class, we recommend that you give students an introduction to the basics of Wikipedia, including instructions on how to edit and some things they should keep in mind about how writing for Wikipedia is different from a typical college essay.

Students will learn the basics of editing Wikipedia through an online training, which you can find at wikiedu.org/student training and which should take about an hour for the students to complete. The training will give students a hands-on introduction to wiki editing. Topics covered by the online student training include:

› Basic formatting

› Editing wiki markup

› Creating links

› Creating references

› Working in a sandbox

› Core Wikipedia policies

› How to write a Wikipedia article

Some instructors choose to ask students to complete the training as a homework assignment. Others use class time to have all the students go through the training at the same time. If you choose to have students do it in class time, make sure they have created a Wikipedia account before they start the training for two important reasons: (1) They can read Wikipedia's username policy and consider how anonymous they want to be, and (2) it avoids triggering automatic limits placed on creating numerous accounts from the same location in a short time period.

How Wikipedia is different from a college essay

Here are some ways that writing for Wikipedia may take some extra thought for students:

Fact-based, not persuasive writing
Rather than making an argument, students will be writing a description of the information about a topic, cited to reliable sources.

Formal tone and basic language
Articles should be written in a formal tone, but with easy-to-understand language. Wikipedia isn't the place for students to show off their extensive vocabularies. The audience of Wikipedia is global, and people who have never heard of the topic before will be reading what students are writing. Students need to clearly convey the basics of the topic in their writing.

No large block quotes
Academic writing favors large block quotes from reputable sources, but Wikipedia's policies state that you should try to paraphrase whenever possible. Quoting from sources is encouraged, but students should try to provide the context in their own words and only quote the truly key phrase or two from the original.

Interacting with the community

Collaborating with the Wikipedia community is key to giving your students the full benefits of a Wikipedia assignment. But how do you do that?

photos CC-BY-SA 3.0
by Jelly Helm

Wikipedians interact by writing messages to each other on article talk pages or user talk pages. If another user wants to communicate with you, s/he will most likely leave a message directly on your user talk page or the talk page of the article you've been working on, or notify you of their message by including a link to your user page in their post. It is a good idea to monitor and respond to these messages.

All Wikipedia interaction assumes good faith. That is, until it can be demonstrated otherwise, we assume that other editors are here to help improve the encyclopedia. Therefore, all editors should be treated with respect.

When making changes to Wikipedia articles, it is expected that editors will explain their changes briefly in an edit summary. When you fill in the small box in the edit window with a phrase such as "copyediting" or "adding a reference," others will be able to follow the history of the article when they click on the "View history" tab.

Etiquette

Like any community, Wikipedia has an etiquette. These few simple guidelines will help you get along with Wikipedians:

› Assume good faith: Assume other editors are trying to improve the project. Try to understand their point of view. Discuss. Negotiate.

› Be polite and remember that it is more difficult to read sarcasm and irony in text than in verbal form.

› Always sign your posts on talk pages so others can follow who is saying what by using four tildes (~~~~), which will automatically add your username and the date.

› Discuss major changes you are making to the encyclopedia on article talk pages.

› Discuss article content, not editors. Do not make personal attacks.

Assessing student work

How can you assess your students' contributions to Wikipedia and writing about Wikipedia? Depending on the complexity of your assignment, designing a grading rubric for it may be easy or challenging. Here is a sample grading rubric that has worked well for other instructors.

Sample Grading Structure

| 5% each (x4) | Participation grade for early Wikipedia exercises |

| 10% | Participation in class blog or class discussions |

| 10% | Peer reviews and collaboration with classmates |

| 50% | Quality of your main Wikipedia contributions |

| 10% | Reflective essay |

student grade

Early Wikipedia exercises

Did students complete the milestones (first referenced on page 5) listed in your syllabus?

Class blog or class discussion

Many instructors ask students to keep a running blog about their experiences. Giving them prompts every week or every two weeks, such as "To what extent are the editors on Wikipedia a self-selecting group and why?" will help them begin to think about the larger issues surrounding this online encyclopedia community. It will also give you material both on the wiki and off the wiki to grade. If you have time in class, these discussions can be particularly constructive in person.

Peer reviews

Students evaluate each others' work on Wikipedia, leaving reviews for each other on or off the site. These evaluations can cover questions such as how reliable are the references, how well does the article cover the topic, or how well-written is the article.

Quality of contributions

Many instructors contrast what an article looked like before and after a student worked on it, using the article history. You can compare the beginning version with the end, extract the contributions made by the students, and see the individual changes made by the students. You may want your students to do this comparison themselves and add it to a portfolio they present to you.

Reflective essay

After the assignment is over, ask students to write a short reflective essay on their experiences using Wikipedia. This works well for both short and long Wikipedia projects. An interesting variant of this is to have students write a short version of the essay before they begin editing Wikipedia, outlining their expectations, and then have them reflect on whether or not those expectations were met after they have completed the assignment.
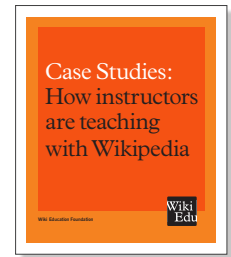
For instructors

Case Studies: How instructors are teaching with Wikipedia

This publication highlights assignment design from instructors throughout the United States and Canada. Each instructor explains how he or she used Wikipedia in the classroom or how he or she graded the assignment.
wikiedu.org/for-instructors

Online Orientation for Educators

All instructors are highly encouraged to complete the online orientation before planning a syllabus. It will introduce you to the culture and rules of Wikipedia, demonstrate the basics of editing, and walk you through the process of creating an assignment plan and a course page.
wikiedu.org/instructortraining
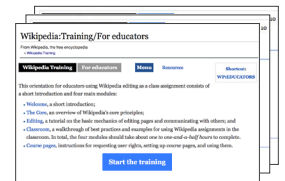
Assignment Design Wizard

This online tool helps you pick and choose aspects of a Wikipedia assignment that align with your course goals.
wizard.wikiedu.org

For students

Editing Wikipedia

A basic introduction to contributing to Wikipedia: how to create a Wikipedia user account, how to start editing, and how to communicate with other contributors. You will also learn how articles evolve on Wikipedia and how to rate the quality of an existing article.
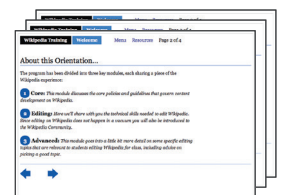wikiedu.org/for-instructors

Online Training for Students

Students are encouraged to take this editing basics training (explained on page 8).
wikiedu.org/studenttraining

Ready to teach with Wikipedia?

The Wiki Education Foundation supports instructors in the United States and Canada who are interested in assigning their students to contribute content to Wikimedia projects as part of their coursework. We'll ensure your assignment design will work with Wikipedia, help you get set up with a course page on Wikipedia, and find support for your students as they edit Wikipedia for the first time.

For more information, visit wikiedu.org or email us at contact@wikiedu.org

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