

# Gleanings from Twenty Years Writing Wikipedia

3 October 2023

Willamette University,  
Institute for Continued Learning

# Overview

- About me
- A short history of Wikipedia
- What you don't know about Wikipedia – but should
- How to use Wikipedia for reference
- How to change or add to Wikipedia



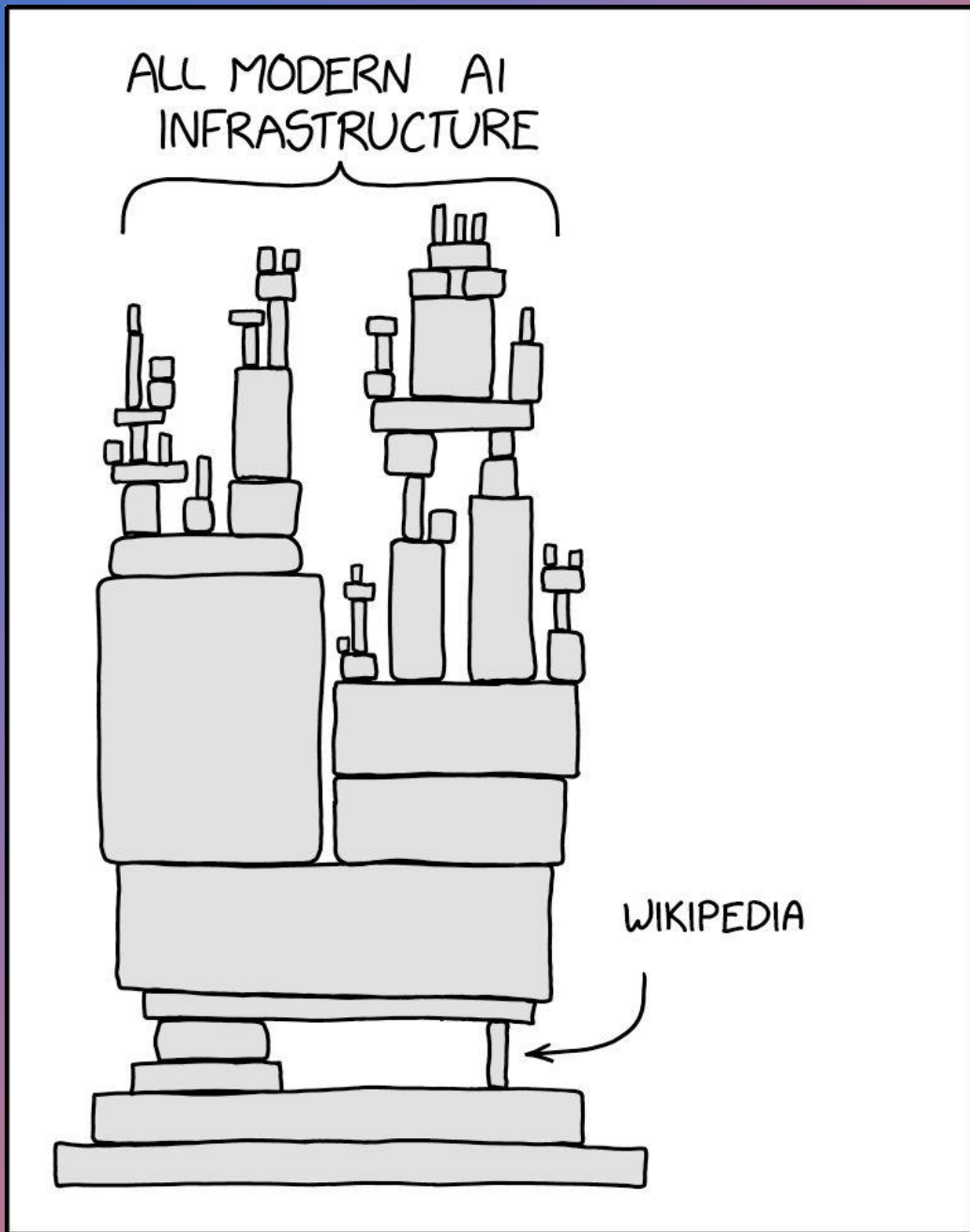
**WIKIPEDIA**  
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# Why do I contribute to Wikipedia?

- The increasing privatization of knowledge
- Helping in the transition of knowledge from print to digital
- I like to write



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# So much depends...

Image courtesy of XKCD, made available  
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# What you don't know about Wikipedia

- Statistics
- What is a Wiki? (Hint: Not all Wikis are Wikipedias)
- Wikipedia is one of a family
- What kind of articles are in Wikipedia?



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# Mandatory statistics section

- Over 6.7 million articles
- 5 million edits August 2023
- 38,000 “active editors” (made 5 or more edits)
- Real impressive Internet popularity ranking

# Wikipedia is Only one of Many Related Projects

- <http://wikipedia.org/>

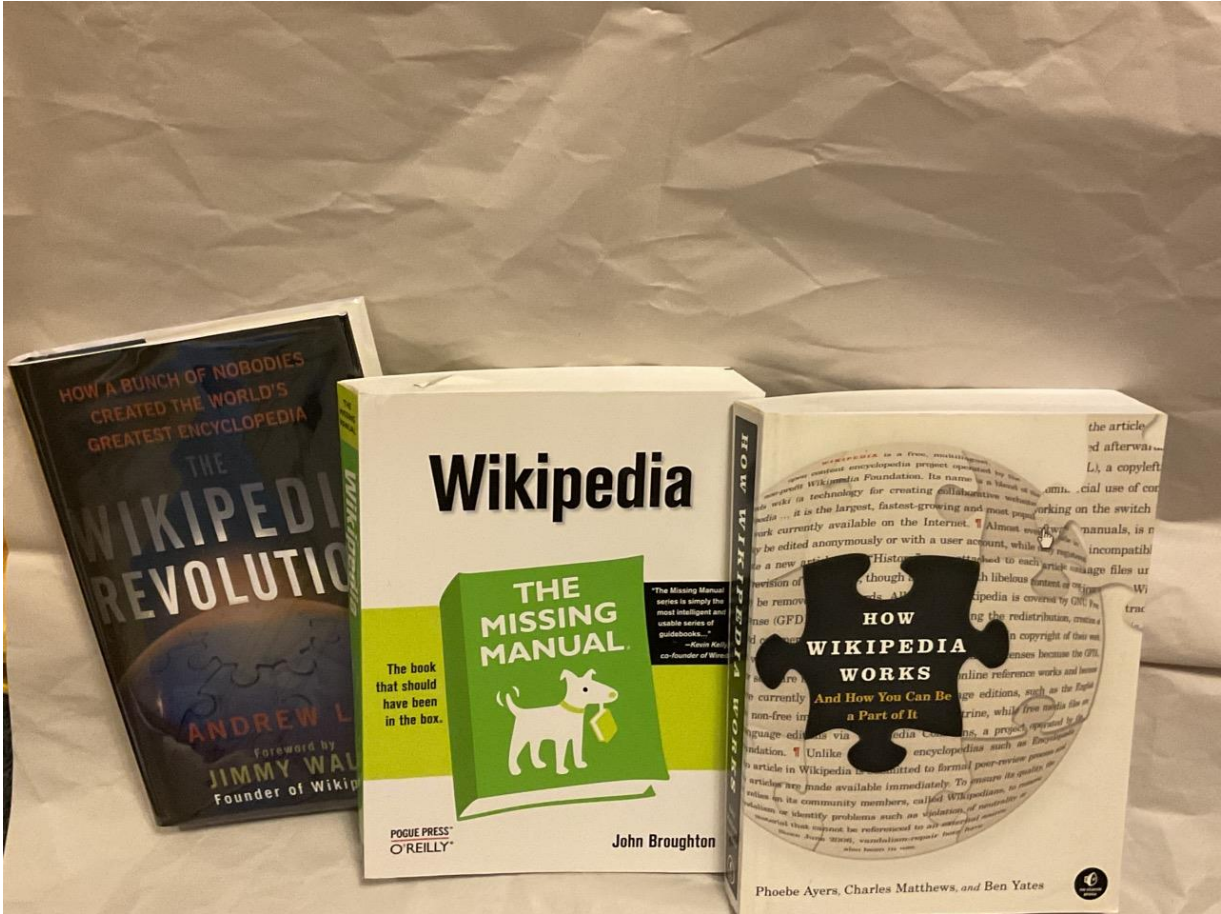
# A short history of Wikipedia



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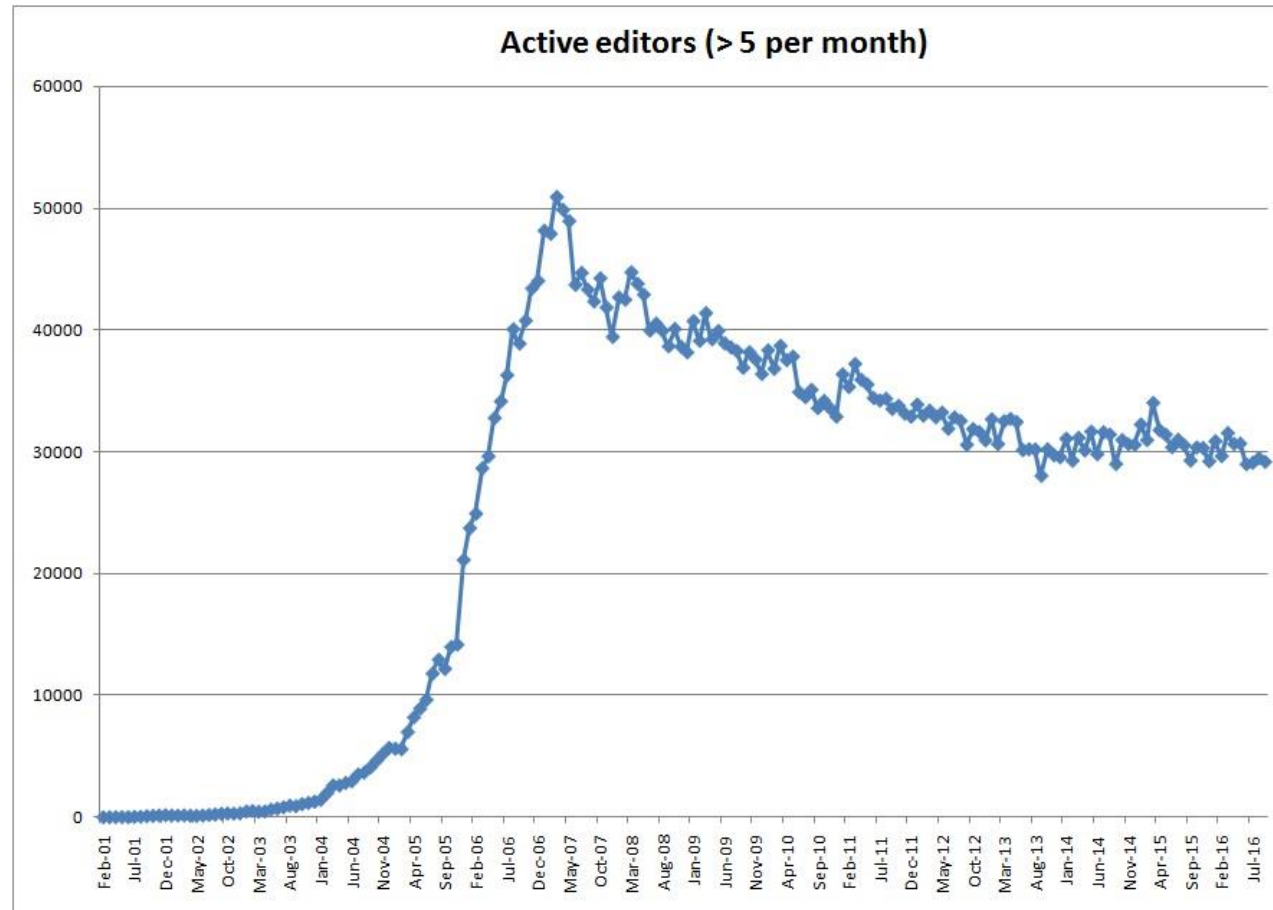
# Good books, but they don't cover today's Wikipedia



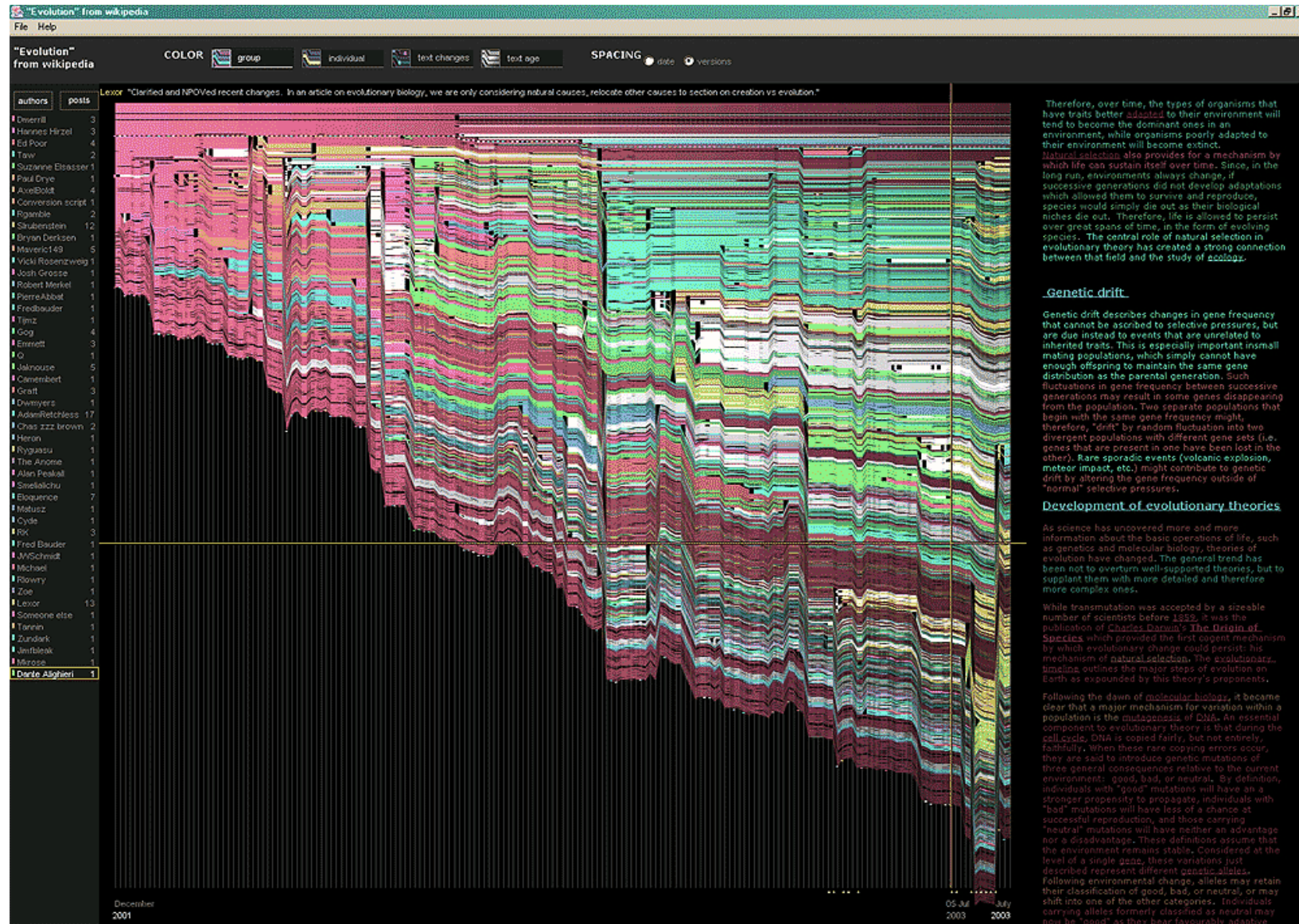
# What has changed since these books were written?

- Dispute Resolution
- Creation of the Foundation
- Increasing Use of Bots
- The Cost of Success

# Active editors on Wikipedia



# Evolution of [[Evolution]]



# Evolution of a More Recent Article

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia revision history page for the article "Lucius Munatius Felix". The page is viewed on a mobile browser at 10:29 PM on Monday, October 2. The browser's address bar shows the URL "en.wikipedia.org". The page title is "Lucius Munatius Felix: Revision history". The page includes a search bar, a "Filter revisions" section, and a list of revisions. The current revision is the 19th revision, dated 05:28, 3 October 2023, by user Llywrch. The list of revisions shows the article's evolution from its creation on 09:12, 28 November 2020 to the current state. The page also features navigation links, external tools, and buttons for comparing and changing the visibility of selected revisions.

10:29 PM Mon Oct 2

en.wikipedia.org

Apple Bing Google Learn iPad...ple Support The Most U...for iPad Pro viaLibri - Th...hand books. How Niger'...opebuilding ZOV.pdf Ma...zmyt's Pubs UAWarData...ian invasion

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Llywrch Talk Sandbox Preferences Beta Watchlist Contributions Log out

Article [Talk](#) [Read](#) [Edit](#) View history [More](#)

## Lucius Munatius Felix: Revision history

[View logs for this page \(view filter log\)](#)

Filter revisions

External tools: [Find addition/removal](#) [Find edits by user](#) [Page statistics](#) [Pageviews](#) [Fix dead links](#)

For any version listed below, click on its date to view it. For more help, see [Help:Page history](#) and [Help:Edit summary](#). (cur) = difference from current version, (prev) = difference from preceding version, m = [minor edit](#), → = [section edit](#), ← = [automatic edit summary](#)

Select: [All](#), [None](#), [Invert](#)

- [cur](#) | [prev](#)  [05:28, 3 October 2023](#) [Llywrch](#) (talk | [contribs](#) | [block](#)) .. (3,380 bytes) (+19) .. (c/e) ([rollback: 1 edit](#) | [undo](#))
- [05:12, 29 September 2021](#) [Martinus KE](#) (talk | [contribs](#) | [block](#)) .. (3,361 bytes) (+1) .. (typo, the Roman emperor is [Antoninus Pius](#)) ([undo](#) | [thank](#))
- [16:27, 6 April 2021](#) [Ira Leviton](#) (talk | [contribs](#) | [block](#)) m .. (3,360 bytes) (-1) .. (Fixed a typo found with [Wikipedia:Typo Team/moss.](#)) ([undo](#) | [thank](#))
- [06:49, 2 April 2021](#) [Chewings72](#) (talk | [contribs](#) | [block](#)) m .. (3,361 bytes) (+69) .. (Adding *short description*: "2nd century Roman eques, official and governor" ([Shortdesc helper](#))) ([undo](#) | [thank](#))
- [19:33, 28 November 2020](#) [Llywrch](#) (talk | [contribs](#) | [block](#)) .. (3,292 bytes) (+69) .. (+ a plausible assumption about Felix) ([undo](#))
- [18:09, 28 November 2020](#) [Llywrch](#) (talk | [contribs](#) | [block](#)) .. (3,223 bytes) (+58) .. (c/e; admitting ignorance) ([undo](#))
- [09:28, 28 November 2020](#) [Llywrch](#) (talk | [contribs](#) | [block](#)) .. (3,165 bytes) (+83) .. (c/e) ([undo](#))
- [09:12, 28 November 2020](#) [Llywrch](#) (talk | [contribs](#) | [block](#)) .. (3,082 bytes) (+3,082) .. (creating an article on a Roman eques: dedicated to my daughter Akasha)

Select: [All](#), [None](#), [Invert](#)

# How to use Wikipedia as a reference



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# A question about Encyclopedias

Is an encyclopedia a collection of all knowledge, or a place to start researching a subject?

(The first is impossible, the second is difficult but possible.)

# How reliable is Wikipedia?

- Is Wikipedia more reliable than, say, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*?
- How “complete” is Wikipedia?
- The problem of a fluid text



# What to look for in Wikipedia articles

- What everyone sees:
  - Articles on subjects
- What everyone does *not* see:
  - Talk pages; Article histories; Policy pages and discussions

# What to do if I find an error in Wikipedia?

- Leave a message on the talk page
- “Contact us”
- When to edit the article
- Contact editor(s)
- Last resort: contacting the Foundation (do not do this at home)



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# Challenges as a Contributor

- Finding the material to write articles with
- Interacting usefully with others, both fellow volunteers and individuals outside Wikipedia
- Having a life



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# Issues in creating/writing an article

- Notability
- No original research
- Competence



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These are attempts towards an ideal: to objectively and accurately report information people want or need to know