

# Editing Wikipedia articles on Psychology



*Editing Wikipedia can be daunting for newbies, especially as a student editor contributing to Wikipedia for the first time for a class assignment. This guide is for students who have been assigned to add content to psychology related articles on Wikipedia. Here's what other editors will expect you to know.*

## Be accurate

You're editing a resource millions of people use to make personal decisions and to draw conclusions about human behavior and cognition, so it's vitally important to be accurate. With great power comes great responsibility!

## Understand the guidelines

Wikipedia editors have developed additional guidelines to ensure that the psychology content on Wikipedia is scientifically sound. Take extra time to read and understand the guidelines here, then ensure everything you post on Wikipedia meets these requirements.

When you post something that doesn't meet these guidelines, someone will have to clean up after you, costing valuable volunteer time that could have been used to improve content. If you're not comfortable working under these guidelines, talk to your instructor about an alternative assignment, or working on an article without biomedical content, such as a biography.

## 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! You may not get a comment, but if you do, please acknowledge it.

## Watch out for close paraphrasing

You must write things in your own words on Wikipedia. Plagiarizing by copy-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.

For a Wikipedia assignment, such plagiarism is a violation of your university's academic honor code. Cleaning up after plagiarism also takes a tremendous amount of volunteer time that would otherwise go into building Wikipedia.

If you plagiarize on Wikipedia, it is extremely likely that you'll be caught by other editors and there will be a permanent online record of your plagiarism tied to your account. Note that even with standard resources like *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, you cannot copy official descriptions of mental disorders into Wikipedia. You may use direct quotation when it is important to keep the original wording, but be sure to explicitly mark what is being quoted and cite the source.

## Scared? Don't be!

Have a healthy respect for why these rules exist: 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 resource you use daily!

# Getting started

## Choosing an article

Generally, follow these guidelines when determining which psychology 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 where 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 psychology are strict, and stay away from pseudoscience sources.
- If you're not familiar with research literature, you may wish to find interesting sources first, then choose a Wikipedia article to develop.

### What is the Lead section?

The lead section is the most important section of a Wikipedia article, and it takes a particular form. A good lead section will summarize the entire article in 1–4 paragraphs, providing context and briefly covering all of the important aspects of the topic. The first sentence — which usually starts with the **name of the topic** in bold — serves as a definition of the topic and indicates why it is important.

One good strategy for writing a Wikipedia article is to draft a lead section first, which you can then use as an outline for the rest of the article. Revise it as you go to make sure it accurately summarizes the body of the article.

## 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 are three common kinds of psychology articles, and general outlines of sections you should include in your article. You can add, remove, or reorder sections as appropriate for your topic. If you're writing on a topic not shown here, visit the page [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:GA-Class\\_psychology\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:GA-Class_psychology_articles) for high-quality articles in psychology, and find a related topic to yours to see how other editors have organized their articles.

### An article on a psychologist

- Lead section
- Academic career
- Major contributions
- Publications
- Legacy

### An article on a psychological concept

- Lead section
- Context/history of concept
- Theory and/or experimental evidence
- Reception/implications

### An article on a psychological condition

- Lead section
- Classification
- Signs or characteristics
- Causes
- Mechanism
- Management or treatment
- History (such as early discoveries, historical figures)
- Society and culture (such as stigma, economics, religious aspects, awareness, legal issues, notable cases)

See | shortcut [WP:MEDSECTIONS](#).

# Using references

## Use these 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 topic, to make recommendations, or to combine the results of several studies. They include:

- Literature reviews or systematic reviews found in reputable psychological sciences journals
- Academic and professional books written by experts in the relevant field, from a respected publisher

## Don't use these sources:

### Primary sources

Avoid citations in which the authors directly participated in the research or documented their personal experiences (treating clients or patients, for example, or studies of lab animals). These include:

- Nearly all papers (aside from review articles) published in scholarly 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, or 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.

Date	<input type="text"/>
Month	<input type="text"/>
Series	<input type="text"/>
Pages	<input type="text"/>
PMID	<input type="text" value="12122621"/>
Access date	<input type="text"/>
Ref group	<input type="text"/>

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/doiewb.py](http://reftag.appspot.com/doiewb.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 article

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

- Don't offer psychological advice; you're writing fact-based descriptions of scientific 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 literature covers it.
- Remember, your audience isn't studying psychology like you are! When mentioning technical terms for the first time, provide a short plain-English explanation in parentheses if possible.

## Final thoughts

- Don't procrastinate! Writing scientifically 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, reach out to the Content Expert listed on your course page, or 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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