

What is Wikipedia?

Imagine a world in which every single person is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge. That's what we're doing.

Wikipedia is a free content encyclopedia that can be read and edited by anyone.

An international project

Wikipedia began as an English-language project on January 15, 2001. It was soon joined by a French edition, and in a short time by many other languages. Enormous efforts are underway to highlight the international nature of the project. While English, with close to 500,000 articles is still the largest Wikipedia, there are well over 700,000 articles in 190 other languages, some quite large, and others just getting started.



Nobody knows everything but everybody knows something

Wikipedia was founded on the belief that virtually everybody has some knowledge that they can share with others. Our editors range in age from seven to seventy and beyond, each of them contributing a little something to help make this the most well-rounded collaborative

educational effort ever seen. We believe that every single person has the right to learn, but also that everyone has something that they can (and should) teach others.

Who are the people in the Wikipedia community?

On Wikipedia, anyone can create or modify an article instantly, so that no article has a single author. Instead, tens and even hundreds of people work together, sharing what they know to edit and improve the content. The result is a never-ending “work in progress,” always getting more thorough and always getting better.

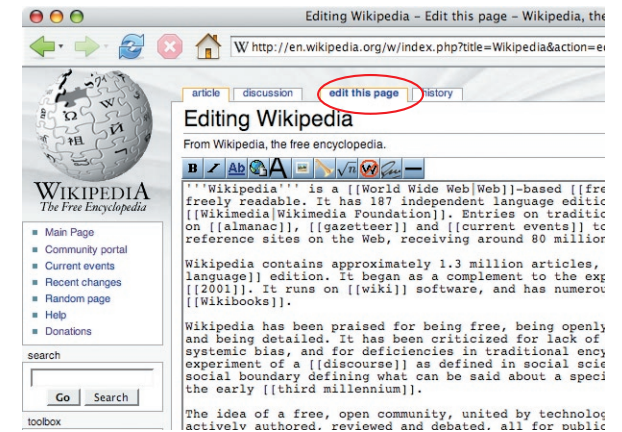
Contributors can create an account with a user name and a password, but this is not required. Much of our best work comes from anonymous users, many of them just passing through, who notice a little something that they can tidy up. Many of them become hooked, and are soon an integral part of the Wikipedia volunteer community. Our neutral point of view policy encourages people from diverse backgrounds to work together. When disputes arise, we have mechanisms in place to resolve them amicably.

“You can edit this page right now!”

The key to Wikipedia’s success is innovative new software known as “wiki.” Created by Ward Cunningham in 1995, this software makes it possible to create a dynamic website, in which all users can edit a webpage quickly and easily, using their personal web browsers. It’s easy. It’s fast. It’s a wiki!

Wikiwiki – “fast” in Hawaiian

The wiki language, known as wikiwiki, is much simpler than HTML. It is practically intuitive, so that anyone can learn it in just a few minutes. For example, to italicize



text, surround it with two apostrophes; use three for bolded text, and enclose a word in two brackets ([]) to create a link.

The software used by Wikipedia is known as Mediawiki, and was developed with the specific goal of creating an encyclopedia in mind. Today, Mediawiki software is distributed under a General Public License (GPL). It is used by many other wikis, though Wikipedia is still the largest wiki in existence.

How do I become a wikipedian?

Easy, all you have to do is go to our site and begin to edit. We’re sure you’ll be coming back again and again to the fastest growing Internet phenomenon in the world!

The GNU free documentation license

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Wikipedia's sister projects

As Wikipedia grew, sister projects were founded to enhance the content of the encyclopedia. Many of these have taken on a life of their own, though they are all part of the Wikimedia family, and there is constant cooperation between them. Our sister projects include:

Wiktionary



a free dictionary project
<http://www.wiktionary.org>

Wikibooks



a project to develop free learning materials
<http://www.wikibooks.org>

Wikiquote



a free compendium of quotations
<http://wikiquote.org>

Wikisource



a repository of source texts
<http://www.wikisource.org>

Wikinews



collaboratively written news
<http://www.wikinews.org>

Wikimedia Commons



a repository for pictures and other media files under free licenses
<http://commons.wikimedia.org>

The Wikimedia Foundation



The Wikimedia Foundation, based in Florida, USA, is the parent organization of Wikipedia and its sister projects. It is a non-profit organization with the goal of providing free knowledge to every person in the world. Wikimedia provides the hardware equipment and covers the costs of bandwidth and domains. As of early 2005, Wikipedia was one of the 200 most popular websites on the Internet.

How can I help?

The Wikimedia Foundation relies on public donations to run its wiki-based projects. If you want to ensure that Wikipedia and all the other Wikimedia projects continue to grow and flourish, donate online with PayPal or MoneyBookers. Our account name for these is donation@wikipedia.org. PayPal allows for onetime, monthly and yearly payment options. For more information, see our fundraising page at <http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Fundraising>.

Donate via postal mail

You can also send donations via snail-mail to Wikimedia's main office at the following address.

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