History

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 about history to Wikipedia.

Be accurate

Wikipedia is a resource millions of people use to inform themselves about history. Reasons for reading about history on Wikipedia are as diverse as history itself. By documenting and sharing accurate and objective content about historical figures and events, you will help to ensure that people around the world have access to a wider spectrum of human knowledge.

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 time and effort that you could have 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 helpful comments and suggestions. Wikipedians might respond or ask questions about your work. If they do, be sure to reply. Thank them, and work with them to improve the article. They may make changes to your work or, if it does not follow these guidelines, remove it from the article. If this happens, don't just add it again! Ask the person who made the edit why they did so and how you can improve it. Discussion is a crucial part of the Wikipedia process.

Avoid close paraphrasing

Use your own words. Plagiarizing by copying-and-pasting or by close paraphrasing — when most 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 or by automated tools. When that happens, your work may be deleted and there will be a permanent online record of plagiarism tied to your account. Even standard resources or authors, such as textbooks, are under copyright and should never be directly copied. The rules for plagiarism apply everywhere on Wikipedia, even to drafts and notes in your sandbox.

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. They may seem intimidating, but soon you'll be contributing your knowledge and judgement to a resource you, and millions of other people, use every day.

Wiki Edu

Getting started

Picking an article

Look for topics that are missing or poorly developed on Wikipedia. Find articles that are incomplete in some important way. For example:

- A biography of a general might leave out their post-conflict role as an administrator;

- An article about a husband and wife team might not mention the contribution of the less famous spouse to their joint endeavor; or,

- An article that focuses on a single perspective, like a colonial war told only from the perspective of the European participant.

If you choose to create a new article, keep in mind that Wikipedia has strict rules about the kinds of articles that can be created. See your *Editing Wikipedia* handbook for more details, or visit https://wikiedu.org/editingwikipedia

Sourcing

Unlike other history papers you've written, a Wikipedia article prioritizes secondary sources over primary sources. Before you spend too much time working on an article, it's important to establish whether the subject has been adequately covered by reliable, secondary sources.

A historian analyzes and interprets primary source documents. A Wikipedian writing about history reports on these interpretations and analyses published in secondary sources. This limits the kinds of things that you can write about on Wikipedia, and the way you should write them.

Use these sources:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles found in databases like EBSCOhost and JSTOR
- Books written by historians that synthesize and evaluate a period in time
- Reputable newspaper articles synthesizing the history of a topic

Do not use these sources:

- Most newspaper articles from the period you're writing about
- Diaries or letters from people directly involved
- Archival records
- Other primary sources

If you're unsure about your sources, review the Dashboard training module on "Sources and Citations" or ask your instructor for help. Detailed information about Wikipedia's sourcing guidelines is available at
| *shortcut*   WP:RS

What's a shortcut?

The text   WP:RS   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 that might otherwise be hard to find.

Including underrepresented voices

The voices of indigenous peoples, marginalized groups, women, and the poor are often absent from Wikipedia articles. Where modern scholarship has given voice to these groups, editing Wikipedia can be an excellent way to add their perspectives. Integrate this information throughout the sections of your article, instead of creating a new section or article dedicated to a particular perspective.

History articles cover a diverse range of topics; some elements of layout are common between different types of articles, while others vary.

Handling different perspectives

Creating a well-balanced history article requires an overview of all major points of view about the topic. History can seem objective, but historians frequently disagree, and sometimes their methods or perspectives result in competing narratives or interpretations of a historical subject. Keep in mind that you're not just writing about the subject; you're writing about how historians have written about it.

Be sure to present these points of view in a way that reflects the relative importance given to them by experts. Interpretations held by a minority of historians about a topic should appear in the article, but only in a way that makes clear that they are only held by a minority of scholars. When there's disagreement, it's usually a good idea to attribute an idea to its author explicitly.

Truly fringe positions don't belong in these articles. For example, an article about the Egyptian Pyramids shouldn't include claims that they were built by aliens.

Describing multiple points of view well is one of the most challenging parts of writing about history, but it's also one of the most important.

What is the Lead section?

At the top of every article is a lead section, which summarizes the article's content. It may be a good idea to save writing the lead section until the end, so you can be sure it properly summarizes what you've covered. It should cover all of the most important ideas from the article, and shouldn't include information that doesn't appear elsewhere in the article.

Writing about events

Articles about historic events tend to have four main sections:

- Lead section
- Background (events leading up to and influencing the event)
- Event itself
- Aftermath or legacy (what were the lasting ramifications)

For good examples, see articles for *1689 Boston revolt*, *Sinking of the RMS Titanic*, or *Burning of Parliament*.

Writing about political entities

Articles about historical kingdoms, nations, or civilizations tend to include the following sections:

- Lead section
- History
- Government or Administration
- Economy
- Society or Culture
- Legacy

For good examples, see articles for *Kingdom of Mysore*, *Ancient Egypt*, or *Parthian Empire*.

Writing about biographies

To learn more about writing biographies consult the Editing Wikipedia articles: Biographies handout, available at https://wikiedu.org/biographies

Writing about military history

Wikipedia has an active community interested in military history. They have a detailed collection of resources for new editors available at | *shortcut*   WP:MHAC

Wrapping up

Key points

As you start writing, keep these guidelines in mind:

- Unlike most school assignments, Wikipedia doesn't permit original research. Your article should cover what the sources say, not your own interpretations or opinions.

- Write for a general audience. Don't assume people have subject matter knowledge. Avoid jargon, and briefly explain complicated concepts.

- Summarize what the sources say in your own words.

- Stick to the structure presented in this guide, but use your judgment about when to rename, combine, add, or remove sections.

- Be sure to write in an impersonal, fact-based, encyclopedic style. Don't approach a Wikipedia article like a blog post or personal essay. 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.

- Remember to link to other pages on Wikipedia so readers can learn more about topics you mention.

- Give appropriate weight to aspects of the topic as the sources cover it.

- 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.