

Editing Wikipedia

**A guide for student editors
supported by Wiki Education**

**Wiki
Edu**

Why write for Wikipedia?

Wikipedia strives to represent “the sum of all human knowledge.” While Wikipedia contains more than 5 million articles, a lot of that human knowledge is still missing or underdeveloped on Wikipedia.



When you’ve written papers in the past, they were likely read by just one person – your instructor. When you write for Wikipedia, you’re writing for an audience of millions.

As a student, you can access knowledge that most people can only dream of. You have your library. You have access to academic journals and textbooks. Writing for Wikipedia makes knowledge available for others to learn from.

You also have your brain. You have the critical thinking skills, and the academic know-how, to help others make sense of the subjects you’re studying.

Imagine the difference your knowledge can make in people’s lives. *That’s* why we’re asking you to write for Wikipedia.



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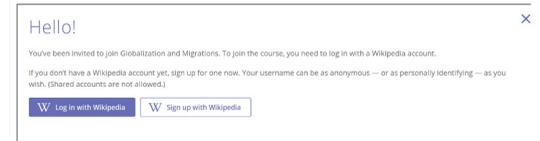


Getting started

As you get started, it’s helpful to familiarize yourself with the tools and resources you’ll be using for this assignment.

Enroll in your course

Click on the course page link provided by your instructor, and you’ll be prompted to create a Wikipedia account.

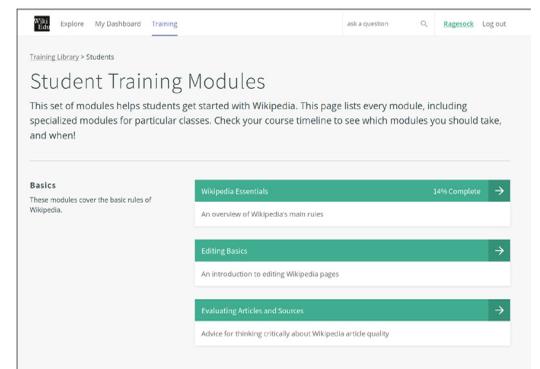


Complete assigned training modules

Once you create an account and enroll on dashboard.wikiedu.org, you’ll have access to the training library.

A few training modules will be assigned throughout the weeks of your timeline. These are important for you to take.

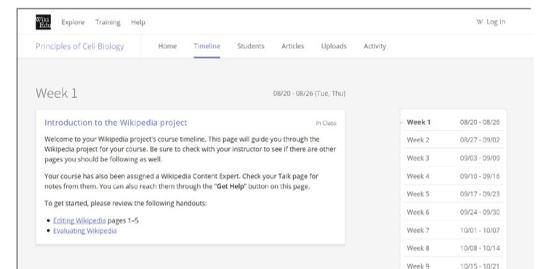
Other, shorter modules may also be assigned as part of your course timeline. These offer a refresher, or new skills that match the task you’ll do that week. You may be graded on these trainings, so check back often to keep up to date!



Consult the Dashboard each week

The Timeline feature on dashboard.wikiedu.org will give you a sense of what you should be working on in any given week.

New training modules and help resources will be made available to you throughout the assignment.



Help is available!



This button is visible on dashboard.wikiedu.org and your Wikipedia sandbox. If you’re seeking feedback on your draft, unsure about a message from another Wikipedian, or have any questions at all, push the button. A Wikipedia Expert will be in touch!

Your class will be assigned a **Wikipedia Expert**. They are paid staff of Wiki Education, ready to help you with expert advice and feedback.

You can request their help through the “Get Help” button.

What's the plan?

Here is an outline of the process it takes to write a good Wikipedia article. Each task has its own section in this guide. Complete the associated training modules for more information.

Writing a Wikipedia article, from start to finish

1 Get to know Wikipedia

Learn how writing for Wikipedia differs from your typical classroom writing assignment. Review the key policies that make Wikipedia work.

[Online Training: Wikipedia Policies](#)

3 Write your first draft

Once you have a few good sources, start drafting your article or contribution. You'll do this in a "sandbox" on Wikipedia. The online student training will show you how.

[Online Training: How to Edit](#)

5 Spruce up your work

Once you've written your article, review your formatting to help it look and feel like the rest of Wikipedia.

[Online Training: Moving Work Out of the Sandbox](#)

7 Revise based on feedback

Now that you're editing live, solicit feedback from classmates. If you receive feedback from other Wikipedians, revise your work and incorporate good advice.

[Online Exercise: Peer Review](#)

[Complete the online, interactive training modules on dashboard.wikiedu.org.](#)

Relevant modules are listed in this guide and are linked from your course page.

2 Choose your topic and identify reliable sources

Select a Wikipedia article related to your course topic that you can expand or create from scratch. Keep in mind you'll need to cite each sentence you add.

[Online Training: Evaluating Articles and Sources](#)

4 Add images

Pictures and diagrams make your article informative for visual learners. Copyright rules are tricky, so consult the training module before uploading new images. If you found an image on the internet, it probably can't be used.

[Online Training: Contributing Images and Media Files](#)

6 Make your work live

When you have written a few paragraphs, with citations, you're ready to go. Post your work to "main space," that is, the Wikipedia article!

[Online Training: Moving Work Out of the Sandbox](#)

Other trainings, not listed here, may be required for your class. Check your course's page often to be sure.



1 Get to know Wikipedia

Writing for Wikipedia differs from writing term papers, essays, and other assignments. Here are a few differences to keep in mind.

Neutral point of view

You may be used to persuasive styles of writing. On Wikipedia, you don't want to persuade. Articles don't take sides, but describe significant viewpoints published in reliable sources. You want to share facts. Wikipedia lets people interpret those facts for themselves.

[Online Training: Wikipedia Policies](#)

No original research

Wikipedia isn't a place to share original ideas or opinions. Instead, you should summarize what others have published in reliable sources about the topic. Skip the thesis statement! Don't offer your own conclusions, interpretations, or analyses.

[Online Training: Wikipedia Policies](#)

Copyright and plagiarism

Everything you write must be in your own words. Changing a few words while maintaining the sentence structure used in a source is still plagiarism.

You might use lengthy quotes in other papers you write, but it would infringe copyright to do that on Wikipedia. In rare cases, when the precise wording matters, a short, clearly marked quote may be acceptable.

[Online Training: Plagiarism and Copyright Violation](#)

Wikipedians have developed these policies and principles over the years so we can ensure that Wikipedia is reliable and trustworthy.



Reliable sources

When people read a Wikipedia article, they want to see where the information comes from. That's why you have to include citations for anything you write.

Good sources have a reputation for fact-checking. That means books published by academic presses, peer-reviewed academic journals, and international newspapers.

You should also use sources that represent widely held viewpoints, rather than authors who write to persuade readers to a particular point of view.

[Online Training: Adding Citations](#)

Conflict of interest

If you have a conflict of interest about a particular topic, avoid editing articles about it. Don't write about your instructors or workplace, for example.

[Online Training: Wikipedia Policies](#)

2 Choose your topic and identify reliable sources

Depending on your class, you may be assigned an article to develop, or asked to choose one yourself. Choosing a topic for your article, and finding sources that support that topic, is often a cyclical process. You'll adapt your choice based on what sources you find, and you'll find more sources as you refine your article topic.

Choose your topic

Choose a topic that you find in a variety of good sources, but isn't well represented on Wikipedia. Avoid overly broad topics. You'll have better luck writing about a narrowly focused (though not *too* narrowly focused) topic than on a broad overview.

As you investigate your topic, you may find there aren't enough reliable sources to write an article. If that's the case, start thinking about other topics you've discovered.

Find good sources

Rather than search online, ask your librarian to help you find good, reliable sources. The best sources are recently published books, textbooks, and peer-reviewed work in academic journals from reliable publishers, written by experts in the field you're writing about.

You'll generally want to avoid blog posts, information with a strong point of view, and opinion columns.

When you find 3–5 good sources that address your topic, you're probably ready to start writing. If you can't, reassess your selected topic.

What makes a source trustworthy? It's not about agreeing with it. Think critically, and look for sources that:

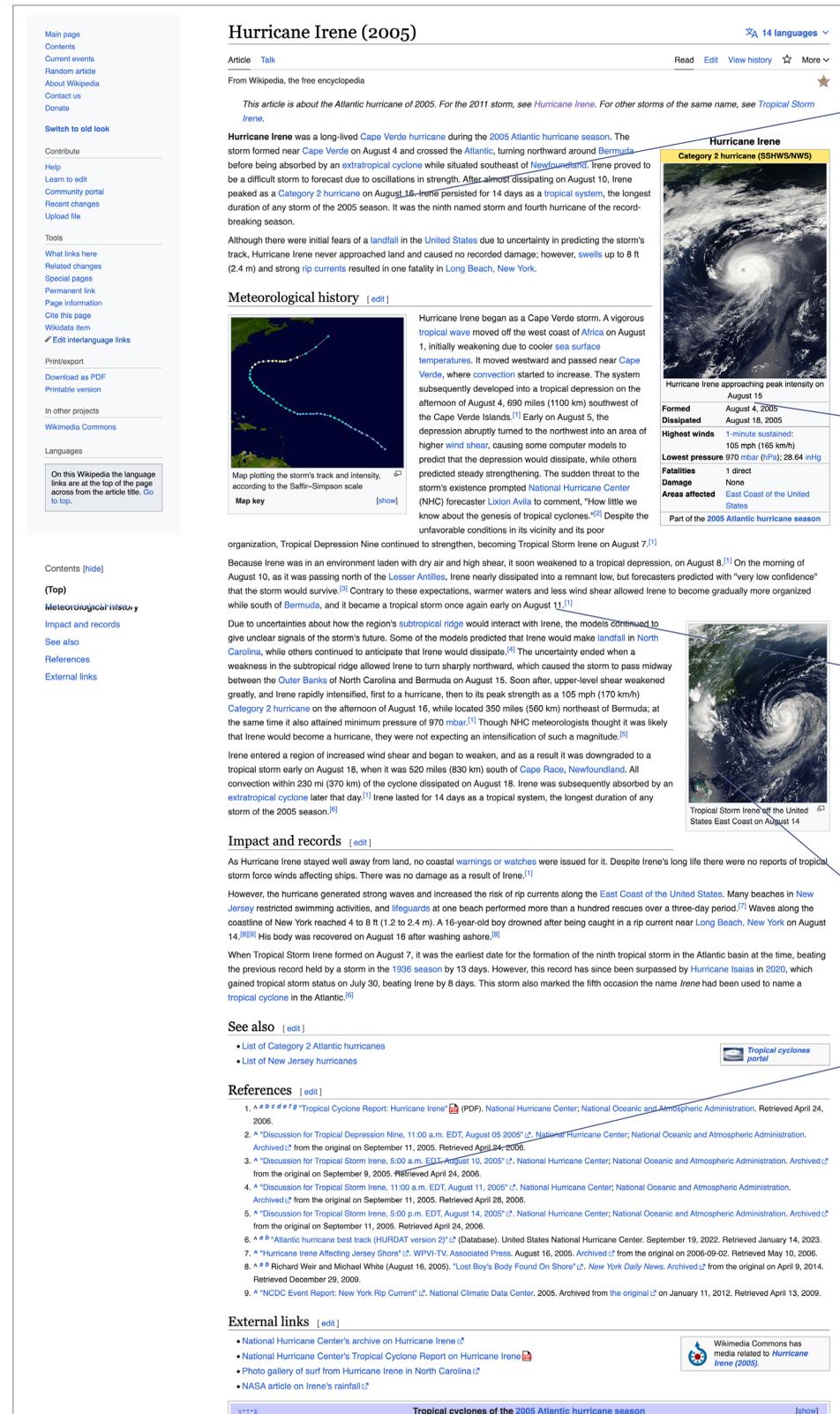
- Fact-check and/or publish corrections
- Don't present some facts and omit others to advance an agenda
- Don't frame facts with a certain slant

 [Online Training: Adding Citations](#)

When you've settled on the article you want to improve, let your instructor know by adding it to dashboard.wikiedu.org.

3 Write your first draft

Here's a small but fully developed article to use as a model. For more ideas, find an article on a topic similar to one you'd like to write, and think about how it's structured.



The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for Hurricane Irene (2005). Annotations include:

- Lead section:** A box on the right notes that the lead is a clear summary of the most important parts of the article, consisting of a few sentences in plain language.
- Infobox:** A box on the right notes that many articles contain an infobox that describes key elements of the topic, such as formation, dissipation, and impact.
- Body of the article:** A box on the right notes that each big idea can have its own heading, and the body covers the history of the hurricane and its impact.
- Images:** A box on the right notes that freely licensed images can be added to Wikipedia articles from Wikimedia Commons.
- References:** A box on the right notes that after the content comes a section listing the sources used in the article, which should appear automatically.

3 Write your first draft, continued

Wikipedia has a unique style of writing

You might be used to writing five-paragraph essays, research papers, or persuasive arguments. Wikipedia uses a different style of writing. Keep to the facts, and let your writing be clear, formal, and impersonal. You aren't trying to convince readers to agree with you. You'll want to make sure they trust the information you're sharing.

Here's a poorly written Wikipedia article:

Here's why:

Britannica and the Future of Encyclopedias

Encyclopædia Britannica, although a celebrated and historically significant encyclopedia, has little relevance in modern society. Instead, most experts agree that the future of the encyclopedia genre belongs to Wikipedia and other wiki encyclopedias — created by regular folks like you and me. Ironically, while it was a great influence on Jimmy Wales and the intrepid new generation of amateur encyclopedists who created — and continue to create — Wikipedia, *Britannica* in recent years has come to symbolize everything wrong about the old ways of creating and distributing knowledge: top-down control, unaccountable gatekeepers who decide what does and does not merit coverage, copyright restrictions and high prices that limit access to the wealthy, and — in its current online form — intrusive advertising that undercuts the reliability and usability of its content.

This title is too much like an essay. Who can factually talk about the future?

Has "little relevance" according to whom? Don't make any original arguments.

Don't use "weasel words" (like "most experts agree" or "some people say").

Avoid casual language and slang, or any references to yourself or the reader.

Don't use "fluff terms" (like "great", "extraordinary", or "intrepid").

Don't inject your opinion into the article.

Don't use overly complex language and sentence structure.

Here's a better article:

Here's why:

Since the early 1990s, the *Britannica* has faced new challenges from digital information sources. In rapidly changing fields such as science, technology, politics, culture, and modern history, the *Britannica* has struggled to stay up-to-date, a problem first analyzed systematically by its former editor Walter Yust.^[1] Although the *Britannica* is now available both in multimedia form and over the Internet, its preeminence is being challenged by other online encyclopedias, such as Wikipedia.^[2]

- It's short and to the point, with plain language.
- It cites sources for factual claims. One citation per statement is the minimum expectation.
- It attributes viewpoints to the people who hold them.
- It states a conclusion, but attributes it to a specific source.

[Online Training: Wikipedia Policies](#)

Writing your lead

When you create a Wikipedia article, the lead is the first section. It's the part of a Wikipedia article that most people read, and it can even be presented by search engines when you look up your topic! That's why it's crucial to get it right.

A good lead summarizes the entire article by briefly covering all important aspects of the topic. 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.

Ultimately, you'll need to revisit your lead when you finish writing your article. Adjust it to reflect the finished product.

Writing the first sentence

The first sentence should serve as a definition of the article topic, with the topic itself — be it a person, place, thing, idea or concept — in bold, and a brief description that puts it into context.

For example, a biography would look like this, with the name in bold, and the birthdate after the name in parenthesis.

Anna Anderson (c. 16 December 1896 – 12 February 1984) was the best known of several impostors who claimed to be Grand Duchess Anastasia of Russia.

An article about a social theory would look like this, with the idea in bold.

Capitalism is an economic system based on private ownership of the means of production and their operation for profit.

An article about a plant, animal, or other species would look like this, with the common name in bold and the scientific name in italics and parenthesis.

Sheep (*Ovis aries*) are quadrupedal, ruminant mammals typically kept as livestock.

How is Wikipedia different from a college essay?

Fact-based, not persuasive writing

Rather than making an argument, think of the article as a description of the information you can find about a topic, based on good sources.

Formal tone and simple language

Articles should be written in a formal tone, but with easy-to-understand language. Wikipedia isn't the place to show off your extensive vocabularies or mastery of jargon. People who have never heard of the topic before will be reading your writing. Keep it clear, and help them learn!

No large block quotes

You might be used to quoting large passages from other works, but Wikipedia's policies ask you to paraphrase whenever possible. Provide information in your own words.

Pickier about sources

Wikipedia is very particular about where its information comes from. You may find that some sources that would work in a typical college paper won't work here.

4 Add images

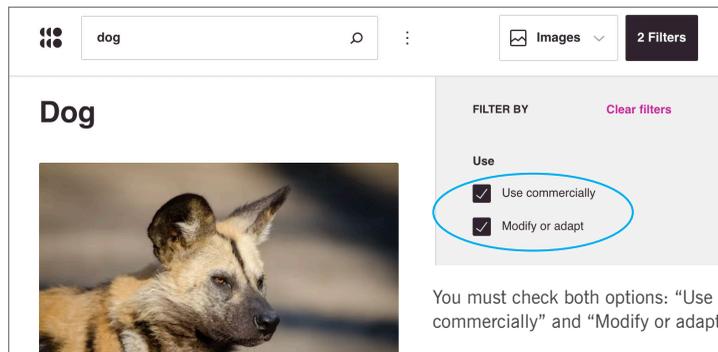
Adding images and illustrations to Wikipedia can be tricky. You can't just grab images you find by doing an image search. Instead, you have to make sure the person who made the image has published it under a free license, such as a Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike license (CC BY-SA). Even so-called "free" images on websites usually aren't acceptable.

You can't use it, even if...

- You don't see any copyright notice.
- The image is older than the internet.
- The creator has died.
- It's a publicity shot for a movie, book, album, etc.
- You own a copy of a photo (unless you took it yourself).
- You scanned it from a book.

So, where can you find legitimate photos?

It may seem impossible to find an image you can use on Wikipedia. That's why Wikimedia Commons, commons.wikimedia.org, is so important! That's where you can find freely licensed images already approved for use on Wikipedia. If you can't find something there, try using Openverse to find freely licensed files: wordpress.org/openverse



Options to find freely licensed images:

- Within the Wikipedia editing window, click "Insert," then "Media," to get access to all the images on Wikimedia Commons.
- You can look in open-access academic journals, such as those from the Public Library of Science (PLOS), which have useful scientific and medical illustrations.
- You can find photos on Flickr, but they MUST be shared under a CC BY-SA license. From Flickr's search page, you'll want to search for "Commercial use & mods allowed," "No known copyright restrictions," and "U.S. Government works."
- You can also use public domain images. Those are images with expired copyrights, and anything created by the U.S. federal government.

When in doubt, ask your Wikipedia Expert by using the "Get Help" button. If you upload an image that doesn't belong on Wikipedia, it can create a lot of problems for you and the Wikipedia community.

Online Training: Contributing Images and Media Files



What is NOT allowed on Commons

By default, you can't upload someone else's work. That includes your own photographs of someone else's work, such as a painting or movie poster.

Never upload:

- Most pictures published on the internet, especially image-sharing sites such as Instagram, Tumblr, Imgur, Reddit, or so-called "free image" or "stock photo" websites
- Logos
- Photos scanned from textbooks
- Promotional photos
- Screenshots of TV shows, movies, or DVDs



What is allowed on Commons

You may upload works that you created entirely yourself. This includes photos, diagrams, charts, and videos such as:

- Pictures you take of natural landscapes, animals, plants, or everyday objects (i.e., not art such as a sculpture or painting).
- Explanatory diagrams you've made. For example, a Bohr diagram, a flowchart, or anatomical illustration.
- People photographed in public places.

How to add an image to a Wikipedia article

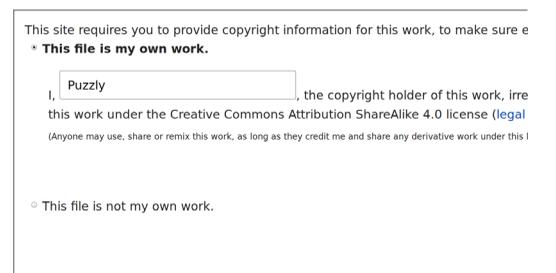
You may not find any images for your Wikipedia article. That's OK! But if you've made an image, chart, or diagram, or found one on Openverse, here's how to add it to your article. If the image is already on Wikimedia Commons, skip to step 4.

- 1 Go to commons.wikimedia.org, and click "Upload file."
(Be sure you are logged in.)



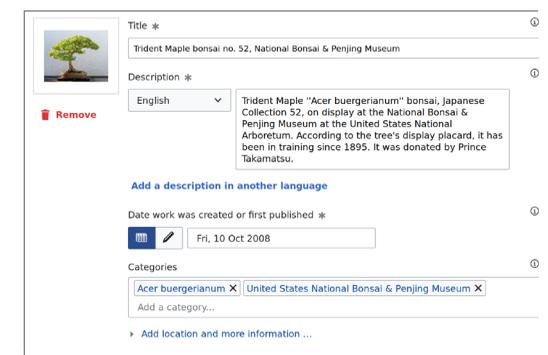
- 2 The upload wizard will give you step-by-step instructions for uploading your work.

If it's not your own work, make sure the image is explicitly described as CC BY-SA, CC BY, or public domain. Name the creator of the image, and link to the source.



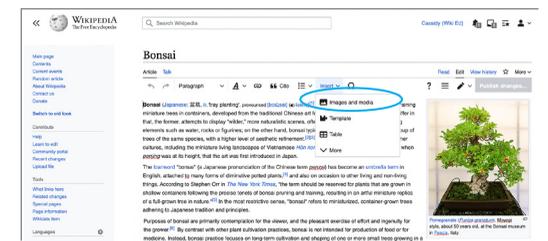
- 3 Add one or more categories describing the subject of the file.

Wikimedia Commons can group related files into categories. For example, bonsai trees are grouped under [Category:Bonsai](#).



- 4 To add the image to a Wikipedia article, go to the section of the article where you want the image to appear.

Click "Edit" and then click the media icon (). Search for the name of your file, and select it.



- 5 Save the page. You're done!

Online Training: Contributing Images and Media Files

5 Spruce up your work

Adding links to and from your article

One of the great joys of Wikipedia is the interesting links that lead to other compelling articles. Creating wikilinks helps others discover your article.

Creating a wikilink

What might your reader want to learn about to deepen their knowledge of your topic? Once you have a few ideas, go back to your article. Find the first time these ideas are mentioned in the text (not in headers or subtitles, which should never be links). That first in-text mention is the best place to create a wikilink to the article about that idea.

- 1 To link to another Wikipedia article, choose the “edit” option in the section of your article you want to link from.
- 2 Highlight the word you want to become a wikilink, and press the link button (🔗) in the editor window.
- 3 A list will pop up, showing Wikipedia’s related articles for the highlighted word. Select the article you want to link.
- 4 Click the “Save” button, and enter your edit summary. “Created wikilink” is a fine summary. Click “Save page,” and you’re all done!

Using headings

Use section headings to distinguish important ideas or broad subtopics. Don’t use them as paragraph headers, or to break up the article. Think carefully about the structure of your article before you start writing. As you write about different aspects of a topic, those aspects will guide sensible choices for your headings.

- Headings should never be questions.
- Don’t number your headings or sections.
- Only capitalize the first word of a heading and any proper nouns.
- Don’t keep naming the subject in your headings. For example, an article about Barack Obama might use the heading “Childhood,” not “Barack Obama’s childhood.”

🔗 Online Training: Drafting in the Sandbox



Never use this method to link to a page that isn't a Wikipedia article. You can create an “External links” section at the end of the article.

6 Make your work live

The online training will show you how to find and use your sandbox to draft an article. Once you have a few well-cited sentences in your sandbox, you can create a new article, or bring your work over to an existing article to improve it.

Improving an existing article

If you've been developing an improvement to an existing article in your sandbox, you'll want to be careful when it's time to make it live. Edit your sandbox and copy just a sentence or two at a time into the existing article, then save the article before copying a little more in. Copying and pasting in small steps makes it less likely you will unintentionally cause an error that may be difficult to fix. Avoid using other text editors like Word or Google Docs; they can cause weird text errors when copied onto Wikipedia.



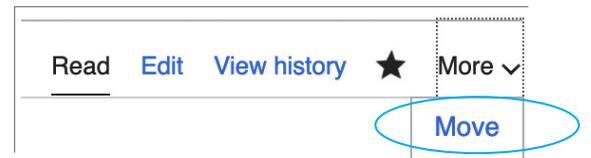
Never copy and paste your work over an entire article! Improve the existing text or add new text.

🔗 Online Training: Moving Work Out of the Sandbox

Creating a new article

- 1 Go to your sandbox (or wherever you’ve been drafting your article). On the sandbox page (where your article is), look to the right. There is a tab called “More.” Click it, and then click “Move.”
- 2 Click the box that says `User` and change it to `(Article)`. Delete all the text in this window and carefully type **ONLY** your article’s title. Pay attention to punctuation and spelling, because this can be hard to change once you move it.

Look at similar topics and choose a title that matches theirs. Don’t use an essay format, or title it with a question. The best title is usually the simplest statement of what your article is about.
- 3 In the `Reason` box, choose “Publish page to mainspace” in the dropdown menu.
- 4 Review your title one last time, and then click on the blue “Move page” button.
- 5 Now, you can link 1–3 other articles to your article. Find relevant words in other articles, and follow the wikilinks instructions on page 12.



Move page

New title:
(Article) State Shinto

Reason:
Publish page to mainspace

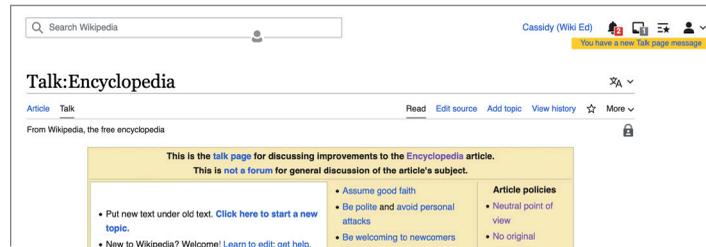
Other/additional reason:

Watch source page and target page

Move page

7 Revise based on feedback

Every article has its own [Talk page](#). Wikipedia is a collaboration of thousands of people, and Talk pages are where they negotiate decisions. You'll use Talk pages to make suggestions, post sources, and discuss changes with other Wikipedians.



Look, new Notifications! These let you know when someone mentions your username, thanks you for an edit, or leaves a message on your User Talk page.



To hold a discussion with other Wikipedians on a Talk page, you'll need to use wikicode, also known as wiki markup. We've provided a guide on the back cover to help you format your text on a Talk page. Remember to end all of your comments with four tildes (~~~~) to sign your name.

What if your work is challenged or removed?

You may find that your work is challenged, or removed outright. If someone has reverted your edit, make sure you read what they said in their edit summary by checking the [View history](#) tab of the article. Check to see if they left more information on the article's Talk page.

Your instructor can see everything you add to Wikipedia, even if other Wikipedians remove it. Don't worry about your grade, and never ask anyone to stop improving an article because of your grade. Instead, discuss the content respectfully, and work to find a solution you both can live with.

If you ever receive a message you can't understand, or if you're not comfortable responding to it yourself (for any reason!) contact your course's Wikipedia Expert. They'll get in touch with you.

Etiquette

- Be polite. Remember, it's difficult to read sarcasm and irony in text.
- Assume good faith. Other editors are trying to improve the project. Try to see their point of view, discuss things on the Talk page when you disagree, and find a solution.
- Never simply post deleted content back into the article.
- Discuss article content, not editors. Do not make personal attacks.

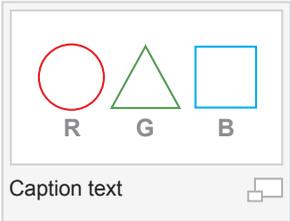
[Online Exercise: Peer Review](#)

Final review

- Is the title short and simple?
Make sure it doesn't look like an essay, or asks a question.
- Is the first sentence direct and useful?
It should clearly define the subject, with the topic of the article in bold.
- Is the lead section a clear summary?
The lead shouldn't be written like an introduction, or argue why the topic is important to read about. It's just a condensed summary of what's in the article below. Everything in the lead should be mentioned in the article, too.
- Did you write in your own words?
Check that the article doesn't contain excessive quotations, or copy any sources, even if you've given them credit.
- Is the article clear to a non-expert?
Check that you've explained acronyms and jargon in simple English the first time you use them.
- Does the article let the reader decide for themselves?
Rewrite any persuasive language that aims to sway a reader to a conclusion. Don't ask the reader to do something. Let the reader make their own conclusions based on the facts.
- Did you proofread your article?
Do a basic grammar and spelling check. Make sure your sentences are complete sentences. Remove any first-person ("I/we") or second-person ("you") writing.
- Is your formatting consistent with the rest of Wikipedia?
Don't use too many bullet-pointed lists or too many headings in your article. Check page 12 for help with headings.
- Are the pictures in your article shared on Wikimedia Commons?
If it isn't your own image, link to evidence that the copyright is shared under a free copyright license. Make sure you do this on Wikimedia Commons, not Wikipedia itself. (If you added it from Wikipedia's media tool, it's usually fine.)
- Is every claim cited to a reliable source?
Good sources include textbooks or academic journals. Don't cite blog posts.
- Did you make links between Wikipedia articles?
Link relevant words to other Wikipedia articles the first time they appear. Visit other Wikipedia articles and link them to the article you've been working on, too. Stick to words that relate directly to your topic.
- Did you thank people who helped you?
Check your User Talk page, and the Talk page of your article. If anyone offered help or feedback, say thanks!
- Did you try searching for your topic online?
A week after you've created an article, try doing a web search for your topic on a search engine. You may be surprised to see your own writing!

Wiki markup cheatsheet

These examples cover the formatting needed most often when editing Wikipedia articles with wiki markup. You'll need to use wiki markup to carry on discussions with other Wikipedians on Talk pages.

| Description | What you type | What you get |
|--|---|--|
| Italic | <code>'<i>italic text</i>'</code> | <i>italic text</i> |
| Bold | <code>'bold text'</code> | bold text |
| Section headers | <code>==Heading text==</code> <code>===Sub-heading text===</code> <code>====Sub-heading text====</code> | Heading text <hr/> Sub-heading text Sub-heading text |
| Link to another Wikipedia page (Internal link) | <code>[[Martin Luther King Jr.]]</code> | Martin Luther King Jr. |
| Internal link with different text | <code>[[Martin Luther King Jr. MLK]]</code> | MLK |
| Link to another website | <code>[http://loc.gov Library of Congress website]</code> | Library of Congress website  |
| Bulleted list | <code>* Wikipedia</code> <code>* Encyclopædia Britannica</code> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wikipedia• Encyclopædia Britannica |
| Numbered list | <code># Canada</code> <code># United States</code> | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Canada2. United States |
| Image with caption | <code>[[File:Example.jpg thumb Caption text]]</code> |  |
| Signature and timestamp (for Talk pages) | <code>~ ~ ~ ~</code> | Username (talk) 19:50, 15 September 2017 (UTC) |
| To make a citation | What you type | What you get |
| Insert a citation | <code>Page text. <ref>[http://example.org Example.org], more text.</ref></code> | Page text. ^[1] |
| Display citation footnotes | <code><references /></code> | 1. [^] Example.org .  more text. |