

## Teaching with Wikipedia

*What can you do with Wikipedia? Here are some ideas!*

### Support

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If you would like assistance turning these ideas in to specific assignments, please contact the TLTC or one of IU's Wikipedia Campus Ambassadors.

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- Chanitra Bishop, Emerging Technologies Librarian and Wikipedia Campus Ambassador (chbishop@indiana.edu, 855-8386)
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### Copyediting

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Many instructors attempt to teach the clarity and precision of writing, but nothing quite makes the point as someone else's failed attempt. Using one of the many poorly written articles on Wikipedia (and that would be most of them!), you can quickly show students the real-world effects of poor communication. You can also show them the benefits of improving that communication by copyediting the article in real-time. If you choose one of the newly-created articles on Wikipedia, you can even have a discussion with the author(s) of the article about how best to convey what they want to say! This assignment can be done by students individually or collectively as a class and is a good introduction to teaching with Wikipedia. It is small and does not require students to learn wiki mark-up (unless you want it to!).

### Compare Wikipedia to other reference sources

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Many instructors use Wikipedia in the classroom to teach media literacy. Comparing and contrasting Wikipedia's entry on a particular topic and another online resource, such as the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* or *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, is a particularly effective assignment in this regard. Not only do students benefit from seeing the strengths and weaknesses of each source, but they also learn about the different resources available from the university's library. This assignment is a good introduction to teaching with Wikipedia, as it does not require students to learn wiki mark-up. However, an interesting extension is to have students comment on the "discussion" pages of the topics they have chosen once they have performed their comparison, offering suggestions for improvements to the article.

### Research a topic and write an article

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When instructors think about how to integrate Wikipedia into their teaching, most think about adding content to the encyclopedia—a noble goal. If you choose to do this, know that it will take your students a few weeks to learn the ropes of Wikipedia—both the mark-up and the community norms. To construct an effective assignment, you will have to invest quite a bit of time at the beginning of the semester envisioning what you want students to gain from the assignment and outlining a timeline for students to follow. If your university has Wikipedia Campus Ambassadors, they can help you think through these questions. Many instructors who have done such assignments integrate reflective papers or presentations to help them grade student work. This assignment tends to stretch from a few weeks to a few months and works better once the instructor has had a short introduction to Wikipedia.

## Use Wikipedia as a primary source for research

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Many classes study local phenomenon, such as mayoral elections or bond issues. Wikipedia is a community in and of itself, with all of the problems attendant upon a city of 100,000 people. Studying the governance structure of Wikipedia, the evolution of policies such as “neutral point of view,” and the ways editors envision themselves as part of a larger global collective are just some of the ways you could use Wikipedia as a primary source for undergraduate and graduate research papers.

## Translate an article

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Did you know that Wikipedia exists in over 270 languages? Translating articles from one language to another is a full-time endeavor for some Wikipedians! Having students translate articles or write articles in foreign-language classes gives their assignments meaning and relevance outside of class. Moreover, their interactions with native language speakers on the discussion pages of the articles will naturally improve their language skills. For this assignment, it would be best if the instructor were familiar with all the language Wikipedias being used in the class, as each community has different norms. However, it is generally recognized that those editors doing translation work are not as familiar with community norms as those “native” to home projects.

## Compare Wikipedia to journalism sources

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To what extent is Wikipedia a form of journalism? Comparing and contrasting Wikipedia articles, such as “2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami,” to the reports and stories that were issued by mainstream news media can help students answer this question.

What role does Wikipedia play as a popularizer science? Scientists often bemoan the coverage of science in the major newspapers. Comparing and contrasting the coverage of the “2009 flu pandemic vaccine,” for example, in the popular press and on Wikipedia would allow biology professors to discuss what it means to write for the public. Also, having students assess the accuracy of the two fora would allow professors to discover what the students really understand about the concepts.

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## Chart the evolution of an article over a news cycle

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Wikipedia has become a news source for many readers—the main page even has an “in the news” section. However, articles change drastically over the course of a news cycle as interested readers add and delete information. Having students trace these additions and deletions and the consequent effects on the article will make them aware of the changing flux of information in the internet age—that knowledge is not static.

## Create charts, graphs, and other images

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Wikipedia is not just about words. Encouraging students to create charts and graphs to illustrate important concepts, such as migration, population growth, and climate change are crucial. Such assignments can be integrated into computing, science, and rhetoric classes alike, where the visualization of data is central.

## Library assignment example 1

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**Learning Objective:** Help students understand different types of information available online or in print and when/how to use them in their research.

**Assignment:** Have students find and compare 3 articles on a topic: a Wikipedia article, a scholarly article and an article from a popular magazine article.

### Library assignment example 2

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**Learning Objective:** Help students identify a quality Wikipedia article appropriate for gathering background information on a topic.

**Assignment:** Compare two Wikipedia articles, one article that is well written and one that needs to be improved.

### Library assignment example 3

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**Learning Objective:** Help students evaluate information found online i.e. identify bias, audience, purpose, credibility, authorship.

**Assignment:** Compare a Wikipedia article, general web site and a video and identify bias, authority, purpose, etc.

### Library assignment example 4

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**Learning Objective:** Help students understand the type of information that can be found in an encyclopedia and when to use encyclopedias in the research process.

**Assignment:** Compare a Wikipedia article, encyclopedia Britannica article and an article from a subject specific encyclopedia such as Access Science or Encyclopedia of Religion.