



# Wikimedia in Schools Series

## **Editing Wikipedia**

## Notes for Teachers:

Before completing this session we recommend looking at the [Introduction to Wikimedia](#) handout for context. This should take about 10–15 minutes and is designed to give students an understanding of Wikimedia and Wikimedia projects before beginning the Wikimedia in schools series.

The lessons in the series can be completed in any order, and each is a stand-alone lesson. However, completing the whole series will give students a deeper understanding of digital and media literacy, and how to use these skills to increase democratic and civic engagement and for positive social change.

All answers given in the teacher copies are suggestions, and other answers may be equally suitable.

If you have any questions about the delivery of this session please contact our Education Lead [sally.latham@wikimedia.org.uk](mailto:sally.latham@wikimedia.org.uk).

You can also sign up to our [newsletter](#) here to see ideas and best practice from other schools.

The Wiki Teacher Community also has a [Facebook group](#) which you can join.

Remember to join our [mailing list](#) for updates on webinars and events.

## Session Objectives:

- ★ Students should understand the key principles of editing Wikipedia, including *neutral point of view*, *notability* and *reliable sources*.
- ★ Students should understand the layout and mechanics of a Wikipedia page.
- ★ Students should know how to create an account and username on Wikipedia.
- ★ Students should know how to stay safe on Wikipedia and not to give away personal information.
- ★ Students should know how to find suitable articles to edit.
- ★ Students should know the basics of how to use visual editor to make edits, and how to practise in their sandbox.

## Session length:

2 hours / 2 x 1 hour

## Activity 1: Opening Discussion



In pairs or small groups, discuss the following questions and make notes for feedback to the whole group:

1. Can you remember the last time you looked at a Wikipedia page?
2. Why did you go onto that page? Was it for school or college, general knowledge, entertainment or something else?
3. Did you click on any links and go to any other pages?
4. Was the page useful and well-written? Why / why not?
5. What could be the benefits of editing a Wikipedia page, or even writing a new page?

## What is Wikipedia?

You may have come across this page before in another Wikimedia in Schools lesson, if so you can either skip it or use it as a recap!

### Key Terms:

#### Encyclopedia:

A summary or general overview of a topic. A starting point for further research, with references pointing to more in-depth work.



- Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia which was created in 2001 in the US by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger.
- It is not a primary source like an interview, nor is it a secondary source like an academic journal.
- It summarises primary and secondary sources, to give an overview of a topic, recommend further reading and link to related topics.
- Articles are created, edited and improved by hundreds of thousands of volunteers across the globe.
- Wikipedia is the product of collaboration between volunteers, and no one person 'owns' an article.
- People who edit or write articles on Wikipedia are called Wikipedians, and they are a global community.
- Wikipedia contains nearly 70 million articles in over 300 languages.
- The English Wikipedia contains over 7 million articles.

# Key Principles of Editing Wikipedia

## 1. Wikipedia is written from a **neutral point of view**.

Content must be presented proportionally and without opinion or bias. This does not mean you have to give equal weight to all positions (for example you do not need to give equal weight to holocaust deniers as to historical facts about the holocaust) but where there are genuine disagreements on the facts, both sides are presented.

## 2. Wikipedia strives for **verifiability**, using **reliable sources**.

People reading and editing Wikipedia should be able to check its information, see that it is up to date and comes from a reliable source. Wikipedia does not publish original research.

## 3. Wikipedia publishes articles on **notable** subjects.

Wikipedia does not publish articles on everything that has ever existed or occurred. For a subject to appear on Wikipedia it has to be notable. This means that it has had **significant coverage** in **reliable sources** that are **independent of the subject**. For example, an actor that had been written about in multiple independent news outlets would be notable, but if an actor had no coverage other than their own Instagram and agent website, they would not be notable, and it would not be appropriate to add their biography to Wikipedia.

## 4. Wikipedia's content is **free to use and distribute, and anyone can edit**.

Even if you create an article, this does not mean you own it. Others can edit and use the article. This also means that articles are produced through a *collaborative* process, and no article is ever 'finished'. As new events occur a Wikipedia article may need updating.

Let's explore some of these principles further...

## Activity 1: Neutral Point of View



Wikipedia is not a place for opinions, only facts. Avoid adjectives that not everyone would agree with. For example, not everyone will agree that Muppets Christmas Carol is the *best film ever made* and is *utterly charming*. But it would be fine to talk about the cast, what various independent reviews said, and viewing figures.

If there are different opinions on a topic, you can mention them all, but do so *proportionally*. For example, you do not have to treat the flat-Earth theory as if it is equally supported as the view that the Earth is round. Take a look at the start of the Wikipedia page [Flat Earth](#) to see how this is done.

Try it for yourself. Pick a topic, person, sport, team, animal or anything else that you really love. Write a paragraph on it now, from a neutral point of view.

*Encourage students to look for value-laden words such as 'best' or 'worst' or descriptions not everyone would agree with, such as 'exciting'.*

Swap with someone else... Do they think it is neutral?

## Activity 2: Reliable Sources



When you edit or write a Wikipedia page, you need to make sure you have reliable sources. This allows others to verify the information you are including, as they can find the sources for themselves. Good sources are independent, known for neutrality and fact-checking. Academic journals are an example of a good source, as the works are blind-reviewed by experts in the field.

Do you think the following sources are reliable for an article on Aston Villa Football Club?

**Think** about this on your own first.

**Pair** with another student and talk about your answers.

**Share** as a whole class.

	Reliable or Unreliable?	Explain your answer
BBC Sports Website	<i>Reliable (usually)</i>	<i>The BBC is neutral, and uses trained journalists, although it does also feature opinion pieces!</i>
The official Aston Villa website	<i>Depends.</i>	<i>This is not an independent source, and will have a bias towards Aston Villa in many instances, although a fixture list will be reliable</i>
A paper by a professor in the <i>Journal of Sport and Social Issues</i>	<i>Reliable</i>	<i>This is an independent, academic journal and will be checked by experts</i>
An Aston Villa fan blog	<i>Unreliable</i>	<i>This is not an independent source, and may not be fact-checked</i>
An Instagram post by an Aston Villa player	<i>Unreliable</i>	<i>This is not an independent source, it is personal opinion</i>

## Activity 3: Notable Subjects



A notable subject has had **significant coverage** in **reliable sources** that are **independent of the subject**.

- **Significant coverage:** at least a couple of mentions that are not overly brief or trivial.
- **Reliable sources:** not original research, but secondary sources from trusted publishers.
- **Independent of the subject:** the author of the source has no reason to be biased, and is not connected to the subject. Not advertising or publicity.

Think about the following people from the city of Hull. They have all achieved success, but which would be notable?

	Notable?	Why / why not?
The captain of the Hull College netball team, who took the team to top of the league.	<i>No</i>	<i>This is not significant enough to have been given significant coverage.</i>
Amy Johnson, born in Hull, the first woman to fly solo from London to Australia.	<i>Yes</i>	<i>This is significant, and would have appeared in different secondary sources.</i>
The winner of the annual <i>Hull's Got Talent</i> competition 2026.	<i>No (probably)</i>	<i>Unless this had been mentioned in different outlets, outside of Hull, this would not be notable.</i>



## Creating an account

It's always better to create an account and edit as a logged-in user. As you make more edits, new options become available like creating new pages. You can track your work, it is easier to have conversations with other editors, and it gives others faith that you are a serious editor.

1. Go to the English Wikipedia.
2. Select 'Create Account' in the top right hand corner.
3. Enter your chosen username.
4. Enter your password and confirm it.
5. Add your email address if you want to be notified about any changes to any articles you create.
6. Complete CAPTCHA security check.
7. Select 'Create your account' to finish.

You can watch a demonstration video here: [https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1\\_0a68aw0i](https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1_0a68aw0i)<sup>2</sup>

When you choose a username, make sure you don't give away any personal details, if you don't want to be identified online. You can still have a username that means something to you, whilst keeping your anonymity. For example instead of **JadeJones2010** you could combine random words, such as **VillaCat**. Remember that all other users can see your username!

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<sup>2</sup> These instructions and video link are taken from the Wikimedia in Residence page of the the University of Edinburgh <https://information-services.ed.ac.uk/help-consultancy/is-skills/wikimedia/wikipedia/create-an-account>

## Activity 4: Choosing a username



Try out a few usernames before you pick one! Share with your partner / group. Are the names appropriate? Do they reveal any personal information? Try this handy username generator: <https://nordpass.com/username-generator/#Generator>

## Staying safe



Never give out your personal information on Wikipedia. That includes:

- Name
- Age
- Phone number
- School
- Location
- Personal email addresses

## Getting help

If you accidentally give out this information, you can request **oversight** from administrators. Oversight on Wikipedia (also known as suppression) is a form of enhanced deletion which, unlike normal deletion, expunges information from any form of usual access even by administrators.

You can do this by emailing [oversight-en-wp@wikipedia.org](mailto:oversight-en-wp@wikipedia.org)

If you have accidentally given out sensitive information, do not post publicly, or repeat the information. Use the email address.

In the case of threat, danger or any kind of emergency, use this email:  
[emergency-en-wp@wikipedia.org](mailto:emergency-en-wp@wikipedia.org)




For general help and advice you can visit the [TeaHouse](#), a friendly place for support.




## Choosing an Article to Edit

When you look for an article to edit, don't just choose what you are interested in, instead choose something that really needs improvement. This means that the best articles to edit are not the ones that are already well-written. This table shows how Wikipedia articles are graded:

<p><b>FA</b></p> 	<p><b>Featured Article:</b> Exemplary, professional-standard work, in-depth, accurate, thorough and encyclopedic level.</p>
<p><b>A</b></p> 	<p><b>A-Class:</b> The article is well-organized and essentially complete, very useful to readers.</p>
<p><b>GA</b></p> 	<p><b>Good Article:</b> Meets core criteria (well-written, neutral, comprehensive, stable, sourced) but not quite FA level. No obvious problems and useful to nearly all readers.</p>
<p><b>B</b></p> 	<p><b>B-Class:</b> Mostly complete with minor issues. Useful, although the content may not be complete enough to satisfy a serious student or researcher.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p> 	<p><b>C-Class:</b> Substantial but missing key content or has irrelevant material. Useful to a casual reader, but would not provide a complete picture.</p>
<p><b>Start</b></p> 	<p><b>Start-Class:</b> Developing, incomplete, needs reliable sources. The majority of readers will need more information.</p>
<p><b>Stub</b></p> 	<p><b>Stub-Class:</b> Very basic, short description of the topic.</p>

- Avoid **Featured Articles (FA **), **A Class Articles (A **) and **Good Articles (GA **) as these are likely to already be well-written and be well-referenced.

- Avoid **contentious topics**. These are topics that are likely to cause an argument or be controversial, such as abortion or Covid-19. These are likely to already be the product of long and complicated discussions and debates. You can look at the talk page of an article to see what discussions have already taken place.

Some contentious articles will already be locked  , meaning you can't edit them. There are different levels of 'locking'. For example the pages on the [Quran](#) or the [Big Bang](#) cannot be edited by any new or unregistered editors. Have a look for yourself!

- Avoid **conflicts of interest**. This is where you have a personal connection to a person in the article, or you may be seen as wanting to promote the topic. For example, you couldn't write an article about your own teacher (even if they were notable), or your karate instructor (even if they were world champion) or your aunty's business (however successful).

## Signs that an article might need work<sup>3</sup>

- **Warning banners:** Often these banners make a statement about the article's reliability, though sometimes it's a minor suggestion for improvement. Make a note and read accordingly.
- **Fragmented lead section:** A short lead (or one with a lot of mistakes) might indicate that the article was written through staggered contributions and could use a rewrite to tie it together.
- **Value statements:** Statements like "the best" or "the most important" are red flags that the article is either written to persuade or isn't well referenced.
- **Gaps in sourcing:** Are there references to unnamed sources of information, such as "some people say," or "many believe"? If you can't answer the question, "Who said that?", chances are that a reliable source isn't cited.
- **Under-developed reference section, few citations:** There should be a good number of citations, relative to how much information is included in the article. Those citations should be from reliable publishers, not questionable websites or publishers who might like to push an agenda.
- **Imbalanced sections:** Sections about an important aspect of the topic shouldn't be shorter than sections about a less important aspect. This sort of imbalance might mean relevant sections are missing entirely.

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<sup>3</sup> This section is taken from the WikiEdu training module [Evaluating Articles and Sources](#)

## Activity 5: Finding articles that need work



Pick an article, and assess it for the features above. You can develop your own rating system, for example you could rate the feature 1-10, or have a traffic-light system of red, amber and green, or even emoji faces 😊 😐 😞 .

You can use this several times until you find an article you think you can improve.

Article Title:		
Is there a warning banner?		
Feature	Rating	Can I improve this?
Quality of the lead section		
Neutrality (no value statements or bias)		
Claims are backed up with sources		
Quality of the reference section		
Balance between different sections		

## Improving articles for better representation

Improving articles on topics or people that are underrepresented can make a huge difference, for example articles on women, individuals from the global majority or LGBTQ+ issues. This can help to give people a better understanding of issues and cultures they may not be familiar with and avoid misrepresentation.

As well as adding information and correcting mistakes, you can make a huge difference by adding sources to the reference section authored by underrepresented groups, such as women, indigenous peoples, individuals from the global south, people of colour, linguistic minorities and sexual minorities.

## Photographs

Updating or adding photographs can be a good way to increase representation. For example, Wikipedia is still missing many images of women, especially black, brown and indigenous women. This was the focus of the 2022 *VisibleWikiWomen*<sup>4</sup> campaign, where people were invited to upload photographs and drawings of women. Images can be uploaded for free from [Wikimedia Commons](#), provided they are accredited.

## Links

You can check that key terms and topics are linked to other Wikipedia articles. You can see how to add links on Visual Editor in the section below.

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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Commons%3AWhose\\_Knowledge%3F/VisibleWikiWomen?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Commons%3AWhose_Knowledge%3F/VisibleWikiWomen?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

## Looking for gaps in citation

When you notice that there are claims being made that are not backed up with a source, you can highlight that a citation is needed. We don't want to see supposed facts backed up with 'many people think' or 'it is widely believed'... we want sources!

Steps in VisualEditor:

1. Open the article and click Edit (not "Edit source").
2. Highlight the sentence or phrase that needs a citation.
3. In the toolbar, click "Cite" (usually looks like a quotation mark icon).
4. From the dropdown, choose "Template".
5. In the template search box, type "Citation needed".
6. Select "Citation needed" from the list.
7. (Optional) Add a date if prompted.
8. Click Insert, then Publish changes when you're done.



<sup>5</sup>

## Check the Talk Page

Looking at the Talk Page (see page 9 for where to find this) lets you see all the conversations that have already happened about this article. Perhaps the edit you were thinking of making has already been discussed, and you can save yourself some time.

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<sup>5</sup> Idil Keysan for the Wikimedia Foundation, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

## Small edits, big impact

Here is an example of how small edits can make a big difference, taken from the Wiki Education training module on [improving representation](#).

By adding just 26 words to the article about Kalief Browder, an African American teenager imprisoned without trial, a student editor filled in critical information gaps about his about his race, imprisonment in solitary confinement, and suicide after release – crucial context for his story, which spurred nationwide activism and criminal justice reform.

Before student edits:

**Kalief Browder** (May 25, 1993 – June 6, 2015) was a young man arrested at the age of 16 under suspicion of robbery and imprisoned without conviction for three years on [Rikers Island](#). His case has been cited by activists who call for reform of [New York City's](#) criminal justice system.

After student edits (underlined):

**Kalief Browder** (May 25, 1993 – June 6, 2015) was a young [African American](#) man who was arrested at the age of 16 for allegedly stealing a backpack. He was imprisoned for three years on [Rikers Island](#) without trial and spent most of this time in solitary confinement. Two years after his release, Browder committed suicide. His case is cited by activists who call for the reform of the [New York City](#) criminal justice system and is the subject of a six-part [docuseries](#) on [Spike](#), *[TIME: The Kalief Browder Story](#)*.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://dashboard.wikiedu.org/training/students/improving-representation/small-edits-big-impact-example>

## Using Visual Editor

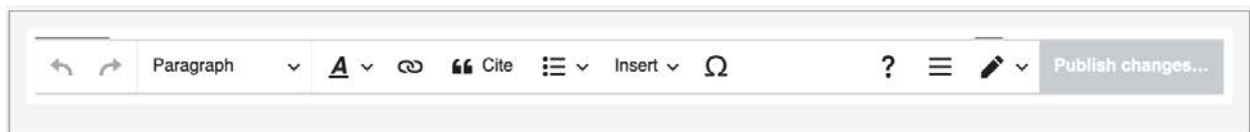
There are two ways to edit, using either Source Code or Visual Editor. We recommend Visual Editor, which is much easier to use, and is very much *what you see is what you get*. It works like a word processor.

### Enabling the Visual Editor

1. Log in to your Wikipedia account.
2. Select 'Preferences' in the menu in the top right of the screen.
3. Select the editing tab.
4. In the 'Editor' section uncheck 'Temporarily disable the visual editor while it is in beta' if it is checked.
5. In 'Editing mode' choose 'Show me both editor tabs'.
6. Select 'Save' in the bottom right corner of the screen.

You can watch a demonstration video here: [https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1\\_049dex5w](https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1_049dex5w)<sup>7</sup>

You will see a toolbar that looks like this:




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<sup>7</sup> These instructions and video link are taken from the Wikimedia in Residence page of the the University of Edinburgh <https://information-services.ed.ac.uk/help-consultancy/is-skills/wikimedia/wikipedia/create-an-account>

## Tools<sup>8</sup>

**Paragraph:** Set the style of your text. For example, make a header or plain paragraph text. You can also use it to offset block quotes.

**A:** Highlight your text, then click here to format it with bold, italics, etc. The “More” options allows you to underline (U), cross-out text (S), and other more advanced features.

 **Links:** Highlight text and push this button to make it a link. The Visual Editor will automatically suggest related Wikipedia articles for that word or phrase. This is a great way to connect your article to more Wikipedia content. You only have to link important words once, usually during the first time they appear. If you want to link to pages outside of Wikipedia (for an “external links” section, for example) click on the “External link” tab.

 **Cite:** The citation tool in the Visual Editor helps format your citations. You can simply paste a DOI or URL, and the Visual Editor will try to sort out all of the fields you need. Be sure to review it, however, and apply missing fields manually (if you know them). You can also add books, journals, news, and websites manually. That opens up a quick guide for inputting your citations. Once you've added a source, you can click the “re-use” tab to cite it again.

**Bullets:** To add bullet points or a numbered list.

**Insert:** This tab lets you add media, images, or tables.

**Ω:** This tab allows you to add special characters, such as those found in non-English words, scientific notation, and a handful of language extensions.

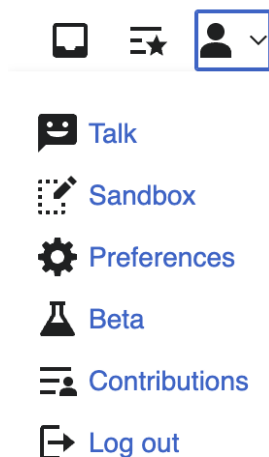
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<sup>8</sup> Taken from the WikiEdu training module [How To Edit, Wikicode vs Visual Editor](#)

## Sandboxes

Once you have decided on an article to edit, you can start making some changes. You can practise this in your **sandbox**.

A sandbox is your personal Wikipedia page where you can practise editing. You can find the link to your sandbox on the top right on the Wikipedia page when you are logged in.



People can see your sandbox if they have the link, so don't write anything you wouldn't want viewed. Copyright still applies in a sandbox so don't be tempted to copy and paste.

A sandbox can be a good place to copy and paste a few sentences or a paragraph to develop. Don't copy and paste the entire article into your sandbox, however. Instead, copy the paragraph or sentences you want to work with back into the article, and then save the change.

## Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is when you use someone else's words and claim them as your own. Wikipedia forbids plagiarism, too. This includes **close paraphrasing**, where your words follow the source too closely. This is something that can happen accidentally when you have the source material in front of you, so you will need to be very careful not to copy the words or structure of the author. Here is an example of close paraphrasing<sup>9</sup>

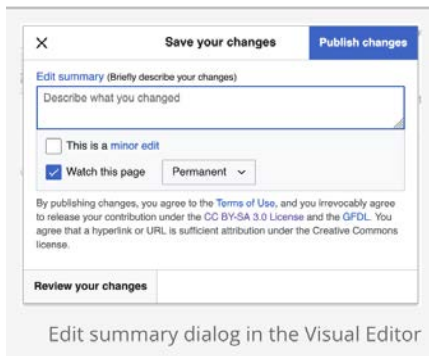
**Original text:** *Because the weather forecast called for rain, the league decided to switch the location of the game to an indoor facility.*

**Close paraphrased text, not acceptable on Wikipedia:** *The league switched the game's location to an indoor facility due to a weather forecast calling for rain.*

**Acceptable text:** *Forecasted rain caused the league to move the game indoors.*

## Edit summary

Before you publish your changes, leave an edit summary:



The image shows a screenshot of the 'Save your changes' dialog box in the Visual Editor. The dialog has a title bar with 'X', 'Save your changes', and 'Publish changes' buttons. Below the title bar, there is a section for 'Edit summary (Briefly describe your changes)' with a text input field containing the placeholder text 'Describe what you changed'. Below the input field, there are two checkboxes: 'This is a minor edit' (unchecked) and 'Watch this page' (checked). To the right of the 'Watch this page' checkbox is a dropdown menu set to 'Permanent'. Below these options, there is a small paragraph of text: 'By publishing changes, you agree to the Terms of Use, and you irrevocably agree to release your contribution under the CC BY-SA 3.0 License and the GFDL. You agree that a hyperlink or URL is sufficient attribution under the Creative Commons license.' At the bottom of the dialog, there is a 'Review your changes' button. Below the dialog, the text 'Edit summary dialog in the Visual Editor' is displayed.

Here you can briefly describe what you have changed, for example you may add 'added citation'. For minor spelling and grammatical corrections you can add 'copyedited'.

<sup>9</sup> Example taken from WikiEdu handout [Avoiding Plagiarism](#)

## Activity 6: Have a Go!



There are a number of ways you can practise editing. You can log in to your sandbox using the instructions above.

Pick an article that needs work (from Activity 5), copy and paste the section you need to work on into your sandbox. Make the changes, add it back to the article and publish. Don't forget to add your edit summary!

### Some more principles to remember:

- **Civility:** Wikipedia editors should treat each with respect and civility. Never engage in personal attacks or edit wars (when editors repeatedly override each other's contributions).
- **Assume good faith:** Always begin by assuming that other editors mean well, are trying to help, and that you all have the common goal of improving free, open knowledge. This can be hard if someone comments on or even removes your edit, but you need to try!
- **Be Bold!** If you see something wrong, be bold and fix it yourself. You may make mistakes, you may even have your edit reversed, but don't let this deter you from trying. Wikipedia only improves if individuals are bold enough to try to make things better.

## Takeaways: Best Practices for Editing:

- Make small changes and publish frequently
- Remember your edit summary
- Add sources for all facts
- Be bold!
- Be civil
- Assume good faith
- Ask for help if you get stuck

## Ideas for Follow-Up Activities:



- Some learners may enjoy The [Wikipedia Adventure](#), which is an interactive introduction to editing.
- Wiki Edu have a series of one-page handouts to support learners on specific areas:
  - [Choosing an article](#)
  - [Avoiding plagiarism](#)
  - [Citing your sources](#)
  - [Using the talk pages](#)
- Learners could make a poster about what features make a good article, or a not-so-good article.

## Evaluation and Feedback

We would be very grateful if you would fill in this [short teacher evaluation](#) about the session, so that we can improve the Wikimedia in Schools resources.

If you are happy to provide anecdotal feedback on how you found the session and resources this would also be gratefully received. Please contact Sally Latham at [sally.latham@wikimedia.org.uk](mailto:sally.latham@wikimedia.org.uk).

Many thanks for taking part in this pilot!