



WIKIMEDIA
UK

Wikimedia in Schools Series
**Understanding how
Wikipedia Works**

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.

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 what Wikipedia is, what makes it an encyclopedia, and Wikipedia's three core values.
- ★ Students should understand the different components of a Wikipedia page.
- ★ Students should understand how to evaluate a Wikipedia page, identifying positive and negative factors.
- ★ Students should understand how Wikipedia is regulated and monitored to ensure it is accurate and trustworthy.

Session Length

1 - 1.5 hours

Activity 1: Opening Discussion



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

1. Have you been on Wikipedia before? What did you use it for?
2. Have you used Wikipedia for your school work before?
3. What do you think makes an encyclopedia different from a text book?
4. What do you think makes an encyclopedia different from reading news on social media feeds?

What is Wikipedia?

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
The Free Encyclopedia

- 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 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 over 66 million articles in over 300 languages.
- The English Wikipedia contains over 7 million articles.

Wikipedia Core Policies

1. 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. No Original Research

All material must come from a published, reliable source. Wikipedia is not the place for new ideas or discoveries, before they have been widely accepted.

3. Verifiability

People reading and editing the articles must be able to check that the information comes from a reliable source. Articles should have citations, and a reference list at the end.

Activity 2: Looking Closer at Neutral Point of View



Look at these two extracts. Which is written from a neutral point of view? Explain your answer.

Taylor Swift's Eras tour ran from March 2022 to December 2024. It was an all-stadium tour in 51 cities, celebrating her 10 studio albums. Critics widely praised the tour for its concept, production and for Swift's energy and performance. It became the highest grossing music tour in history, generating over 1 billion dollars.

Taylor Swift's Eras tour will go down in history as the greatest tour of all time. Between March 2022 and December 2024, fans were delighted by Swift's stunning performance and incredible vocals in 51 cities. The tour generated an unbelievable sum of over 1 billion dollars.

Talk to students about language that is promotional, opinion or shows bias. Would everyone share the same view? Is it an objective fact?

Try it for yourself. Write two short pieces about a famous person or event that you are interested in, one from a neutral point of view and one without.

Anatomy of a Wikipedia Article¹

The "Talk" section shows discussions around the topic of the article. It shows how knowledge is constructed through informed exchanges.

This tab shows the edits done on a Wikipedia article, how the article has evolved over time, and how up-to-date the information is.

Use the search box to look for more information without leaving Wikipedia

The numbers found along a Wikipedia article indicate the sources used to create it. Articles can be assessed according to the number and quality of sources they have.

Blue links allow you to explore more Wikipedia articles related to the topic. Red links indicate that the page does not exist yet but it probably should!

The lead section summarizes the article's key points. It provides the students with an overview of the topic.

There are badges that highlight articles as "good" or "featured" content. Similarly, warning banners indicate areas of improvement for an article, citations needed, or potential conflicts.

¹ Taken from Reading Wikipedia in the Classroom:
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/49/Wikipedia_in_the_Classroom_-_Teacher%27s_Booklet_ISTE_Adapted_%28English%29.pdf

Activity 3: Exploring Wikipedia Articles



Find a Wikipedia article and work through the following:

1. What is the article title?
2. In-text citations look like this: ^[3]^[4] Click on one and see where it takes you.
3. Go to the References section at the end. Click on one and see where it takes you.
4. Pick a blue link and click on it. Click on another in the next article. Do this four times and see where you end up! Write the article names below:

Have some fun with this one... any examples will work!

Cat



China



Fungi



Beer

Wikipedia Article Grading

<p>FA</p> 	<p>Featured Article: Exemplary, professional-standard work, in-depth, accurate, thorough and encyclopedic level.</p>
<p>A</p> 	<p>A-Class: The article is well-organized and essentially complete, very useful to readers.</p>
<p>GA</p> 	<p>Good Article: 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</p> 	<p>B-Class: Mostly complete with minor issues. Useful, although the content may not be complete enough to satisfy a serious student or researcher.</p>
<p>C</p> 	<p>C-Class: Substantial but missing key content or has irrelevant material. Useful to a casual reader, but would not provide a complete picture.</p>
<p>Start</p> 	<p>Start-Class: Developing, incomplete, needs reliable sources. The majority of readers will need more information.</p>
<p>Stub</p> 	<p>Stub-Class: Very basic, short description of the topic.</p>

Evaluating Wikipedia Articles

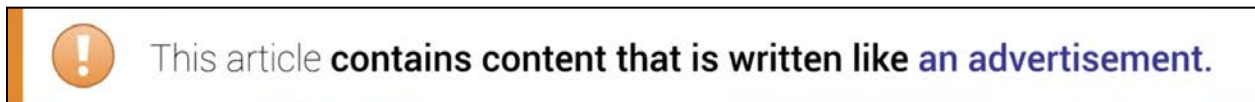
There are various positive and negative factors to look out for when evaluating a Wikipedia article for yourself.

Positive factors:

- ✓ There are plenty of citations and references from reliable sources.
- ✓ The lead section is clear and informative.
- ✓ It is written from a neutral point of view.
- ✓ The information is well organised and balanced.

Negative factors:

- ✗ There is a warning banner, for example:



- ✗ It lacks citations and references, or the references are not from reliable sources.
- ✗ There are spelling and grammar errors.
- ✗ There is outdated information on current topics.
- ✗ It lacks balance, with some sections disproportionately long or short.
- ✗ It contains opinions or value statements.

Activity 4: Evaluating Wikipedia Articles



Find a Wikipedia article and work through the following:

1. What is the article title?
2. Does it have a badge? (not all articles do)
3. Are there any warning banners?
4. Can you identify any positive factors about the article?
5. Can you identify any negative factors about the article?

How Wikipedia Articles are Monitored for Quality

People often think that anyone can edit Wikipedia and those edits will stay there forever, making Wikipedia unreliable.

- ✓ True ... anyone can edit Wikipedia.
- ✗ False ... edits are irreversible and unmonitored.

Here are a few facts about how Wikipedia is monitored that you may not have known:

- Wikipedians and even bots are constantly monitoring Wikipedia and reversing vandalism and bad edits.
- Vandalism is usually reversed in minutes.
- In-depth discussions often happen on the talk pages about the best way to present information. You can look at the talk page on any article.
- Wikipedia has admins who have a higher level of authority and can delete pages, respond to vandalism and lock pages.

Locked Pages



Admins can lock a page if it is vulnerable to repeated vandalism or bad edits. These are often sensitive or controversial topics.

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!

The continual monitoring of articles and edits, with the principles of verifiability and neutral point of view, mean that Wikipedia is a reliable source of information, and a trusted place to launch your research.

Ideas for Follow-Up Activities:



- Produce a poster with the positive and negative factors to look out for on a Wikipedia article.
- Start with one article and click on four links to end up on another. Give your partner the first and last article name and see if they can work out how you did it.
- Watch the video [Using Wikipedia: Crash Course Navigating Digital Information](#)



Evaluation and Feedback

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

If you are happy to provide anecdotal feedback on the session and resources this would also be gratefully received. Please contact Sally Latham at sally.latham@wikimedia.org.uk.

Many thanks for taking part in this pilot!