

Is Wikipedia appropriate for school use?

It probably isn't the best advice to tell students not to use Wikipedia.

Wikipedia use should not be banned, but its use should be part of a larger discussion about digital literacy and information literacy.

The takeaway from the below material:

- Wikipedia is as *reliable* as Encyclopaedia Britannica
- Wikipedia includes *lots* of links to other sources
- Wikipedia is much more open about the reliability of its pages than most 'information' pages online
- Wikipedia is a great *starting point* for research
- "but anyone can change it"
 - vandalism is uncommon on Wikipedia and is corrected very quickly
 - most pages are monitored by subject matter experts who will erase vandalism when it happens
 - vandals are blocked from updating Wikipedia for 6 months or more
 - *why not try changing a page and see what happens – go back to that page the next day*

Students should also look at simple Wikipedia – it is Wikipedia but with easier to access language.

Here is an article about online search strategy:

<https://lawlesslearningland.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/e-teaching-2017-38-final.pdf>

Wikipedia vs. other encyclopaedias

In 2005, the peer-reviewed journal Nature asked scientists to compare Wikipedia's scientific articles to those in Encyclopaedia Britannica—"the most scholarly of encyclopedias," according to its own Wiki page. The comparison resulted in a tie; both references contained four serious errors among the 42 articles analysed by experts.

Using Wikipedia at school

Wikipedia has a policy that requires its [contributors to cite verifiable online sources](#) for the items they are writing. While enforcement of this rule for more obscure topics on the site can sometimes be lax, the more popular articles usually have citations. One useful way to use Wikipedia is as a jumping point to other potentially more trustworthy resources, which appear as citations at the bottom of many Wikipedia entries.

Often, articles without citations are labeled as such by a banner at the top of the page.

The debate surrounding Wikipedia also makes the site a good jumping off point for lessons about evaluating Web sites and information for reliability, and for lessons on critical reading.

Wikipedia deserves the same place in most modern assignments that Britannica did in most of ours. It was a starting point and a collection of additional references for our research. It gave us the general background we needed to dig further. Wikipedia does the same, with remarkable reliability given the success of the crowdsourcing model. Wikipedia, however, makes most of those primary sources and deeper research possibilities available within just a few clicks. We don't need to teach our kids not to use Wikipedia. We need to teach them to make those extra few clicks and decide for themselves if the Wikipedia entry has merit. It's a skill that is broadly applicable in an age of information overload and Google's billions of search results.

Why Wikipedia is a Great Source... For Other Sources

Wikipedia has some institutional controls in place to avoid the very problems outlined above. These include flags requesting citations for information lacking proper support. Of course, not every page has been exhaustively flagged, which is why you shouldn't use the site itself as a source. But in the same superscript as the citation flags are footnote numbers, and these are your key to primary sources.

When you click on a footnote link in Wikipedia, you are directed to the bottom of the page, where sources are listed. Sometimes, these sources are for pages in books, and this will allow you to find the information in question by finding it in the book. Usually, though, citations on the site go to information on other websites, allowing you to continue researching on your computer

According to the Wikipedia FAQ, "Properly written articles cite the sources, and a reader should rely on the Wikipedia article as much, but no more, than the sources the article relies on. If an article doesn't cite a source, it may or may not be reliable. Students should never use information in Wikipedia for formal purposes (such as a school essay) until they have checked those external sources."

Take the extra step.

Every page in the enormous vault that is Wikipedia contains citations, references and other qualifying sources that can be used freely and with confidence. Most, if not all, Wikipedia citations include hyperlinks to the original content. Taking the time to make that extra click will pay off with a visit to a source that isn't Wikipedia.

From Wikipedia itself:

Is Wikipedia accurate and reliable?

Wikipedia's objective is to become a compendium of published knowledge about notable subjects. The reliability of Wikipedia articles is limited by the external sources on which they are supposed to rely, as well as by the ability of Wikipedia's editors to understand those sources correctly and their willingness to use them properly. Therefore, articles may or may not be reliable, and readers should always use their own judgment. Students should never use information in Wikipedia (or any other online encyclopedia) for formal purposes (such as school essays) until they have verified and evaluated the information based on external sources. For this reason, Wikipedia, like any encyclopedia, is a great starting place for research but not always a great ending place

What prevents someone from contributing false or misleading information?

Wikipedia's content control mechanisms are reactive rather than preventive: anyone can go to almost any page and change the information to make it false or misleading. Although the majority of edits attempt to improve the encyclopedia, vandalism is frequent.

Fortunately, such deliberate errors tend not to linger. Hundreds of dedicated Wikipedia contributors monitor real-time edit feeds (particularly for important or controversial articles) and quickly revert most inappropriate edits. Many articles are on one or more editors' personal watchlists (and major articles are watched by hundreds of editors), and this provides a second layer of content control. Third, Wikipedia's huge user base is constantly analyzing and improving every article, undoing vandalism as it is found. If an anonymous or relatively new user changes a statistic or date by even a little bit, without justifying their edit, they are particularly likely to raise a red flag. If an individual continues to vandalize after being warned, then they may even be blocked from further editing.

Sources

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