

Choosing an article



Choosing a Wikipedia article to work on can be a challenge, especially for new editors. Here are some strategies that other students have used.

What makes a good Wikipedia article? Before you start writing, think about how information is structured in encyclopedias, and how that style of writing might be different from a traditional research paper you've done in courses. It will also help to familiarize yourself with Wikipedia articles within your academic discipline, which can serve as guides for the types of sections you'll be expected to contribute.

Do

- Choose a topic that is well known in your discipline, but only weakly represented on Wikipedia. If you can find a lot of literature about a topic, but not very much information on Wikipedia, that is an ideal situation to work from.
- Look for articles considered “stub” or “start” class on Wikipedia's internal quality scale. You can see an article's rating by visiting its talk page.
- Try a few different variants on your search term before creating an article. A topic may already be covered under a different name.
- If you're updating an article and want to work in your sandbox, copy the existing text into your sandbox first. It's better to enhance the work of other editors instead of rewriting the entire article.
- Start with your own curiosity. If you've found a fascinating fact through reliable course readings, that's a great starting point for your search. It will also keep you motivated as you search for additional references to write your article.

Don't

- Don't try to improve articles on very broad topics, such as “law,” or articles that are already of high quality on Wikipedia, such as “Featured Articles”. These topics are more challenging to improve effectively.
- Don't start out by trying to improve articles on highly controversial topics, such as global warming, abortion, or Scientology. Even well-intended edits on contentious articles or emotional topics may leave you feeling frustrated. Consider working on an existing sub-article to bring more detail to a particular facet of the topic.
- Don't work on topics that aren't covered by good sources or sizeable literature. You'll have a hard time providing the references needed to create a Wikipedia article.
- Don't start articles with titles that imply an essay-like approach, such as “The Effects of the Recent Subprime Mortgage Crisis on Global Economics.” Instead, start with something like “Subprime mortgage crisis.” Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, a source for facts. Essays and persuasive writing are not appropriate.
- Don't rewrite or completely rework existing articles. Work with the existing text instead, editing or adding whatever is necessary to build a stronger article. Articles built this way will benefit from true collaboration.
- Don't forget to check Wikipedia's Portal Directory for pages related to your discipline. Many disciplines have portals on Wikipedia that list articles in that subject needing improvement. Just type [PORTAL:CONTENTS/PORTALS](#) into Wikipedia's search bar. Portals may also break down articles into larger domains within your field, which could help you as you brainstorm.