

The Truthiness of Wikipedia

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History/Background

- Begun in January 2001
- Goal: produce a free content encyclopedia to which anyone can contribute
- Wikimedia Foundation
 - Wiktionary, Wikiquote, Wikibooks, Wikisource, Wikispecies, Wikinews, Wikiversity

Scope/reach (as of 2/22/08)

- More than 75,000 active contributors working on 9,000,000 articles in more than 250 languages
- English language version
 - 6,496,381 registered user accounts
 - 2,242,407 articles
- Often near top of results when using search engines

What it is

- Collaboratively written encyclopedia
- Wiki
 - underlying software tracks every change to every page
- No original research or thought
 - Articles must provide substantial documentation to third-party reliable published sources

What it is not

- a blog
- Web space provider
- social networking site
- memorial site
- a mirror or repository of links, images, or media files
- a dictionary
- a textbook
- a publisher of original thought
- a directory
- a manual or guidebook
- an indiscriminate collection of information
- a news ticker

Types of Content

- Articles
- Pictures
- Lists
- Portals
- Topics
- Glossaries
- Timelines
- Indexes

Advantages

- Fluidity/Currency
- Wiki software (tracking)
- Anyone can contribute (new articles, editing)
- Community of editors: researchers, fact-checkers, proofreaders
- Community policing
- Extensive guidance on article content, format, documentation; editor behavior
 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Wikipedia_style_guidelines (or search for: Category: style guidelines)

Disadvantages

- Anyone can contribute (new articles, editing)
- Work in progress, never finished product
- Vandalism
 - any addition, removal, change of content made in a deliberate attempt to compromise Wikipedia's integrity
- Spam
 - adding external links to articles for the purpose of promoting a Web site or product

Editing

- Become registered user
 - Registered users have more privileges
 - WP:Community Portal
- Select topic or article
 - Emphasis now on improving existing articles
 - Work on "known problems:" pages needing attention, requests for expansion, articles needing updating, general maintenance
 - WP:CT
 - Ideas for new articles
 - Most-wanted articles, articles requested for more than a year or two, missing articles
 - WP:RA

Improving Existing Content

- Copyediting
- Fact checking
- Rewriting for clarity
- Checking for adequate citations/documentation (no original research or thought)
 - published, reliable source
 - provide source for every sentence in article
- Checking for neutral point of view, lack of bias
- Monitoring for vandalism and spam

Defense Against Malfeasance

- Bots
- Recent changes patrol (editors who monitor changes as they happen)
- Watchlists set up by editors
- Readers

Evaluating Content

- Giles, J. (2005). Internet encyclopedias go head to head. *Nature* 438, 900-901.
- Suggested criteria
 - Status of the entry
 - Writing style
 - Number, source, quality, & currency of citations
 - Factual vs. opinion
 - Neutrality

Getting Started

- Page layout
 - Left navigation (browse through contents)
 - Interaction (about, how to)
 - Search box (for keywords or titles)
 - Tool box (“cite this page”)
 - Languages
- Top tabs

Evaluating Content

- Featured
 - **Great Lakes Storm of 1913**
- Notes and designations on the page
 - **candle cover**
 - **information and media literacy**
 - **Pat Robertson**
 - **list of pop singers**

Evaluating Content (cont.)

- Discussion tab, history tab
 - **APA style**
 - **Kent State shootings**
- When the system fails
 - **Hotel design**
 - **UFO sightings in Argentina** - history

Additional Information

- *Wikipedia: The Missing Manual* by John Broughton (available as e-book through KentLINK)
- Wikipedia in the Classroom and Beyond http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Wikipedia_in_the_Classroom_and_Beyond

Your Turn

- Find article in your field
- Provide critique
 - Breadth and depth of coverage
 - Neutral point of view
 - Citations and references

Discussion

- Appropriate uses
- Teach students to evaluate as with other sources
- Allow students to cite