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

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

- Suggested criteria
  - Status of the entry
  - Writing style
  - Number, source, quality, & currency of citations
  - Factual vs. opinion
  - Neutrality
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<td>– Interaction (about, how to)</td>
<td>• Notes and designations on the page</td>
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<td>– Search box (for keywords or titles)</td>
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