

# Case Studies: How instructors are teaching with Wikipedia

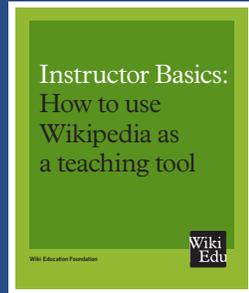
Wiki Education Foundation



## For instructors

### Instructor Basics: How to use Wikipedia as a teaching tool

This brochure covers key Wikipedia policies you'll need to understand, best practices on article selection, working with other Wikipedia editors, and sample grading structures. [wikiedu.org/instructorbasics](http://wikiedu.org/instructorbasics)



### Online Orientation for Educators

All instructors are highly encouraged to complete the online orientation before planning a syllabus. It will introduce you to the culture and rules of Wikipedia, demonstrate the basics of editing, and walk you through the process of creating an assignment plan and your course page. [wikiedu.org/instructortraining](http://wikiedu.org/instructortraining)



### Assignment Design Wizard

This online tool helps you pick and choose aspects of a Wikipedia assignment that align with your course goals. [wizard.wikiedu.org](http://wizard.wikiedu.org)



For a complete, up-to-date list of our materials and support for getting started, visit:

[www.wikiedu.org/for-instructors](http://www.wikiedu.org/for-instructors)

## For students

### Editing Wikipedia

An introduction to contributing to Wikipedia: the basic rules, how to write in encyclopedic style, and how to use and interpret wiki markup. [wikiedu.org/editingwikipedia](http://wikiedu.org/editingwikipedia)



### Online Training for Students

We encourage students to complete the online training at the beginning of their assignment. [wikiedu.org/studenttraining](http://wikiedu.org/studenttraining)



# Learning Objectives

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## Writing Skills Development

Students write for a diverse and interested audience that represents a significant percentage of the worldwide online population. Students must learn to write with others, accept revisions, and implement feedback of their work. Furthermore, with Wikipedia’s emphasis on verifiability and “no original research,” students gain a greater understanding of the difference between fact-based and persuasive writing.



## Media and Information Literacy

Wikipedia’s transparent and collaborative content development process allows students to gain a deeper understanding of how information is both produced and consumed. This provides an excellent opportunity for students to critically evaluate sources and their appropriate usage.



## Critical Thinking and Research Skills

Students learn to critically analyze Wikipedia articles to determine how well the article covers the topic, and assess what information is missing. Your students learn how to locate and identify a variety of high quality sources. Assessing an article and deciding what information is missing is similar to the literature review process in scholarly research.



## Collaboration

Students learn first-hand how to collaborate with a community of active volunteers (including their fellow students) while developing encyclopedic content. They often discuss their work with other editors, and negotiate to build consensus.



## Online Communication Skills

Wiki software use is growing in both educational and corporate settings. Wikipedia assignments teach students how to use MediaWiki software. Students communicate on article and user Talk pages, developing skills and techniques appropriate for getting their message across to their intended audience.

# Case Studies: Assignments

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The Wiki Education Foundation is available to assist you and your students in learning the basics of editing Wikipedia. We have handouts, online trainings, and staff to help you plan and execute your Wikipedia assignment.

# Copyediting

**Adrienne Wadewitz**  
Visiting Assistant Professor  
Indiana University-Purdue University  
Indianapolis

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Course name

Argumentative Writing

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Course level (undergraduate/graduate)

Advanced undergraduates

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Learning objectives

Writing Skills Development ★★★★★

Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★

Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★★★★

Collaboration ★

Online Communication Skills ★★★★★

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Discipline of course

Many

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Class size

20

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Individual or group assignment

Individual

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Duration of assignment

1 week

## Assignment

I asked students to copyedit Wikipedia articles, engaging editors in conversation about their writing and improving the clarity of the language of the material.

In doing so, they had to consider the global audience of Wikipedia and the challenge of communicating with anonymous Wikipedia editors. Hopefully, by the end students realized that copyediting is a painstaking, necessary, and sometimes politically fraught process.

In *Argumentative Writing*, students learned to write in different voices for different audiences. In learning about the specific voice on Wikipedia, they learned about the “authoritative” voice and how its tone can convince, even if the content is questionable. The ways in which tone and content reinforce and/or undermine each other is a crucial media fluency for students to learn.



(CC-BY-SA 3.0) by Joseph C. Jones

# Removing plagiarism

**Becky Carmichael**  
Instructor; Science Coordinator,  
Communication across the Curriculum  
Louisiana State University

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Course name

Natural Disturbances and Society

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Course level

Undergraduates

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Learning objectives

Writing Skills Development ★

Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★

Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★★★★

Collaboration ★

Online Communication Skills ★★★★★

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Discipline of course

Natural Sciences

---

Class size

17

---

Individual or group assignment

Individual

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Duration of assignment

1 week

## Assignment

**Students compared Wikipedia articles to their own literature reviews. They sought out plagiarism, close paraphrasing, and uncited statements.**

This assignment was created as I was reviewing first drafts of student contributions. I realized the need to address appropriate citation of information, discuss plagiarism issues, and work toward improved paraphrasing of ideas.

Students were assigned to explore their own contributions, including existing content on articles they were editing, to locate content considered to be close paraphrasing of original sources.

When we located instances of close paraphrasing or plagiarism, we worked to remove it. This involved searching through reliable scholarly journals, drafting revisions, and noting changes we would make on the Talk page of the article.

Students gained experience in critically analyzing the information and assessing the reliability of references. They also developed an appreciation for seeking scholarly sources rather than any source found on the internet.



(CC-BY-SA 4.0) by Frank Schulenburg

# Translating

**Julie McDonough-Dolmaya**  
Instructor  
York University

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Course name

Introduction to Translation into English II

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Course level

Undergraduates

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Learning objectives

Writing Skills Development ★★★

Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★

Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★

Collaboration ★★★

Online Communication Skills ★★★★★

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Discipline of course

Translation

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Class size

26

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Individual or group assignment

Group

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Duration of assignment

4 weeks

## Assignment

**Students worked in pairs or small groups to translate one of 7,000+ articles on the French Wikipedia that were not available on the English Wikipedia.**

While translating, students critically assessed the French article to decide whether the English translation needed new links to relevant English Wikipedia articles, updated references, or revised content for the new audience. Students had to submit a report about how they divided the work and made their translation decisions. Finally, they presented their finished articles in class and explained the challenges they faced when translating it.

A good professional translator is also a fact checker. Students practiced this skill and improved the articles they translated by finding and citing good sources if the French article was badly referenced.

Some students commented that adapting their texts to an English audience was challenging, particularly when English sources about their topics weren't readily available. Nearly all of them felt the assignment made them look at Wikipedia more critically.



(CC-BY-SA 4.0) by Tony Dolmaya

# Constructing knowledge

**Diana Strassmann**  
Director, Minor in Poverty,  
Justice, and Human Capabilities;  
Distinguished Professor in the  
Practice  
Rice University

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Course name

Poverty, Justice, and Human Capabilities

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Course level

Advanced undergraduates

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Learning objectives

Writing Skills Development ★★★★★

Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★

Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★★★★

Collaboration ★★★★★

Online Communication Skills ★★★★★

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Discipline of course

Humanities and Social Sciences

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Class size

20

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Individual or group assignment

Both individual and group work

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Duration of assignment

12 weeks

## Assignment

**Wikipedia is intended to reflect a consensus of the world's knowledge. In my course, students ask: Whose knowledge?**

My students contributed knowledge to Wikipedia. They also evaluated articles to consider how existing information is organized to emphasize certain perspectives on what and who is important, while obscuring or omitting others. Students evaluated, learned about, and critiqued the construction of knowledge through their work with Wikipedia. Then, they completed assignments that led to the creation of a new Wikipedia article, or a substantive revision of an existing one.

Creating these articles not only deepened their understanding of the topic, but also widened the breadth of accessible information represented on Wikipedia. Along the way, students learned about referencing, documentation, and a new writing genre.

But most importantly, by evaluating the representation of ideas and people in Wikipedia articles, students engaged firsthand with issues of knowledge construction in a way that traditional writing assignments simply can't provide. Students were creating and editing accounts of knowledge in the areas they were passionate about.



(CC-BY-SA 4.0) by Tommy Lavergne

# Writing an article

**Jon Beasley-Murray**  
Associate Professor of Latin American  
Studies  
University of British Columbia

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## Course names

**Murder, Madness, and Mayhem — Latin American Literature in Translation**

**North of the Río Grande — Latin American Civilization and Culture**

**Magical Realism Reconsidered — Survey of Spanish-American Literature since the 1820s**

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## Course level

**Advanced undergraduates**

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## Learning objectives

**Writing Skills Development ★★★★★**

**Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★**

**Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★★★★**

**Collaboration ★★★★★**

**Online Communication Skills ★★★★★**

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## Discipline of course

**Spanish/Latin American Studies**

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## Class size

**15–30**

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## Individual or group assignment

**Group**

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## Duration of assignment

**12 weeks**

## Assignment

**In each of these courses, students were asked to work in groups to create or improve Wikipedia articles related to the course topic.**

These articles were usually devoted to the books and/or authors we were studying in what was in each case essentially a literature class. In many cases, but not all, the articles already existed in some form or another, of variable quality. Students were particularly encouraged to submit their articles to Wikipedia peer review and quality processes, such as “Did You Know,” “Good Article,” and “Featured Article” nominations.

It exceeded expectations in just about every area. I was perhaps most surprised by how much this also became an assignment about writing (and revising).



(CC-BY 3.0) by Ofelia Ros

# Contributing videos

**Jennifer Geigel Mikulay**  
Associate Dean, Communication &  
Technology  
Alverno College, Milwaukee

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Course name

Advanced Media Studies

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Course level

Advanced undergraduates, many of whom are returning students

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Learning objectives

Writing Skills Development ★

Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★

Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★

Collaboration ★★★

Online Communication Skills ★★★★★

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Discipline of course

Communication

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Class size

20

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Individual or group assignment

Individual

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Duration of assignment

4 weeks

## Assignment

**Students created an original informational video to illustrate a Wikipedia article dealing with a subject related to architecture, dance, heritage, landscape, machines, music, parks, or sports.**

The project was designed to facilitate the expansion and integration of media knowledge. Students experimented, problem solved, engaged aesthetic abilities, and applied insights from course readings and independent research. All images and music had to be original, out of copyright, or available with a Creative Commons Share-Alike license.

This assignment increased media literacy, provided experience with digital video, and encouraged web content development. Students learned about Wikipedia as a digital project and as a collaborative community with a specific culture. They learned about the uneven gender dynamic in Wikipedia and tech fields generally. They also learned the value of sharing their work in a highly accessible venue. The feedback students got meant a lot to them. When Wikipedians left notes on their talk pages or otherwise commented on the videos, the students really learned from the engagement.



(CC-BY-SA 3.0) by Katy Lederer

# Contributing photos

**Ryan McGrady**  
Adjunct Instructor, Graduate Assistant  
North Carolina State University

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Course name

Media History and Theory

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Course level

Advanced undergraduates

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Learning objectives

Writing Skills Development ★

Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★

Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★

Collaboration ★

Online Communication Skills ★★★★★

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Discipline of course

Communication / Media Studies

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Class size

20

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Individual or group assignment

Either

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Duration of assignment

6 weeks

## Assignment

**Students were asked to photograph local buildings, monuments, and historic sites, and upload them to Wikimedia Commons.**

The only rules were that photographs must be their own work, should not be photos of copyrighted works, an article must exist for uploaded photos to appear on, and it shouldn't already exist on Commons, Wikipedia's image repository.

Wikipedia-based assignments are most successful when students feel that they have something of value to contribute to Wikipedia. So after students uploaded images for the articles they worked on in class, they had the opportunity to earn extra credit by contributing photographs for use on other articles on Wikipedia.

The Wiki Loves Monuments map tool helped students find articles that needed images on campus and in their hometowns. It pre-empted frustrations that “everything is already covered” – feelings that were easy to slip into when initially brainstorming local subjects for an article. After the assignment, one student expressed surprise and satisfaction that images of buildings and monuments around her hometown had value. Another remarked that she repeatedly visits the articles she added pictures to, admiring her work.



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# Contributing illustrations

**Bruce Sharky**  
Professor  
Louisiana State University

Course name  
Regional Planning and Design

Course level  
Master's students

Learning objectives  
Writing Skills Development ★  
Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★  
Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★★★★  
Collaboration ★★★  
Online Communication Skills ★★★★★

Discipline of course  
Landscape Architecture

Class size  
11

Individual or group assignment  
Individual

Duration of assignment  
12 weeks (part of a larger off-wiki assignment)

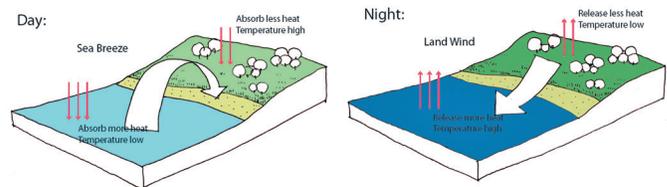
## Assignment

I asked my students to go on Wikipedia and find an article that could use an illustration that would explain graphically what was written in words.

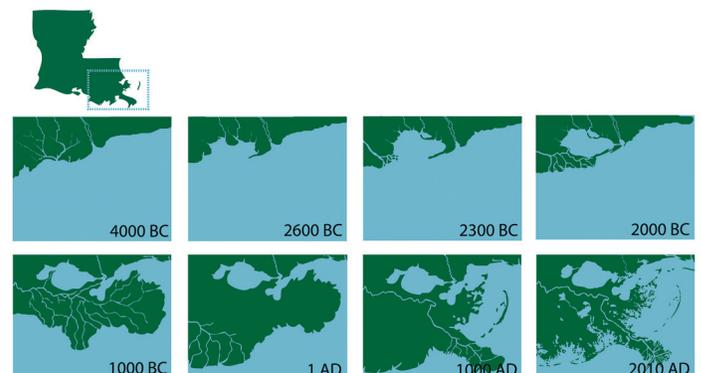
The topics had to do with natural processes in coastal Louisiana, such as wetland loss, hurricanes, etc. The larger assignment included a paper and an in-class presentation.

Students were very excited about the assignment because they were able to be published, they were treated as grown-ups, they were making a contribution to Wikipedia, and people all over the world were critiquing their work. I found that the quality of their other work was some of the best I've seen of my students, and I think it was because of the Wikipedia assignment. It made students think critically about the kind of graphic illustrations they do with all of their assignments. As landscape architects, we have to communicate to the public, and this assignment helped them gain those skills.

### Diurnal Wind Change in Coastal Area



(CC-BY-SA 3.0) by Yue Guan



(CC-BY-SA 3.0) by Dboutte

# Museums and archives

**Andrew Lih**  
Associate Professor  
American University

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Course name

**Wikipedia and Public Knowledge**

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Course level

**Advanced undergraduates and Master's students**

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Learning objectives

**Writing Skills Development ★★★**

**Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★**

**Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★★★★**

**Collaboration ★★★**

**Online Communication Skills ★★★★★**

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Discipline of course

**Journalism and Communication**

---

Class size

**18**

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Individual or group assignment

**Both individual and group work, during different stages**

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Duration of assignment

**15 weeks (part of a larger off-wiki assignment)**

## Assignment

**We spent the first 4-5 weeks becoming experienced editors. Then, every other week, we had an editing session within a different museum or cultural institution.**

We had a number of assignments:

1. Basic Wikipedia editing exercises
2. Media literacy exercises, comparing Wikipedia coverage with the news cycle around various topics, such as crisis, business, and sports reporting
3. Working in groups to analyze examples of open authority
4. "Edit-a-thons" with museums and cultural institutions
5. Evaluating and engaging in WikiProjects, or creating a "report card" for a cultural institution
6. Optional: creating video for Wikipedia

By requiring students to work during "edit-a-thons" — editing sessions where knowledgeable people and resources were readily available — this project made the learning experience much more direct. It also gave students an appreciation for how much work goes into Wikipedia. They learned that there's more behind the mantra that "anyone can edit" — there are stringent and well-thought out policies behind a complex community.



(CC-BY 2.0) by Joi Ito

# Case Studies: Grading

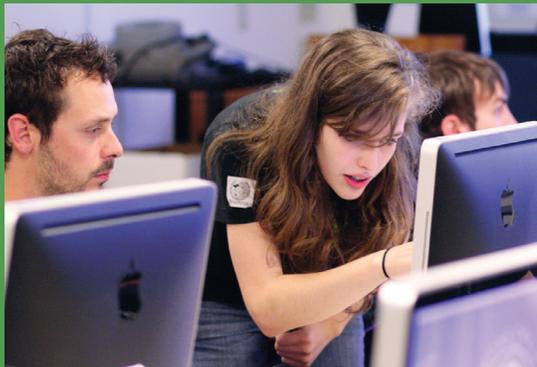
Grading Wikipedia assignments is challenging because students are often working collaboratively, and it's hard to tell just what each student has contributed to the article. Professors use a variety of approaches to assess the work their students have done on Wikipedia.



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# Content added to Wikipedia

**Anne J. McNeil**  
Associate Professor of Chemistry  
and Macromolecular Science and  
Engineering  
University of Michigan

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#### Course names

Organic Chemistry of Macromolecules  
Physical Organic Chemistry

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#### Course level

Ph.D. courses, though advanced undergraduates also took the course and participated in the projects

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#### Learning objectives

Writing Skills Development ★★★★★

Media and Information Literacy ★

Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★★★★

Collaboration ★★★★★

Online Communication Skills ★★★

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#### Discipline of course

Chemistry

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#### Class size

10–45

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#### Individual or group assignment

Pairs

## Grading

**The students worked in small groups to edit a Wikipedia article that is related to the course material and not already adequately described on Wikipedia.**

I gave the students a set of minimum expectations: at least four sections, four figures, and 10 references must be added to the article. They also must write a clear, comprehensible introduction. Then, during the two-stage peer review process, I gave the students a list of questions meant to provide more specific guidelines about what is expected. For example, “is the article suitable for first-time/general readers as well as those looking to understand the topic in more detail?” I also used these questions when determining their final grade. I tracked student progress using tools on Wikipedia, which allowed me to give students different grades within each group.

Breaking down the grading into sections (content, figures, references, peer reviews, etc.) gave me a simple yet fair structure with which to evaluate the article. Each student received a unique grade, which was variable based on individual contributions to the article and peer reviews. This alleviated any concern by the students that someone might not pull their weight.



(CC-BY-SA 3.0) by Matthew B. Soellner

# Milestones

**Robert Cummings**  
Director, Center for Writing and Rhetoric  
Associate Professor of English  
University of Mississippi

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Course name  
Writing 101

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Course level  
First-year undergraduates

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Learning objectives  
Writing Skills Development ★★★★★  
Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★  
Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★★★★  
Collaboration ★★★  
Online Communication Skills ★★★

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Discipline of course  
Composition

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Class size  
23

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Individual or group assignment  
Both

## Grading

The purpose of the assignment was to further student progress toward the composition course outcomes: learning a writing process, building skills in intellectual exploration and argumentation, understanding rhetorical purposes and diverse audiences, engaging in effective research practices, and producing prose with acceptable conventions and mechanics.

Student work was evaluated both in terms of participation in each stage of the assignment process, and also in terms of a reflective essay. At each of the seven assignment stages students were asked to conduct some type of research and then to prepare a brief report for that day's assignment. Within the reflective essay students were asked to evaluate the project's usefulness for helping them reach the course outcomes. This strategy of creating small, incremental writing assignments each day provided manageable tasks that did not detract from the research process.



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# Reflective papers

**Michael Mandiberg**  
Associate Professor  
College of Staten Island/CUNY

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Course name

History of Design and Digital Media

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Course level

2nd and 3rd year undergraduates

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Learning objectives

Writing Skills Development ★★★★★

Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★

Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★★★★

Collaboration ★

Online Communication Skills ★★★

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Discipline of course

Media Studies/Art History

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Class size

22

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Individual or group assignment

Individual

## Grading

I asked my students to write a short (2–5 page) reflective essay on their experiences using Wikipedia. The reflective paper was graded based on the thoroughness and depth with which they reflected on their experience, but the paper was also used as a lens to evaluate their final project.

Their final project was to add 1,200 to 2,000 words to a stub article related to the course. They were expected to create an infobox, add images, and add at least 20 relevant and authoritative citations. While I was able to use the article history to evaluate the objective quality of each student's contributions, it was very useful to see the shifts in subjective self-awareness and perception that is a large part of why I had my students write on Wikipedia. I was able to confirm from the student's own voice the transformations I had witnessed (or believed I had witnessed) via the text they added: it empowered them, it transformed their research skills, it was rewarding for them to do something that was for the greater good, and most importantly, it made their writing better and kept them academically honest.



(CC BY-SA 3.0) by Victor Grigas

# Five criteria

**Rochelle Davis**  
Assistant Professor of Anthropology  
Georgetown University

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Course name

Introduction to the Study of the Arab World  
Theorizing Culture and Politics

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Course level

M.A. and 2nd/3rd year undergraduates

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Learning objectives

Writing Skills Development ★★★★★

Media and Information Literacy ★★

Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★★★★

Collaboration ★

Online Communication Skills ★★★

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Discipline of course

Multidisciplinary

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Class size

20

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Individual or group assignment

Individual

## Grading

Students chose a topic for the semester, researched it, contributed an entry to Wikipedia, and then wrote a research paper on the same subject.

They also wrote five blog entries about their experiences over the course of the term.

I graded the assignment based on five criteria:

1. Vision for the entry content: Did you divide up the material in a way that reflects both the literature and neutral point of view? Did you use appropriate headings?
2. Your research in thinking-beyond-Google to find relevant and diverse sources.
3. Your organization of the entry and the content: Did you organize the material or are there things in one section that belong elsewhere? Did you provide relevant material? Are there things missing?
4. Your writing of a well-supported, well-researched entry: Neutral point of view? Sources/footnotes? Grammatically correct? Paragraphs well-constructed?
5. How you address the comments you were given by me and others.



(CC-0) by Justin Secor

# Peer reviews

**Shamira Gelbman**  
Assistant Professor  
Illinois State University

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Course name  
U.S. Political Parties

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Course level  
Advanced undergraduates

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Learning objectives  
Writing Skills Development ★★★★★  
Media and Information Literacy ★★★★★  
Critical Thinking and Research Skills ★★★★★  
Collaboration ★★★  
Online Communication Skills ★★★

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Discipline of course  
Political Science

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Class size  
70

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Individual or group assignment  
Individual

## Grading

**As part of a larger project that involved both Wikipedia and other components, students were required to evaluate and improve existing Wikipedia articles about state-level political party organizations in the United States.**

The students' improvements to their assigned state-party articles were evaluated twice: a month into their work, and again at the end of the semester. The first involved three kinds of evaluation: Each student self-evaluated his or her own progress; each student was assigned to peer-review one other classmate's work; and I provided an evaluation and suggestions for further improvement for each student based on his or her self-evaluations, peer-review report, and his or her article itself. The peer review component was guided; that is, students received forms with pointed, open-ended questions to help structure their assessment of classmates' work.

I've found that self-evaluation and peer-review made assessment more meaningful; they became active participants in the process rather than passive recipients of a grade. Peer review had the added benefit of facilitating students learning from each other — both in terms of the content and the quality of their work.



(CC BY-SA 3.0) by Cheryl Ball

## Ready to teach with Wikipedia?

The Wiki Education Foundation supports instructors in the United States and Canada who are interested in assigning their students to contribute content to Wikimedia projects as part of their coursework. We'll ensure your assignment design will work with Wikipedia, help you get set up with a course page, and find support for your students as they edit Wikipedia for the first time.

For more information, visit [wikiedu.org](http://wikiedu.org) or email us at [contact@wikiedu.org](mailto:contact@wikiedu.org)



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