



IMPROVING  
KNOWLEDGE EQUITY

*with the Wikipedia Assignment*

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Introduction

This curriculum guide is designed to help post secondary instructors in Wiki Education’s Wikipedia Student Program foster a deeper understanding of the idea of knowledge equity within their classrooms. It also offers strategies for engaging students in efforts to enhance knowledge equity by improving the English Wikipedia, one of the world’s largest and most visited platforms for shared knowledge.

Editing Wikipedia gives students a powerful opportunity to engage with what it means to be a producer of knowledge, not just a consumer. As your students work through their Wikipedia assignments, use the opportunity to collectively explore the bigger picture behind their edits by challenging them to consider the historical context of knowledge production and its implications. Who has the opportunity to create knowledge? Has this changed over time? Historically, participation in knowledge production has been reserved for a small, privileged group — those with access to formal education, wealth, and societal power. This imbalance has been reflected in traditional academic and publishing systems, where historically underrepresented groups have been overlooked, misrepresented, or excluded from authorship.

Wikipedia has increased access to participation in knowledge production, but its gaps — including underrepresentation of certain communities, topics, and perspectives — often mirror real-world inequities. This guide provides a collection of resources and strategies to engage your students in critical examinations of these imbalances. We encourage you to help them consider the ethical and practical implications of unequal access to knowledge and its creation, and their own role in knowledge equity through their work on Wikipedia and beyond.

Please note that this guide is meant to be a supplement to your instructor orientation, student training modules, and other curricular resources provided to you by Wiki Education, and is not intended as a substitute for those materials.

## Framing Knowledge Equity

Knowledge equity refers to the systematic imbalances in the ways knowledge and information have been historically produced, shared, and accessed. It's a complex idea whose definition is context dependent. At its core, however, it's an ideological lens as well as a social movement and call to action. It brings to the fore that knowledge by, about, and for historically excluded communities has been and continues to be greatly circumscribed, and that these inequities have both produced and reinforced this exclusion.

While knowledge equity is a concept unto itself, it's closely bound to a host of systems and structures. It's impossible to speak about knowledge equity without discussing inequities in gender, race, education, technology, health, economic opportunity, and environmental conditions. As a result, tackling knowledge equity cannot happen in a vacuum. It will not be addressed by simply publishing previously excluded information and sharing that information widely. It requires the wholesale restructuring of how knowledge is inscribed and disseminated.

### **Knowledge Equity and Wikipedia:**

The following will focus exclusively on the English Wikipedia, as that's where Wiki Education's programs focus, but knowledge equity is important across all language Wikipedias. Wikipedia is simultaneously revolutionary and traditional. Its founders sought to create a space where anyone could share knowledge and where anyone could freely and openly access that knowledge. The site strove to disentangle knowledge from corporate structures and profit margins, and its ambitions were nothing short of representing the sum of human knowledge. It embodied the best ideals of the early internet, and in many ways, still does. While its approach was novel, Wikipedia is deeply rooted in Western encyclopedic traditions. It would not be unfamiliar to the Enlightenment thinkers who also sought to collect knowledge into vast tomes. As an encyclopedia, Wikipedia is a repository for knowledge, and as such, is intertwined with the same systems that have historically excluded certain knowledge from wide scale production and consumption.

Knowledge equity as it relates to Wikipedia can be broken down into three main components:

1. Who is creating knowledge on Wikipedia?
2. What content is being created?
3. Who has access to this content?

### **Diverse content requires diverse perspectives:**

Wikipedia content is generated by a volunteer community. On the English Wikipedia, the composition of this community is relatively homogeneous and is far from representative of the population at large. Only 20% of editors globally identify as a gender other than male, and in the United States, 80.3% of editors identify as white. The inequities in the composition of the editing community are closely bound to inequities in content. While Wikipedia is the encyclopedia that anyone can edit, a limited segment of the population has the time and access to technology and information required to make regular contributions. Contributing to Wikipedia is a labor of love, and many communities do not have the ability to offer up their labor and time to contribute their knowledge.

The unrepresentative nature of Wikipedia's editing community is one important facet of Wikipedia's knowledge equity gaps. All Wikipedia editors start from their own experiences and knowledge base, and as such, a relatively homogenous editing population will inherently exclude a range of perspectives. Your students, just by participating in this Wikipedia endeavor, will leave an important mark on the editing community. Whether they add content related to a knowledge equity field or not, they will bring a previously unrepresented perspective to Wikipedia.

### **Knowledge equity and its dis“contents”:**

While no one owns a Wikipedia article, the link between contribution and contributor is profound (as described above). The lack of diversity among Wikipedia editors is a fundamental driving factor in the prevalence of knowledge equity gaps, but it's one factor among many. Knowledge equity gaps often persist not because the community is less interested in crafting this content, but because the sources Wikipedia deems reliable simply do not exist. In order to protect and ensure the encyclopedia's integrity and accuracy, the community has developed robust sourcing requirements. Written secondary publications from vetted publishers are considered the best defense against the encroachment of misinformation. It's often the case that information about historically excluded topics can be found in sources that Wikipedia considers unreliable, such as oral traditions, blogs, and even social media. Wikipedia content is only as good as its sources, and there are simply fewer acceptable sources available in order to fill in knowledge equity gaps.

Knowledge equity work must be an intentional endeavor. It will take a systematic overhaul of how knowledge is produced and what knowledge is considered valuable in order to truly tackle Wikipedia's knowledge equity gaps. Despite these limiting factors, you and your students can begin to unravel and remake the systems that have historically undervalued and excluded certain types of information. You, as the subject-matter expert, can play a critical role in helping your students to identify acceptable sources that may be otherwise difficult to access.

## If you build it, they will come?

Wikipedia content is open and free, but this does not mean that all populations have equal access. The digital divide is profound, and we needn't look beyond the borders of the U.S. to see its effects. Rural communities, as well as urban centers, are still without access to broadband internet. Whole populations have limited access to the technologies that would enable them to access Wikipedia content. Disparities in education means that many communities are without the proper training to both access and sift through the information Wikipedia has to offer. While Wikipedia is ostensibly at everyone's fingertips, it remains a world away for many potential users.

In engaging directly with Wikipedia, your students will begin to understand the value of looking beyond the snippets of information presented to them in search results or brief videos. They'll begin to question the sources of information with which they regularly engage and begin to grasp that just because you can produce and share information with relative ease, does not mean that all knowledge is created equally. In contributing to Wikipedia, your students will learn that they, too, have a real stake in how knowledge is produced, consumed, and shared.

## Considerations

### Be flexible

Both you and your students are most likely completely new to editing Wikipedia. You're entering a community with established policies and norms, and it simply takes time to grow accustomed to Wikipedia's internal workings. Tackling Wikipedia's knowledge equity gaps has its own set of challenges. As you figure out what works best for your class, it's ok to revise your assignment as you move through the project. Figuring out the right pace, for example, can take time. You might discover that your students need more time for one aspect of the project and less for another. This is why you're able to adjust the timeline for your project at any point in the term.

### Set expectations

Early on in the course, it's important to discuss Wikipedia's challenges around knowledge equity with your students. Finding acceptable sources to write about these subjects can be difficult, and the content your students add may be contested or removed. Having content reverted can be disappointing. Students may be tempted to simply repost the content or engage in unproductive conversations with editors. If student work is removed, the student should work with the editor who reverted their content to address any concerns. They can also reach out to Wiki Education for support if they are unclear about what to do. This is why it's critical to discuss these potential outcomes in advance. Remind them that even small contributions can have an outsized impact.

## Start small, start early

Because so many knowledge equity topics need coverage on Wikipedia, you might assume that it will be easy to identify a topic to work on and to find relevant and reliable sources. But because the field is so wide open, students may feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of content from which they can choose. Being able to identify knowledge equity gaps is a skill, and it can take students time to learn how to spot these gaps. Finally, appropriate sources for these subjects are often hard to locate, and in some cases, may not exist. It's never too early to start the research process! This is especially true for topics related to knowledge equity.

## Preparing a list of articles vs. allowing your students to choose their articles

When you create your Wikipedia assignment, you'll choose whether you'll provide your students with a list of articles to choose from or let them choose an article on their own. Because working in knowledge equity fields can be more challenging, providing your students with a pre-selected list can remove some of the barriers they might encounter, such as difficulty finding sources or identifying gaps in coverage. On the other hand, allowing your students to choose their own articles gives them the chance to select topics that are personally meaningful to them. Maybe they belong to a particular community that is poorly covered on Wikipedia, and writing about this community will bring them a deep sense of pride and satisfaction. Both approaches have their merits, and you'll decide what works best for you and your students.

## New articles vs. existing articles

Creating a new article on Wikipedia is neither “better” nor “worse” than contributing to an existing article. While there are many topics — especially in knowledge equity fields — that need new entries, there are far more existing articles that need development. The act of creating a new article brings the added complexity of meeting Wikipedia's notability requirements. For a topic to have an article on Wikipedia, it must be substantially covered in several reliable sources, independent of the subject. This can make it especially difficult when creating new entries for peoples and subjects that have been historically marginalized. When adding to existing articles, students don't need to prove the subject's notability. Both are valuable endeavors and have their challenges and rewards.

## Complete activities and tutorials with your students

At its core, contributing to Wikipedia is a collaborative effort. Nothing embodies this more than when you, the instructor, join your students in the Wikipedia project. Not only will it equip you to help your students better, but it will also foster a spirit of mentorship and collegiality in your classroom. It will reinforce the critical nature of this knowledge equity work for your students.



## Never grade on what sticks

Grade your students on their effort, their research, and their writing – all that lies at the heart of this project. Work is modified, rewritten, and even reverted all the time on Wikipedia; it's simply how the site works as a collaborative project. Students working on knowledge equity topics may find their work contested or more highly scrutinized by other Wikipedia editors. But there's no need to panic! Once saved, work is never lost, and through collaboration, students may work to modify their contributions. Remind your students that you'll always be able to see what they did, whether it stays published on Wikipedia or not, and that their work will never be graded on whether it remains live.

## Work with a librarian

Research is at the core of the Wikipedia assignment. Many students really struggle with this piece of the project, as they're often unfamiliar with their institution's library system and were never taught to go beyond the first page of search results. Finding sources for knowledge equity topics may be more challenging, and a librarian can help point your students in the right direction. Librarians can introduce students to databases they may be unaware of or direct them to specialized collections relevant to their research. When it comes to tackling knowledge equity on Wikipedia, knowing how to dig just a little deeper can make all the difference.

## Suggested Activities

### Discuss knowledge equity

In this activity, students will work in pairs or small groups to explore the concept of knowledge equity. Their task is to develop a shared understanding of knowledge equity. To help facilitate their discussion, you may want to prompt them to discuss what it means to them as individuals, how it might show up in different areas of life, and why it matters. Ask them to think about how knowledge equity relates to the work they'll be doing on Wikipedia so they can better frame their work. Once they've reached a consensus and written it down, they can share their definition with the class. Challenge them to come up with their definition for knowledge equity in less than 15 minutes.



## Mock debate – Is this topic notable?

This activity will help students understand Wikipedia’s notability policies, the practical challenges of creating and maintaining articles, and the philosophical implications of who and what is considered “notable.” By engaging in a mock debate, students will critically examine the concept of notability and learn how Wikipedia’s guidelines shape the representation of people, topics, and events.

### INSTRUCTIONS

#### Choose a topic or figure

The instructor will select a person (or topic) relevant to the course who does not yet have a Wikipedia article. This person or topic should be underrepresented or marginalized in some way.

#### Divide the class into teams

- *Team Pro-Notability:* Argues that the person/topic is notable enough to deserve a Wikipedia article.
- *Team Con-Notability:* Argues that the person/topic should not have a Wikipedia article.

#### Research and Preparation

Give both teams time to research the selected figure/topic and refresh themselves on the guidelines for Wikipedia’s notability criteria.

#### First, ask them to review these training slides:

- [What’s a good source?](#) A brief overview of what kinds of sources are suitable for Wikipedia. (Training Library > Evaluating articles and sources, Page 10 of 23)
- [Verifiability, Notability, No original research, Copyright and plagiarism:](#) A deeper exploration of source verifiability, reliability, and notability, and topic relevance and coverage. (Training Library > Wikipedia policies, Pages 11-19)

#### Then, encourage them to consider:

*Practical concerns:* What challenges might arise in creating a Wikipedia article for this person or topic? How does Wikipedia’s community handle topics that are not widely covered in mainstream sources?

*Philosophical issues:* Who decides what is “notable,” and why might certain groups, ideas, or people be underrepresented in Wikipedia?

#### Post-debate discussion

Following the debate, consider a class discussion prompted by the following questions:

- What ethical or philosophical challenges did they encounter while debating?
- Did Wikipedia’s notability guidelines pose challenges for developing an argument?
- Do the notability guidelines adequately reflect the importance of all people or topics, or are there biases built into the system?

## Evaluate a Wikipedia article as a class

For this classroom activity, the instructor will select a Wikipedia article related to their course topic that has a knowledge equity gap – meaning it may lack diverse perspectives, under-represent or misrepresent certain groups, or have incomplete coverage. Examine the article together as a class to identify areas where knowledge equity can be improved. Encourage your students to look for biased language, missing information, and gaps in representation, while considering how Wikipedia's notability guidelines and editorial practices impact who gets included. This collaborative evaluation will help students learn to identify gaps in articles and think through the challenges and strategies involved in improving knowledge equity on Wikipedia.

To prepare for this activity, ask students to review Wikipedia's [source guidelines](#).

## How to find and identify knowledge gaps

In this small group activity, give students a broad subject related to your course topic, then ask them to identify knowledge equity gaps in its coverage on Wikipedia. Encourage each group to consider factors such as overall content, the weight given to certain subtopics within the topic (or even to sections within an individual article), the authors of the sources cited, and the related available images. They will look for underrepresented voices, biases in language, and areas where diverse perspectives are missing or overlooked. After their discussion, each group will present their findings to the class and their main takeaways from the exercise.

To prepare for this activity, ask students to review [Words to watch](#), a text which explores examples of biased language, expressions that lack precision, and other words and phrases that should not be used when writing for Wikipedia.

## Practice neutral writing

In this activity, the instructor will share with students the (fictional) paragraph below as an example of biased, non-neutral writing. Students will work individually or in pairs to rewrite the paragraph, focusing on removing bias and ensuring a balanced, objective tone. Students will practice identifying subjective language, loaded terms, and unsubstantiated claims, while learning how to present information by writing simply and clearly without an underlying argument. This exercise helps students develop skills in neutral, fact-based writing, which is essential for creating high-quality, unbiased content on Wikipedia.

*To ensure that the text is revised without use of an AI tool, we highly recommend asking students to put away any phones or computers and instead use paper and pencil for this exercise.*



*Dr. Tonya Jones is nothing short of an archeological rockstar. After earning her reputation while studying for her PhD at Cambridge, she went on to lead over 30 international expeditions across four continents. Her most legendary feat – unearthing the Atlantean Codex in a submerged limestone cavern off the coast of Santorini – sparked UNESCO summits and three bestselling books, including “Atlantis Decoded: Secrets Beneath the Waves.” Jones also pioneered the Jones Stratigraphy Index in 2021, a revolutionary dating system now used by top archaeologists to reclassify entire eras of prehistory. The world was once again floored by her in 2024, when her team revealed the existence of a transcontinental trade route between pre-Incan South America and Bronze Age Greece, based on ceramic isotopic mapping, a field she practically invented. With appearances on over a dozen documentary specials and a knighthood by King Charles III of England for “Services to Human History,” Jones isn’t just digging in the dirt – she’s digging up destiny.*

Note: Remind students that each fact in the rewritten paragraph will need a (fictional) citation, just like in a real Wikipedia article. To minimize the time needed for this activity, you can simply ask them to add [1], [2], etc. where a citation is needed, instead of also writing out the fictional sources.

In addition to the suggested activities above, we encourage you to bring other discussion prompts into your classroom – [this module](#) includes additional questions to consider.

## Recommended Readings

### Getting Started

- (Specifically for students) McDaniel, W. C. (2008). [How to read for history](#). Introduces students to effective strategies for reading and understanding academic scholarship; focuses on secondary historical texts.
- Ramjohn, I. (2022). [Decolonizing Wikipedia](#). In C. J. Ivory & A. Pashia (Eds.), *Using open educational resources to promote social justice* (pp. 249–262). American Library Association.
- Reagle, J., & Koerner, J. (2020). [Wikipedia @ 20: Stories of an incomplete revolution](#). The MIT Press.

### Wikipedia @ 20 chapter recommendations:

- Chapter 7: Three Links: Be Bold, Assume Good Faith, and There Are No Firm Rules (Rebecca Thorndike-Breeze, Cecelia A. Musselman, and Amy Carleton)
- Chapter 14 (Alexandria Lockett)
- Chapter 19: Possible Enlightenments: Wikipedia’s Encyclopedic Promise and Epistemological Failure (Matt Vetter)
- Chapter 21: Wikipedia Has a Bias Problem (Jackie Koerner)
- Explore Wiki Education’s [brief overview](#) of *Wikipedia @ 20*

## Teaching with Wikipedia

- Shetty, M., & Choi, H. (2023). [Perspectives on teaching with Wikipedia in writing courses before and during the pandemic](#). *Computers and Composition*, Spring 2023 Special Issue: Blurred Boundaries: Post-pandemic perspectives of digital writing pedagogies.
- McDowell, Z. J., & Vetter, M. A. (2022). [Wikipedia as open educational practice: Experiential learning, critical information literacy, and social justice](#). *Social Media + Society*, 8(1).
- Sneegas, G. (2024). [Incorporating a project diary into my Wikipedia assignment](#). *Wiki Education blog*.

## The Impact of Wikipedia

- Thompson, N., & Hanley, D. (2018). [Science is shaped by Wikipedia: Evidence from a randomized control trial](#) (MIT Sloan Research Paper No. 5238-17).
- Thompson, N., Flanagan, B., Richardson, E., McKenzie, B., & Luo, X. (2022). [Trial by internet: A randomized field experiment on Wikipedia's influence on judges' legal reasoning](#). Forthcoming in K. Tobia (Ed.), *Cambridge handbook of experimental jurisprudence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Reagle, J. (2020). 1 [The Many \(Reported\) Deaths of Wikipedia](#). *Wikipedia @ 20*.

## Representation & Knowledge Equity

- Perkins, T., Hussein, S., Trent, M., & Davis, L. (2024). [Wikipedia and the outsider within: Black feminism and social inequality in knowledge sharing](#). *Civic Sociology*, 5(1).  
*If you share this with your students, please note that students are no longer prompted to post on talk pages before making edits, so they are not encountering the level of gatekeeping described in the article.*
- Grabowski, J., & Klein, S. (2023). [Wikipedia's intentional distortion of the history of the Holocaust](#). *The Journal of Holocaust Research*.
- Mandiberg, M. (2023). [Wikipedia's race and ethnicity gap and the unverifiability of whiteness](#). *Social Text*, 41, 21–46. (Also see his “Print Wikipedia” art project: <https://www.mandiberg.com/print-wikipedia/>)
- Simons, A., Kircheis, W., Schmidt, M., Potthast, M., & Stein, B. (2024). [Who are the “Heroes of CRISPR”? Public science communication on Wikipedia and the challenge of micro-notability](#). *Public Understanding of Science*, 33(7), 918-934.
- Cravens, R. G. (2021). [Using Wikipedia to teach queer politics](#). *Feminist Pedagogy*, 1(1), Article 4.
- Lugosi, N., et al. (2022). [Theorizing and implementing meaningful Indigenization: Wikipedia as an opportunity for course-based digital advocacy](#). *Critical Studies in Education*.

# Resources

## Related curricular resources

- Student training module: [Improving representation on Wikipedia](#)
- Discussion: [What's a content gap?](#)

## Sample grading rubric

- [Wikipedia Assignment Assessment](#)

## Related Wikipedia initiatives

- [Women in Red](#)
- [Black Lunch Table](#)
- [Art + Feminism](#)
- [AfroCrowd](#)

## Subject-specific handouts for students

- [Biographies](#)
- [Cultural anthropology](#)
- [History](#)
- [LGBTQ+ studies](#)
- [Women's studies](#)
- Explore [all subject-specific handouts](#)

