Digital Content Creation and Curation: Composing in Wikipedia
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Overview
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Context
In spite of Wikipedia’s pervasive presence in our world, many teachers, librarians, and students continue to view Wikipedia as a substandard, unreliable medium for communicating and finding content. However, its significance as a widely-used knowledge platform makes it a valuable object of study as well as a platform for teaching students how information is created and curated for wider publics. Every year Wikipedia editors add new projects, effectively directing new areas of research; content in new languages, expanding the reach of information to different populations; and new topics, shaping what information is valuable to the public. In an effort to address the lack of critical thinking about Wikipedia and as part of a larger conversation about academic research processes, information access, and digital rhetoric, my composition students completed a Wikipedia composition project in partnership with the Wikipedia Education Foundation.

Project
This project took place in two sections of UW1020 in the Spring semester of 2018. The students were all first-year composition students. We partnered with the Wikipedia Education Foundation who provided each section with a dashboard from which students completed training modules and tracked a variety of milestones leading up to publishing their contributions to the mainspace of Wikipedia over the course of 6 weeks.

Scaffolding: locating content gaps, analyzing the conventions of featured articles, finding appropriate images/videos, understanding how design and content indicate bias, and parsing Wikipedia’s standards for composition and research.

Assignment Parameters: Students were grouped based on their selection from a list of C-class articles. Students conducted substantial research, completed an Annotated Bibliography, paraphrased the research, formatted it for Wikipedia, participated in peer, instructor, and Wikipedia-expert review, and presented their work at the project’s conclusion.

Presentation Guidelines: students had to describe their research process, composition choices, their peer review experience, and their final thoughts on Wikipedia as a knowledge platform.

Results
Through this project, students learn how to locate content gaps, to navigate complex research standards, to conform to the very specific Wikipedia style guides, and to critically evaluate what information and how information is included in what is perhaps the most widely used information platform in the world today.

Student Responses
I wish we had spent even more time on paraphrasing and peer review. I take Wikipedia more seriously now. This was the most research I have ever done.

Wikipedia editor feedback was not helpful. Content was inexplicably deleted from the mainspace. An article was locked because of copyright violation.

Challenges
Visit Wikipedia’s WikiProjects Directory to see what projects are in the works and how you and your students can help or design a project from scratch. I can help you brainstorm!

Project Ideas

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