A word from the wise: tips from experienced instructors

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Running a Wikipedia assignment for the first time can be exciting, but it can also be a bit overwhelming. To help ease some of those first-time jitters, here are some tips directly from veteran instructors.

Be flexible

As one instructor put it, "It will be chaotic, there will be confusion. Embrace that and let the students know about this." Though your students will likely be highly familiar with Wikipedia as regular consumers, the vast majority have never contributed to the site or even realized they could do so. The same is likely true of yourself as an instructor as well. You'll be learning together, and that's part of the fun and excitement of the Wikipedia assignment. What you thought would work in theory, may not pan out in practice. Don't be afraid to switch gears and alter the assignment after the fact. Like Wikipedia itself, the Wikipedia assignment is a work in progress. Remember, neither you nor your students can break Wikipedia, and Wiki Education is always here to help.

Devote regularly scheduled time to discuss the project

We know that the time constraints of the term are foremost in the minds of our instructors as they decide to adopt the Wikipedia assignment for the first time. It's difficult to cover an entire subject area in just 14 weeks or so, but devoting some regularly scheduled time to discuss the Wikipedia assignment with your students can truly make a difference. Whether it's once a week or once a month, carving out time to review the project, field student questions, and simply gauge their progress is a valuable investment of your energies. It will help students keep on track, remain motivated, and provide them with reassurance as they embark into the unfamiliar territory of Wikipedia editing. It will also give you a chance to assess the project from a pedagogical standpoint and make any necessary changes as the specific needs of your students become clear.

Align the project with your course content

Because of its novelty, the Wikipedia assignment can often seem like something entirely external to your course. In learning how to contribute to Wikipedia, along with its many intricate policies and technical demands, students may lose site of the goals of the project. They may begin to focus more on the mechanics of contributing to Wikipedia rather than doing a deep dive into a particular subject. This is why its important to connect the

Wikipedia assignment to your course content. Discussing Wikipedia's coverage of your field, where it excels and where it is in need of improvement, will provide students with valuable context for why they are doing this assignment. It may also lead to interesting discussions of how content gaps arise on Wikipedia and the invaluable role your students can play in remedying those content gaps.

Review the Dashboard

Students grow accustomed to the particular Learning Management System of their academic institutions and may find it daunting to use an additional site. The Dashboard is where students will find all of the tools they need to complete their Wikipedia assignment, so it's critical that they become familiar with it. Having them sign up early and reviewing what the Dashboard has to offer will help them understand why they have to switch between two different sites for your course.

Emphasize the training exercises

Wiki Education has developed a suite of training modules to walk your students through every aspect of the Wikipedia assignment – from creating an account to moving their work into the live article space. You'll find these modules dotted throughout your course page **Timeline** and under the **Resources** tab. Ensure students take the modules by making them a small percentage of their overall Wikipedia grade, and remember, you can use the Dashboard to see which modules they've completed and when.

Start small and early

Learning to contribute to Wikipedia does take time, and it can seem daunting. That's why we've set the assignment up as a series of smaller scaffolded assignments. Students gradually build up their confidence as they make small edits, learn about Wikipedia's sourcing requirements, and become familiar with the editing community. The Wikipedia assignment doesn't lend itself to leaving everything to the last minute, something that will likely be a departure for many students.

Set expectations

Because the Wikipedia assignment differs in so many ways from the traditional writing assignment, it's important to set expectations early on. This means figuring out what you'd like your students to get out of the project, and how you'll assess their work. Some points to consider as you develop your expectations include the difficulty in setting minimum standards, getting students accustomed to the idea that their work on Wikipedia is not truly their own and may be changed or reverted, and the anxieties students may face over writing for a public audience. As one instructor remarked, "Prepare your students for the

fact that it will feel daunting since they know so little about the process (and so do you). But, eventually the students did feel empowered." Remember, the Wikipedia assignment is much more about the process then the end result.

Work through some of the activities

While the vast majority of instructors in our program are not experienced Wikipedia editors and do not strive to be so, it is very helpful to have a firm understanding of the assignment – the various exercises and training modules that your students will be asked to undertake. This will not only help you to provide them with support, but it will enable you to more fluidly incorporate the project into your course. Remember, we don't expect you as the instructor to be a Wikipedia Expert; that's what we're here for, but learning alongside your students contributes to the energy of the Wikipedia project.

Work with a librarian

A common refrain of our instructors is that the Wikipedia assignment compelled their students to walk into their institution's library for the first time. Sourcing and media literacy are at the heart of the Wikipedia assignment and involving a librarian may ease the road for many of your students. Setting up one or two sessions in which your students have the chance to learn about their institution's offerings and how to navigate them will get them on the right track as well as helping them in future courses. It's also a way for you to make collegial connections and emphasize the value of this project to your institution.

Have fun!

Just as there is no single path to improving a Wikipedia contribution, there are a multitude of ways to run the Wikipedia assignment and make it work for your individual course. In the words of one of our instructors, "Have fun with it and trust the community to support you. Also, trust that your students will be successful (as long as you use the Wikipedia tutorials and contextualize the project) and enjoy it, while simultaneously being challenged by it. I have found that it seems scary to students, but that the reward at the end when they can say they have edited a Wikipedia article makes it all worth it for them and for me."

Good luck this term!