

TCS Wikipedia Project

Here we have collected advice on how to create or edit Wikipedia articles. This can be useful reading whether or not you are a first-time contributor. In the second half we offer advice on how to organize or lead a group effort towards editing articles.

Advice for inexperienced contributors

1. Start slow. Before creating new articles or making major edits, try making small edits to existing articles to familiarize yourself with the process. Track your changes over time to see if they stick.
2. Educate yourself on the process and standard practices. Start by reading https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_editing_for_research_scientists.
3. Pay particular attention to style and formatting. Wikipedia articles follow a strict format, and changes that do not conform are likely to be removed.
4. Use simple language wherever possible. Link terms to their own articles.
5. Regarding references and proofs. Wikipedia articles rely a lot more on references rather than proofs. Long parts of an article that are not supported by a reference may be disputed and removed. (For example, as of Aug'16, the article on Dynamic Programming has several such disputes on its validity.) On the other hand, proofs are less essential. As a general rule of thumb, include a proof only if it is short and conveys important information or intuition that cannot otherwise be conveyed.
6. Notability, COI guidelines, and writing about your own work. While you should try to be careful about conflicts of interest, sometimes writing about your own work is unavoidable, especially if you are one of the very few experts on a topic. In our view, this is acceptable. Wikipedia takes notability issues seriously. All content should be backed up by reliable sources -- journal publications, textbooks, survey articles in the context of scientific material. Citing more than one independent sources is best.

Further readings:

Tutorial on Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Tutorial>

Guidelines by CRA-W: <https://www.cs.duke.edu/csed/wikipedia/index.html>

Advice for organizing group editing efforts

1: as a class assignment

1. Wikipedia offers support for this kind of effort. Start by reading https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Student_assignments.
2. Create a course page and track all progress there.
3. Organize the assignment around a tightly-themed set of topics.
4. Encourage work in groups and oversight across groups: have each group read and offer suggestions on work of other groups.

2: as an edit-a-thon

If you are running a workshop on a new area, this can be a great team-building activity for an evening.

1. Here is a general how-to guide:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:How_to_run_an_edit-a-thon
2. Organize the event around a tightly-themed set of topics.
3. Find out about organizational support offered by the Simons Foundation
(<https://www.simonsfoundation.org/features/foundation-news/join-edit-a-thons-at-conferences-to-improve-wikipedia-science/>)