

A Quick Guide for Aspiring Wikipedia Editors

Timothy A. Gonsalves

Created: 5th April 2020

1 Preamble

Wikimedia.org is a collection of encyclopaedic websites. All of these are edited by the community. The best known is Wikipedia. Others are Wiki Commons (digital media), Wikiversity, Wikibooks, etc. The open nature of the editorial process is a reason for the remarkable growth of Wikipedia.

Anyone can become an editor and start to contribute. To maintain standards, Wikipedia has policies that govern the content and the editorial process. All edits are subject to review and open discussion. Edits may be accepted, reverted, deleted, modified. Repeated violations may see an editor being blocked. As an editor makes more and valuable contributions, her/his reputation increases and her/his edits will be trusted more.

While Wikipedia has guidelines and policies, none of them are rigidly cast in concrete. Editors are encouraged to be bold, without being reckless. Your bold edits should be done with good intentions and you should be open to polite discussion and changes based on the consensus.

2 Getting Started

Create a login for yourself using the **Create login** link at the top right of any Wiki page. Once you create a login for yourself, you can use this in any site in Wikimedia. To enter information about yourself, see Section 3.1.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Special:CreateAccount&returnto=Help%3AContents>

Now you can start editing. Follow the guidelines in Section 3. This will ensure that your edits do not get deleted or reverted, and your reputation grows steadily.

It is good to start with **Minor edits**. These are edits that improve the language, spelling, correct typos, etc without changing the content or meaning of the article. You can make an edit in any Wikipedia page that you happen to read. Simply login, then click on the **Edit** tab at the top of the page.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Editing#Minor_edits

For help on many aspects of Wiki editing, click on the **Help** link in the left-side panel.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Contents>

3 Editing an Article

This help page covers editing an existing article and creation of a new article:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Editing>

There are two editors. The default shows the wiki formatting code. This is more tedious to use though it gives you complete control over the appearance. *The Visual Editor is recommended for non-technical editors.* You can switch between the two editors while editing an article. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Editing#Edit_screen\(s\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Editing#Edit_screen(s))

Any edit that changes the meaning of an article is a **Major Edit**, even if it is only one word. Follow the guidelines for Major Edits.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Editing#Major_edits

After editing, review your changes before publishing them. If you are using the Visual Editor, click on **Publish**. In the dialog that pops up, click on **Review your changes** before clicking on **Publish**. If you are using the Source Editor, click **Show preview** to see what your changes look like when formatted.

Always enter a brief **Edit Summary** of your changes. This appears in the **History** and tells other editors and readers what you have done. Typical summaries: “Corrected typos”, “Improved the English”, “Added a reference”, “Added fields in a reference”, “Deleted a broken link”, “Added a new Section ...”, etc.

If satisfied, only then click **Publish!**



Fig. 1: Article Tab bar in Wikipedia

Every article has a row of tabs across the top of the page (Fig. 1).

Read: This tab is selected by default for reading the article.

Talk: This page is used to discuss the article. You may explain the reasons for a major edit. Or someone may question your edit, and you respond here. For many articles, the Talk page is empty (shown in red).

View history: Shows the edit history, most recent first. For every edit, the date/time, username of the editor, the number of characters changed, and the Description are shown. Note that any username ending in “Bot”, such as “InternetArchiveBot” is an automated tool that typically making formatting changes. By selecting two rows in the history, you can see the differences between them.

3.1 Editing Your User Page

A good place to start editing is your own user page. After you login, you will see your username at the left of the list of tools along the top of the page (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: User tools in Wiki

Click on your username. Follow the instructions to create the page and Publish it. It is good to give information that will establish your credentials, such as your professional affiliation and hobbies/interests. However, as this is a public page, be careful about giving personal information. Other useful user tools:

Preferences: Set your editing and other preferences. You can select between Source Editor and Visual Editor here.

Watchlist: Typically, when you edit a page you add it to your Watchlist so you are notified of changes to this page.

Contributions: List of all your edits, similar format to the History.

3.2 Sandbox: Playing Around and Working on Articles

While learning Wiki editing, and when making major changes to articles, you may like to experiment before committing changes to the public Wiki. Your sandbox is intended for these purposes. Your sandbox is a Wiki space that normally only you edit.

To use your Sandbox, click on the Sandbox icon in the toolbar (Fig. 2). You can now edit, review and publish it like any other Wiki page. You can create subpages in your Sandbox by entering a Wiki link to the desired subpage, such as [[User:xyz/sandbox/ArticleA]]. After you Publish, the subpage link appears in red. Click on this to create the subpage.

Your Sandbox is not a part of the Wikipedia encyclopedia (referred to as the *Main namespace*). It does not appear in Google or other search engines. However, it is visible to the general public, and other Wikipedia editors can modify it. So, do not keep anything personal in your Sandbox, and keep a copy in your local disk of anything that you wish to preserve.

4 Infobox

An Infobox contains important facts and statistics that are common to related articles. This makes it easier to quickly find such information and to compare it with that of other articles. Infobox templates are like fact sheets, or sidebars, in magazine articles. They quickly summarize important points in an easy-to-read format.

In general, data in infobox templates should be:

- **Comparable.** If a lot of different subjects all share a common attribute (for instance, all people have a name and a date of birth)
- **Concise.** Infobox templates are "at-a-glance", and used for quickly checking facts.
- **Materially relevant to the subject.**
- **Already cited elsewhere in the article.** Infoboxes should primarily contain material that is expanded on and supported by citations elsewhere in the article.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Infobox>

5 Biography of a Living Person (BLP)

Extract from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Biographies_of_living_persons:

Editors must take particular care when adding **information about living persons** to *any* [Wikipedia](#) page. Such material requires a high degree of sensitivity, and must adhere *strictly* to all applicable laws in the United States, to this policy, and to Wikipedia's three core content policies:

- [Neutral point of view](#) (NPOV)
- [Verifiability](#) (V)
- [No original research](#) (NOR)

Editing of a BLP by the person concerned or a close associate is strongly discouraged. However, it is not prohibited.

6 Details

Here we delve into details of some commonly done editing.

6.1 Citing References

Citing references is essential in every article. The verifiability of the article depends on the references. Most articles have 10s of references. It is not uncommon for an article to have 100s of references. Each reference has many fields, and these depend on the type of reference – book or URL or journal article, etc. Editing a reference with the source editor is tedious and it is easy to make mistakes because of the intricate syntax. Fortunately, editing references is easy with the Visual Editor.

Select the insert point and click on "Cite in the tool-

bar (see Fig 4). In the form, select the type of reference (auto/manual/reuse a ref. from the same article). Then, a detailed form appears (Fig 3). Enter data and click Insert.

Similarly, if you click on an existing citation, you can update the fields.

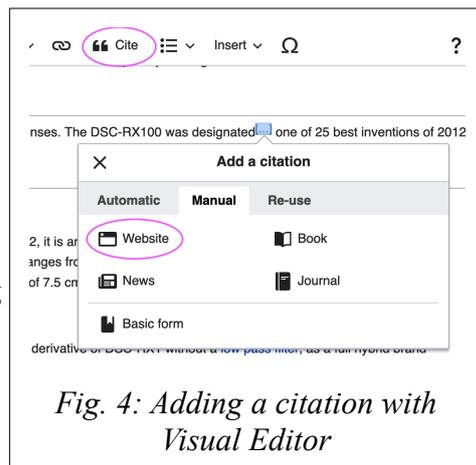


Fig. 4: Adding a citation with Visual Editor

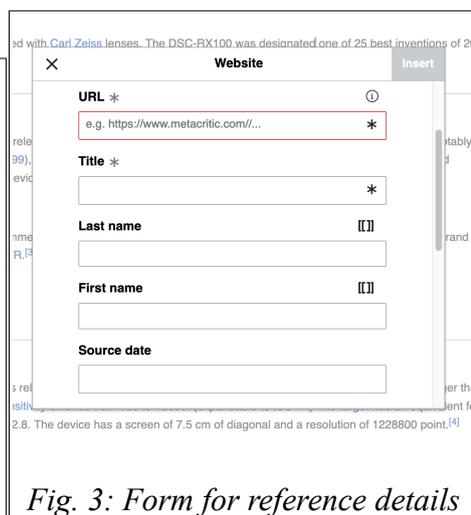


Fig. 3: Form for reference details