A Keystone Publication

Write Your First Wikipedia Article in Six Hours

You hover over Edit. You do not click.
Six lessons later, you publish.

Jake Orlowitz
Founder of WikiBlueprint

Made possible with a generous grant from The Harnisch Foundation.

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ADVANCING OPEN KNOWLEDGE

A Keystone Publication

Write Your First Wikipedia Article in Six Hours

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Write Your First Wikipedia Article in Six Hours

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About This Book

Why it exists, and how to use it.

This book began as a training course. Over several years it was taught to newcomers who wanted to add something to Wikipedia and did not know where to start, and it was refined each time a room of them got stuck in the same place. The six lessons are the ones that got people unstuck.

The title is a strategy. The six hours are the six lessons, roughly an hour each. The homework loop that closes each lesson adds thirty minutes, and a first article takes as long as its sources allow. Counted honestly, the course runs closer to ten hours. The promise still holds. Six lessons, taken in order, turn a person who hovers over Edit into an editor who can publish and keep going.

> **One idea runs through every page.** Wikipedia does not ask you to be believed. It asks you to be checked. Every lesson in this book teaches a way of pointing outward, to a published source, so that strangers can verify what you wrote.

The book is written for newcomers who care about accuracy and fairness and worry about doing it wrong. No technical skill is assumed. No expertise in a topic is required. Every term is explained where it first appears, and the glossary at the back collects them.

Read Part 1 once. Then take the levels in order, one sitting each, with the homework loop between them. Keep Part 3 and the reference pages for the day after you publish, which is when they start to matter.

The WikiBlueprint Team
Santa Cruz, California

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Part 1

Before You Begin

“You are about to learn something surprisingly intimate: how to enter a public space with care.”

Section 1

A Room You Can Enter

What Wikipedia is, why it works, and why your nerves are normal.

Read this when you have hovered over Edit and scrolled away.

AT A GLANCE

- Wikipedia is a living agreement among strangers, held together by a few simple rules.
- It does not claim to be perfect. It claims to be correctable.
- Curiosity, patience, and a willingness to let sources do the work are all you need.

You hover over Edit. You do not click. You scroll instead. You feel the strange pressure of being visible in a place that looks calm and is very much alive. You wonder whether someone will notice you, whether you will do it wrong, whether you should wait until you understand everything.

That reaction is normal, and this book treats it as normal. Wikipedia looks like a website. It is better understood as a living agreement. Millions of people who will never meet cooperate to produce a single reference work, with no central editor assigning topics, no publishing calendar, and no manager approving drafts. The system works anyway, imperfectly and remarkably, because Wikipedia built a few simple rules that make collaboration at that scale possible.

This book is a guided path into those rules. In six lessons you will learn to create a new article responsibly, with citations, and with the habits that make your work last. You will also learn how Wikipedia thinks, which is a different skill. Many people can learn the buttons. Fewer learn the method: how to make edits that other editors can trust, extend, and improve.

You do not need to be technical, expert in your topic, or fearless. You need curiosity, patience, and a willingness to let published sources do the heavy lifting. And one permission, right up front: a first successful Wikipedia day is often one citation, and the skill you are building is steadiness.

01 Why Wikipedia Exists

Wikipedia began with a simple moral intuition: access to knowledge should not depend on wealth, geography, or institutional affiliation. Before Wikipedia, reference information sat behind paywalls, in expensive encyclopedias, or beyond academic credentials. Even when it was available, it was scattered, uneven, and hard to verify.

Wikipedia's answer was radical and plain. Build a free encyclopedia that anyone can edit, then design a process that makes "anyone can edit" compatible with "people can trust what they read." That tension is the beating heart of the project. Openness without standards becomes noise. Standards without openness become gatekeeping. Wikipedia tries, imperfectly, to hold both.

It is a public good, one of the few large noncommercial projects on the internet that still feels like it belongs to everyone.

02 How Strangers Become Reliable

If you have wondered how something edited by strangers can be accurate, you are asking the right question. Wikipedia does not claim to be perfect. It claims to be correctable.

Crowdsourcing fails when it rewards speed, novelty, or charisma. It succeeds when it rewards transparency, evidence, and repair. Wikipedia's design pushes people toward the second set of incentives. Every article has a history. Every change can be compared. Every claim can be sourced. Every disagreement can be argued in public. The trust model asks you to trust the process, and the process asks you to check a citation.

That is why the training ahead is only partly about writing. Most of it is about evidence, proportion, and the calm discipline of pointing outward.

03 The Shift That Makes It Feel Easy

Most first-time editors struggle for the same reason. Wikipedia feels like a stage. You imagine invisible judges. You worry that a mistake will be permanent or humiliating. You fear stepping into a conversation where everyone else speaks a language you do not.

Public spaces activate self-consciousness, and the way through is structure. Each level in this course reduces a specific kind of fear by replacing it with a simple skill. You will learn how to enter the community, how to think in sources, how to test whether a topic belongs, how to draft with restraint, how to polish for credibility, and how to publish in a way that invites stewardship. Follow the steps and you will produce an article, and you will become the kind of editor other editors can work with.

04 Your Curiosity Is the Curriculum

A small secret of Wikipedia training is that motivation matters more than discipline. People keep editing because something caught their attention and they wanted to improve it. That is why this course begins with your interests.

You will build a watchlist of pages you care about and watch how they change. You will read the conversations behind the scenes and start to notice patterns in how editors talk, how sources are used, how wording is softened, and how claims become stable. Then you will choose a topic to write about because you found something worth clarifying, documenting, or bringing into the encyclopedia. Your curiosity will lead you to the work you are most likely to finish.

05 Ethics and Safety

Wikipedia needs careful people. If you care about accuracy, fairness, and evidence, you belong here. Wikipedia is also powerful. It ranks high in search results and shapes what people believe, so editing comes with responsibility. If you are here to promote yourself, your organization, your product, or your cause, you will meet friction quickly. Wikipedia is built to resist marketing and advocacy, even when the subject is worthy.

Wikipedia is also public, very public. Every page, including your own draft spaces, can be viewed by anyone on the internet. Be careful how much you disclose about yourself, so that editing stays enjoyable and you avoid problems that would take the joy out of it.

Before you begin. Take one minute and choose a gentle posture toward yourself. You are here to become effective, and Wikipedia rewards people who are patient, evidence-based, and clear. It is a long game built from small moves. Open Wikipedia. Click on an article you love. Find View history and notice that the page has a memory. Every sentence you read was shaped by someone who was once new too.

Keep this. Wikipedia is a room you can enter. Mistakes are reversible, and the process is what you trust.

Section 2

How the Six Lessons Work

The syllabus, the homework loop, and an honest clock.

Read this when you want to know what you are signing up for.

AT A GLANCE

- Six levels, each about an hour, each with an output you can point to.
- A thirty-minute homework loop closes every level.
- Six hours is the strategy. Ten is the honest total.

This course is a rapid immersion, and it is not a rush. Each level builds a specific competency and produces something you can point to. Each answers one question a new editor has, in the order the questions arrive.

Level	Theme	The question it answers
One	Belonging and signaling	How do I enter without panic?
Two	Verifiability, reliability, discretion	How do I speak without turning this into opinion?
Three	Notability and systemic bias	Should this topic have an article at all?
Four	Fact plus cite	How do I turn sources into Wikipedia prose?
Five	Structure and presentation	How do I make this feel like a real article?
Six	Publishing and discoverability	What happens after it goes live?

01 What Each Level Contains

Every level opens with a North Star, the one thing the hour is teaching, and four capacities you will have by the end. A syllabus lists what you do, what you read, and what a coach would say about the reading. The lesson follows in prose, built around micro-checks, which are single questions to ask yourself at each step, and traps, which are the predictable ways newcomers get stuck.

Each level closes with the homework loop: ten minutes of reading, ten minutes of returning to your own work, and ten minutes of reviewing what others have done. The loop is where the lesson turns into habit.

02 The Honest Clock

The six hours are the six lessons. Add the homework loops and the course runs about nine hours. Add the research and drafting an article needs, which depend on your topic, and a realistic first pass is ten hours or a little more. Nothing in the book is padded to fill that time. The clock is a promise about lessons, and the lessons deliver.

03 What You Need

A computer with a browser, since Wikipedia's editing tools work best on a full screen. An hour of uninterrupted time per level, and a place to write notes. A topic you are curious about, which you will choose in Level Three and may change. And the willingness to do small things well before doing large things at all.

> **Keep this.** Take the levels in order, one sitting each, with the homework loop between them.

Section 3

How Wikipedia Works

The parts of the site you will use, in plain language.

Read this when a word in the lessons is new to you.

AT A GLANCE

- Anyone can edit, and every edit is recorded.
- Every article has a Talk page, where changes are discussed.
- Policies, guidelines, and volunteers hold the whole thing together.

The lessons explain each term as it arrives. This section gathers the basics in one place, so you can return to it when a word in a later level is unfamiliar.

01 Articles, Edits, and History

An article is a page in the encyclopedia. Any reader can change most articles by clicking Edit. Each change is saved in the page history, with the time and the account that made it, and any earlier version can be restored in seconds. A diff is the comparison view that shows what one edit changed. You will learn to read diffs in Level One, and they will become your favorite tool.

02 Accounts and User Pages

You can edit without an account, and you should create one. An account gives you a username that appears in the history, a user page where you can say a little about yourself, a user talk page where others can leave you notes, a watchlist, and a sandbox for practice. All of these are public except the watchlist.

03 Talk Pages

Behind every article sits a Talk page, where editors discuss changes, sources, and disagreements. Behind every account sits a user talk page, which works like an inbox that lives on the site. Most decisions about an article are made on its Talk page, and most conversations between editors happen on user talk pages.

04 Sources and Citations

Wikipedia summarizes what published sources say. A citation is the footnote that points to a source. A reliable source is one with editorial oversight and a reputation for accuracy. An independent source is one with no connection to the subject. The four levels after this one are, in the end, about choosing and using sources well.

05 Policies, Guidelines, and Essays

Policies carry the strongest community consensus, such as verifiability and neutral point of view. Guidelines, such as the notability guidelines, set out accepted practice. Essays record advice and opinion without that standing. Each has a shortcut that begins with WP, such as WP:V for verifiability, which you can type into Wikipedia's search box to reach the page.

06 Who Decides

Volunteers decide everything. Experienced editors review new drafts at Articles for Creation. Patrollers check new articles. Administrators, elected by the community, can delete pages, protect them, and block accounts. Noticeboards gather editors to resolve questions about sources, conduct, and biographies. No one is paid to approve your work, and no one can be paid to.

07 Drafts and Sandboxes

Your sandbox is a practice page attached to your account, where nothing you do affects a live article. Draft space is where new articles wait for review. Both are public, and both are hidden from search engines, so no one will find your practice on Google.

> **Keep this.** Every edit is seen, recorded, and judged by volunteers who care about the rules. That is the safety of the place.

Part 2

The Six Levels

“Each level reduces one kind of fear by replacing it with one simple skill.”

Level One

Belonging and Signaling

How you arrive so the work feels safe and collaborative.

Read this when you are ready to make an account.

AT A GLANCE

- North Star: you are teaching your nervous system that Wikipedia is a room you can safely enter.
- By the end you can show up with an account that does not trigger suspicion, present yourself with a small human signal, navigate from a home base, and read a diff calmly.

DO

- Go to Wikipedia, any way you like, in any language.
- Register with a positive, anonymous username, an adjective plus a noun.
- Write a four-line user page.
- Leave a short note on your user talk page.
- Star twenty articles onto your watchlist.
- Read one diff, left to right, one line at a time.

Learn. Wikipedia: Simplified ruleset, as an overview.

From the coach. A short read. It needs no interrogation. Ask whether it basically made sense and whether anything surprised you.

We want to become part of the community, which takes more than editing pages. We need to show others we are here to help, so that they assume the best of us.

Wikipedia is a room you are entering, and no one is waiting to grade your first move. The project grows through small, steady contributions that improve over time. When you choose a username, draft a short user page, and watch a page evolve, your nervous system settles. You begin to experience the site as navigable.

01 Arrive on Purpose

The first time you open Wikipedia intending to contribute, you are walking into a living social system. The interface is only the surface. Underneath is the feeling of being visible, the fear of being corrected, and the suspicion that everyone else already knows the rules.

So before you learn Wikipedia, do something smaller and more powerful. Enter the room on purpose. Open the site in any way you like, in any language you like, and notice what happens in your body when you consider clicking Edit. If your mind starts narrating catastrophe, that is normal. It means you are treating visibility as danger. Your first practice is arrival.

Here is the sentence you will return to whenever you feel unsure: mistakes are reversible. Say it once now. You will use it again.

Your body reads the Edit button as exposure. It imagines sharp correction, something breaking, looking foolish in front of strangers. Even when you know that mistakes can be undone, your body may not believe it yet. Level One teaches your body that Wikipedia is survivable, through two moves. You create a few clear signals that help other editors interpret you correctly, and you learn one literacy skill that dissolves fear: reading a diff.

02 Register, and Choose Ease

A username is the name attached to your edits, the label other people see in the page history. Many newcomers choose something direct and honest: their real name, their organization, their project, their role. Then they are surprised to feel watched. Wikipedia is reacting to patterns it has seen thousands of times. Accounts that look official or promotional often arrive with agendas, even when the person behind them means well.

So choose ease. Pick a positive, anonymous username, an adjective plus a noun. StokedIguana will do. It reads like a person.

Micro-check. Does this sound like a human and not an organization?

Trap to watch for. The transparency trap. If your name starts sounding like a role, a brand, or an institution, you are buying scrutiny. Choose ease.

03 A Four-Line User Page

A user page is your small profile page on Wikipedia. It is neither a résumé nor social media. Think of it as a note that says a human is behind this account, and here is what the human is here to do. A blank user page makes you harder to interpret. A user page that reads like a manifesto, marketing copy, or a long biography creates distance. The middle path is small and human.

Draft it in four lines: a greeting, your broad interests, one fun detail, and your intention to edit constructively. Keep it short on purpose. You are reducing uncertainty.

A simple user page

Hi! I'm learning to contribute to Wikipedia.

I'm interested in local history, music, and ecology.

I love hiking and collecting odd facts.

I'm practicing small, constructive edits and learning Wikipedia's norms.

Micro-check. Could a stranger read this and assume good intent?

Bonus tip. Look at a few ordinary user pages to calibrate what normal looks like. You are learning the shape.

04 A Channel Where Messages Can Land

Every account has a user talk page. It works like an inbox that lives on the site. Other editors use it to leave questions, suggestions, corrections, thanks, warnings, and sometimes confusion. Newcomers fear talk pages because they imagine conflict and judgment. The truth is simpler. Talk pages are the project's communication system, and the aim is reachability.

If your user talk page does not exist yet, make it real with one short note: “This is my user talk page. Feel free to leave notes here.” That single move signals that you are reachable and not hiding.

Micro-check. Does this channel exist if someone needs to reach me?

> **Trap to watch for. Talk page dread.** If you imagine every message is an accusation, you will avoid the mailbox. Treat it like email. You can always pause before replying.

05 A Home Base

A watchlist is a private list of pages you choose to watch. Wikipedia shows you recent changes to those pages in one place. You add a page by clicking the star icon at the top of an article. Without a watchlist, Wikipedia is an ocean you can scroll forever. With one, it becomes a neighborhood.

Click the star on twenty articles that interest you, pages you would enjoy returning to: your city or region, books or films or music or sports, museums or parks or architecture, animals or plants or science. The watchlist is private. It is how you make Wikipedia navigable.

Micro-check. Would I enjoy returning to these pages?

06 The Diff

A diff, short for difference, is the comparison view that shows what changed between two versions of a page. It highlights text that was added and text that was removed. You do not need to understand everything about Wikipedia to read one. You need to look at a change and describe it plainly.

This is the hinge of your confidence. The diff reveals the truth of the project: Wikipedia is built from tiny moves. People fix typos. People add citations. People soften tone, rearrange structure, undo mistakes. People disagree sometimes, and even disagreement has recognizable patterns. The system expects revision, which means it expects imperfection, which means you can breathe.

Go to your watchlist, open a recent change, and click into a diff. Read left to right, one line at a time, and say one sentence in plain language: “This edit did ___.” You are learning to see what happened, and judging it can wait.

Micro-check. Can I describe the change without judging it?

> **Trap to watch for. Diff blur.** If the diff starts looking like code, reduce the task to one line. Describe only that.

At this point you have done something more important than learning the site. You have begun to feel that the site can be learned. Level One succeeds when you stop bracing, when Wikipedia feels less like a stage and more like a room, and when you can say, honestly, "I know how to be here. I am just getting started."

07 The Homework Loop

Read **10 minutes**

Open Wikipedia: Simplified ruleset and read it once, start to finish, without interrogating it. Read it a second time quickly, looking only for headings or phrases that feel like rules of the room. Notice one thing that surprises you and one thing that reassures you.

> **Trap to watch for. Stage fright.** If you start thinking "I am going to mess this up," return to the sentence. Mistakes are reversible.

Return **10 minutes**

Visit your user page and read it once as a stranger would. If anything feels too long, too personal, too official, or too persuasive, shorten it. Then star ten more pages you care about onto your watchlist.

Review **10 minutes**

Go to your watchlist and open five diffs from recent changes. For each, describe what changed in plain language, judge it quickly as good, bad, or more info needed, and if you chose more info needed, take ten seconds to click the username or the article history to see whether context clarifies it.

Keep this. You have an account that reads like a person, a page that says why you are here, a home base, and the skill to see what changed.

Level Two

Verifiability, Reliability, Discretion

Wikipedia's core move: claims that point to published sources.

Read this when you are ready to add your first citation.

AT A GLANCE

- North Star: you are learning to replace instinct with evidence and proportion.
- By the end you can explain verifiability in one sentence, tell a strong source from a weak one, make a correct citation in your sandbox, and use Talk, History, and Contributions to see how Wikipedia works in practice.

DO

- Read the Talk page of a watchlist article.
- Read its History and parse one line, then a diff.
- Make a dummy citation in your sandbox, any fact cited to cnn.com.
- Open Contributions and read a line of your own.
- Pick a topic on citationhunt.org and research one citation needed as best you can.

Learn. WikiBlueprint Core Policies Guide, key excerpts.

From the coach. This is the law. Read it line by line, like a lease. Due weight means we mirror the proportions in good sources and never impose a fifty-fifty view. Verifiability is about what a reader could check. Original research means your sources do the work, and you may not combine sources to make a new claim.

Sources are the essence of Wikipedia. In arguments, they are the ammunition. Using them wisely and strategically requires judgment.

When you add information, you are pointing to published work that already carries weight, and that shift changes everything. Instead of asking whether something is true, you ask whether a reliable source has stated it clearly. Discretion matters here. Every fact does not warrant equal space. Strong sources set the proportion. As you practice citing with care, you move away from instinct and begin building from evidence.

01 How You Speak Here

Level One taught you how to arrive. Level Two teaches you how to speak.

On Wikipedia you do not add what you know. You add what the world has already published, and you make that publication easy for anyone else to verify. This is the most counterintuitive shift for smart, capable people. In everyday life, credibility comes from lived experience, expertise, confidence, and reasoning. On Wikipedia, credibility comes from something plainer. You show your work by pointing outward.

Begin with a stance that keeps you steady when you feel annoyed, constrained, or tempted to argue. Here is the sentence you will return to: Wikipedia runs on sources. Say it once now. It will save you later.

Level Two often feels like a humility practice. You may read something and think, of course that is true. You may know it is true. Wikipedia still asks whether a reader can verify it without trusting you. That is Wikipedia protecting the one thing it can reliably offer: verifiable claims anchored in published work.

02 Three Words

Verifiability means a reader can check your claim against a published source. It does not mean the claim is true in the universe. It means the claim is supported by something readers can inspect.

Reliability is about which sources deserve that trust. A personal blog is verifiable in the sense that it exists, and it is rarely reliable. A reputable newspaper, an academic book, or a peer-reviewed paper carries more weight. A press release may be accurate, and it was written to persuade. Wikipedia prefers sources independent of the subject and written under editorial oversight.

Discretion separates Wikipedia writing from school writing. You will find facts that are true and sourced and still not worth including. You will find strong sources that mention something once, in passing, which is too little to make it a major point. Wikipedia cares about proportion. If strong sources treat an idea as minor, Wikipedia treats it as minor too.

03 The Terrain

A citation is the footnote that points to the source. A Talk page is the discussion page attached to most articles, where editors debate content and process. A page's History is the log of its edits. Your Contributions page is the public list of edits you have made. Your sandbox is your practice page, where you can draft without touching a live article. A citation needed tag is Wikipedia's way of saying a statement might be fine and needs a source.

04 Read Talk Like an Anthropologist

Pick an article from your watchlist and click Talk. Your job is to read the conversation the way an anthropologist would, and participating can wait. What are people disagreeing about? What counts as evidence in this thread? Are they asking for sources, debating wording, arguing about undue weight, or negotiating what belongs in the lead?

Micro-check. What are they debating, and what counts as evidence here?

> **Trap to watch for. Rule friction.** If you feel the urge to argue with what you are reading, treat that feeling as a sign you are touching the core of Wikipedia. Your job is to learn the method. Winning the debate is someone else's.

> **Bonus tip.** Notice repeated words: source, reliable, undue, primary, consensus. Those are the levers.

05 Read History for What Happened

Open View history on the same article. History is where you see what Wikipedia did, as opposed to what people say it should do. Open one diff and describe what changed, as you practiced in Level One. Then add a layer: guess why the change was made. Adding a citation, removing unsourced content, softening tone, correcting a date, reverting vandalism, tightening a claim.

Micro-check. What problem was this edit trying to solve?

> **Trap to watch for. Pattern fog.** If everything feels equally important, start with the easy edits: citations and wording changes. You are training pattern recognition before judgment.

06 Find Yourself in the System

Click your user icon and go to Contributions. This is your public footprint and your map back to your own work. Read one line. Notice that Wikipedia is transparent by design. That transparency can feel exposing, and it is also protection. Your edits are accountable, and so is everyone else's.

Micro-check. Do I know how to find my edits later?

> **Trap to watch for. Visibility discomfort.** If it unsettles you that this is public, remember that transparency is why disputes can be resolved at all.

07 The Heart of Level Two

Make a correct practice citation in your sandbox. Write one harmless practice sentence, then add a citation to a reputable publication. The topic is beside the point. The habit is the point: claim plus source.

If you do not know how to format the citation, use the Cite tool in the visual editor, or copy a citation from an existing article's references and swap in your source. After you add it, preview it and click it. Confirm that it displays cleanly and links where you expect.

Micro-check. If I click the footnote, does it go where it should?

> **Trap to watch for. Formatting freeze.** If you stall because the tool feels fiddly, copy a working example and keep moving. You are building the habit, and mastering every option can wait.

08 Judgment in the Wild

Find a statement marked citation needed. Use a citation-hunting tool or scan an article until you see the tag. Pick one statement and search for a source. Then make a three-part decision: does a source exist, is it strong enough, and does it support the exact claim?

This is where newcomers learn the most important sourcing lesson. A source can be related to a topic and still fail to support the sentence in front of you. That is the work, and it is no defeat.

Micro-check. Does this source say this, clearly, in its own words?

> **Trap to watch for. Citation mirage.** If you find something that seems relevant and does not support the claim, label it honestly and keep searching. Accuracy beats momentum.

You have now practiced Wikipedia's method across three environments: the Talk page, where decisions are argued; the History page, where changes land; and your sandbox, where you craft claim plus source. If Level One reduces fear of the room, Level Two reduces fear of being wrong. The confidence that follows says "I know how Wikipedia decides."

09 The Homework Loop

Read **10 minutes**

Open the Core Policies Guide excerpts and read them slowly, like a lease. Notice three phrases you keep seeing, especially anything about due weight, verifiability, or original research. Explain each to yourself in one plain sentence.

Return **10 minutes**

Go to your sandbox and add two more cited sentences. After each citation, click it to confirm it displays correctly and links where you expect.

Review **10 minutes**

Open five diffs from your watchlist and run the three micro-steps: describe, judge, and check context if needed. Then find one citation-needed statement and do a fast source screen: strong, weak, or more info needed.

10 The Source Strength Ladder

When you ask whether a source is good, you are usually asking two things: is it reliable, and is it independent. The ladder helps you judge quickly, and you can use it in every level from here on.

Rung	Sources	Use them for
Strongest	Books from reputable publishers; peer-reviewed journals and academic presses; major newspapers and national outlets; reputable magazines with staffed editors; high-quality investigative reporting; government publications and official statistics for basic facts; institutional reports from reputable organizations, with context	Notability and most claims
Usable, with care	Regional newspapers and local reporting; trade publications with editorial oversight; strong niche outlets; interviews conducted by reputable outlets; reputable organization websites for uncontroversial facts	Claims, after checking independence and depth; rarely notability alone
Weak	Press releases and announcements; the subject's own website, biography, or blog; partner organizations describing each other; event listings and directories; social media posts; Wikipedia itself	Basic facts at most; never notability

Micro-check. Does this source treat the subject as a subject, or merely mention it?

> **Keep this.** Wikipedia runs on sources. Cite the right things, from the right places, in the right proportion.

Level Three

Notability and Systemic Bias

What belongs on Wikipedia, and the sources you gather before you write.

Read this when you are choosing a topic.

AT A GLANCE

- North Star: you are learning to separate importance from inclusion, and to turn curiosity into evidence.
- By the end you can generate several topic candidates, assemble a source set and label it honestly, decide Ready, Unclear, or Not Ready without spiraling, and explain systemic bias as a sourcing problem.

DO

- In your sandbox, make a header and a numbered list of topic ideas.
- Pick one to research and paste sources into a numbered list.
- Test notability against what you have.

Learn. WikiBlueprint Notability Guide, on analyzing source quality.

From the coach. The notability guidelines and subject guides lay out the general case: significant coverage in good sources that are independent and secondary. Some subjects also have additional routes, any one of which can get an article in.

Wikipedia's barrier to inclusion is overcome with sources, good sources, lots of sources. A lack of sources in particular areas perpetuates massive systemic bias.

Wikipedia does not ask whether a topic feels important. It asks whether independent sources have treated it as significant. That distinction can feel strict, and it aligns the rules for everyone. Notability lives in coverage. When you gather sources and test them, you see that inclusion depends on evidence that exists beyond personal belief. You will also notice the gaps. Some subjects lack coverage because institutions failed to document them, and not because they lack value.

01 The Question That Saves Time

By now you can enter Wikipedia without panic and speak in its language. You are ready for the question that saves most people the most time. The question is neither whether your topic is interesting, nor whether it deserves a page, nor even whether it is true. The question is: has the world written about this topic in a way that Wikipedia can summarize?

Wikipedia is a place where you show that independent sources have already treated a subject as significant. Arguing that something matters belongs elsewhere. That is why this level is called Notability. Notability does not mean famous. It means covered: the topic has received significant coverage in reliable, independent sources.

02 What the Rule Reveals

That can feel strict, even unfair. Sometimes it is unfair. Whole communities have been under-covered by major media, under-published in academic venues, and under-documented by institutions. Wikipedia reflects that world and does not fully escape it. That is where systemic bias comes in.

Systemic bias is mainly about the shape of the record. If only certain people and institutions get written about, then only certain people and institutions can be notable in the sense Wikipedia can verify. Level Three teaches two things at once: how to follow Wikipedia's rule, and how to see the injustice the rule reveals.

> "Notability does not mean famous. It means covered."

03 Sources First

Here is the mindset shift: you do not draft an article until the sources can carry it. Writing first and sourcing later is the fastest way to get attached to a page you will never be able to publish. Sourcing first feels slower and is faster. It tells you whether you are building on rock or sand.

Open a fresh page in your sandbox and make a simple header: Topic Ideas. List five to ten candidates. Pick topics that interest you, because curiosity creates stamina, and topics where you can plausibly find independent coverage: profiles, reviews, investigative pieces, academic analysis, books from reputable presses, major interviews that are not self-published.

Micro-check. Am I choosing this topic because I love it, or because I can already see the sources? Ideally both.

04 Build a Source Set

Choose one topic and do the work that determines everything else. A source set is a collection you can defend. You are looking for sources that are independent, meaning written by no one connected to the subject; reliable, meaning published under editorial oversight; substantial, meaning more than a passing mention; and multiple, meaning several independent pieces over time.

Wikipedia does not ask for perfection. It asks for enough: enough coverage to justify a standalone page, and enough depth to write more than a stub without stretching. As you gather sources, you will feel the temptation to grab anything that mentions the topic, to hit a number. Resist it. A sentence in a listicle, a directory entry, a routine event listing, a press release, or an About page is none of what Wikipedia means by coverage. The word to keep in mind is treatment.

Micro-check. If I removed this source, would my notability case weaken?

05 Label Honestly

As the set grows, keep it honest by sorting each source into one of three buckets. Strong means independent, reputable, and substantial. Weak means independent and thin, or reputable with only a passing mention. Primary means from the subject or a close affiliate, useful for basic facts later and useless for proving notability. This labeling is clarity, and it keeps you from fooling yourself when you want a topic to work.

06 The Verdict

Now make the decision Level Three exists to produce. Ready means you have multiple strong, independent sources with substantial coverage. Unclear means you have some good sources and too little depth or independence so far. Not Ready means the topic is not covered enough to meet Wikipedia's standard right now.

This moment can sting. It measures the published record, and it says nothing about the topic's worth.

> **Trap to watch for. Worthiness drift.** If you start arguing that the topic deserves a page, you are drifting from evidence to advocacy. Come back to the rule. Wikipedia summarizes what reliable, independent sources have already treated as significant.

Write your verdict as one plain paragraph in your sandbox. Name the best sources you found and be honest about what is missing. If you would feel uncomfortable showing the paragraph to another editor, you are still negotiating with the evidence.

Micro-check. If someone challenged me, could I point to coverage?

07 What Each Verdict Means

If your verdict is Ready, you have something precious: permission to write without panic. Your article will be anchored in coverage.

If your verdict is Unclear, you have direction. Keep researching, broaden your search, or narrow your topic. Sometimes the subject is notable and the angle you chose is too specific. Sometimes the coverage sits in books, magazines, or archives you have not looked in yet.

If your verdict is Not Ready, you pivot to another topic on your list. This is one of the most mature editing skills you can develop: letting the evidence choose the project.

And sometimes the verdict is Not Ready because the world did not document the subject fairly. Wikipedia cannot cite what does not exist, and you can still act. Choose adjacent topics with better coverage. Expand your search into reliable sources that are easy to miss. Improve existing articles on under-covered subjects. Over time, as the record grows, what is not ready today may become ready. That is how knowledge work moves.

If Level One reduces fear of the room and Level Two reduces fear of being wrong, Level Three reduces fear of wasting your effort. It teaches you to build only where the ground can hold you.

08 The Homework Loop

Read **10 minutes**

Read the notability guidance slowly. Your goal is to notice how it defines independent, reliable, and significant coverage.

Return **10 minutes**

Add five more sources for your chosen topic, then relabel your set. If your Strong bucket is still thin, broaden where you search. If your Primary bucket dominates, stop and pivot toward independence.

Review **10 minutes**

Reread your verdict paragraph. Check two things: it is about coverage, and it names at least two strong independent sources as the backbone of the case. If either fails, change the verdict to Unclear or Not Ready and pick a new topic.

Trap to watch for. Attachment spiral. If you feel yourself clinging to one topic, remember the purpose of Level Three: to save your time and protect your morale.

Keep this. Build only where the sources can hold you. Ready, Unclear, or Not Ready, written down and honest.

Level Four

Fact Plus Cite

Turning sources into prose that stands on evidence.

Read this when your verdict is Ready.

AT A GLANCE

- North Star: you are learning to translate published sources into clear, restrained sentences that survive scrutiny.
- By the end you can build a draft skeleton from a strong model, write a fact bank from sources, use attribution to keep claims honest, and reduce promotional tone through restraint and specificity.

DO

- Draft in your sandbox.
- Extract facts from the sources in your own words.
- Use as many of the best sources as you can, ordering facts and citations.

Learn. Wikipedia: Plain and simple conflict of interest guide, on why neutrality requires restraint.

From the coach. You may or may not have a conflict of interest, and you should know what it means and why it raises scrutiny. Writing about your interests is fine. Writing about your company is a different game with its own rules.

The basic unit of an article is a fact plus a citation. Use that structure to flesh out your article, and for inspiration follow a similar good article's outline, organization, and style.

Writing on Wikipedia means translating sources into clear, restrained prose. When you draft, you turn published material into balanced sentences in your own words. The structure of other strong articles guides you as you reflect what reliable sources emphasize, in the proportion they present it. As you extract facts and order them, the article begins to stand on its own, supported by evidence.

01 A Disciplined Translation

You have done the hard invisible work. You can enter without panic, speak in citations, and tell whether a topic is ready. Now you get to do what most people think Wikipedia editing is: writing.

Wikipedia writing differs from school writing. It is neither persuasive nor expressive. It is a disciplined translation. You read what reliable sources say and restate it in your own words, in a calm tone, in the proportion the sources imply.

This is why the level is called Fact Plus Cite. The basic unit of Wikipedia is a single claim paired with a citation. Build that way and your draft becomes sturdy. Other editors can check it, adjust it, and improve it. The page stops being your writing and becomes a shared object the community can maintain.

If you feel an urge to sound impressive, notice it. That urge is normal, and it is the fastest path to promotional tone, speculation, and conflict. Wikipedia rewards accuracy, restraint, and clean sourcing.

02 Borrow a Shape

Open your sandbox and create a new draft page with a simple working title at the top. Then do something that feels almost too basic: paste in an outline. If you are unsure, find one good Wikipedia article on a similar topic and use its section structure as a model. You are borrowing a proven shape, and none of its sentences.

Micro-check. Am I trying to be original, or trying to be readable?

At minimum, include a lead section, which summarizes what the topic is and why it matters; a background or history section; a main section covering the core activities or significance; a reception, impact, or controversy section, if reliable sources treat that as significant; and references. The outline is a promise to the reader that the page will be navigable, and it protects you from rambling, the hidden enemy of neutral writing.

03 Build a Fact Bank

Open your source set from Level Three and start with the strongest sources. For each one, extract facts that can be stated plainly: dates, roles, events, accomplishments, descriptions, and reported interpretations, as long as the source itself states them.

Do not start by writing paragraphs. Write ten to twenty individual fact sentences, each with a citation. You are making bricks before you build the wall. A fact sentence is specific, attributable to a source, and free of your opinion.

Micro-check. If someone asked how I know that, do I have a source ready?

04 No Synthesis

Keep one rule in mind as you write: do not synthesize. You do not combine two sources to imply a conclusion that neither states. Wikipedia calls this original research. Even if your conclusion is reasonable, your job is to be citable.

> **Trap to watch for. Synthesis drift.** If you catch yourself thinking "so this proves that," you are leaving Wikipedia and entering essay mode. Come back to what the sources say.

05 Attribution

Now practice the most important writing move on Wikipedia. When a source expresses an interpretation, claim, or evaluation, you often need to attribute it. Instead of "X is the leading organization," you write "X has been described as the leading organization by Y," and you cite Y. That is accuracy. It shows readers where the claim came from.

Micro-check. Is this a fact, or a claim that needs attribution?

06 Take Control of Tone

Wikipedia prose is restrained, and never cold. The goal is to remove unnecessary heat: adjectives that praise or condemn, rhetorical flourishes, and framing that sounds like marketing. If you see renowned, groundbreaking, world-class, incredible, major, unique, or leading, pause. Sometimes those words are supported by sources. Usually they are not.

Replace them with concrete, sourced statements. Replace leading with "one of the largest, by membership," if the source provides numbers. Replace renowned with "has received X award," if the source supports it.

Trap to watch for. Hype reflex. If your sentence would sound normal in a press release, it probably does not belong as written.

07 From Bank to Draft

Once you have your fact bank, group the sentences into your outline sections. This is where the draft begins to feel like an article. Aim for accuracy and structure. Elegance can come later.

Write the lead last. A good lead summarizes what the article already contains. It is short, factual, and sourced, and it makes no mission statement.

Then do a quality pass that is uniquely Wikipedia: citation coverage. Every paragraph should have at least one citation, and every claim likely to be challenged should have one. A paragraph with no citations will be questioned.

Micro-check. If I deleted the citations, would the paragraph still be convincing? If yes, it is too opinion-shaped.

Remember what drafting is on Wikipedia: preparation for revision. Your goal is a draft that other editors can verify and improve. Level One taught you to enter, Level Two to cite, Level Three to choose a viable topic. Level Four teaches you to write in a way that is compatible with collaboration.

08 The Homework Loop

Read **10 minutes**

Read a short guide on neutral writing and conflict-of-interest awareness. Your goal is to notice the difference between neutral description and persuasive framing.

Trap to watch for. Rule friction. If restraint irritates you, remember that restraint is what makes collaboration possible.

Return **10 minutes and more**

Add five more fact sentences to your draft, each with a citation, and make at least one use attribution. Then, and there is no easy way to say this, keep adding fact sentences until you have used up all the good facts and sources. It takes time, and it is the only way.

Review **10 minutes**

Do a hype scan. Read your draft and circle any word that sounds like praise, marketing, or certainty without support. Replace it with a sourced fact or an attributed statement. Then check citation coverage paragraph by paragraph.

> **Keep this.** One claim, one citation, in your own words, in the proportion the sources imply.

Level Five

Structure and Presentation

Making a draft feel like a real article that readers can trust.

Read this when your draft has facts and citations and looks like notes.

AT A GLANCE

- North Star: credibility is communicated through structure, links, and clean references.
- By the end you can improve the lead and section structure, add purposeful wikilinks, add media or an infobox with restraint, and clean references so every citation displays correctly.

DO

- Finish drafting, integrating every good source.
- Consider an infobox.
- Illustrate with available media, if any exists.
- Add wikilinks to highly relevant pages.
- Check references for formatting errors.

Learn. Wikipedia: Good article criteria, the recipe for quality.

From the coach. These qualities make an article excellent. Every sentence is cited. There is clear organization. The topic is completely described in balanced detail. The page links out to other pages.

How an article looks affects how people judge it and interact with it. Text, citations, wikilinks, sections, and images together turn flat text into an engaging article.

An article earns trust through more than words. Clear organization helps readers navigate with confidence. Presentation signals care. Links connect the topic to the wider encyclopedia. References show that every statement rests on published work. As you refine flow and formatting, the page begins to feel integrated, part of a living network of knowledge.

01 Presentation as Proof of Seriousness

You have something rare: a draft that stands on sources. You have an outline, a fact bank, and citations. The page is an object now. Your job shifts from writing sentences to shaping a reading experience.

Many first-time editors underestimate this stage. They think credibility comes from tone. It comes from structure. Readers trust what they can navigate. Editors trust what they can verify. A well-presented page signals care before anyone reads a word closely.

02 Walk Through as a Stranger

Open your sandbox draft and scroll from top to bottom as if you had never seen it. You are looking for navigation. Do you immediately understand what the topic is? Do the sections make sense? Does the page feel balanced or lopsided? Is it a wall of text?

Micro-check. If I landed on this page from a search, would I feel oriented within twenty seconds?

03 The Lead Is the Handshake

The lead should summarize the article's key points in two to four calm sentences. It defines the subject, signals why it is notable, and previews the main dimensions the article covers. Keep hype out of it. If the lead is persuasive, the whole page will look like advocacy. If you must include an evaluative claim, attribute it.

Trap to watch for. Lead hype. If your first paragraph reads like a pitch, rewrite it as definition plus sourced context.

04 Tighten the Sections

Wikipedia favors predictable headings. If your outline is too idiosyncratic, other editors will find it harder to collaborate. Your job is legibility. Look at each heading and ask whether it is broad enough to hold several facts. Merge tiny headings. Split headings that have grown too long. Aim for sections that feel inevitable.

Micro-check. Does each section have at least two solid, sourced points?

05 Wikilinks

A wikilink is an internal link to another Wikipedia page. Wikilinks are how your article joins the encyclopedia instead of sitting beside it as an essay. Link the first meaningful mention of key concepts, organizations, places, and notable people. Leave repeated words and common words unlinked. Link what helps a curious reader explore.

Micro-check. If I removed all the wikilinks, would the article feel cut off from Wikipedia?

Trap to watch for. Link spam. If you are linking every other word, the page is noisy. Use links as bridges.

06 Images and Infoboxes

An infobox is the summary box on the right side of many articles. It helps for people, organizations, places, and other structured subjects. Images add legitimacy and comprehension when they are properly licensed and relevant. Restraint matters here. Do not force an infobox that does not fit. Do not add a low-quality image to have one. A clean page without an image beats a cluttered page with a dubious one.

Micro-check. Does this image or infobox help a reader understand the subject faster?

07 References

Now the most important mechanical work of the level. Your citations should display cleanly, format correctly, and link to the right places. If the references section is messy, other editors will distrust the whole draft, even when the claims are solid.

Scroll to your references. Look for error messages, red text, or inconsistent formatting. Click a few citations at random and make sure they go to the right source. This is boring, and it is the backbone of Wikipedia's trust model.

Trap to watch for. Citation sloppiness. If you rush references, the page will look unreliable. Slow down here.

08 Balance

Wikipedia is what reliable sources say about a subject, in proportion. If your draft reads like a highlight reel, it will trigger skepticism. If reliable sources cover criticism, controversy, limitations, or debate, your article reflects that in a calm, sourced way. That means mirroring the record, and it never means manufacturing negativity.

Micro-check. Am I reflecting the proportions in the best sources, or telling the story I want to tell?

At the end of Level Five your draft should feel integrated: structured, linked, verifiable, and readable. It should feel like a page that belongs in a network of pages. Level Four taught you to draft from evidence. Level Five teaches you to present that evidence so it can be trusted.

09 The Homework Loop

Read **10 minutes**

Read the Good article criteria once, quickly, to see what good looks like in Wikipedia's own language. Notice the expectations for structure, sourcing, and coverage.

Trap to watch for. Perfectionism spiral. If you start thinking your draft must meet every criterion now, return to the goal: steady improvement.

Return **10 minutes**

Add ten wikilinks to your draft and improve your lead, aiming for clarity and orientation.

Review **10 minutes**

Do a reference hygiene pass. Fix formatting issues, make sure every section has citations, and click three random footnotes to confirm they lead where they claim.

Keep this. Readers trust what they can navigate. Editors trust what they can verify. Build the page for both.

Level Six

Publishing and Discoverability

Moving your work into the encyclopedia and connecting it so people can find it.

Read this when the draft is ready to go live.

AT A GLANCE

- North Star: publishing is the beginning of collaboration.
- By the end you can choose a publishing pathway, connect your article through a short description, categories, and links, invite collaboration through WikiProjects, and respond to other people's edits with calm, evidence-based judgment.

DO

- Move it live.
- Add categories, with the HotCat gadget if you like.
- Add WikiProject banners on the Talk page.
- Add a short description.
- Use What links here to find pages that could link to yours.

Learn. One Woman's Brilliant "Fuck You" to Wikipedia Trolls, on staying resilient.

From the coach. A powerful, poignant, painful essay. It speaks to falling down and getting back up. Even bad experiences can propel immensely positive contributions. Keep going.

Publishing is exciting, and it is not the end. Next you need to make the article discoverable, so that people will read it.

Publishing is the moment your work enters a larger conversation. Help others find and understand what you built. Connections invite shared stewardship. Edits will follow. Some will improve the page and some will challenge it, and that is how the project grows. Wikipedia improves through revision. When you respond with patience and clarity, your article strengthens as part of the encyclopedia.

01 A Living Draft in a Living System

You have done what most people never do. You built a page that can survive: sourced, structured, linked, readable. Now comes the moment that feels thrilling and vulnerable at once, moving it into public view.

Publishing on Wikipedia is unlike publishing anywhere else. You are placing a living draft into a living system. Other people will touch it. Some edits will improve it, some will confuse you, a few may irritate you. That is the project.

02 Choose a Pathway

Three routes are common. If your topic is straightforward, well sourced, and uncontroversial, you may be able to publish directly into the encyclopedia. If your topic is borderline on notability, or you are new and want a gentler review, submit it through Articles for Creation, where a volunteer reviews it first. If you have any conflict of interest or close association with the subject, slow down and choose the path that invites review. The goal is trust.

Micro-check. Am I trying to publish quickly, or to publish in a way that will hold?

> **Trap to watch for. Finish-line rush.** If you feel urgency, treat it as a signal to slow down. Stability is the prize.

Before you publish, do one last integrity pass. Every section has citations. The lead is calm and factual. Nothing reads like a pitch. If any paragraph feels like advocacy, fix it now. You are protecting your work from predictable skepticism.

Then publish through your chosen route, and shift your mindset. The page is no longer private. You steward it like a garden.

03 The Short Description

A short description is a one-line label that appears in search results and at the top of the page on mobile. It helps readers understand what the subject is at a glance. Keep it neutral and concise.

Micro-check. If someone saw only this short description, would it mislead them?

04 Categories

Categories are how Wikipedia groups related pages, and they are a major driver of discoverability. Choose a few that fit the subject's main identity. Think of categories as shelves in a library: you want the right shelves. Many editors use a gadget called HotCat that makes adding them easier, and you can add them manually.

> **Trap to watch for. Category overreach.** If you are adding categories that feel aspirational, pull back. Categories are classification.

05 Links From Elsewhere

Use What links here to find where your new page might reasonably be linked from. This is a subtler art than it sounds. You are integrating. Look for places where your subject is relevant: a list page, a related concept, a parent organization, a location, a historical event. Add a link only where it improves that page for its readers.

Micro-check. Would this link help a reader even if my page did not exist?

> **Trap to watch for. Promotion drift.** If your linking feels like marketing, it will be treated like marketing.

06 WikiProjects

A WikiProject is a community of editors focused on a topic area. Adding the relevant WikiProject banners to your article's Talk page invites knowledgeable editors to watch and improve it. This is one of the healthiest ways to ask for attention. You are inviting stewardship.

Micro-check. Am I inviting collaboration, or recruiting allies?

07 When Others Edit

Some edits will be routine cleanup. Some will add sources. Some will challenge wording. Occasionally someone will remove something you wrote. Your nervous system will want to treat removal as rejection. Do not let it.

When an edit surprises you, open the diff and read what changed. Ask whether the change improves accuracy, clarity, sourcing, or neutrality. If yes, accept it. If no, slow down. Check the editor's pattern. Check the Talk page. Respond calmly and briefly, with sources.

> **Trap to watch for. Ownership reflex.** If you feel possessive, remember that the goal was never control. The goal was to contribute something that can outlive you.

If someone challenges the page's notability or tone, treat it as a request for evidence. Strengthen citations. Improve balance. Tighten wording. The best response is rarely argument. The best response is improvement.

08 A Stewardship Rhythm

You do not need to monitor the page obsessively, and you should return a few times early on. Think of a new plant: regular attention at first, then less as it roots. Check your watchlist tomorrow, then in a week, then once a month. If the page is stable, relax. If it is volatile, ask for help in the right venues.

Publishing is the moment your work becomes part of a living network of knowledge.

09 The Homework Loop

Read **10 minutes**

Read a short piece about Wikipedia collaboration and dispute habits. Notice what calm editing looks like in practice.

> **Trap to watch for. Threat sensitivity.** If feedback feels like danger, return to diffs and sources.

Return **10 minutes**

Add or refine your short description, add three categories, and add at least one relevant WikiProject banner to the Talk page.

Review **10 minutes**

Open five diffs on your page or your watchlist and label each: good, bad, or more info needed. If something concerns you, check the Talk page and respond with one calm sentence and a source, or leave it alone if it does not matter.

> **Keep this.** Publish in the way that will hold, connect the page, and steward it like a garden.

Part 3

After the Course

“The crash course is over. The car is yours.”

Section 10

The Crash Course Is Over

What you learned, and what it was really about.

Read this when you have published, or prepared to.

AT A GLANCE

- You can enter, read a diff, cite, judge a topic, draft, polish, and publish.
- Every skill was a way of pointing outward to something a stranger can check.
- That is a civic skill as much as a writing skill.

Six hours ago, Wikipedia probably felt like a stage. You could sense the invisible audience. You may have hovered over Edit and felt the pressure of being visible in a space that looks calm and is very much alive. Now you have a different relationship with the site.

01 What You Can Do Now

You can enter without panic. You can read what changed. You can tell a clean improvement from something that needs context. You can use the Talk page without treating it like a courtroom. You can build a watchlist that turns the encyclopedia from an ocean into a neighborhood. That is belonging. It arrives as a set of practices first, and the warm feeling follows.

You learned the central discipline that makes Wikipedia work at scale. You do not ask readers to trust you. You give them something they can check. You learned to pair a claim with a citation, to favor independent reliable sources, and to keep proportion aligned with what the best sources emphasize. That is a civic skill as much as a writing skill. It is what turns crowdsourcing into something that can be corrected instead of something that merely spreads.

You faced the hard question that decides whether a new page can live, and you learned notability as an evidence test. You learned to name what the rule reveals: the world's record is uneven, and some subjects are under-documented because institutions failed to document them. That does not make you powerless. It makes you strategic. You choose topics where the record can carry you now and watch for what becomes possible as coverage grows.

You drafted the way Wikipedia wants you to draft, from a fact bank. You learned restraint as a form of respect, attribution as a form of honesty, and the traps by name: synthesis drift, the hype reflex, the urge to sound impressive. Then you polished. You let structure do work that confidence used to do. You made the page legible, with headings that make sense, links that connect, references that display cleanly, and a lead that acts like a handshake.

Finally you published, or prepared to publish by the right pathway, and you learned the most freeing idea in the course. Publishing is the beginning of collaboration, because control was never the goal. You learned how to make the page discoverable and how to stay steady when other people touch your work. That is an accomplishment.

02 Wikipedia in a Stressed Information Ecosystem

What you learned is bigger than a single article. We live in an information environment under constant stress. The internet makes publishing frictionless, which is beautiful and dangerous. Anyone can share anything instantly, and the incentives often reward speed over care, outrage over nuance, certainty over humility. Falsehood travels easily. Disinformation is engineered. Trust erodes, and people who have stopped trusting are easier to manipulate.

Wikipedia is part of that world. It is edited by humans, with biases, blind spots, and limited time. It gets things wrong. Articles can be incomplete, sources weak, arguments exhausting. And it remains one of the internet's most important counterweights, because its core incentive is different.

Wikipedia asks you to check a source. It rewards the most verifiable claim over the loudest voice. It treats revision as the mechanism of truth-seeking in public. In an ecosystem that pushes people toward certainty, Wikipedia is built to prefer something braver: traceability.

That is what you learned to do. You learned to take a statement and attach it to something inspectable. You learned to resist synthesis, hype, and agenda. You learned to mirror the proportions in good sources instead of manufacturing a balance the record does not support. You learned to separate what you believe from what the evidence can carry.

> "In practice, guardianship of public discourse is small, steady work."

It is fixing an unsourced sentence. It is replacing a weak source with a stronger one. It is removing a claim that cannot be verified, and adding context where the record has been distorted. It is writing in a voice that survives scrutiny because it is built from evidence. That work matters because Wikipedia is one of the places people check when they are trying to figure out what is real. When it is careful, it raises the floor of public discourse.

03 What You Know Now

You know that Wikipedia is a room you enter, and that you belong by becoming legible: a human presence, reachable, neither promotional nor defensive. You know that it runs on published sources, and that your job is to summarize the record and make it possible for strangers to verify you.

You know that Wikipedia is a workshop where you build, and that treating edits as reversible lets you keep moving. You know that it is structure, linking, referencing, and proportion, as much as writing. And you know that it is a place to practice restraint, because the voice that survives is the voice that can be checked.

Keep this. You do not ask to be believed. You give people something they can check.

Section 11

Where to Go Next

The rhythm of belonging, and the roads open to you.

Read this when you are wondering what to do tomorrow.

AT A GLANCE

- Belonging is a rhythm, and the rhythm is small edits done steadily.
- Several roads are open, and none of them is forever.
- You are not driving alone.

01 The Rhythm

Belonging on Wikipedia is a rhythm. Return to your watchlist. Read diffs. Make small, calm edits. Add citations. Fix a sentence. Improve a paragraph. Ask a question on a Talk page when you are uncertain. Thank someone who improves your work. Leave a note that is brief, sourced, and respectful. When you make a mistake, correct it. When someone corrects you, learn from it.

This is how you become the kind of editor other editors want to work with. Steadiness does it, and perfection was never required.

02 The Roads

You have a car now. It is neither flashy nor fragile. It is reliable. It starts. It can take you places.

The neighborhood road. Tend the pages you care about, one small improvement at a time.

The citation road. Become someone who strengthens the floor of verifiability, one citation needed at a time.

The second article. Write it more calmly than the first, now that you know the cycle.

The edges of the record. Work where systemic bias shows up as missing coverage, and contribute where evidence exists.

A WikiProject. Join one and learn the culture of a topic area from the inside.

You do not need to pick one road forever. The point is that you are no longer standing at the curb wondering whether you are allowed inside.

03 When It Stings

You will still feel small sometimes. You will still meet bluntness. You will still have moments when a removal stings. That means you are participating in a public process. When you feel the sting, return to what you know: open the diff, check the source, read the Talk page, and respond with calm evidence or let it go. Wikipedia improves through revision. So will you.

04 You Are Not Driving Alone

There are millions of other cars on this road. Some are fast and technical. Some are careful and meticulous. Some are focused on medicine, history, music, science, or local places you have never heard of. Some are fixing typos. Some are arguing about a comma that changes meaning. Some are fighting vandalism. Some are patiently adding citations one by one.

What they share, at their best, is a belief that free knowledge is worth maintaining, and that public discourse deserves at least one place where claims can be traced, challenged, and improved in the open.

You came here to write your first Wikipedia article in six hours. You did something larger. You learned a method for contributing to a shared record without needing to be loud, certain, or perfect.

"The crash course is over. The car is yours. Now drive."

Keep this. Return to the watchlist. Read the diff. Add the citation. That is the whole rhythm.

The Traps, in One Place

Every trap named in the six levels, and the way out. Naming a trap is most of the cure.

Trap	Level	The way out
Transparency trap	One	A name that sounds like a role or a brand buys scrutiny. Choose ease.
Talk page dread	One	Treat the talk page like email. Pause before replying.
Diff blur	One	Reduce the task to one line, and describe only that.
Stage fright	One	Mistakes are reversible.
Rule friction	Two, Three, Four	Irritation means you are touching the core of the system. Learn the method.
Pattern fog	Two	Start with the easy edits: citations and wording.
Visibility discomfort	Two	Transparency is why disputes can be resolved.
Formatting freeze	Two, Four	Copy a working example and keep moving.
Citation mirage	Two	Related is not the same as supporting. Label it honestly and keep searching.
Worthiness drift	Three	Come back to coverage. Deserving is not the test.
Attachment spiral	Three	Level Three exists to save your time and protect your morale.
Synthesis drift	Four	Come back to what the sources say.
Hype reflex	Four	If it would sound normal in a press release, rewrite it as a sourced description.
Lead hype	Five	Definition plus sourced context.
Link spam	Five	Links are bridges. Link what helps a reader explore.
Citation sloppiness	Five	Slow down. This is where trust is won or lost.
Perfectionism spiral	Five	The goal is steady improvement.
Finish-line rush	Six	Urgency is a signal to slow down. Stability is the prize.
Category overreach	Six	Categories are classification. Choose descriptive ones.
Promotion drift	Six	Link only where it improves the encyclopedia.
Ownership reflex	Six	The goal was never control.
Threat sensitivity	Six	Return to diffs and sources.

The Micro-Checks, in One Place

One question at every step.

Ask the question that matches the step you are on. If the honest answer is no, the step is not done.

Username. Does this sound like a human and not an organization?

User page. Could a stranger read this and assume good intent?

User talk. Does this channel exist if someone needs to reach me?

Watchlist. Would I enjoy returning to these pages?

Diff. Can I describe the change without judging it?

Talk page. What are they debating, and what counts as evidence here?

History. What problem was this edit trying to solve?

Contributions. Do I know how to find my edits later?

Citation. If I click the footnote, does it go where it should?

Citation needed. Does this source say this, clearly, in its own words?

Source. Does this source treat the subject as a subject, or merely mention it?

Topic. Am I choosing this because I love it, or because I can see the sources? Ideally both.

Source set. If I removed this source, would my notability case weaken?

Verdict. If someone challenged me, could I point to coverage?

Outline. Am I trying to be original, or trying to be readable?

Fact sentence. If someone asked how I know that, do I have a source ready?

Attribution. Is this a fact, or a claim that needs attribution?

Paragraph. If I deleted the citations, would it still be convincing? If yes, it is too opinion-shaped.

Orientation. If I landed here from a search, would I feel oriented in twenty seconds?

Sections. Does each section have at least two solid, sourced points?

Wikilinks. Without them, would the article feel cut off from Wikipedia?

Media. Does this image or infobox help a reader understand faster?

Balance. Am I reflecting the proportions in the best sources, or telling the story I want to tell?

Pathway. Am I trying to publish quickly, or in a way that will hold?

Short description. If someone saw only this, would it mislead them?

Links from elsewhere. Would this link help a reader even if my page did not exist?

WikiProjects. Am I inviting collaboration, or recruiting allies?

Policy Quick Reference

The shortcuts behind the lessons, and what each settles.

Type any shortcut into Wikipedia's search box to reach the page. Policies and guidelines reflect community consensus. Essays record advice without that standing.

Shortcut	What it settles
WP:5P	The five pillars, Wikipedia's founding principles in one page
WP:SIMPLE	The simplified ruleset, the overview read in Level One
WP:V	Verifiability: readers must be able to check claims against published sources
WP:RS	Reliable sources: editorial oversight and a reputation for accuracy
WP:RSP	The perennial sources list: past consensus on specific outlets
WP:NPOV	Neutral point of view: represent sources fairly and in proportion
WP:DUE	Due weight: mirror the proportions in reliable sources
WP:NOR	No original research, including no combining of sources into a new claim
WP:SYNTH	The synthesis rule within no original research
WP:BLP	Biographies of living persons: the strictest sourcing standards
WP:N	Notability: which subjects get an article
WP:GNG	The general notability guideline: significant, reliable, independent coverage
WP:SNG	Subject-specific notability guidelines, with additional routes for some subjects
WP:COI	Conflict of interest guideline
WP:PAID	Paid-contribution disclosure policy
WP:PSCOI	The plain and simple conflict of interest guide, read in Level Four
WP:PEACOCK	Words to watch: praise and promotion without support
WP:LEAD	How to write the lead section
WP:CITE	How to cite sources
WP:GACR	The good article criteria, read in Level Five

Shortcut	What it settles
WP:AFC	Articles for Creation, the reviewed route to publishing
WP:SD	Short descriptions
WP:CAT	Categorization
WP:WIKIPROJECT	WikiProjects, communities of editors by topic
WP:TALK	Talk page guidelines
WP:OWN	Ownership of content: no one owns an article
WP:AGF	Assume good faith
WP:BOLD	Be bold: edits are reversible, so make them
WP:BRD	Bold, revert, discuss: the normal rhythm of disagreement
WP:TEAHOUSE	The Teahouse, where newcomers ask questions

Glossary

The words the lessons use, in plain language.

Articles for Creation (AfC)
A review queue where a volunteer reads a new draft before it goes live. The gentler publishing route.

Attribution
Stating who made a claim, so that "X is the leading firm" becomes "Y has described X as the leading firm."

Category
A shelf that groups related articles. Added at the foot of a page.

Citation
The footnote that points to a published source.

Citation needed
A tag marking a statement that may be fine and lacks a source.

Conflict of interest (COI)
A personal, professional, or financial connection to a subject. Must be disclosed, and calls for restraint.

Diff
The comparison view showing what one edit changed.

Due weight
Giving each view the space reliable sources give it, and no more.

Fact bank
A list of single fact sentences, each with a citation, built before any paragraph is written.

History
The log of every edit to a page, with who made it and when.

Independent source
A source with no connection to the subject.

Infobox
The summary box at the top right of many articles.

Lead
The opening section that summarizes the whole article.

Notability
Whether a subject gets its own article. Decided by coverage in reliable, independent sources.

Original research
Any claim that no published source states, including conclusions drawn by combining sources.

Primary source
Material from the subject or close to it. Usable for basic facts, never for notability.

Reliable source
A publication with editorial oversight and a reputation for accuracy.

Sandbox
A practice page attached to your account, where nothing affects a live article.

Short description
A one-line label for an article, shown in search results and on mobile.

Source set
The sources gathered to test a topic's notability, labeled strong, weak, or primary.

Systemic bias
The uneven shape of the published record, which makes some subjects impossible to source.

Talk page
The discussion page behind every article and every account.

User page
Your short profile page on Wikipedia.

Verifiability
The principle that readers must be able to check a claim against a published source.

Watchlist
A private list of pages whose changes you want to see.

What links here
A tool listing every page that links to a given page.

Wikilink
An internal link from one Wikipedia page to another.

WikiProject
A community of editors focused on a topic area.

Further Reading

The reading assigned in each level, and where to find it.

Wikipedia: Simplified ruleset
Level One. The rules of the room in one page. Search WP:SIMPLE.

WikiBlueprint Core Policies Guide
Level Two. The key excerpts on verifiability, neutral point of view, due weight, and original research. At wikiblueprint.com.

WikiBlueprint Notability Guide
Level Three. How to judge source quality and build a notability case. At wikiblueprint.com.

Wikipedia: Plain and simple conflict of interest guide
Level Four. Why neutrality requires restraint. Search WP:PSCOI.

Wikipedia: Good article criteria
Level Five. The recipe for quality. Search WP:GACR.

One Woman's Brilliant "Fuck You" to Wikipedia Trolls
Level Six. On resilience. Search the title.

The Guide to Successful Wikipedia Engagement
The WikiBlueprint Keystone guide for corporate communicators working on an existing article.

The Guide to Success for Public Relations Professionals
The WikiBlueprint Keystone guide to what press counts toward a Wikipedia article.

The Successful Wikipedian in Residence
The WikiBlueprint Keystone guide for institutions.

About the Author

Jake Orlowitz.

Jake Orlowitz is a Wikipedia editor, educator, and strategist who helps people contribute in ways that are calm, ethical, and lasting. He founded and led The Wikipedia Library at the Wikimedia Foundation, building global partnerships that expanded editor access to high-quality research and strengthened Wikipedia's sourcing. As the founder of WikiBlueprint, he has trained and advised nonprofits, cultural institutions, and mission-driven organizations on how to work with Wikipedia responsibly.

His open knowledge work rests on the idea that public discourse improves when evidence is accessible, claims can be traced, and more people feel able to participate. His writing focuses on verifiability, information literacy, and the ethics of representation, with particular attention to who gets documented, who gets cited, and what systems shape the public record.

He brings an organizer's mindset to collaboration: practical pathways for newcomers, trust across institutions, and allyship practiced through patient support, shared credit, and a commitment to lowering barriers without lowering standards. Reach Jake at jorlowitz@gmail.com or JakeOrlowitz.com.

About WikiBlueprint

Ethical Wikipedia consulting.

WikiBlueprint is a Wikipedia consulting and training practice built on a clear premise: Wikipedia is a public good, and work on it should be done with care. WikiBlueprint helps clients engage Wikipedia ethically through evidence-first research, policy-aligned writing, and collaborative process. The goal is never to game Wikipedia or control a narrative. It is to build improvements that stand on independent sourcing, survive community review, and remain useful long after a project ends.

Offerings include cohort-based and custom Wikipedia training, strategic guidance for organizations working within visibility and conflict-of-interest constraints, and hands-on support for research, drafting, and publication. WikiBlueprint also helps institutions design Wikipedian in Residence programs and contributes to the ecosystem through citation tooling that strengthens sourcing and supports long-term stewardship. Contact WikiBlueprint at info@wikiblueprint.com or wikiblueprint.com.

About The Harnisch Foundation

The grant that made this book possible.

The Harnisch Foundation has practiced creative, progressive, spirited philanthropy since 1998. Founded by Ruth Ann and Bill Harnisch, the New York City foundation is guided by a belief in a fairer world, with special attention to gender and racial equity. Ruth Ann, a former Emmy-nominated television anchor and radio host, serves as president, leading support for journalism, professional development, coaching, women's leadership, and independent film.

The foundation is the home of Funny Girls, a social-emotional learning program for girls in third through eighth grades that uses improv to teach leadership skills, supporting girls to find their voice at a critical point in their development. Learn more at funnygirls.org.

Other strategic priorities include Creative Mornings, the Institute of Coaching at McLean Hospital and Harvard, journalism programs at Kennesaw State University and Baruch College, the TED Fellows coaching program SupporTED, and Awesome Without Borders, which distributed weekly grants of one thousand dollars to creative project makers. The foundation's support for this training reflects its long commitment to knowledge access, media literacy, and the equitable flow of information. Learn more at thehf.org.

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About This Edition

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WikiBlueprint
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Wikipedia is a room you can enter. This book walks you in.

You hover over Edit and scroll away. You wonder if someone will notice, if you will do it wrong, if you should wait until you understand everything. That reaction is normal, and this book treats it as normal. Wikipedia is a living agreement among strangers, held together by a few simple rules, and the rules can be learned in six lessons.

Each level answers one question a new editor has, in the order the questions arrive, and each replaces one kind of fear with one simple skill. By the end you will have published a sourced, neutral article and become the kind of editor other editors can work with. Refined over years of teaching newcomers, and made possible by The Harnisch Foundation.

You will learn how to

- Enter with an account, a user page, and a watchlist that feels like home
- Read a diff calmly, and treat mistakes as reversible
- Pair every claim with a citation, and judge a source in seconds
- Test whether a topic belongs before you write a word
- Draft from a fact bank, with attribution and without hype
- Polish the lead, links, and references so the page earns trust
- Publish by the right pathway, and steward the page after

Wikipedia does not ask you to be believed. It asks you to be checked.

Jake Orlowitz is a nineteen-year Wikipedia editor and administrator, founder of The Wikipedia Library at the Wikimedia Foundation, and founder of WikiBlueprint, an ethical Wikipedia consulting practice.
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