

Using Wikipedia as an Effective Teaching Tool

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Wikipedia (i/ˌwɪkiˈpiːdiə/ or i/ˌwɪkiˈpiːdiə/ wik-i-pee-dee-ə) is “a collaboratively edited, multilingual, free Internet encyclopedia supported by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation. Wikipedia's 30 million articles in 286 languages, including over 4.2 million in the English Wikipedia, are written collaboratively by volunteers around the world. Almost all of its articles can be edited by anyone having access to the site and not being blocked. It has become the largest and most popular general reference work on the Internet.”ⁱ

Here are just a few ways that Wikipedia can be used as an effective teaching tool:

- **How do I start my research?**
 - Students often have a difficult time knowing just where to begin the research process. A topic's Wikipedia article can be used to garner a basic overview of a topic so students can begin their research more confidently. They can also use the article to mine for keywords associated with their topic and then use these keywords when they begin searching library resources.
- **Narrowing down a broad subject into a feasible research topic**
 - Using the structured outline format of Wikipedia, you can demonstrate to students how to narrow down a broad subject into a much more feasible research topic. By starting with a broad topics such as *Addiction* you can easily demonstrate that the topic is so broad it is difficult to know which parts to focus on. From there follow the link to different types of addictions, i.e. *Behavioral Addiction*, and then to another subtopic, i.e. *Shopping or Compulsive Buying Disorder*. Having students follow along online engages both visual and physical learning styles.
- **Evaluating sources' credibility**
 - While students should not be citing Wikipedia articles themselves, they can use an article's References to find credible, citable sources! The problem with students' use of Wikipedia is their sometimes blind acceptance of its information. Use this as an opportunity to critically review the article's References to determine the reliability of the information contained within.

Further Reading:

Chandler, C. J., & Gregory, A. S. (2010). Sleeping with the Enemy: Wikipedia in the College Classroom. *History Teacher*, 43(2), 247-257.

Giles, J. (2005). Internet encyclopaedias go head to head. *Nature*, 438(7070), 900-901.

Rand, A. (2010). Mediating at the Student-Wikipedia Intersection. *Journal Of Library Administration*, 50(7/8), 923-932.
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See more at: <http://www.mlb.ilstu.edu/learn/instructiontips/tip04.08.html>

Prezi available at: <https://prezi.com/yf6zkr7bzzoj/using-wikipedia-as-an-effective-teaching-tool/>

ⁱ Wikipedia. (2013). Retrieved June 17, 2013, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia>