Editing Wikipedia

A guide for student editors supported by the Wiki Education Foundation

Wiki Edu

Why write for Wikipedia?

Wikipedia strives to represent "the sum of all human knowledge." While Wikipedia contains more than 5 million articles, a lot of that human knowledge is still missing or underdeveloped on Wikipedia.

When you've written papers in the past, they were likely read by just one person – your instructor. When you write for Wikipedia, you're writing for an audience of millions.

As a student, you can access knowledge that most people can only dream of. You have your library. You have access to academic journals and textbooks. Writing for Wikipedia makes knowledge available for others to learn from.

You also have your brain. You have the critical thinking skills, and the academic know-how, to help others make sense of the subjects you're studying.

Imagine the difference your knowledge can make in people's lives. *That*'s why we're asking you to write for Wikipedia.

Finding your way

As you get started, it's helpful to familiarize yourself with some of the tools and resources you'll be using for this assignment.

Enroll in your course

Create an account on Wikipedia, and then enroll on your course's page using the link provided by your instructor.

Hello!

You've been invited to join CHEM 239. To join the course, you need to log in with a Wikipedia account. If you don't have a Wikipedia account yet, sign up for one now.

W Log in with Wikipedia   W Sign up with Wikipedia

Take all the online training modules

Once you create an account and enroll on dashboard. wikiedu.org, you'll have access to the training library.

"Wikipedia Essentials" and "Editing Basics" modules are usually required at the start of your course. They take about an hour each.
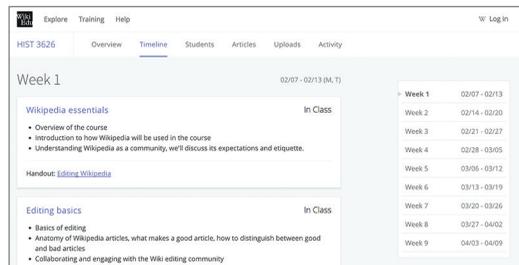
Other, shorter modules may also be assigned as part of your course timeline. These offer a refresher, or new skills that match the task you'll do that week. You may be graded on these trainings, so check back often to keep up to date!
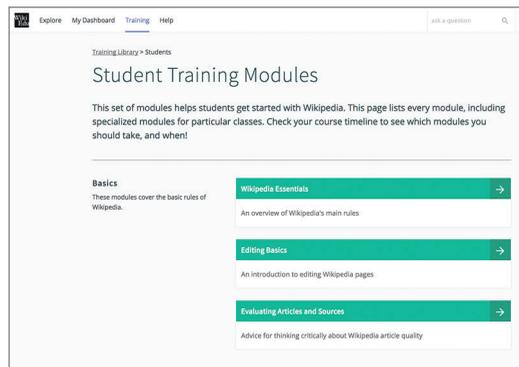
Keep an eye on the Dashboard

The Timeline feature on dashboard.wikiedu.org will give you a sense of what you should be working on in any given week.

New training modules and help resources will be made available to you throughout the assignment.

Help is available!

Your class will be assigned a **Content Expert**. They're paid staff of the Wiki Education Foundation. They're expert Wikipedians who are there to offer advice and feedback.

You can request their help through the "Get Help" button.

Get Help

This button is visible on dashboard.wikiedu.org and your Wikipedia sandbox. If you're seeking feedback on your draft, unsure about a message from another Wikipedian, or have any questions at all, push the button. A Content Expert will be in touch!

What's the plan?

Below, you'll see a rough outline of what goes into writing a Wikipedia article. Each task has its own section in this guide. We'll also show you if there are training modules to help you with that task.

Writing a Wikipedia article, from start to finish

1 Get to know Wikipedia

First, learn about Wikipedia and how writing for Wikipedia is different from your typical classroom writing assignment. Review some key policies that guide Wikipedia.

Online Training: Wikipedia Essentials

2 Choose your topic and find your sources

Your instructor might assign an article or ask you to find a relevant topic to write about. Make sure you have enough material to cite when you write!

Online Training: Evaluating Articles and Sources

3 Draft your article

Once you have a few good sources, start drafting your article or contribution. You'll do this in a "sandbox" on Wikipedia. The online student training will show you how.

Online Training: Editing Basics

4 Add images

You can add pictures and diagrams to your article to illustrate it. But where can you find free images licensed for use on Wikipedia? Pay close attention to the copyright claims on images. If you found it on the internet, it probably can't be used.

Online Training: Contributing Images and Media Files

5 Spruce up your work

Once you've written your article, review your formatting to help it look and feel like the rest of Wikipedia.

6 Post your work

When you have written a few paragraphs, with citations, you're ready to go. Post your work to "mainspace," that is, the Wikipedia article!

Online Training: Sandboxes and Mainspace

7 Get feedback, and improve

When your article is live, you'll want to solicit feedback from classmates. You may also receive helpful feedback from other Wikipedians. Engage with the Wikipedia community to share ideas and incorporate feedback.

Online Training: Peer Review

Other trainings, not listed here, may be required for your class. Check your course's page often to be sure.

You have a variety of online, interactive trainings available to you at dashboard.wikiedu.org.

We've added the titles of the most relevant training modules to certain pages. You'll see them on your course timeline, too.

1 What you may not know about Wikipedia

Writing for Wikipedia differs from writing term papers, essays, and other assignments. Here are a few differences to keep in mind. If you want to know more, visit the most relevant training modules, too.

Neutral point of view

You may be used to persuasive styles of writing. On Wikipedia, you don't want to persuade. Articles don't take sides, but describe significant viewpoints published in reliable sources. You want to share facts. Wikipedia lets people interpret those facts for themselves.

⤷ Online Training: Evaluating Articles and Sources

No original research

Wikipedia isn't a place to share original ideas or opinions. Instead, you should summarize what others have published in reliable sources about the topic. Skip the thesis statement! Don't offer conclusions, interpretations, or analysis.

⤷ Online Training: Evaluating Articles and Sources

Copyright and plagiarism

In your academic papers, you might quote lengthy passages and cite the source. That's not how it works on Wikipedia. Copying content from copyrighted sources onto Wikipedia isn't allowed, *even if you cite the source*.

Everything you contribute to Wikipedia has to be written in your own words. Think carefully about what you write, and draw from a variety of sources.

⤷ Online Training: Plagiarism and Copyright Violation

> Wikipedians have developed these policies and principles over the years so we can ensure that Wikipedia is reliable and trustworthy.

Reliable sources

When people read a Wikipedia article, they want to see where the information comes from. That's why you have to include citations for anything you write on Wikipedia.

Good sources have a reputation for fact-checking. That means books published by academic presses, peer-reviewed academic journals, and international newspapers. You should also be using sources that represent widely held viewpoints, rather than authors who write to persuade readers to a particular point of view.

⤷ Online Training: Evaluating Articles and Sources

Conflict of interest

If you have a conflict of interest about a particular topic, avoid editing articles about it. Don't write about your instructors or workplace, for example.

⤷ Online Training: Wikipedia Essentials

2 Choose your topic / Find your sources

Depending on your class, you may be assigned an article to develop, or asked to choose one yourself. Choosing a topic for your article, and finding sources that support that topic, is often a cyclical process. You'll adapt your choice based on what sources you find, and you'll find more sources as you refine your article topic.

Choose your topic

Choose a topic that you find in a variety of good sources, but isn't well represented on Wikipedia. Avoid overly broad topics. You'll have better luck writing about a narrowly focused (though not *too* narrowly focused) topic than on a broad overview.

As you investigate your topic, you may find there aren't enough reliable sources to write an article. If that's the case, start thinking about other topics you've discovered.

When you've settled on the article you want to improve, let your instructor know by adding it to dashboard.wikiedu.org.

Find good sources

Rather than search online, ask your librarian to help you find good, reliable sources. The best sources are recently published books, textbooks, and peer-reviewed work in academic journals from reliable publishers, written by experts in the field you're writing about.

You'll generally want to avoid blog posts, information with a strong point of view, and opinion columns.

When you find 3–5 good sources that address your topic, you're probably ready to start writing. If you can't, reassess your selected topic.

What makes a source trustworthy? It's not about agreeing with it. Think critically, and look for sources that:

• Fact-check and/or publish corrections

• Don't present some facts and omit others to advance an agenda

• Don't frame facts with a certain slant

⮑ Online Training: Evaluating Articles and Sources

❸ Draft your article

Here's a small but fully developed article to use as a model. For more ideas, find an article on a topic similar to one you'd like to write, and think about how it's structured.

Lead section

This is a clear summary of the most important parts of the article. For a short article, your lead may only be a few sentences. It isn't meant to catch the reader's attention, or explain why the topic is important. Instead, it's a quick summary of the article in plain language.

Infobox

Many, but not all, articles contain an infobox that describes key elements of the topic. You can find an article on a similar topic to yours, copy the code for the infobox, and adapt it to your article.

Body of the article

Each big idea can have its own heading. In the case of this article, the body covers the history of the hurricane, then its impact. A new article may just have one section.

Images

Freely licensed images can be added to Wikipedia articles from Wikimedia Commons. (See pages 10–11.)

References

After the content comes a section listing the sources used in the article. This should appear automatically.

3 Draft your article, continued

Wikipedia is a unique style of writing

You might be used to writing five-paragraph essays, research papers, or persuasive arguments. Wikipedia is a different style of writing. Keep to the facts, and let your writing be clear, formal, and impersonal. You aren't trying to convince readers to agree with you. You'll want to make sure they trust the information you're sharing.

Here's a poorly written Wikipedia article:

Britannica and the Future of Encyclopedias

Encyclopædia Britannica, although a celebrated and historically significant encyclopedia, has little relevance in modern society. Instead, most experts agree that the future of the encyclopedia genre belongs to Wikipedia and other wiki encyclopedias — created by regular folks like you and me. Ironically, while it was a great influence on Jimmy Wales and the intrepid new generation of amateur encyclopedists who created — and continue to create — Wikipedia, *Britannica* in recent years has come to symbolize everything wrong about the old ways of creating and distributing knowledge: top-down control, unaccountable gatekeepers who decide what does and does not merit coverage, copyright restrictions and high prices that limit access to the wealthy, and — in its current online form — intrusive advertising that undercuts the reliability and usability of its content.

Here's why:

This title is too much like an essay. Who can factually talk about the future?

Has "little relevance" according to whom? Don't make any original arguments.

Don't use "weasel words" (like "most experts agree" or "some people say").

Avoid casual language and slang, or any references to yourself or the reader.

Don't use "fluff terms" (like "great", "extraordinary", or "intrepid").

Don't inject your opinion into the article.

Don't use overly complex language and sentence structure.

Here's a better article:

Since the early 1990s, the *Britannica* has faced new challenges from digital information sources. In rapidly changing fields such as science, technology, politics, culture, and modern history, the *Britannica* has struggled to stay up-to-date, a problem first analyzed systematically by its former editor Walter Yust. [1] Although the *Britannica* is now available both in multimedia form and over the Internet, its preeminence is being challenged by other online encyclopedias, such as Wikipedia. [2]

Here's why:

- It's short and to the point, with plain language.
- It cites sources for factual claims. One citation per statement is the minimum expectation.
- It attributes viewpoints to the people who hold them.
- It states a conclusion, but attributes it to a specific source.

Online Training: Evaluating Articles and Sources

Writing your lead

When you create a Wikipedia article, the lead is the first section. It's the most widely read aspect of your article, and can even be presented by search engines when you look up your topic! That's why it's crucial to get it right.

A good lead summarizes the entire article by briefly covering all important aspects of the topic. One good strategy for writing a Wikipedia article is to draft a lead section first, which you can then use as an outline for the rest of the article.

Ultimately, you'll need to revisit your lead when you finish writing your article. Adjust it to reflect the finished product.

Writing the first sentence

The first sentence should serve as a definition of the article topic, with the topic itself — be it a person, place, thing, idea or concept — in bold, and a brief description that puts it into context.

For example, a biography would look like this, with the name in bold, and the birthdate after the name in parenthesis.	**Anna Anderson** (16 December 1896 – 12 February 1984) was the best known of several impostors who claimed to be Grand Duchess Anastasia of Russia.
An article about a social theory would look like this, with the idea in bold.	**Capitalism** is an economic system based on private ownership of the means of production and their operation for profit.
An article about a plant, animal, or other species would look like this, with the common name in bold and the scientific name in italics and parenthesis.	**Sheep** (*Ovis aries*) are quadrupedal, ruminant mammals typically kept as livestock.

How is Wikipedia different from a college essay?

Fact-based, not persuasive writing
Rather than making an argument, think of the article as a description of the information you can find about a topic, based on good sources.

Formal tone and simple language
Articles should be written in a formal tone, but with easy-to-understand language. Wikipedia isn't the place to show off your extensive vocabularies or mastery of jargon. People who have never heard of the topic before will be reading your writing. Keep it clear, and help them learn!

No large block quotes
You might be used to quoting large passages from other works, but Wikipedia's policies ask you to paraphrase whenever possible. Provide information in your own words.

Pickier about sources
Wikipedia is very particular about where its information comes from. You may find that some sources that would work in a typical college paper won't work here.

4 Adding images to Wikipedia articles

Adding images and illustrations to Wikipedia can be tricky. You can't just grab images you find by doing an image search. Instead, you have to make sure the person who made the image agrees that it's OK to share with Wikipedia under a free license, such as a Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike license (CC-BY-SA). Even so-called "free" images on websites usually aren't acceptable.

You can't use it, even if...

- You don't see any copyright notice.
- The image is older than the internet.
- The creator has died.
- It's a publicity shot for a movie, book, album, etc.
- You own a copy of a photo (unless you took it yourself).
- You scanned it from a book.

So, where can you find legitimate photos?

It may seem impossible to find an image you can use on Wikipedia. That's why Wikimedia Commons, commons.wikimedia.org, is so important! That's where you can find freely licensed images already approved for use on Wikipedia. If you can't find something there, try using Creative Commons Search to find freely licensed files: search.creativecommons.org
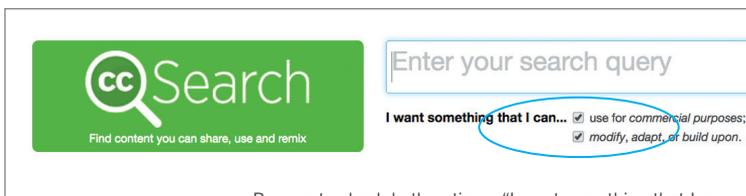
Be sure to check both options: "I want something that I can... use for commercial purposes; modify, adapt, or build upon."

Options to find freely licensed images:

- Within the Wikipedia editing window, click "Insert," then "Media," to get access to all the images on Wikimedia Commons.
- You can look in open-access academic journals, such as those from the Public Library of Science (PLOS), which have useful scientific and medical illustrations.
- You can find photos on Flickr, but they MUST be shared under a CC-BY-SA license. From Flickr's search page, you'll want to search for "Commerical use & mods allowed," "No known copyright restrictions," and "U.S. Government works."
- You can also use public domain images. Those are images with expired copyrights, and anything created by the U.S. federal government.

If you aren't sure if an image is OK to use, ask your Content Expert by using the "Get Help" button. When you upload an image that doesn't belong on Wikipedia, it can create a lot of problems for you and the Wikipedia community.

Online Training: Contributing Images and Media Files

STOP
What is NOT allowed on Commons

By default, you can't upload someone else's work. That includes your own photographs of someone else's work, such as a painting or movie poster.

Never upload:
- Most pictures published on the internet, especially image-sharing sites such as Instagram, Tumblr, Imgur, Reddit, or so-called "free image" or "stock photo" websites
- Logos
- Photos scanned from textbooks
- Promotional photos
- Screenshots of TV shows, movies, or DVDs

OK
What is allowed on Commons

You may upload works that you created entirely yourself. This includes photos, diagrams, charts, and videos such as:
- Pictures you take of natural landscapes, animals, plants, or everyday objects (i.e., not art such as a sculpture or painting).
- Explanatory diagrams you've made. For example, a Bohr diagram, a flowchart, or anatomical illustration.
- People photographed in public places.

How to add an image to a Wikipedia article

You may not find any images for your Wikipedia article. That's OK! But if you've made an image, chart or diagram, or found one on Creative Commons search, here's how to add it to your article. If the image is already on Wikimedia Commons, skip to step 4.

1 Go to commons.wikimedia.org, and click "Upload file."
(Be sure you are logged in.)

Photo: Cabo Espichel, Portugal, 2012-08-18, DD 08 / Poco a poco / CC BY-SA 3.0

2 The upload wizard will give you step-by-step instructions for uploading your work.

If it's not your own work, make sure the image is explicitly described as CC-BY-SA, CC-BY, or public domain. Name the creator of the image, and link to the source.
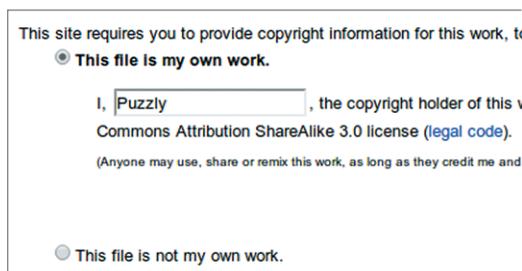
3 Add one or more categories describing the subject of the file.

Wikimedia Commons can group related files into categories. For example, bonsai trees are grouped under Category:Bonsai.

4 To add the image to a Wikipedia article, go to the section of the article where you want the image to appear.

Click "Edit" and then click the media icon ( ). Search for the name of your file, and select it.
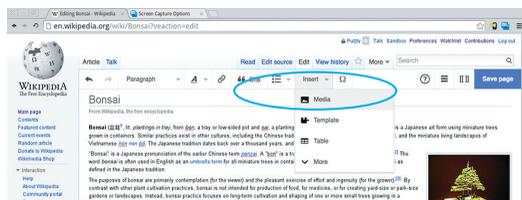
5 Save the page. You're done!

Online Training: Contributing Images and Media Files

5 Spruce up your work

Adding links to and from your article

One of the great joys of Wikipedia is the interesting links that lead to other compelling articles. Creating wikilinks helps others discover your article.

Creating a wikilink

What might your reader want to learn about to deepen their knowledge of your topic? Once you have a few ideas, go back to your article. Find the first time these ideas are mentioned in the text (not in headers or subtitles, which should never be links). That first in-text mention is the best place to create a wikilink to the article about that idea.

1. To link to another Wikipedia article, choose the "edit" option in the section of your article you want to link from.

2. Highlight the word you want to become a wikilink, and press the link button (🔗) in the editor window.

3. A list will pop up, showing Wikipedia's related articles for the highlighted word. Select the article you want to link.

4. Click the "Save" button, and enter your edit summary. "Created wikilink" is a fine summary. Click "Save page," and you're all done!

⚠️ Never use this method to link to a page that isn't a Wikipedia article. You can create an "External Links" section at the end of the article.

Using headings

Use section headings to distinguish important ideas or broad subtopics. Don't use them as paragraph headers, or to break up the article. Think carefully about the structure of your article before you start writing. As you write about different aspects of a topic, those aspects will guide sensible choices for your headings.

- Headings should never be questions.
- Don't number your headings or sections.
- Only capitalize the first word of a heading and any proper nouns.
- Don't keep naming the subject in your headings. For example, an article about Barack Obama might use the heading "Childhood," not "Barack Obama's childhood."

↪ Online Training: Editing Basics

6 Post your article

The online training will show you how to find and use your sandbox to draft an article. Once you have a few well-cited sentences in your sandbox, you can create a new article, or bring your work over to an existing article to improve it.

Creating a new article

1. Go to your sandbox (or wherever you've been drafting your article). On the sandbox page (where your article is), look to the right. To the left of your search bar is a tab called "More." Click it, and then click "Move."
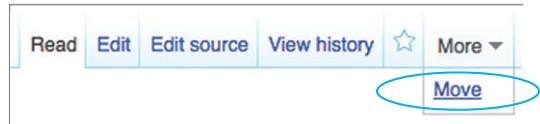
2. Click the box that says User and change it to (Article). Delete all the text in this window and carefully type ONLY your article's title. Pay attention to punctuation and spelling, because this can be hard to change once you move it.

   Look at similar topics and choose a title that matches theirs. Don't use an essay format, or title it with a question. The best title is usually the simplest statement of what your article is about.

3. In the Reason box, enter "Ready for mainspace."

4. Review your title one last time, and then click on the blue "Move page" button.

5. Now, you can link 1–3 other articles to your article. Find relevant words in other articles, and follow the wikilinks instructions on page 12.

Improving an existing article

If you're editing an existing article, the sandbox can be a good place to copy and paste a few sentences or a paragraph to develop. Make sure you copy the text in edit mode. Copy no more than a paragraph or a few sentences at a time, then paste them into the article and save the change. Don't copy and paste from other text editors (such as Word, Google Docs, or OpenOffice). That can introduce weird text errors when you save the edit!

Never copy and paste your work over an entire article! Improve the existing text or add new text.

Online Training: Sandboxes and Mainspace

7 Get feedback

Every article has its own Talk page. Wikipedia is a collaboration of thousands of people, and Talk pages are where they negotiate decisions. You'll use Talk pages to make suggestions, post sources, and discuss changes with other Wikipedians.

Look, a new Notification! These let you know when someone mentions your username, thanks you for an edit, or leaves a message on your User Talk page.

To hold a discussion with other Wikipedians on a Talk page, you'll need to use wikicode, also known as wiki markup. We've provided a guide on the back cover to help you format your text on a Talk page. Remember to end all of your comments with four tildes (~~~~) to sign your name.

What if your work is challenged or removed?

You may find that your work is challenged, or removed outright. If someone has reverted your edit, make sure you read what they said in their edit summary by checking the View history tab of the article. Check to see if they left more information on the article's Talk page.

Your instructor can see everything you add to Wikipedia, even if other Wikipedians remove it. Don't worry about your grade, and never ask anyone to stop improving an article because of your grade. Instead, discuss the content respectfully, and work to find a solution you both can live with.

If you ever recieve a message you can't understand, or if you're not comfortable responding to it yourself (for any reason!) contact your course's Content Expert. They'll get in touch with you.

Etiquette

- Be polite. Remember, it's difficult to read sarcasm and irony in text.
- Assume good faith. Other editors are trying to improve the project. Try to see their point of view, discuss things on the Talk page when you disagree, and find a solution.
- Never simply post deleted content back into the article.
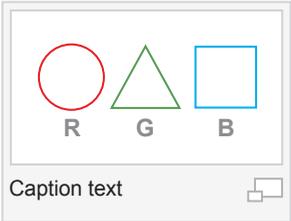- Discuss article content, not editors. Do not make personal attacks.

Online Training: Peer Review

Final review

☐ **Is the title short and simple?**
Make sure it doesn't look like an essay, or ask a question.

☐ **Is the first sentence direct and useful?**
It should clearly define the subject, with the topic of the article in bold.

☐ **Is the lead section a clear summary?**
The lead shouldn't be written like an introduction, or argue why the topic is important to read about. It's just a condensed summary of what's in the article below. Everything in the lead should be mentioned in the article, too.

☐ **Did you write in your own words?**
Check that the article doesn't contain excessive quotations, or copy any sources, even if you've given them credit.

☐ **Is the article clear to a non-expert?**
Check that you've explained acronyms and jargon in simple English the first time you use them.

☐ **Does the article let the reader decide for themselves?**
Rewrite any persuasive language that aims to sway a reader to a conclusion. Don't ask the reader to do something. Let the reader make their own conclusions based on the facts.

☐ **Did you proofread your article?**
Do a basic grammar and spelling check. Make sure your sentences are complete sentences. Remove any first-person ("I/we") or second-person ("you") writing.

☐ **Is your formatting consistent with the rest of Wikipedia?**
Don't use too many bullet-pointed lists or too many headings in your article. Check page 12 for help with headings.

☐ **Are the pictures in your article shared on Wikimedia Commons?**
If it isn't your own image, link to evidence that the copyright is shared under a free copyright license. Make sure you do this on Wikimedia Commons, not Wikipedia itself. (If you added it from Wikipedia's media tool, it's usually fine.)

☐ **Is every claim cited to a reliable source?**
Good sources include textbooks or academic journals. Don't cite blog posts.

☐ **Did you make links between Wikipedia articles?**
Link relevant words to other Wikipedia articles the first time they appear. Visit other Wikipedia articles and link them to the article you've been working on, too. Stick to words that relate directly to your topic.

☐ **Did you thank people who helped you?**
Check your User Talk page, and the Talk page of your article. If anyone offered help or feedback, say thanks!

☐ **Did you try searching for your topic online?**
A week after you've created an article, try doing a web search for your topic on a search engine. You may be surprised to see your own writing!

Wiki markup cheatsheet

These examples cover the formatting needed most often when editing Wikipedia articles with wiki markup. You'll need to use wiki markup to carry on discussions with other Wikipedians on Talk pages.

Description	What you type	What you get
Italic	`''italic text''`	*italic text*
Bold	`'''bold text'''`	**bold text**

Section headers	`==Heading text==`
	
	`===Sub-heading text===`
	
	`====Sub-heading text====`
		## Heading text
		### Sub-heading text
		#### Sub-heading text

Link to another Wikipedia page (Internal link)	`[[Denis Diderot]]`	Denis Diderot
Internal link with different text	`[[Denis Diderot|Diderot]]`	Diderot
Link to another website	`[http://loc.gov Library of Congress website]`	Library of Congress website
Bulleted list	`* Wikipedia` `* Encyclopédie`	• Wikipedia • Encyclopédie
Numbered list	`# A - Azymites` `# B - Cézimbra`	1. A - Azymites 2. B - Cézimbra
Image with caption	`[[File:Example.jpg|thumb|Caption text]]`	Caption text
Signature and timestamp (for Talk pages)	`~ ~ ~ ~`	Username (talk) 19:50, 11 June 2016 (UTC)

To make a citation	What you type	What you get
Insert a citation	`Page text. <ref>[http://example.org Example.org], more text.</ref>`	Page text.[1]
Display citation footnotes	`<references />`	1. ^ Example.org, more text.