



Writing in Wikipedia

- Writing & Rhetoric II -

English 3080j

Summer S. II 2014

Ellis 019

M, W 4:10-6:10

Instructor

Matt Vetter

Office: 343 Ellis Hall

Office Hrs: M, W 6:10-7

Introduction & Overview

Let's face it. Wikipedia hasn't always been welcome in academic circles. It's unreliable, amateur, unstable, an insult to credible research, a major contributor to student plagiarism. Right? This is what its critics would have you believe. And perhaps they are right, to some extent. A crowd-sourced "open-access" encyclopedia that anyone can contribute to *is* going to ruffle some feathers. It challenges many of the systems of credibility we've come to rely on, and dramatically changes the way we share and access knowledge. But if we accept these arguments completely, we're missing out on an exciting opportunity to learn from and contribute to a writing community that has made it the largest and most popular encyclopedia in history.

Welcome to Writing & Rhetoric II – *Writing in Wikipedia*. Rather than ban or ignore it, this course invites you to learn about and practice writing by observing, analyzing, and contributing to Wikipedia. The encyclopedia has a lot to teach us, it turns out, about research, writing, collaboration, genre, authorship, and digital rhetoric—the way new media forms influence texts, and the author/audience relationship.

Yet for all it can teach us, and in spite of its success, Wikipedia is still a work in progress. This course will ask you to critique and update the encyclopedia's coverage of a subject that we all have access to, if not immediate experience with: the representation of Appalachia, and its related issues and identities.

In doing so, we'll also be studying how the encyclopedia, in its attempt to be "universal," often leaves out or fails to represent regional and local culture. Our practical goal for this aspect of the course is to improve the encyclopedia's representation of Appalachia, its people, places, art, etc. But we'll also "zoom out" to think about some broader implications for understanding identity, rhetoric, and writing. How, for instance, does mainstream media perpetuate negative stereotypes about certain identities and regional cultures? How are these stereotypes circulated and promoted? How might they be reversed or dealt with? Finally, how can participation in Wikipedia serve some of these goals? Let's find out together.

Readings & Resources

Course Texts: *Readings Available Electronically*

Course Page: <http://goo.gl/WxHymz>

Style Guide: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Course Delivery

This is a "blended" course that includes both face-to-face and online instruction. We will meet in a lab classroom two days a week (M, W) and work online on Fridays.

Major Projects

1 Representations of Appalachia

A short essay in which you examine representations of Appalachia in mainstream media and connect those representations to your own understanding and experiences. *Key Concepts: Identity & Discourse, Rhetoric, Media Influence.*

2 Genre Awareness Presentation

Groups will work on analyzing featured Wikipedia articles to identify major conventions of the genre and how those conventions reflect community values, then present their findings to the class. *Key Concepts: Genre Awareness, Genre Theory, Imitation, Writing Metaknowledge and Transfer.*

3 Proposal and Article Edit

Identify a Wikipedia article in need of revision and addition. Proposals will outline article “gaps” and suggested developments. Article development should be equivalent to a short research paper and employ effective outside research in line with Wikipedia conventions. *Key Concepts: Research, Fact-Checking, Critical Analysis, Style, Collaboration, Communities of Practice, Source Legitimacy.*

4 Final Reflection

An opportunity to reflect on the work you’ve done in this course: what you’ve learned about writing, identity, and rhetoric. *Key Concepts: Identity Politics, Discourse, Public Knowledge, Wikipedia, Writing Skills/Knowledge.*

Grades

Grades are problematic, especially in writing courses. Traditional ways of grading lead to a lot of stress and anxiety, for both teacher and student. But grades can also hinder learning when we become so focused on assessment that we lose sight of our main objectives: practicing, discussing, and learning about writing. My own approach to grades is to value effort rather than skill. I believe that all students should have an equal opportunity to succeed in my course, regardless of the literacies they bring with them. As a teacher, I’m trying to level the playing field but I’m also trying to get you to work through multiple difficult tasks because that, I believe, is the best way to challenge you to learn. The most practical way (that I’ve found) to accomplish all of this is to use what’s called a grading contract.

Reading Responses

You’ll be expected to contribute frequently to course Talk page (<http://goo.gl/WxHymz>), which will help you both better understand the reading and practice editing in Wikipedia. Generally speaking, whenever we have a reading, you’ll have some kind of response or short writing assignment due. These are low-stakes, informal writing assignments which means you don’t need to worry too much about the formalities (punctuation, style), but they should be substantial and thoughtful and should demonstrate your engagement with the reading. In addition to these Reading Responses, I will sometimes ask you to post drafts or other process work on your major projects to this talk page.



The Grading Contract

This course utilizes a grading contract to maximize learning and facilitate productive discussion about the essays you write. The gist of the contract is that I guarantee a grade of at least a B to everyone who meets the terms of the contract, and in return, you promise to fulfill your side of that contract with an emphasis on doing your best to learn what we are trying to learn. Students who violate the contract (1 major violation or 3 minor violations) will see their promised grade reduced by a full letter grade. At the end of the course, you will have the opportunity to raise your grade by a full letter by producing a superior portfolio of writing gathered from the work you accomplished all semester. If you have violated the contract, superior writing can still raise your grade (if you're down to a C, you could still get a B). The grading contract, then, largely makes grading automatic, up-front, and, I hope, less stressful, which should allow us to worry less about grades and more about learning how to best take advantage of writing in school, work, and life.

Policies

- I use **e-mail** to communicate important information about the class. You are responsible for checking your school account regularly. You should also check the **Course Page** often for informal writing assignments and schedule changes.
- Your work in this class is **always public**. Don't submit writing you can't let other students see. Drafts of papers must be polished and ready for classmates' feedback on the assigned dates to get credit.
- **Plagiarism**: Cheating—whether by claiming another's ideas or work as your own (fraud) or making up or falsifying writing (fabrication) will result in a course grade of F and a report to Community Standards. You are at all times responsible for handling sources ethically by acknowledging the author and source of directly borrowed ideas and language in your writing.
- **Class Accessibility**: Please let me know as soon as possible if you need an accommodation in order to work successfully in this class. This classroom strives for full accessibility, and it is not necessary for you to have an official accommodation letter from Disability Services in order to request changes to the classroom that will better serve your needs as a student, although you are encouraged to explore the possible supports they can offer if you are a student with a disability. Both able bodied students and students with disabilities are encouraged to suggest any improvements to the learning environment. We're all in this together!
- Everyone in our class, including me, must remain **civil and courteous** at all times. We will often have opportunity to share our opinions and beliefs, but no racist, sexist, heterosexist, or any other negative communication harmful to an individual or group will be tolerated.

Materials

You need an Ohio U. Box Account (ohio.edu/oit/box/) (cloud storage) to save and organize your work.

Remember that you will be collecting all of your writing for a final portfolio. You'll also use Box to "turn in"/share major projects with me and your peers. You also need a Notebook to take notes and do in-class writing in. (Bring to class every day.)

Attendance & Participation

Absences in this course will result in a minor violation. 3 minor violations = reduction of final course grade by a full letter. I will consider, but not guarantee, excusing absences with written documentation, but they must be legitimate, e.g. severe illness. Participation is required in this course as well. We'll do a lot of small group work and frequent class discussions. Please come to class prepared to discuss the reading for that day. Bring the book/article/essay and any notes that will benefit our discussion. Do the reading and be prepared to **contribute, but not dominate, the discussion.**

Assessing Your Writing

The grading contract allows us to focus less on a quantitative judgment of your writing, and more on qualitative feedback. It might seem strange at first to not receive a grade on your essay, but remember that we're trying to have a complex discussion about your writing and that we'll accomplish that goal through commentary about how each of your projects succeeds and what you need to work on. I'll spend a lot of time thinking about and commenting on your work, and I expect you to engage equally with my comments and to be constantly reflecting on your growth as a writer. I'll typically use MS Word's comment feature to provide feedback and will also write a short letter at the end of your essay discussing what could be improved. I'll use a blue highlight for sentences/passages that are really well-written and a yellow highlight for sentences/passages that need some work. I'll highlight what I determine to be grammatical errors in yellow. If errors are numerous/distracting, I may ask you to rewrite the essay for credit. Furthermore, if your essay is not meeting the criteria of the assignment in terms of content, length, etc, I may ask you to rewrite the essay. For some projects,, you will also be responsible for a review of a peer's work. To meet contract expectations, I expect a high level of critical review.

Learning Outcomes and Goals

- gain an understanding of texts and writing as tools that mediate social realities (identities, stereotypes, beliefs, attitudes), especially texts/media that contribute to our experience with and understanding of the region and culture of Appalachia/Southeast Ohio
- understand and practice genre analysis to learn about textual forms and conventions in Wikipedia, and how those forms and conventions reflect community values. Understand genre awareness as useful writing knowledge that can be applied to other writing tasks
- work with a team of peers to create and successfully execute an oral presentation with visual aids
- practice writing in digital, collaborative environments (wikis, discussion board forums, cloudshares)
- recognize writing and research as (ongoing) social-collaborative processes within communities of practice,
- learn to critique and analyze texts in order to find "gaps" – opportunities for further revision or development
- recognize your own ability to contribute to ongoing research and writing projects and to add to public knowledge via Wikipedia
- practice and understand the process of integrating research for different types of writing (persuasive/factual)
- recognize the important of social knowledge (community values, conventions, and goals) in writing by contributing to Wikipedia and interacting and engaging with a specific community of practice surrounding a topic area
- practice writing for different audiences (peers, self, instructor, Wikipedia public) and rhetorical situations
- read and write in in diverse genres (encyclopedia article, analytical essay, reflection, presentation) and writing styles (persuasive, analytical, fact-based, etc.)
- understand the capacity of writing in digital media for changing public awareness/knowledge
- learn to recognize effective design principles for both print and digital documents
- gain an awareness of issues of authorship, legitimacy and reliability raised by different forms of digital publishing
- reflect on the significance of contributing to a public knowledge project like Wikipedia in order to improve its representation and treatment of Appalachia; reflect and begin to understand the politics of access and representation as they manifest in Wikipedia and other media