My name is Amber Berson, and in addition to being a writer, curator, and PhD student, I’m the Canadian ambassador for the Art+Feminism Wikipedia project. I’ve been working with Art+Feminism since 2014 to help train more female-identifying editors, and to generate more and better feminist content on Wikipedia. If you’re an artist or other type of creative professional, you may have wondered what it takes to get your own Wikipedia page. And, if you already have a Wikipedia page, you may have wondered how to change the information on your page to make it more accurate (or more flattering!). The tips in this guide are intended to help you understand Wikipedia’s guidelines and policies, and learn more about how you can approach digital archiving, conflict resolution, adding content to the Commons, etc. Hopefully, with all the information presented here, you’ll be able to have the best Wikipedia page possible.
What is Wikipedia, and who writes it?

Wikipedia is an encyclopedia. More than that, it’s the world’s free online encyclopedia, accessed by nearly 500 million unique visitors each month in more than 250 languages. The English version of Wikipedia hosts more than 4.5 million articles, all of them collaboratively authored and edited by volunteers. If there’s an article about you and your work, it’s because someone took the time to make one.

How Wikipedia works

Wikipedia is a publicly generated resource. Anyone, anywhere can edit (almost) any article at any time. This means that once a page goes live, volunteer editors are able to edit and add to a page forever (although, there are also a small number of protected or locked Wikipedia pages that require special permission to edit, mainly for controversial topics or templates).

Anyone can become an editor on Wikipedia in order to modify existing pages, or to create new ones. Editors can also contribute by translating articles (Wikipedia even offers a really cool content-translator tool) and by adding material to Wikimedia Commons—a collection of over 45,184,580 (and growing!) freely usable media files to which anyone can contribute.

To create a new page, all you need to do is create an account on Wikipedia, and then add your new article. While only registered and signed-in users can create pages, anyone can modify a page, and the edits are simply attributed to their IP address. In addition to volunteer editors, Wikipedia employs bots to scan edits for plagiarism and carry out other mundane and repetitive tasks such as checking for typos.

What type of content can go on Wikipedia?

Wikipedia has a number of rules that govern what type of content appears on the site. To quote Wikipedia,

“Wikipedia articles follow certain guidelines: the topic should be notable and be covered in detail in good references from independent sources. Wikipedia is an encyclopedia—it is not a personal home page or a business list. Do not use content from other websites even if you, your school, or your boss owns
them. If you choose to create an article with only a limited knowledge of the standards on Wikipedia, you should be aware that other editors may delete it if it’s not considered appropriate.”

To clarify, EVERYTHING added to Wikipedia must be a newly written, summarized description of a subject. Even if I wrote an article for another website, say on The Creative Independent, for example, I could not copy and paste that information into Wikipedia. I can cite a small portion, but the bulk of an article needs to be new copy.

Wikipedia itself has no firm rules but does operate under what they call their five pillars:

- Wikipedia is an encyclopedia.
- Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view.
- Wikipedia is free content that anyone can use, edit, and distribute.
- Wikipedia’s editors should treat each other with respect and civility.
- Wikipedia has no firm rules, only policies and guidelines.

How do I get (or alter) a Wikipedia page written about me and my work?

Most likely, you’re reading this because you don’t have a Wikipedia page and you want one—or, because you have a page, but you want to edit it. The simple answer is that you can’t edit or create your own Wikipedia page, because that would be a conflict of interest (more on this later). However, you are allowed—and even encouraged—to list yourself on Wikipedia’s repository of articles looking for creators or on a similar list run by a particular community like Women in Red. And, while you can’t write your own Wikipedia article, you can prep the bibliography and images to make it easier for someone else to write one about you (keep reading to learn how). Below are some additional tactics you can employ for the best chance at having a great Wikipedia page written about you by a volunteer editor.

**Get written about in as many places as possible**

Before you can count as a “notable” person, you and your work first need to be covered in multiple, reliable, independent secondary sources. Wikipedia borrows its content and credibility from external editorial bodies, and thus, in order to have enough information available for a whole page about you and your work, there needs to be plenty of credible content about you.
published in other reliable sources.

**Use red-linking to your advantage**

If there are pre-existing articles on Wikipedia that reference you or your work, another good tactic is to go into those pages and red-link your name to alert people that your biography is missing from Wikipedia. This will help editors assess whether you need a standalone page, or a biography in an already existing page.

**What to do if you have a Wikipedia page, but don’t like what’s on it**

If there’s already a page about you but you don’t like what’s on it, I discourage you from editing content yourself (though it is permitted occasionally). Rather, in dealing with articles about yourself, you can open a discussion on the Talk page of the article, and you can contact the Wikimedia Foundation for help resolving the issue.

It’s important to respect how Wikipedia operates—as a repository for facts—so if there is non-inflammatory, non-speculative, factual, verifiable, and cited information on your page that you are not excited to share, if it’s true information, it may not get removed. For the best chance of a change being made, you need to be able to demonstrate how the information is not noteworthy or reputable.

**A few notes on notability**

If you don’t have your own Wikipedia page yet, before you do any of the above, you need to determine whether or not you’re a notable figure. Notability guidelines are possibly the most subjective part of Wikipedia, and are the subject of many of the discussions that take place behind the scenes, in what Wikipedia calls Talk pages. Like Wikipedia states, “Existence does not prove notability.” You will need to demonstrate that you and/or your work have garnered significant coverage by verifiable, reliable, and independent sources. And while you can’t create your own page, you can make it easier for people to know about your work by assembling this information for them—on your own website, for example.
Using your own website to archive unbiased information about you/your work

I strongly encourage you to set up a Google alert for yourself. When articles are written about you and your work, create a PDF of the article and include it—as well as a link and citation—on a well-marked section of your personal website. This will help future editors access content from verified sources to help with their article. If you don’t archive articles yourself, future editors will have to scour the internet to find things about you and your work, and they might not always turn up the content you are most proud of, or that you want highlighted on your page.

To help your own website show up towards the top of Google search results when a future editor goes hunting for information about you, you can take a few steps. When you’re being written about, ask publications to link to your site (links to your website from reputable sources tell Google your site is legit, which will help it show up higher in search results). Using a domain name for your website that features your own name can help as well (for example: yourname.com). Also ensure that your name is featured throughout your website, as this helps with something called “keyword density.” Updating content on your site relatively frequently can help as well, since Google prefers fresh content to stale content when indexing search results.

Adding to the Commons

Another really important way to contribute to Wikipedia is by adding media to the Commons—a collection of 45,187,131 freely usable media files to which anyone can contribute. According to Wikimedia, “any freely licensed media file (images, sound, video, etc.) that is useful for any Wikimedia project can be uploaded.” It’s very important that you are the owner of any media you add to the Wikimedia Commons. Content added to the Commons must bear a Creative Commons license. Wikimedia offers a pretty awesome upload wizard for this purpose.

Adding media to the commons is helpful when creating a new article, but you can also search the commons for media that has already been added that supports the subject. This means that it is within your power to add your own image, or images of your work, to the commons right now. In doing so, you are adding to the public domain and providing resources for editors who want to work on your page. And this way, you have the power to choose the type of commons license that you feel most comfortable with for images of you and your work.

If you don’t want to bother uploading to the commons—or if you can’t rationalize a need for your images to be housed there yet—you can add
images to many sites (like your website or blog) and have them labeled with a shareable Creative Commons license. When people search your name, Google makes it possible to narrow the results down to ones with open licenses.

**The risks of being on Wikipedia**

Just because someone has created a page for you on Wikipedia doesn’t mean that you’ll like what they wrote. Sometimes edits are good, but sometimes they can be biased, unflattering, or any number of other things. The risks of being on Wikipedia include the risk of bad edits being added to your page.

There is also a risk of a Wikipedia administrator removing the post about you for a variety of reasons. For example, if another editor suspects a conflict of interest, or a bot picks up on plagiarism, the article will be nominated for deletion.

There is also always a risk that when women, transgender, and non-binary people are profiled online that it can lead to online harassment. Wikipedia takes harassment very seriously and in addition to the non-Wikipedia related consequences to these actions, users found guilty of harassment will be blocked. Unfortunately, because of Wikipedians general anonymity, and the fact that an IP address can generate multiple user accounts, harassment is still a problem on Wikipedia, in spite of the good-faith measures they’ve taken to stopping it.

**Conflict negotiation**

While harassment is a real problem on Wikipedia, not every negative interaction can be labeled as such. Having your edits flagged for deletion, your edits rewritten, and/or tracking a user’s contributions for policy violations does not constitute harassment, though it certainly can lead to conflict. To quote Wikipedia:

“Editors do not own their edits, or any other article content, and any other editor has a right to track their editing patterns, and, if necessary, to revert their edits. Unwarranted resistance to such efforts may be a sign of ownership behavior and lead to sanctions.”

If you’re dealing with a conflict with another user, there are several things you can do. First, assume the other editor was acting in good faith if they changed or removed your content. Similarly, if you find questionable content on Wikipedia, remember that the page may have been created by a new editor. Next, follow Wikipedia’s dispute resolution protocol and bring the dispute to the article’s Talk page. If you require outside support to
continue the discussion, consider the dispute resolution noticeboard and maybe get a third opinion. Don’t assume things will get ugly, but if they do, know that there are many, many Wikipedians dedicated to making it a more zen and safe space.

A user’s guide to writing and editing Wikipedia pages

Editing Wikipedia is pretty simple. You have the choice to edit using a visual editor or using code, and you can toggle between the two using the button found in the top right-hand corner of the editing screen. You must be logged in to use the visual editor feature. Some users need to activate the visual editor, which you can do under Preferences/Editing/Editing Mode.

To make an edit to a pre-existing Wikipedia page, simply click edit and make the change. Note: It’s highly advisable to “preview changes” before saving. Once you’ve made and reviewed your edit, you can save it and make it live. Before doing so, remember to record the type of edit you’ve made in the appropriate field (added content, images, corrected spelling, etc.) and note whether it was a minor edit or not. This helps other editors and bots to understand why you made the edit.

If you would prefer to create a new page (note: you can only do this if a
page does not already exist for the subject), the first step is to search Wikipedia to see if a draft page about the same subject already exists. You can do this by typing the subject into the search bar and then running an advanced search for draft pages.

Wikipedia maintains a page with instructions and helpful tips for creating your first article. Note that to create full articles (as opposed to draft pages), your account must be at least four days (96 hours) old, and you must have already made more than ten edits. It is advisable to work in drafts until your article is complete, and to play around in your Sandbox (a space to experiment with the process of editing Wikipedia) while you learn to edit. When you’re ready to create an article, you can also use the Article Wizard tool.

For more technical information on editing Wikipedia—including slideshow tutorials and videos—I encourage you to take a look at Art+Feminism’s resources.

**Avoiding conflict-of-interest editing**

Editors are responsible for ensuring that their work does not pose a conflict of interest. To quote Wikipedia, “conflict of interest (COI) editing involves contributing to Wikipedia about yourself, family, friends, clients, employers, or your financial and other relationships.”

If you would like to see a page created about someone or something but have a conflict of interest, you should request it be created by a neutral third party. For information on how to request a new article that can be created by someone else, see Wikipedia:Requested articles. This is a compendium of red links—instances where a page has been requested but does not yet exist. Once a corresponding Wikipedia page has been created, it will turn blue. In addition to this list, you can also check out projects like Women in Red and the Black Lunch Table for a list of red links.

**Following Wikipedia’s content guidelines**

Anything published on Wikipedia must link back to multiple verifiable sources, i.e. “reliable sources.” These types of sources are defined as “articles on reliable, third-party, published sources with a reputation for fact-checking and accuracy.” Some examples of verifiable sources are university-level textbooks, books published by respected publishing houses, magazines, journals, and mainstream newspapers.

Wikipedia does not publish original research and all articles must
link to a number of external citations. Additionally, Wikipedia content must present a neutral point of view. When writing about a person, and especially a living subject, it is important to familiarize yourself with Wikipedia’s notability guidelines.

Criticisms of Wikipedia’s guidelines and principles related to the above topics abound. For example, it’s possible that what different people will consider a “verifiable source” will vary. And, more importantly, Wikipedia’s policy for verifiable sources can magnify the already existing gender bias as well as other systemic biases plaguing the platform. Projects like Art+Feminism and Wiki Loves Women work to combat this bias and to close the gender gap.

In summary...

I hope that this information helps you to get excited about Wikipedia. I get that it’s a lot of information to take in at once and that much of the content here can read as pretty dry and technical. But I promise, Wikipedia is fun! And I’ve saved the best for last: You can’t break Wikipedia. While it’s true that editing is serious business—you can literally shape and correct gaps in history when you take to Wikipedia!—no edit is permanent. Which means that even if you accidently delete something, or add the wrong link, you or someone else can always go back in and fix the mistake. So effectively, there are no mistakes.

Ready to start getting involved in Wikipedia? Head here to find Art+Feminism Edit-a-thon initiatives in your area, or simply head to the page of red-linked requested articles and start making a new page today.

Amber Berson is a writer, curator, and PhD student conducting doctoral research at Queen’s University on artist-run culture and feminist, utopian thinking. She most recently curated World Cup! (2018); The Let Down Reflex (2016-2018, with Juliana Driever); TrailMix (2014, with Eliane Ellbogen); ~._.:JENNIFER X JENNIFER*:.~ (2013, with Eliane Ellbogen); The Annual Art Administrator’s Relay Race (2013, with Nicole Burisch); The Wild Bush Residency (2012–14); and was the 2016 curator-in-residence as part of the France-Quebec Cross-Residencies at Astérides in Marseille, France. Her writing has been published in Breach Magazine, Canadian Art, C Magazine, Revue .dpi, Esse, Fuse Magazine, and the St Andrews Journal of Art History and Museum Studies.