

How Do I...? Use Wikipedia

First Consider...

This guide will help you:

- *Understand why to consider Wikipedia*
- *Advantages and disadvantages to using it*
- *Helpful tips on how to use it for research*

Wikipedia is great as a general encyclopedia, but at the college level, your professors are looking for more than that. When it comes to academic research, there are some great ways Wikipedia can help you, but using a Wikipedia entry as a source can compromise the quality expected in an academic assignment.

Always be sure to read your assignment carefully and identify the types of sources your instructor has asked you to use.

- Does the assignment call for a specific type of resource, such as an article in a scholarly journal?
- Would an online encyclopedia be appropriate for the assignment?

Be sure to ask your instructor if you are unsure what sources to consult.

And if you are ever in doubt about the reliability and credibility of a resource or need assistance finding a proper resource, do not hesitate to Ask a Librarian!

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How Wikipedia Can Help You



Some advantages of Wikipedia include:

Gather Background Information

Wikipedia's varied subject matter and embedded links can be used to generate ideas and learn new terminology associated with your topic. However, you must recognize that you will need to consult and cite a credible source to verify the information you've found, such as a library database or encyclopedia.

Generate Search Terms

Wikipedia can be used to help generate search terms to use in for searching in library databases. Take a look at the embedded links, bolded words, or items listed in the table of contents.

Consult Entries' Bibliographies

Most Wikipedia entries will include a bibliography at the bottom of the page that details the various sources used to compile the entry. These resources could be helpful sources for you if they are compatible with the requirements of your assignment and are reliable.

Why Wikipedia May Not Be The Best Source

While Wikipedia has its uses, there are reasons your instructors don't want you to cite Wikipedia in your assignment. These include:

Reliability

Because Wikipedia's content is user-created and contains no mandatory review process, users have no guarantee that the information presented is accurate and credible.

Authorship

Unlike other resources, authors are not required to provide credentials or other information indicating their expertise on a given subject area. This compromises the credibility of the entries.

Bias

Although Wikipedia works to maintain a neutral point of view, pages that have been recently edited or are controversial can be very biased.

