

Being digital

Using Wikipedia

1: Introduction

You may have heard people say different things about Wikipedia.

For some it is their first port of call when they come across an unfamiliar topic. However, if you are doing academic studies of any kind, it's likely you have been warned not to use it.

So should you use Wikipedia, and how far can you trust it?

Learning outcome

By the end of this activity you should be able to judge the trustworthiness of information you find in Wikipedia.

2: Evaluating a Wikipedia article

Below is a link to a short article from Wikipedia. Select the link to view the article. Alternatively, you may prefer to search Wikipedia for an article on a topic of your own choosing.

- Quickly read through the article. How far do you trust what it says? What influences your decision?
- Select the 'View history' tab to see who has edited it. What sort of motives might some of these individuals have?
- View the list of references. How far do you trust these sources?
- Go to the 'Rate this page' section at the bottom of the full article screen. Select the 'View page ratings' link. How trustworthy, objective, complete and well-written have others found it? Do you agree?

[Wikipedia: Wellie wanging](#)

3: What did you find?

If, like me, you are not an expert in welly wanging, you may have wondered if Upperrthong is a real place. A quick search of Google shows that it is situated near Holmfirth, not far from Huddersfield in West Yorkshire.

You may have noticed that the article looks a bit incomplete, with a missing citation. There are also not many references at the end of the article, although as it is clearly not academic in nature, this might not matter. You can see that Wikipedia describes the article as a 'stub' and suggests that it needs expanding. It is hard to say what authority the authors have in this subject.

Some of the people who have edited the article did not appear to have the best motives, and their contributions have been removed.

It has been comparatively well-rated, although the number of people to do this is quite small.

The information provided seems fairly accurate, but as the article is very tongue in cheek, it should probably be taken with a pinch of salt and not used for any serious academic purpose.

4: Wikipedia: the questions to ask

Keeping the following questions in mind can help you make a judgement about whether to trust what you find on Wikipedia:

- **Purpose:** What do you need the information for and how important is it that what you find is accurate and reliable? If you are just getting a quick overview of something unfamiliar that has come up in conversation, it may not matter if specific details are in question. However, for academic research or decision-making at work, it is essential to verify the information carefully.
- **Author:** Do you know who put the information there? What is their authority in the subject? What are their motives?
- **Editors:** Who has edited the information? How many times has it been edited? Is there any evidence of different conflicting agendas on the part of the editors?
- **Sources:** What references are listed at the end? Do these seem reliable?
- **Double-check:** What else can you find out about the topic? Be wary of taking facts at face value and use other sources to double-check accuracy.

Further reading

[Bateman, Alex \(2012\) Why scientists should be publishing on Wikipedia](#)

[Moran, Mark E. \(2011\) The top 10 reasons students cannot cite or rely on Wikipedia](#)

References

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