

**What's Up With Wikipedia?
A Pro and Con Discussion**

**Kevin Peers & John Stemmer
Bellarmine University Library**

Abstract

This session will take a look "behind the scenes" at one of the most popular web sites. Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia written and maintained by its users. Many high school and college students use it as their main destination when doing research. This program will reveal some of the problems and issues of using Wikipedia as a research tool.

What's Up With Wikipedia? A Pro and Con Discussion

Presented by
Kevin Peers &
John Stemmer
Bellarmine University Library

Kentucky Library Association Annual
Conference Oct. 1-4, 2008

Wikipedia in the News

TUESDAY
September 30, 2008

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JAN. 26, 2007

A Stand Against Wikipedia

As *Wikipedia* has become more and more popular with students, some professors have become increasingly concerned about the online, reader-produced encyclopedia.

While plenty of professors have complained about the lack of accuracy or completeness of entries, and some have discouraged or tried to bar students from using it, the history department at Middlebury College is trying to take a stronger, collective stand. It voted this month to bar students from citing the Web site as a source in papers or other academic work. All faculty members will be telling students about the policy and explaining why material on *Wikipedia* — while convenient — may not be trustworthy.

“As educators, we are in the business of reducing the dissemination of misinformation,” said Don Wyatt, chair of the department. “Even though *Wikipedia* may have some value, particularly from the value of leading students to citable sources, it is not itself an appropriate source for citation,” he said.

The department made what Wyatt termed a consensus decision on the issue after discussing problems professors were seeing as students cited incorrect information from *Wikipedia* in papers and on tests. In one instance, Wyatt said, a professor noticed several students offering the same incorrect information, from *Wikipedia*.

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Wikipedia in the News

The screenshot shows a Windows Internet Explorer browser window. The address bar displays the URL: <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2008/04/01/wilson>. The page title is "Professors Should Embrace Wikipedia :: Inside Higher Ed :: Higher Education's Source for News, - Windows Internet Explorer".

The page content includes a navigation menu on the left with links for Home, Sign up, News, Views, Blogs, FOR JOB SEEKERS, POST A JOB, FOR EMPLOYERS, About us, Audioconferences, Contact us, and Help. The main article is dated "APRIL 1" and titled "Professors Should Embrace Wikipedia" by Mark A. Wilson. The article text reads: "When the online, anyone-can-edit Wikipedia appeared in 2001, teachers, especially college professors, were appalled. The Internet was already an apparently limitless source of nonsense for their students to eagerly consume — now there was a Web site with the appearance of legitimacy and a dead-easy interface that would complete the seduction until all sense of fact, fiction, myth and propaganda blended into a popular culture of pseudointelligence masking the basest ignorance. An *Inside Higher Ed* article just last year on Wikipedia use in the academy drew a huge and passionate response, much of it negative. Now the English version of Wikipedia has over 2 million articles, and it has been translated into over 250 languages. It has become so massive that you can type virtually any noun into a search engine and the first link will be to a Wikipedia page. After seven years and this exponential growth, Wikipedia can still be edited by anyone at any time. A generation of students was warned away from this information siren, but we know as professors that it is the first place they go to start a research project, look up an unfamiliar term from lecture, or find something disturbing to ask about during the next lecture. In fact, we learned too that Wikipedia is indeed the most

On the right side of the page, there is an advertisement for the "AAC&U Fall Conference" titled "Engaging Science, Advancing Learning: General Education, Majors, and the New Global Century" held from November 6-8, 2008 in Providence, Rhode Island. Below this is a "Looking for a job?" section with a search bar and a "Search Jobs" button. At the bottom right, there is a "Jobs Related to Professors Should Embrace Wikipedia" section with a search bar and a "Find Jobs!" button.

The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the Start button, several open applications including "For Stocks, Worst S...", "Professors Should E...", "wikikla", and "Microsoft PowerPoin...", and the system clock showing 4:39 PM on September 29, 2008.

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Wikipedia in the News

The screenshot shows a Windows Internet Explorer browser window with the address bar containing a file path: `mhtml:file://C:\Documents%20and%20Settings\gmc\Desktop\Wikipedia%20Canned\BBC%20NEWS%20%20World%20%20Americas%20%20Fake%20prof...`. The page title is "BBC NEWS | Americas | Fake professor in Wikipedia storm". The main content area features a red header with the BBC logo and navigation tabs for Home, News, Sport, Radio, TV, Weather, and Languages. Below the header, there's a "News Front Page" section with a world map and a list of regional links including Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Middle East, South Asia, UK, Business, Health, Science/Nature, Technology, Entertainment, and Also in the news. The main article is titled "Fake professor in Wikipedia storm" and is dated Tuesday, 6 March 2007, 14:39 GMT. The article text reads: "Internet site Wikipedia has been hit by controversy after the disclosure that a prominent editor had assumed a false identity complete with fake PhD. The editor, known as Essjay, had described himself as a professor of religion at a private university. But he was in fact Ryan Jordan, 24, a college student from Kentucky who used texts such as Catholicism for Dummies. He has now retired from the site. Wikipedia is an encyclopaedia open to all, written by volunteers worldwide. 'Trust and tolerance' Under the name Essjay, Mr Jordan edited articles and also had the authority to arbitrate disputes between authors. In his user profile, he said he taught both undergraduate and graduate theology, and in an interview with the New Yorker in July 2006, was described as a 'banned professor of religion'." To the right of the article is a small image of a computer monitor displaying the Wikipedia homepage. Below the article, there are sections for "SEE ALSO" (listing links like "Wikipedia founder takes on Google" and "Virus creators target Wikipedia"), "RELATED INTERNET LINKS" (linking to Wikipedia), "TOP AMERICAS STORIES" (listing "Embrace Islam' Bin Laden urges" and "Two acquitted over Katrina deaths"), and "MOST POPULAR STORIES NOW" (listing "Madeleine McCann: The evidence" and "US woman survives canyon"). The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows several open applications: Start, Internet Explorer, wikicanned02.ppt, KLawiklive.ppt, and BBC NEWS | Americ... The system tray shows the time as 10:59 AM.

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Wikipedia in the News

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Magazines > ONLINE > March/April 2008

September 30, 2008

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infolitland What to Do With Wikipedia

By William Badke, Trinity Western University

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Vol. 32 No. 2 — Mar/Apr 2008

If you want to get five opinions from four information professionals, just mention Wikipedia. Often banned by professors, panned by traditional reference book publishers, and embraced by just about everyone else, Wikipedia marches on like a great beast, growing larger and more commanding every day. With no paid editors and written by almost anyone, it shouldn't have succeeded, but it has. In fact, it's now emerged as the No. 1 go-to information source in the world. It's used not only by the great unwashed but also by many educated people as well. *ONLINE* reported on the Pew Internet & American Life Project's findings that 36% of the American population regularly consult Wikipedia (July/August 2007, p. 6).

Admit it—you use Wikipedia too. Someone comes to you wanting to know how to find some good stuff on quantum physics, so you sneak a peak at the relevant Wikipedia article just so you won't sound stupid to your patron. Or someone queries, "What year did George Washington die?" and you could look it up in Oxford Reference, but you don't. I mean, even Wikipedia couldn't get the date of George Washington's death date wrong, could it?

Maybe the newer, supposedly more reliable Citizendium (<http://en.citizendium.org>) will provide a better alternative, but the standards for Citizendium article production are not much higher than those for Wikipedia. Moreover, Wikipedia remains the online encyclopedia of choice for users.

Some Just Don't Like It

There are detractors. I know of any number of professors who will not allow a Wikipedia article to appear in a student's research paper. Wikipedia is labeled as shallow, unreliable, sometimes slanderous, and too often dead wrong. On a more philosophical note, Wikipedia is viewed as the child of our postmodern age in which "truth" is measured by how many people believe something.

The satirist Stephen Colbert introduced the term "Wikiality" (truth by consensus) to poke fun at the concept that if enough people support a Wikipedia statement it becomes true (*The Colbert Report*, July 30, 2006; www.comedycentral.com/motherload/index.jhtml?ml_video=72347). This is closely related to another term Colbert created: "truthiness" (*The Colbert Report*, Oct. 17, 2005; www.comedycentral.com/motherload/index.jhtml?ml_video=24039). Researchers at the University of California at Santa Cruz have created software that uses the measures of age of an entry and number of edits to gauge reliability of articles (the code was released on Dec. 14, 2007). But this, of course, only determines level of consensus (<http://trust.cse.ucsc.edu>).

Which begs the question: If Wikipedia is so bad that we caution our students not to use it for academic work, how can it be so good that much of what you need to know is found there?

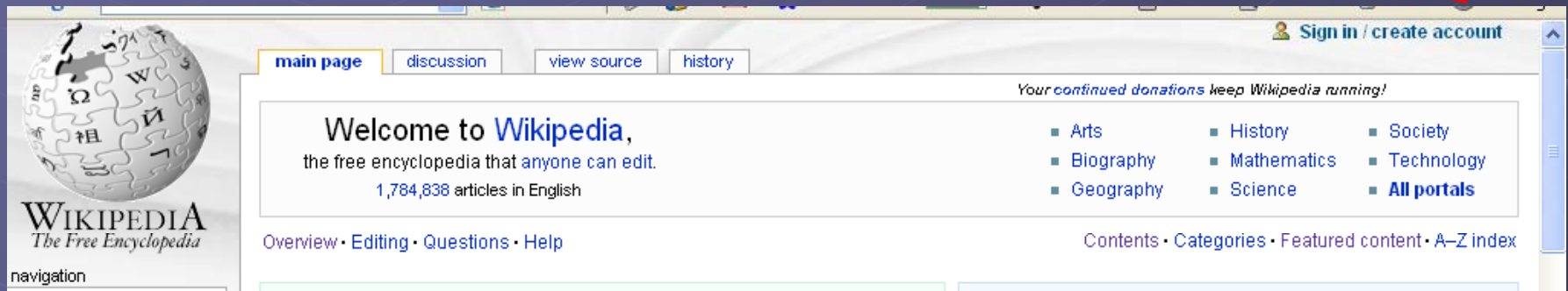
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How an article is published on Wikipedia

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Create Account



The screenshot shows the Wikipedia main page interface. At the top right, there is a link for "Sign in / create account" with a user icon. A red arrow points to this link. Below the navigation tabs, there is a welcome message: "Welcome to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit. 1,784,838 articles in English". To the right of the welcome message is a grid of portal categories: Arts, Biography, Geography, History, Mathematics, Science, Society, and Technology. Below the grid is a link for "All portals". At the bottom of the page, there are links for "Overview", "Editing", "Questions", "Help", "Contents", "Categories", "Featured content", and "A-Z index".

[main page](#) [discussion](#) [view source](#) [history](#)

[Sign in / create account](#)

Your *continued donations* keep Wikipedia running!


Welcome to Wikipedia,
the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit.
1,784,838 articles in English

- Arts
- Biography
- Geography
- History
- Mathematics
- Science
- Society
- Technology
- All portals**

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[Contents](#) • [Categories](#) • [Featured content](#) • [A-Z index](#)

Create Account

 [Go](#) [Search](#)

[special page](#)

[Log in / create account](#)

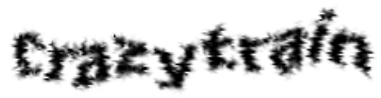
[Learn more about citing Wikipedia](#)

Log in / create account

happens to cause concern, there may be discussion linked to your username.

To help protect against automated account creation, please enter the words that appear below in the box ([more info](#))

Unable to see the image? An administrator can [create an account for you](#).



Username:

Password:

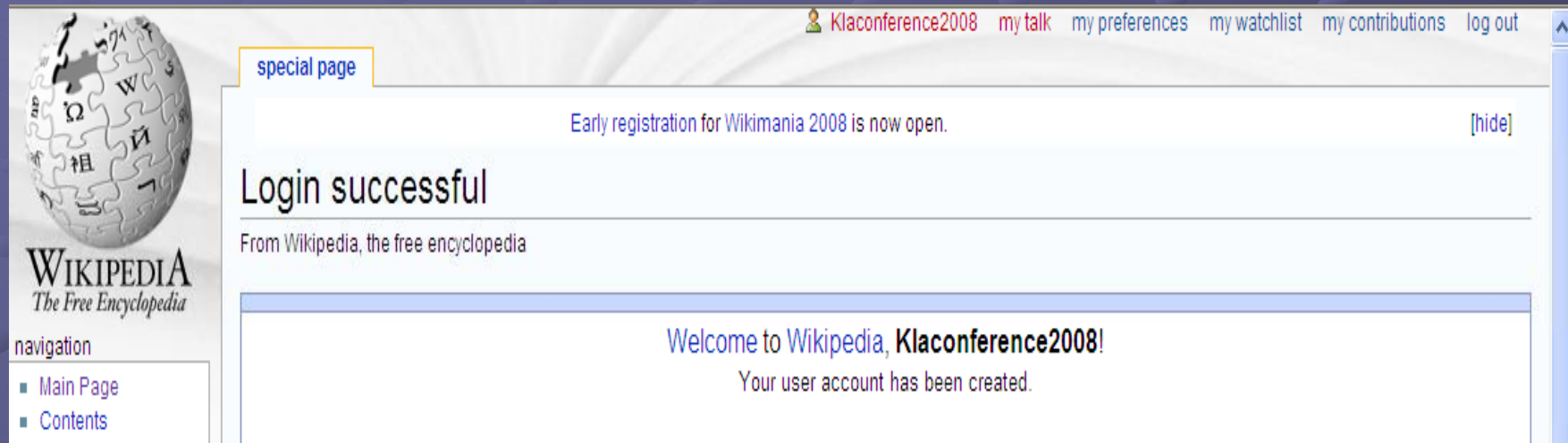
Retype password:

E-mail (optional)*

- E-mail (optional): Allows us to e-mail your password to you if you forget it. If you also "Enable e-mail from other users", then others can e-mail you from your User or User talk page by using the "E-mail this user" feature. Note that the sender's e-mail address will be visible to the recipient. If you change your e-mail address, you will need to [reconfirm](#) it.

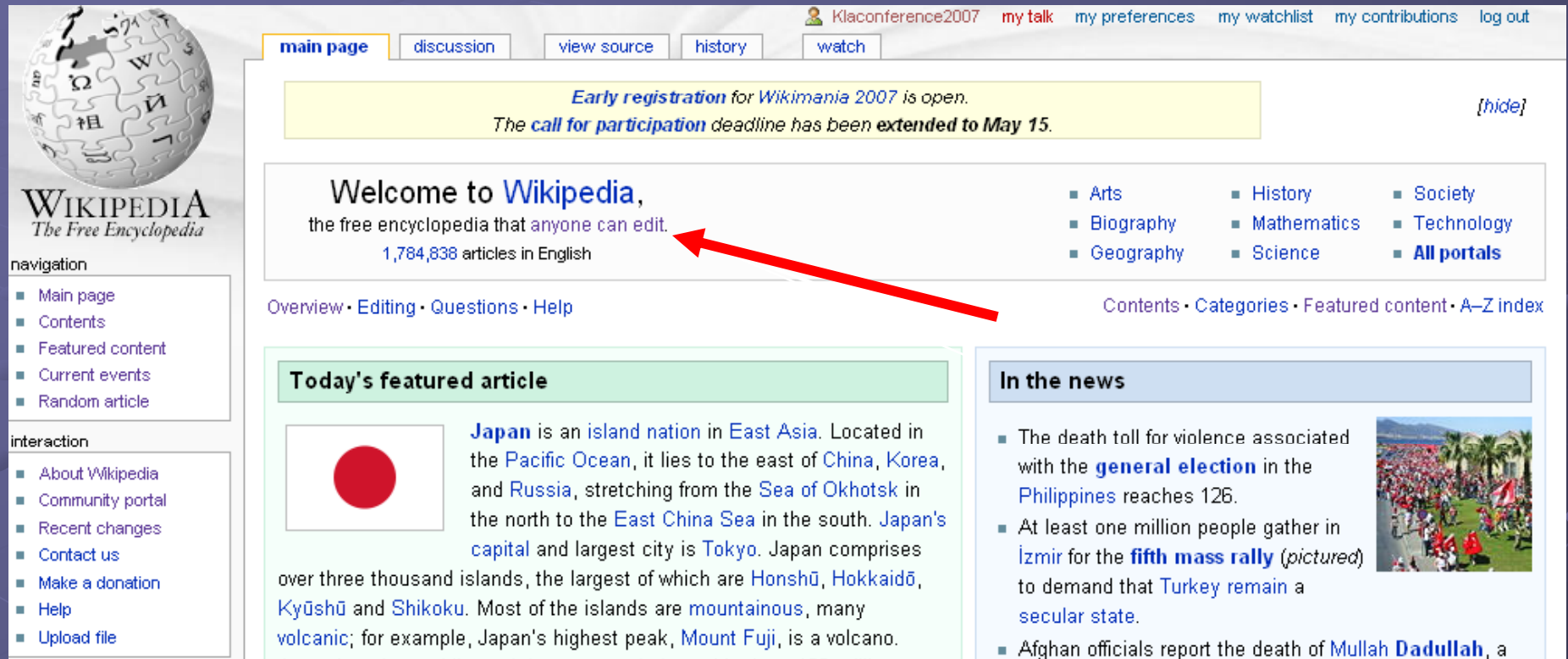
Remember me

Login Successful!



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Wikipedia login success page. At the top right, the user's name 'Klaconference2008' is visible, along with links for 'my talk', 'my preferences', 'my watchlist', 'my contributions', and 'log out'. A 'special page' tab is active. A message states 'Early registration for Wikimania 2008 is now open.' with a '[hide]' link. The main heading reads 'Login successful', followed by the text 'From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia'. A large blue box contains the message: 'Welcome to Wikipedia, **Klaconference2008!** Your user account has been created.' On the left side, there is a 'navigation' menu with links for 'Main Page' and 'Contents'. The Wikipedia logo, featuring a globe with various characters, is positioned above the 'WIKIPEDIA The Free Encyclopedia' text.

Anyone Can Edit



The screenshot shows the Wikipedia main page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'main page', 'discussion', 'view source', 'history', and 'watch'. A user profile for 'Klaconference2007' is visible, along with links for 'my talk', 'my preferences', 'my watchlist', 'my contributions', and 'log out'. A yellow banner announces 'Early registration for Wikimania 2007 is open. The call for participation deadline has been extended to May 15.' Below this, the main heading reads 'Welcome to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit.' with a red arrow pointing to the phrase 'anyone can edit'. To the right of this heading is a grid of portal links including Arts, History, Society, Biography, Mathematics, Technology, Geography, Science, and All portals. The left sidebar contains navigation and interaction links. The main content area features 'Today's featured article' on Japan and 'In the news' with a list of current events and a photo of a mass rally.

WIKIPEDIA
The Free Encyclopedia

navigation

- Main page
- Contents
- Featured content
- Current events
- Random article

interaction

- About Wikipedia
- Community portal
- Recent changes
- Contact us
- Make a donation
- Help
- Upload file

main page discussion view source history watch

Klaconference2007 my talk my preferences my watchlist my contributions log out


Early registration for Wikimania 2007 is open.
The call for participation deadline has been extended to May 15. [hide]

Welcome to **Wikipedia**,
the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit.
1,784,838 articles in English

- Arts
- History
- Society
- Biography
- Mathematics
- Technology
- Geography
- Science
- All portals


Overview · Editing · Questions · Help Contents · Categories · Featured content · A-Z index

Today's featured article

 **Japan** is an island nation in East Asia. Located in the Pacific Ocean, it lies to the east of China, Korea, and Russia, stretching from the Sea of Okhotsk in the north to the East China Sea in the south. Japan's capital and largest city is Tokyo. Japan comprises over three thousand islands, the largest of which are Honshū, Hokkaidō, Kyūshū and Shikoku. Most of the islands are mountainous, many volcanic; for example, Japan's highest peak, Mount Fuji, is a volcano.

In the news

- The death toll for violence associated with the general election in the Philippines reaches 126.
- At least one million people gather in Izmir for the fifth mass rally (pictured) to demand that Turkey remain a secular state.
- Afghan officials report the death of Mullah Dadullah, a





- navigation
- Main Page
 - Contents
 - Featured content
 - Current events
 - Random article

- interaction
- About Wikipedia
 - Community portal
 - Recent changes
 - Contact Wikipedia
 - Donate to Wikipedia
 - Help

search

Go Search

- toolbox
- What links here
 - Related changes
 - Upload file
 - Special pages
 - Printable version
 - Permanent link

languages

help page discussion view source history watch

Early registration for Wikimania 2008 is now open. [hide]

Help:Starting a new page

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For help creating an article, read [Wikipedia:Your first article](#). This article provides help on creating pages other than articles, and provides technical details on the several ways to create a page.

This is a copy of the master help page at Meta. Do not edit this copy. Edits will be lost in the next update from the master page. See below for more information.

Is it new?

Type, then click "Go"

Go (try title) Search

Clicking the "Go (try title)" button takes you to an **edit page** where you can enter the new text, so long as you have set up an [account](#) and there is not already an article at that title. The edit page also has a link for *Editing help*, in case you need it. Other helpful links include [Help:Filling the page](#) and [Help:Editing](#). You do not have to always return to this page to create a new article. New pages can also be started by following a link to a non-existent page, which likewise leads to an edit page (see *Starting a page through the URL, below*). Users are encouraged to be bold when starting a new article.

When creating a new article, you should bear in mind the following:

- The title that you choose is important, as this will be the title of your new article.
- Un-doing mistakes is rarely easier than avoiding them, so it is always a good idea to do a little homework first (see *General principles below*).

The path to a Featured Article

- Start a new article
- Develop the article
- Check against the featured article criteria
- Get creative feedback (Peer review)
- Apply for featured article status
- Featured articles

Search results - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia - Windows Internet Explorer

W http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Search?search=Kentucky+Library+Association&go=Go+%28try+title%29

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Google Go Bookmarks 1093 blocked Check Look for Map AutoFill Settings

W Search results - Wikipedia, the free encyclop...

llconference2007 my talk my preferences my watchlist my contributions log out

special page

Early registration for Wikimania 2008 is now open. [hide]

Search results

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

You searched for **Kentucky Library Association** [Index]

No article title matches

No page with that title exists.

You can search again:

- Titles on Wikipedia are **case sensitive**, except for the first character; please check alternate capitalizations and consider adding a **redirect** here to the correct title.
- See all pages that begin with **this prefix**.
- See all pages within Wikipedia that **link to this page**.
- See **Wikipedia:Searching** for more search tips.

You can create this article:

- Read **Wikipedia:Your first article**.
- Gather references to the source(s) of your information.
- Create the page** including your references.

Or you can **request that this page be created**.

For more information about searching Wikipedia, see **Wikipedia:Searching**.

Kentucky Library Association MediaWiki search Search

Showing below results 1 - 20 of 924

View (previous 20) (next 20) (20 | 50 | 100 | 250 | 500)

- Kentucky

Done

Internet 100%

start Microsoft PowerP... Search results - ... Search Results 7:13 PM

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Editing Kentucky Library Association - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia - Windows Internet Explorer

W http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kentucky_Library_Association&action=edit&redlink=1

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Google G Go Bookmarks 1093 blocked Check AutoLink AutoFill Settings

W Editing Kentucky Library Association - Wikiped...

llconference2007 my talk my preferences my watchlist my contributions log out

article discussion create this page watch

Early registration for Wikimania 2008 is now open. [hide]

Editing Kentucky Library Association

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

- Before creating an article, please read Wikipedia:Your first article, or search for an existing article to which you can redirect this title.
- To experiment, please use the sandbox.
- As you create the article, provide references to reliable published sources. Without references, the article may be deleted.

Notice: You are re-creating a page that was deleted.

You should consider whether it is appropriate to continue editing this page. Information is available on what to do if a page you created is deleted. The deletion log for this page is provided here for convenience:

- 00:31, 21 November 2007 Espresso Addict (Talk | contribs) deleted "Kentucky Library Association" (*Expired prod on non-notable professional association*)

B

Internet 100%

start Microsoft PowerP... Editing Kentucky L... 7:24 PM

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Comparison of Free Encyclopedias

- [A look at an article in Wikipedia](#)
- [Encarta](#)
- [Columbia Encyclopedia](#)
- [Britannica Concise](#)

Behind the Scenes!

- [Louisville article](#)
- [Louisville article editing screen](#)
- [Louisville page edit history](#)
- [Louisville page discussion](#)

As a result of this universal access, what are some of the Issues?

- Disagreement over content (edit wars)
- Hoaxes
- Vandalism

Edit Wars

- [List of edit wars](#)
- [Copernicus](#)
- [Copernicus edit war](#)

Some Known Hoaxes

- Upper Peninsula War
- Brahmanical See
- Brahmanical See lives on...

Examples of Vandalism

- [Kentucky](#)
- [Easter Island Entry](#)
- [Seigenthaler Controversy](#)
- [Seigenthaler Controversy Cont.](#)

Wikipedia in Science Journals

- [Science Direct Search](#)
- [Search Results](#)
- [Article Citing Wikipedia](#)
- [Reference to Wikipedia](#)
- [Wikipedia Article Cited](#)

Attempts to Check Authority

[Wikilab](#) Example

● [Wikiscanner](#)

● [List of salacious edits](#) Example

● [Whois IP Address Finder](#) Result



Domain Tools:

- [Whois Domain Search](#)
- [Whois By IP Address](#)
- [DIG Lookup](#)

Web Analysis Tools:

- [Ping](#)
- [Your IP Address](#)
- [Name By IP Address](#)
- [IP Address by Name](#)
- [About Your Browser](#)

SEO Analysis Tools:

- [Alexa Reach Chart](#)
- [Alexa Rank Chart](#)
- [Compare Alexa Rank](#)
- [Total Google Pages](#)

Website Validators

- [CSE HTML Validator](#)
- [WC3 HTML Validator](#)
- [CSS Validator](#)
- [Robots.txt Validator](#)



Tool: Whois By IP Address

Use Whois By IP to figure out who owns and IP address or the location of where it is hosted. [click here](#) find out more information about Whois searches.

Find Out Whois By IP:

Enter IP Address: Search

OrgName: Exxon Mobil Corporation
 OrgID: [EMC-55](#)
 Address: 5959 Las Colinas Blvd.
 City: Irving
 StateProv: TX
 PostalCode: 75039
 Country: US

NetRange: [192.67.48.0](#) - [192.67.48.255](#)
 CIDR: 192.67.48.0/24
 NetName: [NETXOM-192-67-48-0](#)
 NetHandle: [NET-192-67-48-0-1](#)
 Parent: [NET-192-0-0-0-0](#)
 NetType: Direct Assignment
 NameServer: PEGASUS.MOBIL.COM
 NameServer: PEGASUS2.MOBIL.COM
 Comment:
 RegDate:

Information Environment

- Live in an ocean of readily available information.
- Students have grown up in a digital world
 - Never relied on print sources as authoritative
- Wikipedia is a product of a digital world

Information Seeking Behavior

- Krikelas (1983) Information Seeking Behavior model
 - “information seeking begins when someone perceives that the current state of knowledge is less than that needed to deal with some issue (or problem). The process ends when that perception no longer exists (p. 7).”
- Path of least resistance

Information Literacy

- Use it as an instructional tool
 - Evaluating criteria for information resources
 - Accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, coverage
 - Discussion tab
 - Different points of view
 - Settling scores
- Appropriate starting point
 - Like other encyclopedias

Evaluating Criteria

- Accuracy – ??
- Authority – none / Wisdom of Crowds
- Objectivity – uses “Neutral Point of View”
- Currency – extremely current
 - e.g. financial bailout bill
- Coverage – extensive
 - Over 2.5 million articles in English
 - Fort Dix attack plot

Good Enough Information

- Not GOOD Information
- FDA and Drug Approval
 - Aspirin would not be approved today

Things to Watch...

- [Google Knol](#)
- [Citizendium](#)
- [New Britannica](#)

Additional Humorous Stuff

Time Permitting

- [Deletionpedia](#)
- [Wiki Dumper](#)
- [Asylum Seeker](#)

Link To Presentation Info

www.bellarmino.edu/faculty/kpeers/wikikla/wikikla.htm

www.bellarmino.edu/faculty/kpeers/wikikla/klabib.htm

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