

Assignment Prompt: Wikipedia Genre Analysis

Wikipedia is the fifth most visited website in the world, after Google, YouTube, Facebook, and the top Chinese search engine, Baidu.¹ Wikipedia has become an incredibly valuable source for finding information about a wide variety of topics, and for good reason. For the same reasons, Wikipedia also makes an excellent case study in evaluating how we receive information and evaluate its credibility.

At a glance:

DUE: Thursday, September 6, at the start of class

Portion of Final Grade: **10% points**

Essay length: **1200 words**

It is more important than ever that each of us is strongly equipped to be a careful and critical consumer of the information we encounter in our lives. This skill is known as "information literacy." The Association of College and Research Librarians (ACRL) have developed a Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education,² which is designed to guide the development of stronger information literacy practices. The Framework states that, among other skills, we should be able to "monitor gathered information and assess for gaps or weaknesses," "synthesize ideas gathered from multiple sources," and "use research tools and indicators of authority to determine the credibility of sources, understanding the elements that might temper this credibility." This essay will give you the opportunity to put those skills to practice.

In this essay, you will analyze Wikipedia as an information source, evaluating how it shapes the information we access and understand. You will also analyze how we evaluate information, including how to use it and whether or not it is trustworthy.

In order to do this, you should *select a single Wikipedia page that you can analyze as a case study* in information literacy.

Tip: I strongly encourage you to select a page on a topic you are familiar with, as doing so will make completing this essay vastly easier. For example, you might select a page to analyze on a significant topic in your major field of study.

You should examine the page you selected, using it to answer the following questions:

- How reliably does the Wikipedia page you selected to analyze represent the topic it is about? What are its positive and negative aspects?
 - **Tip:** I am not looking for a "yes" or "no" answer to the question of whether or not Wikipedia is a reliable source. In almost all cases, the answer is "both

¹ <https://www.alexa.com/topsites>

² <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>

yes and no." Instead, I am looking for you to answer the question: in what ways is this both reliable and not?

- What information is included on the page you are analyzing? What information is not included? What kinds of sources are being used as references on the page, and where in the page are they being referenced? Is any information presented in media other than text?
- How is the information on the page organized and presented? What sections are used, and how is the information being broken down into these sections?
- What issues are at play on the page's Talk Page? (See Discussion Board #3 for more information on what this is and where to find it.) How do these issues affect your perception of the page and its contents?
- How would you evaluate the page overall—what are its strengths and weaknesses? What does it address and what does it not address?

Once you have analyzed the page you selected thoroughly, answering these questions, you should offer some conclusions and generalizations about the way we gain new information. You should answer questions such as:

- How do we determine if information is credible or not?
- How do we determine whether or not a source is trustworthy?
- How do you use information in your everyday life, and how does that information use take account of the credibility of information or the reliability of its source?

In order to support your claims and analyses in this essay, you should use (meaning: quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing) and cite *at least two sources*:

1. The Wikipedia page you have chosen to analyze
2. Any one of our assigned course readings from the first four weeks of class.

You can cite these sources in any format (e.g. APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.) that you wish. You are also welcome to cite more sources, if you like, though I will stress that this is completely optional.

Technical Details:

- 1200 words long
- Create your own page on the Course Wiki to post this analysis
- Include a header with your name, my name, the class, and the date
- Include a title for your essay that communicates something about its content (i.e. not "My Essay" or "Wikipedia Analysis")
- This essay requires you to cite *2 sources*: one Wikipedia page you are analyzing, and one reading from the first four weeks of class.