Nelson English Usage

Digital resources for the Australian Curriculum

Write or Die by Dr Wicked: Argumentative

Exemplar

Topic:
Do your own research: Wikipedia as an assignment resource

Title:
Why Wikipedia puts your assignments in peril

My position on this topic (summarise in one sentence)
Students should not use Wikipedia in their assignments because the information cannot be properly verified, and anyone can edit the information, whether they are 'experts' or not.

Things to mention in my paragraphs
- Wikipedia pages are often hijacked for fun, with articles vandalised to include wrong information for no reason.
- Anyone can write and edit the articles, whether they are experts or not, so it can take a long time for anyone to notice if the information in an article is wrong – often it won't be until an actual expert sees the article that anyone knows it is a problem.
- As Wikipedia is free and staffed mostly with volunteers, wrong information can stay live on the site indefinitely, because it relies on the public to find the time to fix it.
- The writing style is inconsistent; sometimes it is so bad that it is hard to tell what the author of the article is saying.
- There is no guarantee that the information on Wikipedia is objective or neutral, which means that students might read a Wikipedia article and develop an opinion based solely on that, rather than considering other facts and sources.
- There is no referee system, which makes it academically unsound.
- Much material on Wikipedia is also copied and pasted from other sources without permission, which means students might unknowingly use text that already breaches copyright.

Things to mention in my conclusion
- Wikipedia encourages laziness of students by being a one-stop shop for information, which effectively discourages them from looking elsewhere.
- Students cannot verify the validity, neutrality or accuracy of what they read on Wikipedia.
- Teachers will easily know when a student has taken the easy way out and written something based on Wikipedia, and will mark them lower for failing to research and for using an unsound source.

300 words / 30 minutes

Wikipedia is one of the most popular websites in the world. Its encyclopaedia articles make it easy to find and cross-reference information in one place. It is tempting for students to use Wikipedia because it seems like all the information they need. But Wikipedia has many downsides that make it unsuitable as a resource. Students who write using Wikipedia as a resource put their assignments in peril.

Anyone can edit or create an article on Wikipedia. It doesn't matter if they know everything about the topic or nothing at all. Wikipedia's allows anyone to do whatever they want, and information is not academically refereed. That means that articles could be live that are inaccurate and biased. Any Google search of a topic brings up the Wikipedia page in the first few results, regardless of who wrote the article, which means people may read and use the information, trusting it when they shouldn't.

A lot of information on Wikipedia is copied and pasted from other sources without permission. There is no set verification procedure for new pages so it is not until someone notices stolen content and follows up on it that it is addressed – students who list Wikipedia as a resource may be furthering copyright infringement.

Wikipedia is also a hotspot for trolling and flaming. Pages are often vandalised for fun. People edit pages to include defamation and sometimes illegal content. Until it is flagged and corrected, it may remain live and end up in assignments.

You cannot trust what you read on Wikipedia because there is no standard quality control. It could be true, false or anything in between. It is also easy for teachers to know when students have used Wikipedia instead of researching properly, and they can penalise an assignment accordingly. Wikipedia is not worth the risk.

375 words / 30 minutes

Wikipedia is one of the world's most popular websites. It is an encyclopaedia with millions of linked articles, and a lot of information about a topic can be found in one place. This makes it tempting for students to use as a resource in their assignments, but students should avoid referencing Wikipedia. Using it will put assignments in peril.

Anyone can edit or create a Wikipedia article, whether they are experts in their chosen topic or not. If a non-expert writes a Wikipedia article, it cannot be verified as accurate or unbiased, and the quality of writing could be very poor. This means students might end up using inaccurate material in their assignments without knowing it because they have trusted the article.

There is no one set quality control system to Wikipedia because it relies on the contributions and time of the public to create and edit articles, which means it relies on them to pick up on problems and flag or correct them, too. In fact, sometimes articles are flagged as having problems but go unfixed for a very long time. At any given time, many articles on Wikipedia are live with inaccurate, biased and sometimes even defamatory and copyright-infringed content.

It is easy to vandalise a Wikipedia page to include defamatory and illegal content. Some people do this for fun, with no real motive. They insert inappropriate photos, write lies about famous or notable people, make false claims about an event or object or group, and spread hate speech. Unless someone notices that a page has been vandalised, it could remain that way for a long time. A student could put defamation into an assignment unintentionally, and get penalised.

Sometimes Wikipedia authors copy and paste information from other sources without permission. It is not until someone notices that copyright-infringed content is on a page that something can be done about it – so students will use copyright-infringed content in their assignments without knowing it.

Wikipedia may seem like the simplest way to find information, but there is no guarantee what you read is true. It is tempting to be lazy and use it as the one-stop shop for assignments, but teachers will know and will penalise accordingly. Using Wikipedia is not worth the risk.

Read both of your drafts and compare them against your outline and your research. Make notes if needed. Type your comparison notes here:
- The Google search reference (1) was unnecessary
- Good to tie in the final sentence of the first paragraph with the title (peril)
- Putting quality control earlier in the piece (2) is better than in the conclusion (1)
- No need to use trolling or flaming (1) – it will make the teacher ask for definitions of these, which are unnecessary
- Better to list examples of vandalism (2)
- Overall, the second piece is more effective.

450 words / 48 minutes

Wikipedia is one of the world's most popular websites. An encyclopaedia with millions of linked articles, Wikipedia makes it easy to find a lot of information in one place. For students, it is a tempting resource because it makes research easier and quicker. But Wikipedia has many downsides, and students should avoid using it. Wikipedia puts assignments in peril.

Anyone can edit or create a Wikipedia article, whether they are experts in a topic or not. When non-experts write Wikipedia articles, the information in them cannot be verified as accurate or unbiased, and sometimes the writing is very poor. Students may end up using inaccurate resources in their assignment without knowing it because they have trusted the Wikipedia article to be true and objective. It is very easy to believe the first thing that you read about a topic because at first glance it is hard to understand why someone would lie. That automatic trust causes major problems with assignments and with independent thought.

As a free website relying on the contributions of millions of readers, Wikipedia has no fixed quality control system. The burden is on the reader to create and edit articles, as well as to pick up on problems and flag or correct them. Just knowing a problem is there isn't enough: sometimes articles are flagged as untrue, poorly written or disputed but are not fixed for a very long time. At any given time, there are always articles live on Wikipedia with untrustworthy content – sometimes it's even defamatory, illegal or copyright-infringed.

It is easy to vandalise Wikipedia articles to add defamatory and illegal content. Some people do this for fun, with no real motive. Such content often includes inappropriate photos, lies about famous or notable people, false claims about events, objects, people or groups, and hate speech. Unless someone notices that a page has been vandalised, and goes out of their way to fix it, it could remain that way indefinitely. A student could put hate speech into an assignment unknowingly.

Sometimes people who create and edit Wikipedia articles copy and paste text from other sources without permission, which infringes on the copyrights of the original author. Because of the lack of quality control, it is not until someone notices that copyright-infringed content is in a Wikipedia article that it can be addressed. Students who use Wikipedia sometimes use copyright-infringed content in their assignments unintentionally.

The Wikipedia one-stop shop is often the simplest way to find information, but there is no guarantee that the information is reliable. Teachers can easily tell when a student uses Wikipedia instead of researching properly, and they are likely to penalise assignments as result. Using Wikipedia is not worth the risk.