Linguistics

Editing Wikipedia can be daunting at first, especially for a student editor contributing to Wikipedia for the first time in a class assignment. This guide will help you add content about languages and linguistics to Wikipedia.

Make a difference

You're contributing to a resource millions of people use to inform themselves about the world and their environment. Your work will be read by thousands of people, so it's important to be accurate.

By documenting and sharing your knowledge about linguistics, you'll help Wikipedia present a wider spectrum of information about the world. With great power comes great responsibility!

Understand the guidelines

Take time to read and understand the suggestions here to make the most of your contributions to Wikipedia. If you post something that doesn't meet these guidelines, fixing it may take up valuable volunteer time that could have been spent making other content better.

If you aren't comfortable working within these guidelines, talk to your instructor about an alternative, off-wiki assignment.

Engage with other editors

Part of the Wikipedia experience is receiving and responding to feedback from other editors. Don't wait until the last day to make a contribution, or you may miss comments, advice, and ideas. Volunteers from the Wikipedia community might respond or ask questions about your work. If they do, make sure to reply. Thank them, and work with them to improve the article. Discussion is a crucial part of the Wikipedia process.

Watch out for close paraphrasing

Use your own words. Plagiarizing by copying-and-pasting, or close paraphrasing — when most of the words are changed, but the structure and meaning of the original text remains — is against the rules.

Plagiarism is a violation of your university's academic honor code. Plagiarism on Wikipedia will be caught by other editors, and there will be a permanent online record of it tied to your account. Even standard resources or authors, such as educational resources about linguistics, are under copyright and should never be directly copied.

The best way to avoid this hassle is to make sure you really understand your material, and write about it in your own words. If you aren't clear on what close paraphrasing is, contact your university's writing center.

Be bold!

Take the time to understand the rules and guidelines, and soon you'll be contributing important knowledge to a resource you and millions of other people use every day.

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Choosing an article

- Choose topics with plentiful and interesting literature in peer-reviewed journals or science periodicals (such as *Language* or *The Journal of Communication*) or books, but not very well developed Wikipedia articles. Explore related articles to see if the subject is covered under another term.

- You may wish to search for interesting and plentiful sources first, then choose a Wikipedia article based on what you find.

- Check the article's rating on its Talk page. "Start-class" or "stub" articles need your help! Avoid "featured" or "good" articles.

- You can find a list of "stub" articles by typing Category:Linguistics stubs into the Wikipedia search bar.

What's notable?

Remember that not every linguistics topic is notable enough for Wikipedia. You have to rely upon what others have said about your topic. If there isn't any reliable academic literature about a language or theory, it may not be ready for a Wikipedia article. Don't advocate for a topic's importance. Stick to verifiable facts, and write in a clear way.

> ### What is the lead section?
>
> The *lead section* is the first section of a Wikipedia article. A good lead will summarize the entire article in 1–4 paragraphs, providing context and briefly covering all of the important aspects of the topic. The first sentence — which usually starts with the **name of the topic** in bold — is a definition of the topic and indicates why it is important.
>
> Consider writing a lead section first, which you can use as an outline for the rest of the article. Revise it as you go to make sure it accurately summarizes the body of the article.

Organizing your article

Every article will be unique. Add, remove, or reorder these suggested sections as needed.

Writing about a language or dialect
- **Lead section:** A scaffolding paragraph that summarizes the article.
- **Classification:** What is the genetic classification of the language?
- **History:** What languages did it derive from, and when did it begin to diverge? Who spoke it? Also describe changes to the language.
- **Geographic distribution:** Where is it spoken? How many people speak it? Does it have a special status anywhere? You should also list varieties, dialects, or derived languages.
- **Sounds and phonology:** If there's plentiful information, this can be its own article.
- **Grammar:** Outline what's *unique* about the language's grammar. Morphology and Syntax can have their own subsections.
- **Vocabulary:** Focus on *unique* aspects of vocabulary shifts. Are there many borrowed words, honorifics, taboos, etc?

For good examples, see articles for *English language*, *Tamil language*, *Mayan languages*, or *Black American sign language*.

Writing about a linguistic concept
Articles about concepts will take form based on your sources. Consider this a rough outline, and adapt as needed.

- **Lead section:** A scaffolding paragraph that summarizes the article.
- **Define the concept:** What is it? Explain the idea using simple English. Break distinct ideas or approaches into subsections.
- **History:** Provide some history of the concept and its evolution. Name contributors, and any experiments or other theories they drew from.
- **Criticism:** What are the limitations of the theory? Are there debates? Describe them here.

Find an article similar to your topic to use as a model.

Developing your article

Using reliable sources

How do you know if something belongs in a Wikipedia article about languages? First, it needs to be covered by a variety of fact-checked sources. These sources should be published, and reviewed by neutral third parties (an editor, a peer review) for accuracy.

Good sources include current books, textbooks, and peer-reviewed work in journals from reliable publishers, written by experts in linguistics. Literature reviews are good sources for articles on theories and methods.

Generally, travel guides, whether in print or online, are a poor source for language information, and should be avoided.

For more about finding sources, type WP:RS into the Wikipedia search bar.

Accessing special characters

When you edit a Wikipedia article on a language, you may find yourself needing access to special character sets, especially the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). For more on using IPA, type Template:IPA into Wikipedia's search bar. For other languages, see Template:Lang.

Activating these fonts through your keyboard should work on Wikipedia. You can find this and other character libraries through Wikipedia's Visual Editor. In the section you'd like to add the character(s), click "Edit". Then, click "Ω" to open the character library.

Creating a table

Tables can help show the functions of a language. You can showcase numbers, pronunciation guides, or sample sentences.

To add a table, click "edit" in the section you'd like it to appear. In the text bar, you'll see the option to "Insert." Click, and select "Table." Point and click to set the height and width of the table, and write directly into the boxes.

Creating an InfoBox

An InfoBox gives an overview of a language at a glance. To the right is the infobox for Japanese. Here's how to make a simpler version for your article.

First, in "Edit Source," add the text below to the very top of your article:

```
{{Infobox language
|name=
|states=
|nation=
|speakers=
|date=
|ref=
|familycolor=
|fam2=
|dia1=
}}
```

Next, you'll want to write basic information in the fields to the right of each equal sign.

Here's what each one means:

- **Name:** The name of the language or dialect. For example, Japanese.
- **States:** Nation-states where the language is spoken. Link the nation to a Wikipedia article.
- **Nation:** Nations where the language is the official language. Ignore this field if there aren't any.
- **Speakers:** How many people speak it? Use a source cited in the article, or a standardized source, like Ethologue 17.
- **Date:** The year (in four digits) the estimated number of speakers was published.
- **Ref:** The name of the reference.
- **Familycolor:** Type Template:LQUILT into the Wikipedia search bar to see a list of language families, e.g., "Afro-Asiatic." Add yours here.
- **Fam2:** Use this for additional family types.
- **Dia1:** The most common dialect. You can use "dia2, dia3" etc for additional entries.

Type Template:Infobox Language into Wikipedia's search bar to find a complete template with many more options.

Writing tips

- Wikipedia articles are written for the general public, not scholars in the linguistics field. Avoid jargon, and briefly explain academic terms in simple English when you use them.

- Be especially mindful of abbreviations (such as NOM, ACC, or DAT) that may not be immediately understood by Wikipedia's readers.

- Rather than summarizing or creating new sections to give background on your topic, create a wikilink. For example, if your article is on a theory related to "standard language", create a link to the standard language article.

- For ideas on structuring your own article, check out other Wikipedia articles on languages in the same family or region.

Final thoughts

- Don't procrastinate! Writing good, reliable Wikipedia articles takes time. Don't wait until the last minute. If you get stuck, always ask your instructor for extra time rather than adding content to Wikipedia that doesn't meet these guidelines.

- If you have additional questions about contributing to Wikipedia, you can ask the Wikipedia Content Expert listed on your course page.

- Check back on your article's Talk page! Not only can it be interesting to see how your article grows, you may also have comments and suggestions from other editors.

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