

Is Wikipedia for Scientists?

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Participation in a social network can have it's perks. Thanks to the O'Reilly Group on Facebook (that other social network), I received a review copy of Wikipedia: The Missing Manual. But why would a scientist want to know how to write and edit articles on Wikipedia?

Wikipedia has become a respectable source of information that rivals the more traditional encyclopedias such as the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Remember the December 2005 Nature study that compared the two? Wikipedia has accurate information even on such obscure topics as dwarf woolly mammoths from Wrangel Island.

But we all know that Wikipedia is not perfect. If we want to improve the information on topics we care about – and probably have spent years working on – we could become a Wikipedia editor. Especially if we are interested in an audience that includes not only fellow scientists, but also people from other scientific disciplines, journalists or students.

Writing and editing content on Wikipedia is a complicated process. Because anyone can edit content, a great number of rules exist to make sure that the articles have correct information, don't violate privacy, aren't misused as marketing opportunity, etc. All these rules, as well as many practical tips and other tools are of course available online. But Wikipedia: The Missing Manual is a very good text for the aspiring new Wikipedia editor that wants a more systematic introduction.