

Wikipedia State Space Article... Editing Process

ENGW3302: Project 3 Reflection

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1 Overview

In Project 3 I contributed to the State Space Wikipedia article. It had a “needs better in-line citations” warning on it to begin with, so that was the first order of business. After that I discovered that it was missing a significant amount of information on continuous state spaces, and did not include enough examples. I added new sources from UC Berkeley and CMU open courses, and a mathematics website. I also improved the inline citations, added a number of examples, and modified the Definition section to include continuous state spaces.

2 Interactions

The article was a stub when I began, and had only a few talk page entries, the most recent of which about deleting some irrelevant content. All in all, it seemed like a pretty ignored article. I have thus far received no feedback about my work from editors, but in my opinion the article has improved significantly. I created a link to the 8 Queens Puzzle article from State Space because it is a good example of the state space of a simple board game, and gives good intuition on valid/invalid states.

3 Learning

The most significant learning for me came from my struggle in evaluating sources. It was more difficult than I realized to find good source material for Wikipedia. A lot of standard web material is not reputable, scientific papers are often too complex to cite for such a simple concept, and the textbooks that discuss state spaces are paywalled. There are also strict rules on copyrighted material. I thought it would be a good idea to add a Pacman board to the article to show a State Space just like what was done in the UC Berkeley CS lectures. It turns out Pacman is copyrighted and Wikipedia does not allow the use of that type of material without special permission. These instances gave me new insight into and respect for the Wikipedia writing process.

4 Free Information

This was easily my favorite writing project I’ve ever done. Most writing courses make bold claims about how impactful our writing pieces will be in our future, and how we will absolutely look back on these projects and think about how valuable they were in improving our writing. That never happens. Every single writing piece I’ve produced for a class has been sitting in a blue crate under my desk. I’ve never once felt the desire to look back at them and I never will.

This piece, on the other hand, could be relied on by thousands of people looking for basic information. It will have real impact in the world. If I write something stupid or inaccurate, it serves only to reinforce the barriers to accessible knowledge by furthering the notion that open access information is unreliable. I hate writing but I finished

this project a week ago and I've already shown it to 5 people and gotten usable feedback from 2. That's a first for any of my writing pieces.