

Wikipedia (/ˈwɪkɪpidiə/ or /ˈwɪkiˈpidiə/ *WIK-i-PEE-dee-ə*) is a free, web-based, collaborative, multilingual encyclopedia project supported by the non-profit [Wikimedia Foundation](#). Its 17 million articles (over 3.5 million in [English](#)) have been written collaboratively by volunteers around the world, and almost all of its articles can be edited by anyone with access to the site.^[3] Wikipedia was launched in 2001 by [Jimmy Wales](#) and [Larry Sanger](#)^[4] and has become the largest and most popular general reference work on the Internet,^[2]^[5]^[6]^[7] ranking around seventh among all websites on [Alexa](#) and having 365 million readers.^[8]^[9]

The name *Wikipedia* was coined by Larry Sanger^[10] and is a portmanteau from *wiki* (a technology for creating collaborative websites, from the Hawaiian word *wiki*, meaning "quick") and *encyclopedia*.

Although the policies of Wikipedia strongly espouse verifiability and a neutral point of view, critics of Wikipedia accuse it of systemic bias and inconsistencies (including undue weight given to popular culture),^[11] and allege that it favors consensus over credentials in its editorial processes.^[12] Its reliability and accuracy are also targeted.^[13] Other criticisms center on its susceptibility to vandalism and the addition of spurious or unverified information,^[14] though scholarly work suggests that vandalism is generally short-lived,^[15]^[16] and an investigation in *Nature* found that the science articles they compared came close to the level of accuracy of *Encyclopædia Britannica* and had a similar rate of "serious errors".^[17]

Wikipedia's departure from the expert-driven style of the encyclopedia building mode and the large presence of unacademic content have been noted several times. When *Time* magazine recognized [You](#) as its [Person of the Year](#) for 2006, acknowledging the accelerating success of online collaboration and interaction by millions of users around the world, it cited Wikipedia as one of several examples of [Web 2.0](#) services, along with [YouTube](#), [MySpace](#), and [Facebook](#).^[18] Some noted the importance of Wikipedia not only as an encyclopedic reference but also as a frequently updated news resource because of how quickly articles about recent events appear.^[19]^[20] Students have been assigned to write Wikipedia articles as an exercise in clearly and succinctly explaining difficult concepts to an uninitiated audience.^[21]

History

Wikipedia began as a complementary project for [Nupedia](#), a free online [English-language](#) encyclopedia project whose articles were written by experts and reviewed under a formal process. Nupedia was founded on March 9, 2000, under the ownership of [Bomis, Inc](#), a [web portal](#) company. Its main figures were [Jimmy Wales](#), Bomis CEO, and [Larry Sanger](#), editor-in-chief for Nupedia and later Wikipedia. Nupedia was licensed initially under its own Nupedia [Open Content License](#), switching to the [GNU Free Documentation License](#) before Wikipedia's founding at the urging of [Richard Stallman](#).^[22]



Main Page of the English Wikipedia on October 20, 2010.

Larry Sanger and Jimmy Wales founded Wikipedia.^{[23][24]} While Wales is credited with defining the goal of making a publicly editable encyclopedia,^[25] ^[26] Sanger is usually credited with the [strategy](#) of using a [wiki](#) to reach that

goal.[27] On January 10, 2001, [Larry Sanger](#) proposed on the Nupedia [mailing list](#) to create a wiki as a "feeder" project for Nupedia.[28] Wikipedia was formally launched on January 15, 2001, as a single English-language edition at [www.wikipedia.com](#),[29] and announced by Sanger on the Nupedia mailing list.[25] Wikipedia's policy of "neutral point-of-view"[30] was codified in its initial months, and was similar to Nupedia's earlier "nonbiased" policy. Otherwise, there were relatively few rules initially and Wikipedia operated independently of Nupedia.[25]

Wikipedia gained early contributors from Nupedia, [Slashdot](#) postings, and [web search engine](#) indexing. It grew to approximately 20,000 articles and 18 language editions by the end of 2001. By late 2002, it had reached 26 language editions, 46 by the end of 2003, and 161 by the final days of 2004.[31] Nupedia and Wikipedia coexisted until the former's servers were taken down permanently in 2003, and its text was incorporated into Wikipedia. [English Wikipedia](#) passed the two million-article mark on September 9, 2007, making it the largest encyclopedia ever assembled, eclipsing even the [Yongle Encyclopedia](#) (1407), which had held the record for exactly 600 years.[32]

Citing fears of commercial advertising and lack of control in a perceived English-centric Wikipedia, users of the [Spanish Wikipedia](#) forked from Wikipedia to create the [Enciclopedia Libre](#) in February 2002.[33] Later that year, Wales announced that Wikipedia would not display advertisements, and its website was moved to [wikipedia.org](#). [34] Various other wiki-encyclopedia projects have been started, largely under a different philosophy from the open and [NPOV](#) editorial model of Wikipedia. [Wikinfo](#) does not require a neutral point of view and allows original research. New Wikipedia-inspired projects – such as [Citizendium](#), [Scholarpedia](#), [Conservapedia](#), and Google's [Knol](#) where the articles are a little more essayistic[35] – have been started to address perceived limitations of Wikipedia, such as its policies on [peer review](#), [original research](#), and commercial [advertising](#).

Though the English Wikipedia reached three million articles in August 2009, the growth of the edition, in terms of the numbers of articles and of contributors, appeared to have flattened off around early 2007.[36] In 2006, about 1,800 articles were added daily to the encyclopedia; by 2010 that average was roughly

1,000.[37] A team at the [Palo Alto Research Center](#) speculated that this is due to the increasing exclusiveness of the project.[38] New or occasional editors have significantly higher rates of their edits reverted (removed) than an elite group of regular editors, colloquially known as the "[cabal](#)." This could make it more difficult for the project to recruit and retain new contributors, over the long term resulting in stagnation in article creation. Others suggest that the growth is flattening naturally because the [low-hanging fruit](#), obvious articles like [China](#), already exist.[39][40]