Activity #6 Verifying Wikipedia Information

Objectives
1. Students will understand the importance of verifying the information in Wikipedia articles.

2. Using Wikipedia and three additional electronic and print reference sources, students will contrast the information in a Wikipedia article with the information presented on the same topic in the other sources.

Procedure
1. Discuss what Wikipedia is, focusing on how anyone can edit information. You may wish to go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Making_the_best_use_of_Wikipedia to learn more about Wikipedia as a research tool, including its strengths and weaknesses.

Ask students why they think teachers would not approve of Wikipedia as a source for a research paper or project.

2. Select several relevant topics and divide the class into groups, with each group having a different topic.

3. Have students go to http://en.wikipedia.org and search for their topic. Have students print or save their article.

4. Next, have students select three additional reference tools that contain articles on the same topic that they were assigned. Please refer to the Internet Public Library collection of free online resources for suggested electronic reference tools. Direct URL: <http://www.ipl.org/div/subject/>

5. Students will read the Wikipedia article and contrast it with the other articles that they read.

6. Students will make four columns on their paper (turned to landscape orientation) and label each column with one of their reference sources. In each column they will write any information that is specific to that source alone.

7. Lead a group discussion about what students learned about the differences among reference tools. Consider the following: Which sources had the most unique information? Which sources had the most up-to-date information? Did any sources have conflicting information?

Alternative Activity

1. Divide the class into the following groups:

Group 1: Survey group to develop questions to poll students and teachers on their use of and attitudes toward Wikipedia, as well as on classroom usage policies for Wikipedia. Results will be displayed visually (either on a poster, in PowerPoint, or by some other means).

Group 2: Research group to determine the strengths and weaknesses of Wikipedia as a research tool and to provide an overview of the tool itself (ex: how entries are created and edited, Wikipedia’s reliability in studies, etc.). A summary of the group’s findings will be typed with proper citations.

Group 3: Pamphlet group to create a brochure that explains the pros and cons of using Wikipedia and shares the findings of the survey group (perhaps in a visual form). The pamphlet could be distributed in the library or given to classes that have a research component. This group would be responsible for identifying appropriate sources for distribution within the school.
**Group 4:** Debate group to argue whether Wikipedia should be allowed as a source for research projects. This group could use some of the information uncovered by the survey and research groups. The debate could be conducted for an English or communications class.

2. Determine a timeline with due dates and assist each group with assigning tasks to group members.

3. Meet regularly with groups to provide feedback and offer assistance.

**Option:** Have one large survey group and several smaller research groups. Once those groups finish their initial assignment, rearrange the groups into the pamphlet and debate groups. This project option requires a larger time investment, but it also provides more opportunity for students to teach each other and will keep everyone on a similar timeline.


Activity created by Wendy Baker Torrence. April 2008. Revised 2012 JCS.