CiTY OF GLASGOW COLLEGE

Using Wikipedia in your research

LIBRARY SERVICES

CHARITY NUMBER: SCO 36198

http://library.cityofglasgowcollege.ac.uk

Updated June 2016

f City of Glasgow College Libraries

🐦 @CoGClibraries

What is it?

Wikipedia is a popular, free online encyclopaedia that can be accessed on the Internet at www.wikipedia.org. It differs from other information sources in one major respect.

How is it different?

Unlike other traditional encyclopaedias such as *Britannica*, subject specialists and experts are not paid by the publisher to write entries. Instead, those who read Wikipedia also write its entries. That means that anyone can contribute information to Wikipedia.

To contribute an article on a topic, you must register with Wikipedia. However, if you want to add information to an existing article or edit it, you can currently do so without having to register.

If you wish to use Wikipedia to research information for your college work, you should first consider its strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

Those who like Wikipedia say that it's up-to-date and covers topical subjects that traditional encyclopaedias do not. It deals with things that are happening now and covers topical subjects that other sources might ignore, for example pop culture and media. Check this out by looking up your favourite band or your local area.

Weaknesses

Those who don't like Wikipedia point out that its information can be inaccurate or even deliberately misleading. There are many cases of people writing articles with misleading or prejudiced information, or editing accurate articles so they contain inaccurate or malicious information. Opinion can be presented as fact.

Our advice

Simply put, use Wikipedia for the kind of thing it is best at – pop culture, topical, and local issues.

If you're researching online for your studies, use the Library's e-resources, such as Credo Reference and Gale Databases. Ask at the library if you need any help in using these free to access resources, or any of those posted on the library website. These services are reliable, tried and trusted.

If you do use Wikipedia for your studies, you should always double-check information by consulting another source to see if it is accurate. It is standard, good practice to double-check facts and material you intend to use in a report or essay.

Last, but not least

If you quote sources from Wikipedia in you bibliography or resource list, remember that it may be more difficult for your tutor to check than traditional sources. This is because the articles may have been edited and changed since the last time you read them. This may count against your work when it comes to marking.

Do not list Wikipedia as a primary source.