

# Wikipedia *Secrets*

Presentation to the Washington

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# *Secrets: What most people don't know*

- About wikis
- About Wikipedia in general
- When reading Wikipedia articles
- When editing Wikipedia articles

## *Secrets: Wikis and Wikipedia*

- Wiki ≠ Wikipedia
  - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>
  - The first web-based wiki was installed in March 1995. Wikipedia began in January 2001.
- Wikis aren't word processors.
  - They store every single version of every single page.
  - Every edit is identified with a specific editor, whose list of edits is visible to all.

## *Secrets: Wikis and Wikipedia*

- That the history of page can be interesting.
  - Heävy mätal ümlaut:  
<http://jonudell.net/udell/gems/umlaut/umlaut.html>
  - [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Barack Obama&action=history&year=2004&month=6](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Barack_Obama&action=history&year=2004&month=6)
  - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palimpsest>

## *Secrets: Wikipedia in general*

- Who owns Wikipedia.
  - Non-profit: <http://wikimediafoundation.org>
- What the goal of Wikipedia is.
  - Not: on-line encyclopedia
  - But: freely sharing in the sum of all knowledge
  - So:
    - CD/DVDs for schools
    - People can download the entire encyclopedia for free
    - Proliferation of mirror sites

## *Secrets: Wikipedia in general*

- That Wikipedia isn't (just) an English-language encyclopedia.
  - <http://wikipedia.org>
- *(For those who know about those other 200+ languages)*  
How the various language versions interact.
  - Basically, they don't. Each is a separate community. The commonality is the underlying software, plus interlanguage links.

## *Secrets: Wikipedia in general*

- How popular it is.
  - 300 million page views per day (English language)
  - <http://stats.wikimedia.org/EN/TablesPageViewsMonthly.htm>
- How it's funded.
  - 2007/2008: \$7.06 million total revenues, of which \$6.79 million was donations. ( [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/foundation/2/2a/WMF\\_20072008\\_Annual\\_report.pdf](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/foundation/2/2a/WMF_20072008_Annual_report.pdf) )



*Secrets: What readers don't know*

- *(For American readers)* “English language Wikipedia” ≠ “American Wikipedia” or “U.S. Wikipedia”
  - About half of all readers of the English language Wikipedia are outside the U.S. (as measured by page views)
  - About half of all English language Wikipedia edits originate from computers outside the U.S.
  - Guideline: [WP:ENGVAR](#)

## *Secrets: What readers don't know*

- Non-English language versions may have better articles.
  - Interlanguage links are on the left
  - Compare:
    - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sete>
    - <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%A8te>
- Categories (bottom of page) can lead to interesting articles.

## *Secrets: What readers don't know*

- What images in articles really are.
  - Images are typically huge, but “thumbnailed” when viewed in Wikipedia. Just click on one to see the larger version
  - The large images are “free” content – at most, attribution is required.
  - Most images come from the [Wikimedia Commons](#), which has more than 5 million freely usable images and other media files.

*Secrets: What readers don't know*

- Biographies (articles) about living people have quality requirements that other articles don't.
  - Contentious material that is unsourced or poorly sourced should be removed on sight.  
([WP:GRAPEVINE](#) )
  - Example: an Internet hoax death:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanye West](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanye_West)

## *Secrets: What readers don't know*

- Talk/discussion pages (of articles) aren't just for editors.
  - Readers can see what editors said about content that did not get into the article, or isn't there any more.
  - Readers can see discussions of emphasis (amount of text), and tone of text.
- Wikipedia tracks how many page views each article has, by day.
  - The counts are available via a link on the history page of the article.

## *Secrets: What readers don't know*

- What Wikipedia looks like can be modified.
  - You have to register as an editor. (*Free, no disclosure of personal information required.*)
  - Once registered, you can use preferences to select a “skin”, change the default size of images, and even set the screen to use a black background with green text.
  - You can also have displayed the internal “quality rating” of an article at the top of that article.

## *Secrets: What readers don't know*

- How few editors there are.
  - My personal opinion: about 1000 readers per editor.
  - Monthly: 6 billion page views, 6 million edits.
  - Monthly: 150 million readers, 150,000 editors
- How easy it is to edit.
  - Click “edit”, type something, click “Save page”.
  - *No one reviews, screens, or approves edits before they take effect.*
- That anyone is allowed to edit.
- That a Wikipedia “editor” is someone who edits.

## *Secrets: What editors don't know*

- Most problematical edits don't survive.
  - Anyone can edit just about any Wikipedia page, but that's irrelevant.
  - About 25% of all edits are “wash” transactions: someone does an edit, and then someone else reverses (reverts) that edit, generally for violating a rule.
  - Citing a good source when adding information is the equivalent of a god-class weapon in a computer game.



## *Secrets: What editors don't know*

- *(Malicious editors)* How easy it is to spot vandalism.
  - Edit filter: [WP:EF#Notification](#)
  - Recent changes:  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:RecentChanges>
  - Watchlists:  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Watchlist>

## *Secrets: What editors don't know*

- *(Malicious editors)* How easy it is to fix (revert/reverse) vandalism.
  - Fully automated: [Wikipedia:CLUEBOT](#)
  - Semi-automated: [WP:HUGGLE](#)
  - Manually: Undo one or more edits
  - Manually: Save an old version as the current version
  - Manually: Reverse all an editor's edits (rollback)

## *Secrets: What editors don't know*

- *(Most unregistered editors)* “Anonymous” editing isn't.
  - IP addresses are recorded, visible, and traceable
- *(Most unregistered editors)* Registered editors don't have to disclose any personal information whatsoever when registering.
  - Editing as a registered editor is actually more anonymous.

## *Secrets: What editors don't know*

- What an editor needs to learn to be a really good editor.
  - Technical matters (how to footnote, for example)
  - Enough of the rules (policies, guidelines) to know when to look for more, and where to find them
  - Community norms (good editors use edit summaries, for example)
  - How to find good sources for content (because Wikipedia doesn't care what you personally think)

## *Secrets: What editors don't know*

- What Wikipedia is not ([WP:NOT](#))
  - Not a dictionary
  - Not a soapbox
  - Not a blog, webspace provider, social networking, or memorial site
  - Not a directory, manual, guidebook, textbook, or scientific journal
  - Not an indiscriminate collection of information
  - And more

## *Secrets: What editors don't know*

- How much help exists.
  - Two free online books on editing, thousands of pages of documentation
  - Lots of places to ask questions, such as the Help desk: [WP:HD](#)
- How easy it is to be constructive.
  - Copyediting/maintenance is always appreciated.
  - Always, always cite a good source when adding information. Find a good source before editing.

## *Secrets: What editors don't know*

- How content decisions get made.
  - Wikipedia has a enforcement hierarchy (administrators, Arbitration Committee, etc.), but no content editing hierarchy.
    - No “managing editors”, “super-editors”, etc.
  - The rules require content decisions to be made by (rough) consensus.
    - Persuade interested editors of your view, or give in
  - Editors get in trouble for behavior issues – not following the rules about civility and consensus

## *Secrets: What editors don't know*

- How to avoid burnout.
  - Trust the system. Eventually the bad guys do lose.
  - Do what you enjoy. If you're not getting more out of it than you're putting in, do something else.
    - Wikipedia is a big place, with a wide, wide variety of things to do. You don't have to get into fights.
  - Find other editors to work with.
    - Join a WikiProject, restart a dead WikiProject, or find others to start a new WikiProject. (If you can't find other like-minded editors, maybe Wikipedia isn't for you.)