

Editing Wikipedia (for Scientists)

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Why should Biophysical Society members be bothered?



As highlighted by the *Society for Neuroscience's* recent "Neuroscience Wikipedia Initiative," there are a number of reasons for scientists to contribute their intellectual knowledge to this comprehensive online encyclopedia:

- 1) Wikipedia remains the most popular encyclopedia across online and print formats, with its articles regularly topping search results for the major search engines.
- 2) Wikipedia's up-to-date, community-driven editing model has held up surprisingly well against traditional encyclopedia publications in terms of accuracy.
- 3) Disseminating scientific knowledge through a heavily used public encyclopedia is a direct way for academic scientists to actively engage in public outreach and education efforts.

The objective of the following two-part article is to provide a brief how-to for editing Wikipedia, one that is a little less lengthy and more focused towards the scientist than previous guides published elsewhere.

An html version of this article is available at: <https://sites.google.com/site/biophysecc/committeearticles/editing-wikipedia>.

Registration

Although not necessary for editing, creating a user account is desirable if you want to better track your contributions and participate in editorial discussions. To create a new account, click the Create Account tab in the top right of any Wikipedia page. Whether one contributes under a pseudonym or true identity is purely a matter of preference.

Beginner editing aids: Sandbox and Preview

"If you want to learn how to build a house, build a house. Don't ask anybody, just build a house." – Christopher Walken

The best way to learn to edit Wikipedia is to immediately begin editing Wikipedia. Two handy tools to help the beginner editor along are the Wikipedia's sandbox function, and the preview mode. The sandbox page can be freely edited in any manner, and will automatically refresh itself every 12 hours. It is there solely for the purpose of allowing beginners to learn and hone their editing skills. The Wikipedia sandbox can be found by typing WP:SB in the Wikipedia search bar (top right of page). The sandbox is a good place to familiarize oneself with Wiki markup script, the mostly intuitive text editing language used by Wikipedia's page editor. The basics of Wiki markup script can be learned from the following Wikipedia information pages:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:How_to_edit_a_page
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Wiki_markup
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Cheatsheet>

When editing an actual Wikipedia article, you can use the preview mode in the editor to view your changes in format before finalizing them.

The Wikipedia Page Dissected

At the top of every Wikipedia page you will see five tabs: Article and Discussion are on the left; Read, Edit and View History are on the right.

Article—Links to the article content proper

Discussion—On this page, editors can discuss the editing of this particular article's content. This is useful to resolve disagreements about the material in the article, or in order to add a note justifying changes one might have made. To make a comment, simply click on the Edit tab at the top of the Discussion page.

Read and Edit—These tabs allow you to switch between the readable page and the editor tools for that same page.

View History—This navigates to a list of the previous 500 versions of the article. Alongside each version is the time, date, and the name of the editor responsible for making the changes from the previous version.

Taking shortcuts...

If you wish to create a new page, or expand a stub article (a brief and currently incomplete entry), it is often easiest to use the page layout of a similar older article as template. For example, if the subject of the new article is a ligand-gated ion channel, you can cut and paste the Wiki markup script for the standard gene and protein information boxes, contents boxes, diagram boxes, etc. and copy the general content layout from another article such as the "Nicotinic acetylcholine receptor" and "P2X Purinoreceptor" pages.

Look in next month's issue for the continuation of this article, about citing scientific papers and uploading images to Wikimedia Commons.