

## Wikis: Wikipedia and Beyond

Most people who have done any kind of online research are familiar with **Wikipedia**, the online encyclopedia. But many may not exactly understand what Wikipedia is, or how it truly operates. We know that Wikipedia is “the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit,” but what does that mean? And is it the only wiki out there? And what is a “wiki,” anyway?

The term “wiki” refers to a website in which any community member can edit the site’s pages. The first generation of webpages were one-way pages: a person, a company, or an organization created webpages, which others read and used as they saw fit. Individuals could not make changes to those pages; they could only read or view them. “Web 2.0” referred to the ability of individuals to start contributing content to pages that they had not created, and had no role in building. One example is reviews of products, where someone who has no responsibility for management of the website can still contribute content that will be visible to all other visitors to that site. Wikis are a great example of this Web 2.0 structure, and Wikipedia ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)) is certainly the most successful and well-known wiki.

The first wiki, or user-editable site, was launched in 1995 in Hawaii and took its name from the Hawaiian word “wiki,” meaning “quick.” Anyone could quickly add content to the page, and it became a valuable way for people to collaborate, and to contribute information to a webpage accessible to all. Wikipedia was launched in 2001, and promptly became one of the largest and most-visited sites on the internet. While some complain about inaccuracies in Wikipedia’s content, it can be a valuable tool for learning a basic amount of information regarding a subject. Some entries can provide much more extensive information, and you can quickly lose hours exploring random pages.

Wikipedia takes a “no original research” approach, in which they aim to have nearly every statement supported by a citation to some source in some form. For researchers, the citations that appear at the end of a Wikipedia article can prove more valuable than the article itself, and can represent many hours’ worth of in-depth research.

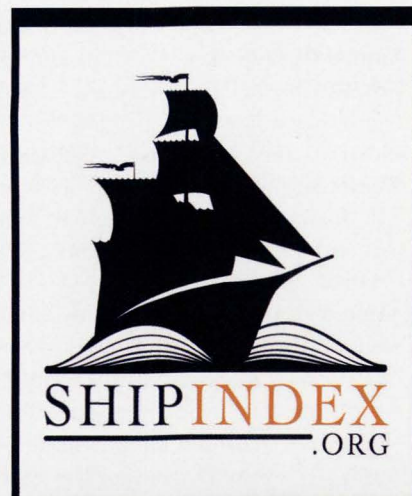
Many people have written about the errors they find in Wikipedia, and others enjoy providing a litany of reasons why Wikipedia is not reliable. If you find something that you believe to be inaccurate, you can simply create an account, and change the entry. It is likely, however, that others are watching that page and

may respond very quickly to revert the changes you made. Entries for some controversial subjects, in fact, are “frozen” and can only be changed by those with certain high-level permissions, but for less-popular topics you can contribute your knowledge by editing and expanding existing articles, or by creating completely new ones.

Wikipedia is certainly the largest wiki in the world—there are over 5 million articles in English, and ten other languages have more than a million articles in each. (Though, interestingly, for several of these—Swedish, Cebuano, and Waray-Waray—the vast majority of the articles have been written by a computer program, primarily as one-sentence “stub” articles.) But Wikipedia is not the only wiki out there. **Citizendium** ([www.citizendium.org](http://www.citizendium.org)), for instance, is a direct response to those uncomfortable with the anonymity of Wikipedia contributions and edits. In Citizendium, each article and edit must be signed with the author’s real name. They aim to create longer, “citable” articles of interest. Its founder was a co-founder of Wikipedia, but Citizendium has not met with the same success and currently has fewer than 17,000 articles, of which 160 have been deemed “expert-approved citable versions.”

Several sites serve as wiki hosting services; **Wikia.com** is the largest, and offers fans a place to build free wikis about movies, TV shows, video games, and other fan-based projects. It now hosts **Memory Alpha** ([www.memory-alpha.wikia.com/](http://www.memory-alpha.wikia.com/)); about the Star Trek universe) and **Wookieepedia** ([www.starwars.wikia.com/](http://www.starwars.wikia.com/)); about the Star Wars universe), along with hundreds of others. Wikia hosts a few maritime-related wikis, including **Ships and Things** ([www.shipsandthings.wikia.com](http://www.shipsandthings.wikia.com)), which has just over 1,300 pages, many of which would benefit from additional contributions and edits. The **Duluth Ships wiki** ([www.duluth-ships.wikia.com](http://www.duluth-ships.wikia.com)) only has 78 pages about the ships of Duluth, but it has hundreds of pictures of those ships. **Ferry Wiki** ([www.theferry.wikia.com](http://www.theferry.wikia.com)) has more than 300 pages about ferry boats from around the world. Off of Wikia, the **World Cruising Wiki** ([www.cruiserswiki.org/wiki/World\\_Cruising\\_and\\_Sailing\\_Wiki](http://www.cruiserswiki.org/wiki/World_Cruising_and_Sailing_Wiki)) has, not surprisingly, information about cruising and sailing.

Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at [peter@shipindex.org](mailto:peter@shipindex.org). See [www.shipindex.org](http://www.shipindex.org) for a free compilation of over 150,000 ship names from indexes to dozens of books and journals. †



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