Art+Feminism

Community Hours: "Unreliable Guidelines"
Report Share Out
July 21, 2021

UNRELIABLE GUIDELINES

RELIABLE SOURCES AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN FRENCH, ENGLISH AND SPANISH WIKIPEDIAS

June 2021
We believe in Brave, Safe, and Friendly Spaces

The goal of this session is to create an encouraging space for collective learning. This requires intentional behavior, wherein participants are conscious of and accountable for the effect of their statements and actions on others. We respect our experiences and the experiences of others and recognize that we can’t do this work without one another.

We agree to hold each other accountable to foster a Brave, Safe, and Friendly Space.

Review the whole Safe/Brave Spaces agreement here: bit.ly/AFBraveSpace
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Ha-Loan Phan Academic; Wikimedia Canada; Montréal, Canada; she/her
This is a celebration!
The goal behind this effort was to understand the effects of the current set of reliable source guidelines and rules on the participation of and the content about *marginalized communities* on Wikipedia.

And we did it!
Components of the research project *Reading Together: Reliability and Multilingual Global Communities* (September 2021 - March 2021).
## Summary - Reliable Sources Guidelines in English Wikipedia -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official guideline</th>
<th>Content Guideline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Project Page “Reliable Sources” - Shortcut: WP:RS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources">Link</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of creation</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Largest number of edits between 2006 - 2009</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Greatest editorial changes between 2011-2020</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of reliability</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complementary pages</td>
<td>“Reliable sources Noticeboard”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources/Noticeboard">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“List of Perennial Sources”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources/Perennial_sources">Link</a></td>
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| **Official guideline** | There isn’t a specific guideline about reliable sources. The closest recommendation is the page “Citez vos sources” (in English, “Cite your Sources”). - Shortcut: WP:CVS  
The page was started as a translation of the 2004 version of the English Wikipedia content guideline “Citing Sources”.  
https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia:Citez_vos_sources |
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date of creation</strong></td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition of reliability</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Complementary pages** | Essay “Sources Fiables” (in English, “Reliable Sources”).  
The essay was started as a translation from the 2011 version of the English Wikipedia content guideline “Reliable Sources”.  
https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia:Sources_fiables  
“L’Observatoire Des Sources” (in English, “Observatory of Sources”).  
https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia:Observatoire_des_sources |
# Reliable Sources Guidelines in Spanish Wikipedia

| **Official guideline** | Page “Fuentes fiables” (in English, “Reliable Sources”). Shortcut: WP:FF  
*The page was started as a translation of the 2008 version of the English Wikipedia content guideline “Reliable Sources”.*
https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia:Citez_ |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
<td>Official Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date of creation</strong></td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition of reliability</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complementary pages</strong></td>
<td>There are none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on community conversations and interpretative analysis of the guidelines, the Unreliable Guidelines report shows that on Wikipedia source authority is facilitated by social and technical processes which elevate the decisions of a small number of self-selected editors.
Findings:

1. Lack of rigor

2. Silence as consensus is problematic

3. The essential work of trainers
Recommendations related to the contents of the reliable sources guidelines

Provide funding and resources to redevelop the guidelines with a task force of a broader range of stakeholders, including trainers, librarians, and academic and community-based subject matter experts. The task force can revitalize the guidelines in the following ways:

a. De-center English Wikipedia’s definition of reliable source and Western-centric biases.

b. Improve the guidelines in each language foregrounding references to scholarship in the social sciences and humanities that addresses the historical and cultural specificities of the concept of “reliability.”

c. Offer specific guidelines for editors on how to address ways scholarship and news media can reproduce biases and marginalizations through claims to objectivity. In addition, the task force can guide editors to evaluate institutional materials such as catalogs, databases, indexes, bibliographies, pamphlets, online magazines or press releases as reliable sources of factual information.
Recommendations related to the contents of the reliable sources guidelines (continued)

Provide funding and resources to redevelop the guidelines with a task force of a broader range of stakeholders, including trainers, librarians, and academic and community-based subject matter experts. The task force can revitalize the guidelines in the following ways:

d. Provide guidance for editors to use alternative methods to assess source reliability. For instance, during the Town Hall about Spanish Wikipedia, participants observed that the challenge posed by the scarcity and dispersion of reliable sources of information on women and other marginalized communities can be overcome through the use of the Triangulation method,84 which has been taken up by feminist researchers to reveal new information.85 Participants expressed that Reliable Source (and Notability) guidelines on Wikipedia would benefit from the contrasted and complimentary use of different types of information sources (e.g., primary and secondary sources; sources that address the topic directly or tangentially). (continued...)

... This would generate a more receptive environment to the presence of content on marginalized topics and communities, as the use of the same set of rules to determine the reliability of sources without taking into account the partial and situated character of knowledge results in the rejection of identities that do not fit the standard.

e. Offer guidance to editors on how to approach sources where there is a presence of hateful or harmful speech, or ambiguity about fact-checking.
Recommendations related to community processes

1. Revisit the user consensus definition and processes. We have called into question the problem of relying on “silence” as consensus. We suggest that a task force is assembled to develop a user consensus process that is welcoming to all editors and potential editors.
2. Celebrate and uplift the work of trainers and Wikipedians-in-residence. There needs to be more direct support for trainers positions, especially given how consensus works on Wikipedia.
3. Enable the VisualEditor across all platforms including Talk pages and Meta Wikimedia to facilitate engagement, as well as provide support and promotion to new features such as Tools for Discussions, which is currently in beta. This set of tools for Talk pages aims to make participation easier through improvements like creating Reply to and New discussion buttons.
Recommendations → Action
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