

## ESS C113/C213 midterm project: Wikipedia

Due Feb. 9, 2018

### **Assignment**

In this project you will either create or significantly modify a Wikipedia article on a topic related to biological and environmental geochemistry. The goal is to improve Wikipedia resources, and to help you learn to use your expertise to make scientific information accessible to the wider public. If you have never used Wikipedia before, you may want to browse through a few pages at <http://en.wikipedia.org>, and look at the about page: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>

You may choose any biogeochemistry-related topic you wish – if you are unsure whether a topic is appropriate feel free to ask the instructor. I have listed some potential topics on the last page of this document. Whether you are picking your own topic or choosing one of the suggested topics, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we can avoid conflicts. The new article or revision should be on the order of 500 words (i.e., equivalent to two double-spaced pages of text and references in a paper). You will turn in a text copy of the Wikipedia entry (highlight your revisions, if appropriate), and the http address for the online article (this can be a link to your Sandbox – see below).

### **Teamwork**

Undergraduates are encouraged to work in pairs. Larger groups are also permitted, but the product will be expected to scale (roughly) with the number of participants (~250 words per student). Graduate students should work independently. I am open to proposals for larger group projects. When turning in a 2-person or group project please add a note briefly describing each member's contribution.

### **Scope**

You should strive to use at least 4-5 independent sources for each article, and cite them. Projects will be scored on the basis of the depth and scope of the new article or revision, in addition to adherence to Wikipedia norms and guidelines. A couple of examples to aspire towards (though some of these are longer than expected for this assignment!):

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dichlorodifluoromethane>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onkalo\\_spent\\_nuclear\\_fuel\\_repository](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onkalo_spent_nuclear_fuel_repository)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clair\\_Cameron\\_Patterson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clair_Cameron_Patterson)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obed\\_Mountain\\_coal\\_mine\\_spill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obed_Mountain_coal_mine_spill)

### **Editing Wikipedia**

Wikipedia is a free, public-access online encyclopedia, which relies mainly on users for the creation, improvement, and maintenance of articles. In practice, this philosophy means that anyone can change most of the entries in the encyclopedia, simply by clicking on the “edit this page” link at the top of each article.

This ease of participation is tempered in three important ways. First, there are guidelines that page editors and creators are expected to try to adhere to. Among the most important of these is to cite references to confirm the content of your changes. Secondly, there are

editors and web-bots charged with monitoring the quality and format of entries. Finally, highly controversial entries, or those that appear to be subject to vandalism, may be restricted. Usually restriction is temporary, and at any rate is not likely to apply to the subjects of interest here. To learn more about contributing to Wikipedia, read [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Contributing to Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Contributing_to_Wikipedia)

Most of you will be creating new articles, which requires some additional steps, detailed here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Your first article](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Your_first_article). The most important difference between editing and creating is that you will need to create a user account. Even if you don't plan to create a new entry, you are strongly encouraged to create a user account, so that you can track your revisions more easily. You can acquire an account anonymously by filling out a simple form here: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Special:UserLogin&type=signup> Creating a user account will also give you access to the “sandbox”, where you can practice editing Wikipedia entries without having to worry about posting the results for everyone to see. For security reasons it is probably wise not to use your real name, verbatim, as your login. Be sure to create your account early! There may be a waiting period of several days, up to a week between creation of your account and full activation (allowing you to create an article).

Wikipedia entries are created and edited using a simplified html-like scripting language. If you have ever written a web page, or used LaTeX, the formatting style for a Wikipedia page will hopefully look familiar. If you've never used these programs, don't panic! You'll get the hang of things fairly quickly – just spend a little time playing in the sandbox (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Sandbox>), and looking at the source code for some existing entries (you can see the source code for any article by hitting the “edit this page” button at the top of the page). Feel free to contact your instructor, talk to other students in the class, or get help from any local experts you know, if you get stuck. A useful tip is to make a text (or Word) file on your own computer containing the script you are working on, and to cut & paste your revisions at the end of that file occasionally. This will give you a journal of your work, in case your internet connection dies or you accidentally mess up the formatting or content along the way, and want to go back to a previous version. Word and other word-processing programs also have the advantage of doing some basic spelling and grammar checks, and they can count words for you.

### **Including images in a Wikipedia article**

Incorporation of images & illustrations in your Wikipedia article can help explain your topic, but they are not required for this assignment. Be aware that there are fairly strict guidelines for using copyrighted images ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Image use policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Image_use_policy)). US Government websites (where images are often public domain), and the Wikimedia Commons ([http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main Page](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)) are good places to look for images, figures and diagrams with clearly described copyright statuses.

(Suggested topics, next page)

**Potential topics for new Wikipedia entries (contact the instructor to reserve one, or to suggest an alternative)**

Pollution

Alark Hard Chrome, Riverside County CA. Superfund site  
Ralph Gray Trucking Co., Orange County CA. Superfund site  
Klau Buena Vista Mine, San Luis Obispo County CA. Superfund site  
Blue Ledge Mine, Siskiyou County CA. Proposed(?) Superfund site  
Pacific Coast Pipe Lines (Texaco) Superfund site  
Dorado Ground Water Contamination, Dorado PR

Pollutants

Hexabromobenzene \* There is already a very brief entry that could be expanded

Biogeochemists (and scientists in related disciplines)

Please note that Wikipedia has extra guidelines for biographical entries on living persons (including everyone on the list below) – see

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Biographies\\_of\\_living\\_persons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Biographies_of_living_persons)

Gregory P. Asner	Carnegie Institution of Science
William A. Berggren	WHOI/Rutgers University
Edward A. Boyle	MIT
Katherine Freeman	Penn State * There is already a very brief article
William A. Jury	UC Riverside
James Kennett	UC Santa Barbara
Judith Lean	Naval Research Laboratory
Ernesto Medina	Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research
Claire L. Parkinson	NASA Goddard
S. George H. Philander	Princeton *There already is a German-language article
A. R. Ravishankara	Colorado State University
Karen C. Seto	Yale
James Zachos	UC Santa Cruz