

GETTING REAL WITH WIKIPEDIA ASSIGNMENTS IN ACADEMIC WRITING COURSES

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Jasmina Najjar, Senior Instructor
Department of English
American University of Sharjah (UAE)

THE MOTIVATION & THE FOCUS

Generative AI concerns & the need for authentic learning = innovative assignments.

Challenge in writing courses = engaging students with a real audience.

The best practice involves reimagining assignments to include Wikipedia content creation where students worked on underdeveloped Wikipedia articles about underrepresented communities, cultures, countries, and topics, contributing to knowledge creation:

- Spring 2023-2024 in WRI 102 Advanced Academic Writing as part of the research essay for WRI 102
- Fall 2024-2025 in WRI 101 Academic Writing as part of the analysis essay for WRI 101


THE NUMBERS

WRI 102 Spring 2023-2024 (2 sections. Individual work, 3 references/student required)

- Articles: 33
- Words Added: 28.3K
- References Added: 210
- Article views: 782K (as of 17 March 2025)

THE EXAMPLES

Emiratis


Quality Problems? 

Other traditional Emirati piece of clothing for women include:

- The Gishwah, a light see-through fabric that is wrapped around the face.
- The [Battoulah](#), also known as Gulf Burqa, a metallic-looking mask that typically covers a woman's eyebrows and lower face. The burqa is mainly worn for modesty by married women. However, it also protects a woman's face from the sweltering sun and dust, and according to numerous tales, the burqa's design was influenced by the countenance of the falcon.^[119]
- The [Jalabiya](#), a colourful embroidered dress, is the traditional attire of Emirati women. There are many different types of jalabiyas. Jalabiyas worn daily are usually made of cotton threads or prism embroidery threads, while jalabiyas worn on special occasions such as weddings and Eid are called thobes. Thobes are made of zari threads (shiny threads) and crystals. The jalabiya comes in traditional forms as well as modern ones, varying in designs, colours and materials.^[120]
- Gold is a very important part of Emirati attire. Many unique gold pieces adorn woman from head to toe. Some accessories are worn daily, such as the heyool (bracelet), mariya (necklace), and shighab (earrings).^[121] Other pieces are only worn on special events such as:
 - The tassah, a heavy headpiece made of pure gold with dangling gold chains draping over the hair.
 - The haqqab, a gold belt usually worn on top of the thobe.
 - Fitakh, a wide toe ring that covers most of a woman's toe.^[122]

THE EXAMPLES

Culture of the United Arab Emirates

Quality Problems? 

third consecutive World Cup with two Arab nations qualifying, after [Kuwait](#) and [Algeria](#) in 1982, and [Iraq](#) and [Algeria](#) again in 1986.^[44] The UAE also won the [Arabian Gulf Cup](#) held in [Abu Dhabi](#) in January 2007.^[45]

Recognized by [UNESCO](#) as living human heritage, [falconry](#) has evolved into a revered sport and cultural tradition within the UAE.^{[46][47]} Owners of falcons place great value on their falcons, considering them to be valued family members and trusted companions. With an estimated 5000 falconers in the country, a community is bounded by a shared passion for this sport. Through events such as the International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX), the [UAE government](#) actively supports and promotes falconry, highlighting its value as a sport and a treasured heritage. The importance of falconry in the United Arab Emirates is further highlighted by the existence of specialist institutions like the [Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital](#).^[48]

Inhabitants of [Arab States of the Persian Gulf](#) have enjoyed [camel racing](#) for many years, and it is considered a traditional sport.^[49] Formalizing camel racing was

THE EXAMPLES

Hunza Valley

Quality Problems?



Local Hunzans in traditional dress.

The local languages spoken include [Burushaski](#), [Wakhi](#) and [Shina](#). The literacy rate of the Hunza valley is more than 95%. The establishment of community schools that provide high quality education, and the influence of the Aga Khan Mirs, contributing towards building universities for higher education have directed towards the high literacy rate in Hunza Valley, especially for girls.^[23] The historical area of Hunza and present [northern Pakistan](#) has had, over the centuries, mass migrations, conflicts and resettling of tribes and ethnicities, of which the [Shina people](#) are the most prominent in regional history. People of the region have recounted their historical traditions down the generations. The Hunza Valley is also home to some [Wakhi](#), who migrated there from northeastern Afghanistan beginning in the nineteenth century onwards.^[24] The majority of residents in Hunza belong to the Ismaili Shia sect. They believe that Aga Khan IV is their religious figurehead and transcendent. He is also believed to be the biggest promotor and contributor towards the literacy success and overall well-being of the people of Hunza and the valley itself.^[18]


THE NUMBERS

WRI 101 Fall 2024-2025 (2 sections. Group work, 1 reference/student required)

- Articles: 12
- Words Added: 15.86K
- References Added: 128
- Article views: 130.3K (as of 17 May 2025)

THE EXAMPLES

Women in Kenya

Quality Problems? 

Maternal Healthcare


Maternal healthcare has improved recently for Kenyan women. Generally, maternal mortality rates have reduced, however, difficulties within the rural parts of Kenya persist as healthcare can be inaccessible in rural areas because of distances.^[13] In Western Kenya, healthcare institutions often do not have electricity or clean water, and are unable to provide women with the necessary services.^[13] In 2016, only 16% of its healthcare establishments were equipped to deliver emergency obstetric services.^[13] Additionally, the rate of maternal mortality, referring to deaths linked to pregnancy, was reported to be 355 per 100,000 live births in 2024.^[14] Maternal mortality remains heavily influenced by poor quality healthcare, with over 80% of deaths still linked to this issue, despite an increase in skilled midwives assisting births from 62% to 70% from 2017 to 2024.^[14]

Economic empowerment and contributions

Over time, the role of Kenyan women in society has evolved from more traditional duties like homemakers, to vital participants in the country's economy. Women today contribute significantly to the [Gross Domestic Product](#) of Kenya, particularly through small and medium-sized businesses, where they often hold both job and ownership positions.^[15] These successful women business owners are able to provide for their families, assist their communities, elevate their living conditions, and help transcend poverty.^[16] In the agriculture sector, a sizable portion of smallholdings is overseen by women. Women are also managing and directing both food and cash crop production.^[17] Many of Kenya's women's groups start as informal savings circles and gradually develop into formal organizations or [Non-Governmental Organizations](#) (NGOs). Women entrepreneurs are assisted in navigating challenges by these NGOs. These organizations offer women the support,

THE EXAMPLES

Nabati

Quality Problems? 

Nabati poetry frequently explores themes that resonate with those found in classical Arabic poetry. However, nabati poetry distinguishes itself through the use of [colloquial Arabic](#), differing from the formal [Modern Standard Arabic](#) (MSA) used in classical works. This shift in language contributes to a more direct style, which creates a sense of intimacy in both the poetry and its message.^[11]

In its thematic development, nabati poetry follows the structural principles of classical Arabic poetry. The poems are often long and connect many themes together, such as chivalry, pride, and exaltation.^[12] Other themes commonly found in panegyric and boasting nabati poems are valor and hospitality.^[13]

In the United Arab Emirates

Among the first Emirati poets to gain importance during the twentieth century were Mubarak Al Oqaili (1880–1954), Salem bin Ali Al Owais (1887–1959) and Ahmed bin Sulayem (c. 1905–1976).^[14] Three other poets of importance in the UAE were Khalfan Musabah (1923–1946), Sheikh Saqr Al Qasimi (1925–1993), a former ruler of [Sharjah](#), and Sultan bin Ali Al Owais (1925–2000).^[15]^[non-primary source needed] The three poets, known as the Heera group, grew up in the village of [Al Heera](#) in Sharjah and were close friends. In addition to these pioneers of nabati poetry, many other prominent figures have emerged over the years, leaving an everlasting fingerprint on both classical and Nabati poetry as they are known today. Among these figures is Sheikh [Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum](#) (b. 1946), ruler of Dubai, whose poems often depict themes of patriotism and leadership. His works, written in nabati form, were celebrated for the deep philosophical reflections and emotive language used in them. Another important figure is the late Sheikh [Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan](#) (1918–2004), the founding father of the UAE, who was not only known for his visionary leadership but also for his poems that echoed his love for his land, its people, and its unity. [Mana Al Otaiba](#) (b. 1946), another renowned Emirati poet, is also known for his immense contributions to nabati poetry. His verses explored a variety of themes including heritage and national pride, allowing readers across the Arab world to resonate with his works.^[16]

THE COMMON STEPS

- Submitted proposal to Wikipedia Education team & completed official faculty training.
- Enrolled students in official student training course & completed student training myself.
- Attended weekly meetings with Wikipedia Education team & official webinars for Wikipedia Education project.
- Made Wikipedia article contributions small part of major assignment.
- Assigned peer review for Wikipedia article drafts based on guided questions.
- Adapted Wikipedia's suggested rubrics to needs.
- Gave students freedom to decide whether they would keep work in Wikipedia Course sandbox or publish live on Wikipedia.

Data was collected via course reflections, course evaluations (ICE), and observation.

Results were compared to literature on Wikipedia assignments in courses.

THE FINDINGS

Course reflections, feedback, and comments from ICE revealed that the Wikipedia assignment:

- Brought learners a sense of **accomplishment and pride**.
- Let them experienced what it's like to be part of a **discourse community** and the realities of having to **abide by strict rules and standards** so their work isn't deleted or edited.
- Made them **think differently about research and selecting credible sources** since Wikipedia has different guidelines than writing courses.
- **Changed perceptions** about Wikipedia and generative AI.
- Increased **rhetorical awareness**.

THE FINDINGS

Other benefits identified via observation are echoed and supported in the literature. There's a track record of Wikipedia assignments:

- promoting **skills development** including **writing and research skills** (Bridges & Dowell, 2020; Conde et al., 2020, O'Neill, Rai & Kilpatrick, 2017), **critical thinking** as they contemplate the information they are editing or creating (Conde et al., 2020; O'Neill, Rai & Kilpatrick, 2017), **collaboration and teamwork** (Conde et al., 2020), and **information literacy** as they learn to evaluate and use information from various sources effectively (Conde et al., 2020).
- empowering students to **apply their authority** on a topic by contributing to Wikipedia articles and helps lessen systemic bias in Wikipedia by focusing on **underrepresented topics** though there maybe resistance from students because of their unfamiliar with using Wikipedia as an editor (Bridges & Dowell, 2020).
- encouraging students to write for a **public audience** beyond the classroom and aligns with first year composition courses learning outcomes (Azar, 2023).
- providing **real-world experience in writing and editing**, which can be beneficial for future academic and professional endeavours and the prospect of contributing to a widely-used platform like Wikipedia can be **highly motivating** for students (O'Neill, Rai & Kilpatrick, 2017).

THE DRAWBACKS

Azar (2023) mentions the following which concur with my own findings:

- Not everyone has equal **access to technology and resources**
- **Student frustration** with the Wikipedia platform and dealing with other editors
- Difficult for faculty to **managing large class sizes** and **varying student knowledge/aptitude levels**
- Tough to ensure students meet **Wikipedia's strict sourcing and formatting requirements**, and there's the real potential for student work to be removed

Many students had positive experiences expressed through reflections and ICE, but some found the **training demanding**, Wikipedia **interface challenging**, and **comments/edits from seasoned Wikipedia editors harsh**.

From a teacher's perspective, integrating Wikipedia is **extremely time-consuming**...It's even **stressful** given the burden of responsibility since, while students' names aren't visible (unless they use their real name as their username), their contributions are linked to the course on Wikipedia.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Wikipedia assignments are best for junior, senior, and graduate students.

Only viable when you can allocate a significant percentage of course grade to project or make it a proper stand-alone project.

Very versatile and hence adaptable to any course in any discipline.

Food for thought:

- concern about how Wikipedia is a main source of AI training data and the increased use of AI to generate content for Wikipedia (Smith, 2023)
- raises its own set of questions and concerns though Wikipedia is taking measures to remain relevant in the age of AI (Safian, 2023)
- there's a vital need for younger editors from Generation Z to help maintain and update the platform (Harrison, 2024).

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Thank you!

Email: jnajjar@aus.edu

Phone: +971 6 515 5555 Ext: 4571

You can find me on the AUS website and LinkedIn: Jasmina Najjar