



WHEN FACTS MATTER

The President of Wikimedia Australia, PRU MITCHELL, reports on the role of libraries in ensuring accuracy of information and the difficulties faced by Wikipedia in ensuring quality citation.

Transparency and critical literacy are challenges for information consumers in a post-truth society. Wikipedia stands firm in its policy of verifiable facts, and is working closely with libraries – because Wikipedians know that libraries have the best sources.

When asked in the 2017 ALIA Membership survey what issues they felt were important as an individual or LIS professional in 2017, ALIA Members ranked access to factual information as their #2 priority (after literacy skills). This is hardly surprising for knowledge-based professionals, but does this apply to those we serve? Are our students, our community or our politicians still interested in facts?

As Australia's sixth most visited website we can see that many millions of people use Wikipedia to fact check current events, or the show they are watching, or their medical symptoms. Wikipedia doesn't provide reviews or opinions, only neutral, verifiable facts – so clearly facts are of interest to a large section of the community.

The quality of our facts is only as good as our sources. In Wikipedia edit wars, it is not the person who is 'right' that wins; it is the person with the best citation. In Wikipedia a quality citation is a secondary source, reliable, reputable and

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published – by a third-party not directly affiliated with the article's topic.

This idea that the most important part of Wikipedia is not its content but its more than 36 million citations was the message of the recent WikiCite conference. WikiCite's goal is to build a central bibliographic repository, as well as tools and strategies to improve information quality and verifiability in Wikimedia projects. It uses Wikidata to make citations available as linked open data. Wikidata itself has 326 million facts about 40 million subjects. Both Wikidata and WikiCite are part of a new direction for the Wikimedia movement.

Wikipedia started 17 years ago and its community has worked towards one vision: *Imagine a world in which everyone has free access to the sum of human knowledge in their own language.*

Following a new global strategy process through 2017, we have set an equally ambitious direction for Wikimedia through to 2030. Our key work is to focus on service and equity. We know that a traditional web-based, browser-delivered encyclopaedia is not the way most users will approach knowledge by then.

The library sector is a key part of this infrastructure, and Wikimedia's Australian chapter is working with those who share our vision across library sectors. School libraries dealing with the Australian Curriculum priority of critical and creative thinking use Wikipedia as an information literacy tool. Universities use Wikipedia in their teaching programs, run edit-a-thons and promote wiki projects in their research support networks. Public libraries are in a perfect position to deliver digital literacy programs that educate their communities about how Wikipedia works.

By 2030, Wikimedia will become the essential infrastructure of the ecosystem of free knowledge, and anyone who shares our vision will be able to join us.

We, the Wikimedia contributors, communities, and organizations, will advance our world by collecting knowledge that fully represents human diversity, and by building the services and structures that enable others to do the same. We will carry on our mission of developing content as we have done in the past, and we will go further.


Wikimedia Australia is a technical partner in the GLAM Peak workshops working with small volunteer-run regional collecting bodies. Wikipedians have been 'in residence' in our state libraries in NSW, QLD and WA, and WikiClubs run out of QLD, WA and the Northern Territory Library. State Library Queensland headed the global leader board in the #1Lib1Ref campaign.

How can you or your library help raise the quality of citations in Wikimedia projects and fight the good fight for factual information? You can use the great sources in your collection to add citations to articles any time. The automatic citation tool powered by OCLC's WorldCat is easy to use – just paste in an ISBN, URL or DOI. There are currently 300,000 facts missing citations just waiting for an information specialist who can locate a quality source.

And here's a final fact for you: the global @WikiLibrary Twitter account uses the State Library of Victoria as its banner image.



Banner image Twitter @WikiLibrary Based on Dlliff 2017 State Library of Victoria La Trobe Reading room, CC BY 2.5

For more information about Wikimedia Australia visit wikimedia.org.au 

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