# More than Memorizing Rules
## Using Wikipedia to Emphasize Rhetorical Approaches to Grammar Instruction and Collaborative Editing Practices

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## Abstract

This article details a collaborative editing assignment that asks students to analyze and assess editorial contributions made to Wikipedia. This project not only provides students an opportunity to apply their understanding of grammar and style concepts to real-world editing situations, it also calls students' attention to the underlying ideological biases and rhetorical impact of subtle language choices used in specific Wikipedia articles. In explaining the rationale behind this assignment and discussing several student samples, this article demonstrates how designing writing assignments around the collaborative, multi-authored nature of Wikipedia can highlight the influence of cultural circumstances on both sentence-level stylistic choices and broader developmental editorial practices.

## Introduction: Fostering Rhetorical Grammar and Collaborative Editing

Questions surrounding how grammar instruction enhances students' writing facilities have been a consistent concern for instructors since the early days of composition studies (Braddock et al., 1963; Shaughnessy, 1977; Sommers, 1980; Williams, 1981). While these discussions have traditionally surrounded the treatment of grammatical errors in basic-writing classes, more contemporary grammar-based scholarship emphasizes the rhetorical impact of grammar and style choices. This research situates grammar and style-related decisions within a larger cultural, academic, and professional context (Butler, 2008; Clark, 2006; Dunn & Lindblom, 2011; Kolln & Gray, 2017). Put differently, grammar and style interventions are viewed through the lens of genre-specific conventions that influence the writer's larger purpose and audience. Moreover, what Kolln and Gray (2017) refer to as "rhetorical grammar" allows instructors to shift students' focus from concerns surrounding "right" and "wrong" applications of grammar rules to more practical questions regarding how best to communicate one's message to a specified audience and become visible within a professional or scholarly community.

While such work has drawn connections between grammatical and rhetorical instruction, rhetorically-focused grammar pedagogy often omits a discussion of editorial practices. Contemporary scholarship typically frames grammar and style through a binary writer-audience relationship. However, this overlooks the role of intermediary parties and/or collaborative editing practices. Grammar and style choices are traditionally treated as highly individualized decisions by a single author when speaking to an audience. This article will push back against the binary writer-audience relationship underpinning grammar instruction by narrating my experiences designing a Collaborative Editing Project around Wikipedia for a college-level Grammar and Professional Editing seminar. This assignment asks student groups to analyze the

history of editorial contributions to a specific Wikipedia page, discuss any unique patterns, trends and/or debates within these contributions, and explain the rhetorical dimensions of precise grammar or style interventions. Meaning, they need to explain how grammar and style decisions implicitly or explicitly impact the nature of the information being conveyed within a given Wikipedia page. An underlying goal of the Collaborative Editing Project is to highlight the interconnection between subtle grammar/style choices and ongoing editorial interventions within multi-authored, collaborative digital texts. In unpacking and exploring this interconnection, students are able to examine the cultural orientation of grammatical and stylistic decisions insofar as they consider how specific grammar and style choices shape (and are shaped by) their surrounding social and cultural contexts.

## Grammar and Professional Editing: Course Context and Curriculum

From 2018 through 2022, I taught five sections of a Grammar and Professional Editing course, ENGL 3375. A majority of students who take this class are advanced English majors (juniors/seniors) and interested in either teaching English or working in publishing as editors and/or technical writers. Additionally, many students in our English program also are interested in creative writing, and creatively-inclined students who have taken this course noted that they wanted to learn the "rules" of language to derive more control and agency over their writing. In previous semesters, ENGL 3375 was taught as a traditional grammar seminar that emphasized learning formal grammar principles and identifying and fixing mechanical errors in writing samples. However, when I was first assigned the course, I redesigned the class to highlight the professional and cultural work of grammar in practice. My rationale for this redesign was that while each of the student cohorts I mentioned earlier—students interested in teaching, publishing, and creative writing—has a strong formal grasp of grammar principles, they tend to be less inclined to view grammar as a professional resource. Students often viewed grammar comprehension as a measurement of their individual writing expertise rather than seeing grammar principles as a set of tools that can be deployed in professional settings.

In response to this concern about professionalization, I wanted students to better understand the sociocultural contexts and contingencies that impact how we use, receive, and modify language choices. In revising this course's major assignments, I moved away from a decontextualized approach to grammar instruction whereby students learn a series of static grammar rules in isolation and identify the (mis)application of said rules in isolated writing samples. Instead, I sought to illustrate how grammar concerns function in real-world writing scenarios that students would encounter beyond the classroom. Hence, I redesigned class readings and assignments to help students learn grammar and mechanical conventions by rhetorically engaging with the writing and editing practices found in real-world forums. More specifically, I designed an end-of-semester project around Wikipedia in order to highlight how grammar standards are applied, adapted, or even created anew when composing digital texts in public, online forums. Through engaging with a popular, multi-authored writing platform, students could see how specific grammar or style choices impact how information is circulated and received while also considering how online spaces influence language use. My hope was that this course redesign would professionalize students by demonstrating how skillsets traditionally associated with literary studies overlap and resonate with the reading/writing strategies that are actively used in new media environments while also introducing them to the digital platforms they might encounter as professionals. In the following sections, I discuss the reasoning behind selecting Wikipedia as the primary focus for this project and clarify the specific learning

outcomes associated with this assignment. In doing so, I explain how this project calls attention to the role of the editor in negotiating grammar or style concepts for reader accessibility and, furthermore, provides a foundation for exploring how language use evolves to coincide with larger cultural shifts.

## Collaborative Editing: Why Wikipedia?

When selecting Wikipedia as the focus for the Collaborative Editing Project, I reflected upon my own editing experience. Working as an editor for trade magazines, I saw the enhanced role digital media plays in how we produce and consume information. Consequently, editors find themselves responsible for both responding to the work of a single author and navigating a nexus of publicly accessible—and, usually, collaboratively written—information databases. Moreover, editors must acknowledge how specific editorial choices impact the ways in which information is produced and revised. Thus, as a crowd-sourced site, Wikipedia provides a forum for exploring how editorial decisions shape the ways in which public information is circulated. Put differently, Wikipedia demonstrates collaborative editing practices by archiving how, when, and why specific editorial decisions have been made, thereby underscoring the dialogic nature of editorial interventions.

Wikipedia has an extensive Manual of Style, which outlines the standards that are expected of all contributions. These standards are primarily structural and grammatical, and the style manual reviews topics such as how article sections should be arranged or how possessive nouns should be formatted. However, a key feature of Wikipedia's style manual is the insistence on a neutral point-of-view (NPOV). The NPOV emphasizes summarizing information without participating in debates or favoring one view over another when discussing a topic. Similarly, Wikipedia also has a firm "no original research policy," meaning that contributors cannot analyze and/or interpret information without including links to verifiable sources to support their claims. While these policies may seem to be procedural and logistical in nature, actually abiding by these guidelines demands a critical awareness of one's language choices. For example, the style guidelines note that "the word claim…could imply a lack of credibility. Using this or other expressions of doubt may make an article appear to promote one position over another" ("Wikipedia: Neutral Point of View," 2023). This illustrates how upholding the goals and values of Wikipedia requires a nuanced approach to specific language choices when making contributions.

As a crowdsourced platform, a majority of Wikipedia pages are open. This means that anyone can edit, add, or remove information from a page. Contributors can include comments to clarify the rationale for their own edits or explain why they have modified (or even removed) edits made by someone else. There also exists a "talk page" for each article wherein extended conversations about page edits and the appropriateness thereof can occur. Disputes between contributors are not uncommon, and viewing these conversations unfold on an article's talk page can provide insight into the ways in which multi-authored texts are created through on-going exchanges between several contributors. Lastly, there are many pages that are "protected," meaning that all page edits must be reviewed and approved by a volunteer administrator before being published. Protected pages are typically reserved for controversial topics or issues that have been the target of site vandalism.

Much of the scholarship surrounding the use of Wikipedia in the English classroom emphasizes Wikipedia's capacity for contextualizing language choices and redirecting students' focus from concerns about error to more sustainable conversations regarding how style and grammar influence a reading experience. For example, Purdy (2009) posits that Wikipedia decenters information exchange, counterbalancing traditional notions surrounding correctness. Purdy writes, "Correctness still matters, but it is established through a never-ending process

of negotiation among multiple positions rather than the advancement of the single 'correct' one" (p. 356). Wikipedia can be a tool for extending and refining "correctness" as an editorial pursuit, one that helps students recognize both the connotative and denotative functions of language. Similarly, Patch (2010) claims that Wikipedia can foster critical digital literacy skills, namely assessing source reliability, navigating online databases, and identifying patterns/trends in editorial practices. Such scholarship underscores how Wikipedia-based assignments help students investigate grammar-based decisions through the craft of editing. In evaluating and intervening in specific editorial practices, students also cultivate an enhanced sense of what distinguishes source credibility while also anticipating the preferences of a diverse reading audience (Vetter et al., 2019). As I will discuss in the following section, the Collaborative Editing Project invites students to consider the rhetorical impact of specific grammar and style-related editorial interventions, evaluate the legitimacy of source material, and explore the contingent nature of editorial decisions, specifically how such choices respond to changing language conventions and social circumstances.

There is a wide range of educational resources dedicated to Wikipedia and incorporating this platform into traditional educational scenarios. However, case studies that specifically examine the intersection between Wikipedia and grammar instruction in college-level writing classes are still in their developing stages. In designing the Collaborative Editing Project, my hope was that students could use a popular platform they were already familiar with to explore how ostensibly small grammar and style choices contour the types of conversations we have about a given content area. In doing so, students would work towards the learning outcomes identified by Purdy (2009) and Patch (2010) (namely, understanding the sociocultural influences of subtle-yet-important language choices and evaluating source credibility) while also cultivating information literacy skill sets, such as working with digital databases and identifying long-form patterns and trends in editorial oversight. Through this assignment, I hope to foreground the following learning objectives: (a) to identify and evaluate the impact of specific grammar and style choices, considering how/why contributors elected to apply or break specific grammar "rules" and the ways in which such choices shape a reading experience; (b) assess the legitimacy of intertextual and referential sourcing, including hyperlinking and secondary references; (c) become proficient with using digital tools to navigate publicly-accessible text and database entries, exploring how writing and/or editing within digital forums influences standard notions of correctness and; (d) recognize and contextualize language choices based on larger technical, historical, cultural/ideological trends. Next, I will describe the Wikipedia assignment sequence and structure in greater depth to show how this project achieves these learning objectives.

## Assignment: Analyzing, Assessing, and Performing Editorial Interventions

During the first half of the semester, students engage in peer editing assignments and submit an editorial analysis of a local periodical. These assignments prepare students for pushing beyond simply memorizing the "rules" of grammar in order to identify real and feasible editorial interventions. Shorter assignments in the first half of the semester also helped students contextualize grammar choices made by authors across a variety of different genres and circumstances, which prepared them for eventually navigating and analyzing Wikipedia contributions. The second half of the semester focused on the Collaborative Editing Project. Working in editorial teams of four, students select a Wikipedia article of their choosing and then analyze the consequences of specific editorial interventions on four fronts: grammatical, stylistic, historical, and intertextual/referential connections. Student groups then present their findings to the class

# Grammar: Revision history

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⌄ **Filter revisions**

External tools: Find addition/removal ↗ (Alternate ↗) · Find edits by user ↗ (Alternate ↗) · Page statistics ↗ · Pageviews ↗ · Fix dead links ↗

For any version listed below, click on its date to view it. For more help, see Help:Page history and Help:Edit summary. (cur) = difference from current version, (prev) = difference from preceding version, **m** = minor edit, → = section edit, ← = automatic edit summary

(newest | oldest) View (newer 50 | older 50) (20 | 50 | 100 | 250 | 500)

| Compare selected revisions |
|---|

- (cur | prev) ◉ 10:13, 14 April 2023  46.10.58.171 (talk) . . (27,658 bytes) (+35) . . *(it was working)* (undo) *(Tag: Undo)*
- (cur | prev) ◉ 08:25, 14 April 2023  Denisarona (talk | contribs) . . (27,623 bytes) (−35) . . *(non-functioning link)* (undo) *(Tag: Reverted)*
- (cur | prev) ○ 00:16, 14 April 2023  Anita5192 (talk | contribs) . . (27,658 bytes) (−8) . . *(Undid revision 1149710779 by 185.20.89.188 (talk)Reverted unnecessary clarification. Readers already know the article is about grammar.)* (undo) *(Tag: Undo)*
- (cur | prev) ○ 00:16, 14 April 2023  Anita5192 (talk | contribs) . . (27,666 bytes) (−8) . . *(Undid revision 1149710879 by 185.20.89.188 (talk)Reverted unnecessary clarification. Readers already know the article is about grammar.)* (undo) *(Tag: Undo)*
- (cur | prev) ○ 23:58, 13 April 2023  185.20.89.188 (talk) . . (27,674 bytes) (+8) . . *(Fix link)* (undo) *(Tag: Reverted)*
- (cur | prev) ○ 23:57, 13 April 2023  185.20.89.188 (talk) . . (27,666 bytes) (+8) . . *(Clarification)* (undo) *(Tag: Reverted)*
- (cur | prev) ○ 03:13, 11 April 2023  Anita5192 (talk | contribs) . . (27,658 bytes) (−7) . . *(Undid revision 1149251129 by 117.104.252.168 (talk)Reverted unsourced edit: not helpful.)* (undo) *(Tag: Undo)*
- (cur | prev) ○ 03:13, 11 April 2023  Anita5192 (talk | contribs) . . (27,665 bytes) (−11) . . *(Undid revision 1149251299 by 207.194.182.140 (talk)Reverted unsourced edit: not helpful.)* (undo) *(Tag: Undo)*
- (cur | prev) ○ 02:10, 11 April 2023  207.194.182.140 (talk) . . (27,676 bytes) (+11) . . *(Better description)* (undo) *(Tag: Reverted)*
- (cur | prev) ○ 02:09, 11 April 2023  117.104.252.168 (talk) . . (27,665 bytes) (+7) . . *(Clarification)* (undo) *(Tag: Reverted)*

**Figure 1.** Revision history of the "Grammar" Wikipedia article. Author screenshot.

and cowrite an editorial memorandum paper based on their presentation feedback. I encourage students to select articles on topics they are already familiar with.  The reason for this is to focus students' attention on how editorial interventions can subtly or dramatically impact a reader's interpretation of the information being conveyed on a Wikipedia page. If students were to select a topic that they are not familiar with, they would run the risk of focusing too much on understanding and retaining the information presented in a Wikipedia page as opposed to examining how said information is shaped by particular stylistic and grammatical choices. Hence, selecting a topic that they already possess knowledge about helps students inhabit an editorial middle-ground between audience and author. Students have worked with Wikipedia articles about literary figures (Emily Dickinson and Nathaniel Hawthorne), cultural figures (Walt Disney), infamous figures (Jack the Ripper), films and musicals (*Les Misérables*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Interstellar*), popular forms of entertainment and digital media (Nintendo), and environmental policies (sustainability initiatives).

Each editorial team is comprised of two copyeditors and two managing editors. Students self-select these roles on the basis of the types of editorial choices they want to engage (i.e., grammar and style-related choices versus more qualitative concerns surrounding how the article has been managed to ensure a neutral approach to the content area in order to abide by Wikipedia's standards and style conventions).  Students electing to serve as copyeditors are asked to examine how seemingly straightforward grammar choices, such as the use of pronouns, sentence structure (simple, compound, complex), the relationship between clauses (subordinate/independent), shifts in voice (passive versus active), and/or changes to verb tense alter how information has been received. I also task copyeditors with analyzing and modifying

**prompt** 7.2 (2023)  | Propper, *More than Memorizing Rules*                                                     64

their article's style choices, such as how information is sequenced and organized, the efficacy of the article's headings and subheadings, the import of specialized versus formal/professional terminology, the relationship between word and image. This rhetorical approach to grammar applications emphasizes the degree to which "correctness" is contingent upon a series of qualitative considerations, such as assumed audience knowledge, authorial credibility, and external sociocultural contexts or influences.

Students serving as managing editors are expected to identify key patterns within the article's editorial history using Wikipedia's "View History" function. The "View History" function archives every editorial contribution made to an article and the rationale behind these contributions (Figure 1).

Additionally, the "Page Statistics" tool catalogs the propensity of edits per article, the number of edits made by specific contributors, and fluxes and flows in yearly and monthly editorial contributions (Figure 2).

Students learn to navigate this database by searching data entries using variables such as the entry date, contributor entries, and entry size. Students also compare selected revision entries, which enables them to analyze a series of entries over a discrete time period. Using the "View History" function not only fosters critical digital literacy skills (such as negotiating an archive of online information to locate specific content and identify key patterns within a content area) but also underscores the collaborative nature of editing insofar as students learn how/why specific editorial decisions were made and the extent to which these choices are informed by cultural and historical phenomena. That is, students are encouraged to hypothesize how specific editorial contributions and patterns might be influenced by cultural circumstances.

While each editorial team examined the grammar, style, and editing history of their articles to gather insight into how information is presented to an audience, I also asked students serving as managing editors to assess the ways in which the article's intertextual connections (i.e., hyperlinks and references) supported or refined the information shared in the article. In other words, a central feature of the editing process is evaluating the legitimacy of source material, including how contributors support their content with scholarly references. Furthermore, Wikipedia is unique as an encyclopedic text because it provides the option of hyperlinking textual material in order to clarify key terms, compliment topics referenced in the article, and emphasize useful secondary information. Asking students to analyze how an article supports its claims with scholarly references as well as the efficacy of specific hyperlinks allows them to consider the multivoiced nature of writing and editing. That is, hyperlinks introduce another "voice" to the conversation. Evaluating hyperlinks allows students to consider when additional elaboration regarding a key term or claim is necessary. In my experience, conversations regarding when a scholarly reference or hyperlink may be warranted (and which references are appropriate) offer students opportunities to consider different forms of supporting evidence (i.e., quantitative versus qualitative research; primary versus secondary research). Once again, such conversations helped emphasize writing and editing as a collaborative, dialogic process—one that is contingent upon not only the cultural milieu but specific research conventions and practices.

In preparation for this assignment, I spend a class session reviewing Wikipedia's Manual of Style and then conduct a guided lecture where I compare several versions of our university's Wikipedia page. When comparing earlier and later versions of this page, I ask students to examine the ways in which specific contributions sync up with the platform's style guidelines and, furthermore, consider the cultural context and rhetorical impact of these contributions. For instance, I call students' attention to an early version of our university's Wikipedia page where a hyperlink for "public university" first appears in the introduction section, and then I identify how this hyperlink was modified to include "public research university" in a subsequent version.
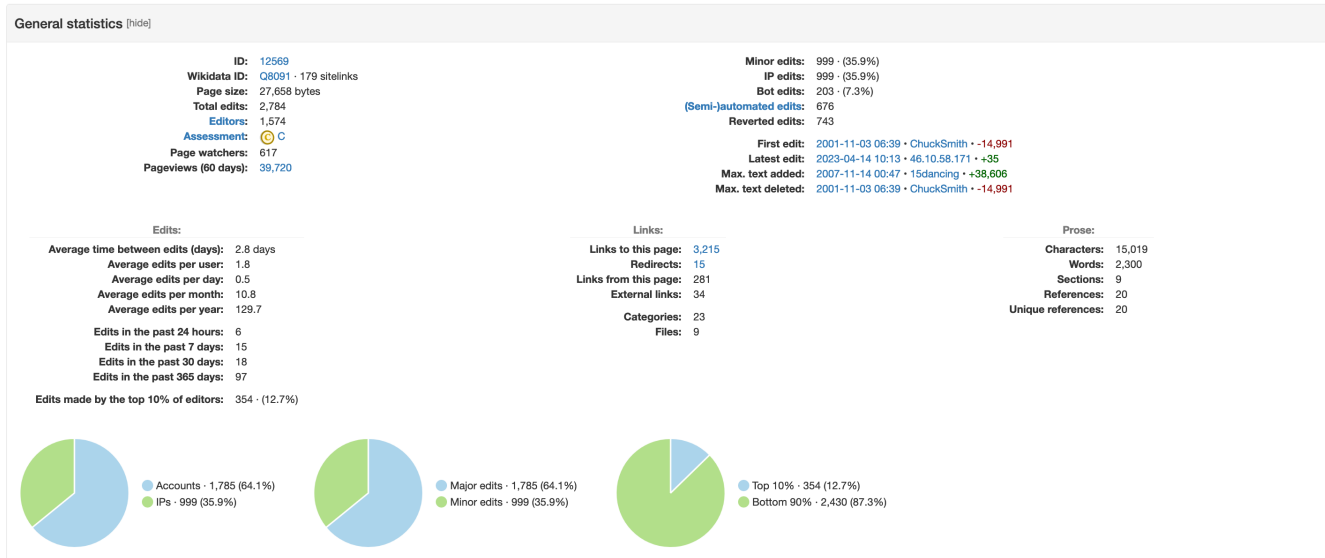
**Figure 2.** Page Statistics function on the "Grammar" Wikipedia article. Author screenshot.

In class conversations, students note the connotative differences between these labels insofar as being designated a "research" institution could subtly establish a degree of prestige compared to other types of colleges. However, I also contextualize the timing of these changes and explain how our university's research designation status (i.e., R2, R1, etc.) was promoted around the same time as these editorial contributions. Hence, these conversations illustrate how editorial contributions can take the form of sentence-level edits in addition to broader developmental edits (such as creating new sections, hyperlinks, or intertextual connections within a Wikipedia page in response to real-world developments). Ultimately, this class activity serves two purposes. First, it introduces students to Wikipedia's "View History" function and familiarizes them with the basic procedures for reviewing multiple versions of the same Wikipedia page. Second, this activity models the same type of critical examinations that students are expected to undertake in their own projects.

I would like to discuss two short examples that illustrate how students were able to map the broader cultural circumstances surrounding both grammar/style choices and broader developmental editing interventions. Throughout the semester, our in-class conversations focused on questions surrounding "choice and impact" as opposed to "right versus wrong" applications of grammatical principles. Moreover, we not only examined how grammar and style decisions shaped the ways in which information was relayed but also how grammar and style inform (and are informed by) the cultures in which these conventions circulate.

## Reflection: Drawing Connections Between Grammar and Cultural Shifts

While identifying patterns in the history of edits to the Wikipedia article for the popular 2014 film, *Interstellar*, one editorial team from my class recognized an influx in contributions centered on the use of pronouns and proper nouns when describing the film's characters. The group observed a surge in editorial activity surrounding these choices, beginning in 2016 (two years after the film debuted). According to the student group, attention to pronouns, proper nouns, and gendered modifiers used in the article remained consistent between 2016-2018. They write,

"male characters would be referred to with their titles (Dr., Professor, etc.) and their full or first name. However, the female characters, who also held similar titles, were only referred to by their last name." The group speculated that a heightened interest in how to name male and female characters may have been influenced by increasing concerns "for equal rights for females, including equal pay among other things. This, coupled with the recent #MeToo movement perhaps spurred the contributors to ensure that the female characters and actresses get the same recognition that their male counterparts receive." Here, the team's copyeditors demonstrate how specific grammatical and stylistic choices can lend insight into larger cultural and societal biases. By asking students to make these connections, my intention was to emphasize how language use is shaped by cultural shifts.

Recognizing how culturally informed editorial choices shape not only language usage but our larger cultural ideologies, another editorial team focused on the treatment of queer identity in Emily Dickinson's Wikipedia article. While analyzing their article's editorial history, the team's managing editors observed that references to Dickinson's queer identity received the most editorial attention, as sections discussing Dickinson's sexuality were added and removed throughout the course of the article's history. However, the publicly-facing Wikipedia article showed no engagement with or reference to Dickinson's purported queer identity or her relationship with Susan Gilbert, a childhood friend who later became Dickinson's sister-in-law. Contributors cited the lack of substantial supporting evidence to rationalize the removal of such information from Dickinson's biography. The team's managing editors write, "This is a clear case of bias" and argue that "[w]hile Dickinson never publicly admitted whether or not she was queer, the speculation alone is worthy of a section [...] In the original 'Sexuality' section, terms like 'alleged' and 'rumored' were used to discuss Dickinson's relationship with Sue Gilbert, but the section was still cut [by moderators] for lack of evidence." Thus, in the team's observation paper, they proposed incorporating a section that treated questions surrounding Dickinson's queer identity through the lens of her poetry and current scholarship engaging with alterations to Dickinson's canon. More specifically, the team referenced posthumous alterations made to Dickinson's poetry, namely the changing of pronouns and proper nouns that reference women, to explain the erasure of Dickinson's queer identity. The team resolved that such an erasure was "reckless" and suggested that "adding a subsection" focusing on Dickinson's relationships with women would "provide context to who she was behind closed doors and the metaphors within her poetry." In short, these students noted how omitting key aspects of Dickinson's identity runs the risk of overlooking or downplaying specific themes in her poetic works.

These examples illustrate how this assignment elicited productive connections between language usage and ideology. That is, students were able to chart the relationship between the application of grammar and style concepts and the cultures from which these conventions are drawn. Such observations resonate with James Berlin's (1988) argument that shared discursive practices and rhetorics "have their imbrication in ideology" and "can be read so as to favor one version of economic, social, and political arrangements over other versions" (p. 477). Ideology "normalizes" or makes legitimate a given cultural/historical value system, but the ideologies governing and structuring how we use, deploy, and interpret language are often invisible or hidden to us as language users. In other words, the ideology characterizing what we value, think is possible, and construe as "normal" in terms of social relations is often taken for granted as natural cultural occurrences. This assignment asked students to consider how ostensibly arbitrary language choices carry with them specific forms of social endorsement that can be, at times, exclusionary and patriarchal. Moreover, each editorial team demonstrated an ability to recognize and contextualize long-form patterns and trends in editorial interventions that may otherwise be overlooked. While copyeditors identified such connections based on pronoun

and proper noun usage and managing editors focused on the text's metadata, both groups were able to bridge ostensibly arbitrary grammar and style choices to specific cultural values and biases. In bridging this gap, these examples reflect how students were able to engage with the connotative functions of language, as both groups were able to assign larger values and preferences to individual grammar, style, and meta-textual choices. Furthermore, editors based their evaluation of the "impact" of grammar and style choices by considering how such decisions shaped the type of information privileged in a text. That is, both editorial teams foregrounded how an article's grammar and style influenced how readers accessed information about their subject area. In both examples, each editorial team recognized the relationship between one's language choices and the identities they make visible and/or invisible. Ultimately, in each of these examples, students were able to identify how an application of a grammar concept, namely how pronouns and proper nouns operate in a large body of text, shape which aspects of a story get told. My intention was to foreground how grammar operates in long-form writing that students will encounter beyond the classroom space. In emphasizing grammar in context, my hope was to provide students with a more nuanced lens for testing, evaluating, and assessing how grammar operates in writing and the larger cultural stakes associated with language use.

## Challenges: Overcoming Student Hesitancy and Anticipating Site Vandalism

Although this assignment provides opportunities for students to access real-world editing practices, working within an online forum can present challenges with respect to student hesitancy. Based on personal experiences, some English majors were intimidated by the prospect of navigating online databases and engaging in quantitative examinations of editorial patterns and practices. However, I have found that clarifying the digital literacy skills fostered through this assignment (such as negotiating a database of information and identifying patterns and trends in how content is produced and revised for an online audience) can ease students' reticence. To allay students' anxieties about how to locate editorial information on Wikipedia, I dedicated class periods to modeling for students how to find editorial patterns and trends using the "View History" function. One such class period focused on our university's Wikipedia article. Using the "View History" function, we charted the article's evolution from its inception in April 2005. We then used the "Compare Selected Revision" tool to identify which content had been added and the date of these contributions. This allowed us to consider the extent to which increased editorial attention coincided with specific changes to the university, such as the growth of our student population or the addition of athletics offerings. Such a process showed students how an influx in editorial contributions might signal significant moments in their subject's history. Furthermore, using a familiar example provided students with a roadmap to follow for conducting their own database research.

A second issue I encountered when teaching this assignment was site vandalism, meaning instances in which Wikipedia articles were purposefully filled with misleading and/or derogatory edits. While it is important to acknowledge that site vandalism does occur, I do not encourage students to engage in sustained analysis of such vandalism for two reasons. First, given the often vulgar nature of such material, further engagement with such writing would detract from students' capacities to rhetorically analyze purposeful and productive editorial interventions. In other words, a central learning outcome for this project was to evaluate how editorial contributions made to an article can model appropriate editing practices for students. Hence, examining site vandalism can limit students' ability to mimic and practice appropriate editorial interventions. Second, discussing vulgar article edits in classroom settings may be uncomfort-

able or unsettling for other students, especially when articles have been vandalized with sexist, xenophobic, and/or homophobic content. While it is important to understand the ways in which discriminatory remarks in online settings may incite real-world violence, I wanted to create a learning experience wherein students could focus their attention on the nuances and intricacies of key grammatical or stylistic decisions without the risk of exposing them to hate speech.

## Conclusion

Using Wikipedia to re-approach grammar and style concepts for the purpose of modeling real-world collaborative editorial practices can professionalize English students by helping them cultivate critical digital literacy skills. In undertaking the Collaborative Editing Project, students not only learned how to recognize and rationalize grammatical or stylistic editorial contributions but also intervened in these collaborative practices in such a way that had real-world impact. This, in turn, encouraged students to recognize the cultural and rhetorical dimensions underlying collective language practices. To conclude, designing writing projects around Wikipedia can encourage students to view grammar principles as a collection of stylistic strategies that actively respond to their surrounding cultural contexts (as opposed to seeing grammar as a set of decontextualized rules) while also highlighting the unique role of editors in the creation and circulation of collaborative, multiauthored texts.

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## ASSIGNMENT
## Collaborative Editing Project: Working with Wikipedia

### Task

Throughout this semester, we have explored traditional grammar concepts and considered their practical application to academic, professional, and everyday language. Moreover, we have examined connections between grammar conventions and editorial practices, weighing the impact of both following and breaking specific grammar "rules." Our first two major assignments asked you to summarize various points of grammar and identify helpful techniques for teaching and learning grammar concepts. Meanwhile, our third major assignment asked you to apply these grammar concepts to editing strategies found in local periodicals. This final assignment encourages you to refine both the grammatical and editorial skills we have been cultivating throughout the semester as you analyze a Wikipedia page of your choosing. Thus, this assignment asks you to expand and apply your repertoire of grammar and editing techniques to account for a digital, collaborative-written document.

The Wikipedia article you choose to analyze should be a minimum of 7,000 words and have multiple editorial contributions. You will work in editorial teams of four, divide team members into copyeditors and managing editors, and submit a co-written editorial memorandum paper with three sections (see below). Managing editors will focus on the history of editorial contributions and intertextual connections within your Wikipedia article. Copyeditors will emphasize grammar and style-related content. You will present your editorial analysis to the class in a 30-minute presentation as well as lead a 20-minute Question and Answer session.

# Your paper and presentation should include the following three sections

**Please note:** Each group member should present one of these sections. Groups of three will co-present the editorial contribution section; groups of four can have a single group member present the editorial contribution section.

### Section I—History

After choosing your Wikipedia page, pay attention to specific patterns/trends in editorial contributions, modifications, or removal of contributions by using the page's "view history" function.

- Grammar-focused questions to consider: Which grammatical choices derive the most amount of attention (i.e. preferences for pronoun usage, active vs. passive voice, verb tense, sentence structure, or point of view)? Are there modifications to proper nouns (i.e. names and titles)? How do contributors work with modifiers? In other words, are there editorial contributions surrounding the addition or subtraction of adjectives and adverbs? Does the page make use of adjectival or adverbial phrases? Do contributions emphasize mechanical concerns surrounding punctuation?
- Content-focused questions to consider: When was the article created? Were there consistent contributions over a long period of time or did contributions to this page come in fluxes and flows? Was there an influx of contributions to a particular section? Were there new headings/subheadings that cropped up and when? Were there old subheadings that were removed?

Write a detailed observation of 3-4 editorial patterns/trends your group noticed. Then, analyze how/why these patterns/trends might exist. How might these trends overlap with a given historical moment, popular trend, or event? For example, let's say you're analyzing a Wikipedia page dedicated to a superhero in the Marvel series. Was there an influx in the number of contributions to the page before or after the release of a movie adaptation? Do these patterns/trends dovetail to critical acclaim or concerns?

### Section II—Structure/Organization

After offering a detailed observation and analysis of the page's editorial history, your group should observe the page's structure. In describing the page's layout, please consider the following questions:

- How is information organized on the page, chronologically or based on specific findings/trends?
- What are the titles of headings and subheadings? Are some headings or subheadings more successful than others? Why or why not?
- Pay attention the page's diction (word choice) and syntax (word sequences). Is this diction and syntax proprietary or professional? Is the diction/syntax informal?
- Does the page rely on images? How do these images add to or detract from the content of the page? What "story" do the images provide about the content?

After noting these observations, then analyze the impact/effect of such structural choices. Does the structure privilege some content over others? Is there content that is "buried"? If so, why might this be the case? How did the diction and syntax used throughout the page convey

information (formally or informally)? How did the overall structure/layout influence the ways in which you read/navigated the page?

### Section III—Intertextual Communication

The third section of your paper and presentation should cover the page's intertextual communication. By "intertextual communication," I mean the page's use of hyperlinks and outside sources/references. In describing the page's intertextual communication, please consider the following questions:

- How does the page "communicate" with other Wikipedia pages? Does the Wikipedia page link to other Wikipedia pages? If so, what type of content is featured in these pages? Does the page link to outside sources (i.e. content beyond Wikipedia)?
- How much reference material is included on the page? Does the page use primary or secondary research to support claims?
- What is the overall ration between hyperlinks and references?

After observing the page's intertextual communication, please analyze the impact/effect of including specific hyperlinks and references. That is, click through the various hyperlinks featured on the page, and narrate how these hyperlinks impacted/effected how you read/received the information. Did the hyperlinks take you down a "rabbit hole," so to speak, where you lost a sense of your original thread? Did the hyperlinks accent/compliment your reading of specific content? Were you able to access the references cited on the page? Did you find the references helpful in supporting key claims?

## Making a Contribution

After observing/analyzing the above criteria, write a small contribution to this article based on the patterns/trends you noticed and revise a section or offer an alternative structure/organizational method. You may make an actual contribution to Wikipedia or propose a contribution you would make to the article. Regardless, you must identify why such revisions are appropriate. How do these edits enhance how the article's content is read, received, and/or archived?

## Evaluation

A successful paper and presentation will include the following:

- The editorial team offers detailed observations of the Wikipedia article. These observations should follow the criteria outlined in the above three sections.
- The editorial team supports their observations with specific textual examples/quotations. In other words, don't just tell me the page incorporates specific patterns/trends. Rather, show me where and how these trends operate on the page. Hint: Review the "Integrating Quotations" video on "modules" to familiarize yourself with proper quoting/paraphrasing strategies.
- The editorial team thoroughly analyzes the impact of the patterns/trends they observe, explaining how these patterns/trends shape their individual reading process.
- The editorial team discusses a specific contribution they would make to the article. These contributions could be editing a previous post, adding new content, identifying an additional section to the page, etc. The writers should also deliberate how these new contributions might enhance the material on the page.

- The editorial team presents their work in a 30-minute presentation. Each member of the editorial team (copy editors and managing editors) should participate in the presentation.
- The editorial team will also submit a co-written editorial memorandum, which will serve as the basis of the presentation. The editorial memorandum should be appropriately formatted and written in a style that does not detract from the clarity/meaning of the ideas being presented. This means that the editorial memorandum is written in 12-point font with a formal heading noting the writer's name, professor's name (including title), date, and assignment.

## Purpose/Rationale

The purpose of this assignment is to practice digital editing skills and strategies. Students will not only learn how to analyze a digital text by paying attention to the editing history but also make specific editorial interventions that shape the content, structure/layout, and intertextual communication of a digital space.

[**Editor note:** The course schedule that appears with this assignment is included as a supplement to this article (see Supplementary Materials).]

## Supplementary Material

For supplementary material accompanying this paper, including a PDF facsimile of the assignment description formatted as the author(s) presented it to students, please visit https://doi.org/10.31719/pjaw.v7i2.127.

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