

This is supplementary material for the webtext “Wikipedia as Editorial Microcosm” by Joshua DiCaglio et al., published in *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, 29(1), available at <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/29.1/topoi/dicaglio-et-al/index.html>.

Editing for Encyclopedic Tone

Wikipedia is an encyclopedia and therefore is supposed to sound like an encyclopedia. But what exactly does this mean? Here are considerations when thinking about appropriate writing at the sentence level on Wikipedia.

Policy Pages

[WP:Neutral Point of View](#) (when I was looking for a particular page about encyclopedic tone it just redirected me to this page)

[Writing Better Articles: Informatic Style and Tone](#)

[Words to Watch](#)

Major Issues

1. What exactly is “encyclopedic tone”

There are legitimate questions about what it means to have an appropriate tone and style on wikipedia. Is it ok, for instance, to use a more vernacular term, particularly if such terms are less vernacular in one area or culture than another?

This example uses ‘stomping grounds’ as a reference to where the rapper used to live. Some say that this creates an ‘unprofessional’ tone, while others say that it is common vernacular and should be kept.

Beanie Sigel ([Before](#) + [After](#))

“His stage name comes from a street in South Philadelphia, the rapper’s former **stomping grounds**.”

2. Neutrality and tone

Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, and therefore it should be neutral and unbiased in its content. Some articles have sections or phrases that create an inherent bias simply in the way the sentences are phrased or in the words used. In the example below, the use of ‘a scathing attack’ creates bias for those reading it that could sway their view or understanding of the topic discussed.

Juice Crew ([Before](#) + [After](#))

“A scathing attack on UTFO’s “Roxanne, Roxanne”...”

“Adding to the beef was an ongoing feud between Mr. Magic and his arch-rival Kool DJ Red Alert...”

3. Weasel Words: A subtle NPOV issue

Weasel words are phrases that give the impression that something said/stated is meaningful. These phrases include things like, “some people say”, “researchers believe,” etc. These are not specific phrases but add to a neutral point of view issue in that they give undue weight to a sentence. Sometimes these are signposts of further issues, like missing citations and/or Original Research.

The Giving Tree ([Before](#) + [After](#))

“Some people believe that the tree represents Mother Nature and the boy represents humanity.”

“Some people believe that the relationship between the boy and the tree is one of friendship.”

4. Professional tone

Wikipedia strives to maintain a “professional tone.” In many writing situations, this can be problematic (and it often reflects a default, white, American-centered conception of proper language). However, in certain situations, this makes sense as a guideline for language that diverges from the informatic into the more flowey and poetic (again, we can question all these categories, of course, but we can see their function in keeping Wikipedia within the bounds a more strictly informative rhetorical situation).

For example, the final few words of this example creates a bias in readers and evokes more emotion than say, "...will distort a previously working reed." You can also feel the writer's opinion in this example, and since there is no cited material for this claim, it violates WP:NOR.

Oboe ([Before](#) + [After](#))

embouchure, oral cavity, oboe angle, and air support. The reed is considered the part of oboe playing that makes it so difficult because slight variations in temperature, altitude, weather, and climate will change a perfectly working reed into an unplayable collection of cane.