

# Insist on Sources: Wikipedia, LLMs, and the Limits of Information Literacy Instruction

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# Land Acknowledgement

**I am presenting to you today from Calgary on the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations).**

**The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta (Districts 5 and 6).**

## Wikipedia and GenAI Comparisons

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*Librarians have often stood at the precipice of massive changes in information technology: the dawn of the fax machine, the internet, Wikipedia and now the emergence of generative artificial intelligence, which has been creeping its way into classrooms (Coffey, 2023, para. 5)*

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## Wikipedia and GenAI Comparisons

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*As with any new technology, there will be people who are hesitant adopters. In the early 2000s, many librarians were skeptical of students using Wikipedia. Now we realize that we need to be instructing students about the proper use of Wikipedia, rather than banning it (James & Filgo, 2023, p. 336)*


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## Wikipedia and GenAI Comparisons

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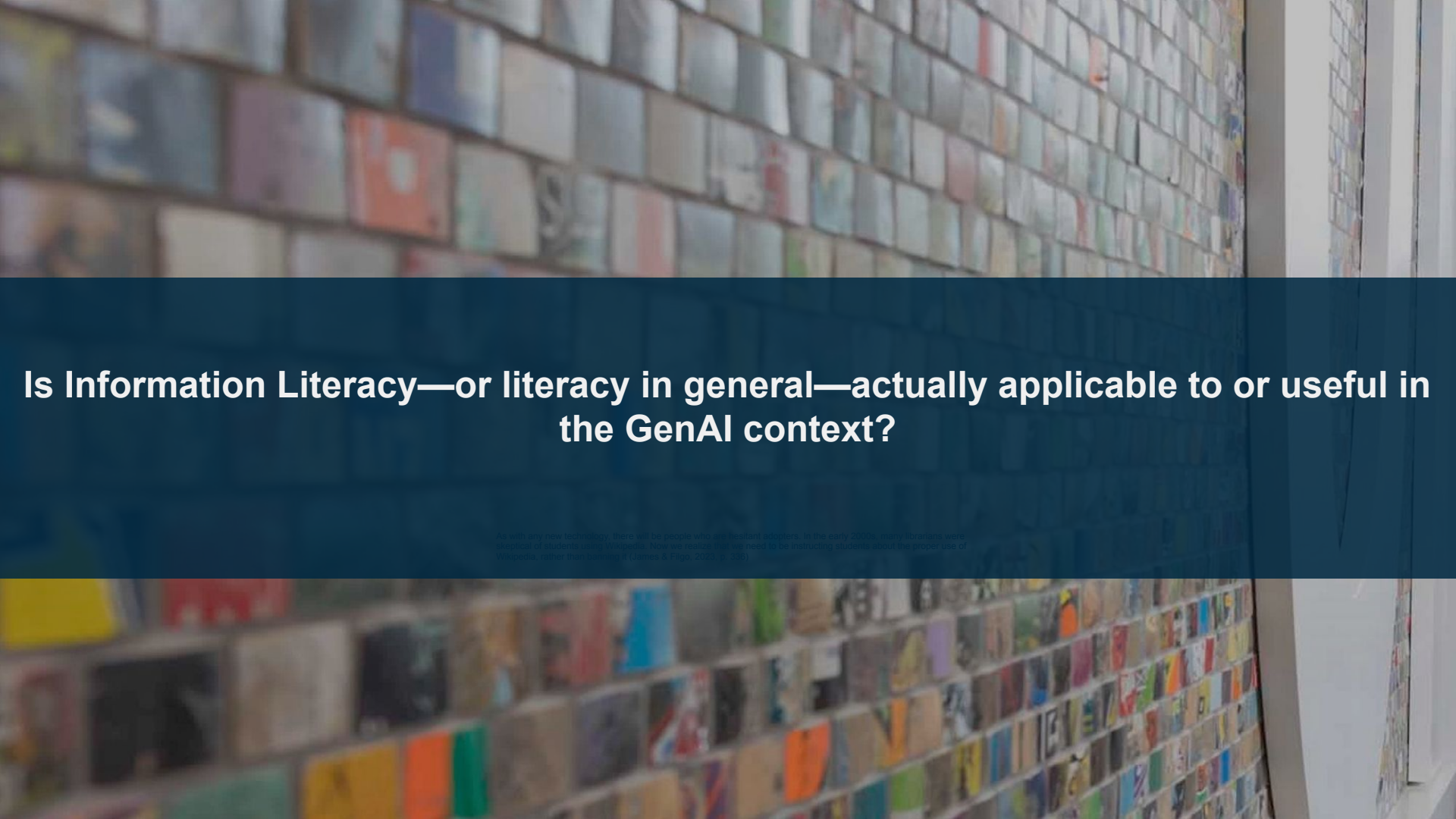
*It's hard to predict how AI tools will impact librarianship. In many ways, ChatGPT reminds us of how society reacted to other innovative developments including the invention of calculators, cell phones, the World Wide Web, and Wikipedia (Cox & Tzoc, 2023, p. 102).*

”



**Beyond being narrativized as “crises”—requiring, of course, resilience and adaptability (Blechinger, 2020) within academic librarianship and LIS’ technologically determinist self-understanding—is there more significant commonality between these two moments?**

As with any new technology, there will be people who are resistant adopters. In the early 2000s, many librarians were skeptical of students using Wikipedia. Now we realize that we need to be instructing students about the proper use of Wikipedia, rather than discouraging it (James & Page, 2002, p. 128).



# Is Information Literacy—or literacy in general—actually applicable to or useful in the GenAI context?

As with any new technology, there will be people who are resistant adopters. In the early 2000s, many librarians were skeptical of students using Wikipedia. Now we realize that we need to be instructing students about the proper use of Wikipedia, rather than warning it (James & Pigo, 2003, p. 338).

# Presentation Overview

1. **Academic Librarianship and the Challenge Posed by Wikipedia in the Early 2000s/2010s**
2. **The Wikipedia and GenAI Crisis Moments: Are They Actually Comparable?**
3. **Wikipedia and GenAI: Significant Differences in Teaching Affordances**
4. **AI Literacy? A Few Closing Provocations**



# Academic Librarianship and the Challenge Posed by Wikipedia in the Early 00s/10s

## Historical concerns:

- Wikipedia's status as a **freely editable encyclopedia** and it, therefore, not being a **stable, reliable, authoritative** resource (Gorman, 2007; Luyt et al., 2010).
- **Editor anonymity** and lack of accountability (Gorman, 2007; Luyt et al., 2010).
- **Editors' lack of credentials** (or traditional "indicators of authority") and this contributing to the devaluation of expertise (Gorman, 2007).
- **Students plagiarizing** from Wikipedia (Germek, 2009).
- **Students' use of Wikipedia prior to (or in total replacement of) consulting librarians** or traditional, print library resources (Luyt et al., 2010).



## Academic Librarianship and the Challenge Posed by Wikipedia in the Early 00s/10s

- Speaking generally, Badke (2008) presciently anticipated **how academic librarians (and the academy more broadly) adapted to Wikipedia**:
  - “The most daring solution would be for academia to enter the world of Wikipedia directly. Rather than throwing rocks at it, the academy has a unique opportunity to **engage Wikipedia in a way that marries the digital generation with the academic enterprise**” (p. 50).
  - Badke (2008) proposes that professors **contribute to Wikipedia, have their students evaluate and improve articles in class, and even contribute new articles to the site.**

## Academic Librarianship and the Challenge Posed by Wikipedia in the Early 00s/10s

- Despite academic librarians' initial apprehension, Wikipedia has proven to be useful in IL teaching, in large part due to its **transparency** (Murley, 2008; McDowell & Vetter, 2022).
- Wikipedia pedagogy is well suited to teaching the ACRL *Framework's* six frames (McDowell & Vetter, 2022; Stine, 2022). It can include teaching about the **peer review process** (Thomas et al., 2021), and Wikipedia editing activities with the aim of increasing students' IL skills have **even been undertaken in the one-shot instructional context** (Oliver, 2014).
- Initiatives like WikiEdu, GLAM-Wiki's #1Lib1Ref (one librarian, one reference) campaign, and many different edit-a-thons (Robichaud, 2016) have demonstrated a **strong affinity between Wikimedia's ethos and contemporary academic librarianship**.

## The Wikipedia and GenAI Crisis Moments: Are They Actually Comparable?

- With the wide-scale popularization of GenAI tools in 2022, some drew **comparisons between the Wikipedia crisis moment and the current GenAI crisis moment** in academic librarianship, usually locating Wikipedia within a lineage of technological innovations or disruptions to which librarians have unfailingly adapted.

# The Wikipedia and GenAI Crisis Moments: Are They Actually Comparable?

## Historical concerns about Wikipedia

- Wikipedia's status as a **freely editable encyclopedia** and it, therefore, not being a **stable, reliable, authoritative** resource (Gorman, 2007; Luyt et al., 2010).
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## Contemporary concerns about GenAI tools:

- The **blackboxing** of most popular GenAI tools and the complexity of algorithmic "decision making" (Bagchi, 2023).
- **(Un)reproducibility** of GenAI tools' output (Ball, 2023).
- **Liquidation of authorship and attribution** in GenAI tools' output (Blechinger, 2024) and related **copyright issues** (Appel et al., 2023).
- **Bias** in GenAI tools' output (the GIGO principle: "garbage in, garbage out") (Ferrara, 2023).
- The **"hallucination"—or "fabrication"—problem** in GenAI tools' output (Edwards, 2023).
- The **environmental cost** of GenAI tool usage and integration into different software products (Luccioni, 2023).
- **Students' use of GenAI tools to bypass learning** via idea generation, text generation, etc. (Clark, 2024).
- **Students' use of GenAI tools prior to (or in total replacement of) consulting librarians** or library resources (Press, 2023).

# The Wikipedia and GenAI Crisis Moments: Are They Actually Comparable?

- Issues related to **information quality, academic integrity, and librarian labour** persist across both crises, but, generally, we have moved **from a human-centered set of concerns to a largely non-human-centered one**.
- The easiest way to drive this point home is to consider how GenAI tools' output frustrates some common IL heuristics:
  - Mandalios' (2013) RADAR, for example, commonly consists of relevance, authority, date, appearance (or accuracy), and reason for writing (p. 473).
  - As I have detailed before (Blechinger, 2023), **RADAR runs into problems when used to assess GenAI output**.
  - **What would it mean for a GenAI tool to have a sufficient amount of authority? Or, what is the “reason for writing” for a user-prompted GenAI tool?**

# Wikipedia and GenAI: Significant Differences in Teaching Affordances

## [Wikipedia's Content Policies:](#)

### **Neutral point of view (NPOV):**

“Everything that our readers can see, including articles, templates, categories and portals, must be written neutrally and without bias” (“Wikipedia: List of policies,” 2024).

### **No original research:**

“Articles may not contain any unpublished theories, data, statements, concepts, arguments, or ideas; or any new interpretation, analysis, or synthesis of published data, statements, concepts, arguments, or ideas that, in the words of Wikipedia's co-founder Jimbo Wales, would amount to a ‘novel narrative or historical interpretation’” (“Wikipedia: List of policies,” 2024).

### **Verifiability:**

“Articles should cite sources whenever possible. While we cannot check the accuracy of cited sources, we can check whether they have been published by a reputable publication and whether independent sources have supported them on review. Any unsourced material may be challenged and removed” (“Wikipedia: List of policies,” 2024).

# “Insist on Sources”

## [WikiEN-l] insist on sources

Jimmy Wales [jwales at wikia.com](mailto:jwales@wikia.com)

Wed Jul 19 17:42:38 UTC 2006

- Previous message: [\[WikiEN-l\] Wikipedia e-mail](#)
- Next message: [\[WikiEN-l\] insist on sources](#)
- Messages sorted by: [\[ date \]](#) [\[ thread \]](#) [\[ subject \]](#) [\[ author \]](#)

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"The defining moment for Sergey, however, was when he met future co-president of Google, Larry Page. Sergey was assigned to show Larry around the university on a weekend tour. Reportedly, they did not get on well to begin with, arguing about every topic they discussed, and even throwing a few pies at each other."

Is that true? Is it not true? As a reader of Wikipedia, I have no easy way to know. If it is true, it should be easy to supply a reference. If it is not true, it should be removed.

I really want to encourage a much stronger culture which says: it is better to have no information, than to have information like this, with no sources. Any editor who removes such things, and refuses to allow it back without an actual and appropriate source, should be the recipient of a barnstar.

--Jimbo


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#####  
# Office: 1-727-231-0101 | Free Culture and Free Knowledge #  
# http://www.wikipedia.org | Building a free world #  
#####
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**“I really want to encourage a much stronger culture which says: it is better to have no information, than to have information like this, with no sources.” (Wales, 2006)**

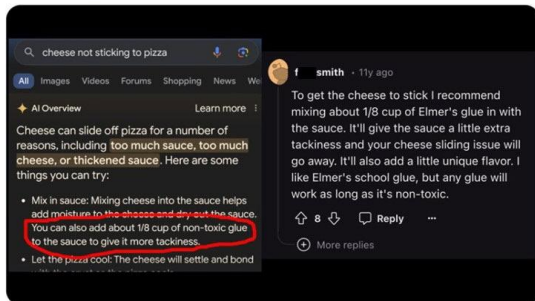


# Google's AI Overview Feature

 **Peter Yang** ✓  
@petergyang

Google AI overview suggests adding glue to get cheese to stick to pizza, and it turns out the source is an 11 year old Reddit comment from user F[redacted]smith 😂

Subscribe



9:14 PM · May 22, 2024 · 3M Views

(Yang, 2024)

Google

how many rocks should i eat each day

All Images Forums Videos News More

AI Overview Learn more

According to UC Berkeley geologists, people should eat **at least one small rock a day**. Rocks can contain vitamins and minerals that are important for digestive health, including calcium, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, zinc, and iron. Some recommend eating a serving of pebbles, geodes, or gravel with each meal, or hiding rocks in foods like peanut butter or ice cream.

ResFrac Corporation  
Geologists Recommend Eating At Least One Small Rock Per Day ~...  
May 19, 2021

The Geological Society  
The Geological Society

climatehubs.usda  
Climate-Smart Agr  
Amendments  
Some of the vital nutr  
naturally in rocks incl

Show more

Geologists Recommend Eating **At Least One Small Rock Per Day**

"In order to live a healthy, balanced lifestyle, Americans should be ingesting at least a single serving of pebbles, geodes, or gravel with breakfast, lunch, or dinner," said Dr. May 19, 2021

(Answer\_42, 2024)

Google

what are the most common jobs

All Images Forums Videos Shopping News

AI Overview Learn more

Some say that parrots can do a variety of jobs, including:

Woodworker, Architect, Prison inmate, Cook, Toy maker, Housekeeper, Behavioral analyst, and Engineer.

(roundbirbart, 2024)

## Transparency's Importance

“

*One of the major themes that pervade the qualitative data in regard to learning with Wikipedia is that students found the transparency of Wikipedia ... to be incredibly helpful in understanding how it functions, and how they experience many of the themes of the [ACRL] Framework. The transparency that Wikipedia provides remains in stark contrast to how the majority of UGC [user generated content] platforms function ... If the transparency of Wikipedia is key to garnering information literacy skills ... we believe this suggests that the lack of transparency of UGC platforms might be one of the facts that begs further inquiry in regard to information literacy, misinformation, and social justice. (McDowell & Vetter, 2022, pp. 8–9)*

”

# Wikipedia and GenAI: Significant Differences in Teaching Affordances

## Wikipedia's Content Policies:

These policies are, of course, not perfect—and can be and have been problematized (see, for example, Matei & Dobrescu, 2011 and O'Neil, 2011)—but **they are at least *legible* to us in our profession and reflect values that we share, broadly speaking, around knowledge production and human sense-making.**

These shared values and the platform's transparency are what made it possible for us to adapt to it and teach it—**they enabled our extension of IL to the Wikipedia pedagogical environment.**

Any attempt at theorizing—and developing, whether in ourselves or in our users—what some are calling “AI Literacy” (Wheatley & Hervieux, 2022; Pival, 2024) or “Algorithmic Literacy” (Ridley & Pawlick-Potts, 2021; Archambault, 2023) has to proceed with a clear understanding of where librarianship and LIS' values **are not in alignment with GenAI as a project.**

## AI Literacy?

### A Few Closing Provocations

- Logan (2024) has expressed ambivalence about literacy's applicability to the GenAI context due to both **the opacity of GenAI tools and also Big Tech's ability to capture "literacy."** He instead proposes an "ecological framework that begins to map some of [GenAI's] social, technical, and political-economic relations" (p. 365).
- To what extent are efforts to theorize—and proclaim a new era of—AI Literacy premature? Do these efforts instead **reflect our own professional investment in the transcendent power of literacy**—what Graff & Duffy (2014) have termed "the literacy myth"—**more than the applicability of literacy to GenAI?**
- Why does AI Literacy so often **assume GenAI use**? From a politics of refusal perspective, can we conceive of an AI literate individual that does not want to use GenAI tools?

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