Gender balancing Wikipedia entries

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Less than 15% percent of people who regularly edit Wikipedia are women: this leads to skewed coverage of topics (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_bias_on_Wikipedia). The reasons for this are not simple, but may be similar to the structural and cultural attitudes present in other tech environments. Wikipedia editathons are a proven way of encouraging and supporting new editors by engaging them on a topic of interest, supporting skills development and building confidence.

The editathon is a reusable learning design which can be adapted and modified, supported by research evidence that this activity leads to a deep approach to learning (among others: Marton et al., 1997; Marton & Saljo, 1976; and Richardson, 2005).

Learners who take a deep approach have the intention of understanding, engaging with, operating in and valuing the subject. Wikimedia UK offers advice on how to make a basic editathon. You can then flavour yours with topics and themes to taste (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:How_to_run_an_edit-a-thon).

Editathons offer:

- opportunities for professional development and workplace learning of digital skills;
- opportunities to build networks of social capital among workplace teams;
- a scheduled time where people edit Wikipedia together typically focused on a specific topic, such as science or women's history;
- a way to give newcomers an insight into how Wikipedia works.

Editathons redress the skewed coverage of topics in Wikipedia, develop digital literacy skills, strengthen social ties and build social capital networks for women in the workplace. This recipe is based on the editathon for the Edinburgh Seven Wikipedia entry (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh_Seven) about the first group of matriculated undergraduate female students at any British university.

When interviewed after the event, the participants (university staff and students) described rich learning experiences, extending their range of skills and knowledge, for example:

- technical knowledge (how to create a Wikipedia page, how to edit, how to cite other sources etc);
- information literacy skills (an understanding of copyright in an open knowledge environment);
- factual knowledge around the topic (names, dates, locations of historical events);

- relational knowledge (how to interact with archivists and materials, how and where to source information, how to plan work with others);
- socio-cultural knowledge (how to operate within a network of people with a common purpose).

Editathons, if run well, can develop not just technical knowledge but also workplace cultural capital and networks. These are the things women need in STEM (science, technology, mathematics and engineering) workplaces. These all seem like good skills worth investing in.

Essential ingredients

- A Wikimedian or two (a Wikimedian is an experienced Wikipedia author who can guide the participants through the processes, protocols and pitfalls of editing). Some cultural and scientific organisations in the UK host 'Wikimedians in Residence' who can help you with your event. You can find out more about these partnerships here: https://outreach.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedian_in_Residence.
- Participants (Wikipedia novices and experienced editors).
- An engaging topic which will attract a local audience. It is important to define

an achievable set of goals for the event, so that participants have something to show, something to point to at the end of the day as a 'take home'.

- Some librarians.
- Some books.
- A computer lab or area with good internet connections and power sockets for those bringing their own devices.
- Baked goods for sustenance.
- Wiki-swap (Wikimedia merchandise to take away).

Method

1. Advertise the event on Wikipedia and social media. Depending on the size of your editathon, the activity can last one afternoon to one week.
2. Mix novice editors with experienced ones.
3. Add the specialist knowledge of an experienced Wikimedian.
4. Surround participants with books, articles and online databases.
5. Feed regularly.
6. Report on Wikipedia the outcomes of the event in terms of coverage and articles improved.
7. Use data in Wikipedia profiles, history and edit logs to see whether your participants have continued to edit. Have you created new editors who stay part of the community?
8. Run follow-up events.
9. Survey participants to discover what they have learned.

Warnings

If you try this without an experienced Wikimedian to help, you may not get the 'before and after' detail of the Wikimedia training and etiquette. This, however, is a knowledge base which can be developed locally if running repeated events.

As a result of the editathon's success, the University of Edinburgh has a Wikimedian in Residence during the academic year 2016/17. Our resident Wikimedian is available to help to deliver editathons across the University (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:University_of_Edinburgh).