Wikipedia has become, for better or worse, the primary (and sometimes the only) source of information for many topics, including science, used by students and the public. Wikipedia has frequently been criticized, both for its content (facts) and grammar (see the BBC article), but there has also been a movement towards embracing Wikipedia, and improving the content of the science material (see the EOS article).

For this extra credit assignment, you will help improve, or at least verify, the content of one or more Wikipedia entries related to any aspect of Oceanography. You can work in groups of up to 4 people; if you choose to do so, you are encouraged to work together, but the amount of work increases for each person (so 4 people means about 4 times more content, compared to 1 person).

If you would like to try the extra credit assignment, it will be worth one Discussion Section assignment, and is due on December 5, 2007.

The Assignment:

1) Choose any topic related to Oceanography. It does NOT need to be in Wikipedia already. For example, you could choose hydrogenous sediments, red tides, breathing adaptations of California sea lions, etc.

2) Once you have chosen your topic, OK it with your TA, and let your TA who will be working on the assignment (up to 4 people). Once your topic is OK’d, provide your TA with a copy of the current Wikipedia entry (if there is one)

3) If your entry already exists, you will:
   a. Fact-check the entry—is the information correct? How did you check it?
   b. Improve the entry (rewrite it) if necessary
   c. Add to the entry, by providing more detail, expanding on the topic, etc. You should have references (from journals, magazines, etc) for any information you add. MAKE SURE you write it yourself! Plagiarism is not acceptable!
d. You will turn in a document showing what you have changed, compared to the original entry

4) If Wikipedia does NOT yet have an entry for your topic, you will write a new entry; follow 3C guidelines.

5) If you prefer to update the information directly in Wikipedia, you can register and make changes directly. However, you will need to keep a list of what you worked on so that we can assign credit for your changes.

Once you have turned in your entry, it will be graded and assigned points. If you did a good job, we will then update the Wikipedia entry with your information (and you’ll be immortalized!) As a rough guideline, one person would be expected to develop approximately a 2-page update (text, images, references, etc) for full credit. This can include links to other Wikipedia entries, etc.

Some Examples:

If you search for “red tide” on the Wikipedia page, you will find a pretty good entry describing what a red tide is (proliferation of single-celled algae, usually dinoflagellates, that discolors the water) However, several “facts” are technically correct, but misleading, such as the description of red tides as primarily occurring off Florida. This entry could be greatly improved with more information. You could start by finding more information on red tides from scientific journals, other websites, and reputable magazines (e.g. New Scientist, Scientific American, Smithsonian, etc). Then prepare a revised entry by writing a “term paper” review of red tides, suitable for Wikipedia.

If you go from “red tide” to “amnesic shellfish poisoning”, you will find a section called “Possible Animal Impacts” that is very incomplete, and missing citations. This could easily be improved with a review of the more recent literature in the scientific journals.

If you search for “eastern boundary current”, you’ll see that the entry is VERY short, and that Wikipedia has identified it as needing more links to other pages, and it needs to be expanded. This would be a good page for someone to describe eastern versus western boundary currents, why they exist (linking to, for example, Coriolis, Ekman transport, etc).