A Students' Guide to Wikipedia

What is Wikipedia?

"In recent years, Wikipedia (http://www.wikipedia.org/) has become one of the most important and useful resources on the Internet. Created by an open community of authors (anyone can contribute, edit, or correct articles), it has become a powerful resource for researchers to consult alongside other established library and online resources" (Liu). *However, Wikipedia is generally not a good tool to use for research on most major subjects.*
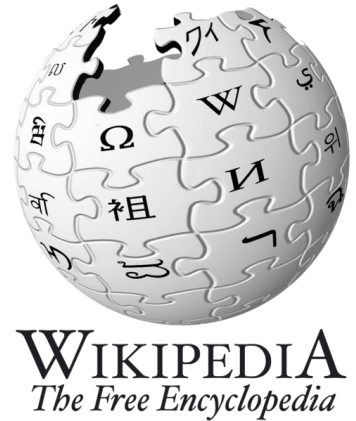
Why isn't Wikipedia a good tool for research projects?

There are several reasons why you shouldn't use Wikipedia for research projects:

1. **As an encyclopedia, Wikipedia gives second or third-hand summaries of events, people, etc.** Because they are so far removed from the original source, there may be inaccuracies or biases that creep in. Also, there are probably primary sources that cover the material more accurately.
2. **Wikipedia can be edited by anyone.** While this means that there are many people watching a particular topic it also means that people who don't know what they're talking about can change information on the site.
3. Sometimes, on certain controversial topics, **"edit wars" take place where people try to commit vandalism or push certain political viewpoints.** While Wikipedia tries to flag articles that has this going on, there are so many topics and articles that they can't keep up with it.
4. **All information on Wikipedia is not created equally.** Articles on science, technology and popular culture tend to be more reliable than other topics. For subjects like history, literature, etc. it is best to avoid Wikipedia because the information is often not corrected by experts or does not present current information.

How can I use Wikipedia in class?

You can use Wikipedia as a starting point for your research. Often, the citations at the bottom of a Wikipedia page can provide helpful links to primary sources and other reliable sources of information.

You should treat all information on Wikipedia with a critical eye. Because anyone can edit information on any topic it is best to treat all articles as blogs rather than a reliable source. **Just because it's on Wikipedia, doesn't mean it's true!**