

**ESSAY 3: ARGUING MEANING**  
**Writing Exercise 3: Wiki Definitions**  
**Due: Thurs, 2/16**

Today, we've been discussing the creation of meaning, and we've discovered that even seemingly simple words or phrases have more than one meaning because of ideology, relevance, reliability, credibility, timeliness and diversity. (See Mauk & Metz 598-604 for a discussion of Evaluating Sources using these criteria.) Even our dictionary and encyclopedia definitions are no longer locked into one definition.

To experiment with this concept of multiple meanings and to practice evaluating sources, you will evaluate an entry on Wikipedia, the open-source online encyclopedia that has been built by Internet-users all over the world. More than a dictionary, Wikipedia offers historical, social and cultural contexts surrounding prominent words and phrases. The authors are anyone who wants to register with the site.

Read through Wikipedia's entry for "2003 Invasion of Iraq":

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003\\_invasion\\_of\\_Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_invasion_of_Iraq)

You'll see that the definition has a tag stating that the "neutrality of this article is disputed." This means that the Wikipedia community does not agree on the meaning of this phrase and has logged a lengthy debate. Typically, when a new entry goes online, the Wikipedia community will revise the entry. If the revisions become biased, the community then locks the definition and debates the relevant points in the Discussion attached to the entry. After a consensus is reached, the definition entry is revised and accepted. However, since words and concepts are always being revised in our world, the Wikipedia entries are never safe from revision or from dissenters.

Wikipedia is supposedly a democratic encyclopedia comprised of definitions based on a consensus. However, unlike print encyclopedias, Wikipedia offers the dissenters a place to record their divergences from the accepted definition. The "2003 Invasion of Iraq" entry has been locked to avoid any further editing until the online community can resolve its differences and agree upon an acceptable definition of the phrase. Since the debate has been heated for a considerable amount of time, the phrase has become one of the "controversial" entries on Wikipedia.

For this writing exercise, read through the existing definition for this entry. Then, read through the Discussions (click the tab "Discussion" at the top of the page). Be sure to click around, reading through the Archive discussions as well. After reading through these debates, answer the following questions:

1. According to the Discussion, why is "2003 Invasion of Iraq" a controversial entry on Wikipedia?
2. What ideology underlies the discussions? (Make reference to individual posters.)
3. What is the reliability of the information in the Definition and within the Discussions? (Consider the nature of online discussions and their anonymity.)
4. Are the arguments in the Discussions credible?
5. Who won the Discussion?
6. What meaning is being created from this online entry? (Remember, "meaning" is more than offering a definition; "meaning" incorporates all of the hidden messages as well.)
7. Is Wikipedia itself a reliable source? Why or why not?

Answer these questions in an essay form rather than listing each question and response.

**Basic Requirements:**

- Type this essay in 12pt font, double-spaced with one inch margins;
- Type your name, the date, your section number and Essay 3, Writing Exercise 2 at the top left-hand corner;
- Type your name and page number on every page;
- Staple your work;
- Proofread everything before you bring it to class.