

House of Leaves on Wikipedia // ENGL 429 Investigation #1

Wikipedia has become one of the main “go to” sites on the Internet for information. The English version of the site has over 1.3 million articles and is growing every day. Entries range from topics you’d find in any reputable encyclopedia to matters so obscure that perhaps only the person who wrote the article cares about that subject.

And this is the power of Wikipedia: anybody can create and edit any entry. A single article may have dozens of authors (unlike an article in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which may have been written by only one or two experts). Furthermore, the articles are always changing, although controversial entries may be occasionally “locked down” by a volunteer moderator. The history of these changes is public, and it is possible, by studying an article’s history, to see how an entry “evolves” over time.

Considering the complex, interconnected nature of Wikipedia, the resource is perfectly matched for Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*. For this assignment, you will either edit the main Wikipedia entry on *House of Leaves*, edit one of the related entries, or create your own sub-entry.



The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for "House of Leaves". At the top, there's a navigation bar with tabs for "article", "discussion", "edit this page", and "history". A "Sign in / create account" link is on the right. Below the navigation bar, a banner reads "Your continued donations keep Wikipedia running!". The article title "House of Leaves" is prominently displayed, followed by the tagline "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia". A disambiguation note states: "For other uses, see [House of Leaves \(disambiguation\)](#)." The main text begins with "House of Leaves (2000) is the debut novel by writer Mark Z. Danielewski, published by Pantheon Books (ISBN 0-375-70376-4). The novel quickly became a bestseller following its March 7, 2000 release, although it had already developed a cult following through gradual release over the Internet. It was followed by the companion piece, *The Whalestoe Letters* (ISBN 0-375-71441-3). The format and structure of the novel is unconventional, with unusual page layout and style (see [ergodic literature](#)). It contains copious footnotes, which often contain additional footnotes themselves; the direction of the text frequently flows in unusual directions; and some sections of the book have only a few lines of text or just a word or two on each page, arranged in strange ways, often to create (paradoxically) both an [agoraphobic](#) and a [claustrophobic](#) effect or to otherwise mirror the events in the story. The novel is also distinctive for its multiple narrators, which interact with each other throughout the story in disorienting and elaborate ways." To the right of the text is a book cover for "House of Leaves" by Mark Z. Danielewski, labeled as a "National Bestseller". Below the book cover is a metadata table.

Author	Mark Z. Danielewski
Country	United States
Language	English
Genre(s)	Novel, Horror

On the left side of the article, there is a sidebar with a "Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia" logo, a "navigation" menu with links like "Main Page", "Community Portal", "Featured articles", "Current events", "Recent changes", "Random article", "Help", "Contact Wikipedia", and "Donations". Below this is a "search" box with "Go" and "Search" buttons. At the bottom is a "toolbox" menu with links like "What links here", "Related changes", "Upload file", "Special pages", "Printable version", "Permanent link", and "Cite this article".

Figure 1: Main Entry <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Leaves>

Step 1: Create a free account in Wikipedia. This allows you to edit the encyclopedia and will attribute any changes you make to you. The link is in the upper right corner of the main Wikipedia screen.

Step 2: Thoroughly read the entry on *House of Leaves* (Figure 1) and then read the discussion that has gone on "behind the scenes" regarding the entry (See Figure 2). You can access this discussion by selecting the "discussion" tab at the top of the page.

	[edit] Published online? The page states: "The novel quickly became a bestseller following its March 7 2000 release, although it had already developed a cult following through gradual release over the Internet." When I read the bit about dissemination on the Internet in the preface? (I don't have a copy handy) of the book I assumed it was true only in the world of the novel, but the DisInfo page [1] implies otherwise. Nonetheless, it would be nice to have more detail and/or verification of the fact; how was it published? On the Web? On mailing lists? Via a .plan? Can fragments be seen via the DejaNews/Google News archives, or the Internet Archive? [edit] Colors I may be mistaken but as far as I know there are only these editions: Black and white - No color Blue edition - House in blue. Minotaur and struck passages in regular black Red edition - House in light gray. Minotaur and struck-passages in red No full color or two-color editions exist as far as I know I think the "Full color, including braille parts" first edition is an intentional misdirection, like the "Unexpurgated" <i>Princess Bride</i>. D'you suppose this should be mentioned in the article? Scix 21:46, 29 November 2005 (UTC) A full color edition (which is actually to say two color) employing both the blue and red text was released recently (the date on the flyleaf reads 05/06). - JacobB, 19 June 2006 [edit] Truant's inheritance "When Zampanò dies, the manuscript and notes are discovered by a Los Angeles club kid named Johnny Truant, who was hired to clean Zampanò's apartment."
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Figure 2: Discussion Page <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:House_of_Leaves>

Step 3: Review the history of the entry, by selecting the "history" tab at the top of the article. The history reveals in detail every single change ever made to the article, and by whom. There is no need to read the entire history, but it is interesting to meander through and get a feel for the way changes are tracked. It's also useful to read the original entry and the first few revisions. You can select any two revisions and compare them side by side (for example, see Figure 3).

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for "House of Leaves". At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like "article", "discussion", "edit this page", "history", "move", and "unwatch". Below this, a banner mentions the 2006 Election to the Board of Trustees. The article title "House of Leaves" is prominently displayed, followed by the text "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia" and "(Difference between revisions)".

Two revision entries are shown side-by-side:

- Revision as of 23:49, 23 September 2002 (edit)** by 172.136.70.223 (Talk). The text for Line 4 is: "The book was followed by a companion piece called "[[The Whalestoe Letters]]", a series of letters written to the character Johnny from within a mental institution, by his mother."
- Revision as of 20:20, 9 October 2002 (edit)** by Easterbradford (Talk | Contribs). The text for Line 4 is: "The book was followed by a companion piece called "[[The Whalestoe Letters]]", a series of letters written to the character Johnny from within a mental institution, by his mother."

Below the second revision, a green box highlights additional text added: "+ 'House of Leaves' was accompanied by a companion piece, a full length album called "[[Haunted]]" and + recorded by Danielewski's sister, [[Ann Danielewski]] (AKA [[Poe]]). The album features a track by the same name as the novel."

The "Revision as of 20:20, 9 October 2002" section contains the main body of the article, starting with: "House of Leaves" was the debut novel by writer Mark Z. Danielewski. It became a legend before it's year 2000 release when it was first released in various formats on the internet. It's pre-release cult following made it an instant best seller.

The article continues: "The novel was unique and like no other of it's time. It is multi-faceted. On one hand, you have the main story of a family that moves into a house that is somehow bigger on the inside than on the outside. As it seems to keep inexplicably growing inside, it eventually sucks them into deep and unending caverns."

Figure 3: Revision History

Step 4: Now decide what you want to add or revise. You have many options:

- You can correct inaccuracies or incomplete information in the original entry;
- You can propose counter arguments to positions or interpretations offered in the entry;
- You can edit one of the related entries (e.g. echo, Minotaur, etc.);
- You can fill out one of the "stubs"—this is the Wikipedia name for an article that exists in name only, but is otherwise empty (e.g. The Approach to al-Mutasim);
- You can create your own new entry, linked to from the main *House of Leaves* article (e.g. an entry on *Underground Worlds*).

You have many sources of inspiration for your revisions:

- Follow-up on one or two of the hundreds of real citations that Zampanó uses;
- Elaborate on any number of the mythological references that appear, and highlight their relevance to the story;
- Propose your own reading of any aspect of the story—its themes, its structure, its format, etc.

Step 5: There is no definitive required word-length on your revisions or additions to Wikipedia, but aim for at least 100 words. In other words, do more than simply add or subtract adjectives or correct a spelling or grammatical error. Your contribution to the *House of Leaves* article or related articles should be substantive. It should add in some way to our collective knowledge and understanding of Danielewski's novel. Interpretations founded upon attention to detail within the text, or which build upon intertextual links suggested by the text are especially valuable.

Wikipedia offers several guides on writing articles, which may be useful:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:How_to_write_a_great_article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Creating_a_new_article

Step 6: Your contributions to Wikipedia are due by Thursday, September 21. Use the revision history tool to print out your contributions (to hand in). I also want a 3-4 page reflective essay to accompany the copy of your contributions. In this essay write about the experience of editing the *House of Leaves* Wikipedia article, particularly the challenges you faced as you pondered what to edit, and the thought processes you went through as you made your edit (why did you edit what you edited, what kind of research did you undertake, what stumbling blocks did you encounter, etc.). Also reflect on your role as a contributor to some larger collective reading experience centered upon *House of Leaves*, taking into account questions of authority, authorship, and narrative control.