



(U) Write Right: Caveat Scrutator (Or, 'But I Saw It on the Internet!')

FROM: ██████████
of the Reporting Board (S12R)
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(U//FOUO) Once again we must don the mantle of old-fogeydom and nip a new practice in the bud. SIGINT product reports have been found in the ANCHORY data base that contain the phrase "According to the Wikipedia web site..." in referencing unclassified collateral*. Information-Sharing Services has sent out a policy statement declaring that this is not a sufficient or appropriate reference for supporting material, especially in this day of close official scrutiny of our sources. Wikipedia should be a starting point for research, not an end-point.

(S//SI) It is true that the HUMINT-like nature of many targets (such as counterterrorism) and techniques (such as denial and deception) makes the Internet a very valuable source of collateral information. In these cases analysts will naturally include their evaluation of the information in the text of the report, in a Comment (see the [May column](#)) - without that evaluation, the information is much less useful to the customer and could be misleading. Such a report would not use "According to the Wikipedia web site..." without explanation.

(U//FOUO) The reports we noted above, however, used straightforward, verifiable information that would have been readily available from official government or research-institute sources, such as "this [the date of a significant occurrence, which was the subject of the report] is a local holiday in the Zendian province" and "this chemical can be used in the manufacture of..." In such cases, Wikipedia entries can tip a reporter to the existence of more appropriate sources to cite.

(U//FOUO) We appreciate the enthusiasm of those analysts who have taken to heart the push to use more open-source collateral, but the guidelines of USSID CR1400 (old 300) still apply. [Section 6.4](#) contains examples of acceptable unclassified collateral sources and general guidance on use of unclassified collateral, and the Advanced Intelligence Research Service (AIRS/S202A) library web site has an [excellent article](#) on tips for evaluating a Worldwide Web search. Another [useful article](#) appeared in the May 2006 issue of The Worthwhile Web; we draw your attention to the paragraph on "Questions of Validity and Reliability."

(U//FOUO) The nature of Wikipedia makes using the site itself as a reference tantamount to saying, "I read it on the Internet" -- a citation unlikely to be found acceptable the next time the Legislative Affairs Office needs to brief Congressional committees on our sources.

(U//FOUO) Thanks to intrepid researcher ██████████ of the AIRS library for the correct Latin for "Let the researcher beware" (Caveat scrutator)!



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*(U//FOUO) Note:

Unclassified collateral is non-SIGINT information intended to support, enhance, or refute the SIGINT facts.

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