**Wikis**

A wiki **is a collaborative tool that allows students to contribute and modify one or more pages of course related materials.** Wikis are collaborative in nature and facilitate community-building within a course. Essentially,  
a wiki is a web page with an open-editing system.  [Wikis in Plain English](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dnL00TdmLY) is a short movie describing what a wiki is and how it can be used in a collaborative process.  According to a recent [Essay on Teaching Excellence](https://podnetwork.org/content/uploads/V22_N5_Eggleston.pdf), wikis provide a vehicle for exercising most, if not all, of Bloom’s ‘higher order thinking’ activities.

In many classrooms, the instructor provides most of the course content. With wikis, students have an opportunity to create - together - much of the course content.  Wikis shift your students from 'consumer of knowledge' to 'creators of knowledge,' which is a great way to encourage your students to develop critical thinking skills, to learn from one another, and to improve their ability to work in groups.

**When to use a wiki**

As you're beginning to see, wikis are ideal for group projects that emphasize collaboration and editing. Some common uses include:

* Mini research projects in which the wiki serves as documentation of student work
* Collaborative annotated bibliographies where students add summaries and critiques about course-related readings
* Compiling a manual or glossary of useful terms or concepts related to the course, or even a guide to a major course concept
* Maintaining a collection of links where the instructor and students can post, comment, group or classify links relevant to the course
* Building an online repository of course documents where instructors and students can post relevant documents
* Creating e-portfolios of student work

Wikis work best when individual authorship is less important than the outcome that is created. Also, wikis are most appropriate for content that doesn’t need to be protected from accidental editing.

Curious about how other instructors are using wikis? Take a look at these real life examples:

* Chris Paris, lecturer at Vanderbilt Divinity, used a wiki in his "Bible in American Culture" class as a way to have students share pop culture references to the Bible, creating a shared class resource. In his "Literary Analysis of the Hebrew Bible" course, he asked students to take turns taking notes on class discussions and to share those notes on the class wiki. See more about his wiki use [here](http://seminariumblog.org/general/semtech/wonderful-yet-misunderstood-world-wikis/).
* Lou Rossi, Professor at the University of Delaware, used wikis in his Calculus undergraduate course and his Applied Mathematics graduate course. Using a wiki helps students spend time on solving problems outside of the classroom in a motivating collaborative environment. Publishing in a wiki gets students aware of the fact that they are writing for an audience, which usually results in using common mathematical language and formulas instead of plain English. [Hear more about his work on this podcast](https://archive.org/details/LouRossisInterviewOnWikis).
* Columbia University Lecturer Jutta Schmiers-Heller created two separate wikis (one in the fall semester and one in the spring semester) to help the same set of Intermediate I German language students practice and recycle vocabulary and grammar, and learn culture in a fun, interactive way. Both wikis were embedded in the course curriculum and used for specific projects.  See more about her wiki use [here](http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/nme2008/sessions/wikispaces_innovative.html).
* Associate professor of English at Barnard, Derrick Higginbotham, used his course wiki as a presentation space and tool for text analysis for students. His course assignments included a close reading of texts within the wiki followed by student discussion in the discuss section of the wiki page. In the discussion section of each page, students responded to each others thoughts and analysis of the text, thus creating discourse outside of class and fueling the discussion in class. See more about his wiki use [here](http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/nme2008/sessions/wikispaces_collaborative.html).
* Professor Patricia Shapley of the University of Illinois Chemistry Department created a wiki with content developed from her undergraduate chemistry students. The site - [Middle School Chemistry](https://wiki.cites.uiuc.edu/wiki/display/etchem/Middle+School+Chemistry) **-**includes nicely done lessons on chemistry-specific. Middle School Chemistry highlights a very public, outreach website use of a wiki system.
* Ben Miller, of the University of New South Wales, was runner-up for the Edublog Awards 2009 award for Best Educational Wiki. You can see is wiki on Censorship and Responsibility [here](http://hums3001.unsw.wikispaces.net/).
* Ruth Page, of Birmingham City University, has written a case study on her use of wikis to support small group work. She provides insight on how she asked students to use wikis to summarize small group discussions, giving greater value to small group interaction and building an online archive of class activities. Read her case study [here](https://s3.amazonaws.com/vu-wp0/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2012/06/09111533/case-study-using-wikis-support-small-group-work.doc).

**Why use a wiki?**

One of the primary reasons to use wikis is because they help your students reach Bloom's higher order skills - things like creating and evaluating. Additionally, wikis achieve many of Chickering and Ehrmann good teaching practices including cooperation between students, active learning, prompt feedback from peers, time on task, the articulation of high expectations, and support for diverse talents.

Practically, we also think that wikis are a good tool to use because access and editing can be controlled by the instructor thus making a wiki public or private. Additionally, wikis are accessible online and include user friendly features that require little training. It's likely your students will know exactly what to do!

**How to get started with wikis**

There are a variety of free and easy to use wikis that make it quick and easy to get started using wikis.  For example, try starting with:

* EditMe  
  <https://www.editme.com/>  
  ​The simplest wiki solution for your business or classroom. Share content and files, capture knowledge and manage processes.
* For some other alternative sites, please also check out some of these links;<https://www.pbworks.com/education.html><http://referata.com/wiki/Main_Page><https://moodle.org/><https://education.weebly.com/>

Each of these options has example wikis that you can view to get an idea of the possibilities the tool.

Once you’ve chosen a tool, you’ll also want to:

1. Make instructions explicit and provide clear expectations
2. Build in time for practice
3. Publish due dates for multi-phase projects
4. Start with a simple wiki assignment before attempting a large, collaborative project

**What does the research say about wikis?**

Research on wikis is still emerging, here we’ll provide a brief annotate bibliography of recent articles:

* Bold, M. (2006). **Use of wikis in graduate course work.** *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, 17(1), 5-14.In the “Use of Wikis in Graduate Course Work,” the researcher evaluates wikis as a viable tool for collaborative work.  Bold cites benefits of wikis including ease of collaboration (“A collaborative workspace that can display documents immediately, with a minimal working knowledge of HTML tags”) and ease of use (“wikis require little to no institutional support, financial or technical”). Further,  Bold believes wikis don’t just help the student learn the curriculum better, but they help the student learn how to improve their skills in online interaction.
* Deters, F. Cuthrell, K., & Stapleton, J. (2010). **Why Wikis? Student Perceptions of Using Wikis in Online Coursework.** *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 6(1). <http://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no1/deters_0310.htm>Elementary education professors at a large southeastern College of Education conducted a study for the purpose of exploring student perceptions regarding the use of wikis in online instruction and potential uses for wikis in the K-12 classroom as perceived by respondents. Participants in the study were 40 students enrolled in 1 of 3 graduate level social studies methods courses. Data were collected using surveys and written reflections. Though students reported initial hesitation at learning a new technology, their overall experience using the wikis was positive. The students felt that wikis were a great collaboration tool. Principle themes that emerged from the data were the potential uses of wikis as instructional tools, potential uses for information dissemination, benefits or advantages to using wikis, and limitations regarding the use of wikis. The authors provide a list of questions developed as a result of the study that, when used prior to implementing wikis as a learning tool, will minimize the limitations associated with their use.
* Elgort, I., Smith, A. G., & Toland, J. (2008).[**Is wiki an effective platform for group course work?**](https://s3.amazonaws.com/vu-wp0/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2012/06/09111731/1222-3807-1-SM.pdf)*Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 24(2), 195-21.  This study reports on students’ and lecturers’ perceptions of using wikis as a platform for conducting assessed group projects in two postgraduate Master’s level university courses. The results highlight the fact that student attitudes to group work, in general, are mixed, and that the use of wikis per se is not enough to improve these attitudes. On the positive side, students found wikis useful for arranging information and sharing knowledge, while instructors thought wikis made managing and marking group work easier  and  more  effective.  Other  issues  related  to  using  wikis  as  a  collaborative learning tool in higher education are also considered.
* Ioannou, A. and ARtino, A. (2009). [**Wiki and Threaded Discussion for Online Collaborative Activities:  Students’ Perceptions and Use.**](https://s3.amazonaws.com/vu-wp0/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2012/06/09111936/Wiki_and_Threaded_Discussion_for_Online.pdf) Journal of Emerging Technologies in Web Intelligence, 1(1), 97-106. Researchers used a wiki with 15 graduate students in an online course. Students worked on two different group activities, first using the threaded discussion feature and then using the wiki. The researchers then investigated students’ attitudes about their experience, as well as differences in their processes, after using each technology. The findings suggest that there are clear benefits and limitations inherent to both technologies. The threaded discussion tool was preferred, yet students recognized the potential of the wiki to support collaboration. Practical implications and future directions are discussed, including the need for instructors to support and encourage discussion as a complement to wiki writing, scaffold and model the use of wikis, and create sufficiently complex group tasks to help make wiki use attractive and appropriate.

**Common Concerns**

A common concern among instructors new to wikis (as with blogs!) is how to evaluate a student's work. We suggest that before implementing a wiki project in your course, you develop a rubric and explain to students how you will be evaluating their contributions to the wiki. Take a look at some of the existing wiki rubrics, like this [one](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson979/WikiRubric.pdf), this [one](http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/profdev/rubrics/wikirubric.html), or this [one](http://flatclassroomproject.wikispaces.com/Rubrics), and adapt it to fit your needs.

Consider how (or if) you will evaluate the wiki's:

* **Content and writing quality** *Consider if the content is interesting and engaging. Does it include images and videos or slideshows? Has it been proofread?*
* **Use and accuracy of citations and references** *Are there links to reliable outside resources that document student thinking?*
* **Appearance** *Is the wiki easy to navigate? Is it organized?*
* **Collaboration among your students** *The wiki will provide you with clues about collaboration on the "Page History" - you'll be able to see if the wiki has changed significantly over time as member of the course added new content or revisions to existing content.*

As with other types of assignments and projects, the more clear you are with your expectations, the more likely students will be able to meet them. To this end, [Dave Foord](http://www.a6training.co.uk/resources_Social_Software.php) created a simple acronym to get good results with wiki projects: STOLEN.

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| **S** | **Specific Overall Objective** (Clear objective for the wiki, Understood by all, Not a “general” area) |
| **T** | **Timley** (Definitive times for different “stages” of use, Definite end point ‐ even if left open after) |
| **O** | **Ownership** (People need to feel that they “collaboratively own” the wiki) |
| **L** | **Localized** (Some structure of what is expected, Starting points for editing) |
| **E** | **Engagement** (Who can edit, Which parts they can edit, Acceptable and unacceptable use) |
| **N** | **Navigation** (Clear navigation structure, Simple) |

**More Resources**

Wikis in Higher Education (A Report by the University of Delaware): <http://udel.edu/~mathieu/wiki/resources/2008-5-23_Wikis_in_Higher_Education_UD.pdf>

Wikify Your Course: Designing and Implementing a Wiki for Your Learning Environment: [https://er.educause.edu/articles/2010/9/wikify-your-course-designing-and-implementing-a-wiki-for-your-learning-environment/](https://er.educause.edu/articles/2010/9/wikify-your-course-designing-and-implementing-a-wiki-for-your-learning-environment)

[50 Ways to Use Wikis for a More Collaborative and Interactive Classroom](https://s3.amazonaws.com/vu-wp0/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2012/06/09112530/50-Ways-to-Use-Wikis-for-a-More-Collaborative-and-Interactive-Classroom.pdf)

Ideas for using blogs and wikis in your course from Duke Center for Instructional Technology  
<http://cit.duke.edu/2009/01/blogs-and-wikis-in-your-course/>

**Should you use a wiki or a blog?**

Wikis are often compared to [blogs](http://wp0.vanderbilt.edu/cft/teaching-guides/technology/blogs/) because, in many ways, they're similar: they're easy to edit, are used to collaborate, and each is easy to set up.

The difference between a wiki and a blog is that wikis are designed for collaboration among groups of users. Anyone with the shared wiki password can edit the content on a wiki at any time. Wikis also provide discussion boards for every page, enabling users to engage in ongoing conversations about their developing project.

So how do you choose? We suggest that you consider what you're hoping to achieve by using a technology in your course. For instance, are you wanting your students to write collaboratively or do you want submissions by a single author? For the former use a wiki, and the latter a blog.

**Ready to get started?**

The possibilities for using wikis to engage students both inside and outside of the classroom are immense.  Don’t hesitate to [contact the CFT](http://wp0.vanderbilt.edu/cft/about/contact-us/) if you are part of the Vanderbilt instructional community and would like to talk to one of our consultants about incorporating wikis into your teaching.

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