

# using wiki in education

*From The Science of Spectroscopy*

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## what is a wiki?

A wiki can be thought of as a combination of a web site and a word document. At its simplest, it can be read just like any other web site, with no access privileges necessary, but its real power lies in the fact that groups can collaboratively work on the content of the site using nothing but a standard web browser. Beyond this ease of editing, the second powerful element of a wiki is its ability to keep track of the history of a document as it is revised. Since users come to one place to edit, the need to keep track of word files and compile edits is eliminated. Each time a person makes changes to a wiki page, that revision of the content becomes the current version, and an older version is stored. versions of the document can be compared side-by-side, and edits can be rolled back if necessary.

The wiki is gaining traction in education, as an ideal tool for the increasing amount of collaborative work done by both students and teachers. students might use a wiki to collaborate on a group report, compile data or share the results of their research, while faculty might use the wiki to collaboratively author the structure and curriculum of a course, and the wiki can then serve as part of each persons course web site (excerpt from my contribution to a Business 2.0 article --Stewart.mader 11:35, 14 Dec 2005 (PST))

*Q. How many wiki people does it take to change a light bulb?*

*A. one, but anyone can change it back. -langreiter.com*

"The New writing is online writing: designing web sites, writing weblogs, and creating and managing wikis. New writers are redefining writing online, creating new forms and approaches for new audiences." - English Dept., Bemidji State University

## ways to use wiki in Education

1. **Easily create simple websites** Typically when students are asked to create web sites as part of a class project, they have to rely on the chance that someone in a group knows how to make a web site, or that some sort of training is available. The wiki eliminates both obstacles, because it provides a ready to use site with a simple user interface, ability to easily add pages, and simple navigation structure. This allows students to spend more time developing the content of the site, instead of trying to learn how to make one. The simplicity of the wiki syntax, or language for formatting text, inserting images and creating links, means students spend less time trying to figure out how to make the site do what they want. As more organizations adopt the wiki for collaboration & information, students will be well prepared to use it in their careers.
2. **Project development with peer review** A wiki makes it easy for students to write, revise and submit an assignment, since all three activities can take place in the wiki. A student can be given a wiki page to develop a term paper, and might start by tracking their background research. This allows the teacher, and peers, to see what they're using, help them if they're off track, suggest other resources, or even get ideas based on what others find useful. Next, the student can draft the paper in the wiki, taking advantage of the wikis automatic revision history that saves a before & after version of the document each time s/he makes changes. This allows the teacher and peers to see the evolution of the paper over time, and

continually comment on it, rather than offering comments only on the final draft. When the student completes the final draft, the teacher and peers can read it on the wiki, and offer feedback.

3. **Group authoring** often groups collaborate on a document by pushing it out to each member – emailing a file that each person edits on his or her computer, and some attempt is made to coordinate the edits so everyone's work is equally represented. But what happens when two people think of the same idea and include it in different ways in their respective copies of the file, or when one group member misses an agreed upon time to finish their changes and pass on the file to the next member? who decides what to do? using a wiki pulls the group members together to build and edit the document on a wiki page, which strengthens the community within the group, allows group members with overlapping or similar ideas to see and collaboratively build on each others work. It also allows all group members immediate, equal access to the most recent version of the document.
4. **Track a group project** considering students' busy schedules, a wiki is very useful for tracking and completing group projects. It allows group members to track their research and ideas from anywhere they have internet access, helps them save time by seeing what sources others have already checked, then gives them a central place to collectively prepare the final product, i.e. write and edit a group paper or prepare the content of a powerpoint or keynote presentation.
  - one way to do this is to give each group a wiki page in which to write the paper itself, and give each member of the group a separate page to track his/her research and ideas for the paper. The paper page lets you see how the group is working collaboratively to construct the paper, and the individual pages let you track how each group member is developing his/her contribution to the paper, and gives you a place to leave feedback and suggestions for each student. If you use the individual pages this way, you may want to restrict view access for each student's individual page to only you and that student.
5. **Data Collection** Because of its ease of editing, a wiki can be very useful for collecting data from a group of students. See "Introduction to Sleep" and "Personality and Clinical Assessment" in the courses using wiki section below for examples of data collection. The wiki best suited for this right now is Jotspot, which has a data collection tool you can install with just a few clicks.
6. **Review classes & teachers** Students at Brown university started CAW – Course Advisor wiki, a place for students to collaboratively write reviews of courses they've taken
7. **Presentations** some people are using a wiki in place of conventional presentation software, like Keynote and Powerpoint. Here's a presentation from Brian Lamb of UBC: what blogs, wikis, and Soylent Green have in common...
8. **Tracking progress in your research group**