

How to Use Wikis in Class

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What is a Wiki?

According to Wikipedia, the largest wiki in the world:

A **wiki** is a collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites and to power community websites. For example, the collaborative encyclopedia Wikipedia is one of the best-known wikis. Wikis are used in businesses to provide affordable and effective intranets and for knowledge management.

"Wiki Wiki" (/wi:ki: wi:ki:/) is a reduplication of "wiki", a Hawaiian word for "fast". It has been suggested that "wiki" means "What I Know Is".

Why the Buzz?

With the advent of Web 2.0 (as opposed to Web 1.0 – the internet in its infancy), internet users are able to do more than just read content on the internet, browse websites, and research data. Now users can add their own input, create blogs and sites, upload content to be shared with others, and more. **Bottom line: Web 2.0 allows you and me to add to the internet without having to be computer programmers.**

Wikis are one of the fastest growing Web 2.0 tools. Organizations and corporations are employing them to gather and manage their own collective knowledge, maintain schedules, document details of projects, build glossaries, unlog inboxes, manage projects, and build teams. Each team member can contribute and access up-to-date information on the projects.

“Diverse organizations, including businesses, schools and government agencies, are waking up to the benefits of wikis...[that] can help people improve their processes and get projects done faster,” says Margaret Locher of CIO Magazine. “[Wikis] don’t require a lot of personnel to support them and many of the tools are free.”

How Will Wikis Benefit My Students?

Students benefit from class wikis by contributing to the class discussion and material. Instructors add a vocabulary word or phrase into the wiki (called a wiki entry). Students watch for those key words or phrases in the videos, PowerPoints, and course material. They then define the terms in the wiki in their own words.

Other students read their fellow students’ entries and add their own twist. This fosters debate and discussion that can be missing in online classes. *Students have a reason to participate and defend their positions.*

In residential courses, those students who might not be apt to participate in a passionate class discussion suddenly become quite verbose when placed in front of a computer.

How Will Wikis Benefit My Instructors?

Instructors benefit from wikis in two ways:

1. Instructors have immediate access to *what* the students are learning. If students are defining something incorrectly, the teacher does not have to wait until everyone fails a quiz to know that the topic should be covered again.
2. Instructors can present real-world challenges to students. Students can work together to solve the challenge by sharing resources, editing documents, defining parameters and definitions, assigning duties and deadlines, and more.

How Do I Get Started?

First, **choose your software**. WikiMatrix.org provides a site that compares software features, support, price, security and more. For more information, visit www.scholar360.com/webtools to view a list of wiki options.

Note: If your school already employs an LMS/CMS, a wiki should be built in. If not, your IT Administrator may be able to install a simple wiki in the school's intranet. Alternatively, bypass both the LMS/CMS and IT by utilizing a hosted wiki.

Second, **integrate your class wiki in your syllabus**. Make sure students understand the benefits and requirements of contributing to the wiki. In my classes, I often explain that their participation in the wiki is part of their attendance or participation grade.

Third, **consider putting someone in charge**. Assign the monitoring of the wiki to a teacher's assistant or class leader, if you do not have time to monitor the wiki. The negative side to this is that you will not have access to the brains of your students.

Fourth, **promote your wiki contributors**. If you publish a blog or a book, make sure to consider your students entries and include them in research projects, with their permission, of course.

For "Mistakes That Can Sink Your Wiki" and other information on establishing class or institutional wikis, to go www.scholar360.com/webtools.