Using Wikis for Online Collaboration

Using Wikis for Online Collaboration is a practical resource for learning to harness the power of wikis to create a shared environment where online students can actively participate in the integration and co-creation of knowledge. This important book shows how to plan, design, and facilitate collaborative wiki projects into effective online courses. Written by James and Margaret West, Using Wikis for Online Collaboration offers:

- Information on the technology and infrastructure needed for implementing a wiki
- Guidelines for selecting wiki services and software
- Ideas for preparing online students for success using wikis
- Advice on pedagogical issues when creating wikis
- Suggestions for managing the collaborative writing process
- Suggested projects that support cognitive processing and knowledge construction
- Guidance for creating complex activities that highlight critical thinking and analysis

Using Wikis for Online Collaboration is the seventh book in the Jossey-Bass Guides to Online Teaching and Learning series. It offers concrete and practical resources to help higher education practitioners meet the challenges of the online learning environment.

Praise for Using Wikis for Online Collaboration

“A practical guide for the ‘newbie’ as well as the experienced technology user or instructional designer. Using Wikis for Online Collaboration provides invaluable guidelines and activities for incorporating this important Web 2.0 tool into an online or classroom setting.”

—J. Ana Donaldson, associate professor, Instructional Technology, University of Northern Iowa

THE AUTHORS

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Using Wikis for Online Collaboration
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THE POWER OF THE READ-WRITE WEB

James A. West
Margaret L. West
CONTENTS

Preface xi
About the Authors xvii

ONE Getting Ready to Wiki 1
Opportunities for Online Learning 2
What Is a Wiki? 3
Types of Wikis 6
Choosing the Right Wiki 9
Features of Wikis 10
Setting Up the Wiki 17
Summary 19

TWO Designing Wiki Projects for Collaborative Learning 21
Teaching and Learning Through Wikis 21
Laying the Foundation—Preparing Students for Wiki Work 22
Building the Framework—Designing the Wiki Project 31
Monitoring Construction—Managing the Wiki Process 45
Summary 57

THREE Wiki Projects for Knowledge Construction 59
Resource Bank 60
Frequently Asked Questions 62
Contents

What the Future Holds ........................................ 126
An Invitation to Collaborate ................................. 128

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ........................................ 129

Wikis for Educators ............................................. 129
Web 2.0 ................................................................ 129
Collaborative Writing ........................................... 130
Scaffolding ............................................................ 130
Bloom’s Taxonomy ................................................ 130

References ............................................................ 131
Index ..................................................................... 135
E X H I B I T S

O N E
Exhibit 1.1. Comparison of Asynchronous Communication Tools 5
Exhibit 1.2. Strengths and Limitations of Wiki Services 8

T W O
Exhibit 2.1. Wiki Project Categories Based on Bloom’s Taxonomy 33
Exhibit 2.2. Sample Home Page 36
Exhibit 2.3. Sample Content Page with Scaffolding 37
Exhibit 2.4. Wiki Collaboration—First Group Process Check 40
Exhibit 2.5. Wiki Collaboration—Second Group Process Check 42
Exhibit 2.6. Wiki Collaboration—Project Outcomes 43
Exhibit 2.7. Sample Trust Exercises 48
Exhibit 2.8. Constructive and Unconstructive Editing Behaviors 53

T H R E E
Exhibit 3.1. Wiki Projects for Knowledge Construction 60
Exhibit 3.2. Sample Annotations 70

F O U R
Exhibit 4.1. Wiki Projects for Critical Thinking 80
Exhibit 4.2. Sample “What If . . . ?” Scenario 82
Exhibit 4.3. Sample Debate Wiki 86
FIGURES

ONE

Figure 1.1. WikiMatrix Web Site (www.wikimatrix.org) 11
Figure 1.2. pbWiki Wiki Creation Page (www.pbWiki.com) 18

TWO

Figure 2.1. Wiki Collaboration Skills and Behaviors 27

THREE

Figure 3.1. Frequently Asked Questions Wiki 63
Figure 3.2. Sample Time Line Wiki 67

FOUR

Figure 4.1. Debatepedia Wiki 87
Figure 4.2. Sample Collaborative Research Paper 89
Figure 4.3. Sample Dissertation Research Proposal Wiki 92

FIVE

Figure 5.1. Sample Macro Map 107
Figure 5.2. Sample Process Map 108
Figure 5.3. DNA Microarray Virtual Lab from Wikiversity 110
Figure 5.4. Sample Project Proposal 119
There is no doubt that the World Wide Web is changing. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the once-static Web has evolved into the “read-write Web,” offering new opportunities for online interaction, collaboration, and learning (Richardson, 2006). The growth of such next-generation Web tools as blogs, social networks, and wikis is astounding, with new collaborative tools appearing online almost daily. Educators are increasingly interested in discovering ways to harness these technologies effectively, both to improve online learning and to promote critical thinking and collaboration.

Collaborative writing tools, such as wikis, are well suited to supporting meaningful learning in online courses. A wiki can be defined as a “collaborative web space where anyone can add content and anyone can edit content that has already been published” (Richardson, 2006, p. 8). Wikis offer a shared environment where online students can actively participate in the integration and co-creation of knowledge. Wiki technology can be harnessed to foster dynamic online learning communities, in which students come together around a shared goal. Wiki community members use the shared space to write, discuss, comment, edit, reflect, and evaluate, with the ultimate goal to complete a shared outcome. Educators must learn to embrace a new “age of participation” and be prepared to coach students in their ability to collaborate online in the creation of products and the sharing of information and learning (Tapscott & Williams, 2006).

Although wikis hold great promise for online learning, without planning, design, and effective facilitation, a wiki is no more than an empty Web page. This book strives to provide educators with useful and practical guidelines, tools, and processes for integrating collaborative wiki projects into online courses. In order
to help faculty members embrace the potential of online collaborative writing, we review the nature of wiki technology, explore the pedagogical foundations of online collaborative writing, and present practical examples for wiki projects that support knowledge construction, critical thinking, and contextual learning.

AUDIENCE
This book is primarily intended for those who teach online courses. The focus is on supporting the needs of higher education practitioners, including faculty, instructional designers, and developers of interactive, collaborative online courses. Although this book focuses on the online teaching community, the information and examples provided in this book also apply to those teaching in a blended learning environment.

This book is also intended for students preparing for roles in higher education, instructional technology, and adult education in which online learning plays a part.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS
This book is designed to be a guide for integrating collaborative wiki projects into online courses. We have kept theoretical material to a minimum, instead placing emphasis on integrating online collaborative writing into instruction using sound pedagogical practices. Chapter One briefly describes the history and development of collaborative Web tools and the nature of the wiki as compared to other forms of asynchronous communication. This chapter also discusses the technology and infrastructure necessary for implementing a wiki, and provides guidelines for comparing and selecting wiki services and software.

Chapter Two discusses the wiki’s potential as a collaborative learning environment and explores the suitability of the technology for millennial and adult online students. This chapter addresses preparing online students for success through skills assessment and orientation activities, and outlines the pedagogical considerations for creating wiki projects that support online learning goals. Practical suggestions and tips for planning and designing the wiki project framework and managing the collaborative writing process complete the chapter.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five provide detailed guidelines for framing and facilitating wiki projects for three distinct levels of learning. Chapter Three
focuses on projects that support cognitive processing and knowledge construction, emphasizing projects that promote the organization, summary, and integration of information and concepts. Chapter Four concentrates on more complex collaborative activities, with emphasis on critical thinking and analysis. Chapter Five focuses on contextual learning activities for online learning teams; these activities require both synthesis of knowledge and application of skills to real-world contexts and problems.

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For many years, interactivity on the Web was limited to clicking, browsing, reading, and searching through Web sites and online databases. Web users were passive consumers of online information. However, the original vision and promise of the Web, according to Tim Berners-Lee, developer of the World Wide Web, was the possibility of its providing collaborative online spaces where “we can all meet and read and write” (Carvin, 2005, p. 1). Today, the Web facilitates a new age of participation that is closer to Berners-Lee’s original intent, inviting users to participate, co-create, edit, and collaborate, rather than merely consume (Lamb, 2004). We have moved from a read-only Web (Web 1.0) to the read-write Web (Web 2.0).

Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs, wikis, social networking software, media sharing, and others, have been instrumental in shifting the Web to its new identity as a collaborative work space, or digital commons, where “we can all meet to read and write.” The digital commons is having an impact in online classrooms, as educators begin to take advantage of free services and the variety of online collaborative tools available. Online educators now have an expanded tool set to support student-centered instruction and collaborative learning. Online students are no longer restricted to passive browsing, page reading, message posting, and other individual learning activities. In the digital commons, online students have the capacity to become collaborative partners in the knowledge-building process.