

What is a Wiki?

Tutorial 1 for new WikiEducators



Introducing a Wiki



Objectives

In this tutorial we will:

- provide an overview of what wikis are,
- and show some examples of their different uses.
- discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using wikis to develop content
- describe the main features of WikiEducator

What is a Wiki?

The name "Wiki" was chosen by Ward Cunningham - - the creator of the first Wiki. It is a shortened form of "wiki- wiki", the Hawaiian word for quick.

A wiki is a web site that is generally editable by anyone with a computer, a web browser, and an internet connection. Wikis use a quick and easy syntax to allow users to apply formatting to text and create links between pages. This simple formatting syntax means that authors no longer need to learn the complexities of HTML to create content on the web.

The main strength of a wiki is that it gives people the ability to work collaboratively on the same document. The only software you need is an Internet browser. Consequently, wikis are used for a variety of purposes. If you make a mistake, it's easy to revert back to an earlier version of the document.



Wiki wiki sign outside Honolulu International Airport. (Image courtesy of A. Barataz)

Examples of Wikis

The largest and most talked about Wiki on the Internet is Wikipedia^[1]

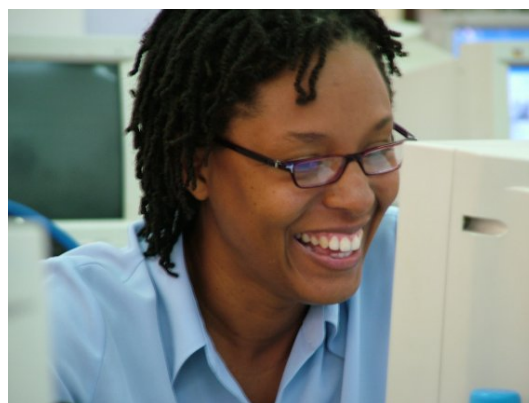
Wikipedia is, for the most part, editable by anyone in the world with a computer and an internet connection and, at the time of this writing, contained over 1,500,000 pages. One and a half million pages in English! There are also more than 250,000 articles in German, French, Polish, and Japanese; and more than 100,000 articles in Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish, and Chinese. That's nearing 2 million articles or pages! While Wikipedia's mission is to create an encyclopedic

resource of knowledge, wikis can be used for a variety of purposes and are quickly becoming the defacto technology for collaborative group work online. They can be great social tools for classrooms, teams, community groups, or can even be configured to provide easily updatable web sites for organisations.

The following wikis display a range of different applications of wiki technology:

- Wikitravel^[2] - a project to create a free, complete, up-to-date, and reliable world-wide travel guide.
- WikiWikiWeb^[3] - the first ever wiki, it has been around since 1995.
- eXe Project^[4] - an example of how a wiki can be used to run a web site.
- Auckland.Wiki^[5] - a city wiki for the people of Auckland, *New Zealand*.
- AKOWiki^[6] - an evolving site to provide a bit of help with technology, ideas and teaching to staff in an institution. Lots of single issue pages, not much hyper linking.
- Scholarpedia^[7] - a wiki project based on a system of peer review.

There are literally thousands of wikis around the web on a diverse range of subjects and supporting many communities.



Wikis are fun as attested by this WikiEducator user from Barbados



Activity

The purpose of this activity is to introduce you to a few examples of wiki projects. In this activity you are encouraged to visit at least three of Wikipedia's sister projects listed below.

For each of the Wikimedia project sites, you should:

1. Identify the main purpose of the site and how this differs from Wikipedia
2. Skim through at least three representative articles on the site to get a feel for contributions from the community
3. Determine which content license is used for the site.

Google three sites from the list of Wikimedia projects below:

- Wikinews^[8]
- Wikimedia Commons^[9]
- Wikiversity^[10]
- Wikiquote^[11]
- Wiktionary^[12]
- Wikibooks^[13]

Many of Wikipedia's sister projects were initiated because the encyclopedia was being cluttered by entries that were not appropriate for an encyclopedia.

Interesting uses of Wiki technology

- British Council Case Study on using a wiki technology to promote collaboration at the office.
- Conference planning, see for example Wikimania 2006
- Wiki as an online presentation tool demonstrated by Meredith Gorran Farkas, a distance education librarian.
- Open Streetmap is a wiki project to provide free geographic data such as street maps to anyone who wants them.
- Distinguishing between types of wiki communities - the difference between "above-the-flow" and "in-the-flow" wikis.
- The Wealth of Networks WikiNotes - This Wiki is an invitation to collaborate on building a learning and research environment based on Yochai Benkler's book, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, available under a Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial Sharealike license.
- Other uses include:
 - Meetings (Posting of agendas, prior meeting discussions, minutes)
 - Documentation for collaborative projects
 - Web space for personal note taking
- If you find a really interesting use of a wiki - please feel free to add this to the list above.

URL links in this section

- [1] [http:// en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)
- [2] [http:// wikitravel.org/ en/ Main_Page](http://wikitravel.org/en/Main_Page) Wikitravel
- [3] [http:// c2.com/ cgi/ wiki?WelcomeVisitors](http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WelcomeVisitors) WikiWikiWeb
- [4] [http:// exelearning.org](http://exelearning.org) eXe Project
- [5] [http:// auckland.wiki.org.nz](http://auckland.wiki.org.nz) Auckland.Wiki
- [6] [http:// akowiki.canterbury.ac.nz](http://akowiki.canterbury.ac.nz) AKOWiki
- [7] [http:// www.scholarpedia.org/ article/ Main_Page](http://www.scholarpedia.org/article/Main_Page) Scholarpedia
- [8] [http:// en.wikinews.org/ wiki/ Main_Page](http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Main_Page) Wikinews
- [9] [http:// commons.wikimedia.org/ wiki/ Main_Page](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page) Wikimedia Commons
- [10] [http:// en.wikiversity.org/ wiki/ Wikiversity:Main_Page](http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Wikiversity:Main_Page) Wikiversity
- [11] [http:// en.wikiquote.org/ wiki/ Main_Page](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Main_Page) Wikiquote
- [12] [http:// en.wiktionary.org/ wiki/ Main_Page](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Main_Page) Wiktionary
- [13] [http:// en.wikibooks.org/ wiki/ Main_Page](http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Main_Page) Wikibooks

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

- anyone can edit
- easy to use and learn
- Wikis are instantaneous so there is no need to wait for a publisher to create a new edition or update information
- people located in different parts of the world can work on the same document
- the wiki software keeps track of every edit made and it's a simple process to revert back to a previous version of an article
- widens access to the power of web publishing to non- technical users
- the wiki has no predetermined structure - consequently it is a flexible tool which can be used for a wide range of applications
- there are a wide range of open source software wiki's to choose from so licensing costs shouldn't be a barrier to installing an institutional wiki

```
<td class="MainPageBG" style="width:45%;
<table width="100%" cellpadding="2"
<tr>
<th> <a name="The_purpose_of_WikiEducator">
</th></tr>
<tr>
<td style="color:#000">The WikiEducator is
<ul><li><b>planning</b> of education projec
</li><li><b>development</b> of free content
</li><li> work on building <b>open educatio
</li><li> networking on <b><a href="/Metawi
</li></ul>
</td></tr>
<tr>
<th>
<a name="Our_community_values..."></a><h2
</th></tr>
```

In the old days you had to edit quite complex HTML syntax to create web pages.

Disadvantages

Advantages in one context, may be disadvantages in another.

- Anyone can edit so this may be too open for some applications, for example confidential documentation. However it is possible to regulate user access.
- Open to SPAM and Vandalism if not managed properly. There are easy ways to restore a page however, and on WikiEducator you must be logged in to edit pages so this reduces vandalism by automated spam bots.
- Requires Internet connectivity to collaborate, but technologies to produce print versions of articles are improving
- The flexibility of a wiki's structure can mean that information becomes disorganised. As a wiki grows, the community plans and administers the structure collaboratively.

What about quality?

Before proceeding with the discussion activity for this tutorial, you should read the following short article.



Reading

There is divided opinion and a healthy debate among educators concerning the quality of content developed in a wiki environment. In your opinion, do you expect to find significant differences in the quality of content when comparing open and closed authoring approaches? Given the recentness of the wiki phenomenon, research on this question is limited. Can both open and closed authoring models produce high quality material? To find out more, consider the Wikipedia article on the reliability^[1] of articles.

The *Wall Street Journal Online* has an interesting debate between Jimbo Wales of Wikipedia and Dale Hoiberg, editor in chief of Encyclopaedia Britannica, and you may find this to be an interesting read^[2] as well.

When comparing closed versus open authoring approaches, it is worth looking at the history of Wikipedia, which has succeeded in creating the largest encyclopedia in history. Wikipedia was preceded by the Nupedia^[3] project, which also aimed to build a free content encyclopedia. Nupedia was not an open wiki like Wikipedia and adopted an extensive process of peer review before final publication of an article. After 3.5 years, Nupedia had only completed 24 Articles, with 74 more articles as work in progress. Clearly this authoring model was not scalable, and was a strong motivation for Jimmy Wales, the founder of Nupedia to open up the authoring model by starting the Wikipedia project.



Discussion

This activity is designed for participants using these tutorials in a face- to- face workshop, or alternatively in an eLearning format with a group of learners. Consider the following questions, which can be discussed in small groups or using an online discussion forum:

- Do you have any concerns about the quality of educational resources developed using an open authoring approach? If so, what are your concerns? If not, how does an open authoring approach contribute to high quality learning materials?
- In your opinion, should course development for education use closed or open authoring approaches? Give reasons for your view?
- What mechanisms can be adopted to assure quality of educational content developed in Wiki environments?

Concluding thoughts



Reflection

Am I still concerned about the openness of wiki editing?

- What is to prevent such a website from anarchy?
- How does a wiki protect my authorship?
- What if someone deletes my work?

Matt Barton, provides a candid yet light hearted response to your concerns in a posting^[4] on a list, which is repeated here for convenience of access. Matt says:

"They [wikis] will not help a writer develop a personal voice. They will, however, enable collaboration and teach us all something very important about what a true democracy is all about.

So, if wikis elide all claims to authorship, offer no protection of material, and allow any 5- year old child or racist bigot to edit a page, what good are they? Well, let us explore why so many wikis are able to flourish in the well- fertilized fields in which they are sown.

For one thing, wikis are not really as vulnerable as you may think. They are at least as well- protected as your home. Now, I beg you to consider: Is your home really invulnerable? Couldn't a small group of hoodlums take it into their minds to vandalize your home? How is that you are able to drive a car at all, since anyone with a fifty- cent pocketknife could slash your tires wherever you park it?

You may say that the police are there to prevent such things. However, I'm looking out my apartment window now at my tiny little Mazda Miata. There are no uniformed people about. However, there are some neighbors. Hopefully they would notice if someone was deflating one of my tires and do something about it.

Wikis work under the same model. In wikipedia, authors can choose to "subscribe" to a wiki page, which means they are notified via email when anyone tries to change a

page. They are free, of course, to re-visit the page and investigate. If someone has written something disagreeable, it's a small effort to change it back. You see, wikis do not only save one version of a page, but every version. Each time a user saves a new version, the old version is stored in a database where it can be accessed by examining the "History" of the page.

Thus, while wikis by default display the top layer of each page, one can easily dig down into the underlying layers and examine the sediment there. What one finds is that highly controversial topics (like abortion) are often loaded with hundreds of layers, whereas boring topics like "comma usage" are typically left alone after three or four changes.

In short, wikis are protected not by code, or by law, but rather by the participation of an active wiki community. If you are proud of your entry, you will feel compelled to see what's up if you receive a notification that the entry has been changed, and "roll it back" if it's obvious the page was vandalized or rendered less intelligent."

URL links in this section

- [1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reliability_of_Wikipedia
- [2] http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB115756239753455284-A4hdSU1xZOC9Y9PFhJZV16jFILM_20070911.html?mod=blogs
- [3] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nupedia>
- [4] http://www.mattbarton.net/tikiwiki/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=4

Introducing WikiEducator

The WikiEducator family



Wikis are about communities - - not the technology that enables them. Social communities develop around projects and ideas. For instance, the Wikipedia community is working together to build a free online encyclopedia. These communities are drawn together by a common set of values.

WikiEducator^[1] was launched by the Commonwealth of Learning^[2] in 2006. It provides free eLearning content that anyone can edit and use. WikiEducator was introduced at the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) course developers' meeting in Mauritius in August 2006. It is now being used extensively for the development of free

educational resources around the world.

Many wiki communities believe that content should be free. The slogan of the Mediawiki software, which runs WikiEducator and all the projects of the Wikimedia foundation, encapsulates this spirit rather well: *Ideas want to be free*. This is why Wiki software is often

cited as an example of social software^[3] because of the ease with which users can work together on content. This combined with the communication features of wikis enables people to connect with each other and to build a real sense of community.

The values of our WikiEducator community

It is important to recognise and respect the core values of the different wiki communities. The WikiEducator community believes in the following values:

- The social inclusion and participation of all people in our networked society (Access to ICTs is a fundamental right of knowledge citizens - not an excuse for using old technologies).
- The freedoms of all educators to teach with the technologies and contents of their choice, hence our commitment to Free/ Libre and Open Source technology tools and free content.
- That educational content is unique - and by working together we can improve the technologies we use as well as the reusability of digital learning resources.
- In a forward- looking disposition working together to find appropriate and sustainable solutions for e- learning futures.

WikiEducators strive to be friendly and neighbourly. Our mantra is: "***Just try it! Our community will support you***".

WikiEducator's learning content

The WikiEducator community is working together to develop free educational content that incorporates the educational features associated with well designed distance education materials. Therefore, you will find that content in WikiEducator typically includes educational elements like learning objectives, activities and case studies. In the tutorials which follow, you will learn how to include these elements into the content you author.

Types of content on WikiEducator

There are four distinctive types of content you will find on Wikieducator:

1. Pages used for **planning** of WikiEducator projects;
2. **Content pages** - - our free educational materials;
3. Resources on **how to create open education resources** (OERs)
4. **Funding proposals** developed as free content.

Selected examples of the different types of WikiEducator content are listed below.

Pages used for the planning of initiatives or projects

Consider for example:

- **International clusters** or project hubs within the WikiEducator community, for instance:
 - The FLOSS4Edu^[4] initiative including regional clusters like the Pacific OER workshop^[5] ;

- Learning4Content^[6] which aims to support and promote capacity building in wiki skills;
- Handouts4Teachers^[7] - - a project to promote the collaborative development of handouts used to support teaching in the classroom, for example worksheets, small group projects, homework sheets for students to practice mastery of new concepts;
- The Open Schools^[8] initiative - - a community node of WikiEducators working together on the development of distance education materials for school- level education;
- **Workshops**, for instance South Asia eLearning Workshop for Teacher Educator's^[9] , New Dehli 2007;
- Planning and **managing international developments**, for instance the Commonwealth Computer Navigator's Certificate^[10]

Development of free content^[11] on WikiEducator

Selected examples include:

- Projects led by **educational institutions**, for example, content development at the Otago Polytechnic^[12] in New Zealand or the University of Education, Winneba^[13] in Ghana. .
- Write2Teach^[14] initiative of the Asian Society for Open and Distance Education.
- The **Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth**^[15] , for example:
 - Applying effective communication skills^[16] which is part of the VUSSC course on Tourism;
 - The unit on Starting up a business^[17] which is part of the entrepreneurship course being developed.
 - The course on Life Skills^[18]

Resources on how to create open education resources (OERs)

For example:

- WikiEducator's Newbie Tutorials^[19] ; or
- OER Handbook for Educators^[20] ; or
- OER Tutorials developed by OCLOS and co- funded by European Union's eLearning Programme^[21] .

Funding proposals developed as free content

WikiEducator encourages the community to develop funding proposals for free content or free software initiatives that are released as free content. Successful bids include:

- Learning4Content bid^[22]
- Multimedia development for the CCNC^[23]



Discussion

Educational wiki projects - - Thinking about similarities and distinguishing features

There are a growing number of wiki projects working in the educational sector. Consider for example:

- The Wikimedia Foundation^[24] projects, specifically the Wikibooks^[25] and Wikiversity^[26] projects;
- The Curriki^[27] project;
- The Scholarpedia^[28] project (See also the Scholarpedia^[29] entry on Wikipedia.)
- Google's Knol^[30] project. (See also the entry for Knol^[31] on Wikipedia).

Questions for discussion

- In what ways does or should the WikiEducator community differentiate itself from these projects?
- Based on your analysis of the listed wiki projects, what advice can you provide for our community to promote a sustainable and successful project?

Additional reading

- Early history of WikiEducator^[32]
- News archive^[33] providing a chronological history of main events and milestones

URL links in this section

- [1] <http://www.WikiEducator.org> WikiEducator
- [2] <http://www.col.org>
- [3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_software
- [4] <http://wikieducator.org/FLOSS4Edu>
- [5] http://wikieducator.org/FLOSS4Edu_Pacific_Workshop
- [6] <http://wikieducator.org/Learning4Content>
- [7] <http://wikieducator.org/Handouts4Teachers>
- [8] http://wikieducator.org/Open_Schools
- [9] http://wikieducator.org/Planning_events/Teacher_educators_New_Delhi
- [10] http://wikieducator.org/Commonwealth_Computer_Navigator%27s_Certificate
- [11] <http://wikieducator.org/Content>

-
- [12] [http:// wikieducator.org/ Otago_Polytechnic](http://wikieducator.org/Otago_Polytechnic)
 - [13] <http:// wikieducator.org/ UEW>
 - [14] http:// wikieducator.org/ Write_2_Teach_in_3_Days
 - [15] <http:// wikieducator.org/ VUSSC>
 - [16] http:// wikieducator.org/ VUSSC/ Content/ Tourism/ Applying_Effective_Communication_Skills
 - [17] http:// wikieducator.org/ VUSSC/ Content/ Entrepreneurship/ Starting_Up_a_Business
 - [18] http:// wikieducator.org/ Life_Skills_Development
 - [19] http:// wikieducator.org/ Wikieducator_tutorial
 - [20] http:// www.wikieducator.org/ OER_Handbook/ educator
 - [21] http:// www.wikieducator.org/ Open_Educational_Content
 - [22] http:// wikieducator.org/ Metawikieducator/ Learning4Content/ Hewlett_bid
 - [23] http:// wikieducator.org/ CCNC_Funding_Proposal
 - [24] <http:// wikimediafoundation.org/ wiki/ Home>
 - [25] <http:// www.wikibooks.org>
 - [26] <http:// www.wikiversity.org/>
 - [27] <http:// www.curriki.org/ xwiki/ bin/ view/ Main/ WebHome>
 - [28] http:// www.scholarpedia.org/ article/ Main_Page
 - [29] <http:// en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/ Scholarpedia>
 - [30] <http:// googleblog.blogspot.com/ 2007/ 12/ encouraging- people- to- contribute.html>
 - [31] <http:// en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/ Knol>
 - [32] http:// wikieducator.org/ WikiEducator_Early_History
 - [33] http:// wikieducator.org/ Old_news

Conclusion

Wikis can be powerful tools to facilitate collaborative work and the development of online communities. The ability for distributed individuals to contribute to the same document or project with just a web browser and a network connection has resulted in some amazing achievements of peer- produced content over recent years. The most notable example is Wikipedia but we are still in the early days of this technology and great things may come from a wide adoption of wiki technology from communities and groups interested in creating open resources. We hope that WikiEducator continues to grow as a place to facilitate and support the development of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and a place for communities of interested practitioners.

"For the gains in autonomy, democracy, justice, and a critical culture to materialize, the practices of non- market information production, individually free creation, and cooperative peer production must become more than fringe practices. They must become part of life for substantial portions of the networked population." - Yochai Benkler, The Wealth of Networks.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

- List your questions here
- How do you spell *wikieducator*?

There is not really any correct spelling. Usually within text we write it WikiEducator, but you will notice various spellings throughout the tutorial. Remember that in the URL it is spelled in lowercase.

External links and resources

These links are provided for further reading. They will be particularly useful for facilitators wanting to add interesting points when working through the WikiEducator Newbie Tutorials.

- [1]^[1], provides a listing of available wiki software as well as the ability to contrast and compare different software.
- 7 Things you should know about wikis^[2], provided by the Educause Learning Initiative
- Ward Cunningham's original wiki, called WikiWikiWeb^[3] which he started coding in 1994.
- Etymology^[4] of the Wiki
- Uses and Potentials of Wikis in the Classroom^[5], by Ferris and Wilder.
- Using Wikis in Schools: A Case Study^[6]

URL links in this section

- [1] <http://www.wikimatrix.org/index.php> Wikimatrix
- [2] <http://www.educause.edu/LibraryDetailPage/666?ID=ELI7004>
- [3] <http://c2.com/cgi/wiki>
- [4] <http://c2.com/doc/etymology.html>
- [5] <http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=258>
- [6] http://www.futurelab.org.uk/download/pdfs/research/disc_papers/Wikis_in_Schools.pdf

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