Lesson 8 – Communication and Interaction

	Objectives
In this tutorial we will:	

In this tutorial we will:

- learn how and why to use the Discussion or Talk pages,

- discuss the *my talk* page,

- and explore some useful features like the Watchlist, and the My Contributions link.

The wiki also provides tools to facilitate communication and conversation amongst participants.

We have already mentioned the collaborative nature of authoring content on the wiki and will now look in greater detail at some of the tools that are available to facilitate communication and interaction between authors and collaborators. Besides checking the Recent changes page there are a number of ways to keep closer track on what is being changed on the wiki, as well as tools and spaces where discussion about content development and projects can take place.

The discussion tab (sometimes called the **Talk Page**) is an essential part of the WikiEducator environment and can be found at the top of every page. This space can be used to leave notes or start discussions about the page you are viewing. **Talk pages** provide a space for editors to discuss changes and makes suggestions about the associated page. The talk page is the same as any page on the wiki and accepts all wiki syntax and editing that other pages do.

The prime values of the talk page are communication, courtesy and consideration. The following list is designed to help people use talk pages effectively.

How to use the talk pages

- **Try to keep on topic**: Try to keep discussions on the topic of how to improve the associated content.

- **Discuss edits**: The talk page is particularly useful to talk about edits. If one of your edits has been reverted, and you change it back again, it is good practice to leave an explanation on the talk page and a note in the edit summary that you have done so. The talk page is also the place to ask about another editor's changes. If someone queries one of your edits, make sure you reply with a full, helpful rationale.

- **Make proposals**: New proposals for the page can be put forward for discussion by other editors if you wish. Proposals might include changes to specific details, page moves, merges or making a section of a long page into a separate section or page.

The following guidelines are also considered good practice for talk pages:

- **Sign your posts**: To sign a post, type four tildes (~~~~), and they will be replaced with your username and time stamp, like this: brent 01:32, 9 January 2007 (CET).

- **Try to be concise**: If your post is longer than 100 words consider shortening it. Long, rambling messages may be difficult to understand, and be either ignored or misunderstood. If you need to make a detailed, point by point discussion, see below for how to lay this out.

- **Keep the layout clear**: Keep the talk page attractively and clearly laid out, and avoid repetition, muddled writing, and unnecessary digressions. Talk pages with a layout are more likely to attract continued participation.

 Tip:

Layout Suggestions

- Answer posts or comments in the Talk pages underneath the original. Then the next post will go underneath yours and so on. This makes it easy to see the chronological order of posts. The one at the bottom is the latest.

- Indent your posts: This makes it easy to see that you are a different user to the previous post. Any indentation system is acceptable. The important thing is that the sequence of talk should be easy to follow. There are two main systems:

- Each post indents by one regardless of user: The thread starts as above, but each new post is indented by one extra colon (:), regardless who made the post. When the post is indented too far, the next post can start at the left margin again, marked (Unindent). Sometimes a post in this system will develop its own sub tree to discuss a particular response in more detail.

- Each user has a specific indentation: The first contributor is all the way to the left, the following person starts with one colon (:), and the one after starts with two colons (::) and the one after with three colons (:::) and so on. Then, when the first contributor responds, they start at the left margin again, and the second, third and fourth persons continue to mark themselves with one, two and three colons respectively. Each user's posts are vertically aligned. However, this system tends to break down when there are many different contributors, as there are only a few usable indentation levels.

Headings in Talk pages

As we have mentioned the Talk pages accept all Wiki syntax. It is often useful to make a headings for new topics in the Talk pages; this way your topic will be clearly separated into its own section and will also appear in the TOC (table of contents) at the top of the page. A heading is easy to create with == either side of the words, as in == Heading ==. You can use the "+" tab next to the "Edit this page" tab instead) and enter a subject/heading in the resulting edit page, and it will automatically become the section heading.

My Talk pages

Every page on the wiki has an associated discussion or talk page, even your User page. The talk page of your User page can be used by others to contact you to discuss projects or edits that you have made. The *my talk* link at the top of this page (assuming you are logged in) will take you to your talk page. Other wiki users may use your talk page as a way to contact you to discuss a project or to introduce themselves.

My Watchlist

The Recent changes page provides wiki users with a broad overview of what is happening across the entire wiki, but, if there is a lot of activity happening, it can be difficult to keep track of pages that you are particularly interested in. Logged in users have the convenient ability to "watch" pages by clicking on the **watch** tab along the top of the page. Clicking on this link will add the page you are currently on to your watchlist. The **watch** link will change to **unwatch** for any page you have added to your watchlist. You can remove the page from your list by clicking this link.

The *my watchlist* link that appears along the very top of the page after your login name acts like a personal Recent changes page for pages that are on your watchlist. It gives a list of all watched pages, ordered backward according to the time of the last edit of the page. Any future changes to any page on your watchlist and its associated Talk page will be listed in your *my watchlist* page, and the page will also appear bolded in the list of recent changes to make it easier to pick out.

Each line on the *my watchlist* page shows details about the last edit: the day it was edited, whether it was a minor or major edit, the time, a link to the page, and the difference between the current version and the last one, the history, the user name and the edit summary.

If you are editing a page you can also add the page to your watchlist by clicking on the "Watch this page" checkbox.

 Tip: You can also change your user preferences to "Add pages you edit to your watchlist"; in this case the checkbox on the edit page will automatically be checked, so unless it is unchecked before saving, the page will be automatically watched upon saving.

Email notification

If you are logged into the wiki you will have the ability to modify some preferences on how the wiki works for you. One of the preferences available to you from your *my preferences* page is to notify you via email when a page you're *watching* is changed. This can be very a very useful way to keep track of changes to pages or project you are interested in.

My Contributions

The *my contributions* page is a special page that keeps track of which pages you have worked on. Checking your contributions is a useful way to refresh your memory about pages you have worked on (and to easily access these again), and can also be used to find out whether there have been any subsequent edits. This makes it possible to "watch" pages even if you haven't put them on your watchlist.

Other users' User contribution pages can also be accessed and are useful for seeing how other users have contributed. To see another user's contributions, bring up the user's User page (User:username) and click on User contributions in the left hand toolbox.

What really makes the Wiki a great tool for colloboration is it's facility to enable communication between participants in the same environment that authoring is taking place. Pay attention to **Talk pages** while looking through the wiki and you may notice that often there are rich discussions taking place in these spaces. Use your watchlist as a way to keep track of projects and pages you are particularly interested in and turn on the email function in your user preferences to keep informed quickly of changes to pages you are watching.