Assignment Type: Wikis for Group Work

What is it

Practically speaking, a wiki is a shared online document or workspace for multiple contributors. Technically, it is a website—but its use doesn't require any special skills. Editing a wiki is as easy as editing any regular document.

Why use it

Similar to a blog, the wiki is a platform that can be used to help students reach a wide variety of instructional goals. Wiki-based assignments and projects can involve the compilation and presentation of information tailored to just about any hypothetical audience. Students can share reflections about what they know, demonstrate integration of knowledge, or provide evidence to support a stated position on an issue. While a group blog allows multiple members to create individual content postings on a single webpage, a wiki offers opportunities for more advanced collaboration. Working together, students can collectively create anything from a single content posting to a multiple page document.

A wiki is easy to set up within any course in Blackboard. It provides a specific online area for written collaboration between a group or entire class of students. This eliminates the potential for multiple conflicting versions of a document to get into circulation as students attempt to edit the same paper, presentation or project. With a wiki, there is only one "live" group product. Any member can add, edit or delete content—even if it was created by someone else. This includes design and formatting characteristics such as layout, extra pages, colors, and fonts. The onscreen version of the document always looks clean without any of the "track changes" style notations you see when editing a Word document. However, all individual contributions and edits are automatically tracked behind the scenes so instructors can view them at any time.

How to use it

A wiki may be appropriate for any type of class activity or group that requires coordination of effort, sequencing or scheduling, or a place to aggregate things.

Examples:
- Students create a task list together as they plan a group project

- Topic brainstorming area or signup sheet for a paper or project
- Event signup to book time slots (office hours, final presentations, etc.)
- Aggregate links to each student's completed assignment (essay, website, presentation or slideshow, online poster, etc.) for easy peer-review access

A wiki may also be appropriate for any type of collaborative writing or multimedia project that requires students to collectively produce a single finished product. A traditional style group paper, report, or presentation could easily be produced on a wiki. However, the online nature of the wiki allows you and your students to extend such assignments by incorporating additional resources like images and videos.

Sample assignments might include collaborative creation of items like these:
- Glossary of key terms from the course
- Design of a research plan including literature search, statement of hypotheses, and planned methodology
- Collection of real-life examples of course topics in action (stories from personal experience, coverage in the popular press, videos from YouTube or educational sites, publicly available presentations and slideshows, etc.)
- Resource library where students share items of interest they've created or found on the web (websites, notes and study aids, links to articles from the university library, etc.)
- Log/summary of key learning by class session, week, course module, etc. that includes in-class and out-of-class activities, assignments, and discussions
- Website designed to communicate with or educate a specified target audience about a topic from the course or issue from the discipline
- Reference manual, training binder or e-textbook

A wiki can even be used as an individual page or site. While a blog is a similar type of easy-to-create web document that can be created within Blackboard, the format of a blog is a string of individual entries or "posts" organized chronologically. Wikis offer much more flexibility in terms of structure and formatting. A multi-page wiki site can provide a designated webpage for each student. For cases in which each student needs a multi-page site of their own, individual wikis can be created.

Ideas:
- E-portfolio (gallery of academic work from the course/across courses, professional or career-targeted site, online curriculum vitae or resume, research or project presentation, etc.)
- Individual project/paper/thesis site where instructor and peers can review plans, compare scope and progress, contribute feedback, etc.
- Use almost any time that an assignment to create a basic website for a defined purpose would be a great way to achieve one or more learning objectives in the course

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- Ongoing assignments/assignments of extended duration (lab notebook, field log, assignments that need progress tracking, etc.)

Considerations

When they hear a "Web 2.0" label such as "wiki" or "website," some students may fear that their current technological skills will be inadequate to complete their assigned task. However, students can be assured that working with a wiki involves no special skills. While there is virtually no learning curve with this tool, the digital communication skills that students pick up using a wiki are important and expected in many 21st century occupations.

Instruction and assessment that uses wikis

Assignments using wikis may be useful to explore or demonstrate mastery of any kind of content that students can summarize, organize, and share with others. Like any type of document, a wiki offers a platform for written communication that may range from formal to informal based upon the instructor's defined expectations. Group activities and assignments that suggest or require incorporation of images and multimedia may be most easily completed using a wiki as compared to more traditional document formats.

Level of Bloom's Taxonomy: Sample Action Verbs

A wiki, like any other document format, can be used to submit a wide range of completed assignments.

Just as an MSWord document might be the requested format for turning in items ranging from short answer and essay responses to position papers and research reports, the wiki format is appropriate for a diverse array of assignments. It is particularly appropriate when a written assignment can be enhanced by the addition of images and/or multimedia items such as video.

This flexibility means that assignments using wikis can be constructed to assess accomplishment of learning outcomes at any level of the cognitive domain on Bloom's Taxonomy. Here are a few examples of action verbs at different levels of Bloom's that can be demonstrated by students in group projects completed on a wiki:

- Knowledge: Define; List; Record
- Understanding: Describe; Explain; Express
- Application: Apply; Demonstrate; Illustrate

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- Analysis: Analyze; Compare; Distinguish
- Evaluation: Appraise; Critique; Review
- Creation: Assemble; Design; Construct

Resources

- [Blackboard Self-Help Documentation on Wikis](#)
  - o Task aids provide information on how to set up and use the built-in wiki tool in your online Blackboard course.

- [Wikis in Plain English](#) (4-minute video by Common Craft)
  - o A short overview of how wikis work using the practical example of a group of friends planning a camping trip together.

- Educause Learning Initiative "7 things" series
  - o [7 things you should know about...Collaborative Editing](#)
  - o [7 things you should know about...Wikis](#)

- [Collaborative student writing via Wikis](#)
  - o Describes student behaviors that have implications for the design of your assignments using wikis. In this study, adding and editing content were more common actions than deletion of existing content. Some previous studies have indicated students may be hesitant to make editorial edits to classmates' content, though that wasn't seen in this study. Other phenomena seen in online contexts were observed, such as small number of users supplying large amounts of content and a small number of content items attracting the attention of a large number of users (while a larger number of content items were edited by only a small number of users).
  - o **Reference**: Meishar-Tal, H., & Gorsky, P. (2010). Wikis: What students do and do not do when writing collaboratively. *Open Learning, 25*(1), 25–35. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680510903482074

- [Wikis and Peer Evaluation](#)
  - o Describes how a wiki with peer review was used in a research assignment on medical conditions. The majority of students reported that they enjoyed the assignment and group work, but only just over half reported that they found it easy to review a peer's completed work.

- **Reference**: Otter, M.E, Whittaker, S., & Spriggs, S. (2009). Using wikis and peer evaluation to teach medical students how to find and assess evidence based resources: A pilot study. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, *15*(2), 187-205. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13614530903240502

- Wikis as a Teaching Tool
  - This article provides background on wikis, linkages with the Cooperative/Collaborative and Constructivist learning paradigms, and provides examples of ways that wikis are being used in education.
  - **Reference**: Parker, K.R., & Chao, J.T. (2007). Wiki as a teaching tool. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Knowledge and Learning Objects, 3*, 57-72. Retrieved from http://www.informingscience.org/Journals/IJELL/Overview

- Wikis and the Construction of Collaborative Knowledge
  - The section of this piece on "Instructional Applications of Wikis" offers a framework for considering the function of your wiki and examples of assignment ideas at the defined levels of inquiry.
  - **Reference**: Caverly, D.C., & Ward, A. (2008). Techtalk: Wikis and collaborative knowledge construction. *Journal of Developmental Education, 32*(2), 36-37. Retrieved from http://ncde.appstate.edu/publications/journal-developmental-education-jde

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