

## WHAT IN THE WIKI?

How familiar are you with wikis? Our column this month aims to briefly introduce wikis, highlight some ongoing projects in education, and offer some links to get you started creating your own wiki.

### What is a wiki?

Wikipedia, one of the most well known wikis, defines a wiki as “a type of Web site that allows users to easily add, remove, or otherwise edit and change some available content.” [To read more on wikipedia, please refer to LeLoup & Ponterio, 2006]. The origin of the word “wiki” comes from “Wiki wiki” which means “quick” or “hurry” in Hawaiian; the first wiki (WikiWikiWeb) was named after a line of Hawaiian buses. Ward Cunningham coined the concept of a wiki, which is a type of social software.

A wiki can be described as a combination of a Web site and a word processing document. The content of a wiki is accessible from the Web, while at the same time it can be edited and updated similar to a word processing document. A wiki's collaborative nature can be characterized by the fact that it can be updated by any number of users, and the community organizes and supplies the content.

### Characteristics of Wikis

To begin, one of the more interesting features of a wiki is its collaborative nature. Users of a particular wiki can add, modify, and delete content. The history of the document is stored and can be accessed to see any changes that are made. Unless users are logged in, it may be difficult to actually determine who did what. Most wiki hosting sites offer the possibility of creating individual user accounts so that changes can be tracked. Lamb (2004, p. 38) summarizes some of the main features of wikis as follows:

1. Anyone can change anything;
2. Wikis use simplified hypertext markup;
3. Wikipage titles are mashed together;
4. Content is ego-less, timeless and never finished.

A wiki serves as a way for users to easily and quickly create a Web site. Due to the simplicity of wiki syntax, more time can be spent adding content than working on Web design. Titles often appear “mashed” due to the fact that the wiki attempts to provide quick page creation and simplicity in format. Additionally, wikis are organized by content rather than chronologically, like blogs (Godwin-Jones, 2003). Wikis offer the possibility of continuous collaboration so that information remains up-to-date.

### Project Ideas

Building on the collaborative nature of the wiki, the uses of these tools in an educational setting are varied. Here are some of the projects that have been developed using wikis in the classroom:

1. Plan a trip: students can collaborate to plan a trip abroad [<http://careo.elearning.ubc.ca/wiki?galiano>];
2. Put together a reading list for a book club: students at Drew University are creating a book club for reading and discussion [<http://drewbookclub.pbwiki.com/FrontPage>]
3. Organize a conference: educators can use the wiki as a planning tool and then decide to host a conference or event [<http://careo.elearning.ubc.ca/wiki?Technoculture>];
4. Take collaborative notes: notes can be posted by students, verified by teachers; students can share the load in note taking; they are created collaboratively as a study resource [<http://careo.elearning.ubc.ca/wiki?CS430>];
5. Share and edit lesson plans: [[www.wikiweb.org/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://www.wikiweb.org/index.php/Main_Page)];
6. Create a resource page: students can post what they have learned related to grammar, culture or other resource. The following page [<http://flteaching.wikispaces.com>] is home to a foreign language teaching wiki resource page created by graduate students in foreign language methods classes;
7. Post book notes, reviews, or commentaries: students can comment on literature assignments and identify main characters, plots, subplots, objects, settings, and details of stories. This collaboration can serve both as a review and study aid [[www.theplenty.net/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://www.theplenty.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)];
8. Engage in collaborative storytelling: wikis are used in some primary schools in Canada to teach collaborative storytelling to children [[http://lizzy.iit.nrc.ca/LizzyHelpNew/public/wiki.cgi?Lizzy\\_in\\_primary\\_schools](http://lizzy.iit.nrc.ca/LizzyHelpNew/public/wiki.cgi?Lizzy_in_primary_schools)];
9. Collaborate for group writing projects: at Penn State, rhetoric students are using a wiki to develop ideas for writing projects [<http://epochewiki.pbwiki.com/>];
10. Develop an encyclopedia for a school and its surroundings: Case Western Reserve University uses a wiki to feature information about the school,

social outings, biographical information, student group information and much more [<http://wiki.case.edu/CaseWiki:Usage>].

### Using a wiki in a French literature and culture course

In addition to the projects mentioned above, I wanted to highlight a wiki project that recently took place in a French class. Cindy Evans reports on a project at Skidmore College where students created a wiki featuring aspects of *Québécois* culture [wiki: [http://www.skidmore.edu/cgi-bin/wikis/FF209\\_001\\_f04.cgi/HomePage](http://www.skidmore.edu/cgi-bin/wikis/FF209_001_f04.cgi/HomePage)]. Students chose topics such as dance, music, cuisine, geography, and education and then researched their topics and provided content to a particular wiki page. In addition to content, students provided links to external sources as well as internal links to their peers' sites, and integrated literary and historical class material. Professor Evans' students used process oriented learning as they revised their work and peer edited activities so that they could participate actively in the project. Evans' article on this project is available at [[www.oberlin.edu/ilc/pubs/wikiproject.doc](http://www.oberlin.edu/ilc/pubs/wikiproject.doc)].

### Creating a Wiki

Creating a wiki involves a few simple steps. I have included a few wiki hosting sites below. These sites generally offer basic wiki services free of charge; in other words, free wikis are often limited to a certain amount of space, offer limited templates, and may require ads to appear on your wiki Web site.

[www.wikispaces.com/](http://www.wikispaces.com/)  
[www.wikidot.com/](http://www.wikidot.com/)  
<http://pbwiki.com/>  
[www.oddmuse.org/](http://www.oddmuse.org/)  
[www.cafewiki.org/](http://www.cafewiki.org/) [a wiki hosting site in French]

Some of these wiki host sites offer video tutorials to show you how to get started and to familiarize you with a wiki. No matter which wiki you choose, set up takes only a few minutes and a series of two or three easy steps. Happy wiki-ing!

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### References

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