



## Wikis

### Purpose

To provide an easy to use Web based authoring environment that supports document preparation by the public or authorised users, and where documents can undergo multiple revisions their change history recorded.

### Description

A *wiki* is a user-editable Web site – while browsing a site you can click on the "edit" link and change the contents of a page. Within organisations, wikis are commonly used as "glue" between other forms of communication. More permanent than a mailing list, more flexible than a departmental Web site, and not time-specific like a weblog or other "journal" entry, a wiki can link to all of these and provide a single, easily updateable point of reference for a course, team or event. The most famous example of wiki is **Wikipedia**, a very large encyclopaedia in many languages that allows anyone with internet access the ability to contribute articles.

You can simply start writing a wiki page using your web browser. Should you need it, the simple formatting syntax is very easy to learn. Wikis also include other features such as: page subscription, so that you receive an email whenever a page is changed; version history, which means that you can see each edit that was applied to a page and can return to a previous version if necessary; and attachments that allow you to add images to a page as well as include other files such as PDFs, Word documents, spreadsheets and MP3s.

## Ways of using this tool

Wikis are very useful for staff and students to quickly make notes and gradually work up content into something more permanent. They provide facilities for structuring content in numbered sections and for linking internally and externally. Teaching materials can easily be mounted in wikis as a series of interlinked documents. Wikis are also particularly effective for subjects where information is changing rapidly, for example to share information within a lab group.

A considerable amount of educational material is already available in wikis (notably in Wikipedia) and many such wikis can be edited by anyone, highlighting issues such as accuracy and provenance of information. Students can work on such collaborative knowledge bases and be assessed on their editing, not only on the content itself, but on how they make use of others' work and present the information.

## Learn More

**Wikipedia:** definition of *wiki* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>

**Master's Course in Cultural Hybridity and Discourses of Culture**, Martin Irvine, Georgetown University

[http://www.metapedia.com/wiki/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://www.metapedia.com/wiki/index.php?title=Main_Page)

Students developed most of the content of this wiki.

**Students assessed with Wikipedia**, BBC News Web site,

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/1/ukfs\\_news/hi/newsid\\_6420000/newsid\\_6422800/6422877.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/1/ukfs_news/hi/newsid_6420000/newsid_6422800/6422877.stm)

**Mediawiki** – the software that powers Wikipedia and many others

<http://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/MediaWiki>

## Access

You can create an account in Wikipedia and experiment with wiki authoring in a sandbox (test area).

This document is part of a larger set aimed at introducing the reader to a wide range of technologies. Please visit this web page for more information:

<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ltg/>

*Your primary support for IT issues comes from your department or college. If you would like advice on using wikis in learning and teaching at Oxford please contact OUCS.*

*A.Marshall 2009*