

Wikis - Helpful Hints

What is the difference between a wiki and a blog?

A wiki is a collaborative environment where more than one person can present and share content. Wikis are organized into pages, like the various pages of a website ('content-centric'). A blog is more of a communication tool that is organized by its author's entries or posts ('author-centric').

Why should I use a wiki in my course?

1. Develop a learning community, an active learning tool.
2. Help students develop writing, research, and critical and analytical thinking skills.
3. Establish a collaborative space to work on group projects and team assignments.

How can I be sure it will be successful?

1. Establish clear objectives for use.
2. Be specific about requirements. Have a grading strategy/rubric.
3. Set rules for engagement: who can edit, what can be edited, what is acceptable and unacceptable. If groups are being created and a single wiki is used, students should be clear on what the boundaries are for each team – which pages they can and cannot edit.
4. Associate the wiki with specific assignments or topics.
5. Students need to feel that they have "ownership" in the wiki; it is important to allow flexibility. However, it may be a good idea to set up a navigational structure in advance, depending on the nature of the assignment and whether or not there are several groups of students using the same wiki.

Ideas for Wikis:

Brainstorming: When starting a project, assignment, or creative process, students can share thoughts on a wiki.

Group projects: A wiki can be a tool for group projects where participants can communicate, share resources (including texts, videos, spreadsheets, links, etc.), and write collaboratively. This can be the locus of a process or a finished product.

Writing a collective letter or position statement: A wiki is an excellent tool to reach a consensus, define key ideas, and co-author clear and definitive final content.

Text-book supplement: Materials authored or collected by the faculty member, or by the students, can supplement text books particularly in areas where no adequate, appropriate, or single source exists that reflects the parameters of the course.

Study guides: Students can build a glossary of terms, write explanations of key concepts, and provide outlines or other aids.

Collaborative writing: Creative or non-fiction peer revision helps students understand and be more aware of the editing process, writing for an audience, and leads to better writing.

Virtual exhibitions: Students can mount virtual museum exhibitions using images, video, audio and writing texts for a virtual wall label or catalog.

Research projects: Group/collaborative assignments are a good experience for science students because they may work in distributed teams throughout their professional research careers. A wiki can be used to present data from experiments, provide a forum for discussion on results, and a place to collaboratively write a final report.