



INSPIRE THINKING ONLINE.™

OUR COMPANY

PRODUCTS

GETTING STARTED

SUPPORT

INSTRUCTOR LAB



## INSTRUCTOR LAB

Training

Case Studies

Show and Tell

Usage Guide

Research &amp; Resources

Suggest Enhancements

## Usage Guide

- [Is your course a candidate for blogs, wikis, or podcasts?](#)
  - [What makes wikis special?](#)
  - [When are wikis useful for education?](#)
  - [What makes blogs special?](#)
  - [When are blogs useful for education?](#)
- [Creating blog and wiki assignments](#)
- [Blogs vs. Private Journals](#)

## Is your course a candidate for blogs, wikis, or podcasts?

Think about the assignments that you already use in a course you teach.

1. Does an assignment require students to:
  - Assemble a set of information over time?
  - Work together either researching or presenting information (eg, writing a report)?
  - Conduct the same activity at intervals over time, such as critiquing a series of readings or reflecting on course modules?
  - Read and comment on each other's work?
  - Listen to audio recordings, such as language tapes or musical compositions?
  - View video recordings, such as speeches by historical figures or presentations by outside experts?
2. Do you have an assignment that could benefit from one of requirements in Question #1, if only it were easy?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then adapting the assignment to use wikis, blogs, or podcasts will likely make sense for you.

## What makes wikis special?

- **Hyperlinking** - Linking both between pages of a website and to resources elsewhere on the Internet is unique to the online environment. Hyperlinking is what makes a website a multi-layered, non-linear collection of information. This ability to structure information in multi-dimensional ways is what separates websites from traditional written reports or catalogs. With wikis, creating rich, multi-layered sites is easy.
- **Simplicity** - Using the rich text editor to build a wiki is far easier than coding a website. The unique advantages of online media are available, but with little hassle or specialized knowledge required.
- **Easy-access authoring** - A group of users, from one to many, can contribute to the site anytime, anywhere. The work-in-process is not under the control of any given user. By allowing users to readily see the evolving work and to contribute how and as often as each would like, this feature maximizes the potential benefits of collaboration.
- **Versioning** - Even as new edits are saved, the prior versions of the wiki are retained, and users can view the earlier versions and the differences between

## get ideas

Case Studies

Show and Tell

## learn more

Deployment Guide

Knowledgebase

Frequently Asked Questions

Product Documentation

Training

them. Users can even choose to revert back to an earlier version. The fact that earlier versions are not lost is what makes the easy-access authoring so usable. A user can contribute to the project without fear that the someone else will dispense with his contributions, and a user can pose an alternative to someone else's work without 'trashing' the other user's work. Conflict is reduced, and the quality of output is improved.

#### When are wikis useful for education?

For any activity that:

1. involves the assembly, organization, or annotation of a body of information (e.g., course outline for exam review, research papers, annotated bibliographies) and/or
2. needs, or would benefit from, multiple contributors (e.g., group papers, course knowledgebase, intra-departmental projects)

#### When are blogs useful for education?

- **Component structure** - The typical blog is a series of entries – each addressing a single concept, thesis, or time period – that are linked by a unifying theme. By its nature, the structure encourages writing of short or medium-length essays focusing on a single idea.
- **Chronological ordering** - Entries in blogs are displayed in reverse-chronological order. This time-based presentation makes blogs particularly well-suited for any subject matter that evolves in some aspect over time, whether it be current affairs, research results, or simply a student's understanding of a course of study.
- **Viewing and commenting** - The potential for an audience of readers can motivate a blog author to formulate his ideas and rhetoric with more care than an essay he might prepare solely for his instructor's grading. Moreover, the opportunity for readers to give feedback prompts an author to consider alternative views more consciously – both before and after publishing the blog entry.
- **Hyperlinks** - With all the information publicly available on the Internet just one hyperlink away, a blog author can easily incorporate specific references to illustrate and support his thesis. Moreover, that same wealth of resources is readily available to any reader who may want to challenge that thesis.
- **Rich media** - Like other tools formulated in HTML, blogs make it easy to add graphics, photos, video, and audio files to an entry. The ease with which multi-media can be incorporated creates the opportunity for students to create more engaging and persuasive output than was readily feasible in traditional academic formats.

#### What makes blogs special?

For any activity that

1. involves writing
2. requires analytical reading
3. progresses over time and/or
4. benefits from peer review or peer modeling

#### Creating blog and wiki assignments

---

##### Grading Assignments

The grading of an assignment using a blog or wiki should be conceived similar to that of any other assignment. For example,

- Was the research conducted productively?
- Has the information been organized well?
- Has the analysis been insightful?
- Is the writing solid?
- Have the results been persuasively presented?

Considerations particular to blogs or wikis may also be pertinent. For example

- Has the wiki author(s) used the ability to link pages in multiple layers and non-linear ways to present information in a particularly insightful way?
- What does the wiki history suggest about how the group functioned as a team?
- Has a student's comments on his peers' blog entries been insightful and well-articulated?
- Has the student wisely considered the credibility of the external information sources he has linked to?

Such considerations are not new concepts. They are simply assessments of academic performance within the context of the resources at hand. So grading blog and wiki assignments should be approached with the same principles as you apply to grading other assignments.

#### Communicating Assignments

As with most assignments, providing clear overview of the assignment is important. This is often posted in the "Description" field for the blog or wiki. Points to note include the following:

- Purpose of the assignment
- Your expectation for the scope or depth of work
- Your expectation for the quality of the work
- Your expectation for collaboration, if relevant
- The grading rubric
- The dates of availability for creating and/or viewing the wiki or the blog entries and comments, if the availability has been restricted

#### Setting Up a Wiki

Before configuring a wiki, it is helpful to have answered a few key questions about the logistics of the assignment:

- How many students do I want working together as members of the wiki?
  - Should the period for developing the wiki be restricted by date?
- Should non-members have permission to view the wiki?
  - If so, over what time period?
- Do I want to enable commenting?
  - If so:
    - Do I want commenting to be available for use by the members as they develop the wiki (eg, for organizing purposes)?
    - Do I want the commenting to be available to non-member viewers so they can respond to the wiki?
      - If so, do I want to allow the wiki members to view and reply to the comments? Or just to view them?

#### Notes on Commenting

Giving read/write commenting privileges to both the wiki members and non-members allows everyone to take part in a dialog about the wiki and its content.

If part of the assignment emphasizes peer review, then giving read/write commenting privileges to the non-members, while giving only viewing privileges to the wiki members, could possibly be desirable.

In addition to being a forum for viewers to discuss a wiki, the commenting option can be used by the wiki members themselves for internal organization and communication. This use may not be considered desirable if non-member viewers will also be allowed to read and write comments, since the intra-team organizing comments would remain in the comment stream during any subsequent dialog about the work itself. (Of course, wiki members can always coordinate internally by writing notes in-line in the wiki itself. These notes can be edited out as the wiki evolves).

#### Groups of One

Given the ease with which wikis can be accessed and edited by multiple users, wikis are well-suited for group projects. However, it is also reasonable to create a wiki assignment in which each individual builds a wiki. Other features of a wiki - the ability to organize information in multiple, interconnected layers; the ease of incorporating multi-media and links to external resources; or the ready opportunity

for peer review - may make it a great platform for some assignments, even if collaboration is not an objective.

#### Availability Dates and Restrictions

For many purposes -- most knowledgebases, for example - it is not necessary to set availability dates. Left with the default setting of no date restrictions, the wiki is available for editing, viewing, and/or commenting for as long as the course is available.

Of course, setting an end date for the editing period is quite common. This establishes a deadline for work, after which the product is graded.

The right availability period for non-member viewing access depends on the objectives of the assignment. If non-members have access only after the editing period is passed, then non-members review the work output in polished form, while wiki members can develop the wiki within the privacy of their own group.

Permitting students to see each other's work as the projects are underway allows for peer modeling. That is, a team may be inspired by the approach and the ideas pursued by other teams. And open viewing can inspire competition.

Which of these scenarios make sense depends on the assignment. For example, if all groups are researching the same topic, then delaying open viewing until after the editing date would generally be appropriate. But if each group were conducting research on different topics, then allowing the opportunity for peer modeling could perhaps be beneficial. (Note that page views are counted but identity of the view is not recorded; in contrast, page edits are counted and recorded by name.)

#### **Setting up a Blog or Private Journal**

Before configuring a blog, first consider who should be given what permissions. That is, given the nature and goals of the assignment:

- Who should have permission to author entries?
- Should the authoring/editing period be restricted by date?
- Should non-authors have permission to view the entries?
  - If so, over what time period?
- Do I want to enable commenting?
  - If so:
    - Should the author(s) be able to view the comments? to add comments?
    - Should non-authors be able to view the comments? to add comments?

Creating and configuring the blog is then a matter of selecting settings based on the answers to the above questions.

#### **Blogs vs. Private Journals**

---

#### **Blogs**

For a given blog, access can be broad or narrow:

- Privileges to author blog entries can be given to a 'group' of one student, a few students, or all students in the course.
  - The instructor can view, author, and edit all blog entries.
  - The author(s) can author entries and edit their own entries. (One author cannot edit another author's entry.)
  - The author(s) can view all entries in the blog.
  - Non-authors may be allowed to view the blog, at the instructor's option.
    - "Non-authors" includes all other course members.
    - If the course allows guest access or if the RSS feed is enabled for the blog, then "non-authors" also includes non-course members.
      - The time period during which others can read the entries can be restricted.
  - Commenting may be configured to accommodate any of these

combinations:

| <b>Author(s)</b>     | <b>Non-authors</b>   |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| neither view nor add | neither view nor add |
| view only            | view only            |
| add only             | add only             |
| view and add         | view and add         |

- The instructor can always view and add to the comments, regardless what configurations of commenting are made available.

#### **Private Journals**

Private journals are a specialized form of blogs in an entry can be viewed only by the author of that entry and by the instructor.

- For convenience, the instructor can view all authors' entries in a single list, or can filter the list by author.
- Journal authors can only see they entries that they themselves author; they cannot see the entries of other authors.
- Non-authors cannot view entries in a private journal.

Typically, a private journal is configured with "All course members" as participants. Then, all students in the course have the ability to add private entries into the journal, while the instructor can view all students' entries in one place.

- Sometimes, an instructor would like to create a private journal for only some members of a course. To do so, an instructor would de-select the "All course members" check-box and instead select specific individuals. (Note: By selecting a pre-defined group as a member, you add that group's members to the private journal all at once, but once within the journal, each individual still has access only to his own entries - just as if the names had been selected one-by-one.)
  - An instructor may want to have all students in the course participate in a private journal, but 'silo' them into a few different journals for purposes of organization during the instructor's review process. In this case, the instructor would create multiple private journals, each with a different sub-set of students as participants.
    - For example, segmenting student into multiple private journals could be useful in large courses with sections taught by different TAs; courses including students from different disciplines with distinct objectives in the course; or courses in which, for some reason, different sets of students have different journaling assignments.