

Collaborative Authoring in the Online Classroom

Collaborative Authoring Collaborative authoring tools can be a great way to integrate group work into the classroom, or to have an entire class work together to create a final project. These tools can also allow students and faculty to interact regardless of distance or schedules.

Collaborative authoring can be achieved either through a document sharing framework such as Google Drive or through the development of a wiki. Some uses for collaborative authoring software, highlighted by the University of Calgary, include:

- **Students** can create online lab books, research notebooks, or even textbooks for their own benefit, or for peer or instructor review.
- **Faculty** can communicate with their students, or “collaborate on research or writing projects with their peers (e.g. textbooks, articles) through the collection of ideas, papers, timelines, or documents,” or analyze results within a collective digital space.
- **Departmental personnel, instructors, and teaching assistants** can “organize and discuss common course assets such as syllabi, office hours, and assessments, without having an endless email chain or difficult to schedule face-to-face meetings.”
- **Conference organizers or event planners** can use these tools as a way of coordinating, scheduling, and implementing events

What to consider when using collaborative authoring in your class

1. **Define the purpose and learning outcomes**
 - a. How does the introduction of this new tool fit into goals for the course?
 - b. What needs to be set up in advance?
 - c. How will student work be assessed?
 - i. Quantity versus quality
 - ii. How to mark individual work that was part of a collective project
2. **Define the learners**
 - a. Year of study, online/face-to-face, class size, program type, etc.
3. **Define the rules**
 - a. What are the rules for collaboration?
 - b. Who and how will the content be monitored?
 - c. Who will be able to access the content? Will it be public or private?

Best Practices

- The system must be stable and easy to use
- Students need guidance on how to use the tool specifically for learning, even if they are accustomed to using the same kind of tool for fun or entertainment.
- The tool has to be built directly into the course design.

For more guidance on integrating this type of tool into your class, see the Checklist for Adapting Web 2.0 / Social (Learning) Tools: <http://ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/programs/teachingtech/Web20Checklist.pdf>

Google Drive

With Google Drive, users can create, edit, and share documents, spreadsheets, and presentations. Import Microsoft Office files and edit them within Google Docs, or create a file within Google Docs and export it as a Microsoft Office compatible file.

- Google Docs allows for synchronous collaboration on a single document
- The system handles conflicting changes well.
- A history of revisions is kept for all documents
- Each spreadsheet and presentation has a built in comment area for collaborators
- Google allows users to upload and export most word processing and spreadsheet file types.

Access the LTO's folder of templates for use in Google Drive: <https://goo.gl/fp0b4b>

Wikis

Wikis are user-generated web pages that can be created and edited quickly, right from within the web browser. Unlike the synchronous collaboration offered by Google Drive, wikis are edited asynchronously. Like Google Drive, however, wikis keep a history of revisions for all documents.

The most well known wiki is Wikipedia, the online, open-source encyclopedia. While this site is often criticized for the position it holds outside of academia, there are also many possibilities for using it in the classroom. For instance, editing Wikipedia as part of a classroom assignment can:

- Provide an opportunity for students to hone their research skills.
- Allow students to think critically about the sources being cited and potential bias or inaccuracies.
- Help students learn by creating (generating knowledge) and analyzing existing text.
- Model collaborative learning.
- Provide students the opportunity to practice writing neutral, objective prose and experience the peer-review process

Read more:

“Wikipedia for Credit,” <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/09/07/wikipedia>

To read more about using wikis in the classroom, read our Teaching Tips document on Blogs and Wikis in the Online Classroom:

http://ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/resources/handouts/OnlineLearning_BlogsWikis.pdf

For assistance using any of these tools in the classroom, contact the DMP: <http://ryerson.ca/dmp/>