



# Online collaboration: what's a wiki?

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Students usually achieve a deeper understanding of the subject matter when they interact with fellow students and have to reach a conclusion together. However, organising such collaborative learning requires a well-thought-out approach (Hodges, 2017). First of all, the teaching team needs to reflect on the learning goals it wants to achieve through cooperation: is the focus on the subject matter alone, or also on the acquisition of certain skills? They should also consider how to facilitate cooperation between students. In this ECHO Tip, we'll take a closer look at one possible way of enabling asynchronous remote collaboration: a wiki.

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## What's a wiki?

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There are lots of different applications for students to collaborate online. Students and lecturers often use informal collaboration tools outside their own institution's online learning platform. Examples include file sharing via Microsoft 365, Google Drive, OneDrive, etc. However, most electronic learning environments, such as Blackboard, also offer useful collaboration tools. A **wiki** is a good example of a **collaboration tool that can be used to have students build content together at different times**. Since it's embedded in the learning environment, the teaching team can easily monitor the use of the tool.

The name comes from the Hawaiian language, in which 'wiki wiki' means 'to hurry'. It's **an interactive, modifiable website, the contents of which can be edited only by users who have been granted access** (Kamel Boulos et al., 2007; Parker et al., 2019). Using a wiki is a good way to ensure fast, easy, secure and asynchronous group collaboration.

Users can add content to a wiki **in a simple and structured way**. Multiple wikis can be created within one Blackboard course, so there can be a wiki for each group of students, and each of these can have

**multiple pages**. Content can then be added to these pages at any time. The content can consist of **text, pictures and hyperlinks**. Each student can contribute to the content remotely. Using the **'track-back' history** option, individual student contributions can be monitored and previous versions can be viewed.

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## Example from the Rehabilitation Sciences and Physiotherapy study programme (UAntwerp)

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In the Rehabilitation Sciences and Physiotherapy study programme, wikis are used to introduce students to rare syndromes in children as part of the Paediatric Physiotherapy programme component. The students work together in groups on a number of aspects of a particular syndrome, based on recent scientific literature, using wikis that have been structured in advance by the teaching team. Initially, students only have access to their own group's wiki. Once the teaching team has checked the content, the wikis for the various syndromes are opened up to the other groups. The wikis then serve as course material and, in a second part of the group exercise, the groups compare various aspects on the basis of

the other groups' wikis, such as the incidence and prevalence of the syndrome they worked on. In other words, the wiki is used as a tool to teach students to collect scientific information as a group, to decide which information is useful in a specific context (e.g. a patient with a rare syndrome comes and visits the practice) and to report this information to colleagues.



Figuur 1: Voorbeeld van een wiki gemaakt door studenten 3<sup>de</sup> Bachelor Kinesitherapie bij kinderen

- Then you can start adding **wiki pages** to this topic. A wiki page is a more specific question or deepening of the general theme. For example, the wiki topic Modern Philosophy could include a wiki page on utilitarianism, a page on empiricism, and so on.
- You can also compile all wiki topics created for a course or by a group on an **overview page**.

To wrap up this teaching tip, here are some practical pointers:

- Make sure your wiki is **featured prominently in your online Blackboard course** so students know that it's a key part of the course.
- Give students **clear instructions and deadlines**.
- **Structure** the wiki yourself by creating pre-named wiki pages, or include this in the instructions for students.
- Create a **sample wiki**. For example, for the Paediatric Physiotherapy programme component, the teaching team have already developed the page for Down's syndrome (the most common syndrome) to give the students an example of what's expected of them.
- Creating the wiki is part of the learning process, so be sure to link it to an **assessment**. This may be either formative or summative. In addition to assessing the final product, you can also have students assess another group's wiki, or way of working, through self- and peer-assessment.
- You can leave your **feedback** on the wiki pages.
- If you want to use the resulting wikis as **study material** for other students, make sure that they're only made available after

## Getting started with wikis

Organising group work as a teaching method should be a well-thought-out didactic choice. If you're considering using wikis, you should first ascertain how they can help you achieve one of your **previously formulated competences and learning objectives**. A good example of a learning objective that the use of wikis can contribute to is 'learning to collect, summarise and communicate relevant scientific literature'.

If a wiki does indeed prove to be a useful tool in relation to the learning objectives, you can start developing the wiki structure.

You should proceed as follows:

- First, determine **the wiki topic** that group members will be contributing content to. The topic is the overarching theme that connects the different pages. A wiki topic contains an overview of all the related wiki pages.

the content has been checked. This check can be performed by fellow students or by the teaching team.

- Encourage students to work **directly in the wiki** and not to copy and paste content from a word processor (e.g. Microsoft Word), as

the added value of the wiki is lost when individual contributions can't be tracked.

- **Don't make the wiki too big**, not only because there might be a word limit on your learning platform, but also because a clearly defined task is easier for students who have to work independently.

### Want to know more?

#### References

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Kamel Boulos M., & Wheeler S. (2007). The emerging Web 2.0 social software: An enabling suite of sociable technologies in health and healthcare education. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, 24(1), 2–23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-1842.2007.00701.x>

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<https://www.wikimatrix.org> - retrieved 18 May 2021

<https://elearningindustry.com/how-to-use-wiki-in-the-classroom> - retrieved 18 May 2021

#### ECHO Teaching Tips (in Dutch)

[Online onderwijs: studenten aan het roer van hun leren](#) (December 2020)

[Ondersteunen van samenwerkingscompetenties](#) (March 2018)

[Hoe studenten indelen bij groepswork?](#) (January 2018)

#### Sources accessible to UAntwerp staff (in Dutch)

Good practice '[Blackboard als katalysator voor zelfstudie en groepswork voor psychomotoriek](#)'

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