

Defining Wiki Goodness

For teachers new to digital learning experiences, one of the challenges of structuring wiki projects in their classrooms is having a firm understanding of exactly what good wiki work is supposed to look like. This handout details four criteria that can be used to evaluate classroom wikis.

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Criteria	Rationale
Accurate Content	<p>The initial fear that every teacher has when approaching work with wikis is the constant risk that students will learn to embrace a tool that may promote the sharing of inaccurate content. With the much-publicized horror stories of false information appearing on major wiki sites like Wikipedia, we've become hesitant to embrace wikis as a teaching tool.</p> <p>And in some ways, these fears are justified. Because wikis are open websites that can be edited by anyone at any time, content on wikis is often changing—and at any given time, wikis can contain information that is just plain wrong.</p> <p>But in many ways, that risk is what makes wikis such a valuable teaching tool! The most accomplished wiki-educators don't shy away from inaccurate content posted on classroom wiki projects. Instead, they embrace it as an opportunity to teach students about the importance of judging the reliability of online sources.</p> <p>While they are constantly pushing students to proofread for accuracy—and while they value accuracy in the products that are produced by their students—they also recognize that content errors are new opportunities to teach students about information literacy.</p>
Deep Linking	<p>Higher level learning experiences require learners to read and react to information. Synthesizing and evaluating content created by others is essential before new understandings can be developed.</p> <p>In wiki work, evidence of synthesis and evaluation can be seen in the number and quality of resources linked to on a wiki page. As new content is developed, links from a variety of reliable sources are inserted to provide evidence supporting the thinking of authors.</p> <p>Deep linking forces students to make connections between their own beliefs and external evidence. It also serves as an additional opportunity for classrooms to have conversations about judging the reliability of online sources. Wiki pages with extensive links to credible sources are more likely to be trustworthy than those with limited links to questionable sources.</p>
Evidence of Group Revision	<p>Wikis are designed for collaboration, plain and simple. They are tools that facilitate the asynchronous work of groups around content that is of shared interest. As a result, accomplished academic wiki pages have evidence of extensive group revision.</p> <p>Page discussion boards include ongoing conversations about quality and content—and a careful exploration of the page history button (<i>generally found somewhere in the header or footer of each wiki page</i>) will reveal an extensive collection of previous versions.</p> <p>In many ways, group revision is the greatest challenge for teachers interested in incorporating wiki work into their classrooms because students are inherently tentative about making meaningful edits to one another's work. Used to the traditional isolation of the American classroom—where collaboration has generally been somewhat simple or superficial—peers generally use wiki pages as places to post their own content, rather than to make changes to content posted by others.</p> <p>Over time and with constant modeling, however, students embrace the collective nature of wiki pages and begin to make meaningful revisions to the work of their peers.</p>

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Criteria

Rationale

Quality Presentation

Accomplished wikis are really no different from accomplished writing in any other format: They demonstrate the use of age appropriate grammar, punctuation and spelling. Writers recognize that effective communication depends on their ability to create pieces that are easy to understand and unencumbered by mistakes.

For many teachers, wikis become natural forums for reviewing grammar and spelling rules with students! Because errors are almost always going to be present in constantly changing work being created by kids, wikis are built-in, real world opportunities for proofreading practice.

Accomplished wikis also demonstrate age-appropriate levels of visual presentation. Images and embedded video are often used to enhance wiki pages. Creators maintain a balance, however, between appropriate use of multimedia content and digital overkill, recognizing that interactive elements can distract readers.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1. If you were to rank these four criteria for highly accomplished academic wikis in order from most important to least important, what would your rankings look like? Why?*
- 2. Are there any other criteria for accomplished wikis that you believe are important? What other outcomes would you like to see wiki projects offer to your students?*
- 3. Which of these wiki criteria are going to be the most difficult for your students to master? Why?*
- 4. Which of these wiki criteria are going to be the most difficult for you to introduce to your students? Why?*