Wiki-wiki-what?

Welcome wikis into your world, and be wowed

Heard the term *wiki*? This plain-but-powerful type of Web page can change the way you interact with students and colleagues. Page visitors can modify a wiki without any special knowledge or software beyond a standard Web browser. With just a few clicks of the mouse, a user can add or edit text, upload photos or video, or participate in an online discussion.

The origin of wikis

The first wiki was developed in 1995 by computer programmer Ward Cunningham. Wikis quickly became a way for groups of people to share information and collaborate on documents efficiently. (Visit *www.commoncraft.com/video-wikis-plain-english* to watch a video that illustrates how friends might use a wiki to plan a trip.)

The most famous wiki is Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia that anyone can edit. The fact that anyone can edit Wikipedia makes it unreliable, but as a jumping-off point for learning about a subject and starting a search for reliable sources, Wikipedia is hard to beat. And, for idealists, Wikipedia represents the ultimate power of the Internet: It's a place where anyone, anywhere, can contribute to a collective knowledge pool—and do so for free.
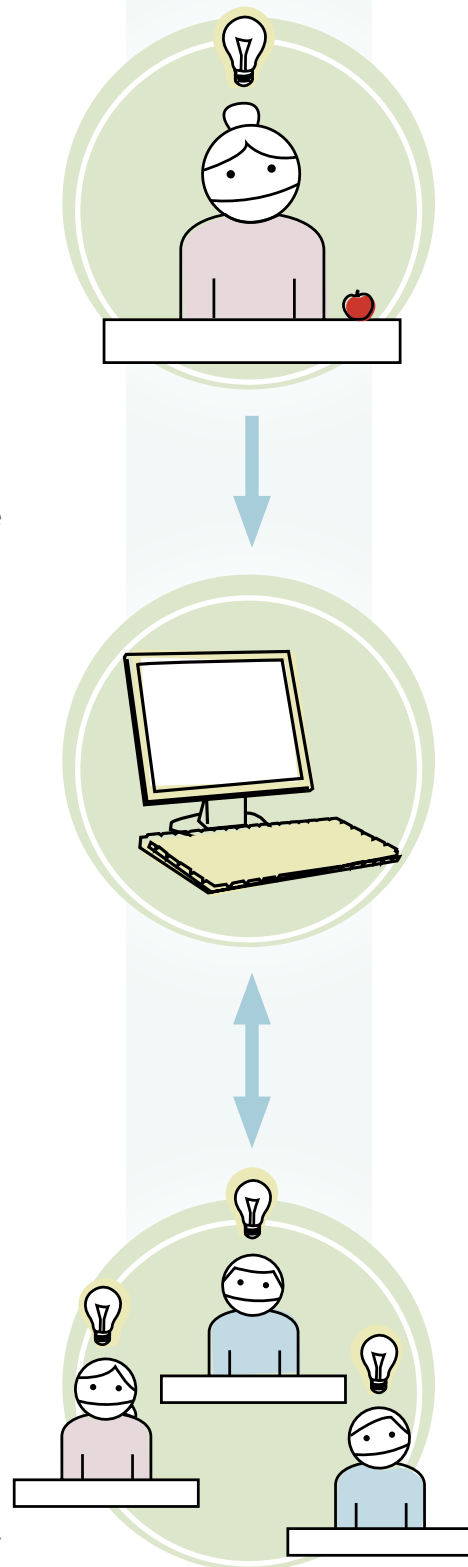
Want your own wiki?

To set up your own wiki, visit a site such as *www.wikispaces.com*, *http://pbwiki.com* or *www.wetpaint.com*, and sign up for a free account. Once your page is established, click on the Edit button to add or modify content. You will be able to modify text much like you can modify text in a word processing document. Click Save when you're finished editing, and … *voilà*. You're done.

As a wiki administrator, you can choose whether to make your site visible to anyone or to invited users only; you also determine which invited users have permission to modify content and which content they can modify.

Ways to use wikis

The College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has established WikEd (*http://wik.ed.uiuc.edu*), a wiki where educators from around the country share ideas and information. You could establish a wiki for educators on your campus, in your grade level or in your subject area and use the page to share lesson plans, links to Web sites and reflections on lesson effectiveness.

Teachers around the world have used wikis as repositories of information about projects, classroom management Web sites (*http://mrlindsay.pbwiki.com/*) and the home for write-alongs (*http://terrythetennisball.wikispaces.com*). The possibilities for wikis are limited only by your imagination.

WIKI ILLUSTRATION-CAM TODD