

What is a wiki?

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A wiki is a website that allows people with access to easily edit, add to, and delete webpages and/or their contents. Wikis are very similar in appearance to ordinary websites that have 'static' information on them, such as the ANU website. The differences are that you cannot edit the ANU website, but you can edit a wiki, and that a wiki is by its nature a work in progress.

What about Wikipedia?

Wikipedia is probably the best-known example of a wiki. Wikipedia is a website that anyone in the world can contribute to by creating and editing articles on any topic. It is important to understand that Wikipedia is just an example of a wiki -- not all wikis are Wikipedia.

How is a wiki organised?

Wikis have pages (like webpages), which make up the main parts of a wiki. Each wiki page also comes with a discussion forum attached to it (so that contributors can discuss the changes they've made to the page) and a 'history' of all the edits made to the page (so that the community can track who has made what changes).

Who can contribute to a wiki?

Some wikis are fully editable by anyone and some wikis are 'locked off' so that only certain people can access them. It will depend on how the wiki you are using has been set up.

What are wikis about?

Wikis can be on any topic. Wikipedia, for example, is an online encyclopedia that seeks to bring together all the knowledge in the world. That's a lofty ambition, but not all wikis have to be about everything, in the world, ever! Some wikis are about dirt bikes, others about cancer research or colonialist literature, and still others are about Joss Whedon's TV shows!

What is the philosophy of a wiki?

Wikis are about the ongoing process of knowledge construction around a particular topic. Contributors collaborate on a wiki to build a webspace that constantly changes, according to what the community knows at any given point. Wikis are a 'work in progress' and the knowledge that they contain is always 'unfinished.'

Should I change other people's content?

Yes, that is the point of a wiki. A wiki is not about you and your work as an individual, it is a collaborative space where contributors put aside an individual viewpoint to create a resource that best reflects the state of knowledge within the wiki community. Changes to others' content shouldn't be based on personality factors, but on what is best for the wiki.

What about errors that appear on a wiki?

Because wikis are about the community of users, anyone can fix errors at any stage. Of course, anyone can also produce errors at any stage, so that is why building a wiki needs to be a collaborative exercise - so that false or inaccurate information can be corrected quickly.

What if there is disagreement about the content of a wikispace?

If disagreements about content occur, the editing of a wikispace should cease and a discussion about the problem should take place in the wikispace's discussion forum. The forum allows collaborators to make arguments for and against the edits they've made, and to (hopefully) reach a consensus about what goes into the wiki. 'Edit wars,' in which contributors simply edit each other's content back and forth, are not helpful to the creation of a successful wiki.

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