

Wikis

Part 1: Wikis & Libraries

Created by Oregon-based computer programmer Ward Cunningham in 1994 and named after the shuttle at the Honolulu Airport in Hawaii, the *wiki* offers librarians the chance to build Web resources without knowledge of HTML or access to the server. Web-based editing allows groups to easily edit and create pages.

For this chapter's definition, I also went to the source of all things wikis and libraries: Meredith Farkas, distance learning librarian at Norwich University in Vermont, wiki-master of the LibSuccess Wiki, and creator of the official 2006 ALA Annual Conference wiki.

She defined a wiki as an application that: “enables a group of people to collaboratively develop a Web site with no Web design experience. Any member of the community can add to or edit the work of others, so essentially, a wiki is a perpetual work in progress. Wiki, meaning *quick* in Hawaiian, was designed specifically for easy and quick collaboration online.”

Features of most wikis include:

- Article: A page on a wiki devoted to a particular topic;
- Page-editing mode: Where creation and editing take place;
- Talk or discussion pages: Section for each article where readers can discuss or ask questions;
- History page(s): Tracks the changes and versions of any article;
- Edit or view source option: Allows editing or viewing of the wiki article's code; and
- Search function: searches the wiki.

Emma Tonkin addressed wikis in her article “Making the Case for a Wiki” at *Ariadne* in January 2005.¹ Tonkin

presents several “use cases” or models for wiki use and notes the benefits of built-in search functions, organizational schemas, and categorization.

All of these scenarios could benefit librarians:

- **Single-user wiki:** A wiki could actually be a personal information manager or repository for notes, concepts, and ideas for one person.
- **Lab book:** An online research diary by one person that may be more formal than the above example.
- **Collaborative writing:** A group uses a wiki to create a document.
- **Knowledge base:** A collection of factual documents and procedures on a particular subject.

How Wikis Work

Once configured or installed, a wiki is edited by a simple set of commands in a Web interface that is strikingly similar to that of a blog; however, wikis employ different tag commands. Mediawiki, for example, an open-source software option, uses straight brackets to create hyperlinks and other pages (see figure 18).

Jessamyn West, Biblioblogger at Librarian.net, has authored a page of wiki editing tips at the LibSuccess Wiki, a collection of library best practices and more. West offers up these tips for building pages and general wiki partici-

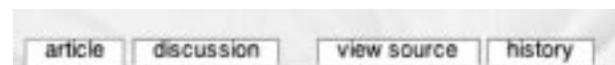


Figure 17:

Tabs of a MediaWiki Page: article, discussion, view source, and history.

pation. Although specific to Mediawiki installations, these hints are most useful for understanding wiki culture.

- **Register**—Registering lets people know who edited a page and allows all of your edits to be grouped under your name. This helps you establish a reputation—this is important on big wikis like Wikipedia, perhaps not as much here—and lends authority to your entries and edits. If you are registered, people can contact you through your talk page if they have questions about your entries or edits.
- **Annotate**—You have the option of adding little notes to your edits in the Summary box beneath the editing page. If you are including a fact that is not widely known, sometimes a brief cite is helpful here. Check the minor edit box if you are just fixing a typo or a punctuation error.
- **Discuss**—Every page on the wiki has a discussion page that you can use for discussing an article. This is often more useful than making an edit, having someone else undo it, and back and forth. These pages can be for asking questions about the topic, or informal coverage of a topic.
- **Link**—Please feel free to add hyperlinks and cross-links to other wiki pages.
- **Look**—The best way to learn how to format things on the wiki is to look at how people have formatted things on other pages. Just hit “edit” at the top of the page to see how people did what they did.²

Surveying the Library Wiki Landscape

What can libraries and librarians do with wikis? From the various articles, blog posts, and Webinars of late, we can see there are many uses for wiki software in libraries.

- Subject guides
- Project planning
- Policy manuals
- Resource listings
- Training resources

Librarians may find a wiki useful for just about any Web-based project!

Wiki Design Principles

Ward Cunningham shares his design principles at his Web site. It’s fascinating to apply these principles to Web 2.0 thinking as well.

- **Open**—Should a page be found to be incomplete or poorly organized, any reader can edit it as they see fit.
- **Incremental**—Pages can cite other pages, including pages that have not been written yet.
- **Organic**—The structure and text content of the site are open to editing and evolution.
- **Mundane**—A small number of (irregular) text conventions will provide access to the most useful page markup.



Figure 18: Example of a wiki page in edit mode.

- **Universal**—The mechanisms of editing and organizing are the same as those of writing so that any writer is automatically an editor and organizer.
- **Observable**—Activity within the site can be watched and reviewed by any other visitor to the site.³

Wiki Editing Tips, Library Success Wiki
www.libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Tips_page

Ward Cunningham's Wiki Design Principles
<http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiDesignPrinciples>

The New Services group at Bethlehem Public Library in Delmar, New York, recently created a wiki to keep track of links to online resources, according to Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, head of circulation and technical services. “We were trying to do this by group e-mail but found that we were just ‘gunking up’ each other’s inboxes.” Now members of the team can view the wiki for new posts at their convenience.”

Steve Backs, who uses an internal blog at Monroe County Public Library, also has gotten into wikis. “I wanted to start a pilot project that would carry over to the library’s intranet, which it has. Since then, committees have started using wikis to communicate and share information,” Backs explained.

I’ve also learned, through this wiki and some other wiki experiences, that a successful wiki relies on the COLLABORATION of many people. If, for whatever reason, people don’t start contributing to the wiki, then it’s all but dead—a tool with great untapped potential. For a wiki to work, it requires active participation by many people, building a resource that participants and observers view as having value and being worthwhile.

Scott Pfitzinger, Creator of the Butler WikiRef,
www.seedwiki.com/wiki/butler_wikiref

Butler WikiRef

One of the first library wikis was the Butler WikiRef, created by the librarians at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana (see figure 19). The front page of the wiki describes the resource and invites participation:

WikiRef is a collaborative review of databases, books, websites, etc., that are part of the collection of Reference Resources available at or via

the Butler University Libraries. It functions like a Reference User’s Group that facilitates discussion between and the empowering of reference users.

Butler librarians, faculty, staff, and students are welcome to add their comments about any reference resource we provide, including how useful you find it and what classes it may apply to. Please only delete or change text if it is factually incorrect or unprofessional in department. You are also welcome to add additional reference resources that you have used at Butler.⁴

Butler reference-team librarian Scott Pfitzinger created the wiki in early 2005, and I asked him about the benefits and pitfalls of the project recently. “The best thing about the wiki I’ve implemented is its potential,” he told me. “While it hasn’t exploded yet, there is a lot of potential for a quality collaborative site. The primary purpose of the Butler WikiRef is collaborative discussions and feedback on our reference resources, both print and online. There has only been a little of that so far.”

Library Wikis

This is just a sampling of wikis created by librarians:

- **BizWiki:** Librarian Chad Boeninger’s business resource wiki at Ohio University Library, www.library.ohiou.edu/subjects/bizwiki/index.php/Main_Page;
- **LibSuccess Wiki:** Collection of best practices and information for library services and projects, www.libsuccess.org;
- **LISWiki:** A collective wiki for articles and information about the field, www.liswiki.com;
- **Library Instruction Wiki:** Clearinghouse of training materials and tips developed by the Oregon Library Association’s Library Instruction Roundtable, <http://instructionwiki.org>;
- **Library 2.0 Wiki:** Resource for Library Camp, held at Ann Arbor District Library in April 2006, and more, <http://wiki.library2.net>; and
- **SJCPL Subject Guides:** Subject Guides at the St. Joseph County Public Library on topics of interest to library users, www.libraryforlife.org/subjectguides/index.php/Main_Page.

Part 2: Implementing Wikis

First, you’ll have to choose your software and determine a hosting option. The choice will depend upon the expertise level available at your library. Wiki software that is hosted elsewhere (besides your library) can be found at various Web sites and can be configured and running in minutes, while a server installation may take some time and know-how.

Hosted sites (where you can start a wiki within minutes):

- Jotspot, www.jot.com
- Pbwiki, <http://pbwiki.com>
- Seedwiki, www.seedwiki.com

You can also consider an open-source option, for installation on your library's server. Mediawiki (www.mediawiki.org) is the software of choice for Wikipedia, the LibSuccess wiki, and the SJCP Library Subject Guides. Once installed and configured, it can be customized and enhanced with plugins. For more on wiki software, visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Wiki_software.

Wiki Goals, Authors, and Monitors

It is important to have specific goals and objectives you want to achieve with the wiki. Your library staff will need to ask the question, "What is the goal of this wiki?" Other questions you and your fellow staff members may ask: "Do we want to build a resource with a working group of librarians?" and "Do we want an entire department to edit a policy or procedural manual?" A wiki may be the perfect solution for group-oriented work. Plan the goals and mission of the wiki just as discussed in the blog chapter in this issue.

After determining the reason for starting the wiki, the next step will be to decide who the wiki authors will be. Who will collaborate on the wiki? Will it be select staff? Everyone? An entire department? Wiki software includes the functionality to set author logins and passwords, so configure as you would like—or open it up to everyone on your library's staff. If you are building a community resource, open it to all users and staff members, and watch what happens! See the Ann Arbor wiki for more at http://arborwiki.org/city/Main_Page.

Appoint a wiki monitor. Even if the resource is open to all, appoint a person to monitor changes and watch for wiki flames and wiki spam.

Take the Time to Train and Promote

Take time to train staff members how to use the idiosyncratic software conventions of wikis. Again, give your fellow staff members a chance to learn the commands and then play with the wiki. At SJCP Library, the best training scenarios played out as one-on-one sessions, during which librarians learned how to create and edit their own personal pages. That learning translated to the creation of the *SJCP Library Subject Guides*, and many of the librarians went on to offer even more peer-to-peer experiential training.

Promote your resource, plain and simple. Do not build a great resource and then not tell anyone! Announce

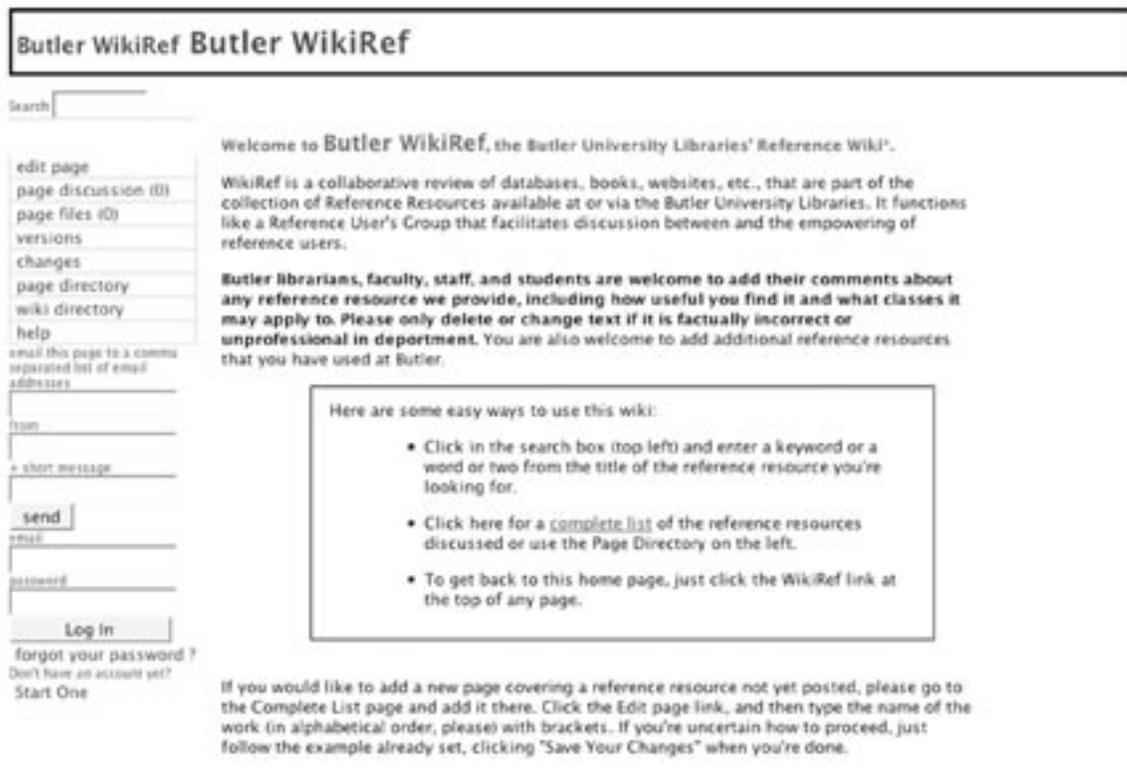


Figure 19: Butler WikiRef was created by the librarians at Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana (www.seedwiki.com/wiki/butler_wikiref/butler_wikiref?wpid=186560)

it on the library blog! Issue a press release. Print up an informative bookmark or sticker. Ask to speak at campus or community meetings and talk about the wiki. Librarian Scott Pfitzinger commented on the Butler WikiRef and promotion: “I’ve learned that a great deal of marketing/ publicity is necessary to implement a new technological tool in an environment that is unfamiliar with it. That will be one of my projects for this summer—outlining a plan of communication, letting students and faculty know about this resource in as many ways and methods as possible.”

Part 3: Best Practices for Library Wikis

Encourage play, and ensure that you impart to your staff that it’s okay to make mistakes and learn from them. As stated previously: this is the best type of training for wikis and all of the Web 2.0 tools—try things, experiment.

It is important to provide the wiki with a structure, so before you turn your wiki authors loose, have them build in some basic structure, such as general categories, the briefest of outlines, or a loose guide. Then allow your authors to fill in the blanks and enhance the structure.

Additionally, it will be important to proactively monitor changes to the wiki. Track changes through RSS, or on the wiki itself, to monitor what’s happening in the resource. Public wikis have the potential for flame wars or spam and can be the battleground for two authors who disagree. Watch for signs of such issues and intervene, guiding the authors to compromise or offer up other solutions. The librarian in charge of the resource or project utilizing the wiki is likely the ideal individual to fill this role.

One way to get users interested in a wiki resource is to use it for library instruction; ponder ways you can use a learning wiki to enhance instruction. At Butler University, Pfitzinger has created question sets within the wiki. “Students can work, even during the session in a computer lab, on learning some basic research skills by answering the questions together and then looking at what the other teams have come up with.”

Use wiki software that generates RSS feeds. MediaWiki (see figure 21) has built-in RSS feeds from *Recent Changes* and *New Articles*, which is one limitation of the software. This is handy for watching who’s changing articles, and for watching what changes when, but it is not that helpful if you want feeds from multiple pages. Those using PBwiki (see figure 20), in contrast, can build pages in the wiki, and each page an author/user builds has its own RSS feed.

Resources on Wikis

Meredith Farkas, “Wiki,” TechEssence.Info Blog (April 8, 2006), <http://techessence.info/socialsoftware/wiki> (accessed June 6, 2006).

Darlene Fichter, “The Many Forms of E-Collaboration,” *Online* 29, no. 4 (2005): 48–50.

Michael Stephens, “Wikis in the University Library,” ALA TechSource Blog (May 22, 2006), www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/05/wikis-in-the-university-library.html (accessed June 6, 2006).

Wiki definition at Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>

Notes

1. Emma Tonkin, “Making the Case for a Wiki,” *Ariadne* 42 (January 2005), www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue42/tonkin (accessed June 6, 2006).
2. Jessamyn West, “Tips Page,” Library Success Wiki, www.libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Tips_page (accessed June 6, 2006).
3. Ward Cunningham, Wiki Design Principles, <http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiDesignPrinciples> (accessed June 6, 2006).
4. Butler WikiRef, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana, www.seedwiki.com/wiki/butler_wikiref/butler_wikiref?wpid=186560 (accessed June 6, 2006).



Figure 20: PBWiki in edit mode.

[Create an account or log in](#)



article | discussion | edit (librarians only) | history

Harry Potter

navigation

- [Subject Guide](#)
- [Home](#)
- [Browse by Category](#)
- [See All Guides](#)
- [Ask a Librarian](#)
- [Online Catalog](#)
- [Recent Changes](#)
- [Random Page](#)
- [SJCL Home](#)

search

toolbox

- [What links here](#)
- [Related changes](#)
- [Upload file](#)
- [Special pages](#)
- [Printable version](#)

About the Author: J.K. Rowling [edit]

Did you know that the author of the Harry Potter series is now thought to be richer than the Queen of England? Or that she has three children and lives in Edinburgh, Scotland with her husband, who practices medicine? Learn much more about the creator of Harry's world at the biography sites listed on the side.

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[hide]

- 1 About the Author: J.K. Rowling
- 2 Books in the Harry Potter series
 - 2.1 Other Books by J.K. Rowling
- 3 Harry Potter movies
- 4 If you liked Harry Potter ...
 - 4.1 For children and teens
 - 4.2 For adults
- 5 Books about the Harry Potter series available @ SJCL
- 6 Videos about the Harry Potter series available @ SJCL

Books in the Harry Potter series [edit]








Official Harry Potter Links

- [J.K. Rowling's website](#)
- [Warner Bros', Harry Potter movie site](#)
- [Scholastic's Harry Potter book site](#)

JK Rowling Biography Links

- [Biography Resource Center: articles about J.K. Rowling](#)
 - Available at any SJCL branch, as well as from your home computer with a valid SJCL library card.
- [Biography.com's J.K. Rowling biography](#)
- [IMDb's J.K. Rowling information](#)

Harry Potter Fan Sites

- [HPANA \(Harry Potter Automatic News Aggregator\)](#)
- [Harry Potter Lexicon](#)
- [Immeritus \(Serius Black Fan Club\)](#)
- [Into the Pensieve](#)
- [The Leaky Cauldron](#)
- [MuggleNet](#)

Figure 21: Harry Potter page at SJCL Subject Guides; built with MediaWiki.