**Sharing & building knowledge online asynchronously: A comparison of means**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Wikis</th>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>Discussion boards/forums</th>
<th>Shared network drive</th>
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<td><strong>Common elements</strong>: Collaborative online, conversational, text-based tools allowing people to communicate irrespective of time and place. &gt; ‘social’ software. They are relatively simple to use, and don’t require any knowledge of coding or specialist editing tools. Cost barriers are minimal (with much software free or open source).</td>
<td><strong>Web-based (web pages viewable by a web browser)</strong> &lt;br&gt;<strong>Content focused</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Web/Internet-based</strong> &lt;br&gt;<strong>People-focused</strong></td>
<td><strong>Intranet-based</strong> &lt;br&gt;<strong>Content focused</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Main purpose</strong></td>
<td><strong>Collaborative publishing / authoring</strong>&lt;br&gt;Sharing and/or joint building of knowledge &gt; community created content (e.g. Wikipedia) &lt;br&gt;Collaborative maintenance of content &lt;br&gt;Many&lt;&gt;Many ‘broadcasting’ model</td>
<td><strong>Individual/group web publishing / ‘story-telling’</strong> &lt;br&gt;Sharing of knowledge / expertise &lt;br&gt;‘One’&gt;many broadcasting model</td>
<td>Online discussion - questions / answers; exchange of ideas/views, creating links among people who join in the conversation</td>
<td>Shared repository of documents for a select / restricted readership</td>
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<td><strong>Essential features</strong></td>
<td><strong>Two main writing modes:</strong>&lt;br&gt;1. Open editing (or ‘collaboration’ mode) – readership / members can easily edit current live web pages and create new ones (continuous editing and refinement as information is aggregated and distilled)&lt;br&gt;2. ‘Discussions/thread mode – members can add comments / individual entries (rather than work collaboratively on the one document).&lt;br&gt;Content accuracy moderated by the group.&lt;br&gt;In summary, a process (writing) &amp; product (publishing) tool</td>
<td><strong>Closed editing – only the publisher can add, delete or edit articles (‘posts’) and/or comments from readers (see below)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Readership/members can post comments, or post responses on their own web site (blog) and link back to the original post (‘trackback’). Hence reader moderation of author content is indirect.&lt;br&gt;Authors can keep track of other blogs referencing their posts (the ‘vanity’ measure!)&lt;br&gt;Can have spam protection&lt;br&gt;In summary, a product (publishing) tool</td>
<td>Postings text-based and generally not editable (but note increasing use of audio messages)</td>
<td>Closed editing – members can edit documents (but some may be ‘read only’), but requires the appropriate software (Word PowerPoint etc. – the software in which the document was first constructed)</td>
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<td><strong>Access</strong></td>
<td>Different levels of access can be set (from the general public to restricted membership via password system)</td>
<td>Different levels of access can be set (from the public at large, to controlled membership)</td>
<td>Normally limited to members (signed up or designated – such as a class)</td>
<td>Controlled; security a feature&lt;br&gt;Off-site access may be</td>
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| Member identification | • Online presence of other members not shown  
• Editing can be anonymous or signed  
• May have ‘talk’ or discussion page where members can identify themselves and interact. | Attribution of comments important | • Attribution a key feature (authorship generally shown) – can see who said what and when  
• Direct contact with other members possible | • Online presence of other readers not shown  
• Current editors flagged upon document access  
• No inbuilt means to contact other members |
| Interface & organisation | • WYSIWYG  
• As for web pages, in addition to text can include/upload graphics and other media  
• Flexible layout, with different templates available  
• Organised around topics, themes, categories (chronology not important) | • WYSIWYG  
• As for web pages, in addition to text can include/upload graphics and other media files  
• Flexible layout, with different templates available  
• Organised chronologically (diary-like) – with newest articles on top. [Often articles organised into categories]  
• Archive of older articles | • Entries need to be opened to view content  
• Text only (but can include non-text files as attachments)  
• Organised chronologically (i.e. time-indexed); ideas /exchange structured around topics and threads; new topics push old topics out of focus | File/folder directory structure |
| Search function | Being topic-based, can easily locate, navigate to, reference and use content | Search tools – for key text in Comments; terms in Posts | No search function (but can sort by author; topic/subject; date; read/unread) | By keywords/phrases |
| Links | • Links within the wiki important (of topic-related material – analogous to hypercard)  
• Also links to external URLs, wiki categories | Links to other blogs, web sites and other media a feature (as a ‘blogroll’) | Can insert links into a message (if web-based software) | No links between files on the drive (not web-based) |
| Version control and history of changes | • Can revert/rollback to previous versions  
• Page history of changes | No version control or change history tools | Not applicable (no editing function) | No version control or tracking tools provided. - Keeping track of changes/new versions requires strict adherence to version control protocols |
| Alert of new/edited content | Can set up RSS to notify members of updates and additions | Can set up RSS to notify members of new content | New postings can be flagged | No facility |
| Operational requirements | • Needs a high level of trust so that control can be divested to members  
• Needs protocols and conventions for naming pages, adding and editing content (Text mark up) | Needs regular posting to keep it fresh over the planned lifetime | • Moderation of discussion is often required to keep discussion on track  
• Users need to follow good ‘netiquette’ (for example, to avoid ‘flaming’) | ‘Ground rules’ need to be explained – permissions to create or access folders within the folder hierarchy etc. |
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| **Applications** | • Project management and documentation – project teams can store agendas, minutes, references, links to sites and create online documents and reports [*‘meetings’ wikis*]  
  • Supporting communities of practice – sharing and incremental, collaborative building of understandings and functioning knowledge of practice  
  [knowledge’ wiki]  
  • Strategic planning, policy development and reporting – brainstorming; joint working on plans, policies, reports etc.  
  • Shared knowledge base – sharing of documentation and other information  
  [Single use]  
  • ePortfolio (topic/theme-indexed)  
  • Brainstorming  
  • concept mapping  
  • online lab book / research notes  
  [Student focus]  
  • Peer editing of a document (report, essay, piece for publication etc.)  
  • Creating a glossary of terms  
  • Compiling a reading list | • ‘Harvesting’/sharing of knowledge resident in individual experts or research /innovation groups  
  • Journaling (personal reflective journal – but more than a diary, inviting comment) – staff; students  
  [Student focus]  
  • Publishing of individual/team work (projects, assignments) with associated reflection  
  • ‘Discussions’ with experts (blog exchanges)  
  • ePortfolio (time indexed)  
  • class bogging across borders (institutions, states, countries etc.)  
  • Creative writing  
  • Analytical writing and reflection (with accompanying audio visual files) | • ‘Social’ club (e.g. book club)  
  • Forum to explore views/opinions in an organisation  
  [Student focus]  
  • Online asynchronous tutorials  
  • ‘Help’ facility  
  • Analytical writing and reflection  
  • Student feedback on course | Housing/archiving of project products (drafts; final versions) |