Wikipedia Assignments
as an e–Learning Component

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Chapter Outline

1. Good idea!
   - Overview
   - Case Studies

2. …but how to make it work?
   - Recipes
   - Shortcuts
   - Ressources
Outline

1. Good idea!
   - Overview
   - Case Studies

2. ...but how to make it work?
The 21st century encyclopedia

- Started 2001, open source, content licensed under CC-BY-SA
- 35 million articles, 288 languages
- Largest edition: English, 4.8 million articles, 500 million unique readers
- the Internet’s largest and most popular general reference work
- Written by about 100,000 volunteers
- 21st century’s outline, bibliography, and definition of knowledge
Educational assignments

- Various types:
  - create an article
  - improve an article
  - run an experiment

- Various sizes: from a “class” of five to several thousand

- Various modes:
  - voluntary or compulsory
  - assessed with a mark or not
  - individual or group work

- Various expectations
  - make useful edits
  - add any type of content
  - achieve a quality milestone (“good article”, “start class”)
Possible outcomes

1. **Win–Win–Win–Win**
   - **Students**—media literacy, experience, impact
   - **Local community**—knowledge and language preservation
   - **Teachers**—feedback on assessment methods, impact
   - **Global community**—new content, more hands and eyes

2. **Lose–Lose–Lose–Lose**
   - **Students**—overwhelmed, lectured, driven away
   - **Local community**—no valuable content
   - **Teachers**—exposed to criticism
   - **Global community**—lots of janitorial work, little gain
Case studies I

   - English Wikipedia—Project page
   - 26 students, 10 articles on Latin American literature
   - Instructor is administrator on the English Wikipedia, 20,000 edits
   - No tutors
   - Lots of help from 10 experienced Wikipedia editors
   - Judged as full success, despite getting nowhere near the desired outcome (Featured Articles)

2. India Education Project (2011)
   - English Wikipedia—Project page
   - 670 students (520 never edited), no defined scope
   - No main instructor
   - Tutors were students and newbies on the English Wikipedia
   - Lots of intervention from experienced Wikipedia editors
   - Judged as absolute debacle (plagiarism, language abilities)
Case studies II

3 Polytechnic of Namibia (2010)
- English Wikipedia—Project page
- 200 students, 190 articles on Namibia
- Main instructor 5,000 edits,
- tutors newbies but published academics
- no help from experienced Wikipedia editors
- somewhat successful but tutors didn’t help at all

4 Polytechnic of Namibia (2012)
- English Wikipedia—Project page
- 2,000 students (1,500 never edited), 400 articles on Namibia
- Main instructor 10,000 edits, tutors newbies
- Tutors junior academics but non–published
- no help from experienced Wikipedia editors
- unsuccessful, instructor overwhelmed, tutors didn’t help
...but how to make it work?

Outline

1. Good idea!
2. ...but how to make it work?
   - Recipes
   - Shortcuts
   - Ressources
Recipe for disaster

1. Assessment designer not a Wikipedian
2. No prior training for tutors
3. Lecture focus on technical abilities (formatting, account creation)
4. Loose, if any, topic restriction
5. Strict deadline, punishment for non-submission
6. First non-essay writing experience for students
7. Students write in their second or third language
8. Large course
9. Ad-hoc design and implementation
10. No prior engagement with editor community
Recipe for success

1. Semester 1: Main instructor becomes a Wikipedian.
   - Can write a new article of someone else’s choice, and make it stick
   - Is an active editor (min. 5 edits/month) with 3 months free of warnings
   - Can and does participate in policy debate

2. Semester 2: Main instructor trains tutors.
   - Tutors achieve the abilities of main instructor, semester 1
   - Tutors are examined on their abilities. Fail \( \Rightarrow \) no contract!

3. Semester 2: Main instructor designs assessment.
   - Realistic expectations, depending on student’ level of writing and insight
   - Minimum example: “Add one sentence in grammatically correct language and neutral wording, formatted according to Wikipedia custom, and referenced to at least one reliable and independent secondary source.”

Shortcuts

1. Use smaller Wikipedia editions
   - Indigenous languages leave less room for plagiarism
   - Fewer editors, fewer rules
   - Smaller Wikipedia, more enthusiasm

2. Avoid freshmen
   - Senior students figure out themselves how to achieve set goals
   - Have considerable subject knowledge

3. Allow group work
   - Underachievers can wiggle through
   - Guaranteed level of discussion

4. Allow sandbox submissions
   - Less scrutiny by editor community
   - But more work for tutors and instructor
Available support

- Wikipedia Education Program
  - Instructional videos
  - Mailing list
  - Newsletter
  - Brochures to download (English, French, Portuguese, Italian)
- English Wikipedia Tea House
  - Newbie help
- English Wikipedia School and University Projects
  - Further links (course management portal, current courses)
- Wikimedia Foundation
  - Ship T-Shirts, brochure hardcopies
  - Facilitate liaison with other educators
  - all “official” advice
- Individual editors or employees
  - Tighe Flanagan (Wikipedia—Email)
  - Peter Gallert (Wikipedia—Email)
End of Presentation

Any questions?

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