



A Wiki What?

By Molly Morris, memDesigns, November 2007
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Pop quiz from last month's article: What is the easiest way for me to find the definition of *wiki*? Answer – type “define: wiki” in the Google search bar. Having done that, I now know that the word “wiki” comes from a Hawaiian word that means “quick”, and a wiki is a collaborative website that can be quickly edited by visitors.

Wikipedia is an online free-content encyclopedia written collaboratively by volunteers from around the world. You, too, can be an author. Because of its free-content and collaborative nature, you might wonder how accurate the articles in Wikipedia can be. After all, we all know people who like to think they are authorities on a subject, but how much stock would we put in their expertise? In fact, the reliability of Wikipedia articles is better than you might think. In 2005, the British journal, *Nature*, conducted a peer-reviewed study of the accuracy of 42 comparable scientific articles from each of Wikipedia and *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and found four errors in each source. What's impressive is that because of the open-content and “wiki” nature of Wikipedia, the errors that were found in Wikipedia's articles were immediately corrected upon identification.

In addition to the collaborative encyclopedia, there are several other open-content projects which deliver a cornucopia of information. Below is a list of Wiki-reference sites with short descriptions provided by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation (owner of these Wiki-sites).

Wikiquote: Can't remember who said it? This is a free online compendium of quotations from notable people and creative works in every language, including sources (where known), translations of non-English quotes, and links to [Wikipedia](#) for further information! The English version of Wikiquote has 13,944 pages so far, with many thousands of quotations and proverbs.

Wikispecies: Is there a budding biologist in your life? Wikispecies is an open, free directory of species. It covers Animalia, Plantae, Fungi, Bacteria, Archaea, Protista and all other forms of life. So far they have 113,150 articles.

Wikinews: This is a free news source, similar to Google News or any other online news source with the exception that the stories are not from mainstream news sources (although mainstream sources are often referenced.)

Wikibooks: Here is where you can find a free collection of open content textbooks that anyone can edit, including a Wikimedia [Cookbook](#) and WikiJunior (see below.) Since its founding, volunteers have written about 27,384 modules in a multitude of textbooks.

[WikiJunior](#): The aim of this project is to produce age-appropriate, non-fiction books for children from birth to age 12. These books are richly illustrated with photographs, diagrams, sketches, and original drawings. WikiJunior books are produced by a worldwide community of writers, teachers, students and young people all working together. If the words “science fair” strike fear in your heart, you must check out [Wikijunior’s Big Book of Fun Science Experiments](#).

[Wikiversity](#): This is a community for the creation and use of free learning materials and activities.

[Wiktionary](#): The lexical companion to Wikipedia, this collaborative project has produced a free, multilingual dictionary with definitions, etymologies, pronunciations, sample quotations, synonyms, antonyms and translations.

[Wikisource](#): This online library of free content publications collected and maintained by the community can be searched by genre or subject matter, and includes some 200 audio files (including our family favourite, [Jabberwocky](#), by Lewis Carroll.)

[Commons](#): If you’re looking for free image, sound or video files, this database of over 2 million media files is a good place to start. Each piece of media comes with copyright and licensing information, but almost all of it is freely usable.

With all this information at your fingertips, you should be able to get the answer to just about any question. So, wiki-away!