

Sample Project: How to Write an Informational/  
Explanatory Text

*An Informational Wiki*



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## Sample Project: How to Write an Informational/ Explanatory Text

***Total estimated class time needed:*** depends quite a bit on teachers' work length and revision requirements. Suggested class time: 5 - 10 class periods (will vary depending on how much research students are asked to do outside of class time, how much time you want to spend on introducing Wikis, and how students organize information within a Wiki.)

### Selecting a Topic

For example, ***WOW Project: Writing, Organization and the Wiki***

The WOW Project requires students to

1. Identify and understand a topic,
2. Develop a central focus of their topic
3. Select and analyze relevant content
4. Convey ideas clearly and precisely, and
5. Determine the organizational structure that would be the most effective for developing their central focus.

Creator's structure tool allows a student to organize, plan and present information that closely mirrors that of a Wiki environment. Wikis afford students the opportunity to write using nonlinear text structures. For example, students can use hyperlinks in their wiki writing to create new associations, links, comparisons, and connections within and between their own or other authors' print texts or multimedia texts, anywhere on the Internet. Such hyper-linking affords the creation of connected meaning-making that was previously unknown to text-

based writers and increases the opportunity for nonlinear thinkers to express themselves using written text. Wikis can also be used to promote student writing in that it gives students opportunities to express themselves using multiple modalities. For example, students can use wikis to insert music, graphics, video, and photos in their writing and to communicate meanings that were once inaccessible through the printed word. By encouraging such multimodal compositions, teachers can free those students who struggle to express themselves with written words; and encourage all students to write using a variety of multimodal methods.

The WOW Project can also be used to map concepts, for brainstorming, and as an editing tool that can produce a linked network of resources. Single-user wikis allow a student to collect and edit his/her own thoughts. Using a wiki as a writing tool maximizes the advantages of reflection, review and publication, and allows teachers to observe the cumulative written results as they unfold. In all, the WOW Project discourages 'product-oriented writing' and instead facilitates 'writing as a process.'

### **Aligning with Common Core State Standards**

**W.8.2** - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content:

1. Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
2. Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
3. Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
4. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
5. Establish and maintain a formal style.
6. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

**W.8.5** - With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

**W.8.6** - Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

**W.8.8** - Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

## **Establishing Learning Objectives**

Students will...

1. Use Scholar to write an informative/explanatory Wiki-like informational text.
2. Examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.
3. Use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information, and then create and communicate knowledge.
4. Utilize the structure tool within the Scholar environment to help organize their information and knowledge construction.
5. Evaluate their peers' WOW projects using peer review criteria.
6. Revise their WOW projects based on peer review criteria and their own re-evaluation of their project.

## **Teacher Preparation**

If you are not already familiar with wikis and their use, spend some time learning about them before starting this lesson. A wiki is an online application that allows users to add content to an encyclopedic website and also allows other users to edit the content without requiring a high degree of technical knowledge. For more information about wikis see [Wikipedia: Wiki](#) and [Wiki Wiki Web](#). One good way to familiarize yourself with how users participate in producing wikis, including how they use links, is simply to spend some time browsing different entries on the [Wikipedia](#) website.

Since wiki writing requires students to think differently about informative/explanatory writing, it is useful to introduce them first to nonlinear information and to ways in which you can categorize, present and organize information into topics and sub-topics. Wikis may also use different forms of media (photos, illustrations, graphs, maps, video, etc.) for conveying content and meaning.

A great way to introduce students to how Wikis organize information would be to have them look up Wikipedia entries for people, places, TV programs, etc. During this exercise you can have them evaluate and analyze the Wikis in terms of how they differ in terms of structure, what information they provide, how the information is organized and how/why they have incorporated links and multimedia.

### Developing an Instructional Plan

1. Introduce students to the Wiki concept using on-line examples. Discuss how the Wikis organize, categorize and present information.
2. Discuss and review the WOW project rubric, the purpose of peer feedback, WOW project expectations, and post-project surveys.
3. Students will need some time before they choose their own topic and then research information about it.
4. Students need to be shown how to utilize the structure tool within Creator. Allow students time to experiment with the structure tool. Ask the students to use the structure tool to create topics, through creating a new element for each, and sub-topics, through nesting some topics under others. Have students experiment with the ordering of their information within their WOW project.

*Procedure:*

<i>Web Writing Activity</i>	<i>Activity Examples</i>	<i>Scholar Tools</i>
Connect	Discussion: Who uses wikis? Which ones? When? Why? How do people navigate them?	Offline or general search.
Immerse	Students look at several different kinds of wikis or types of wiki entries (e.g. people vs places in Wikipedia). What is the role of structure?	Access published mentor texts online.
Name	Ask students to identify the key structure concepts in wikis.	Offline discussion.
Structure	Ask students to choose the topics of their wiki entries, then have them lay out headings. Note: students may also have subheadings.	Planning and revising in the structure tool.
Draft	Have students start to draft their own wiki entries. They can add multimedia content. Before submitting, they should check their entries against the review criteria provided.	Using the Creator workspace and review toolgroup's criteria tool.

Review	Students provide feedback on each other's texts against review criteria.	Using the review toolgroup's review tool.
Annotate	At the same time, students write detailed comments and suggest local changes on a text.	Using the annotations tool.
Survey	Students take a survey to determine their underlying understanding of the genre or the subject matter of a text that they have read, written or reviewed. This could be diagnostic (to see what students already know), formative (to give students feedback on what they have learned, during their learning), or summative (to find out what they have learned by the end of the web writing project).	Using the survey tool, located in the tools toolgroup.
Redraft	Students review their peers' feedback, and rewrite their wiki entries.	Creating a new version of their work in Creator.
Publish	After a final draft, the work is published.	Using the Publisher area in Scholar - the teacher will publish in Bookstore. (Not yet available; in development.)

*Example Topics:*

- Choose a topic that you are passionate about, and write a wiki entry providing information which would explain this topic to someone unfamiliar with it. For example, describe the history and development of a game, sport, new technology, etc.
- Create a character Wiki for a fictional character. Or create a wiki entry for a book, poem or song. Research and evaluate symbolism, characters, theme, etc. Or compare and contrast a movie of the same title to a book, a poem to a song, video game to a movie, etc.

*Example Wikis:*

- *Harry Potter Wiki:* [http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Harry\\_Potter](http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Harry_Potter) [This Wiki shows how you provide information about a fictional character. The information is broken down into specific topics and sub-topics. The information provided includes quotations from the novels, pictures from the movies, and hyperlinks to more information.]
- *Twilight Wiki:* <http://twilightsaga.wikia.com/wiki/Vampire> [This Wiki takes up the topic Vampire and breaks apart the characteristics of vampires within the

Twilight series. This Wiki also utilizes hyperlinks, screen shots from the movies, makes comparisons to other characters, and uses quotations and examples from the books.

- *Super Mario Wiki*: [http://www.mariowiki.com/Mario\\_Sports\\_Mix](http://www.mariowiki.com/Mario_Sports_Mix) [This Wiki shows how you can provide information on a video game. This Wiki uses a table to show how each games utilizes various controllers, either the same or differently.]
- *Skateboard Wiki* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skateboard> [This wiki shows how you can provide information about an object and break it into Topics and sub topics, using pictures, links, and animations.]
- *Return of the King Wiki* [http://lotr.wikia.com/wiki/Movie\\_vs\\_Book:Return\\_of\\_the\\_King](http://lotr.wikia.com/wiki/Movie_vs_Book:Return_of_the_King) [This Wiki compares Tolkien’s book *The Return of the King* to the Peter Jackson movie version of the book].

### Peer Review Format (Rubric)

Criteria	3	2	1	0
<b>Organization</b>	Content is well organized, using headlines to group related material.	Uses an organizational structure which groups some but not all, related information.	Uses a loosely defined organizational structure which attempts to group similar items.	There was no clear or logical organizational structure, just a lot of facts.
<b>Layout</b>	Makes frequent and effective use of headings and bullet points to enhance the content’s visual appeal and increase readability.	Makes occasional use of headings and bullet points to enhance the content’s visual appeal and increase readability.	Makes minimal use of headings and bullet points to enhance visual appeal and readability.	Makes no use of headings and bullet points to enhance visual appeal and readability.
<b>Content</b>	Explains all ideas with effective supporting evidence. Knowledge about the topic	Explains most ideas clearly and concisely with supporting evidence. Knowledge about the topic	Incompletely explains ideas and does not effectively use supporting evidence.	Fails to explain ideas clearly, and does not use any supporting evidence.

	is excellent.	is good.		
<b>Hyperlinks</b>	All links provide essential information and add depth to the project.	Includes links to websites or documents, but not all links enhance the information presented.	Includes links to websites or documents which add little value to the information presented.	Does not include any links, or the links selected are of poor quality and do not add any value to the information presented.
<b>Graphics and Multimedia</b>	Selects high quality graphics and multimedia when appropriate to enhance and clarify the content.	Selects graphics and multimedia which are mostly high quality and enhance and clarify the content.	Selects many low-quality graphics and multimedia which do not enhance the content.	Selects no graphics, or uses only low-quality graphics and multimedia which do not enhance the content.

## Post Project Survey

Please answer the following 20 questions by choosing the number that you agree with most:

<b>While working on my Scholar Writing Project...</b>	<b>Not very true</b>		<b>True of me</b>		
1. I often think about the best way to show an idea on the screen, like Should I use a graphic or should I just write about it?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
2. I think that having other students look at my Scholar writing is important.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
3. Working with Scholar sure beats listening in class.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
4. I like to show my Scholar writing project to other students.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
5. I prefer to plan what to put in my Scholar writing project before I sit down in front of the computer.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

6. I think creating Scholar writing projects is fun.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I learn more when I make a Scholar writing project than when I do other types of projects.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I prefer to work by myself on my Scholar writing project than in a group.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I think having different experts in the class helps with peer review.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I find myself doing preparation work before I actually use Scholar to create my project.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I find myself wanting to spend more time working on the Scholar project during study hall or after school.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I don't want to plan when I start my Scholar project.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I learn from other students' comments after they have looked at my Scholar project.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Overall, with peer review, I can accomplish more than I can by myself.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I really enjoy using Scholar as a way of learning.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I try my best to make the main idea clear.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I find time goes by faster when I work on my Scholar writing project.	1	2	3	4	5
18. When I have a question, my fellow class members usually help me.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I remember more about a topic when I have to make a Scholar writing project.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Peer review really makes Scholar projects better.	1	2	3	4	5

*Please answer the following questions with clear and complete sentences:*

21. Did you think the structure tool was helpful? If Yes, how was it helpful? If No, why wasn't it helpful?

22. While using Scholar to create your Wiki Project, what did you do and what did you think about?

23. How useful was the feedback you received from your reviewers? How did you change your final draft?

24. What kinds of feedback are helpful and not helpful? How can you become a more helpful reviewer?