

Kolabora

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March 1, 2007

Collaborative Writing Tools And Technology: A Mini-Guide

Collaborative writing tools are those technologies that facilitate the editing and reviewing of a text document by multiple individuals either in real-time or asynchronously.

Online, web-based collaborative writing tools offer great flexibility and usefulness in learning groups and educational settings as they provide an easy mean to generate text exercises, research reports and other writing assignments in a full collaborative fashion.

Collaborative writing tools can vary a great deal and can range from the simplicity of wiki system to more advanced systems. Basic features include the typical formatting and editing facilities of a standard word processor with the addition of live chat, live markup and annotation, co-editing, version tracking and more.

Google itself has recently entered this field with its [Google Docs](#), a fully-web based collaborative writing tool formely known as Writely. Documents generated with such tools are always accessible to all the editors and can be easily downloaded and exported in standard word processing file formats.

Here are more details about collaborative writing:

The key features that characterize collaborative writing tools and technologies include:

- **File types supported:** which are the supported file formats for the files that can be edited collaboratively
- **Text chat:** the presence of a text chat that users can utilize to communicate while editing
- **Revisions:** the capability to track all changes made to the original document and go back to older versions
- **RSS:** support for RSS feeds, allowing users to get real-time notifications when changes are made.
- **Email updates:** the capability to receive email updating users when there are changes to the documents that are being edited.
- **Public/Private:** the possibility to set up private or public collaborative editing sessions.
- **Max Editors:** the max number of editors allowed
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** the possibility to collaboratively edit in real-time
- **Software/Web-based:** the type of collaborative system
- **Comments:** the possibility to add comments to the document
- **Spell check:** the availability of a spell checking tool

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Web-based Collaborative Writing tools

Zoho Writer



Zoho Writer is a collaborative editor that lets you create your documents and share them publicly or privately. The interface is very intuitive and you can import any existing document to work on it. Zoho Writer also enables you to export your text in several formats, such as PDF, ODT, Word, HTML and others. Zoho Writer offers about 20 different fonts among which to choose. Free to use.

- **Supported file types:** Text, Images
- **Text chat:** NO
- **Revisions:** YES
- **RSS:** NO
- **Email updates:** YES
- **Public/Private:** Public/Private
- **Max Editors:** N/A
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** NO
- **Software/Web-based:** Web-based
- **Comments:** NO
- **Export/File formats:** YES/doc, pdf, html
- **Spell check:** YES
- **Price:** Free
- **Link:** <http://writer.zoho.com/>

[Read our review of Zoho Writer](#)

Writeboard



Writeboard is a web-based editor that enables you to write online documents and collaborate with colleagues. You can subscribe to documents via RSS to be notified of changes and keep your writings organized with Backpack integration. Writeboard requires Internet Explorer 6.x, Safari, or Firefox and it is free to use.

- **Supported file types:** Importing external files is not possible
- **Text chat:** NO
- **Revisions:** YES
- **RSS:** NO
- **Email updates:** YES
- **Public/Private:** Public/Private
- **Max Editors:** Unlimited
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** NO
- **Software/Web-based:** Web-based
- **Comments:** NO

- **Export/File formats:** NO
- **Spell check:** YES
- **Price:** Free
- **Link:** <http://www.writeboard.com/>

Google Docs & Spreadsheets



Google Docs & Spreadsheets is a web-based editor that allows you to create text documents and spreadsheets. You can easily do all the basics, including making bulleted lists, sorting by columns, adding tables, images, comments, formulas, changing fonts and more. Google Docs & Spreadsheets allows you to upload your files and make changes to them online. It accepts most popular file formats. It is possible to invite people and work on files collaboratively; additionally, you can publish your documents and spreadsheets online with one click, as normal-looking web pages. Free to use.

- **Supported file types:**Text, Spreadsheets, Images
- **Text chat:** YES
- **Revisions:** YES
- **RSS:** YES
- **Email updates:**NO
- **Public/Private:** Public/Private
- **Max Editors:** 50
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** YES
- **Software/Web-based:** Web-based
- **Comments:** YES
- **Export/File formats:** YES/doc, xls, pdf, html, txt, rtf, odt, sxw
- **Spell check:** YES
- **Price:** Free
- **Link:** <http://docs.google.com/>

Near-Time



Near-Time is an online asynchronous collaboration platform that supports collaboration on all environments. It's web-based and hosted, so there's no installation. Near-Time is based upon emerging web-standards and takes advantage of many of the core components driving the new web. Near-Time integrates blogging, wikis, calendaring, email, file sharing, RSS output, tags and more. The basic edition costs \$9.95 per month and \$99.95 per year. Check out the complete [pricing list](#).

- **Supported file types:** Text, Images
- **Text chat:** NO
- **Revisions:** YES
- **RSS:** YES
- **Email updates:** YES
- **Public/Private:** Private

- **Max Editors:** Unlimited
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** NO
- **Software/Web-based:** Web-based
- **Comments:** YES
- **Export/File formats:** */HTML, xml
- **Spell check:** NO
- **Price:**Basic edition \$9.95 per month and \$99.95 per year
- **Link:** <http://www.near-time.net/>

[Read our review of Near-Time](#)

Socialtext



Socialtext is a collaboration platform that allows everyone to work on the same page. It allows users to edit within a simple WYSIWYG interface and you can also preview while editing and comment on any page. Socialtext provides both a hosted service and a hardware / software appliance for installation. Deployment options are designed for range of organizational needs: Enterprise, Professional, Personal and Open Source. The basic account is free; check out the [other plans](#).

- **Supported file types:**Text, Images
- **Text chat:** NO
- **Revisions:** YES
- **RSS:** YES
- **Email updates:** YES
- **Public/Private:** Private
- **Max Editors:** Unlimited
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** NO
- **Software/Web-based:** Web-based
- **Comments:** YES
- **Export/File formats:** */HTML, Text
- **Spell check:** NO
- **Price:**
- **Link:** <http://www.socialtext.com/>

[Read our review of Socialtext](#)

Quick Doc Review



Quick Doc Review gives you an instant private space for gathering comments on any Word and HTML document. Your group can comment on each paragraph, directly within the document, and you can also display, sort, and print the comments separately. You can start your document review in about one minute. It's even easier for your readers because they don't have to register or sign in. The basic review service is free, while a Pro version which adds password protection and full customization costs \$79/year.

- **Supported file types:** Text

- **Text chat:** NO
- **Revisions:** YES
- **RSS:** NO
- **Email updates:** YES
- **Public/Private:** Public/Private
- **Max Editors:** N/A
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** NO
- **Software/Web-based:** Web-based
- **Comments:** YES
- **Export/File formats:** */doc, HTML, pdf
- **Spell check:** NO
- **Price:** Free. Premium version at \$79 per year
- **Link:** <http://www.quicktopic.com/>

EditGrid



EditGrid is a service that allows you to edit, store and access your spreadsheets from any computer with a browser. You can import from and export to common formats, including MS Excel, CSV, Gnumeric and OpenOffice's Calc. EditGrid supports Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla FireFox (Safari coming soon). Free to use.

- **Supported file types:** Spreadsheets
- **Text chat:** YES
- **Revisions:** YES
- **RSS:** NO
- **Email updates:** NO
- **Public/Private:** Public/Private
- **Max Editors:** N/A
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** YES
- **Software/Web-based:** Web-based
- **Comments:** NO
- **Export/File formats:** */xls, HTML, pdf, xml
- **Spell check:** NO
- **Price:** Free or \$5/user/month for organizations
- **Link:** <http://www.editgrid.com/>

SynchroEdit



SynchroEdit is a browser-based simultaneous collaborative editor. This tool is fully WYSIWYG, dynamically displaying bolds, italics, underlines, strikethroughs, with various justifications, indents and listing styles as an author inputs them. SynchroEdit also supports a simple, text-only editor for more basic documents. The editor window clearly

depicts every user's changes in a specific color and also marks where each user is currently editing with a colored flag listing the user's name. Free to use.

- **Supported file types:** Text
- **Text chat:** YES
- **Revisions:** NO
- **RSS:** NO
- **Email updates:** NO
- **Public/Private:** Private
- **Max Editors:** N/A
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** YES
- **Software/Web-based:** Web-based
- **Comments:** NO
- **Export/File formats:** NO
- **Spell check:** YES
- **Price:** Free
- **Link:** <http://www.synchroedit.com/>

PleaseReview



PleaseReview is a browser-based collaborative review and authoring solution. Every contributor can comment on the same document (both in real-time or asynchronous mode). The service includes deadlines management, email invitations and reminders. It is also possible to review the documents offline. PleaseReview supports MS Word, MS PowerPoint and allows the inclusion of images. PleaseReview costs \$55 per month and \$270 per year. Free 30-days trial available.

- **Supported file types:** Text, Images
- **Text chat:** NO
- **Revisions:** YES
- **RSS:** NO
- **Email updates:** N/A
- **Public/Private:** Private
- **Max Editors:** N/A
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** NO
- **Software/Web-based:** Web-based
- **Comments:** YES
- **Export/File formats:** NO
- **Spell check:** NO
- **Price:** \$55 per month
- **Link:** <http://www.pleasereview.com/>

[Read our review or PleaseReview](#)

Collaborative Writing software

Gobby



Gobby is a collaborative editor that allows you to edit text documents over a network. All users can work on the file simultaneously, without the need to lock it. The parts the various users wrote are highlighted in different colours and an IRC-like chat is also included. Gobby is completely cross-platform, therefore it runs on Windows, Mac OS X, Linux and other Unix-like platforms. Free to use.

- **Supported file types:** Text
- **Text chat:** YES
- **Revisions:** NO
- **RSS:** NO
- **Email updates:** NO
- **Public/Private:** Private
- **Max Editors:** N/A
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** YES
- **Software/Web-based:** Win, Mac, Lin
- **Comments:** NO
- **Export/File format:** YES/HTML, pdf, xml
- **Spell check:** NO
- **Price:** Free
- **Link:** <http://gobby.0x539.de/>

ACE



ACE is a downloadable collaborative editor that allows groups of users to view and edit in real-time a shared text document. ACE is a simple text editor with standard features such as copy/paste and load/save. Multiple documents can be edited at the same time. Furthermore, ACE can share documents with other users on different computers, connected by communication networks. ACE runs across all major platforms, including Windows, Linux, and Mac. Free to use.

- **Supported file types:** Text
- **Text chat:** NO
- **Revisions:** NO
- **RSS:** NO
- **Email updates:** NO
- **Public/Private:** Private
- **Max Editors:** N/A
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** YES
- **Software/Web-based:** Win, Mac, Lin
- **Comments:** NO

- **Export/File formats:** NO
- **Spell check:** NO
- **Price:** Free
- **Link:** <http://ace.iserver.ch/>

Groove



Groove features folder synchronization and integration with Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Office. You can also share files, discussions, calendar, sketch, web links, pictures and a notepad. Collaborating users can also edit their documents while they are offline and sync up changes once they go online. Groove Virtual Office is available at no cost for personal use or 60-day business evaluation.

- **Supported file types:** Text, Spreadsheets, Images
- **Text chat:** YES
- **Revisions:** NO
- **RSS:** NO
- **Email updates:** YES
- **Public/Private:** Private
- **Max Editors:** Unlimited
- **Real-Time - Co-editing:** YES
- **Software/Web-based:** Win
- **Comments:** NO
- **Export/File formats:** YES/Office formats
- **Spell check:** NO
- **Price:** \$229
- **Link:** <http://www.groove.net/>

[Read our review of Groove](#)

Resources about Collaborative Writing

- **[Collaborative writing on Wikipedia](#)**

The terms collaborative writing and peer collaboration refer to projects where written works are created by multiple people together (collaboratively) rather than individually. Some projects are overseen by an editor or editorial team, but many grow without any top-down oversight...

- **[Collaborative writing definition](#)**

What is collaborative authoring or writing? One definition is: activities involved in the production of a document by more than one author, then pre-draft discussions and arguments as well as post-draft analyses and debates are collaborative components. Based on this definition, the collaborative authoring process includes the writing activity as well as group dynamics. Another definition is ...any piece of writing, published or unpublished, ascribed or anonymous, to which more than one person has contributed, whether or not they grasped a pen, tapped a keyboard, or shuffled a mouse. This definition alludes to the complexity of identifying and acknowledging contributions and their contributors...

- **What is collaborative writing**

Almost every book and article on collaborative writing begins by asking, "what is collaboration?" In most cases, the authors proceed to tear apart the reader's preconceived notions and to leave the question more confused than when they began. While often impractical and unproductive, this approach is understandable and usually justified; collaborative writing is a slippery concept. It is clear that collaborative writing refers to writing in groups but there are as many ways to write in groups as there are possible combinations of individuals. Where does "a little help" and editorial assistance end and collaboration begin? There are no definitive answers...

- **Collaborate @ Stanford**

Welcome to Collaborate!, a website devoted to collaborative writing and research in higher education. Established in conjunction with MLA President Linda Hutcheon's call for "alternatives to the adversarial academy" (MLA Convention, December 2000), this site provides a clearinghouse for information about ongoing collaborative efforts and invites the participation of all who wish to move beyond the academy's traditional agonistic individualism.

- **Group work and collaborative writing @ UC Davis**

Working with a group on a project can be a pleasure: responsibilities are equitably divided, the tedium of work is punctuated by conviviality and commiseration, and large problems dissolve under scrutiny from a variety of perspectives. Working with a group can also be frustrating, the seemingly indirect and digressive, as well as anxiety-ridden and inconvenient.

But still, the product of group work has better odds for success than does the product of an individual. While we give lip service to the value of the rugged individual, admiring ground breaking geniuses like Newton, Woolf, Einstein, and McClintock, or yearning for the self-sufficiency of the early settlers, the social reality is that, for most of us the bulk of our professional lives will be spent working in cooperation and collaboration with others within committees, research teams, boards, departments, professional societies, or corporations.

Self-sufficiency is arguably a noble ideal but also arguably an obsolete one... a visit to your local survivalist's cave in the hills will quickly demonstrate that absolute independence most often results in a primitive crudity which few of us are willing to accept as the price for uncompromising self-sufficiency.

Collaborative Writing tools comparison chart

Click on the screenshot below to [view the full chart](#).

Collaborative Writing Tools: Comparison Chart: Sheet1		
	Zoho Writer	Quick Doc Review
<i>File types supported</i>	Text, Images	Text
<i>Software/Web-based</i>	Web-Based	Web-Based
<i>Max Editors</i>	N/A	N/A
<i>Public/Private</i>	Public/Private	Public/Private
<i>Text chat</i>		
<i>Revisions</i>	*	*
<i>RSS</i>		
<i>Email updates</i>	*	*
<i>Real Time - Co-editing</i>		
<i>Comments</i>		*
<i>Spell check</i>	*	
<i>Export/File Formats</i>	*DOC, PDF, HTML	*DOC, HTML, PDF
<i>URL</i>	http://writer.zoho.com	http://www.quicktopic.com/
<i>Price</i>	Free	Free. Premium version at \$79 per year

Collaborative Writing News Radar

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Assessing the value of cooperation in Wikipedia *via Technorati*
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Italia SW » Collaborative Writing, scrivere diventa passione! *via del.icio.us/tag/collaborativewriting »*

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<http://harperfanlit.com/> *via del.icio.us/tag/collaborativewriting »*

a million penguins *via del.icio.us/tag/collaborativewriting »*

This information has been researched and collected by Robin Good in conjunction and support of the [LANCELOT Language Research Project](#) funded by the European Commission under the [LEONARDO DA VINCI](#), Language Competence II programme.

This mini-guide has been written for online teachers, trainers and language facilitators that need to navigate the vast sea of options and alternatives available to them. In no way this mini-guide intends to be a comprehensive and complete list of all tools and technologies for a specific use.

It is simply an initial starting guide for novice online tutors needing to understand within the least time possible which tools and technologies could be most appropriate for their online language training needs.

Please utilize the Comments section below to add and provide references, info and links to other relevant tools that could be included in this mini-guide.

posted by **Robin Good** on **Thursday, March 1 2007**

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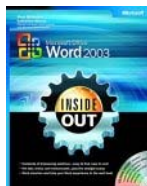
Recommended Books



OpenOffice.org Writer: The Free Alternative to Microsoft Word
Jean Hollis Weber
Amazon Price: \$18.96



The OpenOffice.org 2 Guidebook
Solveig Haugland
Amazon Price: \$59.99



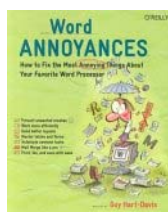
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