

# Using JotSpot: A Teacher's Experience

By

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<http://shiftingsemiosis.jot.com/WikiHome>

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## ***Using Jotspot for Teaching/Learning***

This will be a brief report as I am currently limited to using one hand only.

### **Use**

I used the JotSpot beta wiki as a course container (and example) for my course, *Computers and Communication*, (WRI305 – in the Professional Writing and Communications Program at the University of Toronto at Mississauga.) We met twice a week for 6 weeks. There were 35 students in the class.

### **Discovery**

Stephen Downes (<http://www.downes.ca/>) daily email – *OLDaily*

### **Background Knowledge**

- I approach the web as a former technophobe, who learns by immersion and necessity, asking for help from knowledgeable peers, students, or acquaintances, occasionally resorting to manuals or specific workshops.
- My background is not technical: I am interested in the communication possibilities of the web, and the rhetorical implications.
- The WYSIWYG aspect of JotSpot appealed to me, and seemed appropriate for a class with a broad cross selection of students with and without technical backgrounds.
- Few of the students had heard of wikis; none had used one.

### **Development**

- I laid out and linked a series of pages.
- I “discovered” the Permissions issue, and re-structured pages to allow student

access where useful, to maintain control where necessary, and to protect student personal information where appropriate.

- I used the “Tutorials,” “Quick Help Links,” and “FAQ” and found them quite helpful.

## Student Response

- Most of the students used the wiki as required for marks. A few went beyond that, as can be seen on the home page where a student added a banner he had created. The most (and the least) student creativity can be seen on the pages attached to the “PowerPoint” page.
- The “Appointments” page made basic use of the open quality of the wiki, and most students used at least that.
- *Quoted with permission:*

### Wiki Feedback

This is a great system to use in a class of fifty or less students. Wiki promotes class involvement. How? Even a single post by a classmate will encourage another to act on it. For example, if a student posts a link that interest another classmate – the link will be visited. This type of learning is not promoted in other courses – but it should be.

In an English course, this is a great way to convey your idea and share your work. I strongly support the use of Wiki in any learning or corporate environment.

The only negative aspect about Wiki is its “live” editing feature. Pages filled with bullets, table and colour cause the Wiki editor to “crash.” I think it is in the best interest for the Wiki designer’s to

upgrade their backbone (server) in order to become mainstream in the learning environment.

Wiki is a great tool and with some backbone upgrades it has the potential to become mainstream.

Feedback from,

– Ankur Gupta & Samir Suri

Samir aka Fresh Prince

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## Technical Problems

- Both the students and I found that the formatting could be “sticky” – especially on the “Explorations” page, the Level 3 Heading would stick even after repeated attempts to change to Normal font.
- When many students were all working on the wiki in the same computer lab at the same time, new entries sometimes wouldn’t “take” and had to be re-saved and sometimes even re-created.

## Advantages

- Using JotSpot as a course container allowed me to give students practical experience in using a wiki and the social nature of the web while introducing them to theory about many-to-many communication on the web,
- JotSpot, being WYSIWYG, allowed technically unsophisticated students to participate relatively easily.
- JotSpot allowed extended communication among the students.

- JotSpot was an excellent introduction to the possibilities of wikis.

## Considerations

- I have used WebCT for course management for several years. When it is well supported by the institution, it is a good Course Management Software, and easier in some ways than setting up a wiki. (Wikis are easier when there is weak institutional support for WebCT.)
- I have only used a wiki for a course container once, and have not fully explored all the JotSpot possibilities. For example, I used Blogger for the course blog, because I was already familiar with it.
- The aspect of WebCT that I missed the most was the integration of the mark recording with the access each student has to their own marks.

## Final Thoughts

I thoroughly enjoyed exploring the possibilities of using JotSpot as a course container. It was an excellent tool for teaching and learning, and for introducing students to the possibilities of wikis.

Good Luck as you move beyond the beta phase.