# PBworks Directions for Teachers

*One of the best tools for publishing the work of student research groups is PBworks (http://www.pbworks.com), a wiki service that allows users to create easy-to-edit websites that can be shared with the world. This set of directions introduces teachers to the basic steps involved in structuring classroom PBworks projects:*

| PBworks Directions for Teachers | |
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| **Steps to Take** | **Directions** |
| ***Creating a Free Education Wiki*** | *PBworks*—like many of the most popular wiki services—makes free classroom wikis available to K12 teachers. To create your own wiki, start by navigating to http://www.pbworks.com. Then, click the green ***Get Started*** button found on the right-hand side of your browsing window. From the ***Solutions*** menu that appears, select ***Educational*** wikis. Then, click the green ***Try It Now*** button. <br><br> A free ***Basic*** wiki—one of the three options that ***PBworks*** makes available to schools—will meet the needs of most classroom teachers. After clicking the blue ***Select*** button at the bottom of the column describing ***Basic*** wikis, work through the subsequent menus to name your wiki and to create your ***PBworks*** account. <br><br> After completing these steps, you will be redirected to the homepage of your wiki! |
| ***Creating Student Accounts*** | The first step that you'll want to take after setting up your wiki is to create individual accounts that the students in your classroom can use to login and edit pages in ***PBworks***. <br><br> Creating user accounts for each student allows teachers to track the contributions that individuals make to shared wiki pages. What's more, student accounts allow teachers to create a record of any inappropriate contributions made to classroom wikis—a layer of protection that district-level leaders often require before approving new digital projects. <br><br> To create individual accounts for your students, start by selecting the ***Settings*** link found in the top right-hand corner of your screen. Next, select the ***Users*** link found under ***Access Controls*** in the ***Settings*** menu on the left-hand side of your window. <br><br> *If your students are old enough to have email addresses of their own*, use the ***Email Address*** option in the ***Add Users*** window that appears to send invitations to your classroom wiki. You can also set ***Permission Levels*** for your student accounts by using the drop-down menu found in the center of your screen. <br><br> *If your students are not old enough to have email addresses of their own*, select the ***Create Accounts for Your Students*** link found at the top of the ***Add Users*** window. Then, fill in the ***How Many Students Need Accounts*** and ***What Permission Level Should They be Assigned*** windows. Finally, click the ***Continue*** button found at the bottom of your screen. <br><br> ***PBworks*** will generate a table including generic usernames and passwords for your students. If you are in a hurry, you can simply click the ***Continue*** button found at the bottom of your screen and hand out the generic usernames and passwords to your students. <br><br> You may, however, want to set aside time to customize these usernames and passwords. Doing so will make it easier for you to track individual contributions made to your wiki and easier for your students to manage their usernames and passwords. Many teachers decide to add students' first names and last initials in the ***Name*** box. They also change the generic usernames and passwords generated by |

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| Steps to Take | Directions |
|---|---|
| | **PBworks** to match usernames and passwords that students are already using for other school projects and/or services. |
| | When you are satisfied with the usernames and passwords that you have created for your students, click the **Continue** button found at the bottom of your screen.  After selecting **Create Accounts** from the **Confirm Account Details** window that appears, **PBworks** will send you an email confirming that your student accounts have been successfully added to your classroom wiki. |
| ***Setting Editing and Access Permissions*** | One of the most important decisions that you will have to make after creating your wiki is who you will allow to view and edit your classroom's content.  Philosophically, wikis are designed to be free and open communities where any user can participate both as a consumer and a creator of content. |
| | While those ideas may fit the original intention of wiki creators, they are not always appropriate for school-based wiki projects.  Protecting student identities and the content that research groups are working hard to create are important priorities for classroom teachers.  That's why many teachers choose to close wikis to outside viewers and/or editors. |
| | Both actions begin by signing in to **PBworks** and selecting the **Settings** link found in the top right-hand corner of your wiki.  Next, select the **Workspace Security** link found under **Access Controls** in the **Settings** menu on the left-hand side of your browsing window. |
| | In the **Workspace Security** menu that appears, teachers can decide **Who Can View** and **Who Can Edit** a workspace.  The most common settings are to allow **Anyone** to view a workspace—creating a public audience for student work—and **Only People I Invite** to edit a workspace, guaranteeing that student-generated content will be protected. |
| | After you have made your **Viewing** and **Editing** choices, click the **Save** button found at the bottom of your screen. |
| ***Setting Page Commenting Permissions*** | Another important decision for teachers is whether or not to open pages in a classroom wiki up to comments.  By opening pages to comments, teachers create forums that student research groups can use to collaborate.  Planning comments can be added, feedback can be gathered, and due dates can be set by students who are working together.  These opportunities for communication are especially important for groups working asynchronously across classrooms or continents. |
| | Opening wiki pages to comments also allows student research groups to receive feedback from members of their audience—one of the primary motivators and advantages of working with digital tools in the 21$^{st}$ Century.  Visitors can push the thinking of student research groups, pointing out areas where content and/or detailing is murky.  They can also celebrate wiki successes, providing a source of tangible encouragement for student writers. |
| | There are times, however, where teachers will want to close their wikis to comments from outside readers.  Comments require a level of diligence and monitoring that many teachers are unable to invest in classroom wiki projects.  Students need to protect their identities in wiki forums, which are visible to any viewer, and teachers need to protect students from inappropriate comments added by irresponsible outsiders.  This takes time and training. |
| | The default setting in **PBworks** is to leave pages open for commenting.  *To disable* |

| PBworks Directions for Teachers | |
|---|---|
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| | *commenting on your classroom wiki pages*, begin by selecting the **Settings** link found in the top right-hand corner of any wiki page.  Next, select the **Workspace Security** link found under **Access Controls** in the **Settings** menu on the left-hand side of your browsing window. |
| | Finally, check the box next to **Disable Commenting for Readers** found at the bottom of your browsing window and select **Save**. |
| **Monitoring Changes to Your Classroom Wiki** | For teachers, the greatest challenge in any digital learning experience is monitoring the content added by students for quality.  This challenge is amplified in classroom wiki projects, which encourage thousands of revisions!  Groups of students crafting pages on topics connected to the curriculum can easily make 30 to 40 changes to their wiki pages each week. Multiply that volume by classes with 10-plus student groups, and teachers can become quickly overwhelmed by content! |
| | To make monitoring classroom wikis easy and efficient, the most accomplished teachers use RSS feed readers—also known as content aggregators.  RSS feed readers visit web sites several times a day, reporting changes to users.  RSS feed readers can automatically show teachers every addition and revision to the content and comment conversations taking place in their classroom wikis. |
| | Before RSS feed readers can help you to monitor your classroom projects, however, you need to make a change to the **Notifications** setting in your wiki.  Start by clicking the **Settings** link in the top right-hand corner of any wiki page.  Then, select **Notifications & RSS**, found under **Access Controls** in the **Settings** menu on the left-hand side of your screen. |
| | Finally, turn the RSS feed for your wiki on by clicking the box found next to **Allow Users to Access this Workspace's RSS Feed** and selecting **Save**.  You will now be able to add your wiki to the sites that you are following in your RSS feed reader and to easily skim the changes that students make each day. |
| **Exploring other PBworks Projects** | Often, the most challenging task for teachers interested in starting classroom wiki projects is imagining what's possible.  Without a clear vision of how wikis can be used to facilitate the work that they are doing with students, teachers can end up struggling to structure a successful wiki experiences. |
| | **PBworks** understands this challenge, and has categorized a collection of open educational wikis that are worth exploring.  Including wikis from across content areas and grade levels—as well as wikis designed to facilitate communication between teachers and to deliver professional development—this collection of wikis should be high on your list of sites worth exploring. |
| | You can find the **PBworks** collection of educational wikis posted online at: |
| | http://www.publicpbwikis.com/educational |