

The Red Pencil Is Your Best Friend

Goals

- Teach students that revision is an important part of developing a quality piece of writing.
- Better motivate students to be active editors of their own and others' writing
- Teach students how to use a wiki, a powerful collaborative tool.

Hardware Needed

- Computers
- Digital projector and screen

Software Needed

Online wiki software such as pbwiki.com or wikispaces.com

Teacher Preparation

- Read the **How-To** on wikis.
- Create wiki pages for students to log into and edit. Make one page for each assigned group (you choose the number of students per group), plus one sample page to use as a demonstration. For the sample page, you can use your own vague sentence of the following example: "Maryanne walked into the room. She looked around her and was surprised that no one noticed her." Each wiki page should have its own sample sentence for students to work on. It is suggested that two copies of each sentence be available for students: one remains untouched and the other is edited. This allows for reflection at the end of the activity about how word choices changed the tone/theme of the sentence.



How-To:

Wikis

Instructional Tasks

Let students know that the revision process does NOT need to be something they dread. Introduce students to the idea of a wiki. If students have done previous work/research using wikipedia.org, emphasize the power of a wiki: users can log into and edit information themselves.

Show the class how to log in to their wiki page. Together, read the sample sentence. Collaborate with students to edit this sentence by replacing vague nouns and pronouns with specific nouns and exchanging boring verbs for vivid verbs. As students suggest changes, illustrate how to edit the wiki page by using a red font and the strikethrough feature.

After improving the initial sentence, assign students their task. In groups, they are to log in to the wiki, open up the page that corresponds to their group number, and revise the sentence on that page. Circulate to make sure that students can find their group's wiki page and make reasonable and helpful word choice revisions. Students should focus on word choice and come to a consensus on edits. When students are finished editing and have saved their work to the wiki, display the sentences and discuss the revisions each group made. Note particularly strong word choices and discuss how the theme/tone of the sentence changes through the revision process. Discuss how different groups ended up with different ideas based on the students' imaginative input.

Extensions

Wiki pages are typically able to handle uploaded pictures as well. When students are finished editing their sentence, they can search the Internet for images that could represent the revisions they have made. An further extension might be for students to draw a picture of their sentence, scan the picture in as a file, and add it to their wiki page.

Wikis have been shown to establish powerful home-school connections. Students can revise and edit their work anywhere they have an Internet connection. Before students leave for the day, print out slips of paper with the wiki address on it and encourage them to login at home as well, perhaps for extra credit.