

Google Docs and Wikis for Language Learning

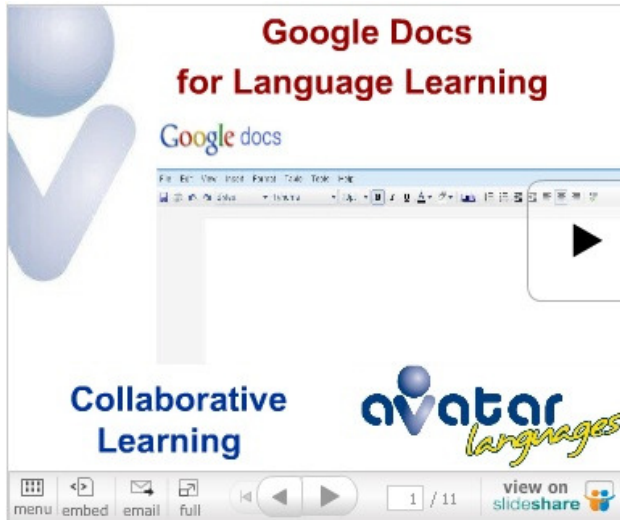
a guide for teachers



How to use Google Docs and Wikis in Language Lessons

Google Docs and similar wiki-based programs simplify collaborative writing projects and can also serve as a shared workspace for the entire class. They are accessed via the internet and so are available independently of location or device. Students quickly learn how to use the programs, because of their similarity to Microsoft Office.

What is it? And how is it normally used?



Google Docs is essentially Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint but available online for free. Whereas Microsoft Office stores each document on the hard-drive of your computer, Google docs stores it on one of Google's servers. Google Docs is therefore accessible through an internet connection using a normal browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox, etc). Documents can be shared with others and accessed at any time by all those with permission to do so. Documents can be jointly edited (even by users in different locations simultaneously), although each document always has a single owner. The document owner can share each document with other people and gives them the corresponding permissions (such

as to edit, to view only and to pass on to others to view/edit).

Google Docs is effectively a wiki. The technology used is essentially the same and there are similar issues of access, viewing/editing permissions and document storage. However, Google Docs is not intended to function as a collaborative, public website like most wikis, rather it is aimed at users of office suites who want an easier way to share and co-write reports, spreadsheets and presentations. Each document is automatically issued a unique web address that can be used to access that specific document.

Why would we be interested?

- **Familiarity:** students recognize the layout and functions as they are similar to Microsoft Word.
- **Simplicity:** Google Docs has fewer functions than Microsoft Word and so is easier to use for basic word processing.
- **Availability:** students with very good internet access can always access Google Docs regardless of which machine they are using or where they are.

How can we use it for language learning?

Google Docs offers an alternative to Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, and facilitates online collaboration and the organization of web-based information in an online notebook or folder. Collaborative writing projects can easily be done at a distance (eg for homework); users can even track the history of changes to understand how the document developed over time. Students can use these wiki-based tools for eportfolios or for collecting and organizing their ideas and notes online.



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- I. **Collaborative Writing:** students can write texts with one another and share them with the teacher. Just as wikis allow teachers to see who added what, the same is true with Google Docs (click on: Tools > Revision History). Students need not be in the same room; they can each edit at the same time or at different times. Private documents can be made public so that student work can be published to the web. As such, information could be presented to others in a similar way to using [Slideshare](#) or [Scribd](#).
- II. **Shared Online Workspace:** Students and teachers can edit the document at the same time and so Google Docs serves as a shared workspace for teachers and students in a lesson. Teachers can jointly correct a text with a student located elsewhere, perhaps by highlighting errors in different colours according to the type of mistake. In this way Google Docs effectively becomes an online whiteboard, yet has the structure and layout of a Word document.
- III. **Personal Learning Environment:** The flexibility of Google Docs makes it a good tool for a [personal learning environment](#) or [eportfolio](#). Just as with a wiki, learners can use Google Docs to record and share what they are learning. Students can add notes, images, links to sites and link to (or embed) videos etc to create an online folder. Zoho Notebook is an alternative to Google Docs. Zoho services can even be accessed by signing in with a Google Account.
- IV. **Spellchecker:** Google Docs has a multilingual spellchecker allowing students to check their spelling in their target language.

Pedagogies for Google Docs & Wikis

As a tool that enables collaboration amongst class members and others beyond the class, both [Dogme](#) and [Task-based learning](#) are well suited as methodologies.

Practicalities

Google Docs is accessed via a Google (or Gmail) account, which are free and easy to get. Students should take care to sign out when using public or shared computers, just as they would after checking their Hotmail account. This is especially important because access to a Google account also gives access to most other Google services, such as Gmail and Google Calendar.

Further Information

- [Google Docs](#).
- YouTube guide explaining [Google Docs](#).
- [Zoho](#) – an alternative to Google Docs.
- [WetPaint](#) – a free wiki site that could be an alternative to Google Docs.

Visit <http://www.avatarlanguages.com/teaching/googledocs.php> for multimedia and links.

