

Collaborative writing of R documentation using a Wiki

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Problem #1: keeping it updated

- New version of R every 6 months, sometimes more for R packages!
- **Official doc and R packages** doc is always updated
- **Unofficial documentation** is rarely updated: authors do not have time to do so
- **Mailing lists archives and papers** are statics, by definition

Current R documentation

- **is diversified:**
 - online help, manuals, vignettes for packages
 - books about R, contributed web pages, ...
 - Mailing lists, R News, JSS, ...
- **has efficient and feature-rich formats:**
 - Rd source files, LaTeX with Sweave
- **is easily “searchable”:**
 - Use and abuse of `help()` and `RSiteSearch()`

But...

Problem #2: cooperation & feedback

- Feedback to official doc and R packages doc through “bug reports” (sic!)
- Most R doc is written by developers,... some would say, for developers mainly! (beginners feedback does **not** make explicitly part of the R documentation production cycle)
- The only real “collaboration” area is through the mailing lists

Problem #3: its “technicality”

- Rd files & LaTeX / Sweave vignettes are great, but they are **technically rather complex formats**
- Beginners / intermediate useRs are often reluctant to write documents in such formats
- Yet, they are potentially excellent documentation writers, especially **doc targeting other beginneRs!**

Solution: a R Wiki?

A Wiki is:

- A server of **hyperlinked pages**
- Optimized for **concurrent and easy edition by everyone** through the Internet, using a simple web browser
- A **simple syntax** producing **rich-formatted documents** (wiki-wiki means 'quick-quick' in Hawaiian)

example...

A Wiki page source and result

Write this... just click 'save'... and you got this!

```
==== My first Wiki page ====
This is my first Wiki page
with:
* //simple __formattings__/,
* an equation:

$$\sum (x + 1)/\alpha$$

* a table:


| x   | y   |
|-----|-----|
| 1.3 | 5.6 |
| 4.8 | 7.0 |


* and some :R: code:
<code r>
x <- rnorm(50) # a random sample
mean(x)       # its mean and his
hist(x, main = "my histogram")
</code>
```

My first Wiki page

This is **my first Wiki page** with:

- *simple formattings*,

- an equation:

$$\sum \frac{x+1}{\alpha}$$

- a table:

x	y
1.3	5.6
4.8	7.0

- and some **R** code:

```
x <- rnorm(50) # a random sample
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```

Efficiency of the Wiki concept

- **Wikipedia** is probably the best example:
 - more than 1,000,000 articles written by many volunteers around the world
 - comparable in quality to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* according to a recent survey by the journal *Nature*

Proposition of a Wiki for R

- **Official launch of <http://wiki.r-project.org> !**
- **for:**
 - Beginners to start using R (**Getting started** section)
 - UseRs to contribute documentation: everybody can contribute -after login- either long (**Guides** section), or short documents (**Tips** section)

A tour of the R Wiki

Let's see now what it looks like...

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