

Collaborative writing of R documentation using a Wiki

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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 #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

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
mean(x)       # its mean and histogram
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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...

Many thanks to...

Jonathan Baron, Damian Betebenner, Roger Bivand, Ben Bolker, Dan Bolser, Patrick Burns, Nick Drew, Jose Claudio Faria, David Forrest, Romain François, Gregor Gorjanc, Gabor Grothendieck, Frank Harrell, Paul Johnson, Holly Kindsvater, Martin Maechler, John Marsland, Duncan Murdoch, Olivier Powell, Tony Plate, Barry Rowlingson, Paul Sorenson, Detlef Steuer, Daniel Rajdl, Kevin Wright, ...

**For helping me to set up this R Wiki site!
A special thank to:**

- **Detlef Steuer**, author of a previous version of the R Wiki,
- **Paul Johnson**, to accept migrating R Tips to the R Wiki
- **Vincent Zoonekynd**, to provide 'Statistics with R' to the Wiki