Collaborative writing of R documentation using a Wiki

Philippe Grosjean
phgrosjean@sciviews.org

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).

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.

A Wiki page source and result

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

```r
x <- rnorm(50) # a random sample
mean(x)        # its mean and his
hist(x, main = "my histogram")
```

Examples of wiki syntax:

- **my first Wiki page**
- ![A Wiki page source and result](image URL)

---

- ![Efficiency of the Wiki concept](image URL)
- ![A Wiki page source and result](image URL)
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