

Using a wiki for information services: principles and practicalities

Peter Blake

Electronic Services Librarian



Overview

- ACU reference desk manual
- Why a wiki?
- The wiki paradigm
- Planning and implementation
- Evaluation
- Amateur vs. professional reference
- Closing remarks



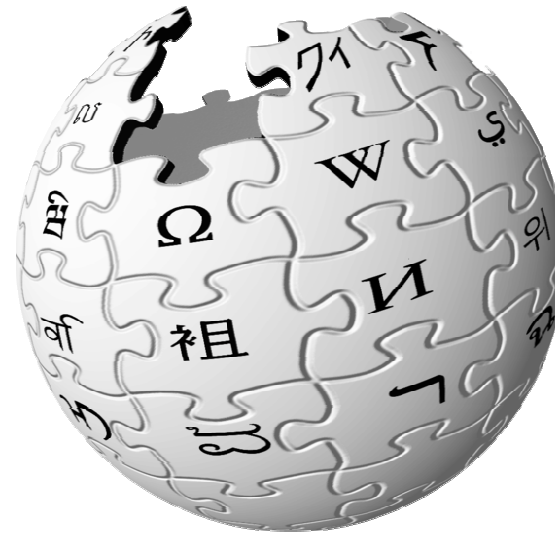
ACU reference desk manual

- Previous practice
- Desired advantages
 - Accuracy
 - Currency
 - Ease of use



Why a wiki?

- “The simplest database that could possibly work” (Ward Cunningham)
- Wikipedia must be doing *something* right





The wiki paradigm

- Web-based
- Broken links are encouraged
- Life cycle of a wiki page:
 - Links
 - Stubs
 - Pages
 - Subdivided pages



Planning and implementation

- What is your wiki's purpose?
- Features
- Language and database
- Community
- Scope
- How much structure?

Theseus and Tarzan





ACU wiki: structure

- Loose hierarchy of topics covered by existing manual
- Links between information
- Maximum depth
- Welcome and help text



Planning and implementation (2)

- Unique syntax (in many cases)
- Adaptation of previous practice
- Collaboration and human nature
- Continuing maintenance

RefDeskEManual

What is this?

This is a conversion of the McAuley Campus Library Reference Desk Manual running on the ACU National Lotus Notes server using the [DominoWiki](#) software.

How does it work?

Look up the topic you are interested using the categories on the right-hand side of the screen, or using the index pages listed below. If you think any information is missing, find the page you think it belongs on, then click the [EditPage](#) button at the bottom of the page. Add the information to the page, and then click the **Save** button. [Further instructions](#) are available, as is a [status report](#).

How do I find things?

The pages have been divided into categories which you can easily jump to using the links on the right-hand side of the page. You can also come back to this page and use this index (which is loosely based on the current [Reference Desk statistical categories](#)):

- **Types of users** – [Undergraduates](#), [Postgraduates](#), [Staff](#), [Community borrowers](#), [External students](#)
- **Other borrowing** – [Course Reading](#), [ICLs and ILLs](#), [Reciprocal borrowing](#)
- **Procedural** – [Emergencies](#), [Circulation Desk](#), [Library staff](#), [Procedures](#), [Reference Desk](#)
- **Information resources** – [Journals](#), [OPAC](#), [Subject searching](#), [Reference questions](#), [Study skills](#)
- **Directional** – [The Banyo campus](#), [Library layout](#), [Phone numbers](#), [Times and dates](#)
- **Online** – [Databases](#), [E-mail](#), [eReserve](#), [Inet](#), [WebCT](#)
- **Printing and photocopying**
- **Software and hardware** – [Laptops](#), [Microsoft Office](#), [Endnote](#), [Passwords](#), [Phones](#), [General Computing Information](#)
- **Other** – [Library equipment](#), [Room bookings](#)

[EditPage](#)

[Back](#) | [History](#) | [Index](#) | [BackLinks](#) | [StartPage](#)

RefDeskEManual home page

Closing Procedures

Loans Desk

Make Closing announcements:

- 30 mins before: "Attention please, the library will be closing at 9 o'clock. The service desks, photocopying and printing will close in 20 mins."
- 15 mins before: "The loans desk is about to close, please bring your loans to the desk now."
- 5 mins before: "The library is closing now, make your way to the exit."

Then..

- Close down PC's (including Discharge).
- Turn off [Self Check Unit](#)
- Lock front doors (two separate keys in Loans Desk drawer – turn to Lock).
- Gate Count (P figure recorded in Green Folder)
- Switch phone to [Voicemail](#) (CfwdAll then 7373)
- Turn off all lights at main switchboard in workroom except [Level B](#) Staff Area. Turn off switches at pillar (workroom lights) near entry to [CirculationDesk](#). *N.B. Security lights on Level A remain on.*
- Exit via rear door.

Reference Desk

Check carefully for patrons as you:

Level C –

- Close down [OPACs](#) (3) (ctrl,alt,delete – shutdown).
 - Study/seminar rooms – Close down PCs (4) (Rooms LC -02, 03, 04 & 07) (ctrl,alt,delete – shutdown).
- Turn off all lights and close all doors. [IC Annex](#) should already be locked.

Level A –

- Close down [OPACs](#) (3) (ctrl,alt,delete – shutdown).
- Turn off light and close door to [Photocopy Room](#).
- Check that doors to Technical Services are locked.

Level B –

- Turn off monitors in row 3, 4 & 5 (both sides) of [Information Commons](#)
- Check Toilets..

[EditPage](#)

[Back](#) | [History](#) | [Index](#) | [BackLinks](#) | [StartPage](#)

RefDeskEManual content page



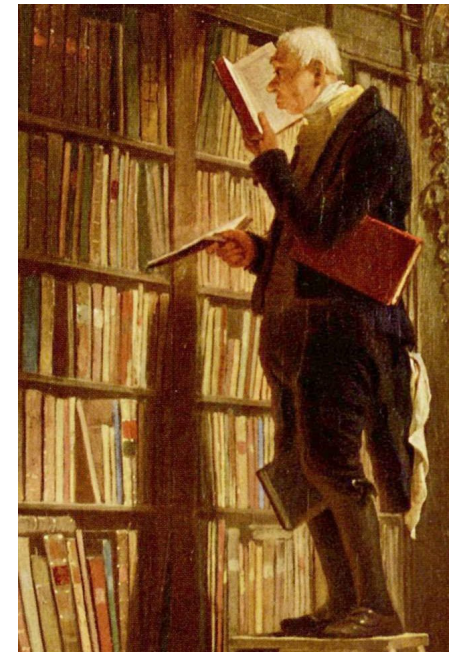
ACU wiki: evaluation

- Missing features
- To link or not to link?
- Training and roll-out
- Migration
- RefTracker



Amateur reference services vs. professional reference services

- Elements of an information service
 - Determination of user need
 - Information gathering
 - Communication back to user
- Wikipedia's reference desk
- U.S. university wikis



Wikipedia:Reference desk - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View Go Bookmarks Tools Help

W http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reference_desk

Sign in / create account

Your continued donations keep Wikipedia running!

project page discussion view source history

Wikipedia:Reference desk

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

[Help:Contents](#)




Wikipedia Reference Desk

Search Wikipedia:




The **Wikipedia reference desk** works like a [library reference desk](#). Before asking a question though, please try [using the search box](#) to find the answer you're looking for. For example, to find out more about the Seven Wonders of the World, you can find our article by entering *Seven Wonders of the World* into the box above.

Shortcut: WP:RD

If you can't find the answer by searching, and you'd like to ask the volunteers at Wikipedia, please choose a category for your question:

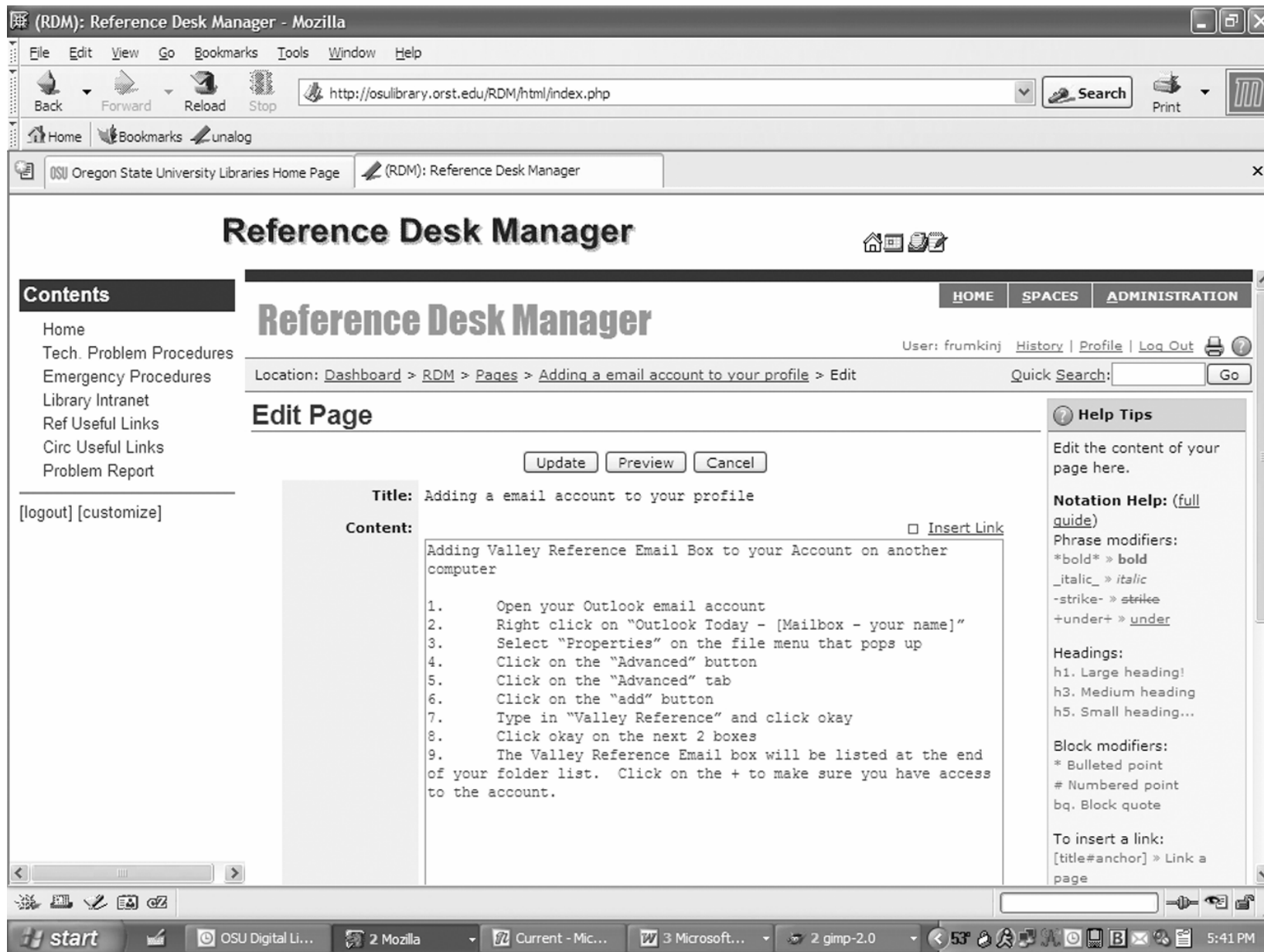
 Humanities History, art, politics, literature, religion, philosophy, law, music, fashion, culture, and society	 Science Science, medicine, and technology	 Mathematics Mathematics
 Computing/IT Computer science, software and hardware	 Language Spelling, grammar, word etymology, linguistics and language usage, and requesting translations (check the FAQs tool)	 Miscellaneous Subjects that don't fit in any of the other categories

Where to get help with problems using Wikipedia:

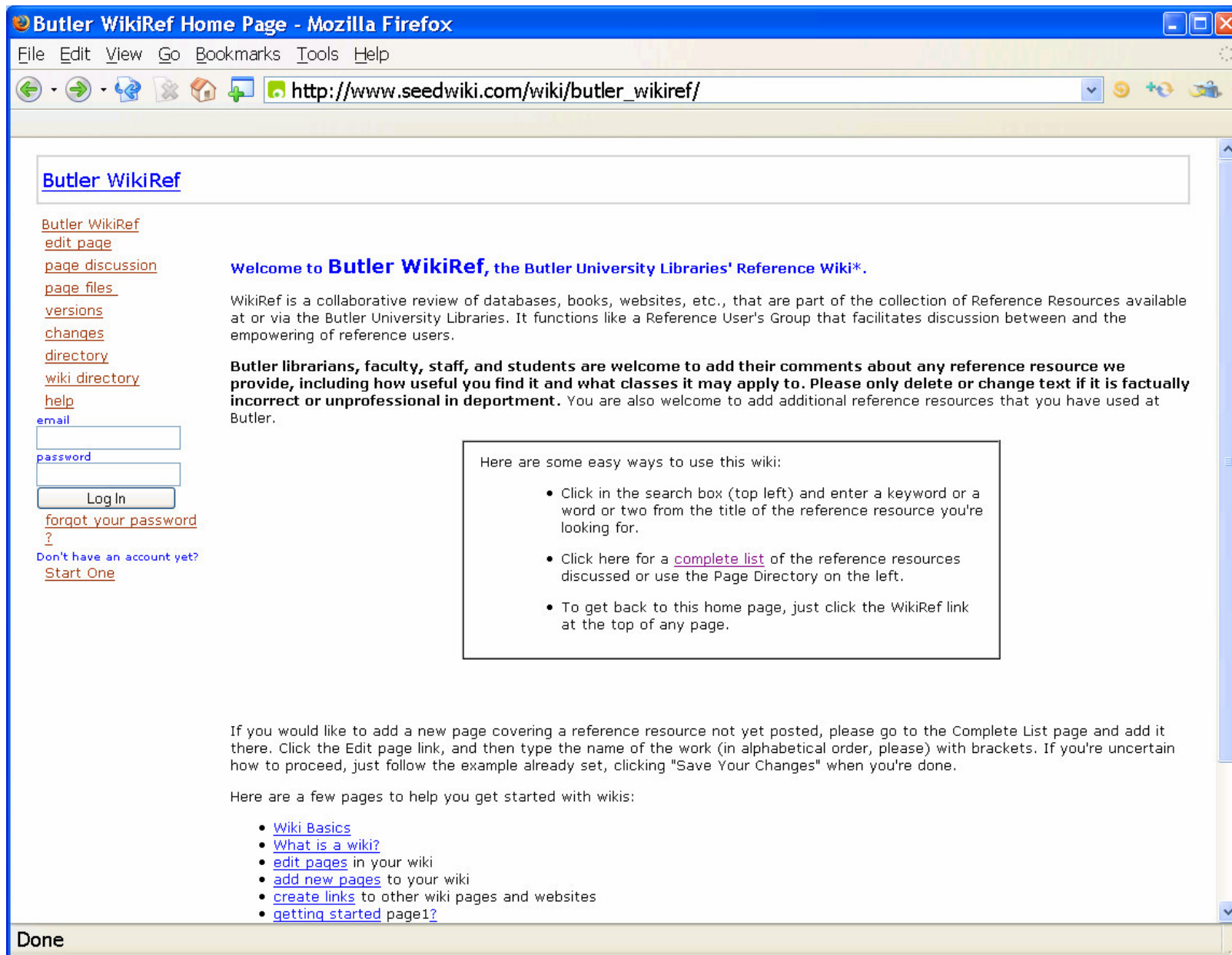
 Help Desk: Wikipedia To ask questions about how to work on articles, how to operate the program to use Wikipedia, and how to participate in	 New contributors' help page A range of services to answer newcomers' questions	 Village Pump: Technical To ask really tough questions about using Wikipedia, like how to fix a page glitch, adding special features to a page, JavaScript and CSS, etc.
--	---	--

Done

Wikipedia's reference desk



Oregon State University's Reference Desk Manager



Butler University's Butler WikiRef



Amateur vs. professional

- Subsets and facets
- Commitment
- Pomerantz: “Because it exists, naïve users are going to use Wikipedia ... it’s our professional responsibility to make Wikipedia a reliable information source.”
- “Naïve users”?
- Naïve information specialists?
- Citizendium



The wiki paradigm (2)

- Collective editing
 - Presumption of quality
- Vandalism and edit wars
- “Be bold”



Closing remarks

- Don't use a wiki
 - Just because wikis are in vogue
 - For mostly static information
 - Where delays are acceptable
- Wikis don't naturally promote
 - Expertise
 - Provenance
 - Completion



Closing remarks (2)

- Wikis need
 - Community
 - Planning and management
- Wikis suit information that
 - needs continual irregular updates by many users
 - cannot usefully be arranged into a strong hierarchy
 - requires consensus



Closing remarks (3)

- Two-way information flow
- Trends
 - Abstraction
 - Speed
 - Independence from authority

