

## Digital Tip: Using Wikis for Collaborative Work

**Wikis are Web sites that can quickly and easily be edited by authorized users – even those who don't know HTML.** Wikis allow numerous authors to collaborate by providing them with basic editing functions and the ability to organize pages and create links on those pages. A writer may post a document draft to a wiki and invite collaborators to edit the draft. By default, the wiki will display the most recent version of the document, but it will also track *all* changes to the document so users can see who revised what and when.

In the workplace, wikis are useful for a variety of purposes, including **co-authoring and editing documents, sharing and distributing information, managing knowledge-bases, and providing communication spaces** for clients and customers. They are especially useful for collaborators separated by distance, as wikis help reduce problems that can arise when tracking multiple versions of a document.

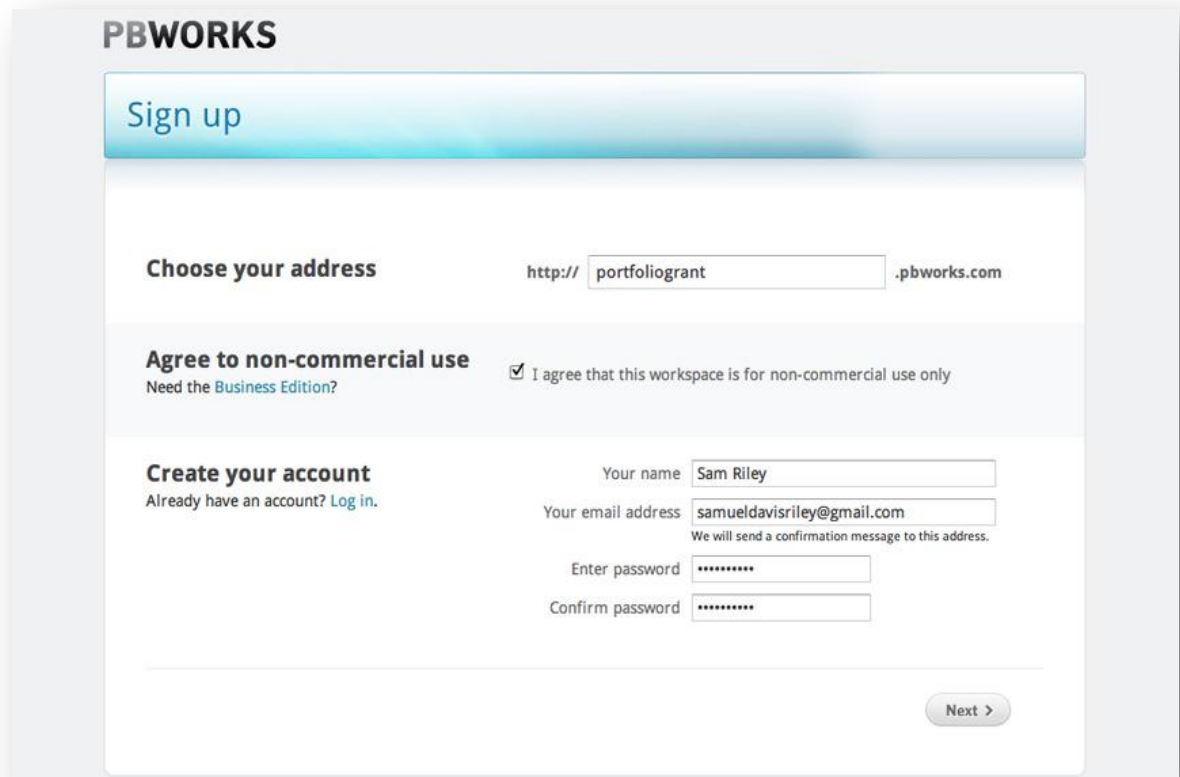
This document outlines guidelines for **setting up a wiki, editing documents in an existing wiki, and selecting the appropriate wiki software** for your project.

## Starting a New Wiki

If your organization doesn't already have a wiki set up on its intranet, you can find many wiki engines online (see the final section of this document, "Selecting Wiki Software"). Although some wiki applications require you to install the wiki on your own server, other popular services offer hosted wikis at little to no cost. This tutorial is based on PBworks, but most wiki applications and services have similar features.

To create a wiki, follow these steps:

1. Direct your browser to <http://www.pbworks.com>.
2. Choose **Sign up now** from the drop-down menu under the type of account appropriate for your purposes (business, education, or personal).
3. Enter a **name** for your wiki.
4. Complete the **user account information**.
5. Click **Next**.



The screenshot shows the PBworks sign-up page. At the top, the PBWORKS logo is visible. Below it is a blue header with the text "Sign up". The main content area is divided into three sections:

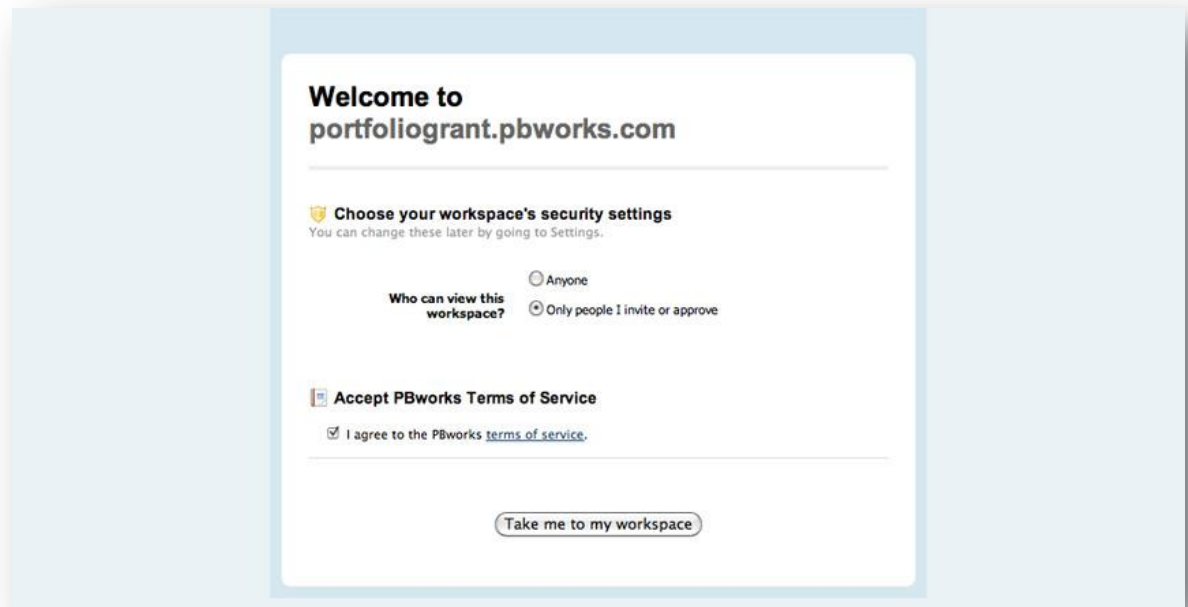
- Choose your address:** A text input field contains "portfoliogrant" and ".pbworks.com" is displayed to its right.
- Agree to non-commercial use:** A checkbox is checked, with the text "I agree that this workspace is for non-commercial use only". Below this, it says "Need the Business Edition?".
- Create your account:** This section contains four input fields: "Your name" (filled with "Sam Riley"), "Your email address" (filled with "samueldavisriley@gmail.com"), "Enter password" (filled with "\*\*\*\*\*"), and "Confirm password" (filled with "\*\*\*\*\*"). Below the email field, it says "We will send a confirmation message to this address." A "Log in." link is also present.

At the bottom right of the form, there is a "Next >" button.

Fig 1. PBworks: Sign-Up Page

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6. You will receive an **e-mail confirmation**. Click on the link in that message to **return** to the PBworks Web site.
7. Choose whether you want your wiki to be **public or private**.
8. Click **Take me to my workspace**. It is important to note that public wikis can be viewed by anyone and may appear in search engine results. For this reason, they are unsuitable for confidential business communications.



*Fig 2. PBworks: Workspace Page*

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9. You are now viewing the **front page** of your wiki, which contains an invitation to **edit** the page, as well as links to **helpful resources** such as the PBworks User Manual.

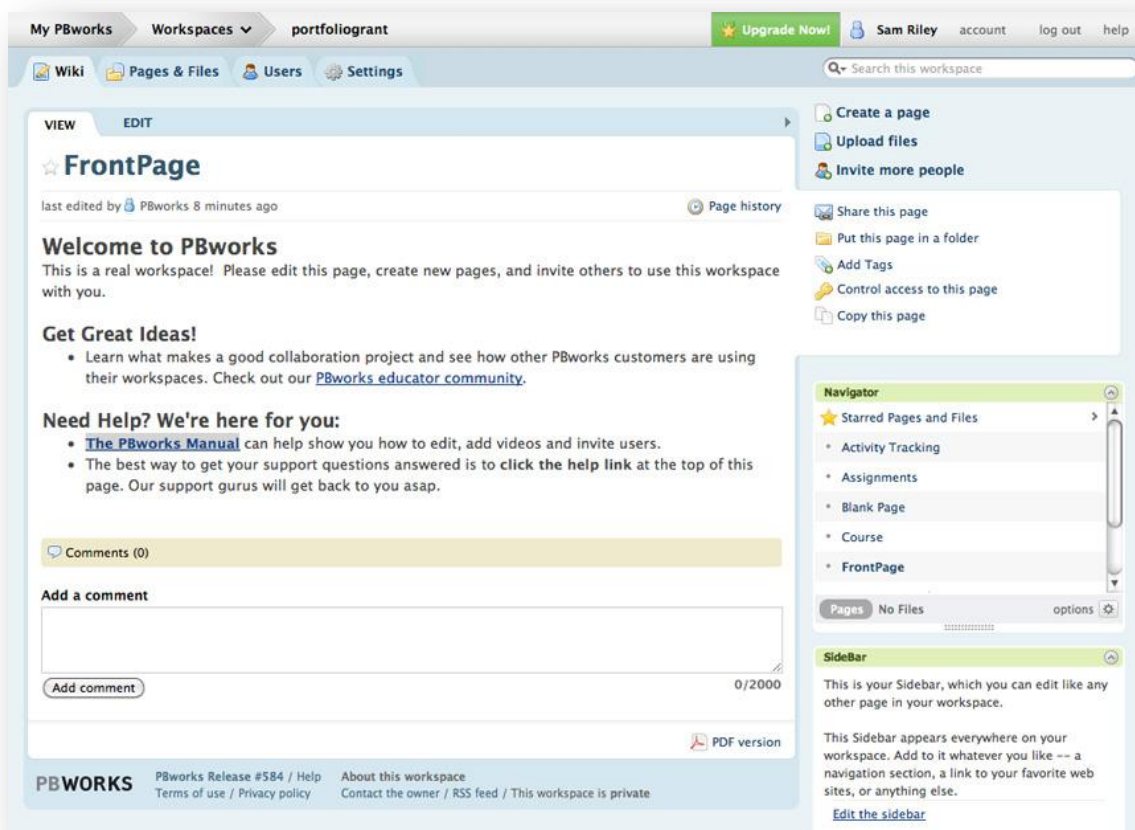


Fig 3. PBworks: Wiki Front Page

10. As the creator of this wiki, you can edit the front page and add new pages. To edit this page, click on the **Edit tab** immediately above the Front Page title.

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11. You are now viewing the front page in **edit mode**, which allows you to add to, modify, or delete existing content. You can use the **formatting toolbar** to create headings, bulleted lists, tables, etc.

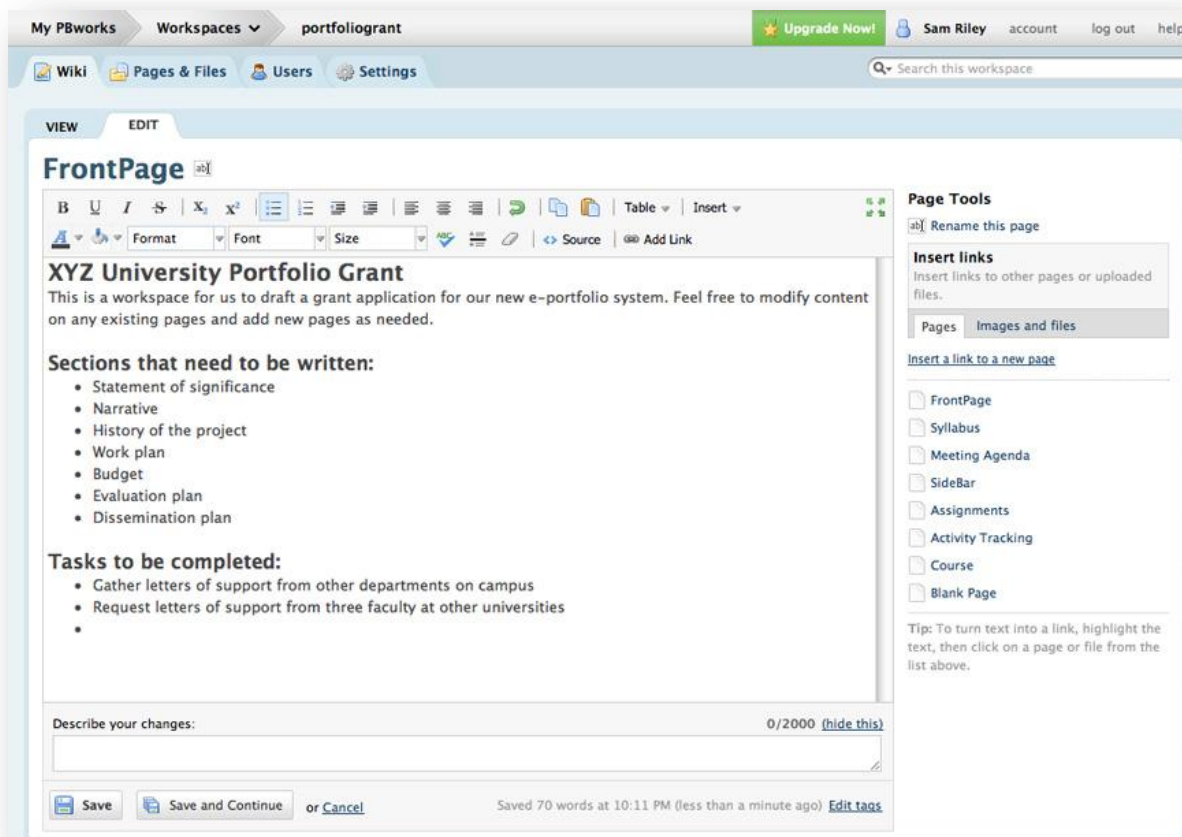


Fig 4. PBworks: Wiki Front Page in Edit Mode

12. When you are finished editing the front page, click **Save**.

## Adding Content

Now that you have created your wiki and modified the front page, you can begin adding new pages to the site. To add a page to your wiki, follow these steps:

1. In **edit mode**, highlight the text you wish to use to link to a new page.
2. Click the **“Add Link” button** in the formatting toolbar.
3. In the pop-up dialog box that appears, type the name of the new page you want to create. **Short, simple page names** generally work best.

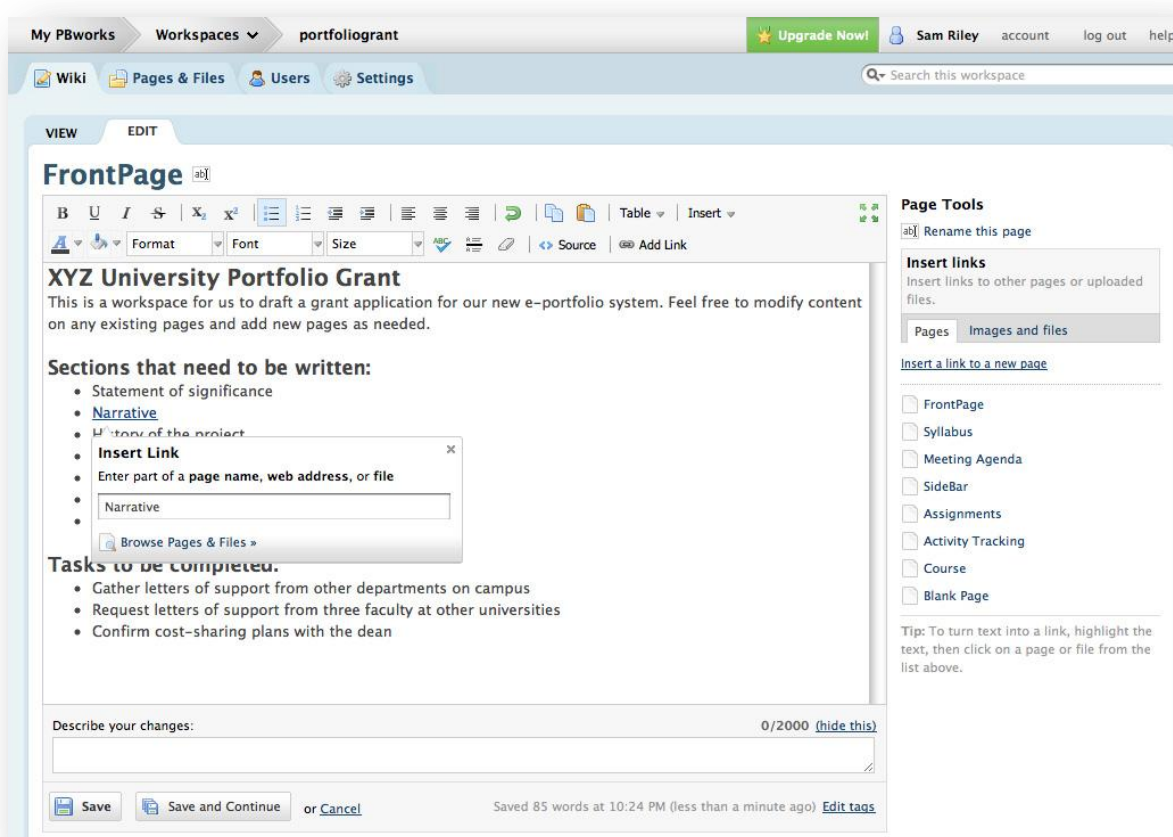


Fig 5. PBworks: Insert Link Dialog Box

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4. Hit **Enter** on your keyboard.
5. Click **Save** at the bottom of the page.
6. On the newly saved page, click on the link you just created to:
  - a. **Name** the page.
  - b. **Select a template** to use for the page (if applicable).
  - c. **Assign the page** to a folder.
7. When you have chosen the appropriate settings, click **Create page**. Doing so will produce a blank page with the title you selected in Step 3.

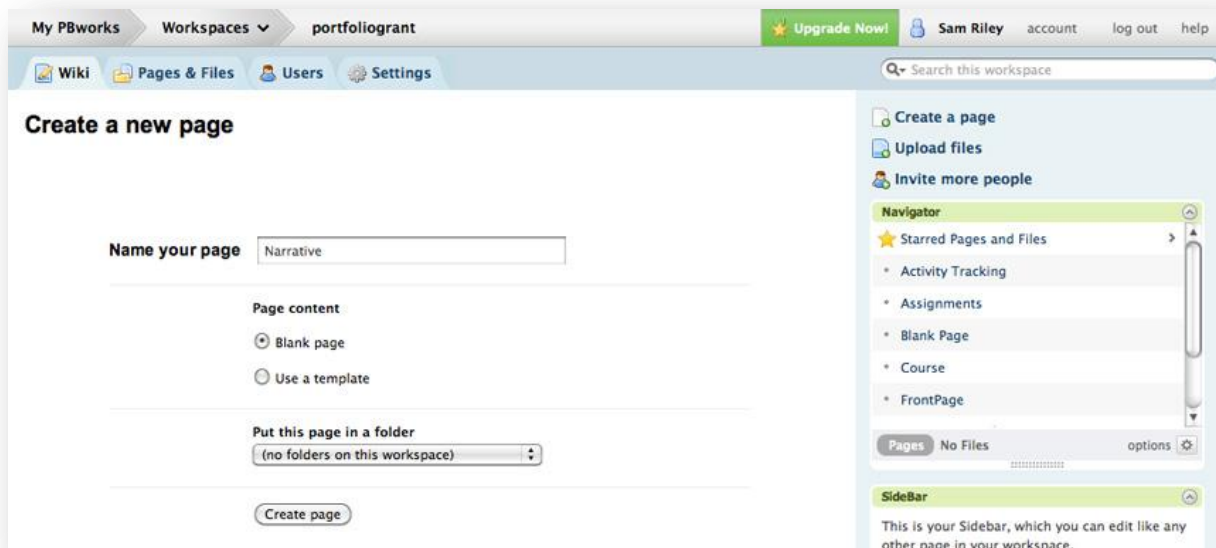


Fig 6. PBworks: New Page Setup

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8. **Add content** to the page, either by typing directly into the text box, or by copying and pasting content from another application.
9. When you are finished editing the page, click **Save**.

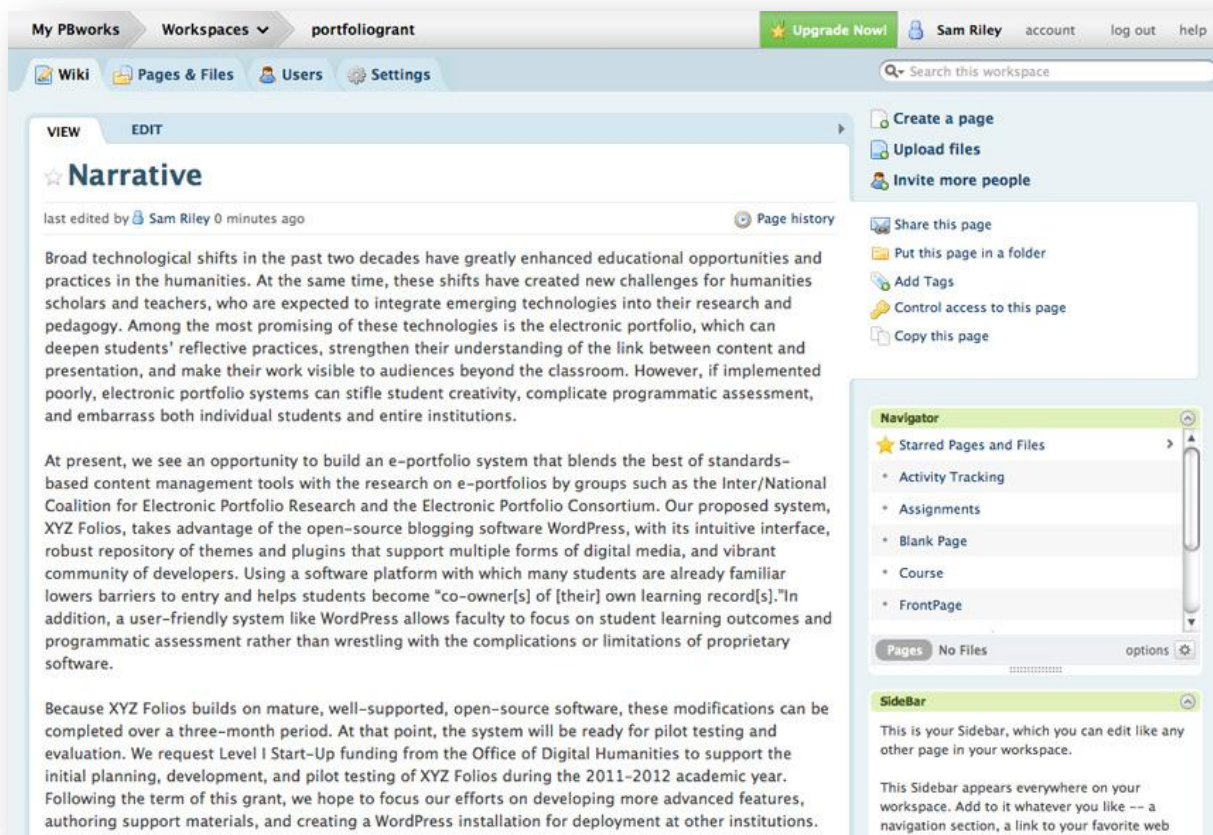


Fig 7. PBworks: Completed New Page



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While wikis make it easy to add pages, most are not very good at accepting previously completed content. Some wikis allow you to upload files from a word-processing program, but these files can only be opened in the word-processing program itself. Most wikis will not directly transfer content. Rather, they require that you copy and paste previously created content into their text boxes and format it using the specific formatting codes for that wiki. Depending on the wiki you are using and the original file you are pasting into the wiki, some formatting options may be preserved, as shown in the image below.

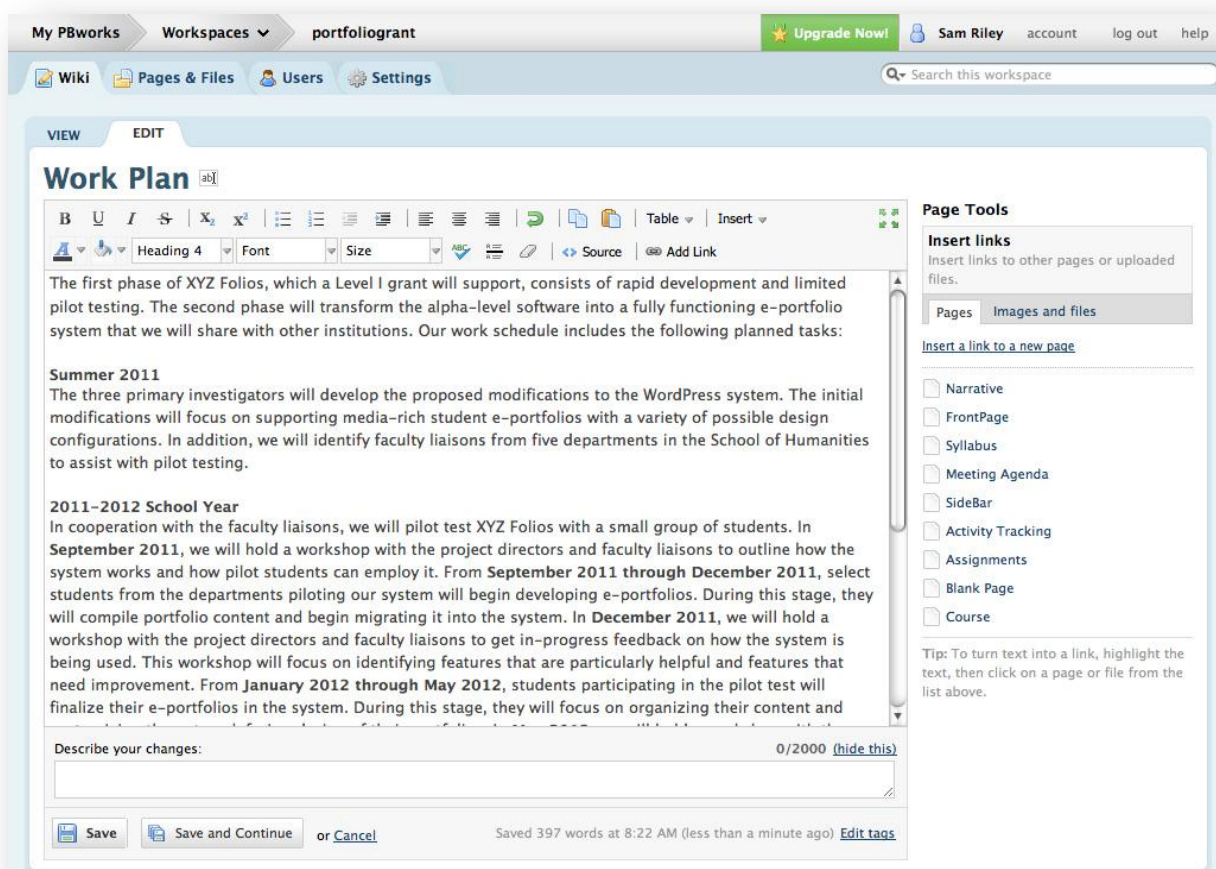


Fig 8. PBworks: Wiki with Pasted Content and Preserved Formatting

## Formatting Content

Almost all wikis now include formatting icons on the editing pages (similar to those appearing in word-processing programs like Microsoft Word). These icons make wikis easier to use, but they generally comprise only the most basic formatting features. Most wikis include a link to a “formatting tips” page that explains the system’s rules for marking up text. Depending on your level of familiarity with HTML and/or the wiki’s markup syntax, you can choose to work in source-editing mode (as shown in the image below) or to use the wiki’s “What You See Is What You Get” editor.

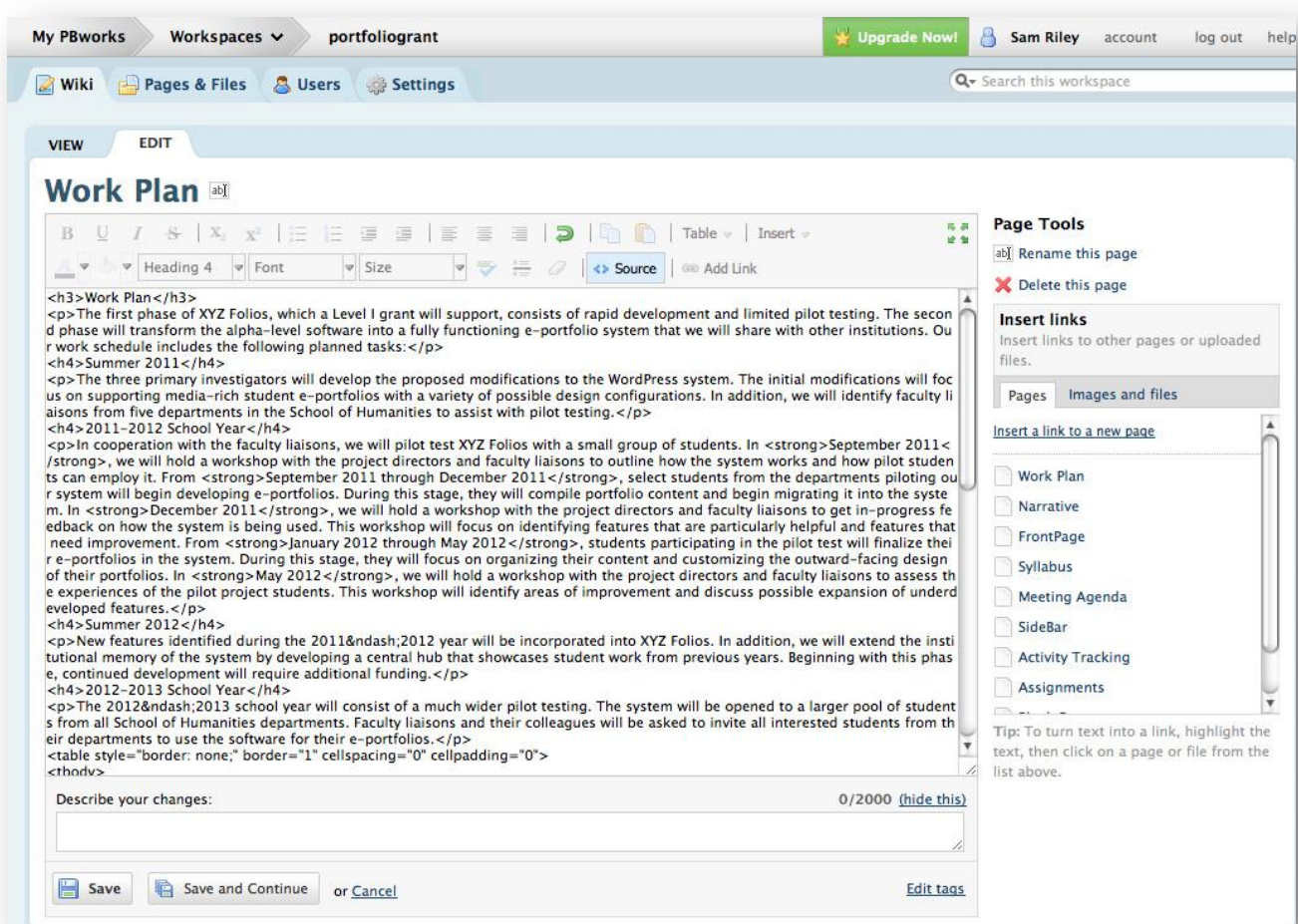


Fig 9. PBworks: Source-Editing Mode

## Monitoring Changes

One of the key distinguishing features separating wikis from other routine writing tools is the ability to not only monitor routine changes, but also to revert to previous versions of a page. To view a page's history in PBworks, follow these steps:

1. On any page in your wiki, click on **Page history** beneath the page title.
2. The **Revisions page** will show you the various versions of that page. Each version lists the date and time it was created, as well as the name of the person who created it. If the person added a description while editing the page, that description will also be displayed on the Revisions page.

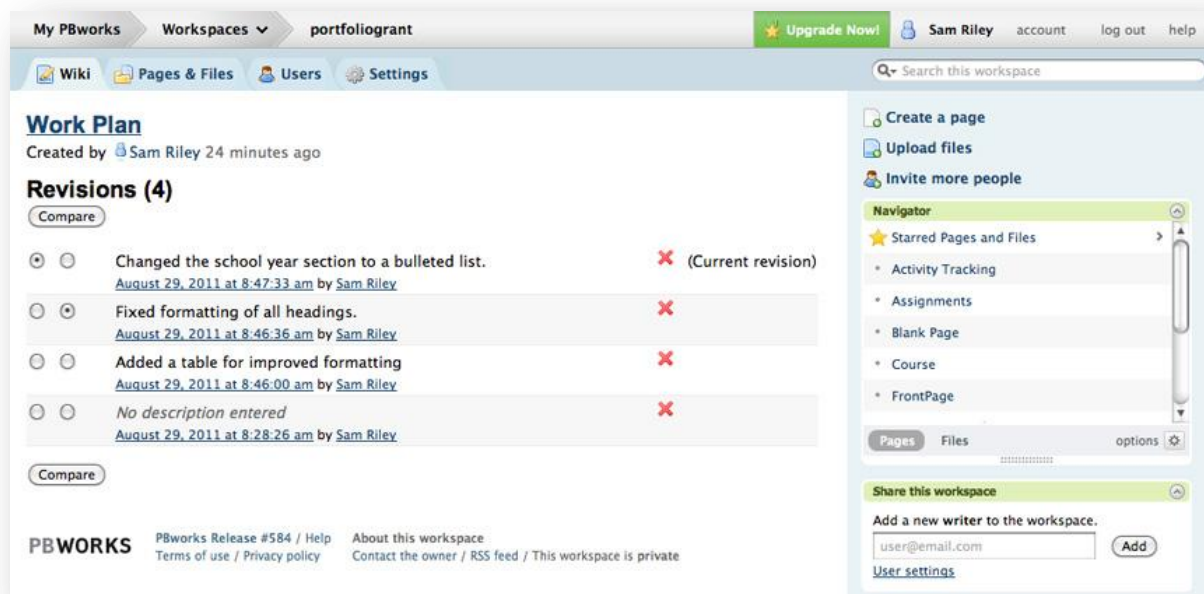


Fig 10. PBworks: Revisions Page

3. For a detailed view of the changes that have been made to the page, select two versions of the page and click **Compare**. Text that has been deleted from the page will appear in red with a strikethrough mark, while text that has been added will appear in green.

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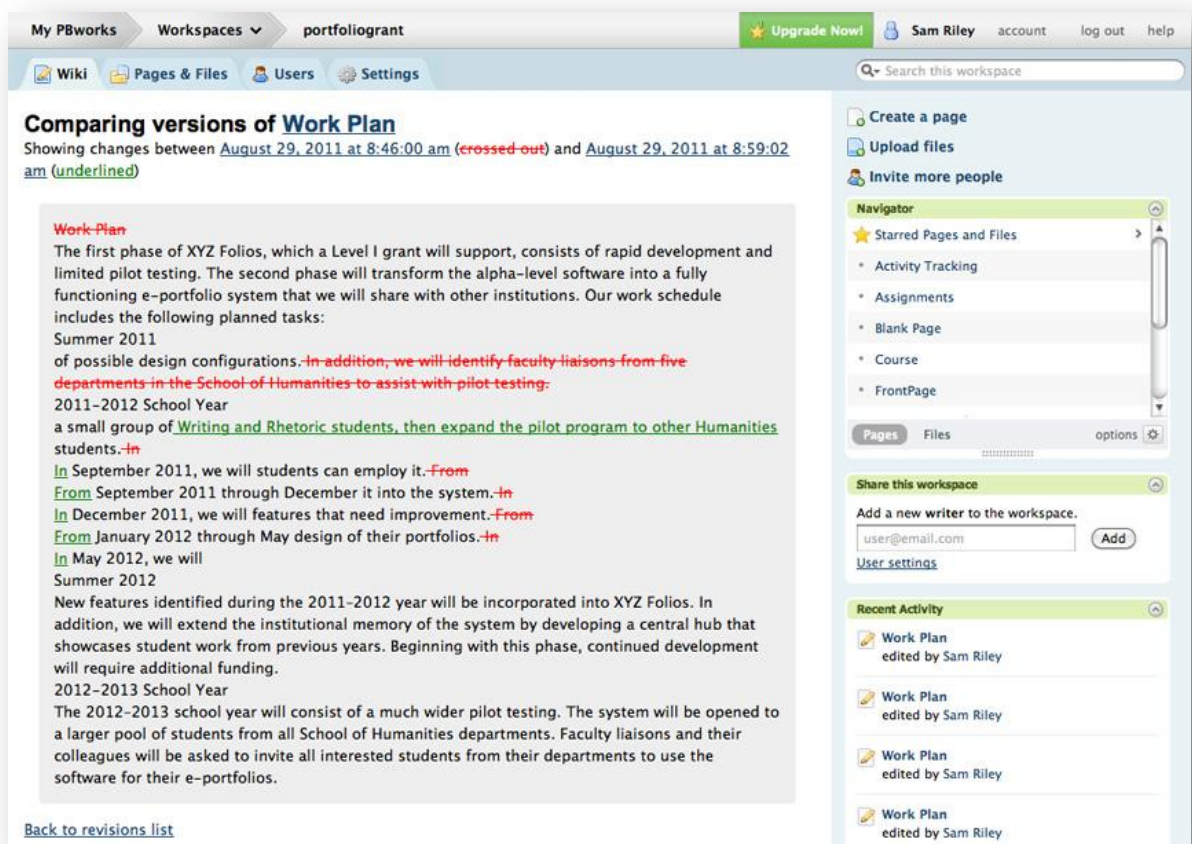


Fig 11. PBworks: Compare View

4. If you wish to **undo** the changes that you or a co-author have made to a page, go to the Revisions page and click the red X next to the iteration that you want to delete.
5. A pop-up dialog box will ask, “Are you sure you want to delete the revision?”
6. Click **OK**. Doing so will cause the page to revert back to the previous iteration. Once you have deleted an iteration, you cannot restore it, so use this feature cautiously.

Most wikis also provide Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, a technology that alerts feed subscribers to changes on Web sites. While RSS feeds are typically used for news headlines and online bulletin boards, a wiki RSS feed alerts subscribers to changes made to the wiki as they happen – even if subscribers are working in another program at the time. To subscribe to your wiki’s RSS feed, click on the “RSS feed” link located in the footer of any page on your wiki.

## Monitoring Changes

As you evaluate various wiki applications, you should consider a few factors:

- **Cost.** Free and commercial wikis are available online. Free wikis offer basic services and may limit the number of authors or the size of the wiki itself. Even so, for many projects, a free wiki is more than adequate. Most commercial wikis have a monthly or yearly fee, but they also offer advanced features, more storage space, and enhanced security.
- **Control.** Hosted wikis run on servers that you cannot own or operate, so you should check online reviews to find a company with a good reputation. You should also look for a wiki application that allows you to regularly download a backup of your entire site. If you want even greater control over your content, or if you are concerned about security, you should consider installing a wiki application on a server that you can control. Maintaining your own wiki installation requires some knowledge of web technologies (e.g., FTP, database management), but it allows for much greater customization of your wiki.
- **Ease of use.** Most modern wiki applications are relatively easy to use, but some function more like word processors and others function more like Web sites. If you prefer a “What You See Is What You Get” editing interface, make sure that your wiki offers one or allows you to install one as a plugin. If your wiki will be edited by people with a variety of technical skills, make sure that the editing interface, the process for creating pages and uploading files, and the revision history are all relatively intuitive. As a general rule, the more powerful a wiki application is, the more complicated it will appear to novice users. The best way to find a wiki that meets the needs of your project is to test several options thoroughly before selecting a specific application or service.

There are dozens of wiki applications. The following lists contain links to some of the most popular wikis in use today; for a more comprehensive list, visit WikiMatrix (<http://www.wikimatrix.org>).

### Hosted wikis

- PBworks ([www.pbworks.com](http://www.pbworks.com))
- Wikispaces ([www.wikispaces.com](http://www.wikispaces.com))
- Wikidot ([www.wikidot.com](http://www.wikidot.com))
- Wetpaint ([www.wetpaintcentral.com](http://www.wetpaintcentral.com))
- Socialtext ([www.socialtext.com](http://www.socialtext.com))

### Wiki software to install on your server

- MediaWiki ([www.mediawiki.org](http://www.mediawiki.org))
- Tiki Wiki (<http://info.tiki.org>)
- MoinMoin ([www.moinmo.in](http://www.moinmo.in))
- Zwiki ([www.zwiki.org](http://www.zwiki.org))