



# Collaborative Academic Writing: Tools and Features

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**Birds of a Feather Session  
“The Tyranny of Distance”**

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# Overview

- **Introduction:** What's the issue?
- **Main part:**
  - **Requirements:** What features do we want?
  - **Options:** Which tools can we choose from?
  - **Overview:** Tools and features matrix
  - **Tools:** Which features does a given tool have?
  - **Features:** How are they implemented in various tools?
- **Conclusion:** How can we move forward?

# Introduction: What's the issue?

- **Writing has changed**
  - no longer a solitary activity
  - a network of people and discourses
  - across distance in space, but also in time and formats, ...
  
- **The situation today**
  - Various use cases: articles, reports, minutes, documentation, edited volumes, textbooks ...
  - Plenty of requirements, plenty of tools

# Features: What do we want?

<b>text and more</b>	<b>collabo- ration</b>	<b>control</b>	<b>technical req.</b>
<b>footnotes &amp; tables</b>	<b>comments &amp; chat</b>	<b>rights mgmt.</b>	<b>import/ export</b>
<b>images</b>	<b>track changes</b>	<b>privacy</b>	<b>offline support</b>
<b>formulas</b>	<b>version control</b>	<b>open source</b>	<b>platform indep.</b>
<b>reference mgmt.</b>	<b>concurrent editing</b>	<b>AAI</b>	<b>usability</b>

# Options: Which tools are there?

- **Some established players**
  - Microsoft Word / Libre Office with Dropbox
  - Google Drive/Docs, Mediawiki
- **Some strong contenders**
  - ZOHO Docs, Confluence Wiki
  - Etherpad, Git/GitHub; ownCloud
- **Some (very) interesting newbies**
  - Fidus Writer, Penflip, DH Writer
  - (Marquee, Draft, Editorially, ...)

# Tools & Features: Overview

	WP & Dbox	Media-wiki	Google Docs	ZOHO Docs	Git/ GitHub	Ether-pad	Con-fluence	Fidus Writer	Penflip	DH Writer
rights mgmt.	-	o	++	++	o/+	o	o	+	-/+	o
privacy	o	++	--	-	-	++	o	++	o	o
open source	-/o	++	--	--	+	++	--	+	-	++
usability	++	-	+	+	o	+	++	+	+	+
footnotes	++	+	+	+	--	--	-	+	--	+
tables	++		+	++	--	--	+	-	o	+
images	o	+	o	+	--	--	+	o	o	+
formulas	+	x	--	-	x	--	--	++	x	--
comm.ts & chat	o	+	++	+	o	--	o	+	o	--
reference m.	++	-	-	-	--	-	-	++	-	+
version control	o	++		o	++	++	++	-	++	o
track changes	++	++	+	+	+	++		++	o	--
conc. editing	--	o	++	o	o	+++	o	+	o	--
import/export	o	o	+	+	--	--	+	o	+	o
offline support	++	--	+	++	++	--	--	--	+?	--
platform indep.	--	++	++	++	++	++	++	o	++	++
master format	-	o	-	-	o	-	o	+	o	++

# Tool: Etherpad

The screenshot shows the Etherpad v1.1 interface. The browser address bar displays 'clgs.pad.dariah.eu/ep/pad/view/2/latest'. The page title is 'Etherpadfreie software Etherpad v1.1 Full screen'. The document title is 'Methodensession in Passau'. A timestamp '02/17/2014' is visible. The document content includes a version notice: 'Methodensession in Passau Version 358 Saved Feb 17, 2014'. The main content is organized into sections: 'Organisatorisches' with an announcement link and a DARIAH-Wiki link; 'Zeitplan und Themen (90 Min.)' with a list of topics and durations. The sidebar on the right offers options to 'View latest content', 'Link to this version', 'Link to read-only page', 'Edit this pad', and 'Download as' (HTML, Plain text, Microsoft Word, PDF). The 'Authors' section lists 'Chr.' and 'dir'.

clgs.pad.dariah.eu/ep/pad/view/2/latest

Etherpadfreie software **Etherpad v1.1** Full screen

Methodensession in Passau

02/17/2014

Methodensession in Passau Version 358 Saved Feb 17, 2014

**Organisatorisches**  
Ankündigung: <http://www.dhd2014.uni-passau.de/programm/workshops/#c40179>  
DARIAH-Wiki: <https://dev2.dariah.eu/wiki/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=25460941>

**Zeitplan und Themen (90 Min.)**

- 5 : Einleitung
- 10+5 : Überblick über das Methodenfeld (Basis: Report/Taxonomie): <https://github.com/Tadirah/TaDiRAH>
- 10+5 : Was bietet die DARIAH-Infrastruktur bisher an? Kleiner Überblick über Angebote, die bestimmte Methoden unterstützen: bspw. Geobrowser, TextGrid, Digivoy, PID-Service, Etherpad (siehe auch Menükarte [http://www.textgrid.de/fileadmin/materialien/TextGrid\\_Werkzeuge\\_und\\_Dienste\\_im\\_%C3%9Cberblick.pdf](http://www.textgrid.de/fileadmin/materialien/TextGrid_Werkzeuge_und_Dienste_im_%C3%9Cberblick.pdf))
- 10+5 : Use Case: Quantitative Textanalyse? Was machen wir, welche Anforderungen an die Infrastruktur ergeben sich daraus?
- 10+5 : Use Case Annotation
- 10 : Abschlussdiskussion

View latest content  
Link to this version  
Link to read-only page  
Edit this pad

**Download as**

- HTML
- Plain text
- Microsoft Word
- PDF

**Authors**

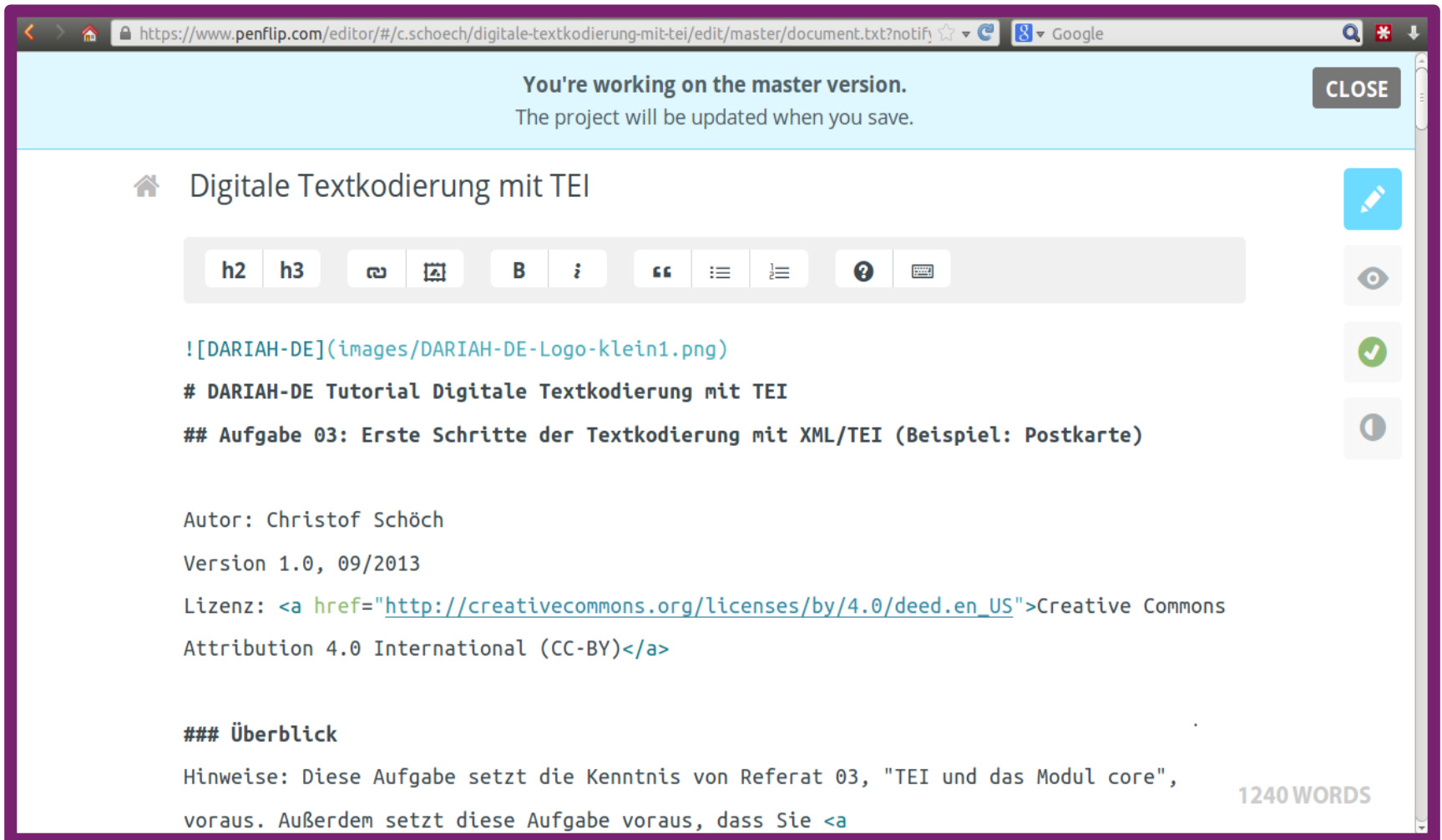
- Chr.
- dir

# Tool: Etherpad

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# Tool: Penflip



The screenshot shows the Penflip web editor interface. At the top, a light blue notification bar states: "You're working on the master version. The project will be updated when you save." with a "CLOSE" button. Below this, the document title "Digitale Textkodierung mit TEI" is displayed with a home icon on the left and a pencil icon on the right. A rich text editor toolbar is visible, containing buttons for heading levels (h2, h3), undo, redo, bold (B), italic (i), quote, list, link, help, and keyboard shortcuts. The document content includes a code block with a logo placeholder, a main heading "# DARIAH-DE Tutorial Digitale Textkodierung mit TEI", a sub-heading "## Aufgabe 03: Erste Schritte der Textkodierung mit XML/TEI (Beispiel: Postkarte)", and a paragraph of text: "Autor: Christof Schöch", "Version 1.0, 09/2013", and "Lizenz: <a href='\"http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en\_US\">Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC-BY)</a>". A sub-heading "### Überblick" is followed by a paragraph: "Hinweise: Diese Aufgabe setzt die Kenntnis von Referat 03, 'TEI und das Modul core', voraus. Außerdem setzt diese Aufgabe voraus, dass Sie <a". In the bottom right corner, a "1240 WORDS" counter is displayed.

# Tool: Penflip

<b>text and more</b>	<b>collabo- ration</b>	<b>control</b>	<b>technical req.</b>
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# Tool: Fidus Writer

The screenshot displays the Fidus Writer web interface. The browser address bar shows the URL `test.fiduswriter.org/document/580/`. The document title is "The red herring". The top navigation bar includes "File", "Export", "Citation Style", "Document Style", "Paper Size", "Metadata", and "Tools". The main editing area contains the following text:

## The red herring

This article begins with a definition of the theoryconcept of red herring in crime fiction (see Patterson 1998, 12).<sup>1</sup>

$$x = 2 * y$$

<sup>1</sup> Although not a recent article, it still provides the best introduction to this issue.

**Bibliography**

Patterson, Peter. 1998. The function of Red Herrings in George Simenon. *Journal of Red Herring Studies*.

On the right side, a "Changes" dropdown menu is open, showing options: "Track", "Show", "Accept all", and "Reject all". Below it, a comment box from "Christof Schöch" dated "2/26/2014 1:53:47 PM" contains the text: "Some people prefer to write 'hering'. That is nonsense."

# Tool: Fidus Writer

<b>text and more</b>	<b>collabo- ration</b>	<b>control</b>	<b>technical req.</b>
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# Feature: concurrent ed., track changes

- **Mediawiki**

- no real-time concurrent editing; concurrent editing of different sections possible; merge conflicts can be managed.
- version control: every time you save, a version is saved
- track changes: compare versions, see who changed what; no option to check who made a specific edit.

- **Microsoft Word / Libre Office with Dropbox**

- no real-time concurrent editing
- merge conflicts are detected but not resolved
- track changes is very well-supported
- versioning is not well-supported

# Feature: concurrent editing, etc.

- **Etherpad**

- full real-time concurrent editing (per-character, per split-second)
- track changes: who wrote what (color-coding)
- versioning: flag intermediate versions, watch writing process

- **Penflip**

- no concurrent editing, instead: Git-style fork, commit & merge
- track changes: yes, but a bit cumbersome
- versioning: yes, version history, flags.

# Conclusion (1): No one tool is perfect

- **The bottom line**

- Each tool excels at some features, none has all the features
- some features are mutually exclusive (ex.: concurrent editing vs. offline support; simplicity vs. full feature set )

- **The consequence**

- For each task, you need to choose the best tool
- Each tool: different syntax, login, features, user interface
- People don't like that > resistance

# Conclusion (2): the next steps

- **Avoid wrong paths**
  - Let's not wait for the perfect do-it-all tool
  - Let's certainly not try and build the perfect do-it-all tool ourselves
- **Our best option**
  - Recognize each tool's strengths („do one thing and do it well“)
  - Work on making it easier to move between them (import/export, format conversions)
  - Work on making it easier for people to use different tools (single sign-on, similar UI principles; exemplary: Fidus Writer)



**Thank you!**

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# Annex: tools with links

- Confluence – [www.confluence.atlassian.com](http://www.confluence.atlassian.com)
- Dropbox – [www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)
- Etherpad – [www.etherpad.org](http://www.etherpad.org)
- Fidus Writer – [www.fiduswriter.org](http://www.fiduswriter.org)
- Git / GitHub – [www.github.com](http://www.github.com)
- Google Drive – [www.drive.google.com](http://www.drive.google.com)
- Libre Office – [www.libreoffice.org](http://www.libreoffice.org)
- Mediawiki – [www.mediawiki.org](http://www.mediawiki.org)
- ownCloud – [www.owncloud.org](http://www.owncloud.org)
- Penflip – [www.penflip.com](http://www.penflip.com)
- ZOH0 Docs / Writer – [www.writer.zoho.com](http://www.writer.zoho.com)