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## Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities

# Collaborative Academic Writing: Tools and Features

Christof Schöch (Würzburg, Germany)

**Birds of a Feather Session**
**"The Tyranny of Distance"**

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de.dariah.eu

# 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?

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# 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

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# Features: What do we want?

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

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# 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
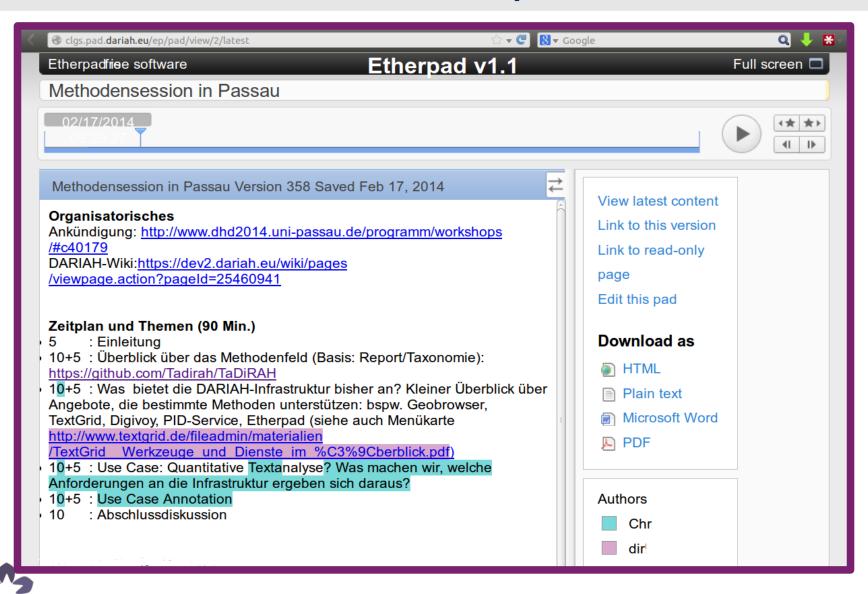
- **Some (very) interesting newbies**
  - Fidus Writer, Penflip, DH Writer
  - (Marquee, Draft, Editorially, ...)

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# 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

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# Tool: Penflip

# Tool: Penflip

| text and more | collabo-ration | control | technical req. |
|---|---|---|---|
| footnotes & tables | comments & chat | rights mgmt. | import/ export |
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| formulas | version control | open source | platform indep. |
| reference mgmt. | concurrent editing | AAI | usability |

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# Tool: Fidus Writer

# Tool: Fidus Writer

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| formulas | version control | open source | platform indep. |
| reference mgmt. | concurrent editing | AAI | usability |

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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

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# 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.

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# 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

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# 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)

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# Thank you!

**Christof Schöch**
**(Würzburg, Germany)**

@christof77
c.schoech@gmail.com
christof-schoech.de/en

# Annex: tools with links

- Confluence – www.confluence.atlassian.com

- Dropbox – www.dropbox.com

- Etherpad – www.etherpad.org

- Fidus Writer – www.fiduswriter.org

- Git / GitHub – www.github.com

- Google Drive – www.drive.google.com

- Libre Office – www.libreoffice.org

- Mediawiki – www.mediawiki.org

- ownCloud – www.owncloud.org

- Penflip – www.penflip.com

- ZOHO Docs / Writer – www.writer.zoho.com

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