



Christian Stoll 2021

Online tools for collaborative work

With the help of certain web applications, it is possible for several people to access the same document at the same time. I can see which parts of the document are currently being edited by whom. Often there is also the possibility to exchange information about editing steps via a comment and/or chat function. In addition, some systems also offer the possibility of restoring older versions.

The largest and best known provider of such web applications is certainly Google. Besides Google Docs, Google also offers a spreadsheet and the possibility to create presentation slides together with several people at the same time. Microsoft also offers the possibility to work on documents, spreadsheets and presentations together in Office 365.

Etherpad



Besides the products from Microsoft and Google, there are also open-source alternatives. A very popular tool is Etherpad. The Etherpad is a web-based text editor for collaborative editing of text documents. The Etherpad is a free software. On the website <https://etherpad.org/> under „List of public instances“ there is a list of public Etherpads that can be used for free.

To create a new pad, I go to the respective page (example) and click on „New Pad“ or I simply enter a name for the new pad in this text line and click OK. If a new pad is created on an Etherpad website or on an Etherpad server, a permanent URL to this document is also created. I can then send this URL to other people via email or messenger. Every person who knows this URL can view and edit the pad.

In the upper right corner it is shown how many people are currently accessing the pad. Each person is assigned a color. It is also shown which color belongs to which person and it is also possible to enter a name and change the color here.

uring editing, the changes of all participants are immediately visible and are saved at certain intervals

on the server. With the help of the colors, changes can be assigned to the individual participants. The colors can also be switched off.

An export function offers the possibility to export the document as txt file. The version management of the Etherpad is used to view the editing history and to restore older editing times. Etherpads have a few simple formatting functions. Additionally, there is a chat window for discussions. Members of the TU Berlin have access to an etherpad at pad.innocampus.tu-berlin.de. To use this pad, however, all participants must have a TU account.

It is also possible to insert Etherpads within a Moodle course.

Cryptpad



A further development of the Etherpad is the [Cryptpad](#). Here I can create a new pas without logging in and share it with others via link.

It is also possible to register and login. Then the pads created here can also be saved and managed. The Cryptpad has besides a word processor also other collaborative applications, among others a spreadsheet, a whiteboard or customized text editors for collaborative creation or documentation of source code. Those to whom I send the link do not need to register either.

Digitale Whiteboards



Besides collaborative work based on e.g. text editors or spreadsheets, there are further possibilities to create complex documents together. [Padlet](#) and [Mindmeister](#) enable the collaborative creation of vector graphics, which can be enriched with images or links to other websites, for example. A person must register with the respective service for this. When a new document is generated, a permanent URL is also created here, which can be forwarded. Using this URL, other people can make changes to the document at the same time without having to register or log in to the respective service themselves. As the name suggests, the Mindmeister.com service allows users to create mind maps together, but also offers functionalities for freely arranging content (text, images, links) in a document in the sense of a digital whiteboard. Padlet.com offers similar functions. Both services are commercial. Free use with a lower range of functions is possible with both services. By installing the respective app, both services can also be used on mobile devices such as tablets or smartphones.

Fazit

There are several ways to work collaboratively on a document with multiple people. The fastest and easiest is to use an Etherpad. Several people can access Etherpad documents simultaneously without having to create a user account. This makes them suitable for quickly working together on ideas, concepts or brainstorming.

If you value a larger range of functions, would like to edit other document forms with several people and would also like to protect the respective pad with a password, Cryptpad is recommended.

If you are looking for a way to create mind maps or need more complex whiteboard surfaces, Mindmeister or Padlet could help you.

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