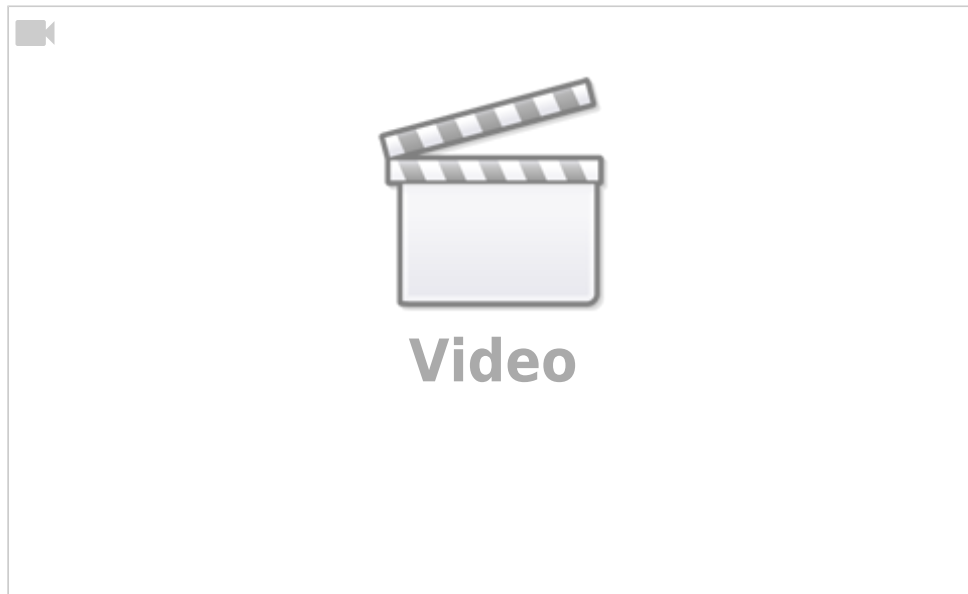




Christian Stoll 2021

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.

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.

Cryptpad



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.

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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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