Using Google Docs to Version Your Project

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Summary

Google Docs is the word processing software that is recommended for this assignment. If you are familiar with Microsoft Word then you will feel at home with Google Docs. Most of the basics, like font adjustment, image insertion and PDF exports, are similar. Google Docs has a simple interface and many useful features for managing projects.

This document focuses on how Google Docs can be used to capture the history of your project, how its collaborative features can be used and how a project can be structured.

On submission of your project you will be required to share the Google Docs file with your supervisor so that they can access the Version History of the file.

Getting Started

You will need to [sign up for a Google account](#) if you do not have one already[1]. Go to https://docs.google.com, give your file a name and start writing. Alternatively, access your [Google Drive](#), click New and select Google Docs.

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[1] Existing (non-gmail) accounts can be *linked* with Google but I have not tested this.

Google Docs is free, online-first software. Files are edited in the browser and stored in the cloud. Editing files in the browser and storing them in the cloud means you can access them easily from different devices. It is also incredibly useful when collaborating with other people.

Every Change is Autosaved

By default your file will be **saved after each change**:
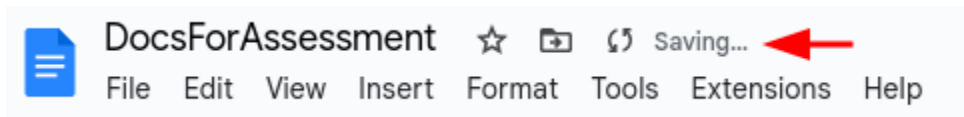
Each time a file is saved it is stored in the **Version History** of the file.
To access this history click on the clock icon at the top right of your screen:

Your Document has a Version History

Although you are working on a single file, Google Docs stores **snapshots** as you write. Here is the Version History for this document as I was writing it:
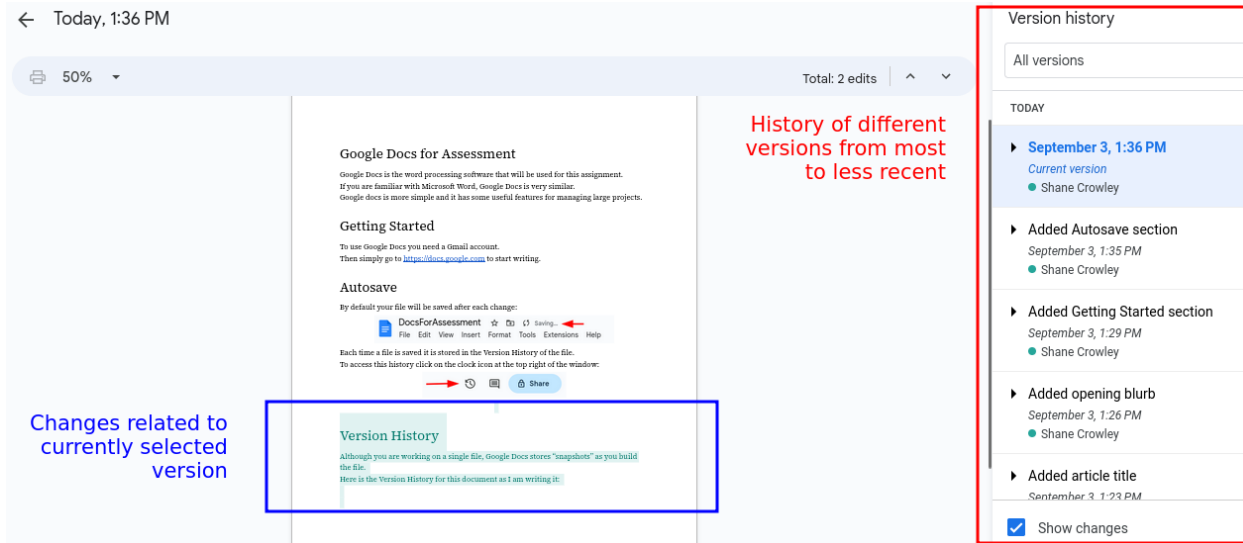
Changes in a version can be viewed by selecting it from the History (red outline). The most recent change in this example was adding a section on "Version History", with the changes highlighted on the left (blue outline).

Why Versions Are Useful

Versions are useful for authors and collaborators, as well as anyone checking your work.

1. **Restoring previous versions after an error:** when editing a file you might make a change that you later regret, such as deleting some important text. In such cases Google Docs allows you to *restore* an earlier version of a document.

2. **Ensuring a fair workload between collaborators:** when editing a file with collaborators (team projects) the contribution of different collaborators will be included along with each version. If there is ever a *question about the extent of someone's contribution* the version history can be consulted.

3. **Providing evidence of original and consistent work:** when submitting a project you want it to be a faithful record of your hard work. *You didn't just copy and paste an AI-generated response a day before the deadline.* By sharing a Google Docs file you also share its Version history, allowing people to confirm that the document is the result of original, consistent work.

The typical alternative to Version History is to create separate files like myProjectDraft1.doc, myProjectDraft2.doc, myProjectDraft3.doc, which gets very messy and difficult to manage.

Naming Your Versions

When Google Docs autosaves the resulting version is given a date and time as its name. There is also the option to **Name current version** and you can see what this does below:
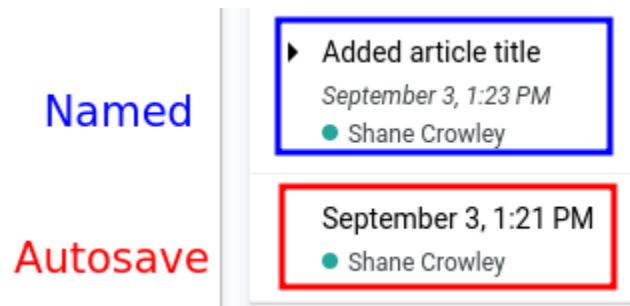

Named versions clearly express the nature of the change that has been made; in the named version above, the article was given a title. When reviewing the history of a document it is easy to identify when a particular change was made if it has been named in this way. This also helps structure your workflow and communicates to anyone checking a project that you were organised in your approach.

Naming versions is easy. When you are ready to name a version select File > Version history > Name current version. A popup window will appear asking you to enter a short description of that version:
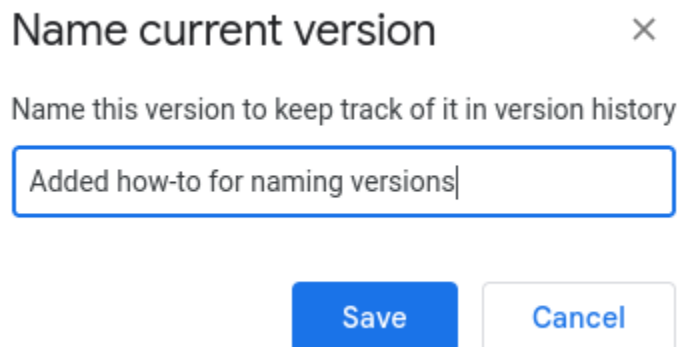
This will then appear as an entry in the Version History[2]:
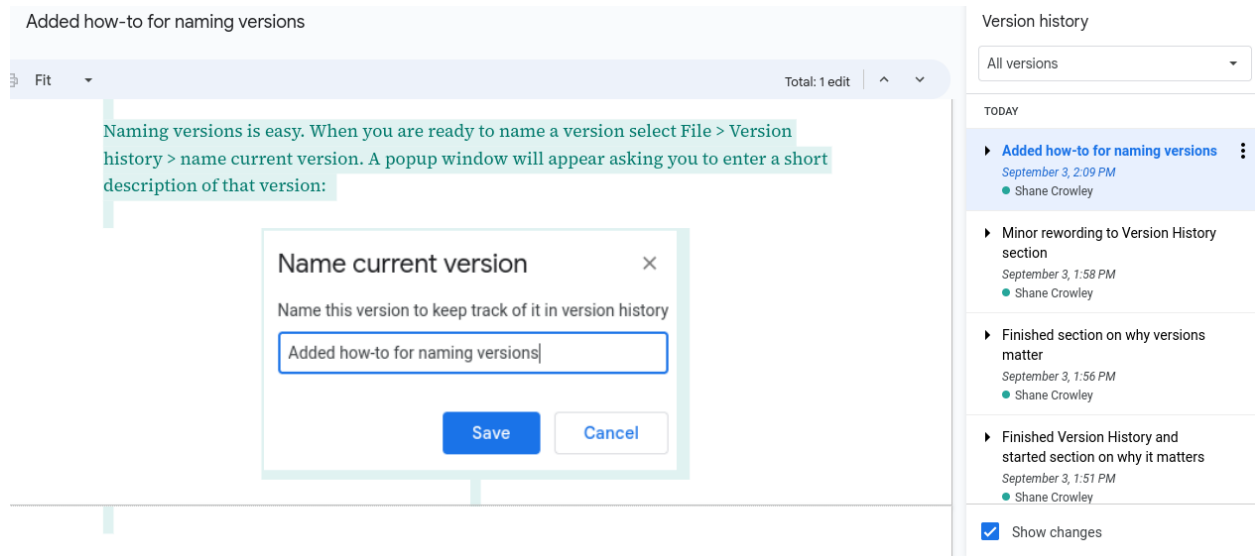
An example of versioning might be as follows[3]:

1. You decide to add a section to your introduction referencing a paper by Barrett (1982).
2. You draft a new section with a citation to Barrett and add the paper to the reference list.
3. You save a Named Version entitled "Add Barrett (1982) to introduction and references".

Sharing Your File and its Version History

You will often need to share your file with collaborators and assessors.
Click the large Share button at the top right of the window:

The resulting popup shows who already has access and gives you a prompt to add more people by typing their email address.

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[2] There is a limit to 40 *named versions* per file, which should be more than enough.
[3] Tiny changes, like fixing a single typo, would not demand a Named Version.

Doing this will send an email with a link to the document.

After you type an email a dropdown menu allows you to assign user privileges.

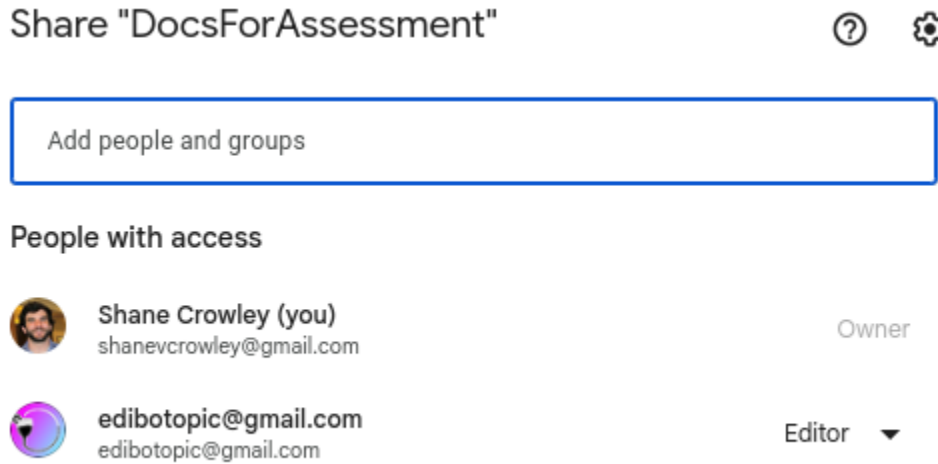Typically, you will want to grant full access rights as an "Editor":

If you click on Share again subsequently you will see that the person has been added:

A Version History is also a Collaboration History

As indicated earlier, the Version History will **show contributions from different collaborators**.
Adding and deleting text, images, tables and other elements will all be captured.
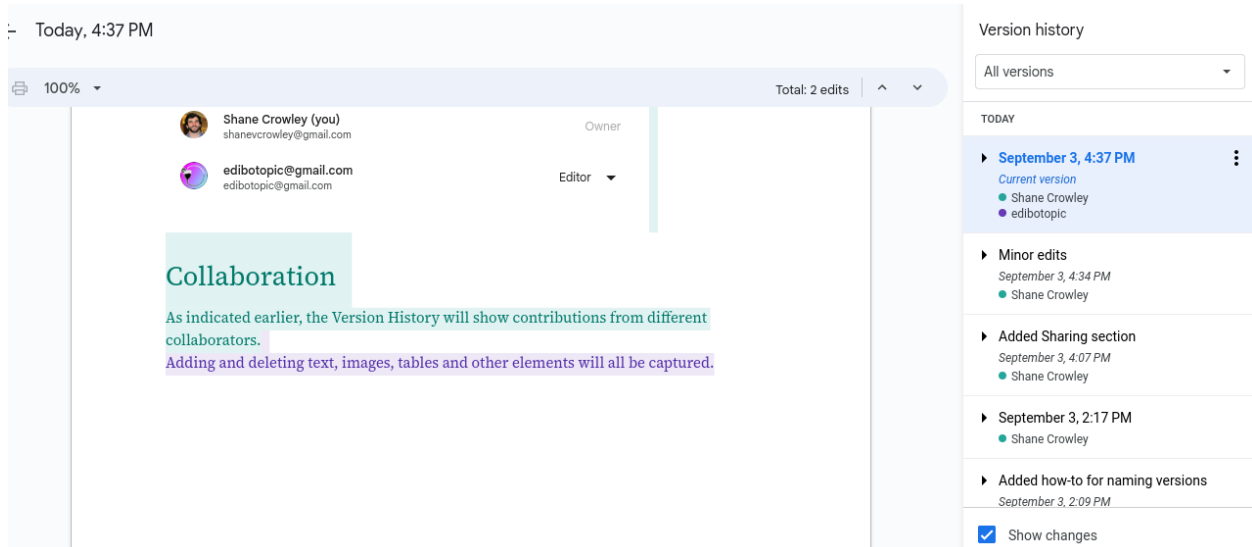
In the screenshot above the most recent changes were made by two collaborators.

Their names are listed in the version and the changes are **colour-coded,** allowing the changes they made to be identified[4].

In a collaborative project, the Version History should reveal that each team member has made a significant contribution to the project.

Alternatives to Google Docs

We cannot support every software choice for this project.
Google Docs is a good option and we are ready to support you when using it.

However, *if you absolutely cannot use Google Docs* then you can use the online version of Word through Office365.
The online version of Word also has a Version History.
You can access it through File > Info > Version History.
This works similarly to Google Docs but you cannot name versions and storage is provided through Sharepoint/OneDrive.

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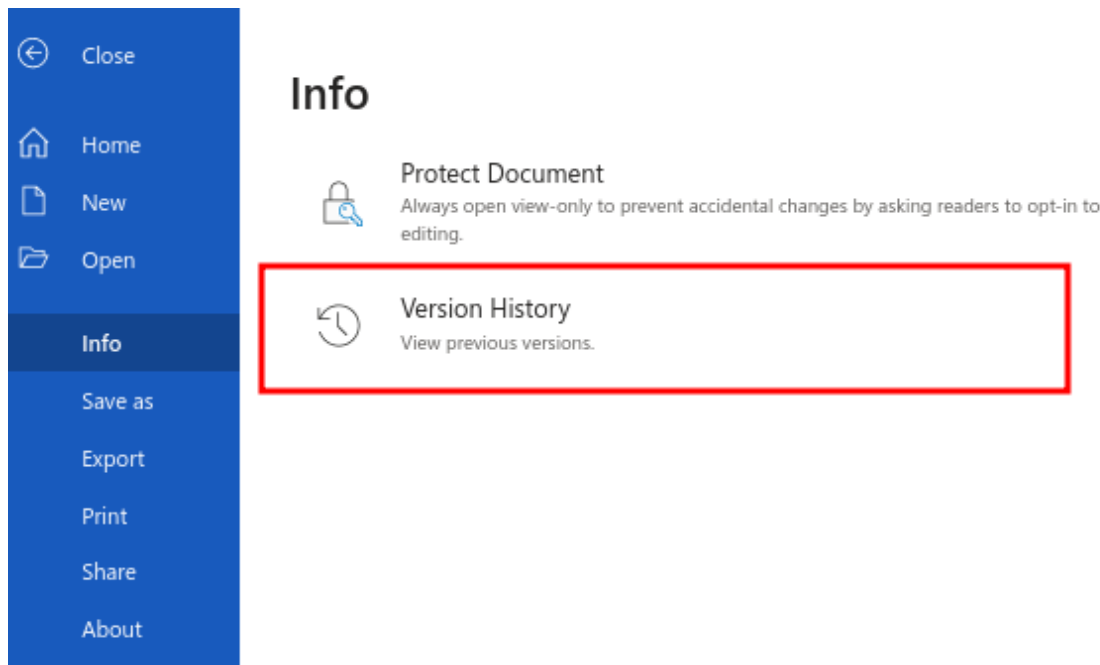
[4] Use an identifiable/professional display name. If someone was checking the work above, they may not be able to identify who "edibotopic" is. The display name can be changed in your Google account settings.

If you use an alternative to Google Docs it is your responsibility to make sure you use it correctly and can provide a Version History for your document along with your submission.