




# Document Commenting: NowComment® vs. Other Applications

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<b>Design Fundamentals</b>			
<b>Features and user interface built for idea sharing</b> (vs. editing) <sup>1</sup>	✓		
<b>Comments form real conversations</b> <sup>2</sup>	✓		
<b>Time efficient</b> for commenting <sup>3</sup>	✓		
<b>Good for large groups</b> <sup>4</sup>	✓		
<b>Web-based</b> <sup>5</sup> (outsourced admin, consistent interface)	✓	✓	
<b>Document integrity</b> is protected <sup>6</sup>	✓	✓	
<b>Comment integrity</b> is protected <sup>7</sup>	✓		
<b>Multiple comment view options</b> <sup>8</sup>	✓		
<b>Idea Sharing Features</b>			
<b>Skimmable conversations</b> <sup>9</sup> (helps overcome information overload)	✓		
<b>Comment monitoring/notification tools</b> <sup>10</sup> (counters, email notifications, RSS feeds)	✓		
<b>Sorting comments</b> (multiple ways) <sup>11</sup>	✓		
<b>Advanced search</b> <sup>12</sup>	✓	✓	
<b>Date controls</b> for document access <sup>13</sup>	✓		
<b>Tagging comments</b> as well as documents <sup>14</sup>	✓		

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<sup>1</sup> For NowComment, collaboration is about idea sharing, where Word and Google Docs see collaboration primarily as group editing. This is most clear in the user interface; NowComment gives comments lots of space (and lets you control how much), but the other apps give comments very little space. Switching between reading comments and reading the base document is also easier in NowComment; clicking on a text passage takes you to the related comments, and clicking on a comment takes you to the related passage.

<sup>2</sup> In Word, you can't reply to a comment. In Google Docs, you can only reply to the most recent comment; this constraint makes for a lot of isolated/disconnected comments rather than coherent and satisfying back-and-forth conversations. NowComment lets you directly reply to any comment, and our threaded structure allows multiple simultaneous conversations on any passage, image, or embedded video (keeping conversations focused and efficient).

<sup>3</sup> NowComment and Google Docs let you see everyone's comments at once. With Word, unless all the commenters are part of the same workgroup with a shared folder, the document owner/editor usually winds up skimming the document multiple times to see each person's "track changes" comments.... and since the commenters don't see what others have said the editor has to wade through (and maybe reply to) redundant comments.

<sup>4</sup> We use unobtrusive comment icons to flag where the comments are (and how many there are). Other methods (e.g. Google Docs highlighting) work fine when there are just a few comments on a page; however, once a page has many comments, these other methods are highly distracting and make the page unreadable.

<sup>5</sup> The "Software as a Service" (SAAS) approach is a cost-saving way to outsource configuration, patching, and other admin chores. Unlike Word, where different versions (old vs. new, PC vs. Mac) behave differently, web

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apps present the same interface to every user, avoiding a major source of tech support headaches.

<sup>6</sup> In NowComment, and now optionally in Google Docs, the original document can't be changed; Word will let students commenting on Shakespeare rewrite his prose too if they wish!

<sup>7</sup> NowComment lets only the commenter and the document owner edit a comment, and edited comments are flagged with the editor's name and time stamped. Word and Google Docs let anyone with document access edit previously posted comments without any flagging.

<sup>8</sup> We offer three ways to view the document and comments: (1) Document and comments side-by-side, (2) Comments in-line with the Document, and Sorted Comments. We also have additional options for controlling how much comment detail NowComment displays. Google Docs offers only one viewing option, a non-adjustable and cramped side-by-side view. In Word, comments are hard to find and read; depending on your version, they're either off to the side (in a cramped amount of space) or at the bottom of the screen.

<sup>9</sup> Comments in NowComment include a short summary of the writer's main point (like an email subject line); this feature lets readers skim conversations and comments to find which comments are of the greatest interest. The more comments there are, the more this feature shines... a significant reason why NowComment works well for medium-to-large group discussions and the other apps don't.

<sup>10</sup> In NowComment you can control when we send you email updates about new comments (e.g. on any change to an important document, or whenever someone comments on one of your documents, or only when someone posts a reply to one of your comments, etc.). We also offer RSS feeds to let you keep up with new Public Documents uploaded by people you want to follow and document-wide and passage-specific comment counters so you can tell when there are new comments. With the exception of a Google Docs notification feature for spreadsheets, the other apps offer

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no such notification features.

<sup>11</sup> NowComment lets you sort all of a document's comments by commenter, date and time made, tag given, or document sequence to find the comments most interesting to you. The other apps have no comment-sorting capabilities.

<sup>12</sup> NowComment's powerful search features can narrow a keyword search to documents with that word anywhere in the text, title, comment, author's name, tags, etc. or any/all of the above. Google Docs has some but not all of these features.

<sup>13</sup> In NowComment, the person uploading the document (teacher or student) can set dates and times when a document (1) can be seen, (2) can be commented on, and (3) allows when group members can see others' comments. These controls are tremendously useful, especially in educational and training environments; an instructor can make a document readable on Monday but block students from commenting before Wednesday's 3 PM lecture and also block students from reading each other's comments until after the Friday noon commenting deadline. The other apps have no such features.

<sup>14</sup> NowComment's ability to tag both comments and documents provides a powerful way to find and organize the material you're interested in. Other apps don't allow tagging of comments.