

# Getting Started with



# WordPress

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## What Is WordPress?

WordPress is what's known as a Content Management System (CMS). Basically, it is a database of files and folders that, when viewed through a browser, form a website.

Unlike the old days, webmasters needed to understand HTML code to create what was called a static site. Now, WordPress offers the advantage that anyone can use it without having to understand code. It's WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editor has become massively popular, prompting almost 25% of all website owners worldwide to use it. In fact, WordPress is so popular as a CMS that it has over 50% of the CMS market share, with Joomla and Drupal being distant competitors.

WordPress comes in two flavors: WordPress.com and WordPress.org. This is where many first-time bloggers get confused, as they are not the animal.

WordPress.com is hosted on the WordPress server - although you can sign up and start blogging free, your site will retain the word "WordPress" in its title, e.g., [www.yoursite.wordpress.com](http://www.yoursite.wordpress.com). You will have limited choice as to how your site is laid out; little, if any, ability to modify it to your own style, and no control over its lifespan.

On the other hand, WordPress.org is home to the WordPress software. This is the WordPress that serious bloggers and site builders use, as it is uploaded to their own server - which is why it's called "self-hosted."

Hosting your own WordPress site allows you the flexibility to choose from a dizzying array of themes and plugins that help design your site how you want.

## Understanding Themes and Plugins

A theme is responsible for the overall look of your site. It will determine the site layout in terms of header size, number of columns for content, typography, site speed, widget location and more.

A plugin is an additional piece of code that allows you add optional form or function to your site that doesn't exist in the basic system.

As your webmaster skills increase you will come across another term; "child theme." Don't be put off by this, it's not as difficult a concept as it first seems. Like most software, WordPress and its theme and plugin developers update their software to improve performance, fix bugs and tighten security. If you have altered any of the code in your WordPress installation, it can happen that the update will overwrite that change and you will lose it - or in extreme cases it will break your site.

A child theme is simply a second theme that forms an extension of the main theme. If you alter its code and any change is made to the main theme, your child theme remains untouched and your site continues to operate as normal. Aside from anything else, it's a good way to keep your site more secure.

The WordPress installation houses the themes and plugins that allow you to extend the functionality of your site. Don't stop there. It's not too difficult to learn how to safely make changes. With even a small amount of effort you can learn enough code (called HTML) to create something that's uniquely yours.

## **How to Install WordPress**

Now that you understand what WordPress is, the first step is to arrange hosting for your site. There are a number of different hosting companies, including GoDaddy.com, Bluehost.com and many more. The larger and more commercial the hosting provider, the more server space you will need to share with others. This is why it's called shared hosting.

How good your hosting is will depend on

- the amount of server space they have available
- how many customers are using it
- the ease of use of the hosting provider's website
- the hosting provider's customer service

If you have trouble visualizing what your hosting provider is doing, let's take a minute to think about it. Hosting is the same as cloud storage. We often think of the cloud as an almost mystical place out there somewhere in the sky, holding all our data. But it's not some ethereal place we can't grasp. It's a circuit board among a bunch of other circuit boards in a warehouse somewhere (possibly with armed guards) that we rent for our own use. We access it via Wi-Fi to make changes to the data that's stored on it. This is just the same as using an email account such as Gmail,

where your email data is actually stored on a circuit board in a Google-owned warehouse elsewhere and accessed via your computer's Wi-Fi connection and an encrypted password.

How many others are using the same resources as you will set the limit for how fast your site is to load for your visitors, as the hosting resources will be depleted by high usage? For this reason, it's vital that you choose your hosting with care.

Once you've made the decision, it's time to upload WordPress.

How you do this will change depending on which provider you have chosen, and with ever-changing web design, it can even change depending on your provider's latest site update. The principle is much the same.

On your hosting account you will create a folder (directory) to hold your WordPress software - the same as using the Programs folder on your computer's C: Drive.

The exact method of installing WordPress is best dealt with by corresponding with your hosting provider, as it will differ from one to the other and although it's not a difficult undertaking, mistakes can cause a lot of problems.

Once your installation is complete, you will interact with it via your own desktop browser. Just navigate to **[www.yoursite.com/wp-admin](http://www.yoursite.com/wp-admin)** and you can log in to your WordPress dashboard using the username and password you created earlier.

Once you are logged in to your dashboard, you can start choosing which themes and plugins might suit your needs.

Other relevant terms you will hear are Cpanel and FTP.

Cpanel is basically an interface that your hosting company provides to you so that you can manage files, add domains, set emails and more. Take time to learn how your Cpanel works before changing anything. Once you know your way around Cpanel it is a very handy tool for running and managing your websites.

FTP refers to a process called File Transfer Protocol and is a method of accessing your hosting through a file explorer - much like the one you use to manage your PC's files and folders. It allows you remotely connect, and add, delete or edit your site's files.

Until you become more familiar with how your sites data is contained on your allocated server space it's best to leave Cpanel and FTP alone and concentrate on mastering the WordPress dashboard.

## The WordPress Dashboard

When you first access your WordPress dashboard you may find yourself at a loss as to what exactly you are supposed to do next. Don't worry. There are a number of changes you will make and never need to think about again, and then there will be a couple of options you will use on a regular basis if you plan to update your site often.

Most of the tools you will use are shown in a vertical column down the left hand side of your dashboard. This list very rarely changes with WordPress updates and so you can rely on it being accurate.

Here's a rundown of what the tools are, why you need to use them and best practices:

**Updates:** Will show a notification of how many updates are available at present - this will include any themes you have installed (whether you are using them or not), plugins or even the WordPress installation itself. Just click on the Updates dialogue to open it.

**Best practise:** Always strive to keep your site as up-to-date as possible, as out-of-date software can result in your site being hacked among other issues.

**Posts:** Clicking here will give you the option to add or edit blog posts. Don't start blogging straight away. There are other aspects of your blog that need work to ensure it runs smoothly before we get to the fun bit. For the moment, just click on "Categories" and edit the "Uncategorized" default category to reflect an evergreen category you may use. "News" is a good choice if one doesn't immediately spring to mind.

**Best practise:** Always use categories and tags to help define your post content. We'll return to this topic later.

**Media:** This is where you will upload images and other files you wish to your site - it's not confined to images, but can also house PDFs, zipped files or audio files you wish to make available as downloads.

**Pages:** Pages will display content that is not liable to change, such as your Contact or About page, your privacy policy, terms & conditions, and anything else that is set in stone.

**Best practise:** Use only posts for blog content (content marketing) and use pages for permanent information that is under your control, not someone else's, e.g., Amazon may change their terms from the ones you have blogged about in a post, and so your post will be out of date, but your own terms are within your control and will need a page on your site.

**Comments:** Allowing others comment on your posts is what drives blogging in the first place, as it creates a bond between you and your audience. This is where you will see a notification of unread comments.

**Best practise:** Respond to all comments as it grows your tribe when conversation starts on your blog.

**Appearance:** You'll spend quite a bit of time here when you are first setting up your blog, as this is where you will choose your site theme, what widgets you will use and where, possibly your site header too.

## Themes

This link will give you the option to search the free themes available through the WordPress.org database, and install them directly into your site. Themes can be searched according to the criteria you choose, or you can upload your own. Typically you will only need to upload your own if you have bought a premium theme. Premium themes can often be of higher standards than free ones, though not always.

## Widgets

Widgets are extra features that can be added to different areas of your site. There are a number of default widgets, and often a new plugin will add further choices to this area. Just drag and drop the widget to the sidebar area you want it to show in on the actual site when viewed directly on the front end.

Your WordPress "back end" is the dashboard - where only you see what's going on behind the scenes. The "front end" is what your site visitors see when they visit [www.yoursite.com](http://www.yoursite.com).

## Menus

The menu area is where you choose how your web visitors will navigate your site.

There are more options here than are immediately obvious:



Clicking "Menu Locations" will tell you how many menus your theme allows. You may choose what to call your menus here and where they will be located. The locations will be set by your theme and often require coding if you want to change them. This is something that's best left to an expert.

Under "Edit Menus" you may select the pages you wish included in the navigation menu from the list on the left and click "Add to menu" to move them beneath the "Menu Structure" on the right. By moving a text box to the right you may create a sub menu whereby the menu will appear as a separate menu when your visitor clicks on or moves their cursor over the main navigation item.

Clicking the downward arrow on the text box marked "Page" will open even more options available - you can choose to alter the Navigation Label - this won't change the name of the page, but will alter how it is displayed in the navigation menu.

**Custom Links** allows you add a URL that may not be on your site, such as an affiliate link, or a link to another sit you own.

A little known tip for creating a header category tile that does not link to a page, yet serves to display a hierarchy of subpages, is to add the title of the link, but put a hashtag (#) in place of the URL.

**Categories** allows you choose a category title as a menu option. This is a great way to group relevant content for a visitor, where they can see all the posts of a particular category of interest to them.

### **Header**

The header option is self-explanatory - and won't necessarily exist for every theme. If you see the option available, this is where you can get details of what size graphic is allowed for use as a header for your site and the option to upload it from your PC or media gallery.

## **WordPress Plugins**

**Plugins:** The part of your dashboard that allows you add extra software. Clicking "Add New" will allow you search the free plugins available from the WordPress repository. To be listed here, the plugin developers must meet strict criteria that ensures the plugins are free from viruses and other malware.



**Best practises:** Though it's tempting, don't overload your site with additional plugins. Unfortunately, as attractive as many of the software applications are, too many plugins will overload your site and slow it down. But the problems don't stop there: plugins no longer kept updated by their developers can be a major source of security issues. Also, not every plugin plays nice with others, and using some plugins together can cause issues with your site. Read the plugin description carefully, noting what reviewers have pointed out as issues, making sure the plugin is compatible with your version of WordPress and that it is still supported by its developer.

**Users:** You may be running your log solo, or maybe sharing it - here's where you can add other users if you wish.

**Best practises:** Click "Your Profile" and add a nickname, then choose to display your name as the chosen nickname. This is to stop your login name being publicly displayed as post author - an important security step to take. It's not fool proof, but nonetheless should be done.

**Tools:** There's nothing here you will need unless added by another plugin.

**Settings:** This is probably the area that you'll work in most when setting up your site, and there are a number of very important settings you will need to take note of.

### **General**

Site Title- You'll need to add the name of your site here. This is important for SEO.

Site Tagline- Add a short, keyword rich description of what your site is about. It's very important to do this or your site will show up in search engines as "just another WordPress site." Not great if you want to be taken seriously - and a big no-no unless you want to be targeted as someone worth hacking by displaying your naivety.

WordPress Address & Site Address- the URL of your site.

E-mail address- Add your ordinary email to get important site updates.

### **Writing**

This area can be left as-is, but it's a good idea to add some update services. These are sites that will be "pinged" whenever you update your

content and will help notify the blogosphere that you have something new to read. They also help index your material. See bonus for a list of sites you can copy/paste into your update services.

### **Reading**

Front page displays- decide whether you want a specific landing page or your home page, or your latest posts. Default is your latest posts. Also, choose how many posts will be on your front page, and whether they should be shown as a summary or full post in your RSS feed.

### **Discussion**

Before a comment appears- It's a good idea to tick "Comment author must have a previously approved comment" to prevent spammers from using your blog for comment spam (attempting to create links to their spammy sites).

Default Avatar- Choose "Gravatar Logo" here as it helps show who's commenting and creates a better experience for you and your tribe.

### **Permalinks**

There are a number of different ways to set how your posts and pages will show in the URL when viewed online, but the easiest for your readers is *not* the default setting.

Common Settings- Choose "Post name" for best user experience. The only reason you should change this is if instructed by a security plugin you decide to use.

### **Other Actions to Take**

By default, WordPress will include a post, page and comment when it installs. These are placeholders to show you how to create them and where they will be placed. Delete these as soon as you understand how to add a post or page - they are bad for your SEO if left as-is and are another tell-tale sign that yours is a newbie blog, ripe for hacking.

### **Extended Dashboard**

As you add plugins, they will often require that you adjust their settings. Be aware that these options may be visible as additional links visible on your dashboard beneath the vertical list of default settings on the left.

## **The Main Dashboard**

Center stage of your Dashboard will be an "At a Glance" feature where you may see information about various aspects of your blog, such as how many posts, pages and comments you have, among other things. This area may also be influenced by plugin settings. For example, a plugin may display details of how many shares your content is getting. To decide on what WordPress shows here, simply click on "Screen Options" at the top right of the dashboard and you can choose which options will be displayed. It's convenient to turn off those notifications you have no interest in monitoring.

The "Welcome" tab is worth turning on if you are new to WordPress because it has links to helpful tutorials.

## **How to Choose a WordPress Theme**

Choosing a theme for your site has been known to cause many bloggers to procrastinate on their site building. The choices are almost endless and there are so many different needs your site may have that some themes fulfil more than others.

WordPress themes are available under a licensing called GNU - basically the WordPress coding is free for anyone to alter and share or sell. This applies to all WordPress themes and plugins. Some alterations are high end and their developers charge a fee for their work by selling their themes or plugins. Others do the work free. While there are many skilled developers who give away their work free, it doesn't always follow that those who sell their work can be viewed as any more skilled.

If you are new to blogging, choosing a free theme is tempting, and there are many good free themes out there - but regardless of whether you are starting on a tight budget or have money to spend, there are a few aspects to theme choice you should pay rigid attention to.

There is no doubt among the WordPress community that a theme or plugin from StudioPress (who created the Genesis theme and various related plugins), Woo Themes or Thesis are the most highly regarded.

With price being taken out of the equation, your chosen theme should meet the following requirements:

**A minimum of code** (often referred to as a bootstrap theme).

A good programmer uses the minimum amount of code to create the theme you will use. This is very important because more code means more delay in your site speed and performance, and also possible interference from plugins.

### **A responsive theme.**

Responsive themes are those that resize your site according to the device used to view them. If you are using a phone or tablet to view the site, it should resize without any distortion. If you wish to check a theme yourself, just click and drag the corner of your browser window to make it smaller and watch what happens. Your site should rearrange itself to remain as visible as possible.

### **HTML5 compliant.**

Often confused with responsive, this means that it uses the latest code to be accepted as stable and compliant with modern web browsers. A responsive site will generally be HTML5 compliant, but a HTML5 site will not always be responsive.

If you're just starting out, choosing your theme can be a little overwhelming. It's tempting to just pick one that looks good on WordPres.org. However, Google have let it be known that user experience dictates how well ranked a site will be. That means, if it's not easy to see on a mobile device, or if it's too slow, they will rank it lower than otherwise.

Google's experiments have found that a typical searcher will leave your site within a maximum of 4 seconds if it hasn't loaded - so this is an area worth paying attention to.

### **Whitespace.**

Whitespace is a term used for the amount of white space there is on a theme page. In conjunction with good typography (proper font choice and sizing) it means an uncluttered look that appeals to people and makes it easy for them to read your content. Avoid themes that have too many bells and whistles - they will often distract your visitors from your call to action, which should be to sign up for your email list.

You can choose from a number of great, free responsive themes here:

<http://www.wpzoom.com/>

<http://themegrill.com/>

<http://www.mageewp.com/>

<http://www.woothemes.com/>

<http://www.woorockets.com/>

<http://athemes.com/>

<https://accesspressthemes.com/>

<http://studiopress.com/>

<https://swiftthemes.com/>

<http://www.colorlib.com/>

<https://themeisle.com/>

## Must Have Plugins

Plugins are a great way to extend the functionality of your site and they can be a lot of fun to experiment with, but try to resist the lure of adding every plugin you can cram into your site.

Aside from content, there are only a limited amount of extras you need to achieve your blogging goals. This list of must-have plugins are all you need. Feel free to experiment with more, but be aware that the more, the worse - in terms of clashes, crashes and slow response.

Broadly speaking, the plugins you will want fall into these TK categories:

1. Site speed
2. Social engagement
3. Email marketing
4. SEO
5. Security
6. Anti-spam (optional)

**NOTE: It's important to understand something that is often overlooked by people who announce themselves as WordPress gurus. Often, they give advice that such-and-such a plugin will help to solve such-and-such a problem. However, what they fail to tell you is that installing the plugin will often do absolutely nothing unless you search for its settings, where you will need to make some changes to get the plugin to get the**

**results it promises. You can usually find plugin settings beside the plugin name in the list of installed plugins; in the Tools menu; in the vertical list of dashboard options, or even on your post editor itself. Be sure to read the plugin description on WordPress.org to understand what is expected of you to get the most from it. Can't find all the data you need? YouTube is your friend! Any plugin below that requires additional action after installation is marked by an asterisk\*.**

## **Site Speed**

Your site will be fast when it's straight out of the box, but as you add a theme, plugins and content, it will slow down. These plugins will help.

### Cloudflare\*

Requires a Cloudflare account and changing some settings on your hosting site. Cloudflare are what's called a Content Delivery Network, and take over the delivery of your site to the viewers' browser. They are often much faster than your own shared hosting and have a free level of membership.

### GZip Ninja Speed Compression

Nothing to do here, just install the plugin.

### W3 Total Cache\*

The best known and fastest caching plugin there is. This has a learning curve but you can find good information from WordPress blogs online to help configure it.

### WP-Optimize\*

Easy to use, just navigate to the settings and there's a link to a walkthrough.

### Cleanerpress

When editing a post or page, look to the bottom to uncheck any actions you don't want taken on it - reduces load time by disabling selected plugins for that page only.

## **Social Engagement**

### Simple Social Icons

Hugely popular with Genesis users in particular - this is a very stylish widget that displays your social networks to allow visitors connect with you.

### Shareaholic

One of the most fully functional sharing plugins there is - includes data analysis of your social shares among other things.

### rtSocial

The most lightweight sharing plugin there is on the entire WordPress platform - if you need to really cut your load time this is the one to use.

## **Email Marketing**

### Magic Action Box\*

An email capture plugin - often a good alternative to the one below if using Mailpoet, which can cause issues with it.

### Genesis eNews Extended\*

Capture email addresses from your visitors using this handy form.

### MailPoet

An excellent newsletter plugin that has both free and paid tiers and works in tandem with a number of mail delivery systems.

## **SEO**

### Wordpress SEO\*

The best SEO plugin there is - make sure to use all its functions, as there is more than meets the eye.

### Google XML Sitemaps

Let Google index your site quicker with this plug'n'play addition.

## **Security**

### Wordfence\*

The best free security plugin there is for WordPress - also available as a paid upgrade.

## **Antispam**



Getting spammed? There are different ways to deal with it:

### Antispam Bee

Simple, plug it in and you're done.

### Disqus

Make commentators sign in socially to add a comment. Has the added benefit of creating a related comments display beneath posts that negates the requirement of a Related Posts plugin, and creates a community around your blog.

### **Faultfinding**

If you've installed a few plugins and suddenly your site homepage is blank or there's lines of code appearing where they shouldn't it can often be the cause of a conflict between plugins. Go to the top of your plugin list and tick the box beside "Plugin." From the "Bulk Actions" box, choose "Deactivate" and click "Apply" to deactivate them all at once. Then start reactivating them one by one to find out which one is causing the problem.

### **Finally**

It can be a real pain trying to figure out which plugins are slowing your site down. Use the P3 plugin from GoDaddy to do a scan of your plugins to find out which ones are the big system hogs. You will have to decide which ones you can live without.

## **How to Create a Blog Post in WordPress**

Creating a blog post or a page in WordPress is quite simple.

From the Posts link on the left of your dashboard, just choose "Add New."

Enter your headline in the field that says "Enter title here." Note that when you have entered the title and moved down to the main WYSIWYG editor, WordPress will assign a URL to your post. The post's permalink will appear after it has saved itself as a draft.

It's important to understand how to engage with your permalink and why it's not a good idea to leave it as-is.

Let's take an example - say you are writing a post about compost gardening. You've done your homework and found that the keyword

phrase "compost gardening" gets 50,000 searches a month with low competition. However, as interesting as compost gardening may be, not many people are going to click on an article with that title.

By getting creative and creating an article entitled, "23 Secrets You Never Knew About Compost Gardening" you will attract many more clickthroughs to your content. However, no one is searching for 23 Secrets You Never Knew About Compost Gardening, are they?

You can use this as your title, but click "edit" beside your permalink and make it "compost-gardening" - so that when the search engines are scanning your post, they will see that it's about compost gardening - that phrase that 50,000 people are searching for.

You need a title to appeal to your readers and a URL to appeal to search engines. There are authority sites that don't do this, and count on a catchy tile that includes the keyword phrase, and that's possible too if you are smart about the combination of words you use.

## **Adding Media**

An image paints a thousand words. It's a cliché because it's true. Add images to your post - preferably one at the top of your post and others to break it up if it's a long one. Uploaded images remain in your library and can be chosen again and again. They need to remain in your media library - if you delete one, the post it contains will display a broken link image instead of the image you wanted it to. When adding images, it's important to enter a keyword phrase included in a description in the "alt title." Although intended to be read aloud by a PC to aid blind people, this tells the search engine what the image is of - and it can turn up in image searches driving more traffic to your site.

Remember that the alt description should make sense, as if it was being read aloud by the PC's voice setting.

## **Choosing Categories and Tags**

Categorizing and tagging your posts (on the right hand side of your post page) add further indicators to the search engines as to what your content is about.

Don't use more than one category for a post - it dilutes the effect and has a negative effect on your SEO. Instead, choose one category and several, applicable, tags.

For example, the category may be "WordPress" and the tags may be "Social Sharing, Free, and Analytics."

## Featured Images

The featured image is what will show up when your post is shared on social media or appears in search results. It needn't be the same as the one at the top of your post - or any other in it - and can be a completely different one depending on what you want to appear in searches.

## Publishing Options

On the top right of your post dashboard you can see publishing options under the word Publish.

Here, you can save your post as a draft if you wish to return to it another time, or if you want to preview it. You can also choose whether you want to publish it immediately, or schedule it for a specific date and time. This is useful if you want to write a batch of posts and schedule them for future release.

There are a number of other options that may appear in your post dashboard, depending on what plugins you have installed, but these are the default options.

## Now to Add Content Regularly

Once you have your site set up it is important to add content to it regularly. This has the dual purpose of getting traffic to your blog. The more fresh content you post the more often your site will be visited by the search engine bots and it will start to get ranked.

One way to get motivated to keep posting regularly is to join some type of Blogging Challenge. The one I like the best is this [30 Day Blogging Challenge](#) – you get awards as you complete sections of the challenge. Plus it is a fantastic way to pick up new readers, and make connections with other bloggers.

Thank you for reading and please feel free to connect with me if you have any further questions about Wordpress.

[www.DocupletionForms.com](http://www.DocupletionForms.com)