

How to Build a Blog

Course Material by Andrea Zoellner

Here's an outline of what we'll cover in this course:

- [Lesson 1: Getting started](#)
- [Lesson 2: Intro to how the web works](#)
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Lesson 1: Getting started

In this lesson, we'll pave the way for your new blog by answering some key questions and considerations.

By the end of this course, you'll have your very own platform to share your thoughts online. The best part is that you'll own your content. Unlike social media platforms that may change the rules tomorrow or go out of business, having your own website means you're in control. By choosing to build your website using the WordPress Content Management System, you're also opening yourself up to adding any

features you like in the future. In Lesson 2, I'll explain why that's possible and in Lesson 6, how to pick the right features to add.

Now, before we move on to the next lesson, I have some homework for you. I want you to take a few minutes to answer these questions about your future blog:

Why do I want to start a blog?

Writing out your mission statement is a great way to set a clear and solid foundation for building a blog. Are you hoping to inspire others and find community? Are you hoping to launch a blog to draw attention to your professional services? Are you hoping to create a space where you can send your YouTube fans, for example? Write out your mission so you're clear on what purpose this blog serves.

Another way of looking at this question is: What does success look like to me?

Are you hoping to monetize your blog and eventually turn it into a full-time gig? Are you hoping to book more consultations or sell more products with a blog? Or are you hoping to simply build a space where you can journal daily and share it with your extended family?

Picturing what success looks like can help you make decisions along the way as you're building your blog.

Do I want to be the face of my blog or do I want to have a blog identity?

The second question to ask yourself is: Do I want to be the face of my blog or do I want to have a blog identity?

For example, my website andreazoellner.com is my own personal space. It's my thoughts, it's my professional activities and it's unmistakably my own. My other blog, The Capsule Suitcase, is another website where I have a blog identity. Yes, it's still from my point of view, but the blog is less about me and more about the topic: travel and packing for trips.

If you go looking, you'll find examples of this all around the internet, including on YouTube. Some people vlog under their own name, and some people have channels with channel names that aren't their personal name, channels about cars, fashion, and other topics. You don't have to make a decision right now, but it will help if you do by the time we get to Lesson 5 on customizing your WordPress theme.

How much money do I want to spend on my blog a year?

The last question you should think about is: How much money do I want to spend on my blog a year?

You've already invested in online learning, so kudos for taking the step to start your blog right. And maybe you've already purchased a domain name and hosting and just need to build your blog. There are ways to blog for free on the internet, but none of them will give you the same

freedom and flexibility as purchasing your own hosting. Plus, there's usually a tradeoff to using free platforms. It may be that the platform gets to display ads on your site, or that you don't get to pick your own domain. Make sure you read the Terms and Conditions before opting for a free platform.

Now, does this mean you have to spend hundreds of dollars every year on your site? Nope! You can get hosting that meets the needs of your blog for a few dollars a month. And, you can choose themes and plugins that are totally free.

Whether or not you want to invest in getting a custom logo made, or want to choose a paid, third-party plugin (more on that in Lesson 6) is totally up to you! And for those who want to start lean, there are plenty of ways to do that too.

In summary, your homework before moving to Lesson 2 is to answer these questions:

- Why do I want a blog?
- What name do I want to give my blog?
- How much do I want to spend on my blog?

Lesson 2: Intro to how the web works

This lesson will explain the fundamentals of what makes up a website and the different services and softwares required to run a site. If you already know this, you can skip ahead to Lesson 3.

The reason I made sure to include this lesson is that many people misunderstand the basics of how domains, email hosting, website hosting, and content management software work together. Understanding these foundations will help you make informed decisions when choosing providers and when troubleshooting potential issues as your site changes and grows. It will also give you the foundational knowledge about the web industry that will help you in the rest of the course. Ok, let's get started.

Let's break down the anatomy of a website.



Where does my website live online?

At their core, websites are essentially files and databases. People visiting a site are making requests to the computer server where those files live, requests to view the content. Without a server to host your files, your website can't be made accessible to people online. That's why you need

to purchase a hosting service to house your website files and database. This is usually a service paid monthly or annually by a hosting company that manages the servers and the server software.

What is WordPress and why do I need it?

To design how that website content is organized and displayed, you'll need to build your website with software. CMS, or Content Management System, is the software you use to build your website, hosted by your web host.

WordPress is a CMS, in fact, it's the most popular one. WordPress is also free, and is what is called “**an open-source software**”. That means that WordPress isn't a company or no one person owns WordPress. It's a software project that is maintained and developed by hundreds of thousands of contributors around the world. And I'm one of them! If you download WordPress in Canadian French, you'll see interface text that I translated.

I want to highlight this because I often get questions from people I meet who ask: do you work for WordPress? The answer is no, because WordPress isn't a company. There is a foundation that manages the non-profit and community functions of the WordPress Open Source Project. But people who work in the WordPress industry work for hosting company's, web agencies, they are freelance developers or designers, make themes people can purchase for their sites, or sell plugins that enhance the features on a site. These people all run their livelihoods

supporting and creating products for people using WordPress, but they don't work for a company called WordPress.

In the situation you encounter a problem with your web hosting, you can call the company that manages your hosting, but if you ever get stuck or angry at your WordPress site, you won't find a WordPress customer service phone number to call. But you can find thousands of people online who make a living offering WordPress Support, and a million blog posts or videos on how to use WordPress, often by the very people who contributed to building the feature.

How do I pick what my site's URL is?

If we go back to our anatomy of a website, the next element I want to talk about is domains. Domains are the unique web address people will use to get to your site. When you type in a URL, which stands for Uniform Resource Locator, it usually looks like this:

<https://andreazellner.com>

HTTPS stands for Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure. HTTP means the same thing, but it means it's unsecured. I'll explain more about this in lesson 3. You might be wondering about www or World Wide Web. This is no longer needed and most URLs don't use it anymore.

Now the rest is up to you, as long as nobody else has already claimed the same domain. The first part, in my case, andreazellner, is your unique domain, and the last part, .com, is what is called a Top-Level Domain.

Top-level domains are pretty varied now a days: .com, .org .ca, .blog .online . shop and so so much more.

That's why I wouldn't worry too much if your first choice for a domain is already taken since you may be able to find a combination and a top-level domain, that's unique to you.

So how do you register your domain? You need to go through a registrar or a reseller to secure your domain. Domains are overseen by [ICANN](#), or the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, and registrars own the rights to sell certain top-level domains, like .com or .blog.

Registering your domain is an annual fee. If you fail to renew your domain, someone else can snap it up.

Hosting companies often bundle things like annual hosting with domain registration and email, but more often than not, they are reselling domains, and not the original registrars. Don't worry though, there aren't any major pros or cons to where you register your domain, since like your website, you can often move your domain registration to another provider.

How do I get a custom email address?

Lastly, email. While Gmail dominates the landscape for free email, professionals and businesses should seek out a professional email

address that matches your web domain. For example, you can reach me at a@andreazoellner.com and you can reach my blog's team at hello@capsulesuitcase.com. This is not necessary to get started, since you can totally list your Gmail address as a way to get in touch or have online contact forms route directly to any free email you have already. But, to look extra professional and polished, I do recommend getting your own email address with your site domain.

Getting email hosting is a separate service to web hosting and domain registration, but you'll often see 2 or 3 of these services bundled. Just remember that if you do select these services from different providers, to keep an organized record of your renewal dates so you never let anything accidentally lapse or expire and compromise your website.

And that's it, those are the ingredients to getting your website online. In the next lesson, we'll get our hands dirty and I'll show you exactly how to get started with your hosting, domain, and email setup.

Lesson 3: Choosing your hosting and buying a domain

Whether you're building a blog, a website, or a portfolio, most WordPress hosting will meet your needs. Where things get more complex is when you have high-traffic sites, complex site setups, large sites, or big eCommerce sites. That's when you'll need faster, more powerful, hosting, with additional specs and features.

But for today, here are a few pointers for choosing a WordPress host:

What kind of hosting do they offer?

Most entry-level hosting is **shared hosting**, which is like renting a storage locker in a big storage facility. You, along with a bunch of other tenants, each have your section of the space. Pros: It's the most affordable hosting you can get. Cons: Shared hosting is usually slower and has more security weaknesses. Support is usually less responsive because you get what you paid for.

Dedicated server hosting is like renting the whole storage building for your stored personal items, and cloud hosting is like having little copies of your stuff in the cloud, that you can access at any point.

Cloud hosting is by far the most advanced and high-performance option on the market, but it also costs more.

What are the reviews like?

This is where the real juicy stuff is. Look at websites like **G2**, **Trustpilot** and third-party review sites. Pay close attention to how people review the support offered by the hosting company.

Do you want to bundle email, hosting, and domain registration in one?

Not all hosts do this, so you might want to decide if that's a dealbreaker for you from the start.

How much does it cost?

Watch out here, since some hosts will give you an amazing deal on the first year, and then charge you three times as much the next year. Make sure you always read the fine print and are aware of the full price.

What's included?

Things like [domain privacy](#), which hides the name and address you used to register your domain, [SSL certificates](#), a [Content Delivery Network](#), and website backups.

[Bluehost](#) is a very common shared hosting provider, with competitive rates for first-time website owners. [Kinsta](#) is my pick for top-tier cloud hosting, with some of the fastest load times on the market. I've been an employee at Kinsta since January 2020 and although a bit pricey for beginners, they deliver great results.

WordPress.com is not the same as WordPress

If you are googling WordPress and find a website called [WordPress.com](#), you've found a product from a company called Automattic. This is an online platform where you can host and build a website using a version of WordPress maintained and controlled by Automattic. They offer all-in-one pricing. This is a great place if you want a new site that is easy and simple to spin up and manage. But keep in mind, this is not ideal if you want total control over your site. WordPress.com is a website building platform and is not using [the Open Source version of WordPress](#). That means that you can't easily download your content and move your

WordPress site to a different web host. In a nutshell, WordPress.com is a website builder, and installing WordPress on the host of your choice is called “self-hosted”.

Buying a domain

I host my websites with [Kinsta](#), a Premium cloud-based hosting company, so I’m going to use my account to demonstrate how to set up a brand new WordPress site. I’ll point out where the experience will vary from host to host, and what to expect.

Because [Kinsta](#) doesn’t have email hosting or domain registration, I like to use a website called [Hover](#) to register my domains. If you’ve chosen a hosting provider that offers domains, email, or both with your hosting bundle, you’ll want to use their service since you’ve already paid for it.

With [Hover](#), I’ll look up my first choice domain and see if it’s available. If it isn’t, it’ll suggest some alternatives including different spellings, and top-level domains. Once I’ve picked one, I’ll pay for it, and I always check off [Private domain registration](#), so people can’t look up who registered the domain. I like to be mysterious and also privacy concerns.

[Hover](#) has a few email options, so you can choose the one that suits your needs. If you want something very professional, choose the works. For the super simple option, you can choose email forwarding, and for a free option, bypass this entirely and continue using your current email provider like Gmail.

**Some of these links are affiliate links. If you sign up for or purchase anything with these links, I get a little kickback.*

Lesson 4: Installing WordPress

This lesson is a step-by-step guide to installing WordPress in your web host account.

By now, you already have a hosting account, so you don't need to download and install WordPress. Good hosts will make it super simple to install WordPress right from your hosting dashboard.

Follow long in my video to see the general steps to follow when installing WordPress in your hosting account. Here are a few links for how to install WordPress with major hosting services.

[GoDaddy](#)

[SiteGround](#)

[Kinsta](#)

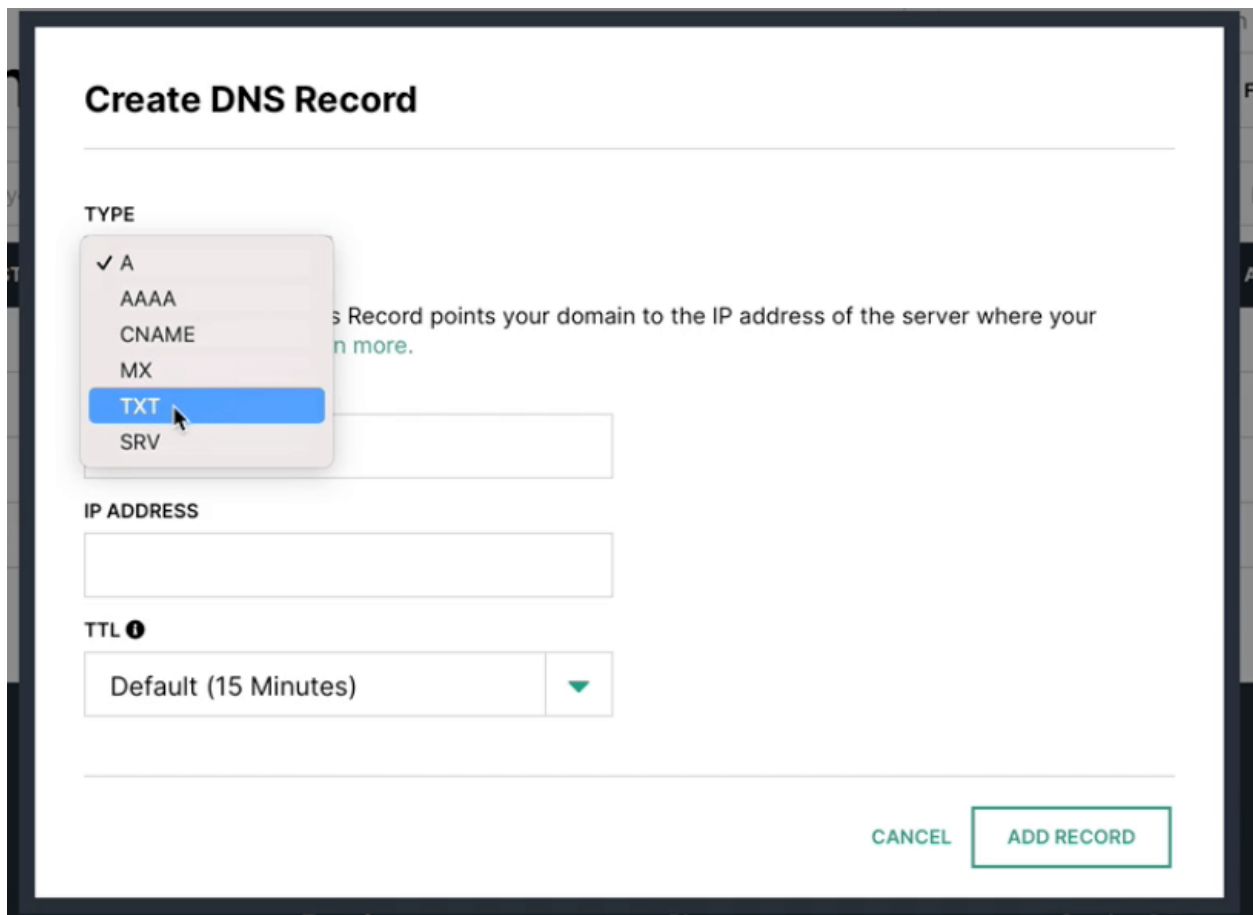
[Bluehost](#)

Connecting your domain and email hosting

To verify your domain, you'll need to copy a TXT record into your DNS settings. This can look different from one host and domain provider to the next, so I recommend looking in the help documentation of your

providers. [This general overview from Hover](#) can help understand how to update DNS records.

TXT (short for text record) is an informational DNS record used to associate arbitrary text with a host or other name. This will help you connect your domain to your website and adding an MX record will connect your email server.



Create DNS Record

TYPE

- ✓ A
- AAAA
- CNAME
- MX
- TXT**
- SRV

Record points your domain to the IP address of the server where your website is hosted. [Learn more.](#)

IP ADDRESS

TTL ⓘ

Default (15 Minutes) ▼

CANCEL **ADD RECORD**

If you've chosen a hosting provider that offers all three: hosting, domains, and email, and purchased a package with all three services, make sure you take advantage of this and set them up within your one account.

Choosing your WordPress theme

When installing WordPress, it comes with the default theme of the year. But you'll probably want to change things up based on how you want your site to look. Here's a quick lowdown on WordPress themes.

WordPress.org theme repository

There are free themes, available online, or through the official [WordPress theme repository](#). These are vetted themes that have been checked for coding standards and that I personally recommend too. They are usually quite simple, though, so not everyone finds exactly what they need among the choices.

Theme marketplace

Anyone can design and sell themes online, so you can also go the route of buying and downloading a theme from a marketplace and uploading it to your website. Make sure you do read reviews and see examples of the theme in action, however, since not all themes have the same quality of code.

Page builders

The third avenue to consider when picking your theme is to install a page builder plugin. These plugins are usually paid plugins that enhance your theme and add additional features, flexibility, and design options to your website. These are very cool, and I actually use one called [Elementor](#) on my travel blog. Other popular ones include [Beaver Builder](#), [Divi](#), and [Visual Composer](#).

If this is your first website, I recommend holding off on website builders since these can make your website a little more expensive, and more complicated. WordPress also has some great features out of the box that are worth exploring before you decide to add another set of tools.

Activating a theme

Once I've found one I like, I can demo it on my site by clicking on Live Preview. Now because I don't have any pages or blog posts yet, it might not look that great. Not to worry, once we add content, it'll be a lot easier to make the blog look like the demo site.

Is my website live? Can I hide it until I'm ready?

At this point, if you've purchased a domain, installed WordPress, and connected your domain, your website is live and fully available to viewers. This means anyone who types in your URL will see your site.

Three options:

1. Hold off and only connect domain when your site is ready
2. Build site live but discourage search engines
3. Put up a Coming Soon page

Unless you've already started sharing your domain name, it's unlikely many people will look up your site and check it as you add content and build it. For most people, holding off until they connect their domain or building their site live over the course of a few days is fine.

You'll want to make sure your website settings are set to discourage search engines from indexing your site. This will tell Google "I'm not ready yet, come back later" instead of search engines scanning your site and showing matches to people on the internet.

Search engine visibility

Discourage search engines from indexing this site
It is up to search engines to honor this request.

Check this box under Settings > Reading to hide your site from search queries online.

If you want to create a Coming Soon page that allows you to show a splash page to visitors while you build your site on the down low, you can install a [Coming Soon Page Plugin](#) to do that. You'll learn how to install plugins in lesson 6.

Lesson 5: Customizing your blog

In this lesson, I'll cover how to really customize your blog so that it looks great, is easy to navigate, and will set you up for success as your blog grows. Let's dig in!

Customizing your site identity and using the WordPress Customizer

When using the Customizer in WordPress, different themes will display different options. I'll cover the ones that are common across all WordPress sites. This includes Site Identity, where you can add your site's logo and name.

When you've logged in to your site, you'll be able to access the WordPress dashboard. Some people might call this the back end, or the control panel, but the correct terminology is the WordPress dashboard. This is different from your hosting dashboard, which controls your hosting settings.

When you're logged in, you'll see a toolbar appear at the top of your website. This is only visible to you, as the admin and to any user who is logged into your site. Your visitors won't see this. You can use it to toggle between your site's "front end" and dashboard.

Customizing your Site Identity

You can launch the Customizer by going to Appearance > Customize. When using the Customizer in WordPress, different themes will display different options. I'll cover the ones that are common across all WordPress sites. This includes Site Identity, where you can add your site's logo and name.

Your Site Identity will display site info in search results and in your browser tab, as well as on the site itself. The Site Identity displays across the entire site, unless you choose to hide it completely.

Your Site Identity is made up of 4 elements:

- Title
- Tagline
- Logo
- Site icon (the small icon that appears in your browser tab)

You don't need a logo necessarily, since your site title in the font of your choice can act as your logo. Whether you use a logo or just your site title text, this will be clickable and act as a 'return to home' link.

Customizing your Menus

Different themes will have different menu areas, which means the different places on your site where you can add clickable site navigation. The Customizer is an easy place to build a new menu and add links, and

see in real-time how they look on your site. You can also build menus and not assign them to a menu area at all. This will save your custom menu on the backend and allow you to later use them as a widget in widget areas on your site.

Static homepage vs your latests posts

There are two main ways to set up your homepage in WordPress: to have one page designated as your homepage and displayed at your home URL, or, a page that pulls in your blog posts in a style dictated by your theme. If you run a blog, the option of displaying your blog posts on your homepage is the best way to put your content front and center.

If you are building a website, it's best to choose a static page and design that page to look exactly how you want. With the WordPress Editor, you can still pull in your latest posts and display them on your static page. This is my recommendation if you have a website that also has a blog section. Again, if you run a blog, I recommend sticking to displaying your blog posts on the front page.

When you set your homepage to be a static page, you need to choose which page or create a new one. If you also plan to create blog posts, then you should create a new page called Blog (or Posts, or News, whatever works best for you) and mark that as your Posts Page. If you add that page to your menu, that's how people will access your latest blog posts.

Note that this setting isn't permanent. You can change your mind at any point!

Adding and removing Widgets

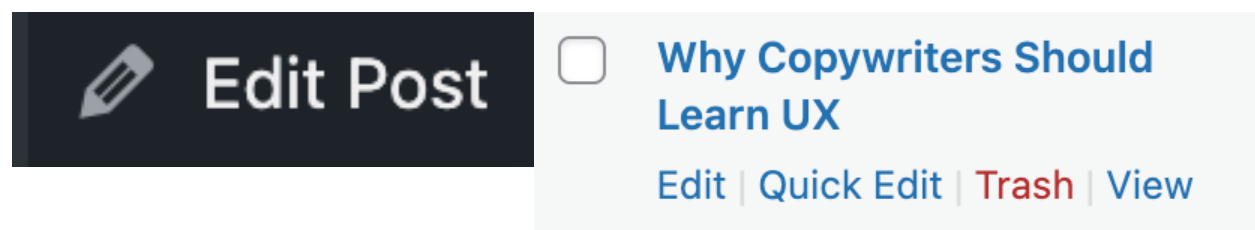
The Customizer is also where you can view and edit your widgets with a live preview. Widget areas are theme-dependant. Most often, widget areas include the sidebar of your site or the footer. Some widgets are standard across all WordPress sites, some themes add widgets to the options, and plugins can also expand your widget selection on your site, although your widget areas are controlled by your theme.


Adding and editing blog posts

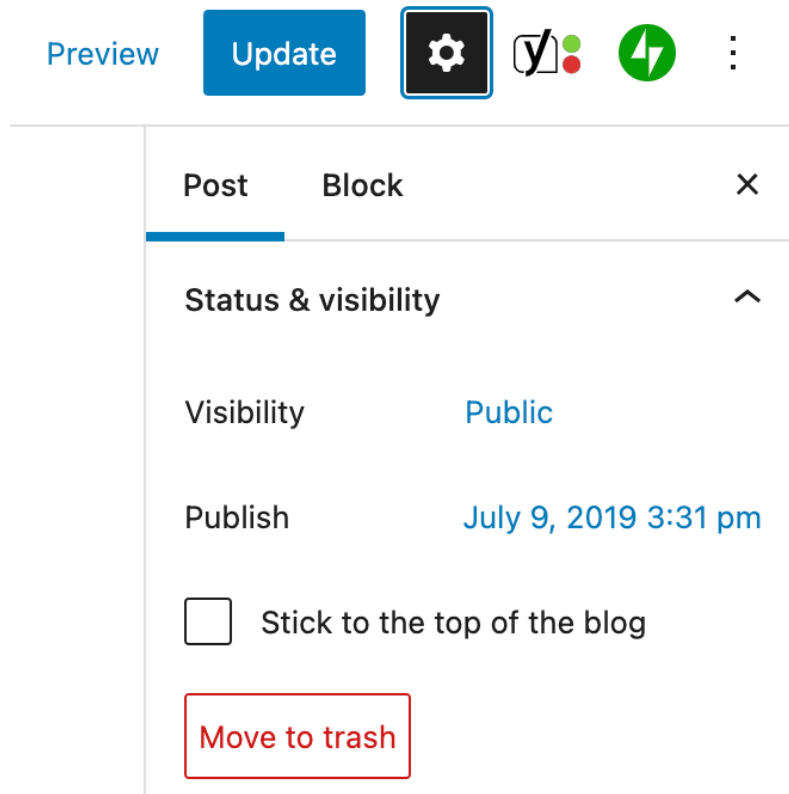
Without content, your website looks empty. In this video, I add posts and introduce you to the Editor.

Using the Block Editor to create interesting posts

You can access the editing view of any page by clicking on Edit Post on the top toolbar when viewing the page or by going to Posts and clicking on Edit below the name of that page.

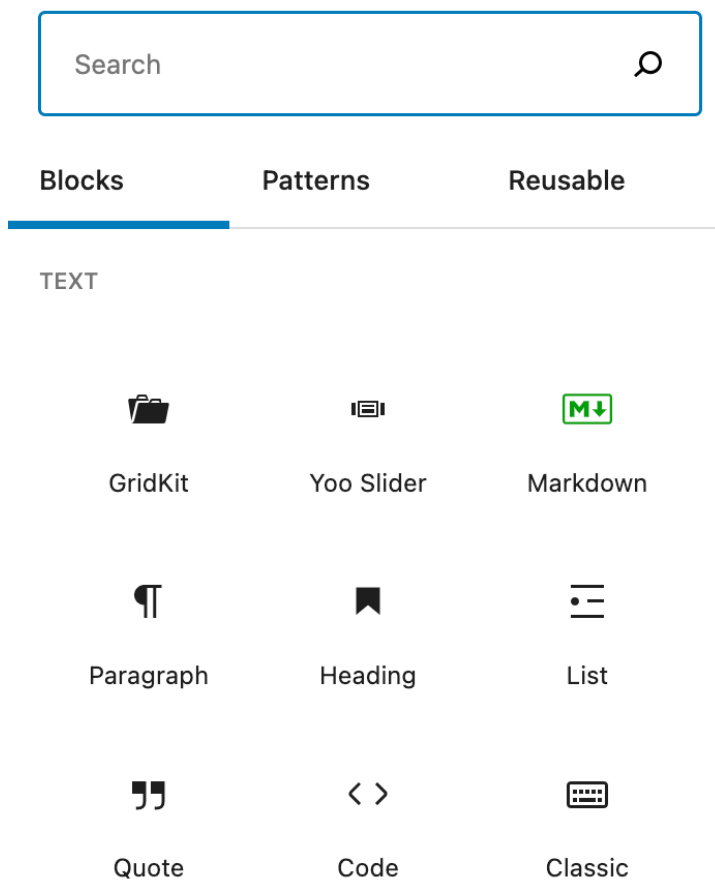


Once you're in the post, you'll notice the right-hand toolbar. Under the  gear icon, you'll see Post and Block. Post controls the settings for the whole post, such as the visibility, author, publication date, URL, featured image, and whether or not you allow comments.



The Block tab under the gear icon controls individual blocks. When you add a block to the editor, these settings show up and allow you to make changes to the appearance of each block.

Here is a [helpful guide on using the Block Editor](#). Note the guide is from WordPress.com, but the block instructions work for your WordPress instance as well.



There are many blocks that are available out of the box, but adding Plugins to your site can also add additional blocks to use on your site. In Lesson 6, we'll add Plugins and you'll see how they add even more blocks

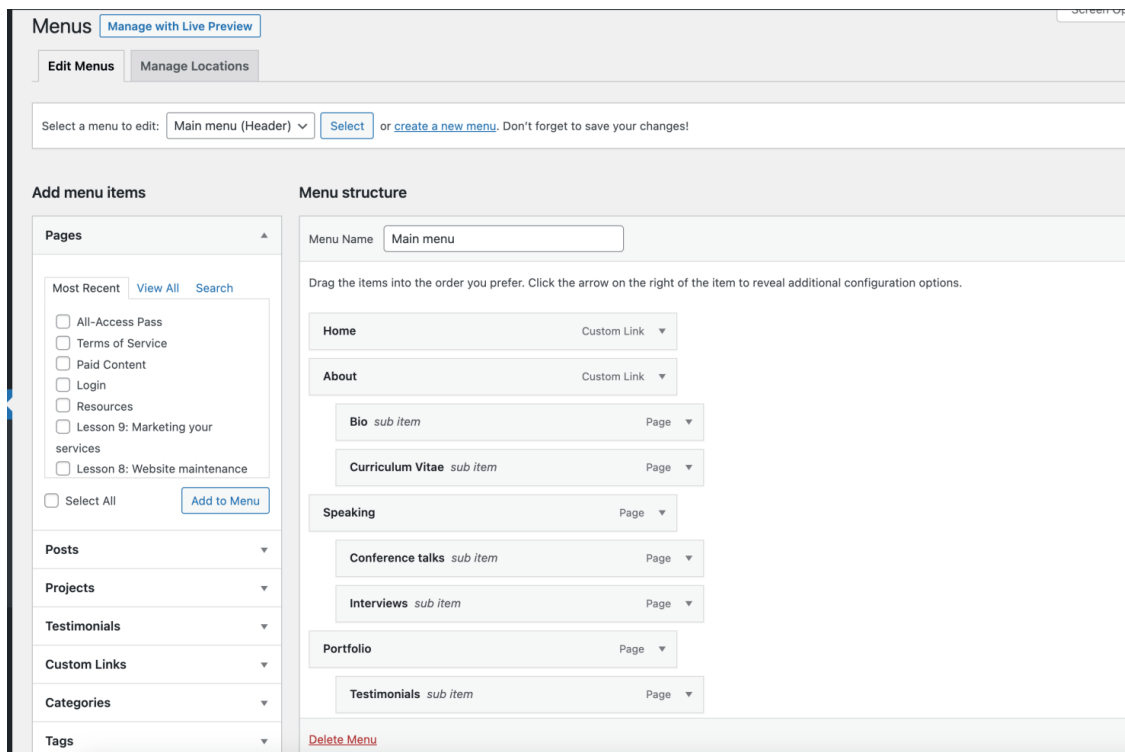
and widgets to use on your site. Patterns, which you can see when viewing all blocks, are a grouping of blocks that are pre-designed. Reusable blocks are groupings or preset blocks that you've designed and saved yourself. Note that when you make a reusable block, anytime to edit it, it updates across all the places it's used.

Using menus to add site navigation

As you add content, you'll need to create easy ways to organize and access your content. Site navigation through a well-structured menu will help! If you've used Categories and Tags correctly, it'll be even easier to link to your content in Menus and Widgets. Here's a [helpful guide to menus](#) for more examples.

Whether you plan on posting a lot or once in a while, you can already start thinking up your main categories. If you run a business website, you might have categories about products, or feature releases, corporate news, or upcoming events! You should only have a handful of categories in total and assign 1-3 for a blog post.

Tags can be more niche and numerous and don't have to be consistent across your blog posts. Both of these metadata items can help you organize your content into sections, and even be used in your menus to create easier navigation. For that reason, I recommend putting some thought into it from the start. You can even nest categories under broader topics for a more complex topic hierarchy. Sketching it out on paper can help bring clarity to your blog's content structure.



Adding a menu

Menu areas are theme-specific, meaning that where your menu appears can vary. But you can create cool menus that serve your needs with any theme! You can control your menus in two places: Appearance > Menu, or click on Live Preview to access the Customizer, where you can see your menu changes in preview mode.

Notice how you can edit menus, create menus, and manage locations all in this screen. The steps to creating a new menu are:

- Create a menu and give it a name.
- Add items. You can add Pages, Posts, custom links, or a link to a specific category or tag used in posts. You can scroll through your content or search it.

- Organize your menu. Notice how some menu items are indented? You can drag, drop, and indent menu items so they become drop-down menus.
- Set a location. Choose where this menu will appear. You can choose more than one location if you want to have it both in the header and footer for example. However, I recommend creating a slightly more condensed menu in your footer or to link to another set of links to make certain quick links (Contact, Privacy Policy, or FAQ, for example) easier to find.

Some themes have a dedicated menu location called Social Menu. I recommend only using this for links to your social media profiles. This menu area is most often designed to display social icons when the appropriate Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter profile link is added as a custom link.

More blocks, widgets, and customization

Widgets and blocks can give you lots of ways to display content on your site. The block editor does use those blocks only within the content section of a post or a page while the widgets are limited to the widget areas of your theme. That being said, there are widgets and blocks that do exactly the same thing, like display your latest posts, which gives you plenty of options to make an interesting and engaging site experience for your reader.

I recommend playing around with the available blocks to see what you like and what styles work for your content. Some plugins add block patterns to your choices and some themes come with extra options as

well. Once you find a few styles you like, I recommend sticking to them throughout your site for a clean and consistent look.

Site settings

Comments, spam, and other blogging settings. This video will show you how to customize some of the important back-end features of your blog.

As a blog owner, you are also the moderator of your site's comment section. Under Settings > Discussion you can set limits, block certain IP addresses, limit comments to logged in users, or set your blocklist words.

Under Settings > Permalinks, you can set your default URL structure. I recommend choosing the setting Post Name, which displays a URL generated by the blog post title and editable in the post itself. This is the format that will help your Search Engine Optimization (SEO) the most.

```
https://domain.com/sample-post/
```

And those are the fundamentals! In the next lesson, we'll talk about adding even more features to your blog through plugins.

Lesson 6: Introduction to plugins and third-party services

Learning how to add functionalities to your website through WordPress plugins.

Hi and welcome back. In this lesson, I'll cover the basics of plugins and show you how to install two of my favourites that I think will enhance your blog.

Introduction to plugins

First, what exactly is a plugin? Well, it's a lot like a phone app, that gives your phone more functionality than what came with it when you first bought it. WordPress is like your phone's operating system, which comes with some apps (or in this case, features) built-in, and some that you'll need a third-party software to get. The version of WordPress without any additional plugins is called WordPress core. WordPress core is updated a few times a year, and each release comes with new features and enhancements.

Like apps, plugins can be free, paid, or on a subscription model. Some plugins are created by plugin companies who create and maintain the software as their business, and other plugins are created by freelance developers just trying to share their code with others who might benefit from it.

In any case, if you have something you need to do, chances are, there's a plugin for it. To search the official WordPress plugin repository, click on plugins and add. But not all plugins are created equal, so here are a few tips when picking plugins. The repository has rules to be added, so already, you can feel more confident about picking a plugin in there.

What I look at before choosing a plugin are 1) stars 2) active install and 3) how recent was the last update, so I can tell if it's being actively maintained.

Two of my recommended plugins for bloggers are Jetpack and Yoast SEO. Both of these have free and paid versions, so I'll show you the free ones, how to use them and install them, and you can decide to upgrade later if you feel the need as your blog grows.

Installing and configuring Jetpack

In this video, I explain what plugins are and guide you through the [setup of Jetpack](#), the free version. Hot tip, if you do choose to upgrade your Jetpack subscription in the future, follow them on social media to catch a 20-30% off sale.

Once Jetpack is installed and activated, you have to activate the modules you want to use. To do this, go to the Jetpack section on your dashboard, and at the bottom go to Modules.

Here's a list of Jetpack feature categories (that's right, there's even *more* when you follow the links) for you to explore:

[Utilities](#)

[Blocks](#)

[Extra Widgets](#)

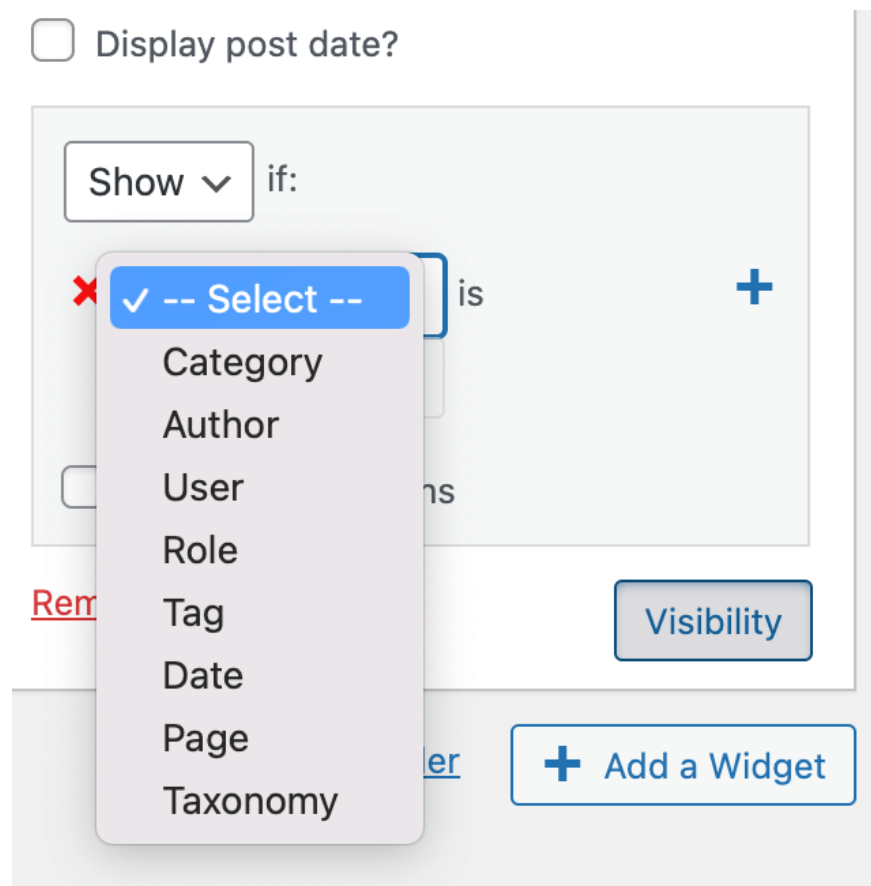
[Custom Post Types](#)

For more Jetpack support, you can view their [support documentation here](#).

With Jetpack modules activated, you'll notice extra features in the Jetpack settings area of your dashboard. You now also have additional blocks available when editing your posts and pages and additional widgets when editing widgets in the Customizer.

Additional widget settings in Jetpack

Jetpack adds extra widgets and widget features like [Visibility](#).



Beyond adding widgets, Jetpack also unlocks widget visibility. This means you can add conditional logic to a widget you add to a widget area so it only shows up on certain pages. Widget areas are consistent throughout your whole site and are theme-specific. Most often, this includes your footer and sidebar. By adding visibility parameters, you can choose to hide or show specific widgets based on the category of the post, tags of the post, type of content (post, page, testimonial, or portfolio item) and more.

Content Options

Content options is a section of the Customizer that appears once Jetpack is activated and the Content Options module is too. It's simply a place to add more features like controlling whether you show the author name, tags, categories and other blog post metadata. The 'Featured Tag' is available with themes that have a prominent way of showing highlighted blog posts. Sometimes that's a slider or a top section. By setting a custom tag (such as 'Featured' or 'Favorites') as your featured tag, any post with that tag will be shown in the featured section of that theme.

Installing Yoast SEO

Although Jetpack does have some Search Engine Optimization (SEO) features, the gold standard for WordPress SEO plugins is Yoast. It has tools that allow you to prepare your website for search engines to index and rank your content so people can find it. It also has great tools for individual posts and pages, so you're really optimizing each piece of content for search engine optimization. If I could go back in time and

give myself one piece of advice as a blogger, it would be to really put in the extra love and attention to each post to optimize it to the max.

Yoast SEO has free and paid versions, but like Jetpack, the free one is rich with useful features. This video will give you a quick tour and show some of the strongest features for bloggers. [Yoast's blog and lessons](#) are also a great source of knowledge on all things search optimization.

If you're curious about how to really optimize your site for search engines, you're in luck, that's what we'll talk about in the next video.

Lesson 7: Introduction to Search Engine Optimization

In this lesson, I'll share the foundations of SEO, or Search Engine Optimization. SEO is a variety of practices both on your site and offsite that increase the chances people will land on your site through a Google or other search engine query. There's so much to say about Search Engine Optimization, and if you want to gain traction and visibility on the internet, it's crucial, no matter what kind of website you run.

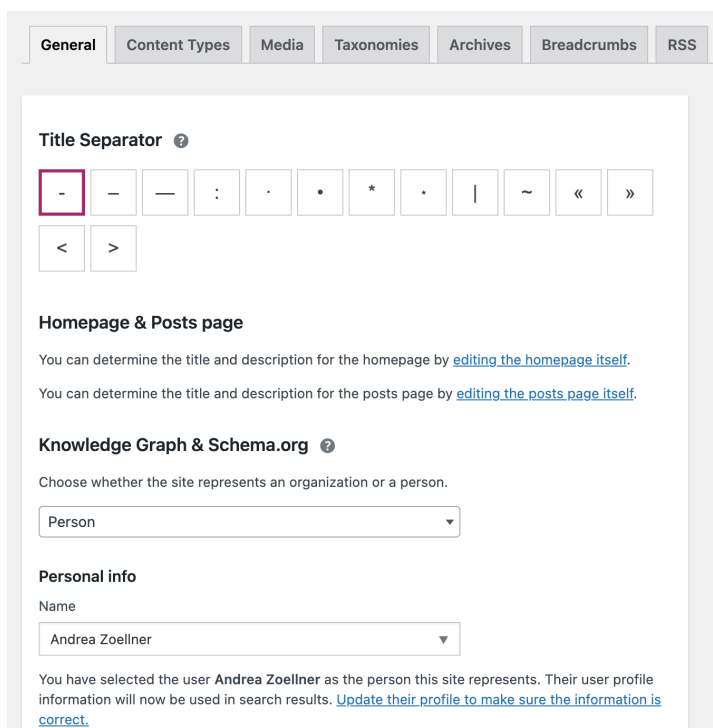
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Google loves a fast website

Let's start with overall website health. One of the top metrics Google looks for when ranking websites is page speed. They know visiting a slow website is a painful experience, so they will demote sites that make visitors wait. Make sure you are hosted with a fast web host, and that you're not doing things that can slow down your site. This includes hosting large files on your site. I recommend hosting videos on another platform and embedding them on your site, and always **compress and reduce the size of your photos** before you upload them to your site. Huge photos are often unnecessary anyways and imagine your poor end-user visiting your site on their phone. Not only will it take a while to load, but it will also eat up their data.

Index your site

You want to make sure that your site is indexed, and that Google can access your sitemap. **The Yoast SEO plugin can help control those settings.**



The image shows a screenshot of the Yoast SEO plugin settings page in WordPress, specifically the 'General' tab. The page has a navigation bar at the top with tabs for 'General', 'Content Types', 'Media', 'Taxonomies', 'Archives', 'Breadcrumbs', and 'RSS'. The 'General' tab is selected and highlighted.

Title Separator ?

A row of buttons for selecting a title separator: -, —, ., •, *, ·, |, ~, «, ».

Homepage & Posts page

You can determine the title and description for the homepage by [editing the homepage itself](#).
You can determine the title and description for the posts page by [editing the posts page itself](#).

Knowledge Graph & Schema.org ?

Choose whether the site represents an organization or a person.

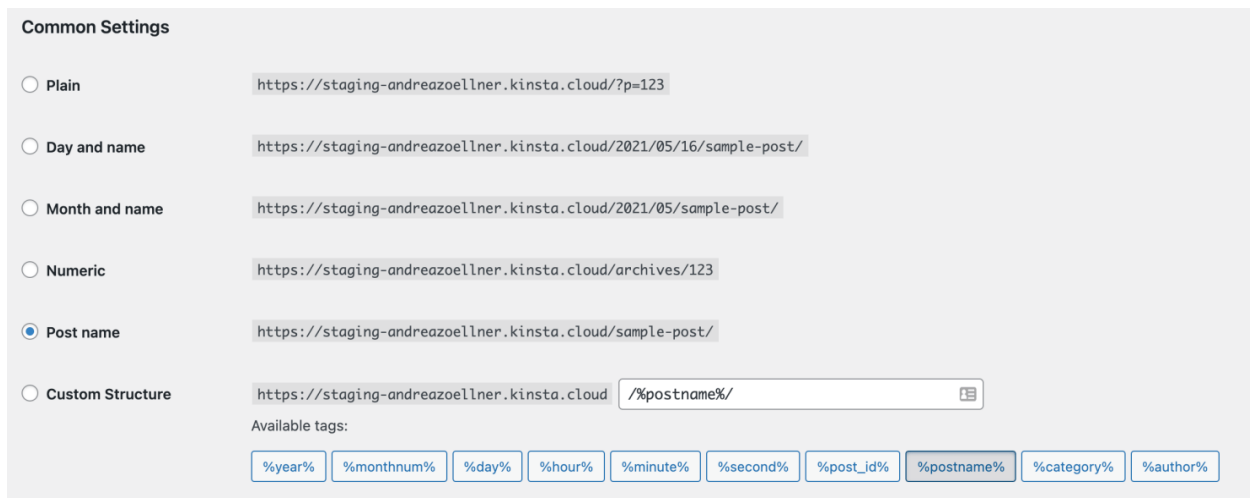
Person

Personal info

Name

You have selected the user **Andrea Zoellner** as the person this site represents. Their user profile information will now be used in search results. [Update their profile to make sure the information is correct.](#)

By setting the metadata on your site, you can communicate to people scrolling a Search Engine Ranking Page or SERP, what your page is about and entice them to click. You can also control your [URL permalink parameters](#), and I recommend using the simplest form available.



The image shows the 'Common Settings' section of a WordPress admin interface, specifically the 'Permalinks' tab. It displays several radio button options for permalink structures, each with a corresponding URL preview. The 'Post name' option is selected. Below the options, there is a text input field for a custom structure and a list of available tags.

Option	Preview URL
<input type="radio"/> Plain	https://staging-andreazoellner.kinsta.cloud/?p=123
<input type="radio"/> Day and name	https://staging-andreazoellner.kinsta.cloud/2021/05/16/sample-post/
<input type="radio"/> Month and name	https://staging-andreazoellner.kinsta.cloud/2021/05/sample-post/
<input type="radio"/> Numeric	https://staging-andreazoellner.kinsta.cloud/archives/123
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Post name	https://staging-andreazoellner.kinsta.cloud/sample-post/
<input type="radio"/> Custom Structure	https://staging-andreazoellner.kinsta.cloud /%postname%/

Available tags:

- %year%
- %monthnum%
- %day%
- %hour%
- %minute%
- %second%
- %post_id%
- %postname%
- %category%
- %author%

Optimizing posts and pages

When creating a page, here are some things to look out for to really optimize your page.

Keyword research

First, and this goes for posts and pages alike, you'll want to narrow in on some keywords that will be effective in representing your content, and matching up with user's search queries. [Here's a useful guide on keyword research.](#)

Let's say, for example, you're blogging about biking in Montreal, sharing bike paths, blogging about scenic bike routes, cyclist bylaw updates, and

reviewing bike shops. Your blog keywords might include “cycling, biking in Montreal, and bike paths” and you’ll want to make sure those appear in your metadata throughout your site. For specific blog posts, you’ll want to zoom in on keywords specific to that blog post content, like “best 10k bike rides in Montreal” and “scenic bike paths”. You can research keywords using special tools like [SEMrush](#) or even just by googling and seeing what the top suggestions are.

The balance is to find keywords and key phrases that have a high search volume, meaning lots of people are looking for those words, and low competition, meaning, not many blogs are ranking for those searches. You might not find a balance on both of those parameters for every post, but it can help to break out in a specific niche.

Follow Yoast’s suggestions

With your keywords in mind, you can start writing the content of your post or page. With Yoast, you’ll get writing recommendations, like writing a minimum of 400 words, keeping the active voice, breaking up your content with headers, and using your keywords throughout the text. Make sure you place extra importance on using keywords in your title and paragraph headers. On the web, these are referred to as H1, H2, and H3.

- [+ Add synonyms](#)
- [+ Add related keyphrase](#)

Did you know Yoast SEO Premium also analyzes the different word forms of your keyphrase, like plurals and past tenses?

Go Premium! ▶

Analysis results

^ Problems (4)

- [Outbound links](#): No outbound links appear in this page. [Add some!](#)
- [Internal links](#): No internal links appear in this page, [make sure to add some!](#)
- [Keyphrase length](#): No focus keyphrase was set for this page. [Set a keyphrase in order to calculate your SEO score.](#)
- [Meta description length](#): No meta description has been specified. Search engines will display copy from the page instead. [Make sure to write one!](#)

^ Improvements (2)

- [Image alt attributes](#): Images on this page have alt attributes, but you have not set your keyphrase. [Fix that!](#)
- [SEO title width](#): The SEO title is too short. [Use the space to add keyphrase variations or create compelling call-to-action copy.](#)

^ Good results (1)

- [Text length](#): The text contains 1043 words. Good job!

Optimize your images

Your images can also be optimized for search engines. First, make sure they aren't too big when uploaded and make sure the file name reflects the content. You should also make sure your images have alt-tags, which you can add in WordPress. These give an extra description to your images that Google can read and index in Google image searches and also make the description available to screen readers and other

accessibility tools for assisted web browsing. On that note, if you're tempted to make all your website content beautifully laid out content in image files, don't do this. Keep that content as additional resources and for Pinterest. Make sure the main content of each page is text, or else you'll lose all that searchability.

Link to other posts from your site and other sites

In your post, you'll want to make sure you're linking to other posts from your own blog, as well as reputable resources on other websites and blogs. The reason is that building that **network of backlinks** with websites with high domain authority, meaning, a good reputation in Google's eyes, will boost your own site too. What's even better is if other high-ranking websites link to you as well. This backlink strategy is really powerful, which is why blog owners will often hire third-party services to reach out to get links to their site added to other blogs. As a blog owner, I get about 1 email like this a day. It might be worth your time to do some of this outreach too, if you want to boost your Google ranking.

Steady wins the race

Remember that website traffic doesn't happen overnight, but there are some things you can do to speed up your site's discoverability. Start sharing your blog on social media! If you already have friends and followers there, this is the best way to get more eyeballs on your content. Building Pinterest into your blogging strategy is also a great way to drive traffic. In fact, Pinterest is the second biggest source of traffic to my blog. Experiment with joining Facebook groups that allow content sharing and other forums.

With things like Jetpack Stats, you can track which blog posts are the most popular and build off of what's working to keep producing great content that people want to read.

One final piece of advice: don't get too caught up in SEO to the point of zapping all the joy out of your website. Remember the reason you started your site in the first place and never lose sight of that.

Lesson 8: Website maintenance

Learn how to maintain and protect your website from spam, malware, and human error.

Now that you have a website, you may think you can just set it and forget it. Not so lucky. Your website is like a plant. You need to water it, give it sunlight, prune, protect it from bugs, and re-pot it from time to time.

Keep your version of WordPress updated

The first thing is always keeping your version of WordPress up to date. You can check on this and automate it through your dashboard, and you can do the same for plugins when they have updates. If ever you have issues with your website after an update, the first thing I always do is de-active plugins one by one to see if one of them may be causing an issue.

Remove old plugins, themes, and users

If you have plugins and themes you're not using, remove them from your site. And if you have users on your site who aren't active, remove their user accounts.

Schedule regular backups

Backups are another very important part of maintaining a website. Make sure your hosting provider is saving backups of your website, or that you have a plugin doing it. The last thing you want is to lose all your hard work!

Use secure passwords

Keep your website, and hosting accounts secure with a strong password and two-factor authentication where available and don't install anything you're not confident in.

Run speed tests

You can also run **regular speed tests** on your site to check the health of your site. If your website is super slow, you may want to compress some of your images.

Run broken link scans

You can also regularly check the health of your content by running a **broken link scanner** and broken page scanner. Cleaning up old content is a great way to maintain your site but also to keep on Google's good side.

Keep up your credit cards on file

And lastly, don't let your account expire! I have helped so many people who have gotten confused about their hosting, and domain, and WordPress logins and which services they have active, and letting their accounts expire accidentally because of a failed payment.

In summary, keep your software up-to-date, have secure passwords, and set aside time to do health checks on your website and you should be on track.

Lesson 9: Monetizing your blog

Ready to make money from your blog? Here are some places to get started.

Now that you have a blog, you might be wondering if there's anything you can do to fast-track making some money from it! Well, I can't give you any silver bullets, because the truth is, high-quality, relevant, consistent content is the best thing to build your online presence. Everything else will come with consistent traffic.

But, I can give you a few tips on what to do to look as professional as possible for potential brand partnerships, and also what you can do to start making some money even with modest traffic, through affiliate advertising!

Build up your stats

Get that web traffic! The first thing, as I mentioned, is really to make sure you're putting content of value out there. That means it answers questions people have, is optimized for search engines, is well-written and organized, and has high-quality images. Then, it's all about sharing your content as widely as possible.

Build a media kit

Putting together a media kit is a great way to attract potential partners and look professional. It also makes it easy to reach out to partners you'd like to work with because you won't have to write out your stats every time. Make sure to include your bio, demographic stats, reach, and some examples of past collaborations once you have some. Then, list your packages and prices.

Affiliate marketing

You can also start making money pretty easily with affiliate programs. You may already be part of some referral programs like "give \$10 get \$10" type referrals. Affiliate marketing is similar, although you get paid in actual cash, rather than store credit.

Amazon affiliates is the easiest one to get started with, and then you can join other networks and apply for specific retailers. Or, you can make a list of brands you really love and go looking on their sites to join their affiliate programs. Once accepted into these programs, you'll gain access to their dashboards and be able to get custom links and ads to place on your website.

When you first get started, you may be contacted by brands offering you free products in exchange for exposure, and that can be really fun! Even some of the non-monetary perks of blogging like blogger event invitations can be a nice perk to having a blog. Eventually, you will probably become big enough to ask for compensation on top of the product. Even 1,000 website views a month and 1,000 followers on Instagram is an audience that can be monetized, especially if they are engaged and commenting.

Just remember to always be transparent and publish disclaimers about affiliate links, ads, paid posts, and gifted items, so **you're compliant with the FTC rules**.

Good luck and have fun!

Lesson 10: Resources

What's next? Here are some ideas to keep learning.

Congrats, you've completed the course! Hopefully, you've learned enough to launch a blog on your own, if you haven't already. Feel free to refer back to this course material again and again as you work on your own blog and make it truly unique.

Additional resources

- [How to Configure Jetpack for Your WordPress Site](#)
- [Jetpack tutorial video](#)
- [Yoast YouTube channel](#)
- [Kinsta YouTube channel](#)
- [Intro to CSS](#)
- [How to run your blog like a business](#)

Let me know how you did by uploading a screenshot of your homepage and a link to your new website to the Project Gallery. Thank you for taking this class!