

LEARNING MADE EASY



9th Edition

WordPress[®]

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Customize your theme
and add plugins

Insert images, audio, and
video into your posts

Use WordPress as
a content manager

Lisa Sabin-Wilson

*Cofounder of WebDevStudios, a WordPress
design and development agency*



WordPress[®]

9th Edition

by Lisa Sabin-Wilson

FOREWORD BY Matt Mullenweg

Cofounder of WordPress

for
dummies[®]
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WordPress® For Dummies®, 9th Edition

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Foreword

There used to be a program from Microsoft called FrontPage, which was the first visual interface for creating websites that I saw. It worked like Microsoft Word and Publisher, so with very little knowledge, I was able to hack together the world's worst website in just a few hours without worrying about what was going on under the hood.

Years later, when I look back at that website, I cringe, but at the time, it was incredibly empowering. The software, though crude, helped me publish something anybody in the entire world could see. It opened a world I had never imagined before.

Now, using software like WordPress, you can have a blog or website light years beyond my first one in both functionality and aesthetics. Just as my first web experience whetted my appetite for more, I hope that your experience entices you to explore the thousands of free plugins, themes, and customizations that are possible with WordPress, many of which are explained in this book.

WordPress is more than just software; it's also a community, a rapidly evolving ecosystem, and a set of philosophies and opinions about how to create the best web experience. When you embrace it, you'll be in good company. WordPress users include old-media organizations such as CNN, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, along with millions of personal bloggers like me for whom a WordPress blog is a means of expression.

Matt Mullenweg

Cofounder of WordPress

Introduction

It was 2003 when I discovered the WordPress blogging software. Way back then (and in Internet years, that’s actually quite a lot of time), I used Movable Type as my blogging platform. A friend introduced me to the WordPress software. “Try it,” she said. “You’ll really like it.”

As a creature of habit, I felt reluctant to make the change. But I haven’t looked back. I’ve been with WordPress ever since.

WordPress started as a tool for blogging. Authors, students, parents, business owners, academics, journalists, hobbyists — you name it — use blogs as a matter of course. Over the past decade, WordPress has emerged as the premier content management system (CMS) available on the Internet. WordPress software currently powers 35 percent of the websites you see.

Today, WordPress is much more than a blogging tool. Individuals, organizations, and corporations are using WordPress to build their entire web presence. WordPress has grown into a valuable solution for everything from selling products on the Internet to running membership sites and blogging. Pretty much anything you think you can do with your website, you can accomplish with WordPress.

To a brand-new user, some aspects of WordPress can be a little bit intimidating. After you start using it, however, you begin to realize how intuitive, friendly, and extensible the software is.

This book presents an insightful look at WordPress. In the book, I cover managing and maintaining your WordPress-powered website through the use of plugins and themes, as well as using the intuitive WordPress Dashboard to manage your content. If you’re interested in taking a detailed look at the website-building tool provided by WordPress, you happen to have just the right book in your hands.

About This Book

This book covers all the important aspects of WordPress that new users need to know to use the software for their own websites. I cover the software package available at <https://wordpress.org> by highlighting important topics, such as these:

- » Installing and setting up the software
- » Navigating the WordPress Dashboard
- » Using the Block Editor to create posts and pages
- » Finding and installing free themes to use on your WordPress website
- » Using basic coding to design your own WordPress theme or modify the one you're using
- » Installing, activating, and managing WordPress plugins
- » Choosing to use the multiple-site WordPress Network option to host a network of websites in your domain
- » Migrating your existing website to WordPress (if you're using a different platform, such as Drupal, Movable Type, or Expression Engine)

With WordPress, you can truly tailor a website to your own tastes and needs. Some sites are packaged with the WordPress software; others are third-party plugins and add-ons created by members of the WordPress user community. You need to invest only a little research, knowledge, and time to put together a site that suits your needs and gives your readers an exciting experience that keeps them coming back for more.

Foolish Assumptions

I'll never know what assumptions you've made about me at this point, but I can tell you a few things that I already assume about you:

- » You know what a computer is. You can turn it on, and you understand that if you spill coffee on your keyboard, you'll have to run out and get a replacement.
- » You understand how to connect to the Internet and know the basics of using a web browser to surf websites.

- » You have a basic understanding of what websites and blogs are, and you're interested in using WordPress to start your own. Or you already have a website, are already using WordPress, and want to understand the program better so that you can do more cool stuff and stop bugging your geeky best friend whenever you have a question about something.
- » You already have a website on another platform and want to move your website to WordPress.
- » You know what email is. You know what an email address is. You actually have an email address, and you send and receive email on a semiregular basis.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons emphasize a point to remember, a danger to be aware of, or information that I think you may find helpful. Those points are illustrated as such:



TIP

Tips are little bits of information that you may find useful.



WARNING

I use this icon to point out dangerous situations.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

All geeky stuff goes here. I don't use this icon very often, but when I do, you'll know that you're about to encounter technical mumbo-jumbo.



REMEMBER

When you see this icon, read the text next to it two or three times to brand it into your brain so that you remember whatever it is that I think you need to remember.

Beyond the Book

I've put a ton of information between the covers of this book, but at <https://www.dummies.com>, you can find a Cheat Sheet that lists

- » Where to find WordPress support online
- » How to navigate the WordPress Dashboard
- » How to locate a reliable web-hosting provider

When you arrive at <https://www.dummies.com>, type the book's title in the Search field to find the Cheat Sheet.

Where to Go from Here

This book is a veritable smorgasbord of WordPress information, ideas, concepts, tools, resources, and instructions. Some parts of the book may apply directly to what you want to do with your WordPress blog. Other parts may deal with topics that you're only mildly curious about, so feel free to skim (or skip) those pages.

If you already have WordPress installed on your web server, for example, you can skip Chapter 3. If you aren't interested in digging into the code of a WordPress template and don't want to find out how to apply CSS or HTML to enhance your design, you can skip Chapters 9 through 12. If you have no interest in running more than one website with WordPress, you can skip Chapter 13.

I don't intend for you to read this book from cover to cover (unless you're my mother — then I won't forgive you if you don't). Rather, scan the table of contents and the index to find the information you need.

Long story short: Take what you need, and leave the rest.

1

Introducing WordPress

IN THIS PART . . .

Explore all WordPress has to offer.

Discover the basic concepts about publishing a website with WordPress.

Understand the different versions of WordPress and choose the right one for you.

Get ready to use WordPress for your online publishing.

- » Seeing how WordPress can benefit you
- » Participating in the WordPress community
- » Understanding the different versions of WordPress

Chapter **1**

What WordPress Can Do for You

In a world in which technology advances in the blink of an eye, WordPress really does make building websites easy — and free! How else can you get your content out to a potential audience of millions worldwide and spend exactly nothing? There may be no such thing as a free lunch in this world, but you can bet your bottom dollar that there are free websites and blogs. WordPress serves them all up in one nifty package.

The software's free price tag, its ease of use, and the speed at which you can get your website up and running are great reasons to use WordPress to power your personal blog or business website. An even greater reason is the incredibly supportive and passionate WordPress community. In this chapter, I introduce you to the WordPress software so that you can begin to discover how effective it is as a tool for creating your website.

Discovering the Benefits of WordPress

I work with first-time website owners all the time — folks who are new to the idea of publishing content on the Internet. One of the questions I'm most frequently asked is "How can I run a website? I don't even know how to code or create websites."

Enter WordPress. You no longer need to worry about knowing the code because the WordPress software does the code part for you. When you log in to your website, you have to do only two simple things to publish your thoughts and ideas:

1. Write your content.
2. Click a button to publish your content.

That's it!

WordPress offers the following competitive advantages as the most popular content management tool on the market:

» **Diverse options:** Two versions of WordPress are available to suit nearly every type of website owner:

- *WordPress.com*: A hosted turnkey solution; primarily used for blogging
- *WordPress.org*: A self-hosted version to install on the web server of your choice; used for building blogs and websites

I go into detail about each of these versions later in this chapter, in the "Choosing a WordPress Platform" section.

» **Ease of use:** WordPress setup is quick, and the software is easy to use.

» **Extensibility:** WordPress is extremely extensible, meaning that you can easily obtain plugins and tools that let you customize it to suit your purposes.

» **Strong community of users:** WordPress has a large and loyal members-helping-members community via public support forums, blogs, and websites geared to the use of WordPress.

The following sections fill in a few details about these features and point you to places in the book where you can find out more about them.

Getting set up the fast and easy way

WordPress is one of the only platforms that can brag about a five-minute installation — and stand behind it! Both versions of WordPress take you approximately the same amount of time to set up.



REMEMBER

Mind you, five minutes is an *approximate* time for installing the WordPress.org software. This estimate doesn't include the time required to obtain domain registration and web-hosting services or to set up the options in the Dashboard. (You can find information on web-hosting services in Chapter 3.)

When you complete the installation, however, the world of WordPress awaits you. The Dashboard is well organized and easy on the eyes. Everything is clear and logical, making it easy for even a first-time user to see where to go to manage settings and options.

The WordPress software surely has enough meat on it to keep the most experienced developer busy and happy. At the same time, however, it's friendly enough to make a novice user giddy about how easy it is to get started. Each time you use WordPress, you can find out something exciting and new.

Extending WordPress's capabilities

I've found that the most exciting and fun part of running a WordPress website is exploring the flexibility of the software. Hundreds of plugins and *themes* (designs) are available to let you create a website that functions the way *you* need it to.



TIP

If you think of your website as a vacuum cleaner, plugins are the attachments. The attachments don't function alone. When you add them to your vacuum cleaner, however, you add to the functionality of your vacuum, possibly improving its performance.

All WordPress websites are pretty much the same at their core, so by using plugins, you can truly individualize your website by providing additional features and tools that benefit you and your readers. When you come upon a WordPress website that has some really different and cool functions, 98 percent of the time, you can include that function on your own website by using a WordPress plugin. If you don't know what plugin that website is using, try dropping the website owner an email or leave a comment. WordPress website owners usually are eager to share the great tools they discover.

Most plugins are available at no charge. You can find out more about WordPress plugins and where to get them in Chapter 7. Chapter 15 lists my top ten choices for popular WordPress plugins available for download.

In addition to using plugins, you can embellish your WordPress site with templates and themes. WordPress comes with a very nice default theme to get you started. Figure 1-1 shows the default Twenty Twenty theme, created by the team from WordPress, which is displayed by default after you install and set up your site for the first time.

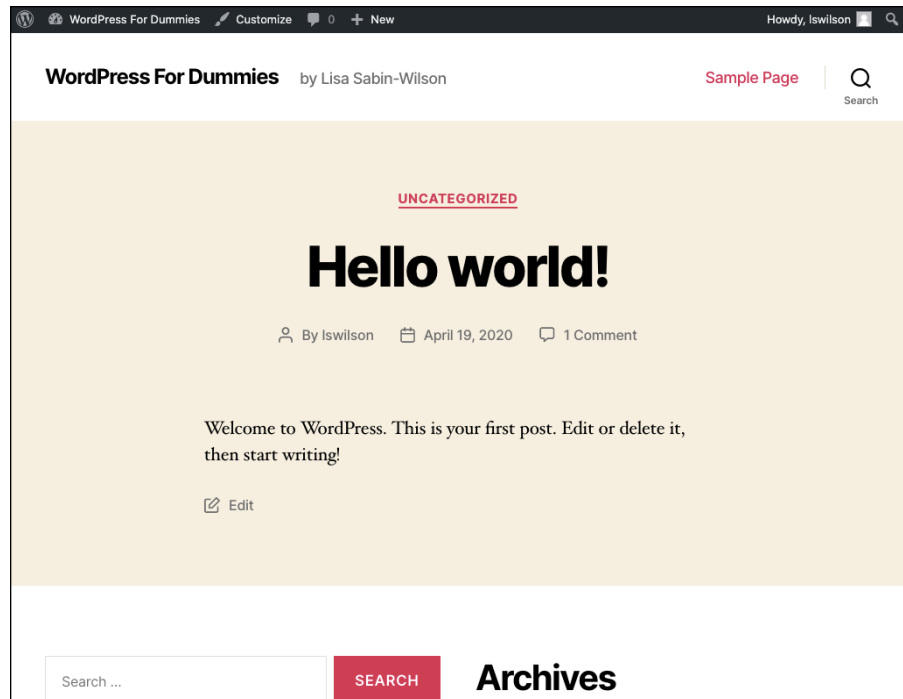


FIGURE 1-1: Start a new WordPress website with a theme.

The theme's default style is minimal, with handy settings built into the Customizer that enable you to change the colors and insert an image to use as a header image. (You can find more about tweaking WordPress themes and the Customizer in Chapters 9 through 12.)



REMEMBER

The Twenty Twenty theme (refer to Figure 1-1) includes all the basic elements that you need to start a new WordPress site. You can extend your WordPress site in a hundred ways with plugins and themes released by members of the WordPress community, but this default theme is a nice place to start.

Using some of the thousands of plugins and themes available, you can truly manage many kinds of content on your website. WordPress isn't just for blogging anymore (although it does still excel at it!). Although WordPress became well known as a blogging platform, you can use it to power diverse and dynamic websites that

allow you to do things like develop an e-commerce site (selling products online), create a members-only site where your content is curated only for those who have registered and become members of your site, or create a large corporate business site like the one you can see in the Microsoft News Center at <https://news.microsoft.com>.

Using WordPress as a content management system (CMS) frees you from running only a blog on the platform. (See Chapter 12 for more about the technique of designing for WordPress as a CMS.)

Taking part in the community

Allow me to introduce you to the fiercely loyal folks who make up the user base, better known as the vast WordPress community. This band of merry ladies and gentlemen comes from all around the globe, from California to Cairo, Florida to Florence, and all points in between and beyond.

In March 2005, Matt Mullenweg of WordPress proudly proclaimed that the number of WordPress downloads had reached 900,000 — an amazing landmark in the history of the software. But the real excitement occurred in August 2006, when WordPress logged more than 1 million downloads, and in 2007, when the software had more than 3 million downloads. WordPress downloads have broken the ceiling since then, with more than 30 million downloads by the beginning of 2020, and the number is growing daily. WordPress is easily the most popular CMS available on the web today. By the first half of 2020, it powered approximately 35 percent of all the websites on the Internet in 2020 — roughly two of every six sites you encounter on the World Wide Web.

Don't let the sheer volume of users fool you: WordPress also has bragging rights to the most helpful community on the web. You can find users helping other users in the support forums at <https://wordpress.org/support>. You can also find users contributing to the very helpful WordPress Codex (a collection of how-to documents) at <https://codex.wordpress.org>. Finally, across the Internet, you can find multiple websites about WordPress itself, with users sharing their experiences and war stories in the hope of helping the next person who comes along.

You can subscribe to various mailing lists, too. These lists offer you the opportunity to become involved in various aspects of the WordPress community as well as in the ongoing development of the software.

Joining the WordPress community is easy: Simply start your own website by using one of the two WordPress software options. If you're already publishing on a different platform, such as Blogger or Movable Type, WordPress enables you to easily migrate your current data from that platform to a new WordPress setup. (See Chapter 14 for information about migrating your existing website to WordPress.)

Choosing a WordPress Platform

One of the realities of running a website today is choosing among the veritable feast of software platforms to find the one that performs the way you need. You want to be sure that the platform you choose has all the options you're looking for. WordPress is unique in that it offers two versions of its software, each designed to meet various needs:

- » The hosted version at WordPress.com: <https://wordpress.com>.
- » The self-installed and self-hosted version available at <https://wordpress.org>. (This book focuses on this version.)

Every WordPress website setup has certain features available, whether you're using the self-hosted software from WordPress.org or the hosted version at WordPress.com. These features include (but aren't limited to)

- » Quick and easy installation and setup
- » Full-featured publishing capability, letting you publish content to the web through an easy-to-use block editor, web-based interface
- » Topical archiving of your posts, using categories
- » Monthly archiving of your posts, with the ability to provide a listing of those archives for easy navigation through your site
- » Comment and trackback tools
- » Automatic spam protection through Akismet
- » Built-in gallery integration for photos and images
- » Media Manager for video and audio files
- » Great community support
- » Unlimited number of static pages, letting you step out of the blog box and into the sphere of running a fully functional website
- » RSS (Really Simple Syndication) capability (see Chapter 2) with RSS 2.0, RSS 1.0, and Atom support
- » Tools for importing content from other blogging systems, such as Blogger, Movable Type, and LiveJournal

Table 1-1 compares the two WordPress versions.

TABLE 1-1

Exploring the Differences between the Two Versions of WordPress

Feature	WordPress.org	WordPress.com
Cost	Free	Free
Software download	Yes	No
Software installation	Yes	No
Web hosting required	Yes	No
Custom CSS* control	Yes	\$96 per year
Template access	Yes	\$96 per year
Sidebar widgets	Yes	Yes
RSS syndication	Yes	Yes
Access to core code	Yes	No
Ability to install plugins	Yes	\$300 per year
Theme** installation	Yes	\$300 per year
Multiauthor support	Yes	Yes
Unlimited number of website setups with one account	Yes	Yes
Community-based support forums	Yes	Yes

* CSS = Cascading Style Sheets

** Limited selection on WordPress.com

Choosing the hosted version from WordPress.com

WordPress.com is a free service. If downloading, installing, and using software on a web server sound like Greek to you — and like things you’d rather avoid — the WordPress folks provide a solution for you at WordPress.com.

WordPress.com is a *hosted solution*, which means that it has no software requirement, no downloads, and no installation or server configurations. Everything’s done for you on the back end, behind the scenes. You don’t even have to worry about how the process happens; it happens quickly, and before you know it, you’re making your first post using a WordPress.com solution.

WordPress.com has some limitations, though. You can’t install plugins or custom themes, for example, and you can’t customize the base code files. Neither are you able to sell advertising or monetize your site at all on WordPress.com unless you

pay a \$300 annual fee. Also, WordPress.com displays advertisements on your posts and pages to users who aren't logged in to the WordPress.com network (<https://wordpress.com/support/no-ads>). But even with its limitations, WordPress.com is an excellent starting point if you're brand-new to blogging and a little intimidated by the configuration requirements of the self-installed WordPress.org software.

If you don't want or need to create a full website for your business or service and just want to create an online diary of sorts, you would typically use WordPress.com, because it excels at allowing you to get a simple site up and running quickly. As I mention previously, however, if you want to use the thousands of plugins and themes available for WordPress — or if you want to customize your own theme for your website — you're limited to only a few themes on the WordPress.com-hosted service, and you're not able to install your own plugins on the service, either.

The good news is this: If you ever outgrow your WordPress.com-hosted site and want to make a move to the self-hosted WordPress.org software, you can. You can even take all the content from your WordPress.com-hosted site with you and easily import it into your new setup with the WordPress.org software.

Self-hosting with WordPress.org

The self-installed version from WordPress.org that I cover in this book requires you to download the software from the WordPress website and install it on a web server. Unless you own your own web server, you need to lease one — or lease space on one.

Using a web server typically is referred to as *web hosting*, and unless you know someone who knows someone, hosting generally isn't free. That being said, web hosting doesn't cost a whole lot. You can usually obtain a good web-hosting service for anywhere from \$5 to \$20 per month, depending on your needs. (Chapter 3 gives you the important details you need to know about obtaining a web host.)

You need to make sure, however, that any web host you choose to work with has the required software installed on the web server. Currently, the minimum software recommendations for WordPress include

- »» HTTPS support
- »» PHP version 7.3 or later
- »» MySQL version 5.6 or later