

# An Online Portfolio with Wordpress

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## Hosting

There are any number of hosts that offer an easy Wordpress install. Generally speaking, if you're not getting a bajillion hits (or hosting large videos or something), you shouldn't run into any problems wherever you're hosted. We'll look at free hosting from Wordpress.com, and discuss the plusses and minuses for that versus paid hosting.

### **<http://wordpress.com/>**

Easy install, recognizable URL. Wordpress restricts the themes you are allowed to use (currently there are 98 to pick from), doesn't allow editing existing themes, and does not allow you to install plugins. However, **if** they will do everything you need, there may be no reason to look further. You can also choose to have your wordpress.com site attached to a personalized domain if you choose.

### **Other hosts in general**

Most paid hosts will provide an installer for Wordpress, so if you want to go that route you should be able to get something easily for \$10 per month or less. This type of service should include backups of both your files and your database on a regular (automated) basis. Most paid hosts will also include an option to purchase a domain name through them, which can simplify the process of attaching that to your site. There are other options (godaddy.com is usually cheap) as well.

Generally speaking, the paid hosting option gives you a lot more flexibility (you can install and/or edit any theme, install plugins, and generally control everything). Depending on what you want to do, this might be worth the money.

## Wordpress Basics

Wordpress started out as a blogging platform, but has been gaining ground as a CMS (Content Management System) over the past few years. You have the choice of having the home page be your blog, or of having a static ("regular") page as the home page and shifting the blog off somewhere else. Given the ability to modify both appearance and functionality through the many, many available themes and plugins, you can basically get Wordpress to do whatever you're going to need for a basic portfolio (again, with hosting elsewhere). Some would argue that you can get it to do anything, period, but we'll leave it as well capable of handling a basic website and avoid that debate.

For those of you with some PHP, HTML and CSS skills, you can also (depending on your host) get in under the hood and start playing with how things work.

Wordpress is administered through a control panel, accessed (usually) at the site's url plus "wp-admin" at the end. When you signed up, you should have created a main admin account, which you can use to log in. Once inside the admin interface, the interesting stuff is in the left-side menu:

- Posts: regular blog posts. These can be organized into categories, and will be shown on whatever page you designate for blog entries.
- Media: handling uploads (images, files, etc).
- Links: if you use the blogroll links, you would add and modify them here.
- Pages: for our purposes, the most useful section. Pages are “regular” static pages, not blog postings. These can be handled as a hierarchy (with parent and child pages) and can be ordered however you want as well. Editing content is a matter of typing it into an online editor, or pasting it in from Word. You can choose to edit the HTML directly, or to let the editor figure it out.
- Comments: if you allow people to comment (usually on blog postings, not pages) you can approve/disapprove comments here.
- Appearance: the section where you handle, add, preview, and activate themes, which change the whole appearance of the site. Note that different themes have different capabilities, and that some show menus differently than others, so you really want to check your content after switching between themes. Editor gets you under the hood (on a non-wordpress.com install).
- Plugins: adding functionality can be as easy as adding a plugin that will handle the work for you. Note that plugins can sometimes conflict, and that some updates will do things you don’t expect. Generally, you don’t want to use any more than you have to. NOTE: This option is not available on wordpress.com (just on standard hosting installs).
- Users: probably just you, but if you want to change your password or something, this is where you would do it.
- Tools: some plugins have a settings page here, and there are import and export tools built in if you’re migrating your site.
- Settings is the other common place for plugin config pages. The whole site is set up from here, including things like which page is the home page (under reading), whether people can comment by default, and what URLs look like (under permalink settings).

## **Getting Started**

- Sign up at wordpress.com (or someplace else for paid hosting) and log in.
- Create a new page, and call it “Home”. Create another, named “Blog”. We can change both later, but this will do for now.
- Go to Settings > General and add your title, subtitle, email, time zone, and date preferences.
- Go to Settings > Reading and set the static home page to “Home” and the blog page to “Blog”.
- Go back to Pages and edit each page (page order, no comments/trackbacks, ...?)
- Go to Settings > Media and un-check the “organize my files” box at the bottom (if you’re hosted somewhere other than Wordpress.com, and don’t like their folder setup).
- Go to Settings > Privacy and block search engines for now, until you’re ready to go public.
- Go to Settings > Permalinks and use a custom structure: /%postname%/ (not at Wordpress.com)

## Useful Themes

- Titan
- K2-lite
- Twenty-Eleven (the default)
- Not that there aren't more, and you can even write your own, but I often come back to these ones. Of course, it may be that I'm dull ...

## Now that you're set up ...

Once Wordpress is set up (on whatever host), you basically want to create and order a set of static pages that contain the information you need to communicate to prospective employers (and whomever else ... colleagues for example). Generally, the tone is usually fairly professional, but people do recognize that blogging about topics other than work is normal (if you're into that kind of thing). On the other hand, you may want to separate this portfolio from the rest of your digital life. Something to consider. That said, if the "nonprofessional" site is under your name, or contains your name, then your employer is likely to find it as well, so it may be just as well to keep it all in one place. Suggestions aplenty both ways.

Depending how complicated things get, you may want to have some pages as "children" of other "parent" pages. If you do go this route, and you're not able to use Custom Menus with your particular theme (check them out in Twenty-Ten, just so you see the option) then you'll want to be careful that your menus work correctly (some themes don't support dropdowns, and the plugins that are supposed to add this functionality don't seem to work consistently (for me, at least). You're better off choosing a theme that has a working dropdown menu.

Other than that, I would suggest creating a new blog posting on some professional topic at least every couple of weeks. This will keep you alive in Google's recent-sensitive rankings, and the professional topics will help with Yahoo and Bing (assuming you're concerned about rankings – the site will be browseable either way).

## Useful Plugins (if you're hosted elsewhere)

- Akismet . Akismet checks your comments against the Akismet web service to see if they look like spam or not. You need an API key to use it. You can review the spam it catches under "Comments." **(Need to sign up, free if a personal site).**
- All in One SEO Pack. Out-of-the-box SEO for your Wordpress blog.
- Fast Secure Contact Form. The contact form lets your visitors send you a quick E-mail message. Blocks all common spammer tactics. Spam is no longer a problem. Includes a CAPTCHA and Akismet support. Does not require JavaScript.
- FV Wordpress Flowplayer. Embed videos (FLV, H.264, and MP4) into posts or pages. Uses modified version of flowplayer (with removed FP logo and copyright notice).
- Google Analyticator. Adds the necessary JavaScript code to enable Google's Analytics. After enabling this plugin visit the settings page and enter your Google Analytics' UID and enable logging. **(Need to sign up for analytics and verify site)**
- Google XML Sitemaps. This plugin will generate a special XML sitemap which will help search engines like Google, Yahoo, Bing and Ask.com to better index your blog. **(Need to submit via Google Webmaster Tools)**
- Lightbox Plus. Implements ColorBox as a lightbox image overlay tool for WordPress.
- Print Friendly & PDF. Adds a Print Friendly & PDF button for your pages. Help your users save paper and ink, and engage with your content.
- Simpler CSS. Simplifies custom CSS on WordPress blogs.

Note that if you're on Wordpress.com and can't use plugins, they have built in some plugin-type functionality. For instance, under Tools, they allow you to add verifications for Google, Yahoo and Bing (something you would normally do in the All in One SEO Pack). Similarly, ratings and polls are built in. Also, your wordpress API (in the confirmation email) lets you use Askimet spam checking. Some things that plugins handle can also be purchased as Upgrades to the basic Wordpress install.