

WordPress Blogging Guide For Teachers and Students

Teachers and students can use blogs for individual projects as record keeping of progress, or for personal or academic reflection. Small groups of students can also keep a single blog for a group activity, with each student contributing to the group's blog and commenting on other student's blog posts. An entire class can keep a single blog for a particular project.

Blogs can be maintained by students both in and outside the classroom. When used outside class time, blogs can be created and maintained by students at home for homework purposes in between lessons. Students can comment on other students' blogs and teachers can comment on student blogs, as well.

Blogs have posts that are time and date stamped when published to the web. Posts appear in reverse chronological order, with the most recent posts appearing at the top of the blog and older posts down the bottom. The WordPress software can even be used to create regular websites that do not look like blogs and are simple to create and easy to use.

Getting Started

Go to wordpress.com and click on the "Sign Up Now" button. Complete the fields:

- The username will form part of the blog URL, eg. simone.wordpress.com and cannot be changed later, so choose carefully. Many common words are already taken by others around the world, so be a little creative.
- The password is to be one of your choosing. The WordPress software will determine how strong (safe) your password is as you type it in the relevant field in the form.
- Your email address must be valid, as this is where WordPress will immediately send you an email so you can validate your blog.
- Make sure the box "Gimme a blog" is checked and press "Next".
- On the next page, you can change the blog title now if you like, but this can be changed later if you prefer.
- **UN**check the box next to "Privacy" on this page. It is very important your blog does **NOT** appear in search engine results on the Internet. This will mean the blog will still be fully accessible to others on the web, but only those who know the blog's web address will be able to locate it.
- Click the "Signup" button.
- If your web browser now asks if you want it to remember your blog's password, only click "Yes" if you're on your home computer. If on a public computer used by others, click "No".
- Writing your blog address, username and password down somewhere is a good idea at this stage of the process!
- Check your email inbox for the WordPress activation email. If it is not there, either wait a few more minutes for it to arrive or check the Trash folder where the email may have accidentally arrived.
- Once you have found the activation email from WordPress, click on the link in the email with the word "activate" in the middle of the link.
- Your blog is now active, so on the next page, click on the "Login" button. You will now need to use your login and password, created a few minutes ago, to access your blog's admin panel.

Logging In

There are three ways to login to the admin panel of your blog to write posts etc.

1. Type into your browser the blog URL eg. simone.wordpress.com and add “/wp-login.php” to the end of it: simone.wordpress.com/wp-login.php. This will take you to your blog’s admin panel.
2. If you use the same computer and web browser, your blog will be remembered at wordpress.com. You can access your admin panel there.
3. Some (not all) blog themes have an admin login widget in the sidebar of the blog homepage and you may be able to login to your blog from there.

The Dashboard

In WordPress, a blog owner’s administration panel is known as the “Dashboard”. Once logged in to your Dashboard, you can always go back and forth from the back-end (Dashboard) to the front-end (blog homepage) by pressing the “Visit Site” button on the Dashboard and then the “Back” button in the web browser. Otherwise, you can access your Dashboard by the clicking on the Dashboard bar at the top of the blog (only visible to yourself when logged in as administrator and not seen by others).

However, sometimes it is easier to view your blog site and the Dashboard in separate windows. To do this, simply press “Visit Site” on your Dashboard by right clicking the mouse and choosing “New Tab”. This will enable you to have one browser tab for the Dashboard and another tab for the blog homepage. Every time you make changes in the Dashboard that affect your blog’s appearance (a new post, a new theme etc), after pressing “Save”, you then go to the blog homepage tab and click “Refresh” in the browser to see the changes. Any changes will be automatic and instantly visible (but you must remember to press “Refresh” to see the changes). Most blog themes have the title of the blog on the homepage hyperlinked to the blog’s address, so clicking the blog title usually refreshes the page, also.

Themes

Dozens of free themes come with a WordPress blog. Go to “Appearance” in your Dashboard, expand this category and click on “Themes”. Browse the themes on offer. When choosing one you like, it will give you a preview window of the theme. Either cancel this window by pressing “x” or choose the theme by pressing “Activate (theme name)”. Go to the top of the Dashboard next to the blog title and press “Visit Site” to see the theme in action.

Blog Title

If you want to change the title of your blog, go to “Settings > General” on the Dashboard and make the change. You can also alter the tagline of the blog here and date & time zone settings. Remember to always press “Save” after changing any settings.

New Posts

There are various ways of making a new blog post from the Dashboard. Quick posts can be made under “QuickPress” at top right. Alternatively, higher up on the Dashboard is the “New Post” button. Otherwise, you can go down the left pane to “Posts > Add New”.

Editing Posts

Once one or more posts have been published to the blog, changes can still be made and the revised post can be republished instantly. Go to “Posts > Edit” in the left side pane of the Dashboard. Hover over the relevant post and press “Edit”. The original post will now be visible. Make the appropriate changes and press “Update Post” (right pane). This will automatically republish your revised blog post and replace the older version of the post with the new one. This is handy if you discover you have made a spelling error after you have published a post. You can edit and republish posts as many times as you like.

Deleting Posts

Sometimes, we need to delete posts that have already been published on the blog. Follow the same process as “Editing Posts”, above, and when you hover over the relevant post, choose “Delete” instead of edit, to delete the post. Multiple posts can also be deleted simultaneously in this section of the Dashboard. WordPress blogs come by default with one example post already published, called “Hello World”. Now is the time to delete this post from your blog.

Adding Categories

When a blog has multiple posts, bloggers always have a number of different categories to post them under. A single post can be assigned to more than one category. These categories appear at the top or bottom of the post for the reader to see. Categories are usually listed on a blog’s sidebar for users to search for posts only belonging to particular categories on the blog.

To add categories to your blog, go to “Posts > Categories” on the left pane of the Dashboard. Place the new category name in the bar, then press “Add Category”. When each new post is being written for the blog, categories you have created previously appear on the right pane of the Dashboard. Simply assign one or more categories to a particular post by checking the box next to the category while writing the post. After you have pressed “Publish”, that post will belong to the category or categories you assigned it to.

Adding Tags

Adding tags is an alternate method of adding categories to a blog. You can have both categories *and* tags on your blog if you like, but most agree this is overkill, so choose one *or* the other. Tags perform the same function as categories, but instead of having a list of categories appear for the reader on the blog sidebar, a tag cloud will appear, instead. Tag clouds are a group of words (tags) you created on your Dashboard and assigned to various posts. The tags with the most posts will appear as words in very large font on your blog sidebar, (the most popular tags) right down to tags with a tiny font size (those tags with only one or two posts assigned to them). Tags came along after categories did in the blogging world. Many consider tags cooler than categories, but both perform the same function on a blog.

Tags are assigned to posts in a similar way as categories are. Go to “Posts > Post Tags” on the left pane of the Dashboard. Add the tag name and press “Add Tag” below. When you are writing a post, or wanting to assign a published post to a tag, you will see “Post Tags” on the right pane of the Dashboard. Here, you need to write the tag you want in the field and the software will autofill the space with the appropriate tag. Choose the tag you want and press the “Add” button to assign the tag to that post.

Adding Media

The WordPress platform easily handles rich media and seamlessly embeds it into blog posts, so this area can be both useful and fun. When making a blog post, above the writing window is a series of formatting tools. Above these are a number of icons next to “Upload/Insert”.

Adding Images

Images can be added by pressing the “Add An Image” icon above the post window in the Dashboard. This will bring up a new window. The various image file types supported by the software are listed. To upload an image from your computer, choose “Select Files”. If you are having trouble doing this successfully, choose the alternate “Browser Uploader” method and try this, instead. Locate the files on your computer and upload them. Position and choose the size of the image in the wizard.

If you do not wish to upload an image from your own computer, you can link to another image on the web. There will be no difference to the user who visits your blog, as the image will still appear embedded in your blog post (but if the owner of the image moves it or deletes it from their website, that image will no longer appear in your blog, but this is uncommon). Instead of uploading the image in the wizard, use the “Link URL” tab and locate the image on the web. Then copy the image address from the browser and paste the web address into the “Image URL” line and give your image a title if you like (not necessary, but it will appear below your image in the blog if you do). Now click your mouse on a blank space in the wizard window to activate the “Insert Into Post” button. After checking your image link has a green tick next to it, hit “Insert Into Post”.

If you have previously uploaded images from your computer to your blog, these will be stored on the WordPress system under your blog account. You can choose to add these to posts as well, by going to the “Media Library” tab in the wizard.

Adding Video

If you wish to insert video into blog posts, press the “Insert Video” icon above the post window in the Dashboard to bring up the video wizard. Follow the same process as with inserting images, above. You can either upload videos from your own computer and insert them into blog posts, link to videos hosted on other websites, or find videos already uploaded by yourself stored in your blog media library. The most exciting thing about inserting videos into blog posts is that videos on sites such as You Tube can be easily embedded. You Tube videos will appear on your blog posts and look very professional. The WordPress wizard makes it a cinch!

Adding Audio

Following the same steps for inserting images and video, above, you can also insert audio podcasts on your blog, by either uploading from your computer or linking to podcasts elsewhere on the web. Audio links can be given a title of your own in this wizard (what your blog visitor sees when they click on the link in your post).

Adding Files and Presentations

Word documents, PDFs and PowerPoint presentations can also be uploaded to the WordPress system and inserted into blog posts by pressing the “Add Media” icon in the same area as the other media icons, above. You can also link to other places on the web for these types of media, if you prefer.

Adding Polls

A recent WordPress feature is adding polls to blog posts. This icon is next to the other media icons above the post window in the Dashboard. Polls are interactive activities on the web where you ask your blog visitors to vote on a set number of options provided in the poll, in order to gauge their opinion on a particular topic.

Comments

Nearly all blogs rely on the interactive nature of other people commenting on someone else’s blog posts. Adding comments to a blog post is quick and easy. Simply go to the relevant post and, depending on the blog theme in use, the link to add comments to a post should either be at the top or bottom of the post (usually the bottom). Click on this link, add your name and valid email address to the appropriate field, write your comment and press the “Submit Comment” button. Your email address will never be seen in the published comment on the web. It is simply needed to verify you are human and not an automated spamming program.

Comment Settings

Sometimes you may not wish for just anyone to add a comment to your blog posts. The WordPress system has a sturdy anti-spamming tool built in, known as Akismet, but sometimes unwanted people or computer programs post comments on blog posts. There are various settings in the blog Dashboard that can solve some of these problems.

Go to “Settings > Discussion”. There are numerous checkboxes on this page and many are checked and unchecked already, by default. It’s probably best to uncheck the box “Comment author must have a previously approved comment” and let it loose until something goes wrong (if it does). Freedom of expression lies at the very heart of blogging. If you come across unwanted spam or other comments at a later stage, go back to this page and tighten up the security settings on your blog’s comments, then.

Writing Settings

Go to “Settings > Writing” on your blog Dashboard. There are a few simple options here, like changing the size of the box you write posts in, which can be useful if you’re using a laptop with limited screen space to blog with.

Reading Settings

These settings determine how visitors view (read) your blog. The most useful tool here is choosing for your readers to see the full text of every post on your blog, or just a summary. Bloggers with lengthy posts, who may also blog frequently, sometimes opt for readers to see only post summaries. In this case, the reader simply clicks on a link at the bottom of the summary such as “Read More” for the rest of the post to be visible. The vast majority of bloggers however, simply leave the full text of blog posts visible to the reader by default.

Media Settings

Here (“Settings > Media”), you can alter the default size for thumbnail, medium and large images to be posted on your blog. These changes come into effect when you click on thumbnail, for example, in the image upload wizard.

Privacy Settings

Located under “Settings > Privacy” on the Dashboard, options in this area decide how visible your blog is on the web. It’s worth seeing at this point if you have “I would like to block search engines, but allow normal visitors” checked on this page. If not, check it and press “Save Changes”. This means only those who know your blog’s address (classmates, teacher etc) can find your blog on the web. Your blog will reject requests from search engines to place it in their index, so it will never appear in search engine results.

Adding Widgets

Widgets are today one of the most popular tools used in blogging. Behind a widget is a small computer program known as a plugin. These plugins add functionality to your blog and enhance its features for both yourself and your visitors. They appear in the form of a widget on the blog, usually located in one or more sidebars, either to the left or right of the main body area of the blog.

Widgets are located under “Appearance > Widgets” on your blog Dashboard. After reading through the various widgets and a summary of what they do, you can drag them over to the blog sidebar section on this page of the Dashboard. Make sure the dotted outline appears on the sidebar when you drag a widget over. More than one widget can appear in your sidebar. If you have two sidebars on your current blog theme, you will need to choose which sidebar you wish to drag the widgets to and make sure you expand the active sidebar by pressing the down arrow. If you have created categories for your blog posts, these will not be visible to your visitors until you drag a “Category”

widget to your sidebar. The same goes for tags; you will need a “Tag Cloud ” widget in your sidebar. The WordPress software will do the rest for you. Popular blogging widgets include tag clouds, blog stats (number of visitors), categories, archives (posts sorted by month, week or day), and links widgets.

Once a widget is placed in the Dashboard sidebar, it will be “saved” there automatically by the WordPress software. But many widgets have options for you to complete if you wish, such as widget titles etc, and it is important to press “Save” after changing or adding options in a widget, in order for these changes to become active on the widget on your blog. If you encounter widgets in your Dashboard sidebar strangely disappearing for no reason, click on “Appearance > Widgets” on the left pane of the Dashboard one more time. If widgets are still disappearing, it’s time to change your theme, as this is where the conflict is likely to be occurring.

Adding Links

Links traditionally appear in a blog’s sidebar and are often lists of links external to the blog itself, linking to other places on the web. Many bloggers have a list of links to their favourite websites on their blog, or to other websites on the same topic as their own blog.

Links can be accessed in the Dashboard by going to “Links > Add New”. Fill in the title of the website you wish to link to in the “Name” field. These are the words that will be visible on your blog to other readers. After copying the website address, paste it into the “Web Address” field. The default category for links on a WordPress blog provided at startup is known as the “Blogroll”, but it’s better to create new categories for your blog’s links by pressing “Add New Category” on this page. Now simply assign individual links to specific link categories you have created by checking the relevant box. These link categories will appear as headings on your blog sidebar, with the various links assigned to these headings, underneath them. You can have several link categories on your blog, all with numerous links assigned to them. In education examples, all the class members’ blogs can be linked in the sidebar of your own blog, or just in the teacher’s blog, which can be used as the portal to navigate to everyone else’s blogs.

Pages

One of the coolest features of the WordPress platform is that it can be used to create fully formed websites with regular looking web pages, instead of blog posts. Instead of posting “Posts”, you post “Pages”! To do this, go to “Pages > Add New” in the blog Dashboard. When you write pages, you can still fill content with words, images and other media, but when published it will appear as a webpage. Before publishing the page content, uncheck the “Allow Comments” and “Allow Pings” boxes under the writing area on the Dashboard.

You will need to create a navigation menu to the various pages on your site in your blog sidebar, or visitors to your blog will not be able to access all of your pages. As each page is published to your blog, it has its own unique URL in the web browser, known as a “permalink”. You need to copy and paste these permalinks one by one at “Links > Add New” on your Dashboard. Here, you can copy the page URL and its name into the relevant fields. Below, you can press “Add New Category”, such as “Pages”, and assign this page to it. The result is all your blog pages will appear under the heading “Pages” on your blog sidebar. An alternate title/category may be “Navigation”.

Justin Cash, October 2009