

Choose a blogging platform

A **blogging platform** refers to how your blog is presented to the audience. When choosing a blogging platform, you must consider the advantages and disadvantages of each one. There are various self-hosted blogging platforms, hosted blog sites as well as site builders that offer blogging capabilities.

Which blogging platform is most suitable for you depends on your needs, skills, what you like and your requirements. Consider the following factors:

- **Cost** – There are free blogging platforms available, but remember the service may have very limited features.
- **User-friendly** – If you are a new blogger, you will probably need a blogging solution that is easy to set up and manage. You will also need to look for a blogging platform that offers support.
- **Features** – Your requirements will change from time to time. You should look at a blogging platform that offers you the ability to modify the design of your blog site or add features when you want to.
- **Maintenance** – Maintenance is time-consuming, so having a blogging platform where maintenance is done for you is a good idea.
- **Income generation** – If you want to generate an income through your blog, make sure that you choose a platform that will work for you and enable you to do that.

YouTube video



The best platform for
blogging beginners

WordPress and content management systems

Starting a blog can be quite easy. There are many platforms available that will provide you with all the tools you need to start and host your blog.

WordPress.org and WordPress.com are two popular blogging services. If you are a personal blogger who does not want to generate an income from blogging, then it would probably be best to choose WordPress.com as your blogging platform. If you want to generate an income from your site or you are a business, then WordPress.org would be a better choice.

WordPress is one of the easiest **content management systems (CMS)** to use. A content management system is an application that allows you to create, modify and publish digital content. Content management systems have text and formatting options, and they allow you to upload videos, photos, audio and maps. WordPress also lets you have several administrative users, each with their own privileges, which means that you can have multiple people responsible for different things on the blog.

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Some features of content management systems are:

- online support
- various templates and designs
- installation wizards
- upgrades and updates
- **search engine optimisation (SEO)** friendly URLs, which improves the quality and quantity of website traffic to a website or a web page from search engines.

Tags and categories in blogs

Tags in blogs are keywords used by bloggers to describe the topic of the post. Tags help to categorise posts and also make it easier for search engines to find the content. When a blog reader clicks on a tag, they are taken to the archive page where all the posts with that tag are listed. So, tags also help readers find topics they are interested in.

Categories in blogs are broad groupings of topics. WordPress automatically assigns a category to a post if the blogger does not select one. Categories can also have sub-categories.

The differences between tags and categories are summarised in the table below.

Differences between tags and categories	
Tags	Categories
Tags cover a small scope and focus on topics.	Categories cover a broad range of topics.
Tags are optional.	WordPress automatically assigns a default category if the blogger does not select one.
There is no limit to how many tags can be added.	Each post has one category.
Tags are similar to an index.	Categories are similar to a table of contents.

Let us look at an example: Imagine that a blogger in a book club writes a review about a book and files a post in the Book Review category. The blogger may then assign tags to that post, such as Crime, Fiction and Author name.

Get started with WordPress

You will learn how to create a blog using the WordPress.com platform, as it is free and easy to use. With this platform, you can start writing or blogging immediately. Other blogging sites usually require a domain name and a host server, both of which must be paid for with a monthly [subscription](#).

[subscription](#) – paying an amount at predefined time intervals for a product or service

To start using WordPress:

- 1 Open a web browser and go to the web address www.wordpress.com.

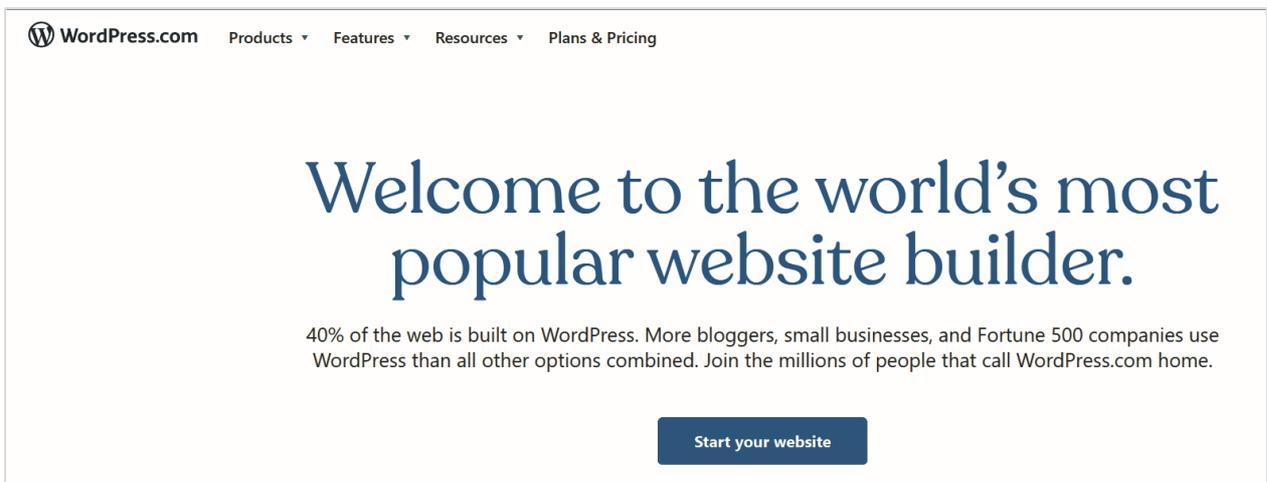


Figure 2 Starting out with WordPress

- 2 Click on **Get Started** in the top right-hand side of the screen or you can click on **Start your website** and create a username and password.

A screenshot of the WordPress.com account creation form. At the top is the WordPress logo and the heading 'Let's get started'. Below the heading is the text 'First, create your WordPress.com account.' The form contains three input fields: 'Your email address', 'Choose a username', and 'Choose a password'. The password field has a strength indicator icon on the right. Below the input fields is a line of text: 'By creating an account, you agree to our Terms of Service.' At the bottom of the form is a red button with the text 'Create your account'.

Figure 3 Create your account with a username and password

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- 3 Enter the name of your free web address, for example, ThandisAmazingWords.wordpress.com.
- 4 Choose which plan you want to use between the free plan or the Personal, Premium or Business plans. The plan determines the kind of service you will get from WordPress.
- 5 Set up a profile with your personal information and upload a **Gravatar**. A Gravatar is an image that represents you in the WordPress.com community. Click on the round icon at the top right of the screen (next to the bell icon) and then click on My Profile to enter your details and upload an image.
- 6 Add your site's title. WordPress will use your username to set your site's title as a default, but you can change that. You can do this by going to **My Sites**, then **Customise**, and **Site Identity**.
- 7 You will be prompted on the next screen to choose a title for your blog. This is the name that your blog will be known by. Remember, it is important to have a title that is descriptive, as short as possible and easy to remember! Next WordPress will allow you to create a URL, which readers will use in a web browser to open your blog.
- 8 You will need to choose a name that will be used as your WordPress profile. In other words, it will be the name that is visible to people reading your blog. This can be your real name or a **nom de plume**.

nom de plume – another name used by a writer instead of the person's real name

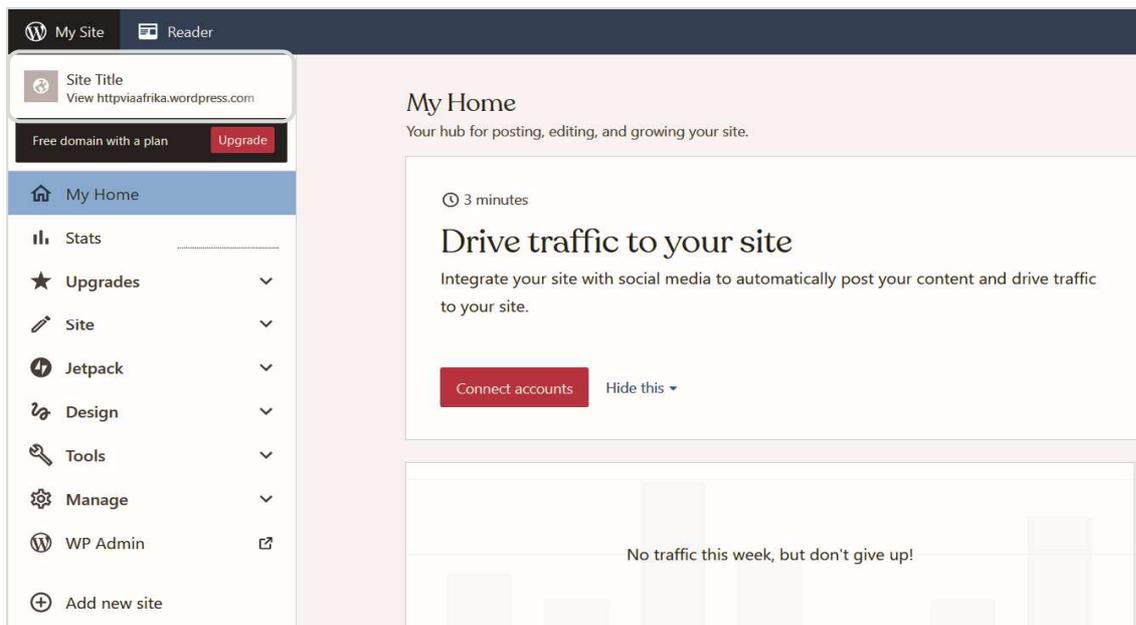


Figure 4 Creating your blog and choosing a Site Title

Choosing a name for your blog

The name of a blog should tell readers something about the blogger and/or what the blog is about.

Use some of the following ideas to think of a name for your blog:

- Think of a catch phrase from a book you have read or perhaps even the title of the book.
- Use words from dictionaries or thesauruses, for example, 'The Smart Adventurer'.
- Use **alliteration** to create a catchy title, for example, 'PayPal' and 'The Avid Adventurer'.
- Find a **pun** that works with the content, such as 'Rands and Sense'.
- Use humour to name a blog, for example, 'Cats who Code'.
- Use unrelated words, such as 'Gentle Dragon'.
- Use your nickname or even your own name, especially if you are going to be a lifestyle blogger.
- Brainstorm ideas. For example, if you are going to blog about travel, brainstorm travel words and ideas.

alliteration – when the same letter or series of letters are repeated

pun – a joke that uses different meanings of a word

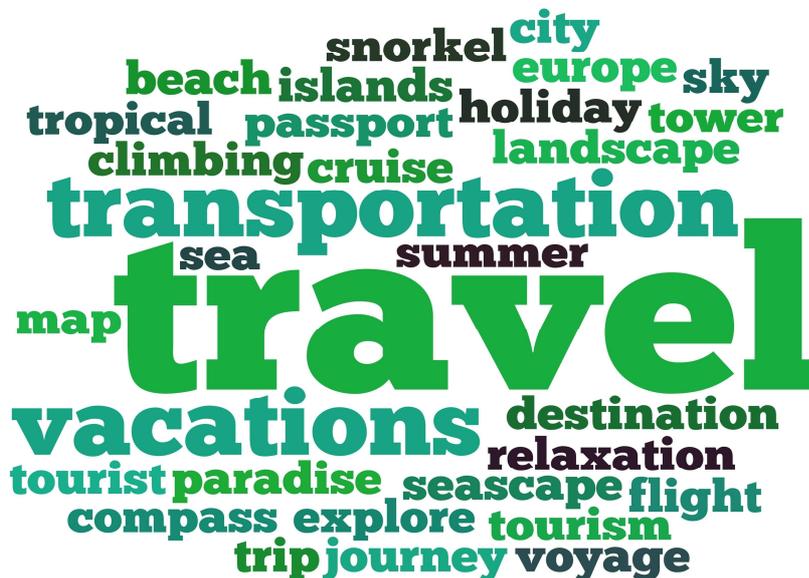


Figure 5 Brainstorming travel ideas

Navigate the WordPress dashboard

When you have completed the installation, you must log in to the WordPress administrator **dashboard**, which is known as the **backend** of the blog. The dashboard provides a summary of the blog activity. There should be a link to the login page on the **frontend** of the WordPress blog. If you have chosen to use a theme to set up your blog, you might find that some themes do not have this link, so you will log in to WordPress by adding **wp-admin** at the end of your website's address, for example:

`http://www.ThandisAmazingWords.com/wp-admin`

This URL will direct you to the login screen, where you need to enter the administrator's username and password. These will be the same that you entered during the WordPress installation.

After logging in, you will see the administrator dashboard, which will give you an overview of your blog website. The dashboard has three main sections: the toolbar (see ① in Figure 6), the navigation menu (see ② in Figure 6) and the main work area (see ③ in Figure 6).

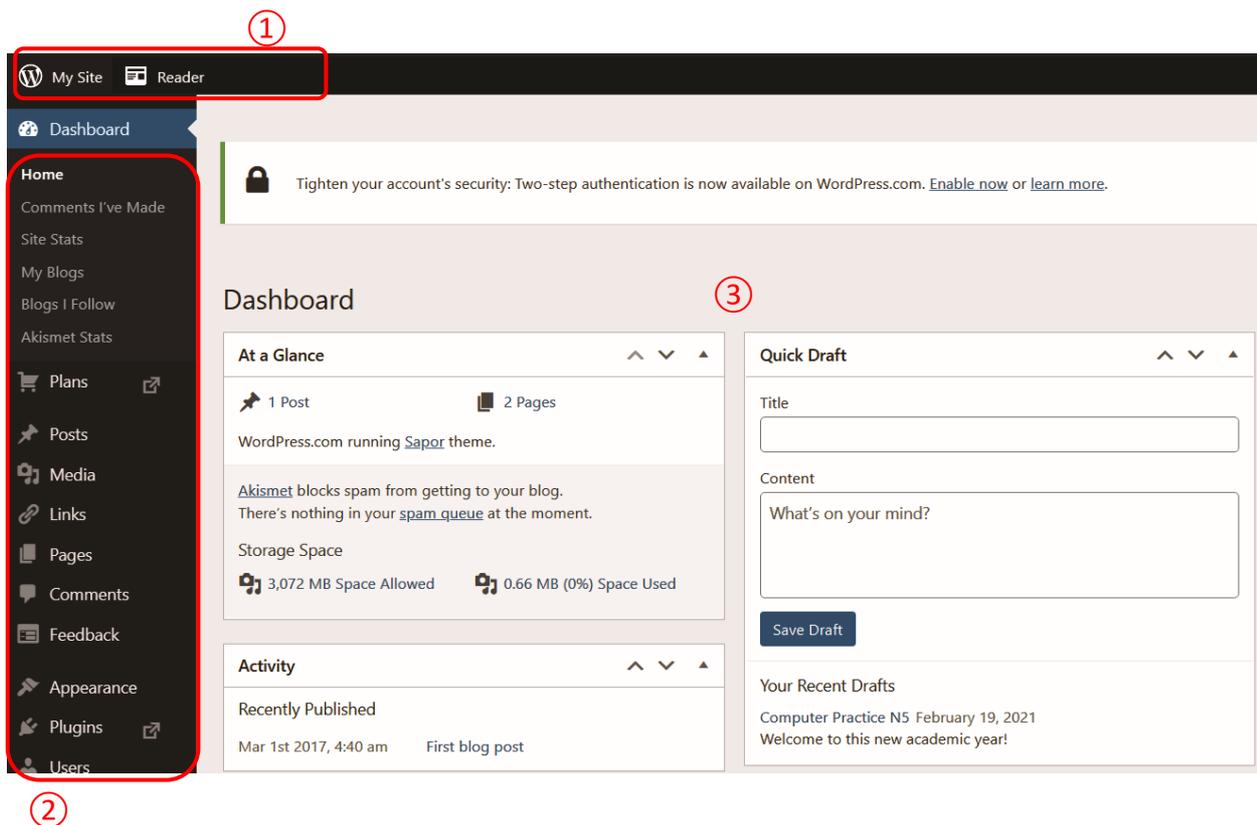


Figure 6 The administrator dashboard of WordPress

The toolbar is at the top of the page and contains the most commonly used administrative functions and resources. If you hover the mouse over your website's name, you will find a link to your site, which is the one the public will see. The toolbar also displays simple notifications, such as updates and the number of new comments.

The main navigation menu on the left of the page contains links to all the administrative screens of WordPress. If you hover over a menu item, a sub-menu will appear.

Blog themes

With WordPress you can choose a **theme** (also known as a template on some sites). A theme is a predefined layout of content, colours, pictures and fonts that you can use to create the layout for your blog. You can change all of these later on in the blog settings.

You can change the look of your WordPress site by applying themes. Some themes are general and can be used on any website. To install a theme:

- 1 Click on **Appearance** on the menu in the administrator dashboard. (See the menu in Figure 6.)
- 2 Search for a theme of your choice. You can filter your search by colours or by features. You can use the preview feature to see what your selected theme will look like before you decide to install the theme.
- 3 Select the **Upload Theme** button and select the .zip file for the theme.
- 4 When the theme has uploaded (which can take a few minutes), you press the **Activate** button to activate the theme.

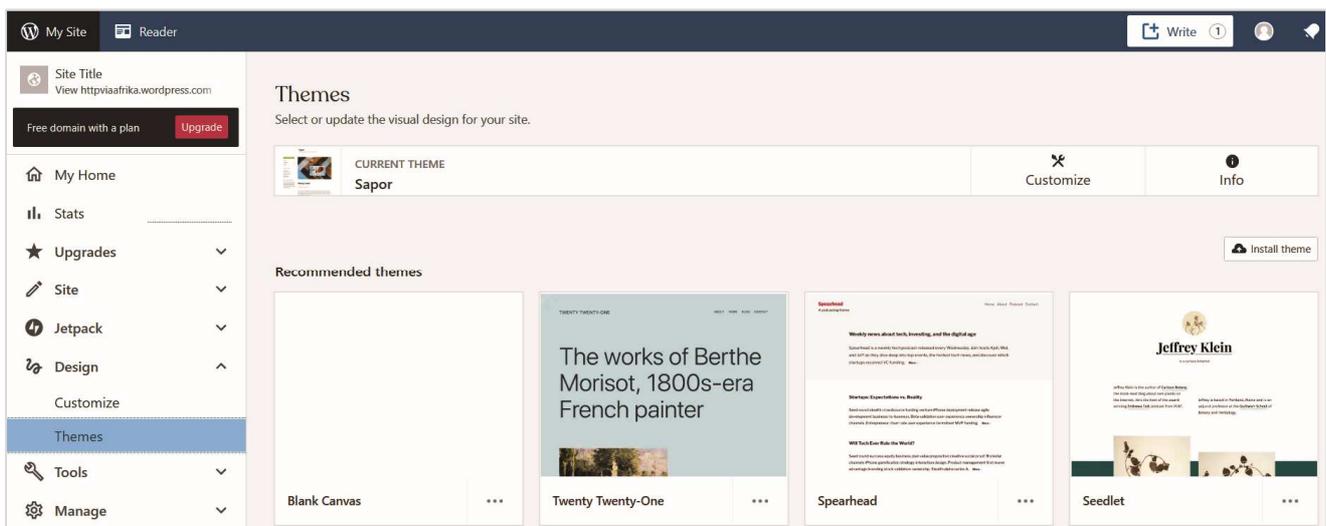


Figure 7 Examples of theme options in WordPress

Blog posts and pages

When you create a website with WordPress you will start off by publishing a new **post** or a new page.

Each unit of information that you place on the blog is called a blog post, or post. Posts are listed on the blog according to the date they were published. The newest post is always on the top. This means that readers do not have to scroll to the bottom of a page to see the newest information.

You can create, write, edit or delete posts at any time. Posts can also be categorised, tagged and **archived**.

Pages are used for **static** content or content that is not dated. Some pages do not have categories or tags. Examples of pages are **Contact us** or **About** pages.

static (web page) – the page remains the same until someone changes it

Create a new post

To write a new post:

- 1 Sign in to your blog site.
- 2 Open the **Add New** section under **Posts** or select the **New** and then the **Post** option from the top toolbar. You will see an editing screen with a range of posting features.
- 3 Enter the actual content of your post in the field below. You can use the toolbar options to format your text.
 - Start by adding a title to your post. This is the heading for this specific post. Each post has its own title.
 - Next add the content for this post. Adding the content is much like working in a word processor such as Microsoft Word. You will find many of the same editing functions in WordPress as you find in Word.

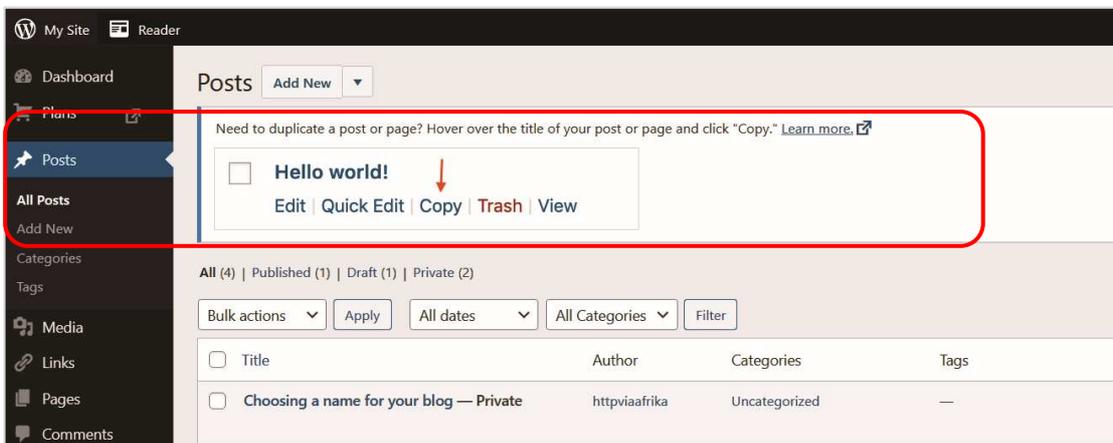


Figure 8 Starting a new blog post

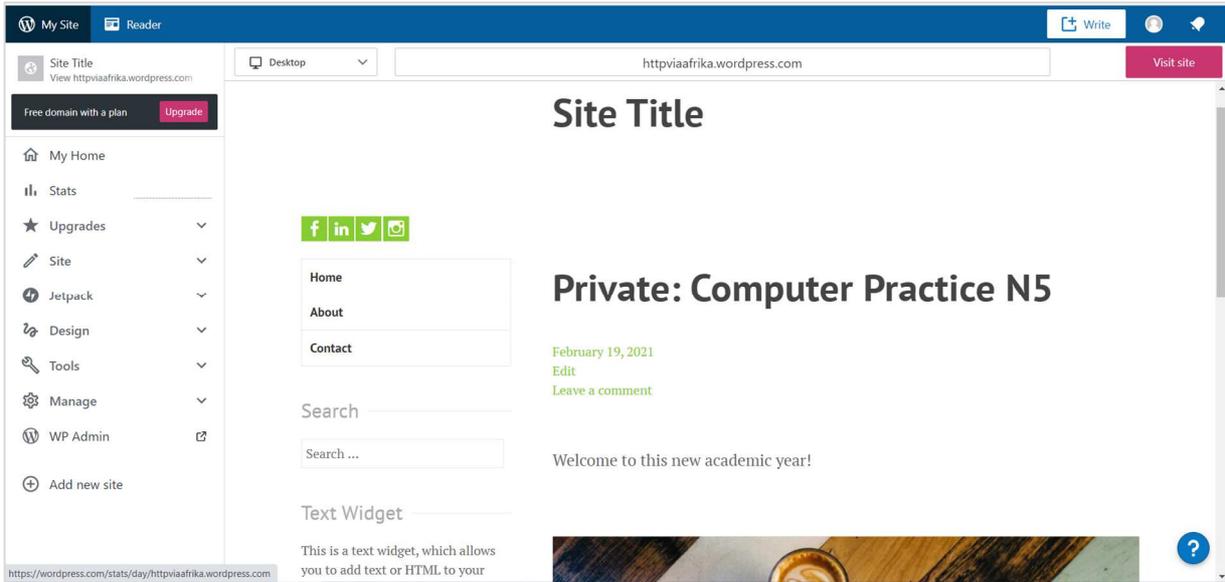


Figure 9 A blog post

- 4 Once you have added all of the content, click on the **Preview** button to see what your post will look like before you publish it.
- 5 Publish your post.

Once you have published your posts, your viewers can add comments.

Meta Box options

Meta Box is a WordPress toolkit that helps you to create and add custom fields to your pages and posts.

If you click on **My Site** in the top left-hand corner of the window, the **Quick links** options are shown.

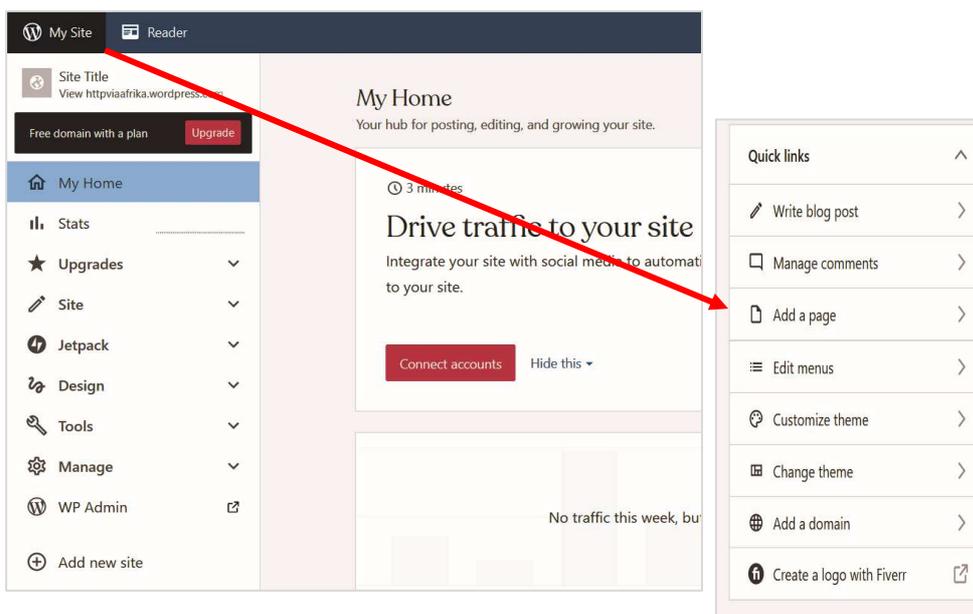


Figure 10 The side bar showing Quick links

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On the right of the screen (see Figure 11), you may find the following Meta Box options, depending on the version of WordPress you are using:

- **Publish** – This lets you change the status or visibility of your post. When you click the **Publish** button, your post will **go live**, which means that it becomes visible to the public. You can delete a post by selecting the **Move to Trash** option.
- **Categories** – This option is used to assign your post to a specific category. You can create a new category by selecting the + **Add New Category** option.
- **Tags** – The Tags box allows to you quickly add new tags to your post.
- **Featured Image** – Use this option to assign a featured image to a post. It will be visible at the top of the post, but may be in a different place depending on the theme you have chosen.

go live – become public or become usable

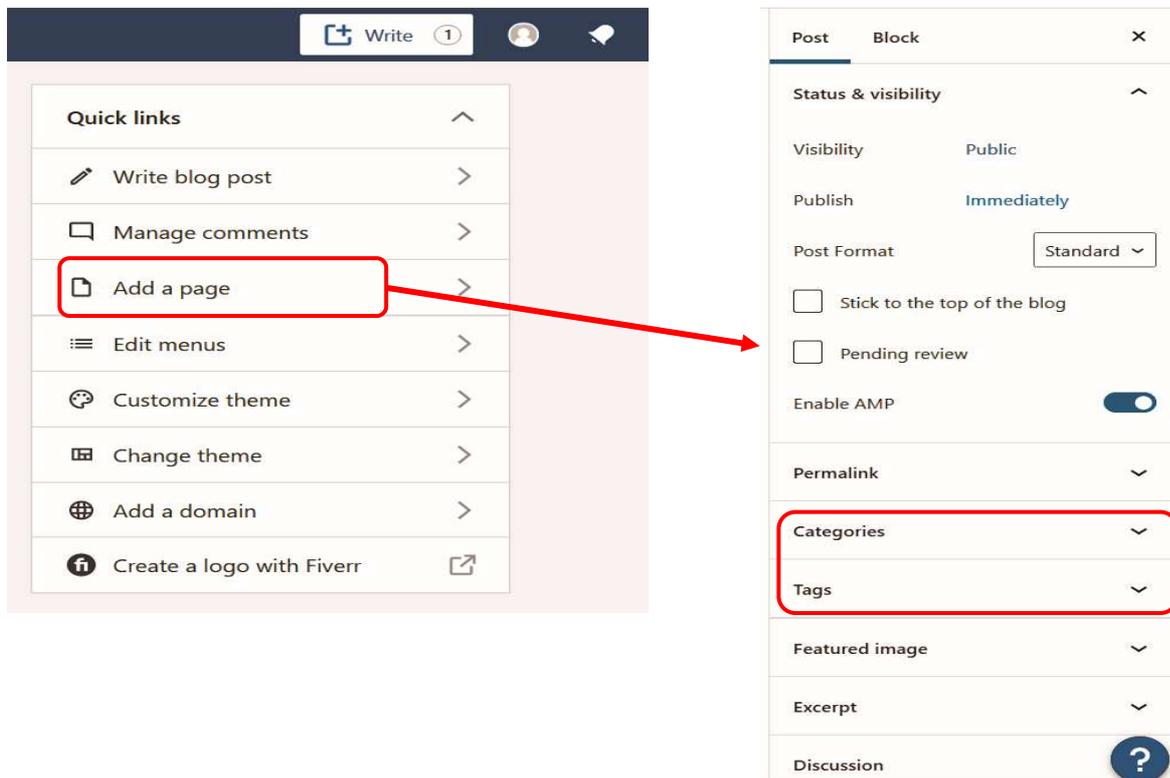


Figure 11 Side bars showing Quick links, categories and tags

Adding tags and categories in blogs

If you are using the free .com WordPress version, go to **Settings** and select **Writing** to add a tag or a category to your blog post:

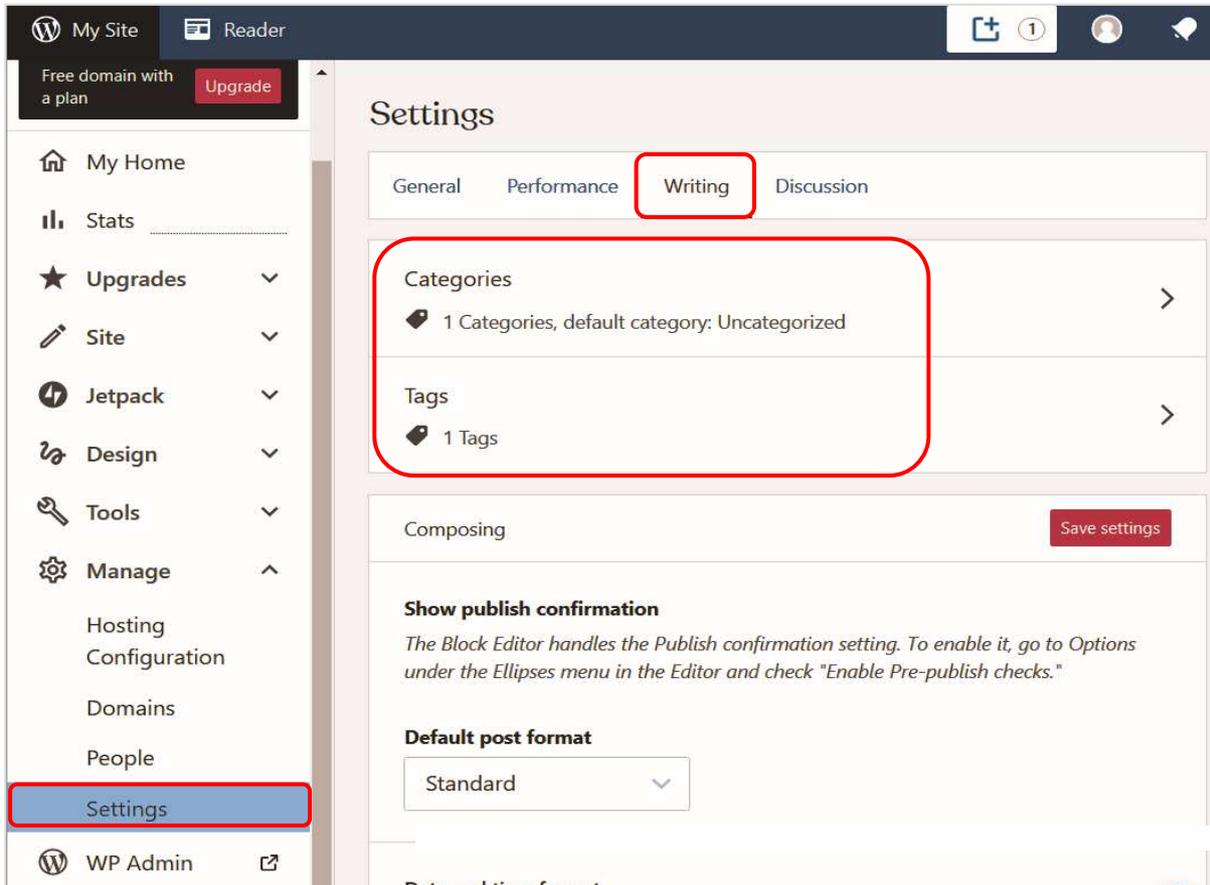


Figure 12 Adding tags and categories to a blog post

Create a new page

To create a new WordPress page, open the **Add New** section in the **Pages** menu or click **New** and then **Page** from the top toolbar.

The **Add New Page** section looks the same as the **Posts** section, and the process of entering text and formatting is the same.

The **Pages** section has a box called **Page Attributes** and does not have Tags and Categories. You can change the order of your pages, and you can also set **parent pages** if you want other pages under one parent page.

Add media

You can enhance your blog and make it interesting by adding media. You can add media in the form of images, documents, videos or audio to your blog. You can even share important documents, such as agendas for meetings, notes and policy changes.

There are several ways of uploading a document to your blog. You can upload the document:

- from your local computer
- from a URL
- by linking an image to a document
- from the WordPress media library

The **Media** tab in the administration sidebar is used to manage media uploads. Select **Media** from the left panel and then upload the media that you want to add.

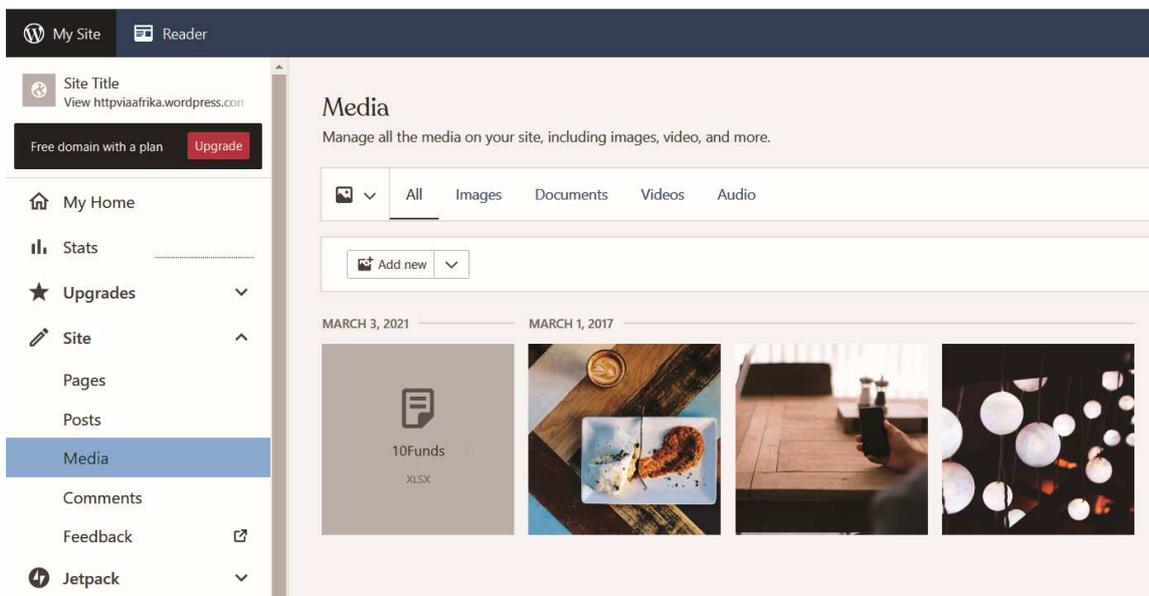


Figure 13 Add media to your blog

Upload media from a local computer

To upload media from your computer (see Figure 14):

- 1 Click on **MySite**.
- 2 Click on **Sites**, and then **Media**.
- 3 Click on **Add new**.
- 4 Select the file that you wish to upload.
- 5 When the file has uploaded, select the **Edit** button.
- 6 Select **Copy** so that you can copy the URL from your clipboard.

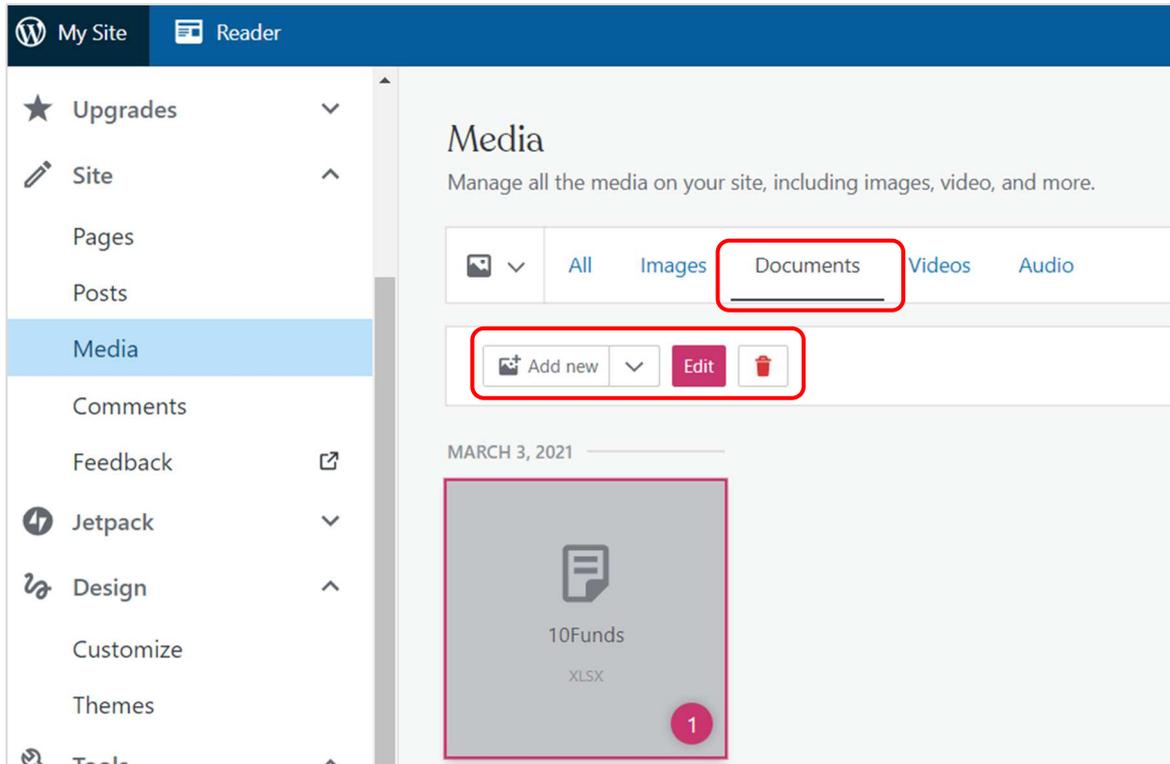


Figure 14 Adding a document from a local computer

Add media from a URL

You can add a link to a file that already exists on another website. This method will only make the link available on your blog and will not upload the media from the other website. Remember that the link on your blog may be broken if the media is removed from the original website.

To add a link to your blog:

- 1 Click on **MySite**.
- 2 Click on **Sites**, and then **Media**.
- 3 Click on the dropdown arrow next to **Add new**.
- 4 Select **Add via URL**.
- 5 Enter the URL and click **Upload**.
- 6 Select the **Edit** button.
- 7 Select **Copy** so that you can copy the URL from your clipboard.



Figure 15 Image of a download

Linking an image to a document

Sometimes you may want to use an image, like the one in Figure 15, that the user can click on to take them to a link. To set this up, you need to upload the image and then link that image to a PDF or another file:

- 1 Upload the document to your Media Library as described above.
- 2 Select the document from the list of uploaded files.
- 3 Choose **Edit** where you will be able to copy the link of that document.
- 4 Upload the image that you want to use and insert it into any post or page. Follow the **Image Links** guide by using the new file URL to link the button image to the URL of that file.

Upload media From the WordPress Media Library

To insert a link to a file that already exists in your Media Library:

- 1 You must be in the WP Admin dashboard to do this. Get the WP Admin dashboard by adding /wp-admin to the end of your site's URL, for example, ThandisAmazingWords.wordpress.com/wp-admin.
- 2 Go to **Posts**.
- 3 Click on **Add New**.
- 4 Click on the Add Media icon (above your editor).
- 5 Click on the **Media Library** tab, locate the file you want to add and click on it once.
- 6 Select the **Media File** option, which is below the **Attachment Display Settings** and click on the **Insert into Post** button. This process should give you a working link to a file in your blog post.

Widgets and plugins

Widgets enable you to customise the appearance of your website without you having to know or do any coding. Widgets are features or website elements that you can add to your blog to make it unique and more appealing. In WordPress, you can add, rearrange or remove widgets from the sidebars and footers of a WordPress website. Examples of widgets are:

- Navigation Menu, which can be used to navigate your website
- Calendar, which displays links to your post by date
- Gallery, for displaying images
- Category Post, which shows the posts for a particular category
- Tag Cloud, which shows a list of the tags in your blog posts
- Search, which can be used to search the website.

YouTube video



How to add a widget

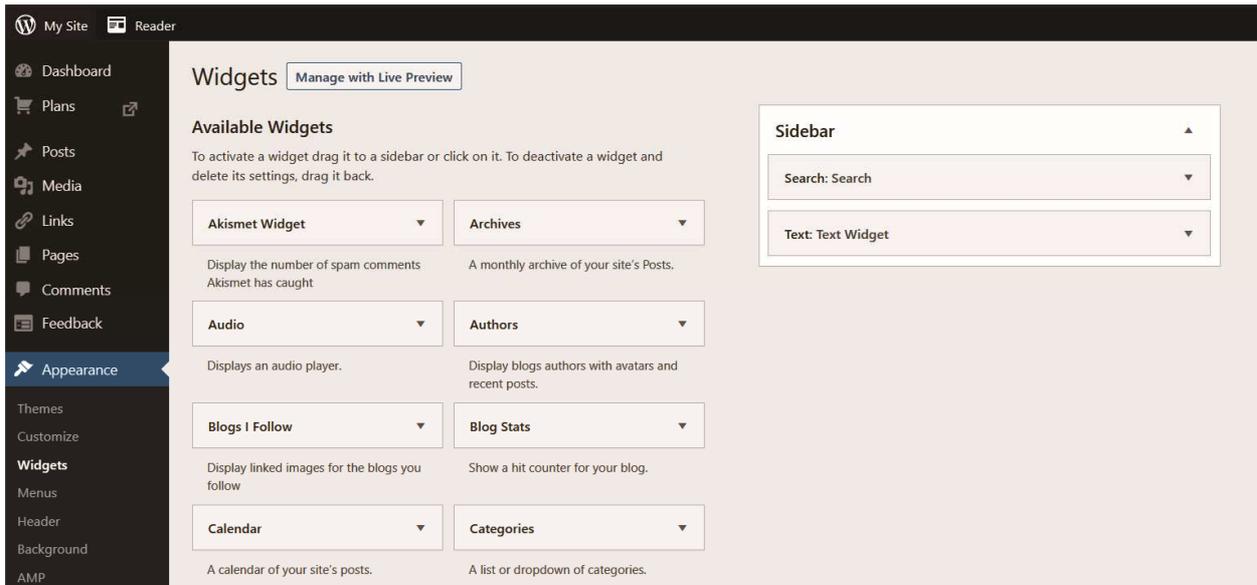


Figure 16 Side bar showing Appearance and available widgets

WordPress **plugins** are used to extend the functionality of WordPress. This means that you can add new features of WordPress. There are many plugins that you can choose from. These plugins are available on the WordPress.org plugin directory.

Some essential plugins for WordPress blogs:

- Google XML Sitemaps is a plugin that automatically generates XML site maps for better search engine optimisation. XML stands for eXtensible Markup Language, which was designed to store and transport data.
- Yoast SEO helps you improve the search engine optimisation so that search engines can more easily find your posts.
- Wordfence Security keeps your WordPress blog safe from hackers and malware.
- Contact Form 7 helps you to manage multiple contact forms. A contact form is a form that a visitor can fill in to contact you.

Plugins are installed using the WordPress installer, in the same way that themes are installed.

To install a WordPress plugin:

- 1 Press the **Add New** button under **Plugins**.
- 2 Enter the name of the plugin that you wish to install in the search field.
- 3 Click on **Install** and then select the **Activate** button.

You can use plugins to add widget areas to your WordPress blog. Widget areas are the sidebars, footers, sections in the header and sometimes even your Home page.