

WordPress for Beginners

Complete Crash Course Notes

SECTION 1: Introduction to WordPress

1.1 What is WordPress?

WordPress is a free, open-source Content Management System (CMS) — a platform that lets you create, edit, and manage your own website or blog without needing to know how to code. It is used by individuals, small businesses, and global enterprises alike.

- Used by more than 40% of all websites in the world
- Users range from bloggers and small business owners to NASA, The Walt Disney Company, and the Facebook Newsroom
- WordPress is open source — anyone can download, use, and even contribute to improving it

1.2 What Can You Build with WordPress?

- Online stores (e-commerce)
- Business websites (e.g. plumbing companies, professional services)
- Food and lifestyle blogs
- Luxury travel and news blogs
- Art gallery and portfolio sites
- Government and nonprofit websites

1.3 Two Essential Elements: Themes & Plugins

Every WordPress site relies on two core components beyond the software itself:

- Themes — determine the visual look and feel of your site. Thousands of free and premium themes are available. You can change your theme without losing your content.
- Plugins — extend functionality. Add features like contact forms, e-commerce, security, caching, SEO tools, maps, multilingual support, and much more.

Note: Themes and plugins featured in the course are examples only. Always evaluate each carefully before installing.

SECTION 2: Domains & Hosting

2.1 Domain vs. Hosting — The Key Difference

Think of your website as a mobile home: the domain is the address and the host is the land it sits on.

- Domain — the unique web address visitors type to find you (e.g., www.cocacola.com). You register a domain with a domain registrar.
- Host — a service that stores your website's files and makes them accessible on the internet 24/7.
- You can change hosting providers without changing your domain, but follow the new host's steps carefully.

2.2 Steps to Get Online

1. Select a domain registrar
2. Search and register your domain name (country-specific domains available, e.g., [.co.uk](http://www.co.uk))
3. Configure domain settings
4. Choose and sign up with a hosting provider

Many hosting companies offer one-click solutions to register a domain, install WordPress, and set up hosting simultaneously.

2.3 Choosing a Hosting Provider — Key Factors

- Reliability — good uptime record and responsive customer support
- Scalability — ability to upgrade your plan as your site grows
- Security — SSL certificates, regular backups, security features
- User-friendly interface — intuitive control panel for easy site management
- Affordability — compare pricing plans and features within your budget
- Bundled domains — some hosts offer domain registration and hosting in one package, simplifying management

SECTION 3: WordPress Themes

3.1 What is a Theme?

A theme is essentially a website template that controls the layout and design of your site. In WordPress, your content is completely separated from its presentation — meaning you can switch themes without losing any of your content.

3.2 The Four Types of WordPress Themes

- Block Theme — uses blocks for ALL parts of the site (navigation, header, content, footer). Managed entirely within the Site Editor. This is the future of WordPress and the most flexible option.
- Classic Theme — does not use the block editor to manage site layout. Uses the Customizer, menus, and widgets. Many more classic themes exist due to their longer history.
- Hybrid Theme — a classic theme that adopts some block-editing features, such as the template editor. Can use the Customizer while also creating custom templates.
- Universal Theme — can be configured as either a block theme or a classic theme, offering maximum flexibility.

3.3 Finding, Evaluating & Installing a Theme

Where to find themes:

- WordPress Dashboard: Appearance > Themes > Add New — browse Popular, Latest, or Block themes
- wordpress.org > Themes — use Feature Filter to search by subject, features, or layout

How to evaluate a theme:

- Version and update frequency — how recently was it updated?
- Active installations — more installs suggest a popular, well-supported theme
- Star ratings — reflects overall user experience

How to install a theme:

- Appearance > Themes > Add New > find theme > Install > Activate
- From a zip file: Add New > Upload Theme > upload from your computer

Live Preview (Block Themes):

- Hover over a block theme > click Live Preview to see and customize the theme before activating it

3.4 Updating & Managing Themes

- Updates are flagged in the top menu bar and the dashboard — always back up before updating
- Update via the Updates page, or Appearance > Themes > select theme > Update Now
- Enable auto-updates for individual themes from the theme detail screen
- Child theme — a sub-theme that inherits the parent theme's look and functions but keeps your customizations safe when the parent theme updates
- Delete a theme: Appearance > Themes > select theme > Delete (bottom right)
- Support: Visit the theme's directory page > Support tab to access its forum

SECTION 4: WordPress Plugins

4.1 What are Plugins?

Plugins extend the functionality of your WordPress site without requiring any coding. There are thousands available for virtually every use case — from SEO and security to contact forms, e-commerce, and performance optimization.

- Common use cases: social media integration, analytics, security scanning, membership/subscriptions, performance caching, SEO, contact forms, maps, multilingual support, e-commerce
- Most plugins in the wordpress.org directory are free but may offer premium versions with additional features

4.2 How to Add & Activate a Plugin

- Dashboard > Plugins > Add New
- Browse Featured, Popular, or Recommended tabs, or search by name or function
- Click Install Now > then Activate
- To upload a premium plugin (zip file): Plugins > Add New > Upload Plugin

4.3 Choosing a Plugin — Four Key Criteria

- Star rating — reflects user feedback and overall satisfaction
- Last updated — recently updated plugins are actively maintained; avoid outdated ones
- Active installations — high numbers indicate a popular and reliable plugin
- Compatibility — confirm the plugin is compatible with your current version of WordPress

Click 'More Details' on any plugin for FAQs, reviews, and support information.

4.4 Managing & Troubleshooting Plugins

- Deactivate a plugin: Dashboard > Plugins > Deactivate (then Delete if no longer needed)
- Plugin conflict troubleshooting:
 - Method 1: Manually deactivate plugins one by one and test to find the culprit
 - Method 2: Use a troubleshooting plugin (e.g., Health Check & Troubleshooting)
- Best practice: only install well-built plugins from trusted developers and remove unused ones

SECTION 5: The WordPress Dashboard

5.1 Logging In & The Admin Bar

- Log in by going to `yoursite.com/wp-admin` and entering your credentials
- Admin bar (dark bar at top): Home icon (go to front end), notification icons (new comments, updates), + New menu (create posts, pages, media, users), and your username/avatar
- Screen Options tab (top right of most admin pages) — show/hide elements and widgets on that page
- Help tab — context-sensitive help for the current page

5.2 Dashboard Widgets

- At a Glance — shows totals for pages, posts, and comments; current theme; WordPress version
- Activity — most recent posts and comments
- Quick Draft — jot down ideas that are saved as draft posts (not published)
- WordPress Events and News — local WordPress meetups and events based on your location

Widgets can be shown/hidden via Screen Options and repositioned by dragging and dropping.

5.3 Left Sidebar Navigation

- Posts — create and manage blog posts, news articles, and other dynamic content
- Media — upload and manage images, audio, video, PDFs, and other files
- Pages — create and manage static pages (About, Contact, Services, etc.)
- Comments — view, approve, reply to, or delete comments left by visitors
- Appearance — manage themes, the Site Editor (block themes) or Customizer (classic themes)
- Plugins — install, activate, deactivate, and delete plugins
- Users — manage user accounts and roles
- Settings — configure core WordPress settings

5.4 User Roles

- Subscriber — can only manage their own profile
- Contributor — can write posts but cannot publish them
- Author — can write and publish their own posts
- Editor — can publish and manage posts/pages written by all users
- Administrator — full access to all settings and management features (typically site owner only)

SECTION 6: Posts vs. Pages & Media Library

6.1 Posts

Posts are for dynamic, regularly updated content that is displayed in reverse chronological order (newest first).

- Examples: blog articles, news, recipes, reviews, travel journals
- Posts use Categories and Tags for organization
 - Categories — broad groupings (like a table of contents): e.g., Desserts, Travel, Health
 - Tags — specific descriptive keywords: e.g., cakes, New York, gluten-free
- Each post should have a Featured Image (thumbnail) representing the post visually
- Posts can be published immediately or scheduled for a future date/time

6.2 Pages

Pages are for static, timeless content that does not change frequently and is not date-dependent.

- Examples: Home, About, Services, Contact, Privacy Policy
- Pages do NOT have categories or tags — they are standalone pieces of content
- Pages can be created and edited either from the dashboard (Pages > Add New) or from within the Site Editor (Appearance > Editor > Pages)
- After publishing, pages typically appear automatically in the navigation menu

6.3 The Media Library

- Stores all uploaded files: images, audio, video, PDFs, spreadsheets, PowerPoints, and more
- Grid View (default) — thumbnail layout; List View — shows filenames and file types
- Filter by: media type (images, audio, video, documents), date, or unattached media
- Bulk selects to delete multiple items at once; search by filename or description
- Add media: Media > Add New Media File, or upload directly when inserting into a page/post
- Large videos should be embedded via the YouTube or Video block — saves server space and improves performance

Image attributes to always fill in:

- Alt Text — a concise description of the image for accessibility and SEO. Always required.
- Title — the name of the image
- Caption — displayed below the image
- Description — helps with organization and SEO

Image editing within WordPress:

- Click Edit Image to crop, scale/resize, rotate, or flip images
- Select Restore Original Image to undo all edits

Image optimization best practices:

- Optimize BEFORE uploading using tools like TinyPNG, Bulky size, or Squish
- Use descriptive, keyword-rich filenames before uploading
- Consider an image optimization plugin from the plugin's directory
- Good file formats: PNG, JPEG, or Web

SECTION 7: The Block Editor & Site Editor

7.1 The Block Editor (Gutenberg)

The Block Editor is the foundation of content creation in WordPress. You use it to add content to individual pages and posts. No code required.

- Access via: Dashboard > Posts/Pages > Add New (or edit an existing post/page)
- Everything is a block — paragraphs, headings, images, galleries, columns, tables, buttons, embeds, and more
- Add a block by clicking the + Inserter (top left or within the content area), or type / (forward slash) followed by the block name

Block Editor interface — three main areas:

- Content editing area — the main canvas where you place and arrange blocks
- Block Toolbar — appears above selected block; controls alignment, formatting, transform, move, and more options (three dots)
- Settings Sidebar (right) — style and configure the selected block; each block has different settings

List View:

- Open with the List View icon (top left) to see the full structure and hierarchy of all blocks on the page
- Click and drag blocks to reorder them; click the ellipsis (three dots) next to any block for more options
- Essential when working with nested blocks

7.2 The Site Editor

The Site Editor (Appearance > Editor) is where you design the overall look and feel of your entire site — not just individual pages. It uses blocks for everything, including headers, footers, and templates.

- Only available with Block Themes (e.g., the 2024 theme)
- Left side view sidebar lets you toggle between: Navigation, Styles, Pages, Templates, and Patterns

Site Editor vs. Block Editor — at a glance:

- Block Editor: add and edit content within individual pages and posts
- Site Editor: edit the overall design — templates, global styles, header/footer, patterns
- You can also create and edit pages directly from within the Site Editor

7.3 Site Editor — Navigation

- View and manage all menus — rename, reorder, delete menu items
- To style your navigation menu, open the template or template part it belongs to
- Navigation items are initially a Page List (auto-updates as pages are added). Click Edit in the sidebar to detach and manage individually.
- Add social icons: insert a Social Icons block inside the Navigation block and add relevant URLs
- Create a hamburger/mobile menu: Navigation block Settings > enable hamburger menu for small screens

7.4 Site Editor — Styles

- Browse style combinations (color and font pairings) that come with your theme
- Edit Styles > Typography — manage font settings globally for text, links, headings, captions, and buttons
- Font Library: Manage Fonts > Install Fonts — install Google Fonts or upload custom fonts
- Colors — change global color settings for different elements
- Layout — control padding and block spacing globally
- Stylebook — preview every block with your current global styles applied; edit individual block styles
- Style Revisions — browse and revert to previous saved style states
- Customize specific blocks globally (e.g., change all buttons to uppercase across the entire site)

SECTION 8: Templates & Template Parts

8.1 What is a Template?

A template provides the structure for how your content is displayed. It does NOT contain the actual page content — it contains the layout framework (header, content placeholder, footer). The Post Content block within a template is where the page/post content appears.

- Key distinction: You add content to pages/posts; you modify the design/structure in templates
- A template can be applied to a single page or multiple pages/posts

8.2 Built-in Templates

- Page template — structure for individual static pages
- Single Post template — layout for individual blog posts
- Index template — fallback template that displays posts
- 404 templates — shown when no content is found
- Blog Home template — controls the layout of your posts/blog page
- Blank template — a completely empty template

8.3 Working with Templates in the Site Editor

- Access: Appearance > Editor > Templates
- Edit a template: click the edit icon; you can modify header and footer template parts
- Add a template: click the + icon next to Templates — choose from page, post category, specific category, or a custom template
- Assign a template to a page: open the page > Sidebar Settings (right) > Template > click the name > select a new template
- Manage all templates: rename, delete custom templates, or clear customisations of built-in ones

8.4 Template Parts

Template parts are synced, reusable groups of blocks used to create repeated sections (header, footer, sidebar) across multiple templates.

- Synced — changes made to a template part update everywhere it is used automatically (indicated by a purple icon)
- Create a new template part: Site Editor > Patterns > + icon > Create Template Part > choose General, Header, or Footer
- Edit a template part: click Edit in the block toolbar, or open it from Patterns > Template Parts
- Replace a header or footer: click the three vertical dots on the template part > Replace Header/Footer > select a pattern or existing template part
- If you replace a template part on one template (rather than editing it), you must manually replace it on all other templates you want updated

8.5 Patterns

Block patterns are pre-made designs or layouts of grouped blocks. They save time, enhance design, and are available to modify freely.

- Add a pattern: Inserter > Patterns tab — browse theme patterns by category, or select Explore All Patterns
- Block Pattern Directory: [wordpress.org > Extend > Patterns](https://wordpress.org/extend/patterns/) — thousands of community patterns; copy and paste into your site
- Create your own pattern: Inserter > Patterns > + > Create Pattern — name it, assign a category, choose Synced or Unsynced
 - Synced Pattern — updates everywhere when edited in one place (purple icon)
 - Non-Synced Pattern — each instance is independent and editable on its own
- Theme patterns are locked, but you can duplicate them to your My Patterns area and then edit freely
- Command Palette: Ctrl+K (Windows) / Cmd+K (Mac) — quickly navigate or create items within the Site Editor

SECTION 9: Building Your Site — Blocks, Embeds & Settings

9.1 Key Container Blocks for Layout

- Group block — wraps multiple blocks into a single named section. Change background color, add padding, rename sections. To use Wide or Full width, deselect 'Inner blocks use content width' first.
- Columns block — one of the most effective blocks for complex multi-column layouts. Select number of columns, set column widths, add content per column, duplicate columns.
- Media and Text block — image on one side, text/content on the other. Change media width percentage, vertical alignment, and which side the image appears.
- Cover block — display text and other content on top of a background image or video. Used for hero sections and banners. Toggle full height or set manually; adjust overlay opacity.
- Row block and Stack block — arrange blocks horizontally (row) or vertically (stack) with flexible alignment and justification options.

9.2 Embedding Third-Party Content

Embeds let you display external media or content on your website without hosting it directly — videos, social posts, maps, audio, surveys, podcasts, and more.

- Add embed block: Inserter > scroll to Embeds — use the generic Embed block or a service-specific block (YouTube, X, Spotify, Vimeo, TED, etc.)
- Shortcut: type /YouTube (or /Spotify, etc.) directly in the editor to add an embed block
- Quickest method: paste a URL directly into the page — WordPress auto-converts it to an embed
- Transform embeds: select an embed block > block toolbar > Transform to Columns or Group block to add backgrounds and multi-column layouts
- Facebook/Instagram: use the Custom HTML block — go to the post > three dots > Embed > copy HTML > paste into HTML block > Preview

9.3 Key WordPress Settings

Settings > General:

- Site Title — the name of your website (shown in browser tabs, search results, and the header)
- Tagline — a short phrase describing your site's focus; important for SEO even if not displayed visually
- Time zone — set to match your local time zone so scheduled posts publish at the correct time
- Date Format, Time Format, and Week Start Day — customize display preferences

Settings > Reading:

- Homepage displays: choose 'Your latest posts' (dynamic blog) or 'A static page' (choose your home and posts pages)
- If 'Your latest posts': edit the Blog Home template in the Site Editor
- If 'A static page': create a homepage and a posts/blog page, assign them in Reading settings
- Search Engine Visibility: ensure this box is UNCHECKED so search engines can index your site

SECTION 10: Security, Spam & Backups

10.1 Seven Website Security Tips

- 1. Use a password manager (e.g., 1Password, Bit warden) and unique secure passwords for every login. Never use 'admin' as your username. Passwords should be 10–12+ characters with numbers and symbols.
- 2. Enable Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) — adds a second verification step at login. Plugins: WP 2FA, Two Factor Authentication, Mini Orange Google Authenticator.
- 3. Review your user base — remove unnecessary users. Limit Administrator role to site owners only.
- 4. Only install plugins and themes from trusted developers — check reviews, update date, active installs, compatibility, and support.
- 5. Keep WordPress core, themes, and plugins up to date — updates include security patches and bug fixes. Always back up before updating.
- 6. Install a security plugin — e.g., Word fence, Jetpack Security, iThemes, Patch stack, All-In-One Security. These scan for vulnerabilities and block malicious traffic.
- 7. (Advanced) Follow security blogs like Patch stack, WPScan, or Blog Security for emerging vulnerabilities.

Additional steps:

- Choose a reliable web host with strong security infrastructure
- Install an SSL certificate (enables HTTPS) — many hosts include this automatically
- Use a spam detector plugin, especially if you allow blog comments

10.2 Managing Comment Spam

Built-in WordPress settings (Settings > Discussion):

- Limit links in comments — default is 2 links max before moderation; reduce to 1 (do not set to 0)
- Comment moderation keywords — hold comments containing specified words for review
- Disallowed comment keys — automatically trash comments with specified words/phrases
- Disable trackbacks — prevents spam from trackback/pingback abuse
- Require manual approval for all comments — most strict setting

Anti-spam plugins:

- Akismet, Anti-spam Bee, Clean Talk — find via the plugin's directory
- CAPTCHA plugins — distinguish humans from bots
- Firewall plugins (All-in-One Security, Word fence, Jetpack) — block bots before they reach your site

10.3 Backing Up Your WordPress Site

Back up before: updating core/themes/plugins, installing new plugins, migrating your site, or making significant content changes.

- **Method 1 — Hosting company:** access Backups & Restores in your hosting control panel. Many hosts provide automatic and on-demand (manual) backups of both the file system and database.
 - File system backup: WordPress core files, themes, plugins, and media uploads
 - Database backup: all textual content, settings, user data, posts, pages, comments
- **Method 2 — Backup plugin:** install Updraft Plus, Jetpack, Duplicator, etc.
 - Configure a backup schedule (e.g., daily), set number of backups to retain
 - Backup Now button for on-demand backups
 - Restore with one click from the existing backups list
- **Best practice:** store backups in a separate location — cloud services like Dropbox or Google Drive
- **Manual method (advanced):** export database via phpMyAdmin; file system via FTP/file manager

SECTION 11: SEO, Headings & Getting Help

11.1 Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Basics

SEO refers to techniques that help your website rank higher in search engine results, attracting more visitors organically. Search engine bots crawl your site to understand its content, keywords, speed, and accessibility.

- Settings > Reading > uncheck 'Discourage search engines from indexing this site' — ensure this is OFF for live sites
- Fresh content — search engines favor sites that are regularly updated with new, quality content
- E-E-A-T (Google's guideline) — Expertise (write about what you know), Authority (others link to your site), Trustworthiness (share factual, credible information)
- Shareable content — consider whether your content is funny, useful, well-written, easy to read, and has a summary

11.2 Keywords

- Research keywords: use free tools like Word stream or Google Keyword Planner
- Research competitor domains to find what words their audience searches for
- Priority order for using keywords: page title > headings > excerpts > body content
- Use keywords naturally — avoid keyword stuffing (overusing keywords damages SEO)
- Install an SEO plugin (e.g., Yoast SEO, Rank Math) to help manage metadata, sitemaps, and keyword guidance

11.3 Linking, Metadata & Site Speed

Linking:

- Link to other posts/pages within your own site — pages linked multiple times are seen as more important
- Link to reputable external sites with high E-A-T — makes your site more credible

Metadata:

- Meta descriptions — text shown below each search result. WordPress auto-generates them, but most SEO plugins let you customize them. Keep to ~2 sentences.
- Write custom excerpts for posts — WordPress uses these to create meta descriptions

Site speed:

- Choose a fast, reliable host; enable server-side caching or use a caching plugin
- Use a lightweight, fast-loading theme
- Optimize images and install well-built plugins
- Test your site speed with GT Metrix or Google Page Speed Insights

11.4 Image Optimization for SEO

- Choose good file formats: PNG, JPEG, or WebP
- Scale image dimensions before uploading — most monitors are max 1,920 x 1,080 px
- Compress file size without quality loss: use TinyPNG, Squish, or an image optimization plugin
- Rename image files descriptively before uploading (e.g., chocolate-cake-recipe.jpg)
- Add alt text describing the image content — required for SEO and accessibility
- Include your target keyword/phrase in at least one image's alt tag

11.5 Sitemaps & Local SEO

- Sitemap — a map of all content on your site that helps search engines navigate it. Most SEO plugins generate one automatically.
- Local SEO tips: do local keyword research, add contact information to footer/contact page, post localized content, get local backlinks (local sites linking to yours)

11.6 Headings — Accessibility & SEO

Headings structure your content and serve two critical purposes: making content accessible to all users and helping search engines understand your page hierarchy.

- H1 — the post/page title (set automatically by WordPress; only one per page)
- H2 — main section headings (must relate to the H1)
- H3 — sub-sections within an H2 (must relate to the H2)
- H4–H6 — further sub-levels as needed
- Never skip heading levels (e.g., don't go H2 > H4) — WordPress alerts you in the outline view
- Use the Outline Feature (below List View icon) to verify heading order and hierarchy
- Accessibility: screen readers use headings to navigate. Keyboard users can jump between headings. Users with low vision use heading sizes to track their location on the page.
- SEO: embed keywords thoughtfully into headings. Headings should accurately reflect the content of the section.
- Style headings globally in the Site Editor: Styles > open Stylebook > select Heading block > modify via sidebar
- NEVER use a heading block just for visual styling — use a Quote block or a styled Paragraph instead

11.7 Getting Help & Support

- WordPress Support Forums: [wordpress.org > Learn > Forums](https://wordpress.org/support/forums/) — search existing threads or post a new topic in 'Fixing WordPress' or 'Everything else WordPress'
- Plugin/theme-specific issues: go to the plugin or theme's own support forum via its directory page
- Premium plugins/themes: contact their website's support team directly
- WordPress Documentation: [wordpress.org > Learn > Documentation](https://wordpress.org/support/documentation/) — comprehensive guides and articles on all topics
- Learn WordPress: [wordpress.org > Learn > Learn WordPress](https://wordpress.org/learn/) — video lessons, online workshops, and courses for all skill levels