

Guidance for Getting a WordPress site built.

This is sort of an FAQ for getting the WordPress Assignment done.

Guidance for getting your site installed:

1. Do **NOT** purchase your site or begin building until we have had an opportunity to discuss it in class. Feel free to start thinking about your site.
2. First think about the context. What is the story that surrounds your proposed site? What is the purpose (why does it exist)? Who (in your story) would be responsible for creating new content on the site? Who would you expect to come to the site and read and comment on the content? What kind of content will you offer? Why would your readers come back again and again (what is the value proposition)? Having a context will make it easier to make design decisions as you build out your site. It may also inform your site URL (remember though, you may want to repurpose your site once class is over, so you may not want to make it specific to a class required context, see more about the URL later in this document). This will be WebAssign 1. Also, think about what you would like your site to look like. This will also make it easier to choose a theme, layout (how many columns, background, menu, etc.) before you get working.
3. Then you have to acquire a webhost account. You are welcome to acquire an account at any webhosting environment, but we are recommending a couple we know are good and inexpensive. SiteGround can offer you an account free for one year via our DePaul University referral link <http://www.siteground.com/depauluniversity> You will need to use your DePaul Email account to take advantage of this offer. (You can find information about DePaul Email accounts at <https://offices.depaul.edu/is/services/email/Pages/student-e-mail.aspx> It is currently taking about 24 hours to activate an email account. To activate an account, go to the above email page, click on the login link, enter your campusconnect username and password. Account information will be emailed to the email account in your Campus Connect profile. With the free account your url will be something on the order of yourname.siteground.com. If you want your own unique URL you will need to provide a credit card and purchase the url for a fee of \$14.95 for the year. This account will not automatically renew at the end of the year.

As an alternative, you may also use this URL

http://www.siteground.com/friends.htm?referrer_id=173144 which doesn't require a DePaul Email account, but will cost you about \$10 more for the 1 year of hosting plus the url (URL is required for this account, so a total of about \$24.95). There is also BlueHost (about \$5.95/mo). Do be careful when traversing the shopping cart that you are getting the appropriate month agreement without additional expenses. Stay away from the following (either lack of services or troubles with customer support): GoDaddy, JustHost, 1and1, HostGator and HostingRails. One last comment: SiteGround (and others) automatically renew. They'll send you emails weeks in advance, but if you don't actively CANCEL the account, they will charge your credit card for the next year's service at the going rate (upwards of \$150.00). From your Siteground login Home,

click on Billing, then to the left Cancellation. Select Hosting and then cancel. Your site will continue until the end of your paid up period and then will be disabled. Wait to cancel until class is over and the site has been graded (this applies only to the paid accounts, the Free one does **NOT** auto renew).

4. You will need a domain name. You might as well pick something you potentially can repurpose for yourself outside of the class. If you already have a domain name, you can transfer it in. If you already have a webhost account, you can use it. We don't want you using someone else's webhost account as we want you to experience managing the account yourself.
5. Once you have an account, find your way to the Control Panel (probably called CPanel). On both siteground and hosting rails, you have to login first, and then find your way to it. Log in; select the "my account" button and then you will find the CPanel to the right of your domain name (not real obvious in my opinion.) Sometimes on siteground, the CPanel times out when you go to it and you see an error screen. If this happens to you, don't panic. Just hit the refresh button on your browser.
6. Once you are at the CPanel, invest a bit of time exploring the different options. The CPanel is laid out slightly differently at each webhost, but the basic constructs are the same.
 - a. You can manage your account from the Preferences Window
 - b. You can set up and manage an email server from the Mail Window (you can have your own custom email address at your own domain name by setting up email here. If you are going to keep your account, this may be something you want to do.)
 - c. You can view your files and file folders via the Files Window. Your webhost account is sharing space on a computer with probably 50 other accounts. That computer has a file manager (just like any Windows/Mac/Linux computer. You are assigned space on the hard disk for your files. These tools let you in to see and edit your own files.
 - d. Once you have a website up, you can monitor traffic via tools in the Logs Window.
 - e. You can manage firewalls (and at some webhosts SSL) via the Security Window (SiteGround puts your SSL option under extra features and charges significant money for a certificate). You do not need SSL for our course.
 - f. You can manage your domain name(s) via the Domains Window. This is also the place where you will manage redirection of domain names to other sites, and manage subdomains – the third level domain name. So, for example, if you wanted to create:
 - i. <http://ect424.rkumar.org>

and other third level domain names, you do it here. Notice that the subdomains are in FRONT of the top level domain name (rkumar) and not after the suffix (.org/). Your Blogsite will NOT be a subdomain but instead a location (after the suffix .org/SUMMER2015).

- g. If you wish to directly manage your MySQL databases, you do this from the Database Window. You will not have to do so in this course (if you are using one click installation).
 - h. You will manage one click installation from the Software/Services Window. At Siteground you will use Softaculous. Take a look at the variety of one click installations available via Softaculous and SiteSoftware. SiteGround uses SPSPanel, which is very similar. Other WebHosts use SimpleScripts.
 - i. Also notice there is a Statistics Window to the left. You can track your webhost account usage here.
7. Installing WordPress.
- a. Click on Softaculous
 - i. On the left, click Blogs, on the resulting screen then click WordPress
 - ii. On the WordPress page, click Install (in blue on the top of the page)
 - iii. In the Directory space put SUMMER2015 (no / required). If you are doing a Sandbox give it another name. The one we require MUST be SUMMER2015 (NOT any other variant!)
 - iv. You must change the site name and tag line, be sure to create a secure Admin password (don't just use pass) and enter a real email address.
 - v. Then click Install (at the bottom). You may wish to have the installation instructions emailed to you by entering your email address in the box at the bottom.
 - b. There are several good tutorials at YouTube on how to do this. Consider <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQQ083hiGug> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxDNJa3RZQ4> One of these ought to resonate for you.
 - c. There are several good tutorial of how the WordPress Dashboard works. Consider <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwqDs8Tzo0k>
 - d. If you have a particular WordPress question or you hit a wall, check several resources (and do feel free to contact me as well, of course):
 - i. http://codex.wordpress.org/Main_Page is the main repository of WordPress documentation. This documentation is searchable.
 - ii. <http://wordpress.org/support/> is the WordPress discussion board forum. Most any issue you will come up against, someone else already has – and the Q&A is posted somewhere in their forum.
 - iii. There are many YouTube tutorials.
 - iv. If you hit an error message you can't figure out, try searching WordPress/support (URL above) AND put the error phrase into Google. You will likely find a discussion around the error somewhere online. This is a very real, very useful troubleshooting technique.

- e. Some issues that will come up with your WordPress site:
 - i. Think through the context (business problem/opportunity) before you start to build. If you have a problem you are trying to solve, decision making about site design is much easier. Without going through this step you will spend way too much time thrashing about without a clear focus of what you are trying to accomplish. Doing a bit of systems planning up front will save you considerable time on this assignment—and on any systems project to undertake.
 - ii. If this is your first WordPress environment, ABSOLUTELY build yourself a Sandbox site in addition to your SUMMER2015 site. Try things out on your sandbox site first. You will sometimes try a combination of things in WordPress that will lockup your site in some unexpected way (not all plugins play well with all other plugins). If you hit a problem, hit it in an environment you don't mind deleting and rebuilding from scratch.
 - iii. If you are more advanced, consider a Sandbox site anyway. It will give you more freedom to try risky advanced things.
 - iv. Think through what widgets and menus you will need. Think through whether you want two or three columns. Do this BEFORE selecting a Theme, as most themes are only minimally customizable without getting deep into the PHP and CSS. Many Themes are limited in their support for menus.
- f. Themes
 - i. There are many good locations for free WordPress themes. Start by searching through the directory of themes within the WordPress Dashboard, but don't feel limited to those themes. Do a Google search on "free wordpress themes" and you will find many sites that offer them. From the Theme/install page on the dashboard, there is an upload button. To install a third party theme, download it from the website where you've found it (it will be a zip file or similar) to your own hard disk. Then from Theme/install upload it from your hard disk. It will install automatically, and will be available for activation.
 - 1. Once you do this, look in the Appearance menu on the left to see what sorts of menu-based customization this theme offers. Each theme is different.
 - ii. You can deactivate or uninstall a theme from the Dashboard, if need be. Should you ever find you have to manually uninstall a theme (and don't do this unless the theme has grunged up your site and won't uninstall from the dashboard), you can use the CPanel file manager to find the theme's directory and delete the entire directory of that theme. [You can do the same sort of deletion for a rogue Plugin.]
 - iii. Some good themes are the ones that permit the most customization. For example Constructor offers a very nice customization menu. There are other customizable themes as well.
- g. Plugins

- i. There is a whole world of Plugins. You may find plugins via the dashboard search mechanism. It is a useful exercise to google something like “Top Wordpress Plugins” and you will find many site that suggest Top 10 or Top 50 WordPress plugins. If you start reading these sites you will find the same plugins are mentioned over and over – this is good guidance to get you started.
 - ii. Even though Cache plugins can speed up your site, they get in the way while you are designing your site. This happens because they load portions of your site to cache (to make it faster). During design phase when you keep making changes and want to test those changes, sometimes changes don’t immediately install or install in unexpected ways due to the cache. So, do not activate a cache until the point your site is fairly stable.
 - iii. There are some plugins that enhance the tagging or categories system of WordPress. If you are going to use these, carefully think through your taxonomy of categories and tags. Then implement this system before your site goes live. Adding a custom taxonomy to a live existing site may mix segregate pre and post taxonomy posts and comments in a way that confuses your search engine and categorization plugins.
 - iv. SEO plugins are great, but you need to invest the time to properly customize them. Installing them without customization provides you little benefit.
 - v. There are lots of plugins that add eye candy. Be judicious in using these as this isn’t “MySpace”. Make sure you are clear about the purpose and brand of your site; then use eye candy only when it reinforces your brand.
 - vi. Some plugins are comprehensive environment on their own. BuddyPress comes to mind as one of these. Be careful about installing a comprehensive plugin during this first assignment as you may be biting off quite a bit of work. Some shopping cart plugins may fit this comprehensive category as well.
 - h. Widgets
 - i. First, plan out your theme selection so widgets can be placed in the locations you want them.
 - ii. Think about what you want to accomplish with widgets. Try out many combinations in your sandbox.
 - iii. If you’ve invested time customizing a widget, not that there is a placeholder in the widget page of the dashboard to hold customized, but unused, widgets without deleting them.
 - iv. If your widgets aren’t refreshing as expected, confirm you aren’t using a WordPress cache. Then confirm your browser cache isn’t the culprit.
8. Perhaps this is enough to get you started. Email me with questions about WordPress customization.