San Antonio College

Google Sites

A User Guide

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Intermediate Web Programming - ITSE2302

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Introduction

This is a user guide to demonstrate what features and how easy it is to use *Google Sites*. The benefit of using a service like Google Sites is how "user friendly" it is, by making the process of building a great looking website straightforward and hassle free. After reading this user guide you should be able to navigate this service with ease and be able to effectively build a simple yet charming website. I will be covering how to get started using *Google Sites*, create the base website, and add flavor and publish it.
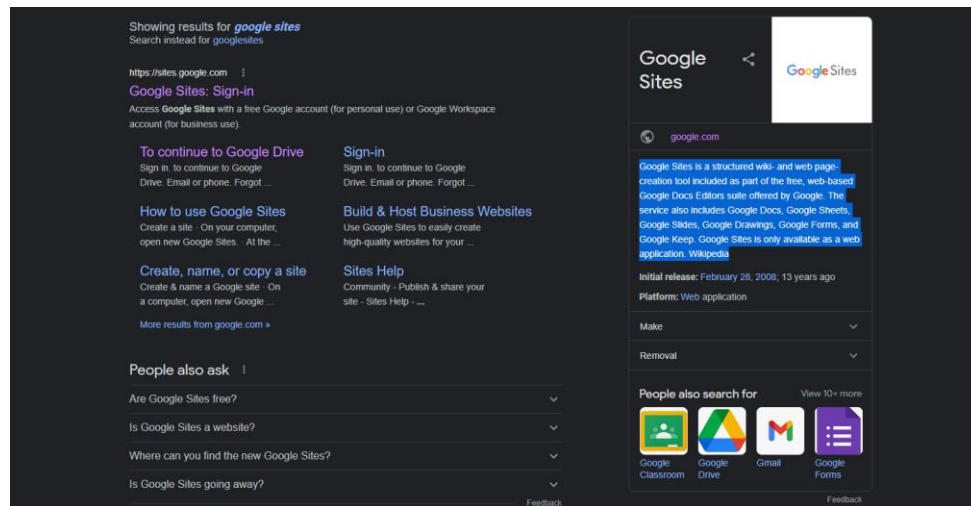
History

Google Sites began as a service that was focused on small and medium-sized businesses called *JotSpot.* The company was founded by co-founders, Joe Kraus and Graham Spencer, of *Excite*. *Google* acquired *JotSpot* in October of 2006 and after two years of redesign launched what is now *Google Sites*. In 2016 Google introduced a rebuild of their classic Google Sites, named *New Google Sites.* In August of 2020, the new *Google Sites* became the new default look.[1]

JotSpot and Google
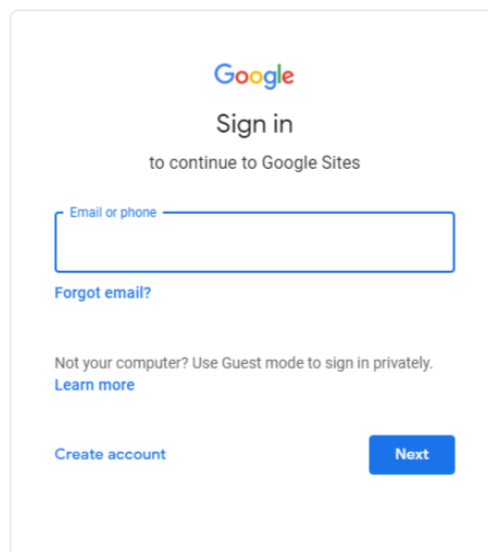
Getting Started

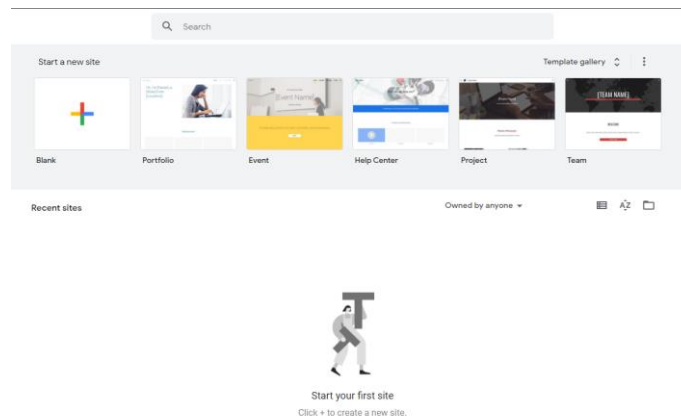*Google search result for "google sites"*

Logging In

The first step to getting started with *Google Sites* or any website is connecting to it then sign-in. After using google to navigate to the website you will be prompted to sign in using your Google email and password respectively.

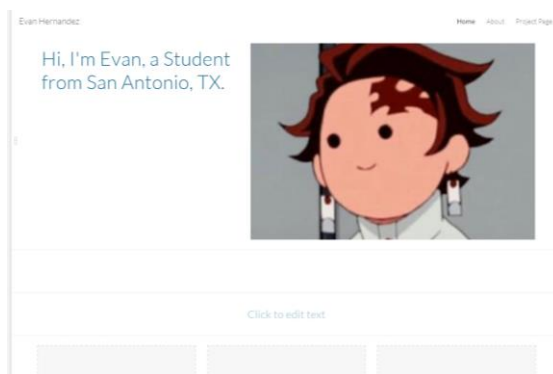*Google Sign in page*

Choosing a Template

After Logging in to Google Sites using your google credentials you will be directed to a page with a few pre-built templates to choose from. Some of the choices include a portfolio, a page for an event, a template for a help center, and a few others. In this user guide, we will be starting with a fresh page to demonstrate the essential features included with this service.

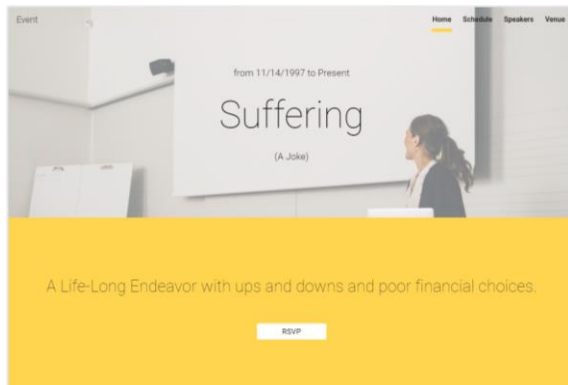*Templates and current projects page*

Portfolio

Portfolio websites are extensions of a freelancer's (or company's) resume.   The purpose is to help land more clients by being able to showcase the abilities and skills you have. If you plan on applying for a Front-End Developer position you might use a portfolio webpage to demonstrate your abilities in CSS and Javascript.
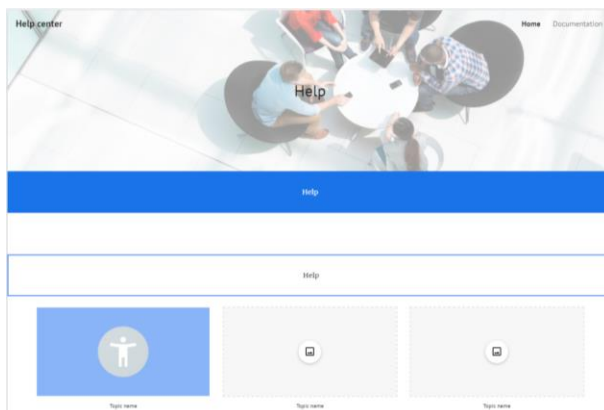

Portfolio example

Event

An event webpage would be used to advertise an event being hosted. Think of it as receiving a card for a birthday party or your Highschool reunion. Typically you'd be able to find more information about the event or RSVP for it through the website.
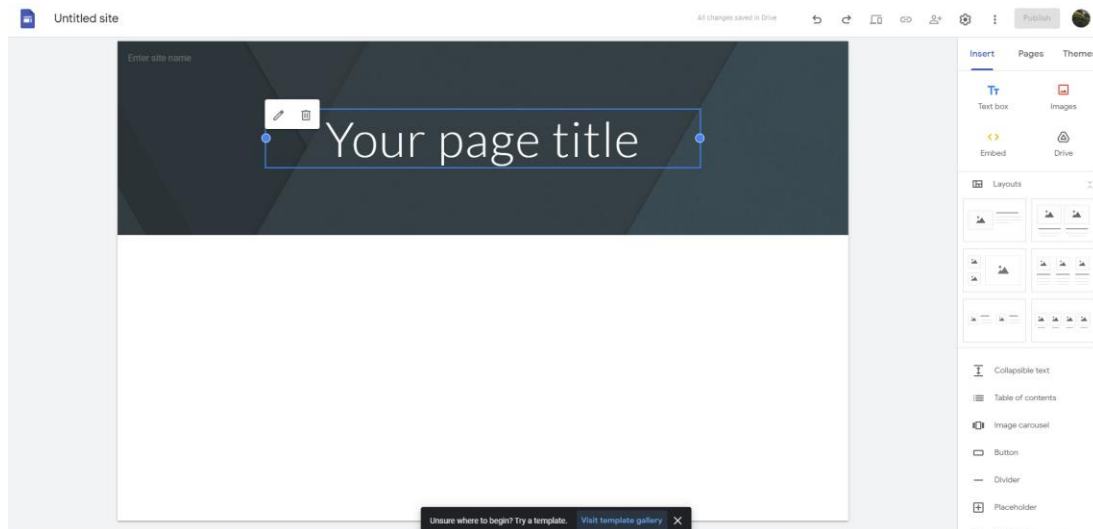

Event example

Help Center

A Help Center webpage is primarily a contact page or FAQ page. Every website has a page like this to help anyone who is lost or needs help with any questions they may have. Typically these pages have a company's contact information if the provided "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) aren't helpful enough.

Help Center Example
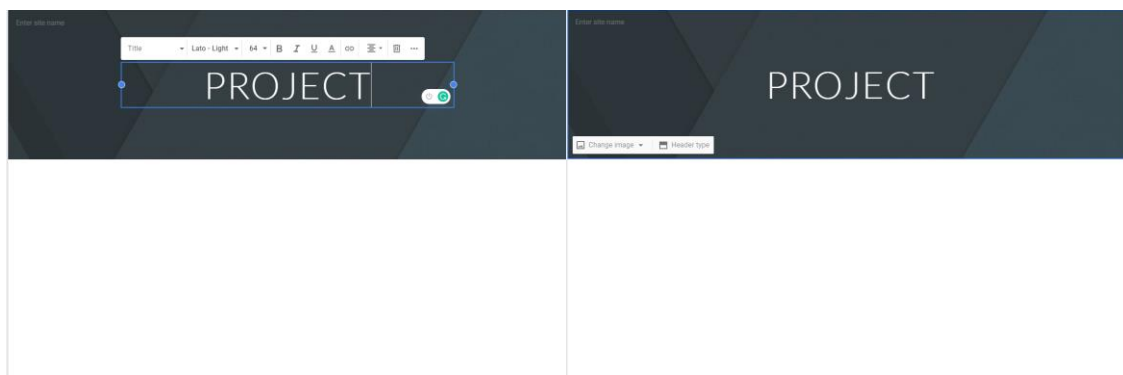
The Google Site Exists, Now What?

After beginning a new site you will be directed to the *Google Sites* page builder interface. The first text box highlighted is for the title of your page. On the right-hand side of the screen, you will find all the tools to design your webpage.

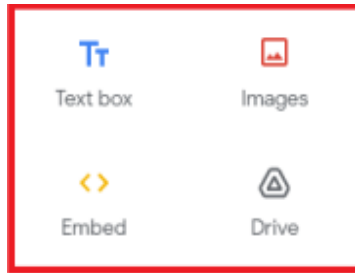*Initial Layout of New Site*

Webpage Header

The webpage header is the first thing that people will notice on your webpage. Google Sites has made editing and designing the header to be incredibly easy.   You can add a title and edit the text size and font all through the simple-to-use text editor that can be found in any google application. After adding a title to your page you can change the header image and header type by highlighting the header and clicking the buttons.

Editing Title of the webpage with google's text editor | Buttons to change header image and type
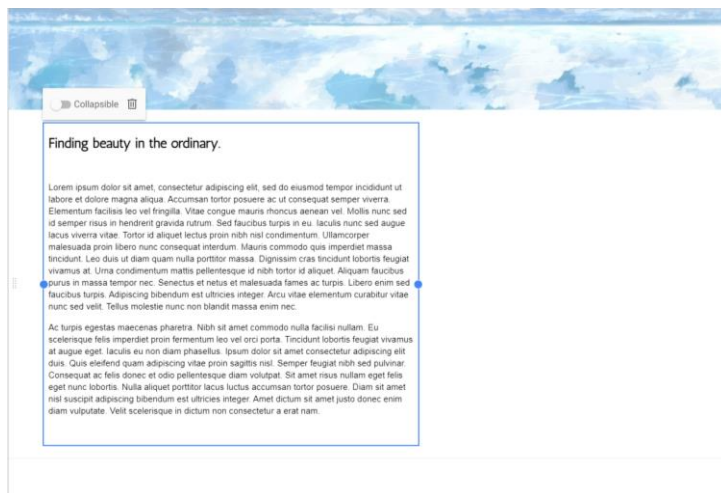
Essential Tools

A few of the essential tools found in the Google Sites application are Text Box, Images, Embedded, and Drive. The Text Box tool allows the user to add text in easy-to-control containers. The Image tool allows the user to add images to the page. The Embed tool is used to add links or other things that can be embedded to a page such as videos. The Drive tool is just for adding items straight from your google drive.

Essential Tools in Google Sites

Text Box

The Text Box tool has to be the most important feature in the user's arsenal. This tool allows you to add text into containers that can be adapted to all of your needs. It makes one of the most common jobs in front-end development a breeze.

Example using the Text Box tool

Images

Inserting Images in Google Sites is incredibly simple. Images can be uploaded from your computer, straight from a url, or from the integrated google image search tool. After adding the image, it can be cropped, resized, and even be captioned.
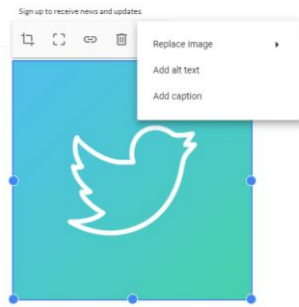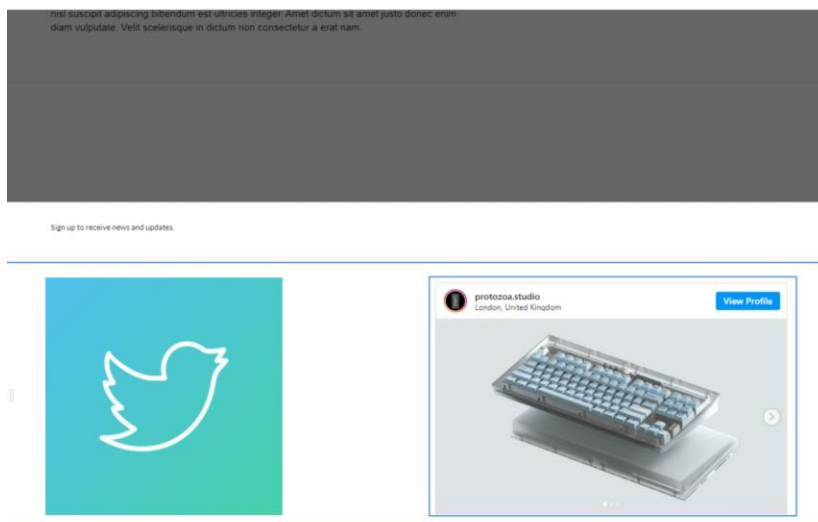
Image tool Google Image Search | *Image tool container*

Embed Tool

This tool lets the website designer embed things such as videos, articles, posts, and even more. I used this tool to embed a post from Instagram. This tool makes anchoring links and other objects much easier to understand. You can embed using a URL or an actual HTML code.
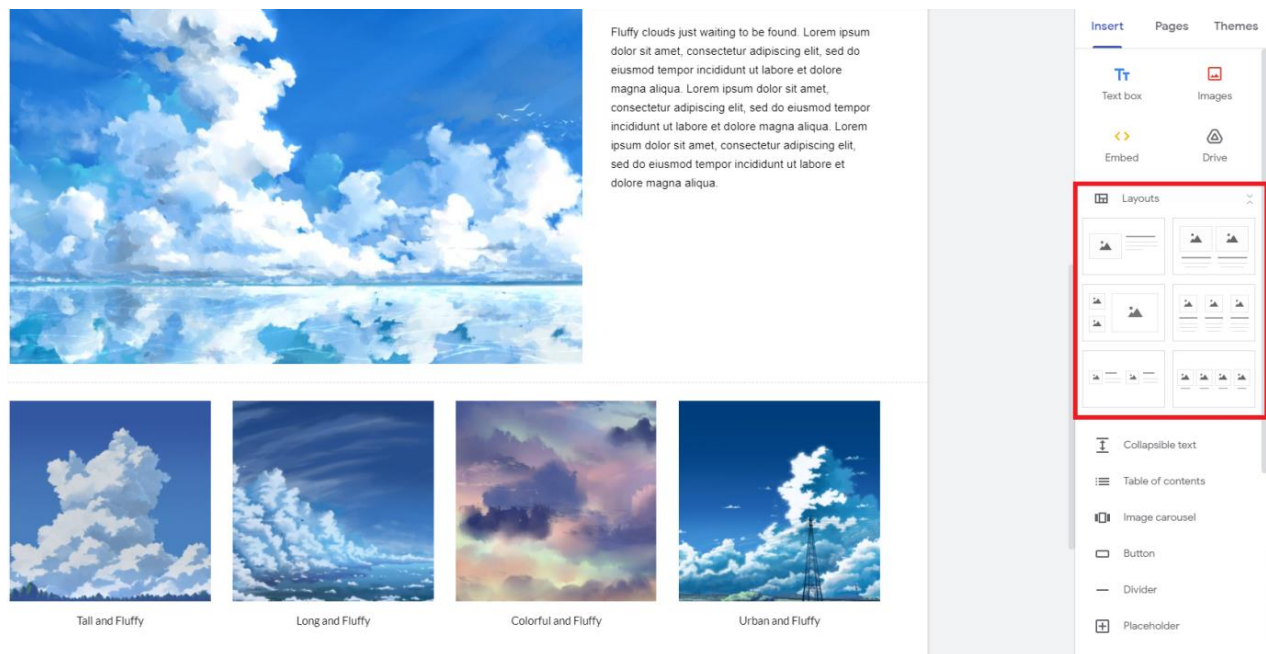

Embedded Instagram post on the right

Changing the Layout and other features
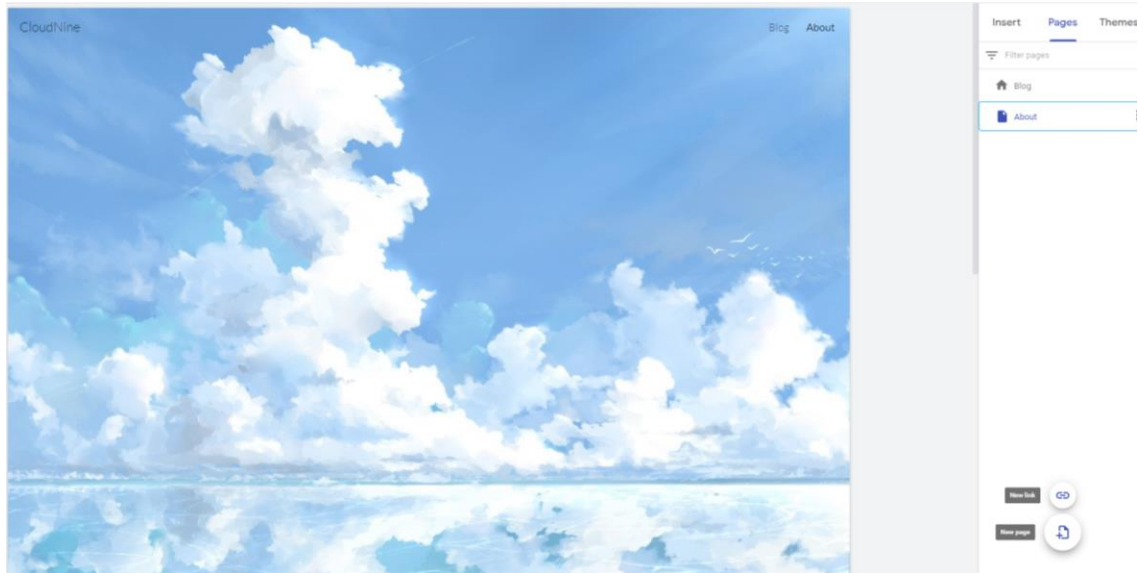
Layouts

Another design element available on Google Sites is the ability to change the layout of the page. This makes creating the perfect look very intuitive. Using the different layouts can make your webpage stand out from the rest of the competition.   By combining a layout with images and text you can create a blog-style page in minutes.
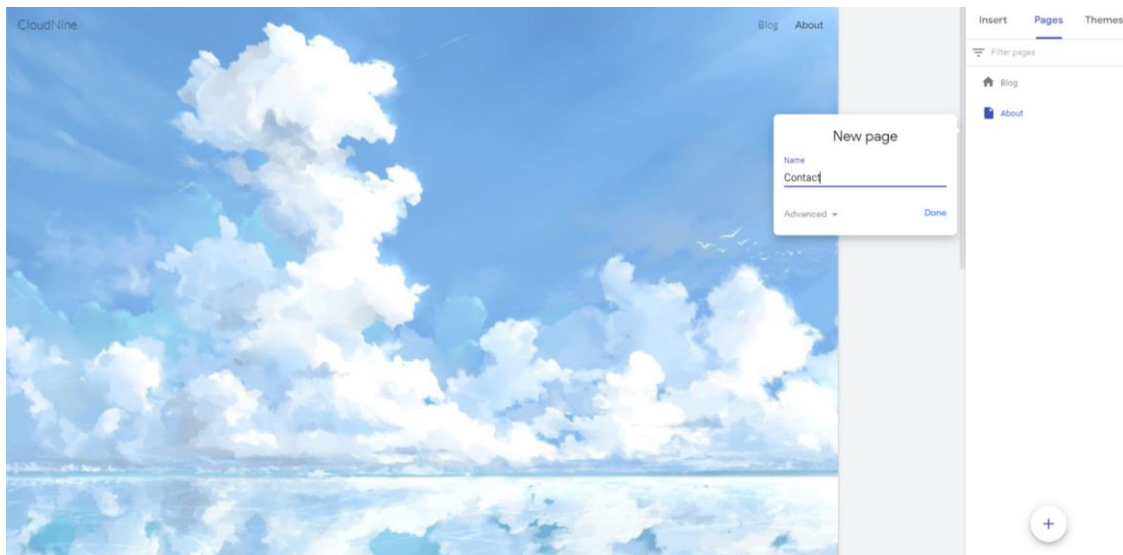

A blog-style webpage was created using images, text, and two different layouts

Adding Pages

No website is complete without multiple pages. Adding web pages in Google Sites is as easy as clicking a button. By tabbing over to the pages tab you can add another page by clicking the large "+" at the bottom of the Pages tab. After adding the page you'll be prompted to name the new page then it'll be added to the bottom of your pages list. Once the pages are added, you can also navigate between them by clicking the page you wish to edit in the list of created webpages.

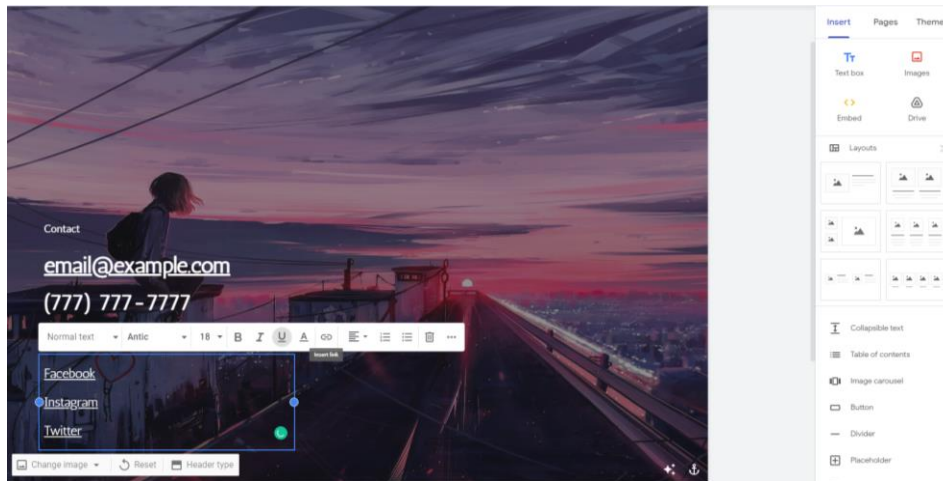*Adding a page with the + button on the bottom of the pages tab*

Naming the new page "Contact"

Adding External Links

Adding external links to your webpage is a great way to include social media, forms, or even articles to your page. They can be added to any text using the Google Sites text
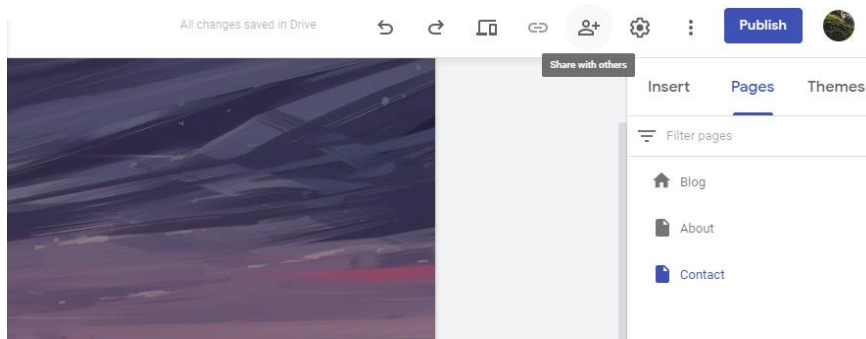
editor and clicking the "insert link" button to add the desired URL to the selected text. Adding external links is useful especially on a contact webpage to help the user be able to find help if needed.
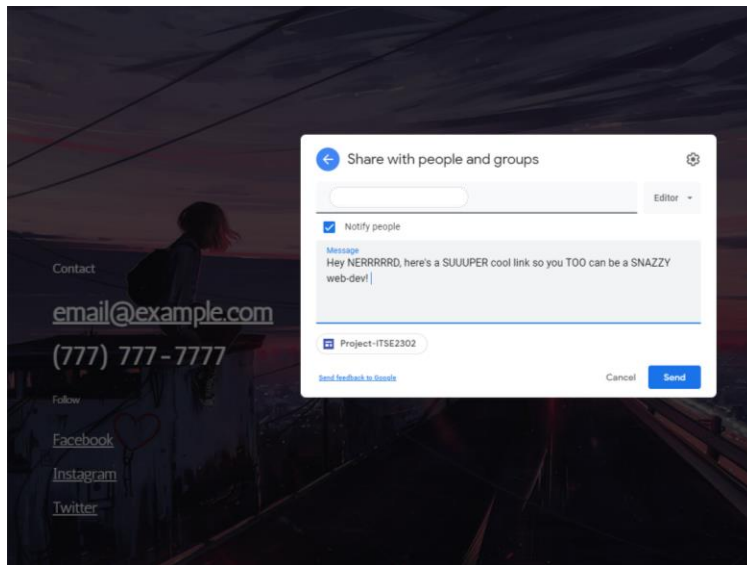

Using the "insert link" button makes adding social media a piece of cake

Working with "Friends"

Google Sites makes working with your "friends" almost as easy as cooking a raw steak. At the top right of the screen, you will find a few buttons, one being the "share with others" button. With this, you can add anyone to help you with your site, or be a published viewer. Having "friends" has never been more fun, now you can hang out while being able to delete all of their hard work.
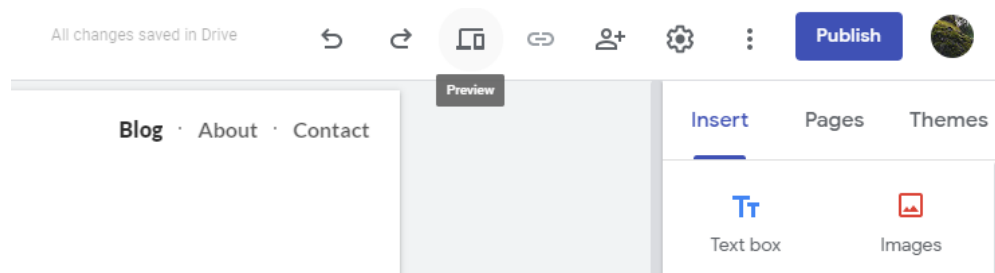

"Share with others" in top-right

Adding my brother to the list of people who can help and edit the website

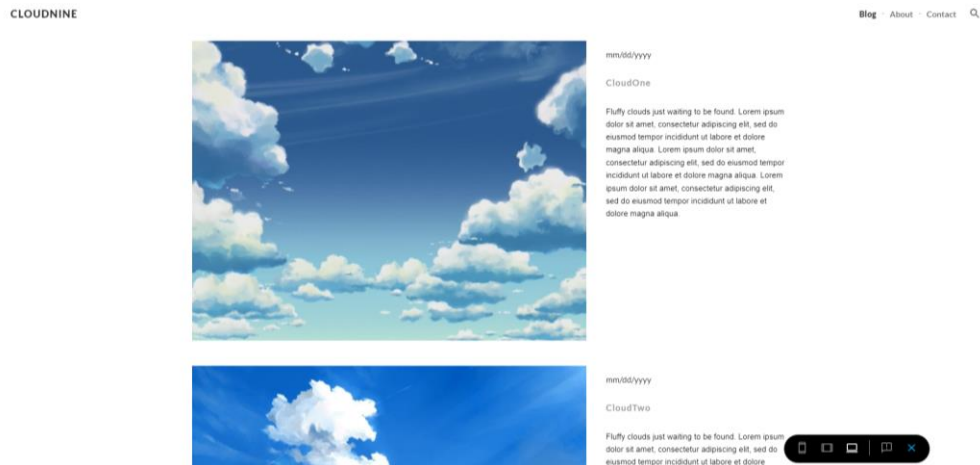# Okay, I Made the Site, What Now?

You have a functioning and great looking website now! What now? Well now you need to see what it looks like from the public view. We still need to publish your website and if you need to, how to make changes to your site and republish the updated site. The final touch will be how to secure a custom domain for your website so it's easier to find online.
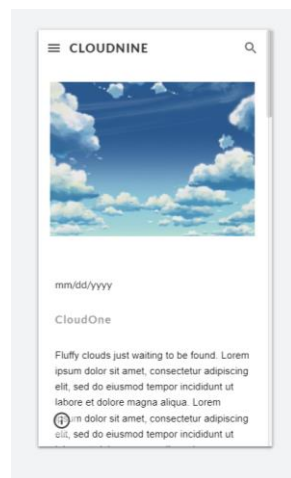
Viewing your Website

It's important to get a look at how your website will look without all the extra things going on around it. Viewing your website before publishing it gives you an idea of how it'll be seen by the public and an idea of what you may have missed or want to add still. You can view your website by finding the "Preview" button at the top of the page near the "Share with others" button. "Preview" allows the user to view what the published website will look like from the perspective of a desktop, tablet, or a mobile device.

Highlighting the "Preview" button

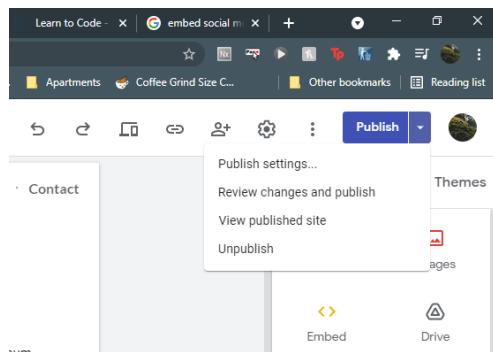
Preview of Desktop (and tablet basically)

Preview in Mobile

Publishing Your Website

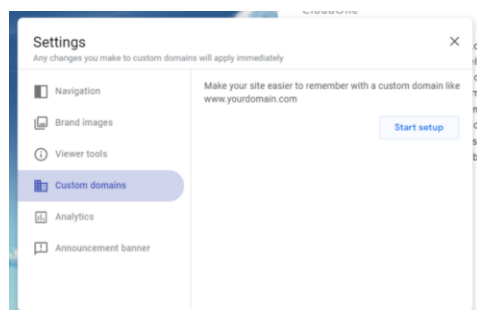After you've given your site a once over, it's finally time to publish your website! Publishing your website means making it accessible to the rest of the world. Publishing a website with Google Sites is, like everything else, incredibly easy and straightforward. At the top right corner of the page, you can find the purple "Publish" button. It has a drop down menu as well. Not only can you publish the website, but you can change the publish settings, review any changes you've made to your website and update it, view your published website, and finally "unpublish" your website if you need.
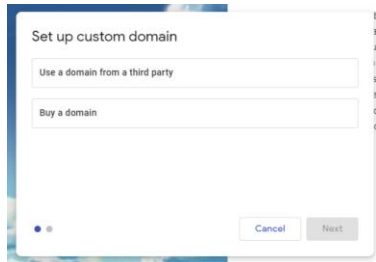

The "Publish" button and drop down menu
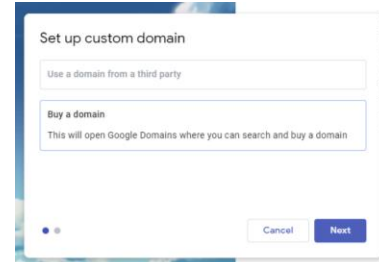
Creating a Custom Domain

The last step, and the part that costs an insane amount of money, is creating a domain. Using the "Gear" button, also known as the settings button, locate "Custom domains". After navigating to the custom domains tab, you will see a "Start setup" button that will create a pop up with two options. The top option lets the user use a domain from a third party. The bottom option lets the user buy a domain and will redirect you to *Google Domains.* From there you proceed with the purchasing of a custom domain.
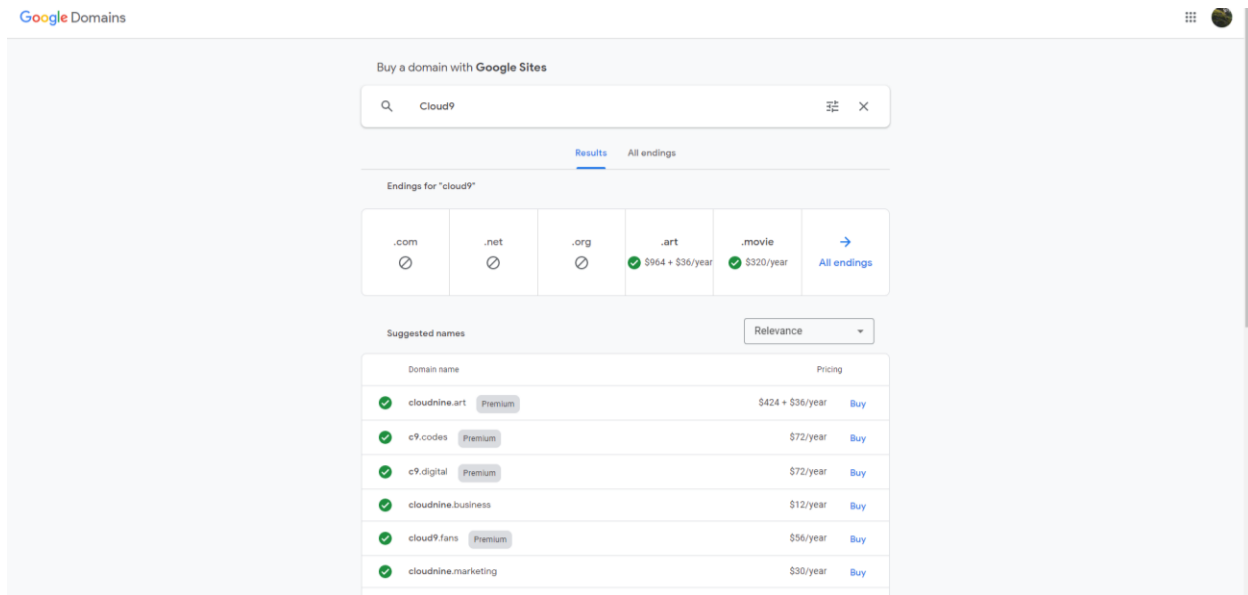

The Custom domain in the Settings menu

Options 1 and 2 of Custom domains

Option 2 lets you buy a domain

I learned how expensive a domain is with this project, I think an ambulance is cheaper

Final Thoughts

This user guide helped show what is necessary for getting started with Google Sites, what tools and features exist to help build your website, and what needs to be done to make it public. With the emergence of Google Sites and similar services, individuals who never learned how to code are able to create beautiful websites of their own and on their own. Using the intuitive tools and features available, you can avoid the headache of learning multiple programming languages just to make a collapsible text box or being able to move from page to page. After reading this guide, making a website with Google Sites will be a breeze. Have fun making your first site!

Note from the Author

Challenges and Personal Experience using Google Sites

If I had to describe my experience using Google Sites with a single word, I would say it was "Smart". Working with Google Sites made me feel like a professional just zipping through the process. Everything I could want or need was a click away, and if it wasn't one click away at most it was two. My first impression was that Google Sites was for only those who didn't know a lick about coding, and by that I mean that there wasn't an obvious way to add your own styling or html. I still don't completely know if there is, but by using the embed tool I was able to make a simple button with html. The only challenge I ran into with Google Sites was making a collapsible text box group that excluded a text container above the other two containers I wanted paired together. Everything else was very straight forward and very well thought out for who would be using this service.

Below you can find a link to the published site built along with this user guide.
Click Here

References

"Google Sites." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 29 June 2021,

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Sites.