WordPress Developer Super Cheat Sheet

Raelene Morey Raelene Morey　– October 19, 2017

There sure is a lot you need to remember when working with WordPress theme files.

From the names of basic template files to functions and how the WordPress Loop works, it's next to impossible to remember every PHP tag or even how to define a new theme.

About 550 students enrolled in our [Academy](#) course, WordPress Development for Beginners, are in their final week, all tackling the final assignment – building a WordPress theme from scratch.

So to help you out, I thought I'd put together this handy cheat sheet, which includes all the files and functions you need to know (but not necessarily remember!) when working with themes. This is definitely one to bookmark and save for future reference!

Good luck with your final assignment, and if you're not already enrolled in [WordPress Development for Intermediate Users](#), get in quick before enrollments close soon!

Theme Files

These are the basic files that every theme should include:

- `style.css` – This is your theme's stylesheet file.
- `index.php` – This is the main body template for your theme. Its job is to bring together all the information in the other theme files using template tags.
- `header.php` – This file contains the header information that appears with the `<head>` section of your site, stuff like metadata and the link to your stylesheet.
- `sidebar.php` – Everything in you sidebar goes in this file, like widgets, categories, additional menus, search form, etc.
- `footer.php` – This file contains your footer information, such as copyright details, widgets, and social icons.
- `single.php` – This file displays just one post.
- `page.php` – When you create a page on your site, this is the template responsible.
- `comments.php` – This file is responsible for displaying comments.
- `404.php` – When visitors try to visit a page on your site that doesn't exist, this file will general an error page.
- `functions.php` – This file is where you can place special functions. We always recommend [creating a child theme](#) rather than edit this file directly.
- `archive.php` – Display an archive with this file so visitors to your site can go way back when and read your Hello World! post.
- `search.php` – Help your visitors search your site with this page.
- `searchform.php` – Display a search form for your visitors with this template file.

Defining a New Theme

Your stylesheet doesn't just contain styling information for your theme – it also holds details about your theme that are displayed in the **Appearance > Themes** section of your WordPress admin.

The following is an example of the first few lines of the stylesheet for the default Twenty Sixteen theme:

```
/*
Theme Name: Twenty Sixteen
Theme URI: https://wordpress.org/themes/twentysixteen/
Author: the WordPress team
Author URI: https://wordpress.org/
Description: Twenty Sixteen is a modernized take on an ever-popular WordPress layout — the
horizontal masthead with an optional right sidebar that works perfectly for blogs and websites. It
has custom color options with beautiful default color schemes, a harmonious fluid grid using a
mobile-first approach, and impeccable polish in every detail. Twenty Sixteen will make your
WordPress look beautiful everywhere.
Version: 1.2
License: GNU General Public License v2 or later
License URI: http://www.gnu.org/licenses/gpl-2.0.html
Tags: black, blue, gray, red, white, yellow, dark, light, one-column, two-columns, right-sidebar,
fixed-layout, responsive-layout, accessibility-ready, custom-background, custom-colors, custom-
header, custom-menu, editor-style, featured-images, flexible-header, microformats, post-formats,
rtl-language-support, sticky-post, threaded-comments, translation-ready
Text Domain: twentysixteen

This theme, like WordPress, is licensed under the GPL.
Use it to make something cool, have fun, and share what you've learned with others.
*/
```

This information goes at the top of your *stylesheet.css* file.

Template Include Tags

Template include tags are used within one template file (for example index.php) to include (or call) the HTML and PHP found in another template file (for example header.php). While PHP has its own built-in include() statement to do this, these WordPress-specific tags make life much easier:

- `<?php get_header(); ?>` — Includes the header.php file
- `<?php get_sidebar(); ?>` — Includes the sidebar.php file
- `<?php get_footer(); ?>` — Includes the footer.php file
- `<?php comments_template(); ?>` — Includes your comments

Template Header/Bloginfo Tags

These are functions you'll find in your theme's header.php file, though you'll also find them in other theme files:

- `<?php bloginfo('name'); ?>` — The title of your site, or blog name
- `<?php bloginfo('url'); ?>` — Your site's URL
- `<?php bloginfo('stylesheet_url'); ?>` — Link to your themes's stylesheet file
- `<?php bloginfo('template_url'); ?>` — Location of your site's theme file
- `<?php bloginfo('description'); ?>` — Displays the tagline of your blog as set in **Settings > General**.

- `<?php bloginfo('atom_url'); ?>` – Link to your site's atom URL
- `<?php bloginfo('rss2_url'); ?>` – RSS feed URL for your site
- `<?php bloginfo('pingback_url'); ?>` – Pingback URL for your site
- `<?php bloginfo('version'); ?>` – WordPress version number
- `<?php bloginfo('html_type'); ?>` – The HTML version your site is using
- `<?php site_url(); ?>` – The root URL for your site
- `<?php get_stylesheet_directory(); ?>` – Location of your stylesheet folder
- `<?php wp_title(); ?>` – Title of a specific page

Template Tags

These tags can be used across all of your template files, such as index.php or page.php, making it easy to display specific information anywhere you want on your site:

`<?php the_content(); ?>` – Displays the content of a post
`<?php the_excerpt(); ?>` – Displays the excerpt used in posts
`<?php the_title(); ?>` – Title of the specific post
`<?php the_permalink() ?>` – Link of a specific post
`<?php the_category(', ') ?>` – Category of a specific post
`<?php the_author(); ?>` – Author of a specific post
`<?php the_ID(); ?>` – ID of a specific post
`<?php edit_post_link(); ?>` – Edit link for a post
`<?php next_post_link(' %link ') ?>` – URL of the next page
`<?php previous_post_link('%link') ?>` – URL of the previous page
`<?php get_links_list(); ?>` – Lists all links in blogroll
`<?php wp_list_pages(); ?>` – Lists all pages
`<?php wp_get_archives() ?>` – List archive for the site
`<?php wp_list_cats(); ?>` – Lists all categories
`<?php get_calendar(); ?>` – Displays the built-in calendar
`<?php wp_register(); ?>` – Displays register link
`<?php wp_loginout(); ?>` – Displays login/logout link only to registered users

This is by no means a definitive list of all the template tags available. For the full list, check out the [Template Tags entry in the WordPress Codex](#).

The Loop

[The Loop](#) is the default mechanism in WordPress for displaying all of your posts. Exactly how many posts are retrieved is determined by the number of posts you've chosen to display in the "Reading" settings in your WordPress dashboard.

Within the Loop, WordPress loops through each post retrieved for the current page one at a time and formats it according to your theme's instructions.

You can use the Loop to do a lot of useful stuff, like:

- Display post titles and excerpts on your homepage;
- Display the content and comments on a single post;
- Display the content on an individual page using template tags; and
- Display data from custom post types and custom fields.

```php
<?php
```

```
if ( have_posts() ) :
while ( have_posts() ) :
the_post();
//
// Post Content here
//
endwhile; // end while
endif; // end if
?>
```

The Loop can display lots of different element for each post. Some of the most common template tags used in themes (according to the WordPress Theme Handbook) are:

- `next_post_link()` – A link to the post published chronologically after the current post
- `previous_post_link()` – A link to the post published chronologically before the current post
- `the_category()` – The category or categories associated with the post or page being viewed
- `the_author()` – The author of the post or page
- `the_content()` – The main content for a post or page
- `the_excerpt()` – The first 55 words of a post's main content followed by an ellipsis (…) or read more link that goes to the full post. You may also use the "Excerpt" field of a post to customize the length of a particular excerpt.
- `the_ID()` – The ID for the post or page
- `the_meta()` – The custom fields associated with the post or page
- `the_shortlink()` – A link to the page or post using the URL of the site and the ID of the post or page
- `the_tags()` – The tag or tags associated with the post
- `the_title()` – The title of the post or page
- `the_time()` – The time or date for the post or page. This can be customized using standard php date function formatting.

You can also use conditional tags, such as:

- `is_home()` – Returns true if the current page is the homepage
- `is_admin()` – Returns true if an administrator is logged in and visiting the site
- `is_single()` – Returns true if the page is currently displaying a single post
- `is_page()` – Returns true if the page is currently displaying a single page
- `is_page_template()` – Can be used to determine if a page is using a specific template, for example: `is_page_template('about-page.php')`
- `is_category()` – Returns true if page or post has the specified category, for example `is_category('news')`
- `is_tag()` – Returns true if a page or post has the specified tag
- `is_author()` – Returns true if a specific author is logged in and visiting the site
- `is_search()` – Returns true if the current page is a search results page
- `is_404()` – Returns true if the current page does not exist
- `has_excerpt()` – Returns true if the post or page has an excerpt

And There's Even More to Know!

I've really only scratched the surface with this list. Overwhelming, I know!

While this article offers a handy list to help you with building themes, here are some other cheat sheets worth checking out:

[Template Tags – WordPress Codex](): It would be remiss of me to leave the Codex off this list since it offers the most comprehensive guide to all of the tags and functions available.

[WordPress Help Sheet – Quickly Code](): Download this wallpaper and change your desktop background. You'll never forget a tag ever again!

[WordPress Visual Cheat Sheet – Artist Relations](): This is one of my favorites because it is so freaking detailed. Definitely worth bookmarking.

[WordPress Cheat Sheet – tuts+](): This compact guide provides a concise overview of WordPress theme files, the Loop and template tags.

[WordPress Mega Cheat Sheet – Make a Website Hub](): I'm also a fan of this cheat sheet, which also include keyboard shortcuts.

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Tags: