

BBHCSD-WordPress Getting Started Guide

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Introduction

Wordpress is a blog package that makes it easy for teachers to communicate online with parents, students, colleagues, and community members. It allows them to have a presence on the web without learning a lot about creating and managing web sites. Teachers who want to have a professional-looking site on the web that is easy to maintain should consider using this tool.

What's a blog? Traditionally, blogs have been online diaries. People can write journal entries and post them online. These entries may contain pictures, or file attachments, or links to other things online. When people read these entries, they can post comments about them, and form an online discussion. Blogs have a negative connotation for a lot of people because they make it very easy to post things online. Some people don't have much to say, and their blogs are meaningless rants about the people in line at the grocery store, or something that happened to them at work, or an argument they had with an acquaintance. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Blog software is easy to use. It can be used to post text, pictures, and files quickly and easily. That's perfect for teachers. There's practically no learning curve, the sites are professional-looking, and they can improve communication with teachers and students while saving time.

Account Set-Up

If you would like to have a blog, go to the User Management interface at <http://www.bbhcsc.org/user>. Log in with your network username and password. Once you've logged in, click "Set up a Blog." The system will confirm your name and set up your blog.

Note: If you already have a blog or a web page on staff.bbhcsc.org, you will be given the option of overwriting it. Doing this will REMOVE your existing blog or web site and replace it with your new blog.

Your blog will be located at <http://staff.bbhcsc.org/username>, where "username" is your network username.

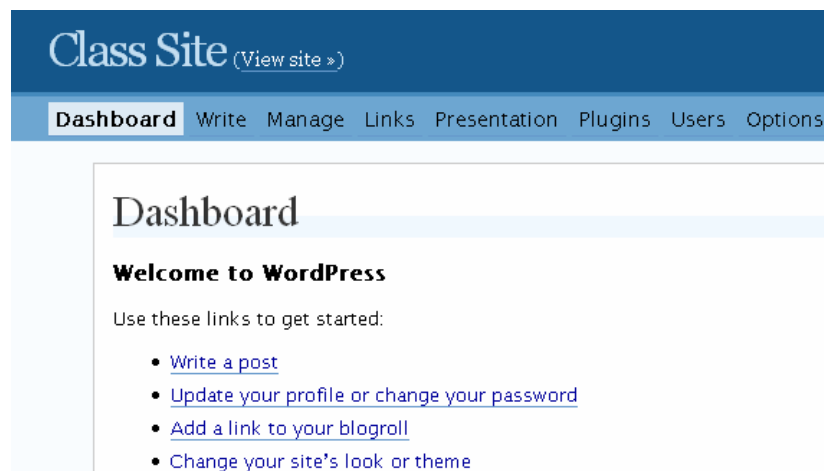
Once your blog has been created, there will be a number of things that you'll want to customize to tailor it to your needs. The remainder of this document will cover those customizations and address some of the things you can do with your blog once you have it configured.

Personalizing Your Blog

When you first visit your blog, you'll find that it's pretty generic. There are two "posts" on the left side about using the software. There are a few categories on the right. The page is called "Class Site". We want to change most of these things.



Start by going to the administrative interface. This is where you'll make changes to your blog. On the right side, at the bottom, is a link called "Login". Click it, and enter your network username and password. You can also get to the administrative interface by adding "wp-admin" to the end of your site's address. For example, <http://staff.bbhcsc.org/schinkerj/wp-admin> will take you to the admin interface for John Schinker's blog.



When you log in to the administrative section, the first thing you see is the **DASHBOARD**. This gives you an overview of the things happening in your blog. On the right side, "Latest Activity" shows recently added or updated items. On the left are some "Getting Started" links. Across the top, you'll see a number of menu items. These are the tools that help you manage your site.

Let's start by going to **OPTIONS**.

The general options tab includes the name and tagline for your site. You'll probably want to change these to something more interesting than the defaults. The "Wordpress" and "Blog" addresses should already be configured, along with your email address. The other items on the page should not have to be changed. At the bottom, click **Update Options** to save your changes.

Changing the Appearance of the Blog

Let's do something more fun. Click on **PRESENTATION**. You'll see a list of several different themes that you can apply to your site. These themes have a dramatic affect on how your site looks. The default theme is the "Wordpress Default" one. You can select another theme by clicking on it.

Some of the themes show thumbnails that give you a sense of how it looks. The best way to look at different themes is to open your blog in one window and the admin page in another window. Change the theme, go back to the other window, and click "refresh" to reload it. It should reload with the newly selected theme. Using this method, you can try out as many as you like until you find one that suits you.

A quick word about additional themes: There are literally hundreds of different themes available, but they're not all installed. Because of some of the plugins that we have installed, each theme that we use has to be modified to work properly. If you really want a theme that's not listed, let John Schinker know, and he'll do what he can to make it available. He'll also be adding more themes as time permits.

Organizing Information with Categories

In a blog, you can configure a number of different categories. These categories determine how information is displayed on your blog. There are some categories that are pre-configured, and you can create others to meet your needs.

When you post something, you determine which categories your post will belong to. Sometimes, information fits in more than one place, and this can be accommodated by simply selecting all of the appropriate categories.

Click on **MANAGE**, and then choose **Categories**. You should have five categories pre-defined for you. Three of these have special meanings:

- **Front Page:** Items in this category will appear on the front page of your blog. That is, **ONLY** items in this category will be displayed on the first page people see when they go to your site. So if you want an item on your front page, make sure it's in this category.
- **School News:** This is the category used for school and district news. Items automatically get added to this category from the district and school web pages. More on this later (See RSS, below).
- **Uncategorized:** This is the default category. It's used when you don't select any categories. It also inherits items if you delete their categories. Ideally, you shouldn't have anything in this category.

This is the point at which you should think about your audience. Who are you writing for? What kinds of information are they expecting to find? What makes the most sense for organizing that information?

Who is your audience?

What are they looking for?

The other two categories that are automatically created are **Parents** and **Students**. Many teachers create their sites to get information out to parents and students. Having these categories would enable you to tag items that are specifically related to one of those two groups. Then, they can click on a link under "Categories" and just see the information that applies to them.

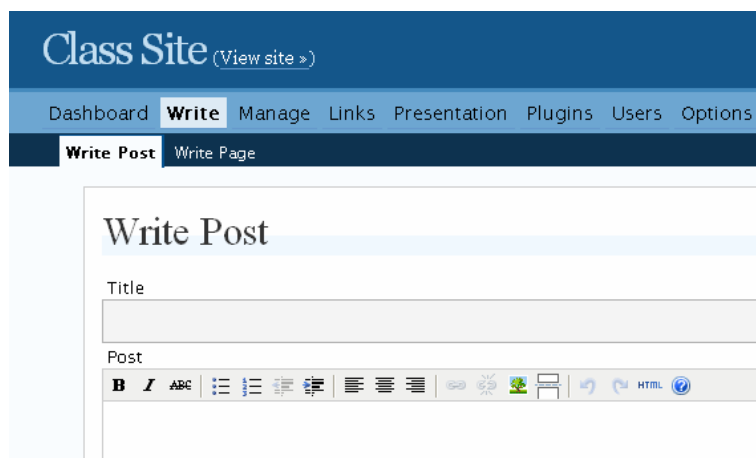
This may not make sense for you. You might have different categories for different kinds of information. You may have different categories for different classes you teach. You may have different categories for different units. It really depends on what makes the most sense for your situation.

Take time now to create the categories for your site. While you can always change them later, it's a good idea to at least have a starting point right off the bat. If you don't need them, go ahead and delete the Parents and Students categories, but leave the others.

Writing

So let's post something. In blog language, a post is just some piece of information that you want to make available. It's usually text, though it can be accompanied by a picture or file attachment, too. Click on **WRITE**.

Type a descriptive title for your post. On the right side, select the categories your post applies to. Remember that **Front Page** **MUST** be selected for your post to appear on the front page. Otherwise, it'll only show up under the categories you specify.



The screenshot shows the WordPress dashboard for a site titled "Class Site". The top navigation bar includes links for Dashboard, Write, Manage, Links, Presentation, Plugins, Users, and Options. Below this, there are tabs for "Write Post" and "Write Page". The "Write Post" tab is active, displaying a form with a "Title" field and a "Post" content area. The "Post" area includes a rich text editor with various formatting tools like bold, italic, text color, background color, bulleted list, numbered list, link, unlink, media, and code.

The main window is an editor. You have all of the normal font, size, color, and text tools available. If you hold the mouse pointer over the icons, it will tell you what each tool does.

Pictures & Attachments

You can add pictures and file attachments to your post using the Upload tab under the editing window. Browse to the file you want to upload, give it a title and (optional) description, and upload it. Once you've done that, you can select the file and insert it into your post. Once there, use the Insert/Edit Image button to control how it appears in relation to your text.

Note that there's a choice for notifying subscribers. If you select that, an email message will be generated sending out your post to everyone subscribed to your blog. See the Email Notification section, below, for more details.

On the right side of the screen, there's a box that lets you control the **Post Timestamp**. This setting determines when your post will appear. If you want to post the answers to tomorrow's pop quiz, but don't want them

there until after school tomorrow, you can just set the date and time to tomorrow afternoon at 4:30, and the post will automatically appear at the specified time.

This screen also has options for podcasting, password-protecting posts, and custom field options, but this is a *Getting Started* guide.

When you're done writing, click **Save** to save it as a draft, or **Publish** to save it and publish it to your site. Drafts are saved on your site so you can edit them later, but they are not visible on your blog.

So far, you've set up your blog, customized the name and layout, created categories to organize information, and posted content. Those are the basics. If you're ready to take on some of the other neat things the software can do, keep reading....

Optional

In order to add pictures to your posts, you will need to make sure your computer is not blocking Popups. In Internet Explorer, go to **Tools**, and select **Internet Options**. Go to the **Privacy** tab. Under *Pop-Up Blocker*, click **Settings**. For address of web site to allow, type "*staff.bbhcsc.org*". Select **Add**, and then **Close**, to return to Internet Explorer. This procedure will allow popups from the server *staff.bbhcsc.org*, while still blocking popups from other sites. This will enable the image functions to work when writing a post.

If you have other popup blockers installed, they will also have to be configured to allow popups from *staff.bbhcsc.org* for this to work.

RSS

RSS is a method of syndicating content online. Essentially, it allows you to have content automatically updated, based on the updates made to another site.

For a really simple example, look at one of the school sites. At the bottom of the main page is a section called "District News." It should have news items on it from the main district web page. The school pages use RSS to connect to the district page. When a news item is added to the district page, it automatically appears on the school pages, too. You can see the same thing on the district's portal pages, where school, local, national, and world news appear on the various panes.

Your blog has been preconfigured to use RSS to pull information from the district web page into your blog. The news items should show up in the School News category on your site. If you'd like, you can

also set up feeds to pull information from the school pages. To do this, start by going to the **LINKS** menu in the admin interface, and choosing **Manage Links**.

You should see the links there for each of the schools. These links show up on your blog under the various categories. You'll note that some of the school links are not visible. You can change this if you'd like by editing those items.

Select the school whose feed you want to use, and click **Edit**. Scroll down to the bottom of the screen and set Visible to "yes". Save the changes.

While still under Links, select "Syndicated" at the top of the screen. This will show all of the feeds you have. For each of the feeds that you want to use, click **Edit**. Change the "next update" to Update ASAP. Assign a category for the posts from this feed on the left, and save the changes on the right.

While RSS feeds are really useful, there are a couple things to keep in mind:

- It's not immediate. The feeds update regularly, but not immediately. When a new item is posted to the web page, it may take a while for it to show up on your blog.
- It may not be complete. On the school web page, if the item is not explicitly published to the front page, it won't be included in the feed. This can be confusing, because all news items on the school sites are automatically on the front page. Unless the "Show on front page" item was selected, though, it won't be in the feed.

Incidentally, you can also *provide* an RSS feed for others to use. They just have to point their RSS clients to <http://staff.bbhcsc.org/username/feed> (where "username" is your username) and they can get updated information from your blog.

Email Notification

There is no need to ask people to "check back for updates." Your visitors can sign up to receive email notifications when the site is updated. They start by signing up on your blog. After entering a valid email address, the site sends them an email message asking them to confirm their subscription. Once this is done, they're added to your subscriber list.

Remember the "notify subscribers" option when you were writing a post? If you select "yes", it will email a copy of your post to all of your subscribers. The email will come from your email address, and it will include a link for unsubscribing.

If you'd like to see how it works, sign up on your own blog. Then, post something and notify the subscribers. Then, check your email.

On the **MANAGE** screen, you can select **Email Notification**. This will allow you to manually add or remove subscribers. You can also send a message to all of your subscribers, and change the email notification settings. Note that the site name doesn't automatically get updated here when you change it in the general options – you'll probably want to fix that.

Please Note

As of September, 2006, Email Notification is broken. The problem has to do with the web server pretending to be a mail server, which is upsetting some spam filters. We're working on fixing it, and hopefully it'll be working soon.

Photo Gallery

This is the only thing you *can't* do through the web interface. The gallery allows you to upload pictures and show them on your blog. To do this, you ***must be logged in to a school computer with your account***. Open **My Computer** and find the **Staffweb** drive. In it, there should be a folder with your last name and first initial. Open that folder.

Inside, you should find a folder called **Gallery**. Open it.

Now, simply drag your pictures into this folder. If you'd like to organize them, you can create subfolders and put them inside this folder.

On your site, the pictures will show up under "Gallery" as thumbnail images. Visitors can click on these thumbnails to see larger versions of the pictures.

Conclusion

That should be enough to get you started. There are lots of other things the software can do. It can be configured to allow people to comment on the things you're posting. You can do much more with links. There are many options for syndicating content and linking to other things online. You can create and distribute your own podcast. There are significant collaborative tools. All of these are in the menus.

Remember that the technology is worthless unless you have something to say. The whole point of software like this is to make it easy for you to share information online without having to spend a lot of time learning how to keep it up-to-date. Your real focus should be on what you're doing with students every day in the classroom.