

# SIX STEPS TO A BETTER BLOG

A GUIDE FROM START TO FINISH  
BUILDING A BLOG WITH YOUR DOMAIN AND WORDPRESS

From WeblogRedux.com



**Hal Brown**  
**WebLog Redux**

© All material in this book is copyrighted by Hal Brown. Reproduction with any media, digital, paper or otherwise, of all or any part of this book is prohibited. You may not redistribute this book, or any part of it without permission. Contact Hal Brown at <http://weblogredux.com> for information and permission about distribution.

## 6 Steps To a Better Blog

### Introduction

It came to my attention that many people use what I call dependent blogs because they do not know how to do anything else. Dependent blogs are those that are usually free, depend on a third party such as Google and you don't own the domain name. This came about after a question from a friend who is an excellent writer, and wanted to know how to promote her blog. The first thing that came to my mind was, she is using Blogspot (Now Blogger). She does not "own" a real top level domain name.

Building a blog with your own domain name is merely a first step towards promotion. I could not answer how to effectively promote any website in 25 words or less. The seed was planted; I decided to grow it.

Everything I plan to explain here is somewhere on the Internet, probably many times over. What I've learned is, many people don't have time to research and put together all the little bits of information to get this done. Think of this as an absolute beginners course, where I put it all in one place.

The key, the emphasis on this entire series is beginner. Every aspect of what you learn here goes much deeper. What I want to do is get you up and running as quickly as possible. Initial implementation is fairly straightforward. Other topics such as SEO, are not so simple. You can learn a few basic concepts here, but volumes have been written on SEO alone. I'll show you where to find more information should you have an interest. I developed websites for a number of years, and I know how the system works. Questions are always welcome and if I do this correctly I expect them.

Here is a summary of what will be available in the coming weeks.

- 1- Where to start - the importance of owning a domain name.
- 2- How to register a domain, explanation of how this works. Do it.
- 3- Hosting. The how, why and where to get your blog hosted and online.
- 4- Implementation. How to set up a system using Wordpress. Why use Wordpress?
- 5-You are up and running, where to go from here. Tips, bits and pieces of using Wordpress and your host company.
- 6-Finally, how to promote using social networking, word of mouth and other means.

Any questions or feedback, comments or suggestions, please let me know.

email: [hdb@inbox.com](mailto:hdb@inbox.com)

This entire series is available online at: <http://weblogredux.com/6-steps-to-a-better-blog-introduction/>

## 6 Steps to a Better Blog – Part One

### Domain Names And Web Hosting

This is the first in a series of articles about the basics of starting a blog with a domain you own. Nothing of prior experience is assumed for this series. There are numerous blogs on the Internet about blogging, most of which do make assumptions. For example some are targeted to an audience that already knows how to register a domain name. Or nothing may be explained about the nature of a domain name – what is it? Like the Mad Hatter from Alice in Wonderland, Let's "Start at the beginning...and when you come to the end STOP!"

Here are the steps to creating your own blog. Each step needs explanation for beginners. And at one time we were all beginners. Those of us who have done this for a length of time tend to forget, everything needs explanation. If you already know how to do any or all of these steps, use what you need and discard what you don't need.

#### About domain names – Why this is important

Anyone can start blogging with little knowledge about using the Internet. If you have an account with Google, for instance, just start clicking, follow the links until you get to create a Blogspot Blog. Wordpress and several others, including MySpace offer free services to start a blog. There is no need to go into detail about any of the free services – if that is what you want, Google it and see for yourself how to get a free blog. For some people this is good enough. If you are serious about blogging, if you are selling something for example, just good enough is well, not good enough. And like all things of value, some knowledge is required to set up a real TLD website or blog of your very own.

A TLD (Top Level Domain) that you own is always better than any free service with a sub domain. The obvious question is why? There are several reasons, but first some definitions.

#### TLD

Without going into detail about domain structure, a TLD is the highest level in the Internet domain naming system. You see it as: <http://yoursitename.com> Note: Websites can be preceded by www but for the most part this is redundant. Compare a TLD to a sub domain to see the difference.

#### Sub domain

The next level below a TLD. Any domain name that is structured as [yourname.anothersite.com](http://yourname.anothersite.com) is a sub domain. Look at a free Blogspot blog. It will be structured as: <http://blogspot.yourname.com>

#### SEO

Search Engine Optimization. Google and other search engines use algorithms to track and rank your site. SEO is complicated to say the least. It is important that when someone searches for your content, it comes as close to the top as possible.

## Why you should own a domain name

- The biggest factor about owning your own domain is, no one can take it down at a whim. Google can remove your blog at their discretion. I have not read all the service agreements for other free blogs, but this is not unusual. A company giveth and a company can taketh away.
- Branding. Whatever you are selling, and we are all selling something, even if we simply want people to read what we present, is the essence of blogging. This is your identity. Standing out, being unique is valuable. The flexibility of owning a domain allows you to brand to your heart's content.
- Your name, your brand is protected. No one else can register your domain. This is another reason why a TLD is better than a sub domain.
- As long as you pay for it – the fee is very inexpensive, about \$20 a year or less – you own it forever.
- You have complete control over design, structure and all content with a TLD. All major hosting companies will provide some sort of control panel for you to initiate various aspects of your site. Most use a server side application known as cPanel.
- Even the smallest hosting package comes with other services such as email. This is important. It is much more professional to have an email address `yourname@yourwebsite.com` than a generic address. This is especially true if you intend to have a storefront on the website/blog. You will also find tons of software ready to install. In this series for example, we will be using Wordpress. In most cases it can be installed with a few clicks from your control panel.
- You want people to find your blog, SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is important. A TLD, as mentioned, is much better with SEO than a sub domain. Of course you need to know something about SEO – Don't be concerned about that until you understand how to set up a domain of your own. In the case of Blogspot this may or may not be an issue since Google owns it.

Many other factors are involved when you own a TLD. The first time you log on to the control panel you will be amazed at all the options available. This is not to scare you, rather to inform you there is a better way.

There is another way to have your site appear as a TLD. Services like TypePad offer a quick, though limited way to quickly start blogging and map your domain to look like a TLD. I have not used TypePad, and this is why.

Compared to registering and hosting your own, TypePad is expensive. Mapping a domain is too involved to discuss here. And why do all this when you can have the flexibility of using your own domain? Next, we look at the procedure of registering a domain name. From there we look at hosting and actual implementation of Wordpress. This is an easy, inexpensive process, so don't quit yet.

## 6 Steps to a Better Blog – Part 2

### Registering a Domain

Now that we have established the benefits of owning your own domain name, it is time to take action and do it. As with many things in life, the hard part may not be what you think it is. The process of buying and registering the name is as easy as buying something from Amazon. The hard part, and the most important aspect is choosing a name.

If you already have a name, you're in the home stretch. Maybe. Consider, this is going to be your brand, your identity on the Internet. This is no different than choosing a name for a brick and mortar business. You need it to reflect what you do.

#### What's in a Name?

The following is emphatically important to keep in mind when you choose a name.

- **Keep it as short as possible.** We all remember names like AOL, Yahoo, Google. These are as distinctive as Ford, Coke or any household name, branded so well they are etched in our psyche forever. This is what you want to go for.
- Unless you are blogging for an organization, do everything possible to **find a .com** domain name. Obviously, if your blog is for an organization, for instance a non-profit, then use .org. Only use .net if all else fails. The .net extension was originally reserved for Internet infrastructure and network providers. A .com (commercial) extension is still the easiest for people to remember. For more about extensions see this...  
<http://www.buydomains.com/domain-resources/domain-extensions/domain-extension.jsp>
- **The bad news first** - all three letter and almost all four and five letter names are gone. You won't find a dictionary word, a common English name or most combinations of names available. Try for what you want anyway. Serendipity can be a wonderful thing.
- **Avoid dashes and numbers in your name** . For some reason most people hate dashes, with numbers running a close second. There are always exceptions to anything, 43folders.com being a good example. We don't shoot for the exception; again, try for a name that is continuous.

You may brainstorm, come up with a Wow! Name, and register it only to find it can be seen in a different light. A good example is therapistfinder.com. This really is a site to find a therapist - but if you're looking for a rapist... .

The bottom line is, think carefully about how you brand yourself with domain name. Usually some combination of letters along with a word will work well. Last year I built a web site for an organization with a name too long for people to type, let alone remember. The original domain they had was thedaytonmasoniccenter.org. After meeting with the director of the center, we came up with this name - dmcoho.org. You can see the site here: <http://dmcoho.org> And yes, I'm a Freemason. I'm a Past Master of Dayton Lodge #147.

## OK, Let's Register a Name

Once you have a name to register, or to check possibilities, an excellent site to do this is [AjaxWhois](http://ajaxwhois.com/). <http://ajaxwhois.com/> It is fast and unlike some other sites, you can check as many names as you want with the least hassle. You can also use [Better-Whois](#) but the interface is a hassle to use.

Whois, is a query/response protocol that is widely used for querying databases in order to determine the registrant or assignee of Internet resources, such as a domain name. For our purposes, in plain language, it is used to see if a domain is registered. If you are interested see more here... <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WHOIS>

Once you have a name that is available, a box will pop up asking you to register it with GoDaddy.com. I suggest you do exactly that. But wait, hear me out about why you should do that.

### Full disclosure

I register all my sites with GoDaddy. I have no affiliation with this company, I receive no compensation in any form from them. I pay just the same as anyone else.

The organization that manages IP (Internet Protocol) addresses is ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers). [icann.org](http://icann.org)

If you want to read more about what ICANN does have look at this site.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ICANN> or <http://www.webhostingreport.com/learn/icann.html>

Though ICANN and its subordinate organizations is the overseer for IP and domain names, other companies can be credentialed to register your name. This is where GoDaddy comes in as a registrar for domain names. Why use GoDaddy?

Get ready for another important aspect of registration. **Keep your domain registrar separate from your web host**. In case you are having problems with a host, you are free to move to another host. Many web hosts offer free domain registration when you buy a hosting package. Don't do this. You will be locked in with them, and even though you can still move, it is much harder to do.

You are free to use any registrar, some are more expensive than others, some I wouldn't trust. GoDaddy has been around for quite a while, I know them to be reliable and support is excellent. Hosting is another matter. For this I do not use GoDaddy.com. We will get into that later.

You can register your name either by clicking through the links, following directions and making the purchase, or (and this is what I like about GoDaddy) you can call them. Real people answer the phone, technicians who are willing to work with you, answer any questions you have and explain the process. It's that simple. Call 480-505-8877 to register a domain name.

Although I use GoDaddy to register sites, and I have quite a few there, they have one of the worst web sites in existence. We will get into this later, but for now, be aware that navigating GoDaddy's site is a nightmare, even for experienced web builders. There are some who think they may have done this on purpose to keep people there. The longer you are there the more likely you are to buy something you don't need. The other thought is, they simply don't know how to build a good web site. Don't be surprised at this. Have a look at Websites That Suck, a great learning experience and lots of good info here. <http://www.websitesthatsuck.com/>

Be aware that you must provide accurate contact information to register a domain. This will go into a database, and is open for anyone to see. For a fee you can hide this information, but I see no reason to do that. If your profile is on social networking sites, your address is freely available in other places, why bother with this expense?

### **Wrap-up - Key points**

- Be absolutely certain the name you choose reflects your brand.
- Query the name you want with AjaxWhois or another site of your choosing.
- Don't wait to register the name. You can own hundreds of names and never build a website.
- Next we will explore hosting you blog. There is much to be learned about the vagaries of choosing a web host. As always, comments and questions are welcome and encouraged. email: [hdb@inbox.com](mailto:hdb@inbox.com)

## 6 Steps to a Better Blog – Part Three

### Hosting Your Blog

This may be the most controversial part of this series. Among those who have experience with hosting, opinion will vary about who is best and who is awful. I uploaded my first site sometime around 1997. One thing all site builders can agree on, things have come a long way baby. It's a heck of a lot easier now.

First things first. Before you can find a host you have to have a domain name to host. Working under the assumption you have registered one, let's go shopping.

**Always keep the following in mind when looking for a host:**

- A great company today may become a nightmare tomorrow. This can happen for a number of reasons, nearly always having to do with profit. They may overload servers, cut staff, grow too fast, outsource support or do something unexpected. Don't let this be of great concern – you can leave if this happens.
- Just because Joe the plumber raves about how good his host is doesn't mean it will be good for you. Do look at review sites such as: [Webhost-Reviews](#) and [Web Hosting Reviews](#).
- Be aware that some review sites are being paid to recommend a certain host. Maybe a blog you read recommends a particular host. Is he being paid commission on sales? This should be disclosed, but sometimes that's hard to find.
- Even Wordpress suggestions can be wrong debatable. GoDaddy used to be a fairly good host. In my opinion they are no longer a good host. As always, your mileage may vary.
- Understand what matters and what doesn't when you look at what a host is advertising. Things such as unlimited disc space or bandwidth usually won't make any difference for an ordinary blog. More on this later.

### How it Works – Shared Hosting vs Dedicated Hosting

There are several types of hosting you should know about. Here is a quick rundown and recommendation:

**Free hosting:** Limited, sometimes ad supported and not extensible. If you ever want to do much of anything beyond blogging, don't go with free. With Wordpress for example, you cannot monetize your blog. That alone kills this option for most of us.

Wade Roush writes on [Xconomy](#) -

*“What's most dismaying to me about the free blogging platforms, though, is that all of their blogs tend to look alike, with a style that's curiously Web 1.0. Blogger, TypePad, and WordPress.com are the worst offenders: you can pick from a range of templates or “themes,”*

*but most of them look like they're straight out of 2004."*

**Shared Hosting:** Your site is on a server with other sites. This is the most practical way to host your blog. And here is where the most problems occur as well. Suppose you start with a host that has 150 other sites on the same server. Your site loads fast, no other issues and all is well. Then they add another 250 sites to this server. Now you may have problems. Don't be surprised to see hundreds of sites on the same server. You can check to see how many other sites are sharing your sever with this tool- [Reverse IP Domain Check](#).

Don't let this scare you. Like all things, whether you have problems or not depends on other factors as well. For example, are the shared sites resource hogs? Just for kicks check adwt.com – You should see listed about 50 other sites and who they are. Then check dmcoho.org hosted on GoDaddy. You should see about 1495 sites on that server.

**Dedicated Hosting:** You get your own server with full control over it. This is expensive. If you plan to run a business with a lot of traffic, you get 200,000 hits a day, any heavy server use, then this is your best option. Get ready to open your checkbook.

Other services that may be offered are: Cluster hosting and Grid hosting. Fundamentally, this means spreading the data over multiple servers to solve the 'too many sites on one server' problem. Cloud hosting is fairly new. Again it is clustered over several servers for load balancing and scalability. In the near future this may become commonplace. I hope it does and is affordable.

As of this writing, February 2010, I have no affiliation with either Doreo or Hostgator, nor any web host mentioned in this series. I receive no compensation of any sort from any of these companies. This is subject to change in the future.

### **Recommendations**

To repeat, as of now for the common blog or website with low to medium traffic, shared hosting is the best you can get for your money. This is what most sites are using.

One important thing you need to know is your IP (Internet Protocol) address. Remember, all computers on a network have an address. A server is just a computer with a special purpose. When you share space on a server you commonly share the same IP with other sites on that server as well. Does this sound like a contradiction? Here's how it works.

The server IP is common to all sites served from it. When someone types in your particular address, the server will determine which website it being requested. If you type in the server IP you will land on some sort of generic page, not any of the sites on the server. In plain words the server controls the site request.

Now, suppose that some unsavory porn sites share the same server IP with you. Although this is hardly ever a problem you have the option to get a dedicated IP. Porn sites are heavy traffic, demanding sites and will probably have a dedicated server anyway.

Herein lies much controversy. In my opinion, I see no need to pay extra for a dedicated (sometimes called static) IP. In more than a dozen years I've never had a problem with shared IP.

## Companies I Recommend – And Those I Don't

If you go with almost any big name company you shouldn't have problems. There are exceptions, companies I either no longer use or don't recommend. If you've stayed with me so far, you know I can't recommend GoDaddy for hosting. Their servers seem to be overloaded, outdated or not balanced well. Your site will more than likely load like it was on a dialup modem.

The second thing is, they don't use cPanel. Instead, they have some sort of proprietary crap that is confusing to use. cPanel is an interface on your server – when you log in think of it as a control panel. It is fairly standard from host to host. It is not confusing, rather easy to use. I also don't recommend 1and1. I used them for years without a hitch. Then one day I bought a package and couldn't FTP (File Transfer Protocol) into the site. 1and1 also uses something other than cPanel. iPowerweb used to be a fine host. I quit them years ago – the support was terrible.

Two hosts that I have right now, I highly recommend. The best I've used is [Hostgator](#), with [Doreo](#) a close second. Hostgator appears to keep their servers updated and load-balanced better than any I've ever used. I have a photo site running on Hostgator; media sites need a lot of bandwidth to load fast. Have a look at <http://adwt.com> – Shameless plug – while you're there look at my pictures as well. ADWT is running on Hostgator.

This site, WebLog Redux is running on Doreo. At first I thought it was too slow – then it picked up and seems to be fine.

More than likely you could use Dreamhost or any of the big names without problems. Just be sure to read a lot of reviews before you decide. And don't listen to all the bitching you see on forums. Most of that is user problems. [Cnet](#) and other independent companies is where to look for honest reviews.

If you are just starting there is no need to buy anything except the lowest price package with either of these hosts. With either Hostgator or Doreo you pay for a 6 months, a year etc or monthly with no contract.

## The Wrap-up

Once you have decided on a company, here is what you need, the requirements to setup Wordpress for your blog. Don't confuse Wordpress the software with Wordpress the website. Wordpress is the most popular software platform in the world, not only for blogging, but building a CMS (Content Management System) website. Using Hostgator as an example:

### Requirements – What matters:

- A Linux host – Whatever you do don't buy a Windows platform. That's a whole other ballgame.
- At least one domain – obviously you get one. Some hosts allow multiple domains. I wouldn't use them.

- PHP 5 – Server-side programming language used to build Wordpress.
- MySQL databases – I would want at least 2.
- Mail accounts – These are common and included.
- cPanel – The standard for a control panel
- Fantastico – This is to install software on the server. More on that in the next part.

If you have never seen cPanel, have a look at this Demo from Hostgator. NOTE: This is a direct link. If you see a login screen, please go to Hostgator, look just below the order plans and see the Demo cPanel button.

This is exactly what you will see when you login to your own host using cPanel. Click around, play with it. You can't screw anything up.

Be sure to have a look at this video by Chris Pirillo. The quality sucks, but his message his clear. He makes some excellent points about choosing a web host.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17YeTgBd1fk&feature=player\\_embedded#](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17YeTgBd1fk&feature=player_embedded#)

## 6 Steps to a Better Blog – Part Four

### Installing Wordpress

As I've previously mentioned, Wordpress is a software application. We will not go into Wordpress the website – the focus here is an independent blog that you own on your host. From here on I assume you have registered a domain name, bought a hosting package and now you're ready to get going with the blog.

Installing software on a server used to be the realm of the hard core techie types. With cPanel it is as easy, maybe more so than installing software on your computer. There are two way to get Wordpress installed on your web host: Use Fantastico in cPanel and click through the prompts, or upload it to the server via FTP and install it manually. Although we will cover FTP later, if you are reading this you should let Fantastico install it automatically.

Fantastico is a web application installer for cPanel servers. Using it, you can quickly install dozens of applications into your web space. Although we are going to install Wordpress, in the future you may consider installing a forum, shopping cart, storefront etc. to expand your blog. I keep pointing out the advantages of a paid host over a free host. This is one of the biggest advantages of all – expansion.

Nearly all web hosts allow at least one sub-domain free. Recall, a sub-domain takes the shape of <http://subdomain.mydomain.com>. Hostgator allows unlimited sub-domains. So what, you ask? You can, and I have done this many times, create a sub-domain and install a second iteration of Wordpress. Why would you do this? In my case I've used them to test plugins and various tweaks prior to implementation on a top level blog. Another application might be a second blog that you want to keep private, a picture gallery – anything that is available for a TLD can be installed in a sub-domain.

### First Things First

Although installing software with Fantastico is easy anyone can still screw it up. Here are the Absolutely DO NOT FORGET things.

- Write down ALL information about database names, passwords, users etc.
- Read number one again.
- Write down and copy the administrator name and password to log into your Wordpress installation. If you don't do this you cannot log in, period. I won't tell how to crack fix that right now. Just do it.

I can't emphasize enough the three steps above. If you should happen to screw this up, you will simply have to delete the installation from cPanel and start over. Sometimes pictures are better than words – this is one of those times. Watch the video below. It will show you exactly how to install Wordpress using Fantastico in cPanel.

VIDEO – Installing Wordpress

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxDNJJa3RZQ4&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxDNJJa3RZQ4&feature=player_embedded)

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Some people check the 'remember user and password box.' I strongly advise against doing this. Even on your own computer, there is always a chance someone may get into your Wordpress dashboard and make a mess of your site. It is ever so easy to make a mistake and take down an entire site.

## **Now What?**

If you are not familiar with the Dashboard in Wordpress, this is where to start. The Dashboard is a control panel for Wordpress. All the menu items for working with Wordpress are on the left side of the panel. Before going any further take a moment to open the Settings menu. There are eight sub-menus under this. You should adjust these settings before doing anything else.

The objective is to set this up so that you can work on it without the search engines indexing it before it is ready. If you screw this up, you may find your site on Google indexed to look like a default Wordpress installation. Simple. Don't let this happen.

## **Here is what I recommend:**

General: Most of this you can get back to later. Do set the time zone and your email address to start.

- **Writing:** I set the post box to 30 lines. Otherwise it is almost useless. If anything is ticked in Remote Publishing uncheck that now. You do not want search engines indexing your blog until it is ready. Don't be concerned about other things on this page for now.
- **Reading Setting:** Unless you know what you're doing, leave the default Front page displays to your latest posts. How you display your posts is highly personal and can be adjusted later.
- **Discussion:** Look carefully at this page. At this time, uncheck anything that allows pingbacks, trackbacks and anything that allows comments. Again, you're not ready for that.
- **Media:** Unless you have specifics in mind, leave this with the default settings.
- **Privacy:** Important! Tick the "I would like to block search engines..." setting. For SEO purposes (obviously later when you go back and reset search engine indexing) use a custom permalink structure. Use `/%postname%/` in the Custom Structure box.
- **Misc Settings:** Uncheck the "Organize my uploads..." box. This is just one more thing that may minimize server usage.

That's all for now. To reiterate, you will need to go back and change these settings when you are ready for the search engines to find your site, comments, etc.

Have a look at this video about the Wordpress Dashboard. If you have never seen it, this is a fine cursory explanation.

Video – The Wordpress Dashboard

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irt2zGfA2tI&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irt2zGfA2tI&feature=player_embedded)

## 6 Steps to a Better Blog – Part 5

### Working With Wordpress – Installing Themes And Plugins

It's time to get your hands dirty. Working with Wordpress can be terrific, fun, frustrating, hateful, fantastic and make you want to snatch yourself bald, all within a single hour. Such is the nature of the most popular blogging software in the world. So what? Your computer can be the same way, but you use it anyway.

The first thing most people want to do is install a theme, get rid of that simple blue default theme, so recognizable as “Just another Wordpress Blog theme.” You can install a theme with a couple of clicks. Finding one that suits you is another matter.

If you have any knowledge of Wordpress, you know there are thousands of available themes. There are some very good free themes. Although free is sometimes good, premium is almost always better. Premium themes (the ones you buy) typically have more options to make them suit the look you want.

First, try to find a free theme. There is a good chance you will find something that reflects what your blog or site is supposed to be. The best place to start is at the Wordpress Themes Base.

#### **Keep these things in mind when looking for a theme:**

- KISS – Keep it simple (stupid). Don't make your readers look through a pile of visual rubble to get to the heart of your message. Look for a light background with black text. I know, we all see sites with white on black or the really-hard-on-the-eyes white on deep red. Please don't do that. How many news or business sites do you see like that?
- Be certain that the theme you choose is updated to work with the latest version of Wordpress. Almost anything you choose that works with version 2.5 or above will work with the current version 2.9.2. If in doubt, and you really like a theme, try it anyway. Simple themes will often work with higher versions.
- Don't settle on the first thing you try. Upload several themes, install them and go over them closely. It doesn't have to be perfect. It does need to be somewhat unique to you and readable by your audience.

I could explain how to install a theme in a couple of hundred words more or less. But I won't. This video is only a few minutes and much more practical for instruction.

#### **Installing Themes Video:**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxDNJ3RZQ4&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxDNJ3RZQ4&feature=player_embedded)

Notice the folder where themes are located – wp-content/themes. Unless you are hacking the core files of Wordpress, there is never any need to open any other folder in Wordpress. And you should never hack the core files in this software. It's illegal; the Wordpress police will kick in your door, arrest you and you will need Missy the Lawyer to get you out of jail. OK, maybe I embellished that a little, but remember, don't mess with the core files.

There are only two items in the wp-content folder you need to be concerned with – Themes and Plugins. You already know what a theme is. A plugin is a mini-program that extends or adds to the usage of Wordpress. For example, you should have a contact page. There are a number of plugins for that. More about plugins later.

There are at least three ways to upload the themes or plugins you want to use. Again, using plugins as an example, you can search for and install a plugin from the Dashboard/Plugins panel. Alternatively, you can simply find a plugin you want, download it to your computer, browse for it from the same panel, and install it that way. Things just get easier and easier with this software.

If you are going to be the master of your domain, you should know something about FTP (File Transfer Protocol). FTP, practically speaking is a client, server protocol. The client, a program you simply download and install, connects to the server so you can see all files in your space on the server. Uploading files within Wordpress, or from cPanel is limited. Using FTP you can upload anything. There will be more about FTP and how to use it in an upcoming post.

## **More About Themes and Plugins**

Note that this site uses the Thesis theme. In my opinion, this is one of the best themes available, and continues to get better with each release. Whether you ever decide to buy this theme or not, here is an excellent demo-video that demonstrates the incredible flexibility of Thesis.

**Full disclosure: I have an affiliate association with DIY Themes.**

You have a theme installed, it looks great and you're ready to start posting. In the next section we will explore plugins you should have, the bare basics of how to hack a theme to get it just right and how to use Widgets in the sidebars.

The basics have been covered, assuming you have Wordpress running on a web server with your theme installed. The final section is somewhat beyond basic. I'll make suggestions for both premium themes and plugins.

## 6 Steps To a Better Blog – Part Six

### Promotion, Themes, Plugins and Content

Unless you are keeping a hidden personal journal, obviously you want people to read your blog. You can make a better mouse trap, but you have to let people know about it. In this section we will look at the pros and cons of various ways to get readers to your site.

#### Themes

By now you should have a theme installed. Through all this promotion business, always put yourself in your readers shoes. Will that frilly background be annoying or does it enhance? There are two salient things to consider about themes:

→Is your theme SEO friendly?

→Does your theme visually say what you're about?

This is why God made designers. They have studied and understand the importance of visual impact. It is because good designers provide templates and themes that you can follow simple guidelines, use the KISS principle and have a professional looking blog.

#### Some general visual No-Nos

Women tend to add frilly, pinkish backgrounds with lots of doodads. This is like wearing your identity with loud clothes and body piercing.

Guys tend to use black or deep red with white text, garish looking sites, hard on the eyes. I've seen some sites that hurt my eyes so bad I didn't stay to read them.

I can't over-emphasize the importance of easy to read text. We are adults, and we want to read as such.

#### What does SEO friendly mean?

This means the theme is coded (it should be) to meet standards, and allow search engines to find and index your blog with the least difficulty. Some themes are much better at this than others. Thesis was built from the ground up to be SEO friendly. And yes, I am a Thesis affiliate. I used Thesis long before I became an affiliate and would continue to use it regardless of that.

Unless you choose some bizarre theme with too much junk coded into it, don't be all that concerned with this aspect right now.

SEO is complex. For the best advice about SEO be sure to read [Ann Smarty's blog](#).

Have a look at [For The Lose](#) and [Theme Lab](#) for more insight into themes and SEO.

#### Plugins

Some people get crazy with plugins. Don't. Only use a plugin if it is necessary and adds needed value to your blog. Do be careful with plugins. Incompatible plugins can easily take your site down and make it inaccessible. Too many plugins can have a deleterious effect on loading time. No one wants to wait and wait for a site to load. Add a mere few seconds to load time, and most people will leave.

The reason people have problems with both themes and plugins are nearly always compatibility issues. Wordpress releases frequent updates which often break existing plugins. It happens, but not as often with themes. I do not recommend auto-updating Wordpress for this very reason. This is akin to beta testing. Wait a week or so before updating and see if others are having problems with new Wordpress updates. **Do install security updates,**

regardless of themes and plugins.

## So, what plugins should you install?

### This is what I use:

**Akismet** – Installed by default. You need a [Wordpress API](#) key to use.

**BackUpWordPress** - Essential, makes backing up your database easy.

**Wordpress firewall** - Another must have for security, especially for those less knowledgeable about coding.

**WP Super Secure and Fast htaccess** - The htaccess file is far too complex to go into here. Suffice to say, this plugin will write to the htaccess file code that hardens security even more. At some point you should know more about what it is and how it works. For an in depth look see [htaccess](#).

**WP- ContactForm** – You should have a way for people to contact you. This hides your address from spammers, and allows people to communicate with you privately.

**A social bookmarking Plugin** – I use SocioFluid and DIGG DIGG. Many times I've wanted to RT or DIGG a post, yet I see no convenient way to do that. Make these icons easy to see. Never make people work to promote you.

**What would Seth Godin Do** – This is a great plugin for returning visitors. It is self-explanatory once you install it.

**Optional Commenting** – I use Disqus. There are pros and cons for every system of commenting. Again, think in terms of what is easy for your readers, not what you like to look at. Have a look at a [comparison of styles](#) and decide for yourself what is best.

**Optional** – Use the All In One SEO plugin if you are not using Thesis or a similar theme.

**Optional** – Use the Google XML sitemap plugin. Use this because it will generate a sitemap of your blog for Google indexing.

## The King of All Promotion

When talk turns to getting people to your site, one aspect is almost universally agreed on – Content is king. This is not particle physics; it is common sense. You must have something on your blog that interests people, else none of the other things make much difference. This one thing is the hardest part of blogging for most people. It is so important let's break it down.

Your best chance for success is to find a niche and keep within that niche with your posts. What is success? In this context it is getting the largest number of people possible to read your blog.

Your least chance for success is a blog with your rants and opinions. This is especially true for beginners. A well-established A-Lister may have a highly successful gossip blog. Not many

people will read your blog just to hear you bitch about something. We all see enough of that elsewhere online.

We live in a time of blog saturation. You will be hard pressed to find a niche that someone isn't writing about, and doing it well. You have to do it better.

You can blog as I do, leaving yourself open to write about various things. This scatter-blogging style is not usually as successful as a niche blog. In my case, I write for me. I hope I can help people with some of my posts, this series being an example.

## The Wrap Up

- Use a clean, well organized and SEO friendly theme.
- Use plugins sparingly. If it doesn't add value it takes value away.
- Make it easy for readers to promote you. Be sure you have sharing and RSS feed icons visible and easy to use.
- If you want to be successful, you must post often and your content must be excellent. Merely good is not good enough. Niche blogging affords you a better chance than scattered blogging.
- Guest posting is the best promotional device you can use. Find others in your niche, contact them and ask if they will accept a post. Ann Smarty has created a great [Guest post community](#). No matter how you set up your blog, joining this community and writing good guest posts will bring attention back to your blog better than all the social networking put together. Danny Cooper has created a [Backlinks movement](#) you should consider as well. The more backlinks to your blog, the higher your page rank with Google.
- Serious blogging is not easy. Success will not come quickly for most. Don't fall for all the hype about making money blogging. Do read this [wonderfully honest post](#) by Someone Bull at Thesis Theme HQ.

This is the end of this six part series. I sincerely hope all who read this, or parts of it gain some benefit from my years of experience building websites. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me. For personal answers that require more than a few lines please use my website Contact form. I promise to get back to you as quickly as possible.

Peace

Hal Brown  
<http://weblogredux.com>  
Follow me on Twitter: @ohal