WordPress2GO

WordPress Tutorial

www.wordpress2go.com

How To Build A WordPress Blog From Scratch, All By Yourself, Even If You Are A Complete Newbie

By Sarah McHarry

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1. Message From Sarah

Dear Fellow Blogger,

This ebook is a comprehensive, hands-on guide on how to create a free WordPress.com blog. It is aimed at anyone, wherever they are and whoever they are, that wants to be one of the WordPress community but is starting out as a complete beginner.

You do not need any money to begin building a free WordPress blog. What you do need is a clear and firm idea of what you want your blog to be about and you also need the motivation to keep it going.

You don't need to know anything about HTML, PHP, CSS, MySQL or FTP to start a WordPress blog. You don't need to be a techie. WordPress is WYSIWYG: if you can use a word processor you can use WordPress.

WordPress is a very comprehensive blogging platform and there's a lot to learn. Many of the guides to blogging are written by geeks and steeped in jargon but that's not what's happening in this ebook!

My approach to teaching WordPress is to start with a broad overview: first, I will take you through the steps to creating your first blog as quickly as possible, explaining on the way just what you need to know. You will notice a lot of detail on the WordPress screens as you go through this but we're not going to get bogged down in intricacies at this stage. We'll just concentrate on building your first blog and you will be amazed at how much you learn simply by achieving this.

And I haven't structured this ebook like most technical manuals. Rather, I've tried to deal with the topics in the order you'll most likely encounter them and that will get you on a fast-start to creating an actual blog. I figure that building a blog is like building a house: you want to concentrate on getting the main structure up first; only when you've got the roof and walls in do you need to start fiddling around with the light switches.

So, when you've built your blog, we will revisit some of the details that we previously ignored so that you can configure your blog to how you want it to work. I will point out to you the features that I think are the most useful and point you in the direction of other resources, where appropriate.

When you've worked through this ebook you should be fine to explore other options on your own. WordPress is unique in that it has a comprehensive network of users around the world who provide helpful forums, blogs and support. I have been astonished at the commitment of so many people, amateurs mostly, who have contributed to making WordPress so powerful.

When you've done this tutorial you will be well-qualified to join them and become part of the wider WordPress community.

Building a free wordpress.com blog is, however, merely the first step. Think of this tutorial as the entry level of WordPress blogging. Serious bloggers, especially those who want to use a blog for business purposes, should really aspire to having a blog on their own domain. This is called a 'self-hosted' blog because you need to host it on a third-party web hosting account.

When you're ready to upgrade your WordPress blog to a self-hosted version on your own domain, I can help you with that, too. Please come over to my blog www.wordpress2go.com for more details.

To your success!

Sarah McHarry

www.wordpress2go.com

2.   Versions Of WordPress

We will start off by using the free version of WordPress at wordpress.com. This means that WordPress hosts your blog on its own computers. This is the 'lite' version of WordPress: fine for entry-level users and the platform of choice for many individual bloggers and non-commerical users.

There is another level of WordPress at wordpress.org which you will need to use if you are a small (or big) business or if you want a blog for any sort of commerical purpose or if you simply want to build a fully-functioning blog that makes use of all the more advanced bells and whistles that wordpress.org provides for you. Under this option, you build a blog under your own domain and pay for your own hosting. This isn't free, but it actually doesn't cost a lot. If you want to go down this route, then please check out my blog www.wordpress2go.com for more details.

But, even if you do want to build a self-hosted blog and go for the more advanced option, you should start with this tutorial to learn the basics as many of the steps to building a blog are the same.

You should particularly start with this ebook if you are a newbie because WordPress blogging can lead you into advanced territory and you'll find it much easier if you've done the beginner's bit first.

3.   Preamble

So, you want to get yourself a blog? Congratulations, you are about to join millions of others around the globe who have discovered the power and joys of blogging!

The first step is sort of obvious but it is actually quite important. You need to work out what your blog is going to be about and what you want it to accomplish. If you just spend the time on a little thought and planning you'll find it easier to make the decisions as you get your blog under way.

If you want to build a blog that will attract the attention of other Internet visitors then you want to decide what your 'niche' is. Is your blog going to be about a hobby? Or a daily journal of your fascinating life? Or maybe you want the world to know what you think about the big issues of the day, or maybe you have ambitions to found an empire.

Decide on the topic of your blog and work out how you want to present yourself to the world and how you are going to keep your blog going. What do you want the main outline of your blog to look like? How important is it that you attract comments from others? How much of your blog will be static and how much will be posts? How often will you want to post to your blog?

At this stage, it might be useful to go out and see what others are doing. Go to Google Search, Blogs and see what comes up in your niche. This exercise will very likely show you some of the things you <u>don't</u> want to do!

If you can, draft out a forward plan. Work out how many static pages you want (if any) and what they are going to be about. Maybe work out a plan to post one page a day until you have them all set up. And while you're doing this, let other ideas come to you about how your blog will develop through time.

Don't think that you've got to get everything set up and running all at once. The power and charm of blogs is that they **evolve**. If you allow yourself the luxury of letting your blog develop and grow through time, you'll probably end up with a better, more creative, blog.

OK, ready? Let's rock and roll!

4.   Getting Started

In this ebook I'm going to walk you through the steps you need to take to set up a free WordPress.com blog. Why WordPress? Well, because it's the most powerful and flexible blogging platform that there is and it's where the professionals hang out. OK, you may be an amateur, but you don't want to look like a complete dummy, do you? Aim high and you'll get a better blog.

First thing to do is go to http://wordpress.com and click on 'Sign Up Now!'

You'll then see a screen that will prompt you to fill in:

- Username
- Password
- Confirm
- Email Address
- Legal flotsam
- Gimme a blog!

This is mostly self-explanatory so go ahead and fill it in. If someone else has already got the username you want you'll get an error message so you'll have to choose another username. Then click on 'Next'.

Then you'll be asked to fill in:

- Blog Domain
- Blog Title
- Language
- Privacy

Your blog domain is important. By default, WordPress will enter your username in here, but you can change this now if you want. This is the domain address you will quote whenever you want to tell anyone where to find your blog. So, if your username is 'susiesoap', WordPress will by default call your blog 'http://susiesoap.wordpress.com' but if your blog is about your hobby of keeping fancy rats you might want to change your blog domain to 'fancyrats'. That way your blog address will be http://fancyrats.wordpress.com and it will be much more apparent to visitors who have no idea who Susie Soap is just what your blog is about. You can't change this once it's set up and, again, you'll get an error message if someone else has already chosen that blog domain.

Click the 'Sign Up' button and you've got a blog!

WordPress will send an email to the address you entered on the first screen. This email is important and you may need the information in it at a later date, so please make sure to save this email and/or print it out so that you can find it later.

There are now three ways to get into your blog and start blogging:

1. You can click on 'write a post' from the screen you just landed on

2. You can log in to http://wordpress.com again but this time enter your username and password under 'Already hip?' and you'll be taken to your blog's dashboard (which is where you start blogging).

3. You can go to http://{username}.wordpress.com/wp-admin and enter your username and password on the log-in screen. For example, my username is sarahmcharry and I can log in to update my blog at http://saramcharry.wordpress.com/wp-admin.

It will be easier for you to get going if you bookmark your log-in screen right at the start.
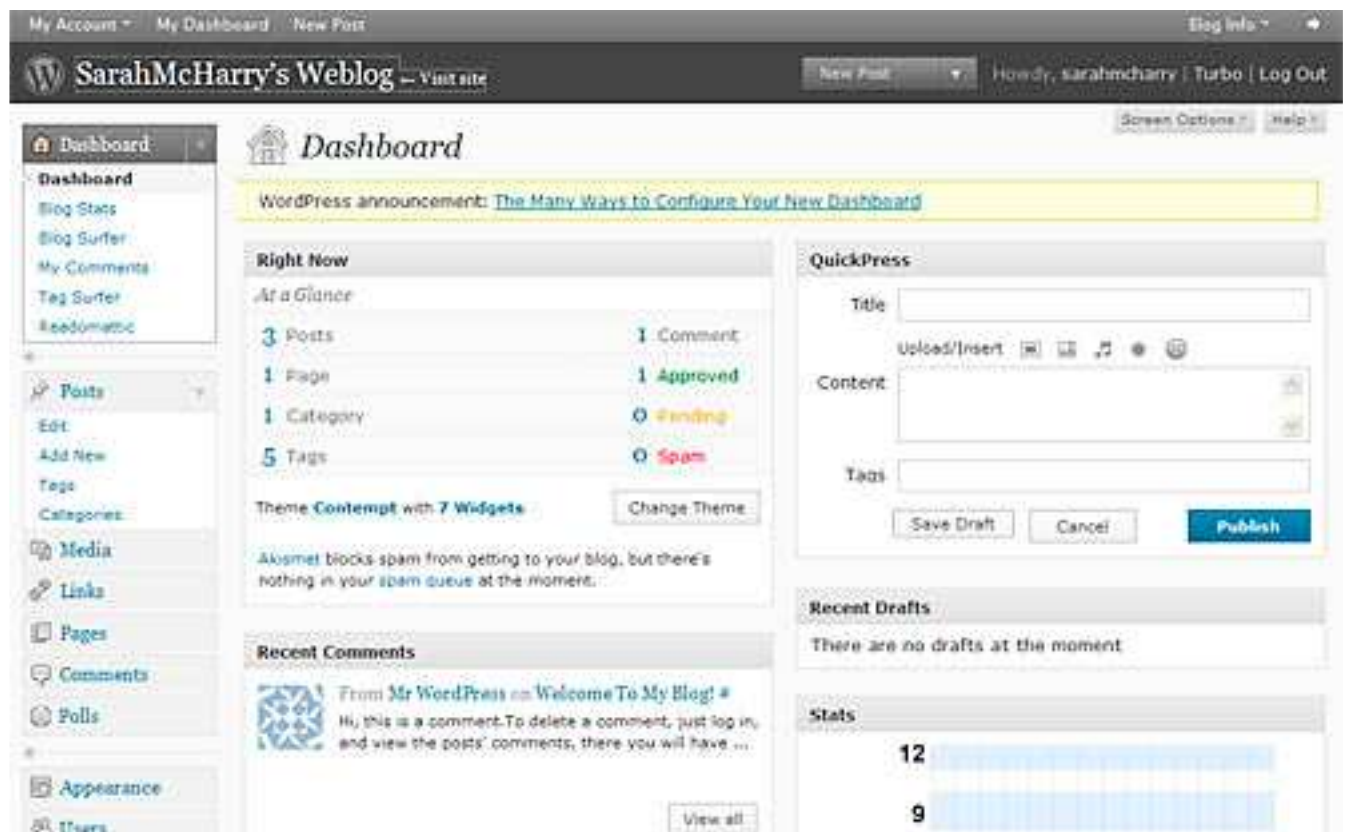
5.   WordPress Themes

The first thing we're going to do is select a theme (or design) for your blog. There are many colorful themes for you to choose from and finding the right theme will help you work out how you're going to build and present your blog.

And just be aware that you can easily change your theme at any time. If you change your mind after you've seen what your selected theme looks like, you can just go back and choose another.

Right, let's get started.

When you log in you'll see a screen like this:

WordPress automatically creates the default blog design for you. If you click on the 'Visit Site' button at the top of the screen you'll see your blog, which will probably look just like mine:

This is the famous 'Kubrick' theme and you'll see it all over the blogosphere because it is so popular. There are many schools of thought about blog design and it is worth taking just a moment to explain what's what.

In the olden days (like in the 1990s) when blogging started, purists believed (as purists do) that the content of the blog was much more important than the blog design. Your message was worth much more than fancy graphics and stuff that decorated your blog and, basically, the plainer the better. Nothing should detract your visitor's attention from your words of wisdom. And that's still what a lot of people think.

If you're a purist, you can just stick with Kubrick and you'll be in fine company. You can, if you must, change the background color and font of Kubrick's header (Click on 'Appearance','Themes' and then explore the options of the Kubrick theme).

But if you're like me, you'll probably want to have a fancier design. WordPress gives you a fantastic choice of themes to choose from.

Now, just in case you're thinking 'Hey, isn't this a bit early to be thinking about themes? Most tutorials would make you learn a bit more about WordPress first and get you on to themes much later', well, I don't see it that way. I want to take you through the process of building a blog in the order that you are most likely to want to do it. Most people, when they start

off with a new blog, are too excited to take in too much detail right away: what they really want to know is 'what is it going to look like?' Only when they've made that decision can they concentrate on all the finer detail that will actually go into making up the blog.

So, if you feel like that (and I expect you do), go ahead and choose a theme. But, if you're happy with Kubrick for now, well, fine. You can always come back here and choose a theme later if you are happy to defer that gratification…

To select a theme, go to your dashboard and click on the 'Appearance' tab. You'll see the available themes in the lower part of your screen. Scroll around the page and you'll see more themes if you click on the 'next' tabs at the bottom of the page.
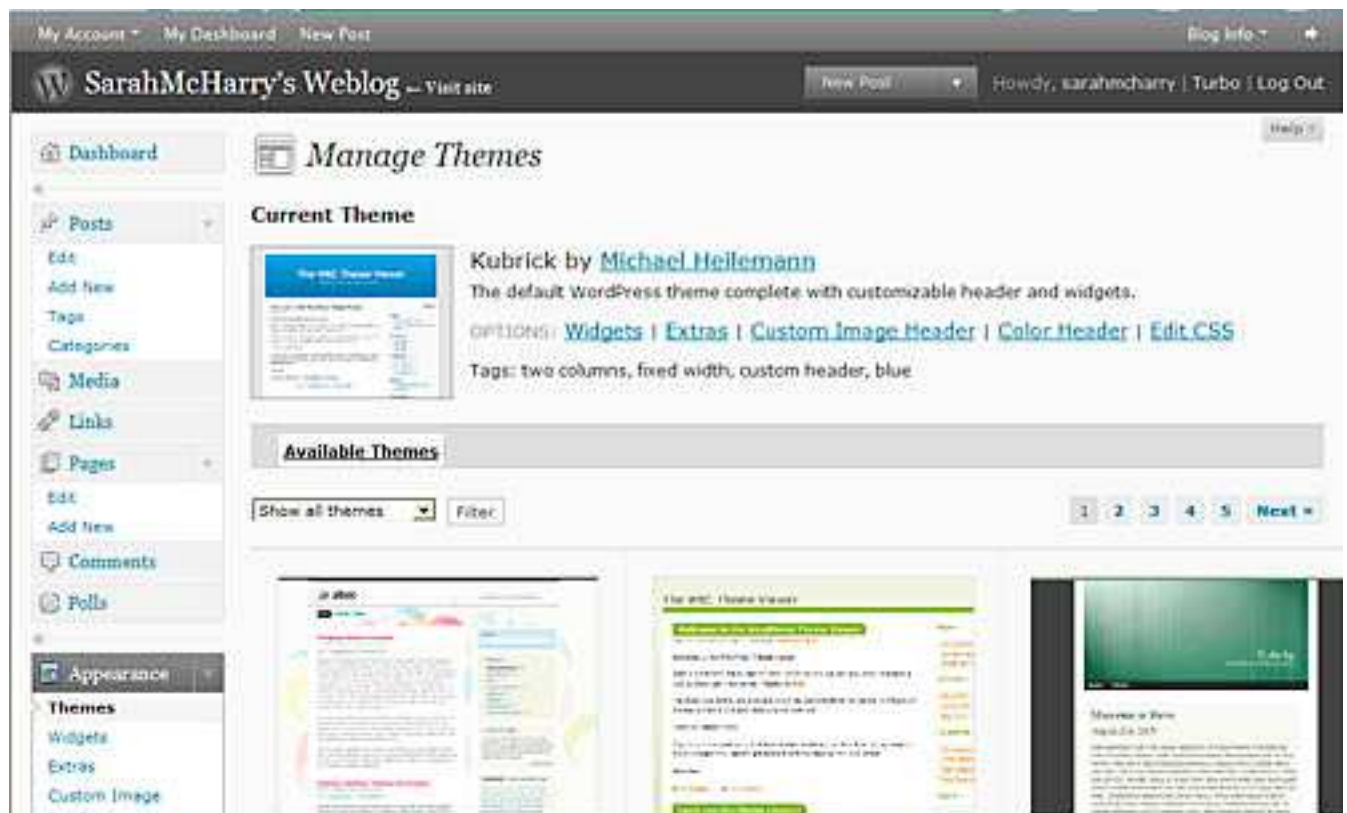
If you click on a screenshot you'll see a preview of what your blog would look like if you chose that theme. So go ahead, have a browse and find a theme that you like.

When you've found a theme, click on 'Activate…' in the top right-hand corner and now click on 'Visit Site'. Yeehaw – you've got yourself a theme!

And if you don't like it, close the preview window and just do it again (and again) until you've got what you like. Magic, ain't it?

Now, before you get carried away with the wonder of your theme, just bear in mind that not all themes support all blog features. You may find later that your chosen theme will not show something that you particularly want, so do keep in mind that you may want to change your theme to another one if this happens.

But let's not get too bogged down too soon. Now let's start really building your blog!

6.   Writing & Publishing Your Blog

There are certain features which are common to most blogs:

- Pages
- Posts
- About
- Categories
- Blogroll
- Comments

Here I'll deal with each of these features in order.

Pages

As I discussed earlier, pages are the static part of your blog and I advised you to plan these out so that you could, say, write one page a day until you've got them in place. One of the advantages of doing your work gradually like this is that it makes the blog look more 'natural', that is, something that you, the author, are lovingly creating over time and which holds out the promise of more to come.

So, now go to your dashboard and click on the 'Pages' tab, then click on 'Add new'.
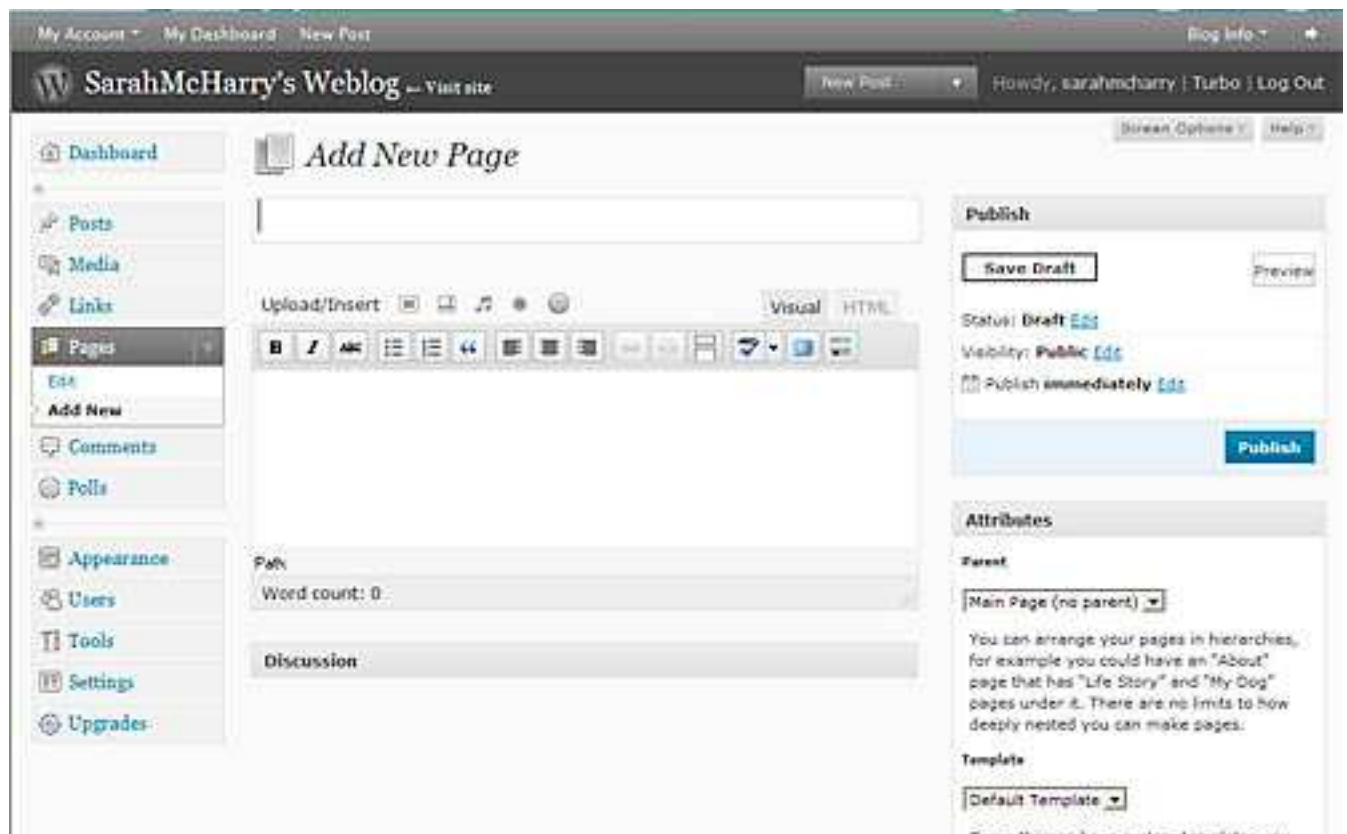
The cursor should be sitting at the blank box under 'Add New Page'. This is for the title of your post.

Your page title should be a straightforward, brief summary of specifically what this page is about. If you want surfers to find your blog page it is much better to put in a title like 'Cleaning Out My Rat's Cage' rather than 'What I Did Today'.

The blank box beneath the formatting icons is where you type your page text. Select the 'Visual' tab and you can type the content straight in. Or, if there's a lot of material, it might be easier to type it into NotePad on your computer first then copy and paste the text into your Page Content box. A page can be as long or as short as you like, but typically 200 – 300 words is just right. The box will scroll if you need more space.

You can see from the toolbar right above the text box that you've got some text formatting icons you can use to do bold, italic, bullets, justification etc. This is pretty much like Microsoft Word© (or other word processors) so you can play around with the formatting until you've got it looking like you want.

Your text can also embed links to other pages if you want, either on your own blog, or elsewhere on the Internet. Adding links is an important part of conveying your message and we'll come to this later.

And you can insert one or more images on a page. I'll deal with uploading images in a later section because this is a topic all by itself. Just for now, just concentrate on getting your text up and you can come back and add your images and/or links later.

You'll notice that you have two buttons to the right of the text box: 'Save Draft' and 'Publish'. 'Save Draft' lets you save what you've done so far but stay on the page to carry on writing. This is a good idea if you've got a lot to do and you don't want to risk your computer going down. 'Save Draft' saves your page as a draft which you can pick up to work on later. No-one gets to see your draft work until you hit 'Publish'. 'Publish' makes your page live on your blog for the world to see. You also have a 'Preview' button which works after you've saved a draft.

If you've published a page but you want to change it later, or add an image, you can edit it. We'll come onto editing later.
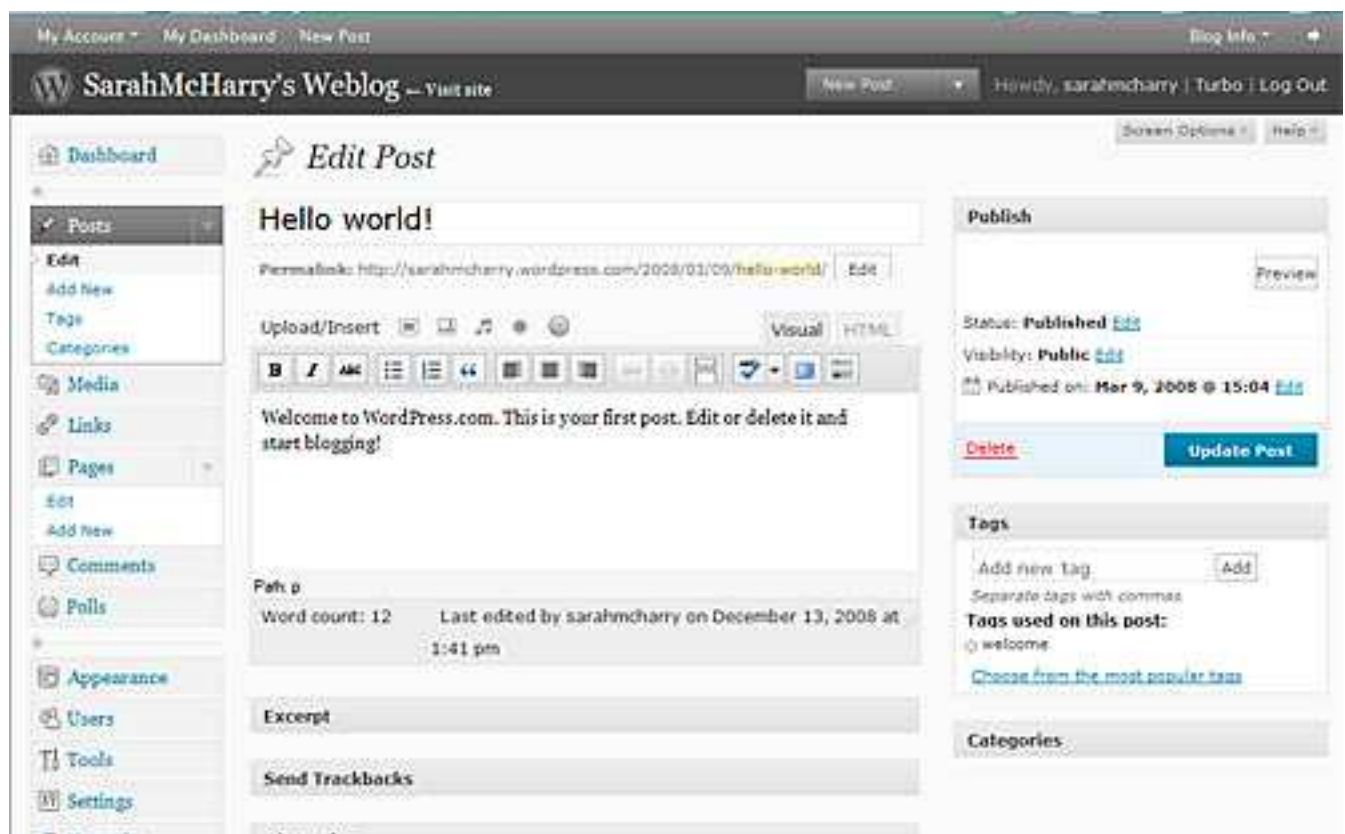
Posts

Post are the more transient part of your blog, usually the regular, maybe daily, chunks of text which contain your current news, views, tips, etc. which you choose to post to keep your blog looking up-to-date and alive. Each new post appears at the top of your screen, above the previous posts and visitors can scroll down to see older posts. When there are more posts than can fit on a page, the posts are archived so that they can be retrieved if someone wants to find them.

Posts are actually the real point of blogging. Posts differentiate a blog from a website: posts are alive and ever-changing and provide an ongoing narrative of your life and work, on whatever your blog topic is.

You can post as often as you like and your posts become the body of your blog – together with all the other components of your blog, your posts become your distinctive contribution to the blogosphere.

When you first start your blog you'll notice that WordPress has helpfully provided a 'Hello World' first post. When you view your site this is the first thing that will display. What you'll want to do is edit this post so that it becomes an individual first message from you. I like my first post to be a 'welcome to my blog' type of post, so let's go and edit that post. Go to 'Dashboard', click on 'Posts'. Click on 'Hello world' and you'll get a screen just like the one you saw before:

You can now overwrite the Title and Post text and make this into your own welcome message. When you've done, click 'Update Post' and you've got your first post!

And, incidentally, you just learned how to edit a post.

To create a new post, click on 'Posts', 'Add New' from the Dashboard and you'll see a screen much like the one before. It looks and works in much the same way as writing a page, so go ahead and type in your new post.

Again, choose 'Save Draft' or 'Publish', as above. If you've followed me so far you'll now have two posts up on your blog.

About

Many blog themes have an 'About' page. This is where you introduce yourself to your audience and tell them something about you, your background, your CV, what makes you special etc. And this is where you can have a picture or logo if you want. You don't have to have an 'About' page if you prefer to remain anonymous, and you can use a nickname or pen name if you'd prefer not to identify yourself.

Blog themes vary in the way they treat 'About' so you'll need to do a bit of digging. This is where we'll start exploring some of the many features behind the scenes of the WordPress platform.

First of all, from the Dashboard click on 'Users', 'Your Profile' and you'll see something like this:

This is your WordPress profile, some of which is private between you and WordPress (First name, Last name) and other (like your email) which may be visible on your blog or when you comment on other people's blogs. As a rule of thumb, do not enter anything in your profile that you do not want to share.

If you want an 'About' page on your blog, first of all scroll down and enter a sentence or two in the section headed 'About Yourself'. Your WordPress theme may or may not use this information, so don't spend too much time on this at the moment. When you've filled in all you want to fill in, click on 'Update Profile'.

Then click on 'Visit Site' (right at the top, next to your blog name). When your blog is displayed, find the 'About' link and click on it. Does it display what you just typed into your profile? Yes? If so, go back to your profile and enter all the details you want to publish. Then click 'Update Profile' and you've got an 'About' page!

If your 'About' page looks empty or different to what you typed in, then can edit the 'About' page that's there so that it includes the details that you want.

Categories
If you're planning to post on a range of topics, the chances are that you'll want to file your posts under categories.

The best way of explaining categories is by example. Going back to our rat fancier's blog, she's probably going to be posting on a different rat-related topic each day and her posts will cover topics such as 'rat food', 'breeding rats', 'my pet rat' etc. If she assigns these broad topics as categories in her blog, every time she creates a post she can choose one or more of these categories to tell her visitors what that post is about. And when someone visits her blog who's interested in rat food but who doesn't want to read through all the stuff on breeding rats they can just click on the 'rat food' category and the blog will only show those posts. Clever, eh?

So, it pays to think about categories early on. When you start your blog you probably have a good overall idea of what you're going to be posting about. So start with a list of three or four categories that you know you have posts planned for. Then click on 'Posts', 'Categories' and you'll get to here:
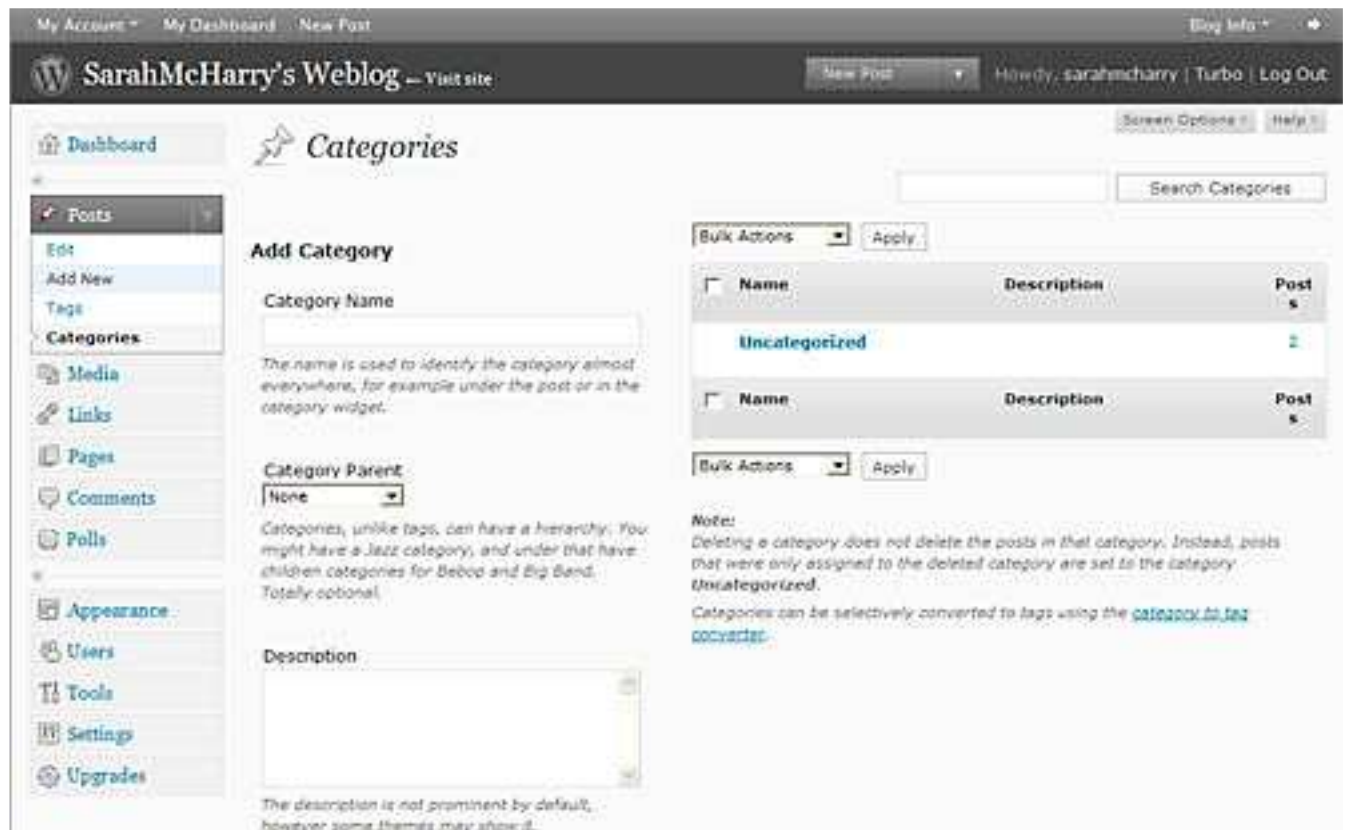
I actually don't like the word 'Uncategorized' because I think it sort of begs the question. What I like to do with a new blog is to change this to something like 'General' because I think it appears more intuitive. If you want to change this, click on 'Uncategorized' and you can change the word to something else.

Then, under 'Add Category' you can enter another category name. You can see that you can also designate sub-categories if you want. You probably won't have things too finely planned out yet so you can leave sub-categories till later if you want. Just for now, enter the categories you know you'll want straight away, enter them in and click 'Add Category'. The description field is optional: some WordPress themes will display what you type here, but most won't.

As your blog develops and grows you can add more categories as you need them.

When you have your first categories set up, go back to your Dashboard and edit the posts you've already created and allocate them to the appropriate category (see the checkboxes down the right hand side). You can, if you want, allocate a post to more than one category. You'll notice, too, that you can add new categories as you go along, as you write your posts.

At the time of writing, you can only assign categories to posts, not pages.

Links

By adding links from your blog to other blogs you can create a 'blogroll'. This is simply a list of other websites and blogs that you want to share with your visitors. This list of links will be displayed by your theme in your left or right sidebar.

Typically, this list would be some authority sites that are relevant to your blog's topic and it may include the blogs of fellow enthusiasts and friends. The other site doesn't necessarily have to know that you've linked to them. But linking to other blogs is a nice, friendly thing to do as it offers your visitors a rich surfing experience and that's what blogging is all about. (Why not consider adding my blog http://wordpress2go.com to your blogroll?)

When you first start your blog you'll probably find that WordPress has helpfully already provided some links. You don't have to keep these links on your blog if you don't want to.

To delete links, click on 'Links', 'Edit' and click the checkmark(s) next to the link(s) you want to delete. Then click the 'Bulk Actions' drop-down box and select 'Delete'. The click 'Apply' and the links will disappear.

If you delete all your links and don't add any more you won't have a blogroll: your theme just won't display one. That may be what you want, but if you do want a blogroll, keep on reading.

Click on 'add new' and you'll get to the page where you can build your own blogroll:
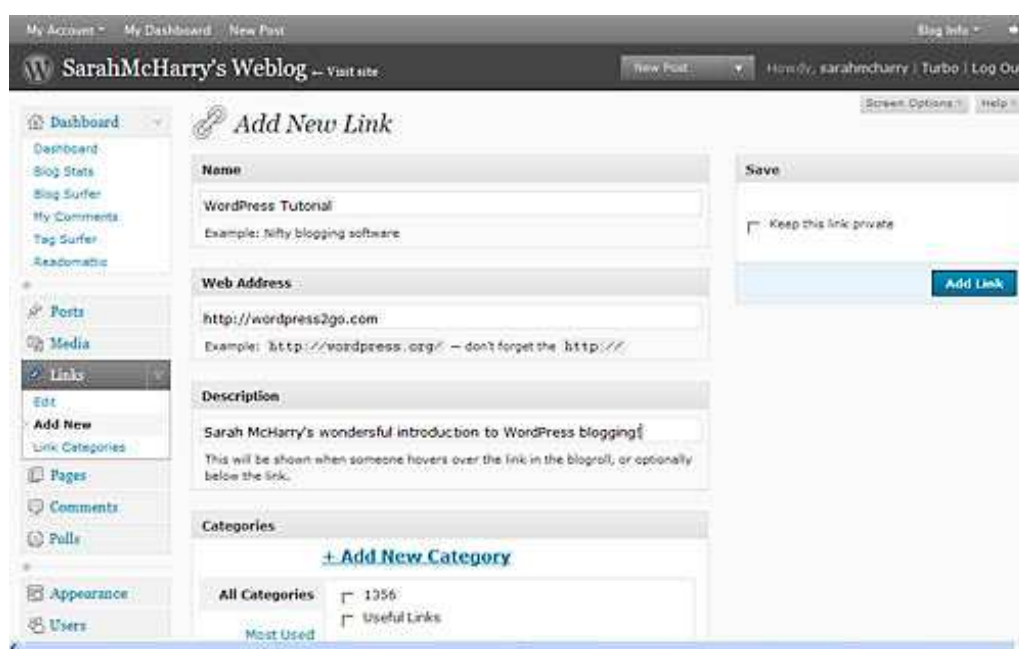
I've shown you here how to complete a really nice entry to add to your blogroll! When you've filled in the details of the link just click on 'Add Link' and it will be added.

Just add as many links as you think will enhance your blog. You can add more later and even arrange them into categories, if you want.

Comments & Spam

Comments can be both the joy and the scourge of your blog. By default, whenever someone visits your blog they can go to the comments box and add their comments. This may be a delightful contribution by a well-meaning fan or it can be some nutcase spam merchant selling fake Viagra.

What I would say to start with is 'don't panic'. When you start your blog, I recommend that you leave it open to comment by anyone who finds it but monitor what is going on. Get WordPress to send you an email whenever anyone comments. You do this by setting the Discussion Settings. Click on 'Settings', 'Discussion' and you'll get a screen where you can set a whole load of options that will help you manage comments on your blog:

At first, check 'Email me whenever anyone posts a comment' and leave 'An administrator must always approve the comment' unchecked. That means

anyone can post a comment but WordPress will email you whenever a comment is posted. Monitor this at least daily to see what happens.

To see the comments on your blog, go to your Dashboard and click on 'Comments'. WordPress will display the comments that others have posted. The first time you do this you'll probably see that WordPress have added a comment to your 'Hello World' post. You can just delete this by clicking the checkbox next to the comment, then select 'Delete' from the Bulk Actions drop-down list. And that's how you delete an unwanted comment!

Because spam comments have become such a nuisance for bloggers, WordPress has provided an excellent spam filter in the form of Akismet. This is a free plugin and it is a highly effective method for stopping spam comments from appearing on your blog.

Askismet looks at all the comments that have been posted and if it detects any that are questionable it dumps them into a spam folder. You can view this folder (but you might not want to let your kids see it) and de-spam any comment that you genuinely do want to appear on your blog. And you can just bulk delete all the garbage (see the Spam tab under 'Edit Comments').

That should be sufficient for most purposes. But if you want to apply more stringent censorship (moderation!) then you can check the box that requires that all comments must be moderated. On a busy blog this can become quite a chore so think this option through and get someone else to help with this if necessary.

When you get nice comments you might want to reply. Setting up a dialogue with your visitors is a powerful way to make your blog 'sticky' so that visitors return. To reply to a comment, view your site and find the post or page containing the comment. Underneath the comment you should see that you are already logged in and you can simply type your reply and click 'Submit comment'.

What if you don't want to allow any comments on your blog? On 'Settings', 'Discussion' uncheck 'allow people to post comments on the article'. That will prevent a comments box from appearing on your blog.

Comments are allowed by default on posts but not always on pages. This varies from theme to theme. If your chosen theme does not allow comments on pages, but you want comments on pages, then I recommend changing to another theme.

7.   Adding Pictures To Your Blog

Pictures can enhance a blog in so many ways. The old cliché about a picture being worth a thousand words still holds true. But I see so many blogs where the author has gone overboard with so many not-very-wonderful pictures that I instantly lose interest. There is a balance to be made between text and graphics and if you get this right your blog will look like a winner.

There are actually two ways to add a picture to your blog and this depends on where the picture comes from. If you have a picture already on your computer that you want to use on your blog you can upload it to WordPress. I'll call this an 'uploaded' picture.

If, on the other hand, you want to display a picture that is already stored on another website or blog then you need to embed that picture in your page or post. I'll call this an 'embedded' picture.

Uploaded Pictures

The first place you might want to add a picture is your 'About' page. You don't have to have a picture of yourself here: you could upload a logo or a stock photo or a jokey cartoon – it's your call.

I'll use my 'About' page to demonstrate how to upload a picture to a WordPress page or post.

First, find a picture and save it somewhere on your own computer in a location where you can easily find it again. This could be a digital photo or a bit of clip art or a stock image that you have rights to use. Whatever, the size of the image is important because you'll want it to display correctly.

Before we upload an image, let me explain how WordPress deals with uploaded images on the page. You have choices about the size you can display: you can display an image as a thumbnail, a medium or a full size image. If you display it as a thumbnail or medium then you have an additional option of displaying it as a full size image if the visitor clicks on it. This is how I usually like to display my images because it means that my text hasn't been displaced by my images. But if your blog is primarily about pictures then you'll maybe want to display the images full or medium sized right from the start.

A 'full sized' image may still need resizing, however. As a rule of thumb I like my images no more than 500 – 700 pixels wide. This is because:

- you want the image to fit comfortably on your visitor's screen
- you don't want the image to take too long to load
- you don't want to use up all your disc space too fast

So, if necessary, resize your image to the maximum size you will want to display it. You can do this through Photoshop or Paint or any image processing software.

Right, let's upload a picture. I'm going to upload an image into my 'About' page.

First, go to 'Pages', 'Edit' and click on the 'About' page. Then enter a little bit of text to tell your visitor what you want them to know about you and/or your blog. It doesn't need to be much yet, but just a few sentences so that you can see how your picture will display.
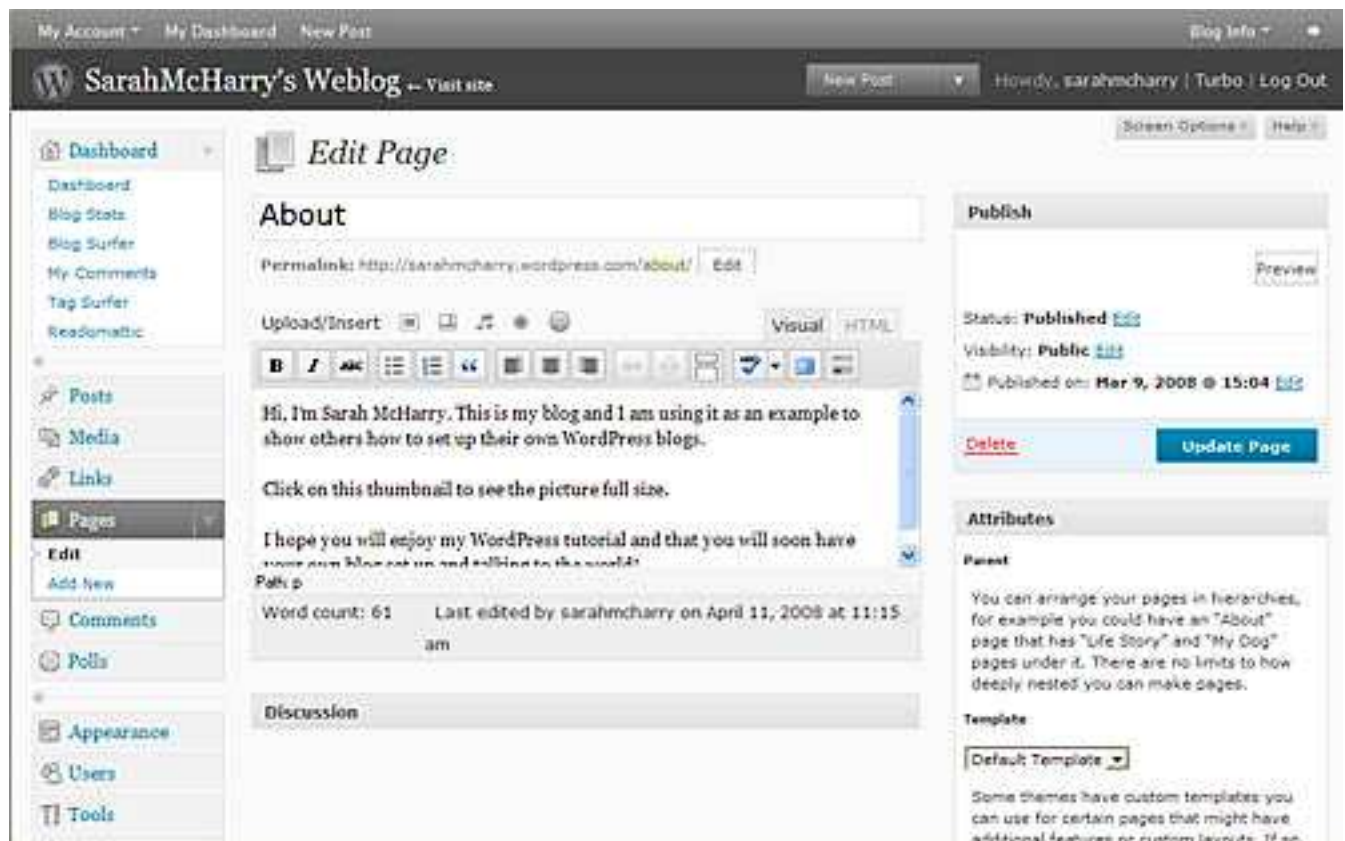
Then click on the first little square icon in the 'Upload/Insert' line. You'll get a popup screen like this:
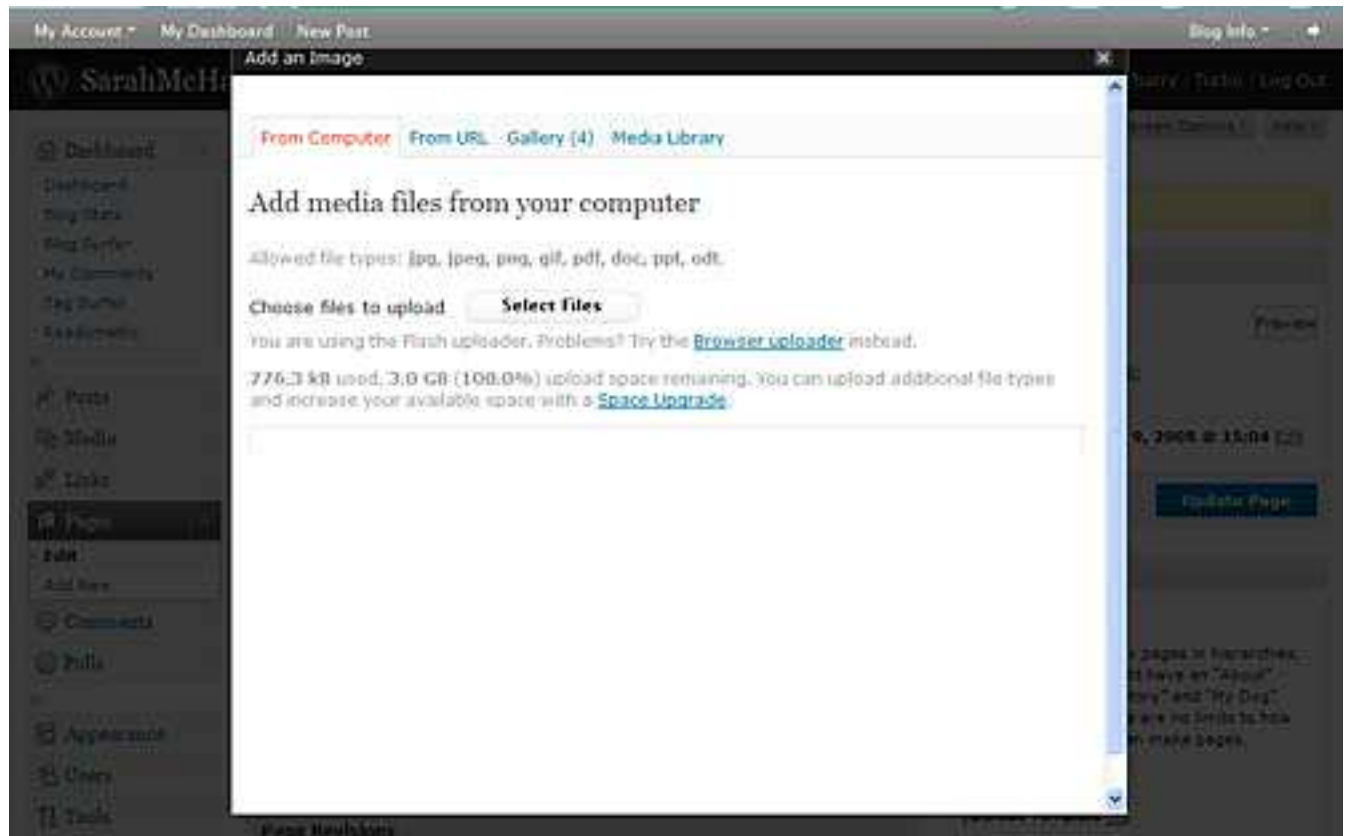
The first tab, 'From Computer', is for uploaded image and the second tab, 'From URL' is for embedded images. I'm going to upload a picture from my computer.

Click on the 'Select Files' button and you'll be taken back to your own computer. Navigate to the location where you stored your (resized) image and click on the file name and click 'Open'. Then click 'Upload'.

Warning: at the time of writing there is a glitch here that means you may have problems uploading images. If you are using Flash Uploader 10 it maybe won't work with WordPress 2.7. Apparently there is an incompatibility between Adobe and WordPress that has the geeks on both sides barring their teeth at one another. The way round this is to use the Browser Uploader instead - see the message on the screenshot above. Don't blame me, I'm only the messenger…

When you have managed to upload an image you'll then see a screen like this with your own picture in the box:
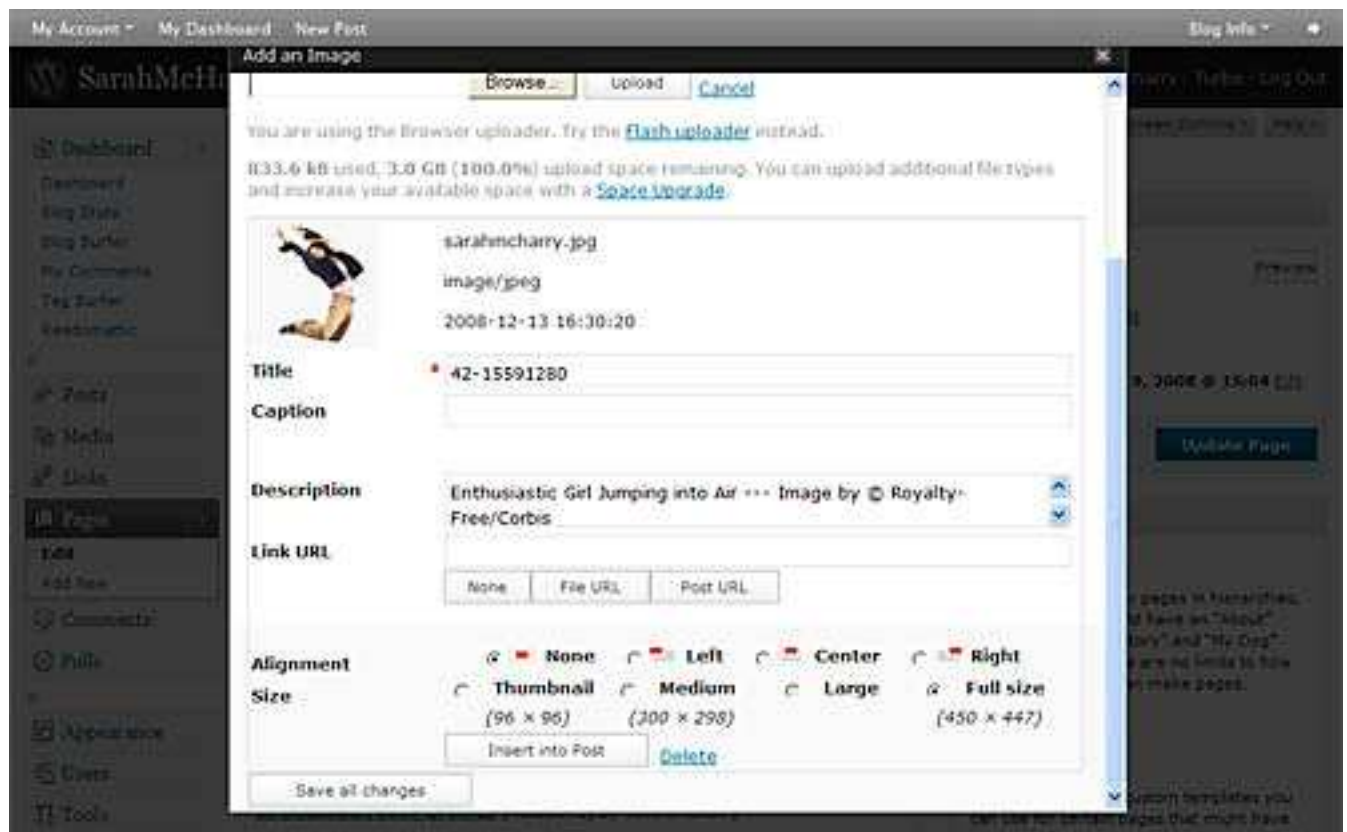
Now here's where you decide how you want your image to be displayed.

Select the alignment that you want and the size you want displayed. Now click on 'Insert into Post'.

Your image has now been uploaded and it appears in your page at the point where you had your cursor.

(And before you ask, you guessed right, that picture isn't really of me. I just used it because I thought it looked good).

There are a number of options there for you to play around with and rather than spelling them all out here I'd rather recommend you experiment with them. As you can see, you can also insert video and audio and other media, so when you have found your blogging feet I recommend you come back to these and see what you can do.

Once you have uploaded an image (or any media) it's there for you to use on as many pages as you want. To find a previously uploaded image, Click on 'Media Gallery' rather than 'From Computer' and you'll see thumbnails of all your previously uploaded images. Then just click on the image as before and insert it as before.

You can also click on 'Media Library' to see your uploaded media.

Embedded Pictures

If you want to display a picture from another website or blog then the approach is different. On the page or post where you want to display the picture, click the 'Add an image' icon as before. Then, on the pop-up box, click the 'From URL' tab.
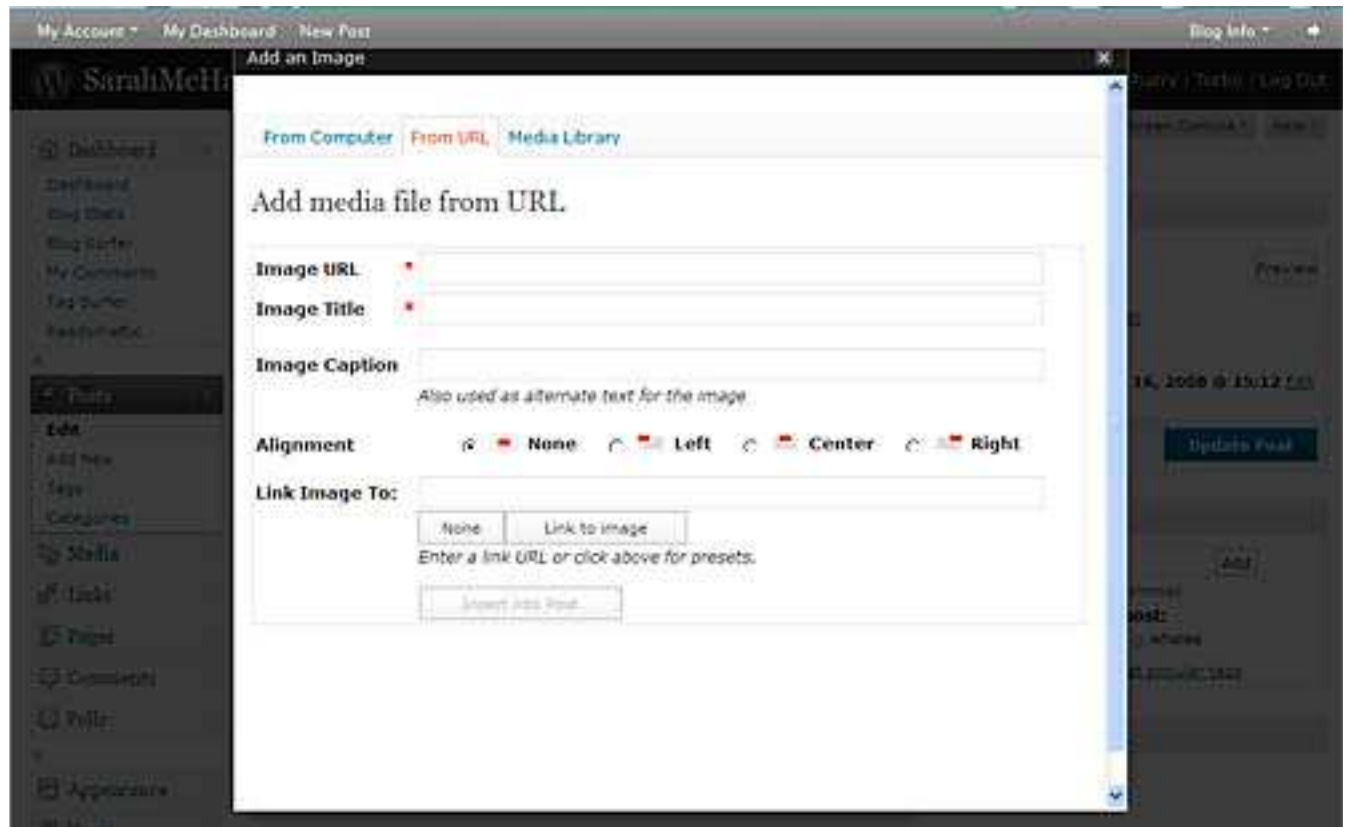
A pop-up box will appear asking you to enter details of the picture. The Image URL is the complete web address of where your picture can be found. For example, the picture I've used for this illustration is found at:

http://www.whale-images.com/data/media/2/orca-whales-vancouver-island_134.jpg

Enter that URL in the box. Then enter a title (optional), a description (optional) and alignment (left, right, center etc).

Then click 'Insert into Post' and you'll see that WordPress has embedded the picture in your post.

SarahMcHarry's Weblog
Just another WordPress.com weblog

« Welcome To My Blog!
what a wonderful world

A family of whales swim just off the shore of Vancouver Island.

(No, I haven't used a picture of rats for this example. I personally think whales are more interesting than rats, but that's just one of my little idiosyncrasies…)

8.   More Options With Posts

There are a number of other features that you should be aware of when you're writing posts to your blog and I'll deal with them one by one here.

Tags

One of the features that you'll notice on the Posts page is the 'Tags' bar over on the right-hand sidebar.

What this does is to make it easy for you to tell the world what this post is actually about. This is in addition to categories. Think of 'categories' as the broad topic of your post ('Breeding Rats') and tags as the detail within that ('male rats', 'female rats').

When you have typed up your post and before you hit the 'Publish' key, type in one or more keywords separated by commas that, as it were, index the content of your post. A keyword can be a one, two, three (or more) - word phrase: 'rat breeding, male rats, female rats, baby rats, how to breed rats' etc.

Why would you want to add tags? You don't have to, it's entirely optional. But if you do use tags you'll make it easier for others on the Internet who are interested in what you're writing about to find you. And it means you can have a 'tag cloud' which is one of those important-looking extras that you can build in when we come to deal with widgets.

Tags are good. Tag clouds are sexy. Use tags!

Timestamps

Timestamps are a <u>really</u> useful feature of WordPress blogs. But you could easily miss this very handy option. When you come to publish a new post or page you'll find an unobtrusive little box labeled 'Published on' and next to it a link marked 'Edit'. When you click on this link a drop-down box appears with the date. You can change that date to the date you want your post to be published.
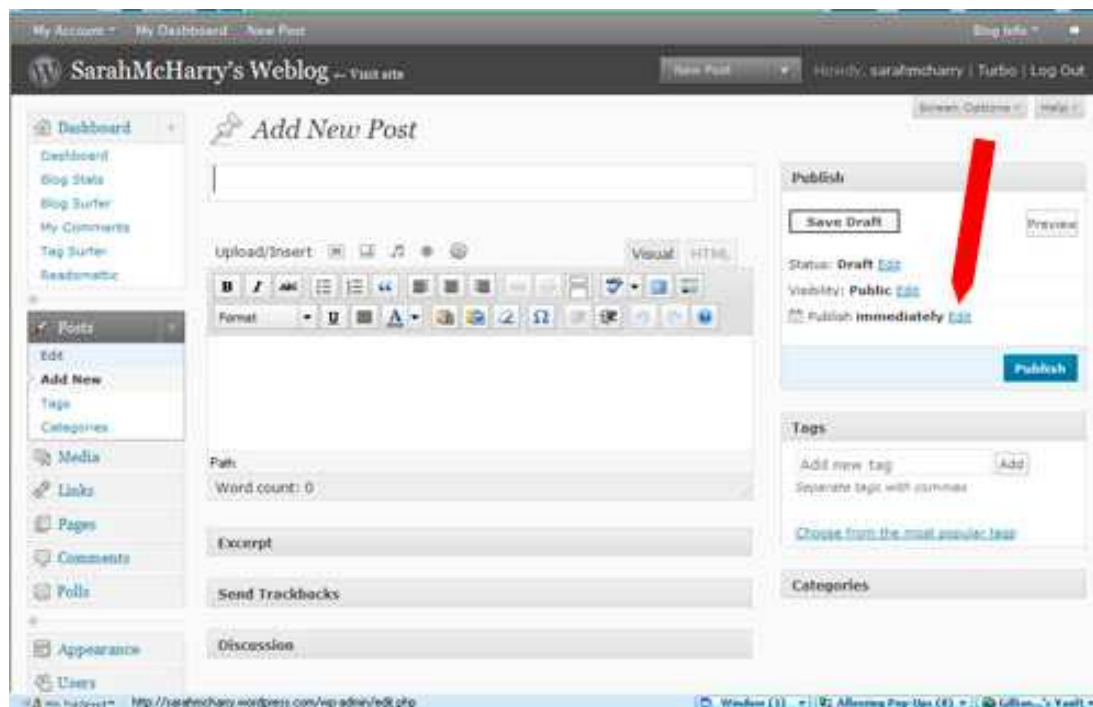
Timestamps enable you to date your post either in the future or in the past. Why would you want to do that?

Well, I don't know about you but I can be a rather spasmodic writer. Some days I wake up and I feel really literate and fluent and creative(!) and I can sit down and the words come and I just type. It feels so good I don't really want to stop. But other days I just sit and stare at a blank screen and I will do anything to distract myself from the main task of writing. If that's you, then timestamps are your answer.

What you can do is to write up a series of blog posts in advance. When you are having one of your good days, type up a post as usual but before you hit the 'Publish' button adjust the Post Timestamp date and time to some time in the future. Then hit 'Publish' and that post won't appear on your blog until the date and time that you specified. This way you could, say, type up six or seven posts, have them spaced at daily intervals and you've got a week's worth of posts in the can. Once it's in the queue the posting takes place automatically as the WordPress clock ticks by. Magic, or what?

You can also backdate posts. I've done this when I've looked at my past blog posts and wished I'd posted one article after another and not before. No problem – just bring up the post you want to reorder, change the Post Timestamp to the required chronological order and hey presto – you've rewritten history.

9.   More Options With Pages

You've learned all about pages and how to create them and you've probably written a few pages already on your blog. But there are a few additional options that you'll want to know about as your blog starts to grow.

Page Order

When you've posted a few pages you'll want to consider the order that they appear in your list of pages. As you write your pages, if you scroll down to the bottom right of the page (under 'Attributes'), you'll see a 'Page Order' box. If you leave this as 0 then the pages will appear in your page list in the order that you posted them. If you want your pages to appear in a particular order in the list, enter a number greater than 0 in here and your pages will appear in the order you numbered them.

Page Parent

If you have a page with a lot of words and a lot of detail you might want to consider splitting the page down into sub-pages. This might make it easier for your visitors to navigate your blog and find what they're looking for.

To make this work, first of all write the main page but omit all the nitty-gritty detail. Just let your page have a broad overview of your topic tagged, of course, with the appropriate tag words. Publish that page.

Then, when you come to write your nitty-gritty pages, click on the 'Page Parent' box on the left and select the page that you want to have as the parent to this one. Then publish.

Now, in your page list, your visitors can see that you have the topic broken down into logical sub-sections and you have made it much easier for them to find the jewel in the crown of your blog.

10.   Widgets

Ah, widgets: now we come to the fun bit. When you get your blog straight out of the box it might look like this:
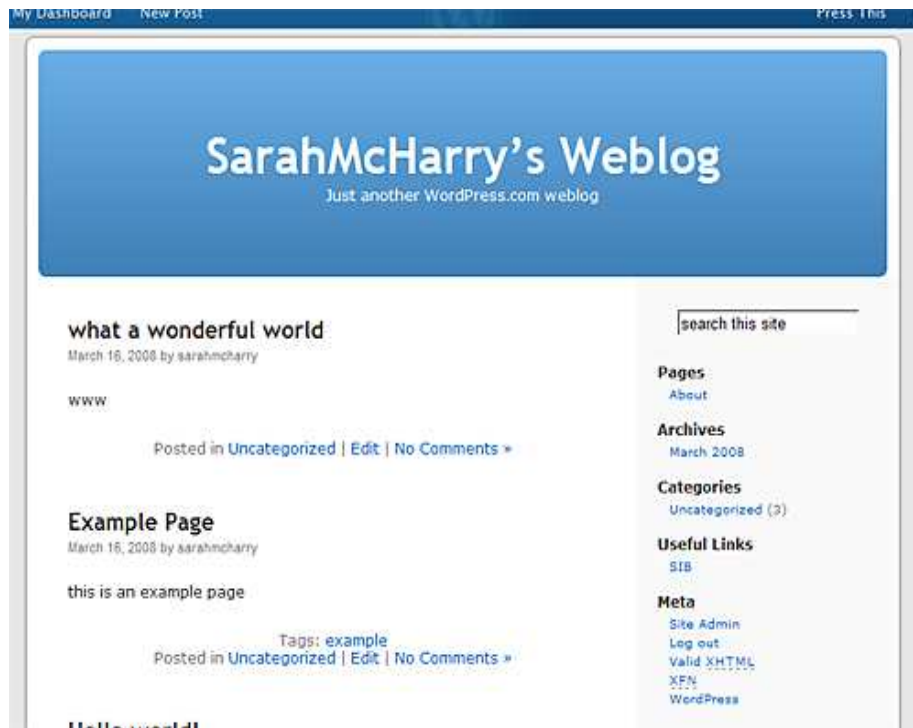
See that column down the far right where it says 'Pages', 'Archives', 'Categories' etc? That's called the 'sidebar' and the different items in the sidebar (like 'Pages') are 'widgets'. Some blog themes have more than one sidebar: some as many as four. And sidebars can appear on the left, the right or both.

But what are 'widgets'? Widgets are little chunks of text and/or graphics that provide an extra bit of functionality to your blog. An example of a widget is a tag cloud, or a search box, or a link to your Flickr photographs.

What's so interesting about widgets is that you can:

• rearrange them
• remove them
• add new widgets

By doing this you can personalize your blog by having the sidebars looking just how you want.

To get started with widgets, go to 'Appearance', 'Widgets' and you'll see something like this:

Your screen might look a bit different to this depending on the theme you have chosen. But the principle is the same: the widgets you can use are listed under 'Available Widgets' and your sidebar(s) appear on the right.

To add a widget to a sidebar, first select which sidebar you want by clicking on it in the drop-down box under 'Current Widgets.' Then click 'Add' on the widget you want to add. It will magically appear in the sidebar. You can drag and drop these widgets into a different order if you want. Click 'Save Changes' to save.

If you want to remove a widget, click on 'Edit' and a drop-down box will appear where there is a 'Remove' button.

There isn't the space here to go into all these widgets but I do suggest that you take the time to explore and experiment with them. If you try a widget but you don't like it you can always remove it and it will disappear from your sidebar.

And don't forget to include a 'Tag Cloud' widget. If you've been tagging your posts, your visitors will see a very striking tag cloud that will impress them no end.

11.   Users

If you are the only person who is allowed to update and maintain your blog then you'll probably not want to be too concerned about this section. Just log in as the administrator each time and that's all you'll ever need.

But if you have a group of people who are allowed to contribute posts and/or pages then you might want to pay attention to this section.

There are four groups of users who can be 'members' of a blog. A 'member' is someone who is allowed to write posts or pages to the blog, as opposed to simply commenting, which anyone can do. Each level of user is allowed different capabilities, depending on their role.

The four levels are:

1. **Administrator** ie. you. You can change, add, delete or do anything else you want with the blog. It's your blog and nobody can touch you.

2. **Editor** can add and edit posts and pages, moderate comments, add, edit or delete categories and manage the blogroll.

3. **Author** can publish and delete their own posts.

4. **Contributor** can write posts but can't publish them. A contributor's posts have to be approved by any one of the three levels higher up the hierarchy.

You can see that this can be quite a handy way of assigning responsibilities if your blog is a group effort.

To set up your users and their roles, go to 'Users', 'Authors & Users' and look under 'Add User From Community'.

The user must already have a WordPress account, and the email address that you enter must be the same one they used when they set up their account.

                   wordpress2go.com

12.   RSS

RSS stands for 'Really Simple Syndication' which is a bit of a mouthful that actually means that your blog posts can get published all over the place, in fact, all over the world.

How come? Well, there are any number of news-sharing resources out there that exist to disseminate news and information to people that are looking for it.

People who want information (or news, or jokes, or gossip) can subscribe (usually for free) to services such as Google Reader, Bloglines, etc, which will display the information they want direct on their screens. This is what the RSS feed from the WordPress2Go blog looks like:
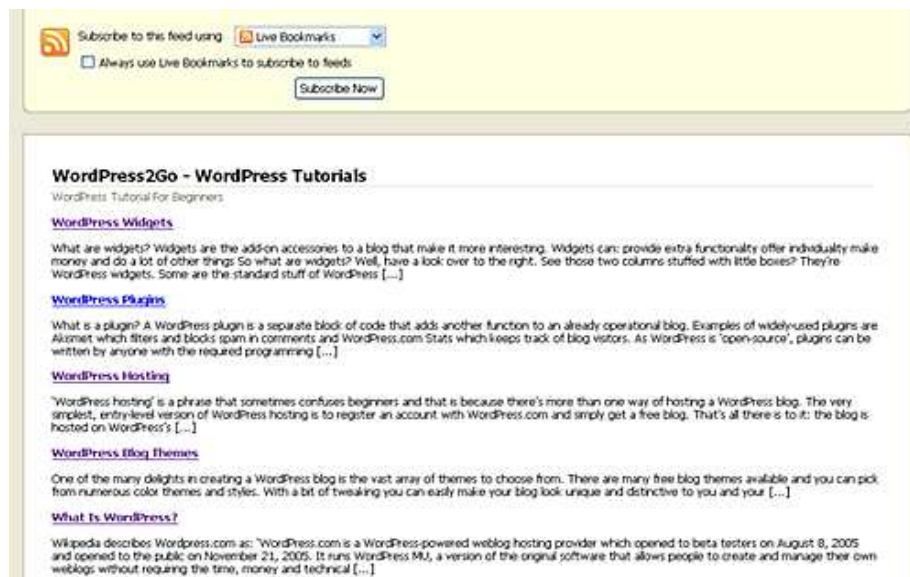
You can see it for yourself at:
http://wordpress2go.com/feed

You can specify your RSS Options by going to 'Settings', 'Reading' and entering your preferences in 'Syndication Feeds.'

And, if you want, you can display other people's feeds (not necessarily blogs) on your blog. See under 'Widgets' and look for the RSS widget. When it comes to using other people's content, the world is your oyster!

13.   Languages

The default language of WordPress is English but if you are publishing your blog in non-English speaking countries, or if English is not your first language, you might be interested in these settings.

Your Blog Language

If you are going to write your blog in a language other than English you should select the appropriate language under 'Settings', 'General':
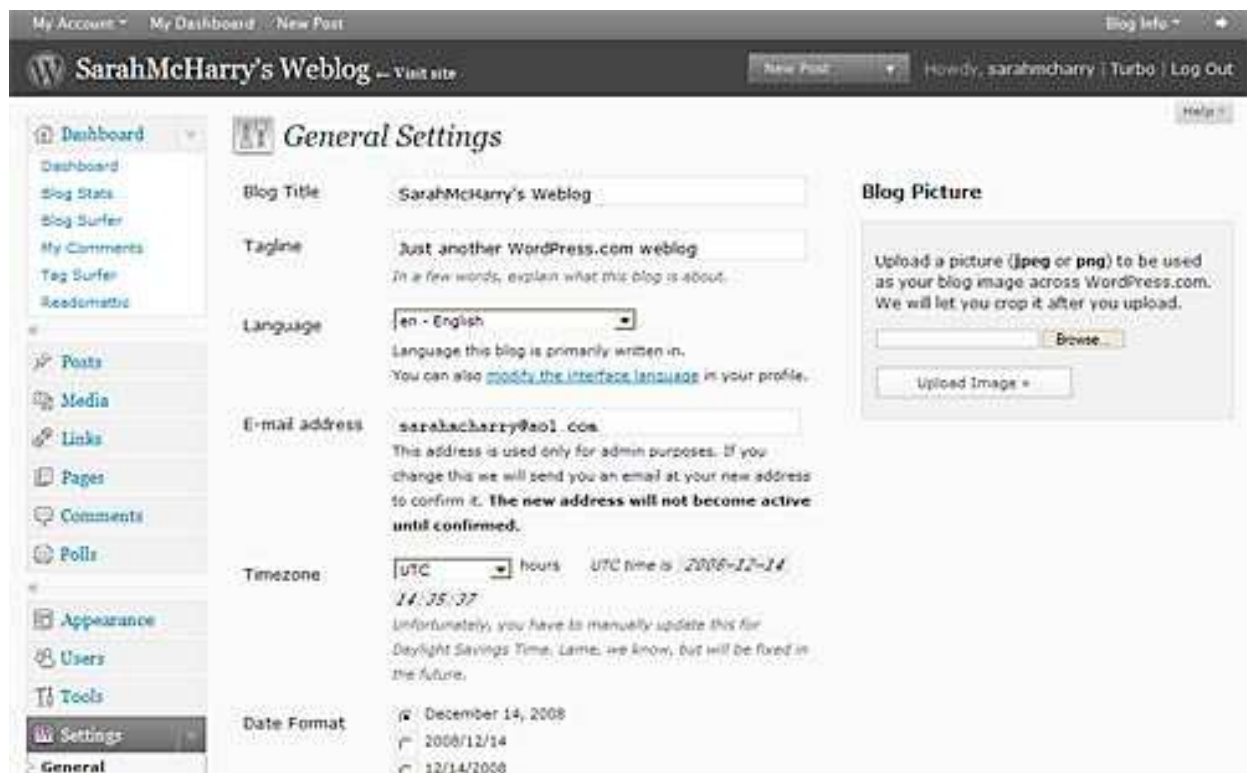
You'll see many languages when you click on the language box. Select your blog language and click on 'Update Options'.

Your Interface Language

This is different from the language of your blog. Suppose that your first language is Spanish but your blog is written in Portugese. You might be more comfortable if your dashboard and all the administrative screens of your blog was written in Spanish. You can change your interface language in your Profile. Click 'Users', 'Your Profile' and you'll see an item under 'Personal Options' that allows you to specify another language for your interface.

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14.   Your WordPress.com Blog

If you've reached this far you've probably already started your blog, in which case, congratulations!

What next? Well, you'll want to decide whether you're going to stay with your free wordpress.com blog or whether you're going to upgrade to a self-hosted blog on your own domain.

WordPress.com blogs are fine for individuals, hobbyists, school groups, non-profits, voluntary groups, charities, clubs – in fact, anyone who wants to blog about non-commercial activities. WordPress exists for people like this who want a free, voluntary, blogging platform.

WordPress.org is the upgrade path, where you want to have a blog on your own domain. If you need a blog for any type of business, there is no question about it, **you need a blog on your own domain**.

And if you've produced some killer content on your free blog while you've been working through this tutorial, fear not, you can export this from the free version and import it into a blog on your own domain very easily!

A WordPress.org blog can sit alongside a conventional website on a domain, or, it can completely replace a conventional website. WordPress has become so sophisticated that there is now very little you can do with a website that you can't also do with a blog.

A self-hosted WordPress blog on your own domain gives you a distinct Internet identity that is all your own and where you can attract traffic from the search engines. You'll belong to the international community of WordPress bloggers and show the world that you have your own distinctive place in the blogosphere.

Come on over to my blog www.wordpress2go.com for more news on how you can do this.

That's it. End of tutorial.

Happy blogging!

Sarah