

Designing Your Author Website

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Book Cover Design & Author Services

Designing Your Author Website

A website is your home on the Web. It's the home of your brand. Whether you're a new author or multi-published, setting up your very first website or looking to renovate your current website, your website shows readers who you are and what you write.

First, we'll take a look at the basics you need when designing an economical, functional, and attractive website that supports your brand. While focusing on using Wordpress.com, this information is relevant when using other site-builders or when planning with a website designer.

In the afternoon, we'll take a behind-the-scenes look at making and using a Wordpress.com site.

Download a PDF copy of this workshop at:

<http://jamiebeedesigns.com/designing-your-author-website-njrw-workshop-8-18-18/>

Designing Your Author Website

What we'll be covering:

Morning Program

1. What Your Website Does
2. DIY - Yes, You Can Do It Yourself!
3. The Basics You Need
4. Content Thoughts
5. Images
6. Extras/Subpages
7. Your Look— Your Brand — Your Style

Afternoon Program

8. Starting a Basic Free Wordpress.com Website
9. Behind the Scenes Demonstration

1. What Your Website Does

Do you need a website?

Imagine not having an address for your house. How would people find you?

Some authors get by without, but having your own website gives you a home base, a web presence, a showcase for your work, and a marketing tool.

1. What Your Website Does

Why not use Facebook or other social media as your home base?

- Social media is a conversation and not everyone is on social media.
- A website is your storefront display window.
- Your author's website give a potential reader a chance to get to know you and often helps them decide if they're going to buy your book.

1. What Your Website Does

Do you need a website if you're not published?

- It's up to you. But even an unpublished writer can have a nice site.
- Reasons to start while you're unpublished:
 - You learn how to use the tools at your pace.
 - You don't have to rush to build your brand. You can explore and grow into it.
 - You can own your domain early on.
 - You may enjoy blogging. It can be a way to explore and share the stories you love writing.
 - You can have pages devoted to your stories in progress, poetry, essays, magazine articles.

1. What Your Website Does

Published or unpublished, your website needs to be:

- Functional and support your brand.
- The first search result your reader sees.
- Accurate and up-to-date. All pages should be tidy and up to date. A bad or out-of-date website can damage your image.
- Easy to navigate and user friendly.

2. DIY - Yes, You Can Do It Yourself!

A website doesn't have to be expensive or complicated. You can start free and build from there. DIY is the focus here today. There are many places where you can make a simple, inexpensive website.

You can learn to do this, but you do need to ask yourself: do I actually want to manage it myself? Do I have the time? You can also get help from family/friends or hire someone.

This is why starting sooner, rather than later, is a good idea. Give yourself time to build and learn.

2. DIY - Yes, You Can Do It Yourself!

Getting Started:

- Research first, find sites you like (or don't like).
- Make notes, bookmark images.
- Decide on colors and images you like, pages and menus you want to have.
- Don't worry about starting simple.
- You don't have to launch everything at once. Your site will evolve.
- If you don't want to update often, keep your content simple and avoid information that is quickly out of date or irrelevant. Think long term.
- Easy and neat is better than unique but complicated. Easy doesn't have to be boring, either.
- Tackle one thing at a time.
- In order to get better at anything, you need to practice.
- It's okay if it starts as a mess.
- Perfect is unattainable. Know when to stop tweaking and rearranging your website.
- Be up-to-date: Make maintenance a monthly task. Review old pages. Keep links checked.

3. The Basics You Need

- **Your Domain/URL**
- **Theme**
- **Your Landing Page/Homepage**
- **Menus**
- **Social Media Links**
- **Page Titles**
- **Your Books Page(s)**
- **About/Bio Page**
- **Contact Page**
- **Newsletter Signup**
- **GDPR**

**What your website should have in the end
is what works best for you.**

3. The Basics You Need

Your Domain/URL:

- Your URL (uniform resource location) is your address on the Web. It should be clear and recognizable as you.
- You should set up your domain name early.
- Base it on the name you publish under:
yourname.com, yournameauthor.com, yournamebooks.com, or yournamewriter.com.
If a .com is unavailable for the name you want, try .net or .me.
- A domain name typically costs around \$14.99/year. There are many places to obtain your domain: Wordpress.com, 1 & 1, Bluehost, Siteground, and many others. Do your research.
- Don't want to spend money until you're ready to commit to the site? You can start with the basic, free plan and url offered by Wordpress, which might look like yourname.home.blog. While the basic url is not pretty, it's an economical start to your first site, and you can later upgrade to a paid domain with WP or do a redirect of a domain bought at another provider.

3. The Basics You Need

Theme:

A theme controls your website's styles, look, feel, page layouts, fonts and colors, and content organization — how your site looks to a visitor when they browse your site.

- Chose a simple, customizable, and responsive design that complements your brand. If you write gritty urban fantasy, don't go all light pastels and flowers, even if you personally adore pastels and flowers.
- You want a clean, modern design.
- Simple color palette.
- Choose a responsive theme that works well on mobile devices. Your site has to be compatible with different browsers and devices, so after you have decided on a theme, double-check how things look on multiple browsers, tablets, and phones.
- Choose larger font sizes and colors that are easy to read no matter whether it is on a phone or desktop.
- Remember light fonts on dark backgrounds are difficult to read.

3. The Basics You Need

Your Landing Page/Homepage:

- The landing page (home page) is what first appears when people visit your site. Clearly states who you are and what you write.
- Design should match your brand and what you write. Don't be conflicting. If you write sweet romance don't have a sexy half-naked couple cavorting on your landing page.
- Highlight the most important things happening. For example: current book release, upcoming book release.
- Your homepage should have :
 1. A header with your name, tagline, and possibly a headshot. The header can be just text, include a logo, or be a full-blown image.
 2. The cover of your most recent book.
 3. A call to action: Your book and/or email newsletter signup.
 4. Clear link to your book page in the top menu.
 5. Optional: Social proof. A snippet of a book review or "New York Times bestseller" etc.
 6. Optional: A very short description of who you are.

3. The Basics You Need

Menus: Offer clear, easy navigation on all pages. Don't make your reader struggle to find the information they want.

3. The Basics You Need

Social Media Links: Are you on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google Plus, Goodreads, etc. ?

- Make the links to your public social media profiles easy to find in your header, sidebar, footer for your readers to follow you and join the conversation.
- Use only the ones that you want to use and are active on. Don't feel pressured to have them all.

3. The Basics You Need

Your Books Page(s):

Your books are the main event, so make it easy to find what's new, what's coming soon.

- Cover!
- Descriptions of each book - Backcover blurb or short version of the blurb.
- Make your back list organized and easy to read.
- You can list your books by genre, series, publisher, even add a printable list.
- Coming Soon Page: Give a publication date (as simple as the year is fine), cover if available, a few sentences about the book.
- Links to all major online retailers where your book can be purchased. Make it easy for your reader to click to buy.

3. The Basics You Need

About/Bio Page:

- About 100-300 words.
- Let your readers know who you are, professionally and personally.
- Be personal, be yourself, but be careful not to over-share.
- A professional headshot is nice, but optional.

3. The Basics You Need

Contact Page:

- Give your reader a way to get in touch with you.
- DO NOT make your visitors hunt for your information!
- A contact form is better than just an email link to avoid spammers getting your email address.
- You can also add media information, a media kit, social media links, links to other websites/blogs you may have or be active on.
- Encourage your readers to get in touch with you via the social platform(s) you are most active on.

3. The Basics You Need

Newsletter Signup:

This is semi-optional. But it's a great way for your readers to subscribe to updates. Let them know about tours, reviews releases, books in progress. It is never too early to start collecting email subscribers. Popular newsletter services are: Mailchimp, Aweber, MadMimi.

- The signup form should be simple, just first name and email address.
- The signup link should be easy to find on your homepage, side bar, pop-up.
- Specify what they are signing up for: newsletter, updates, blog updates.
- Offer a freebie - a sneak peek, book, chance to win.

3. The Basics You Need

GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation): This is more complex than can be covered here today. You should research this matter for yourself.

- In very brief, make sure you enable a notice about cookies.
- Also be cognizant about collecting visitors data, particularly if you collect email addresses for a newsletter. Check with your newsletter service.
- You should also have a privacy policy page for your website.
- You can read up on this subject here:
www.authorsguild.org/industry-advocacy/authors-gdpr-ready/selfpublishingformula.com/episode-117/

4. Content Thoughts

- Page Titles: Keep them clear and obvious such as: Home, Books, Coming Soon, About/Bio, Contact
- Avoid dense blocks of text.
- Use bulleted lists, section headers and short paragraphs. White space is your friend.
- Avoid autoplay music or videos.
- Are you SFW or NSFW? Readers browse at work. Consider keeping the sexy images off the landing page.
- A blog gives you the freedom to add additional content without cluttering pages.
- Just remember, published or unpublished, what you post on the web might be up there forever, so be judicious.
- Also, remember what Mom always said: If you can't say anything nice...

5. Images

- **Be sharp:** Avoid low resolution, small size, blurry images.
- **Be legal!** Don't just take any pic off the web. You wouldn't want your book copyright violated, respect the photographer's rights too.
- **Your Book cover!** Pictures do sell. If you love your cover, show it off. Make it a decent size on the page. Don't put up a tiny thumbnail that's hard to read.
- **But I don't have my cover yet:** You can make a placeholder cover that simply says Coming Soon. Change it out once your real cover is ready for reveal.
- **Author Photo:** This is, of course, optional, but readers like to get to know you. Consider having a professional headshot. This is part of your brand too. Use a clear, sharp, photo in a decent size. Don't crop a fuzzy low resolution snap out of a family get-together.
- **Website Header:** Make one that supports your brand. Think about the image, colors, font. Is your name clear. Do you want your tagline there?

5. Images

Photoshop too difficult or expensive? Don't worry, there are simpler solutions for working with images. Many people like using:

canva.com

paint.NET

<https://www.gimp.org>

There are free and economical images out there. Some place to look are:

Free

commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

search.creativecommons.org

pixabay.com

unsplash.com/

Stock.xchng

Pay

depositphotos.com

istockphoto.com

Wherever you find your images, whether you use a free image or pay, read and follow the license requirements. Every place is different, so read carefully.

6. Extras/Subpages

Not vital, but they can provide useful, fun, and interesting additions to the main website:

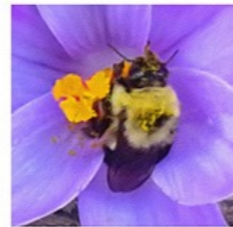
- A media kit. This can be a PDF. Provide a brief description and a link on a page on your site.
- Contests
- A blog. You're a writer. There are many things you can write about. A blog is good for insider information, upcoming events, announcements, contests, insight into your writing life, personal info, recipes, photos, tips, etc./extras/excerpts
- Your best positive reviews
- Latest News, interviews, blog mentions
- Fan Facts
- Message Board/Community.
- A Slideshow
- Podcast
- Youtube Videos
- Book trailers
- Your favorite books, music, and movies
- Exclusive, unpublished content like short stories
- Author's schedule - booksignings, appearances, book readings and signings, speaking engagements, interviews, conferences and professional events, workshops
- Insider information - tidbits, inspirations, research
- Freebies
- Affiliate program links

7. Your Look— Your Brand — Your Style

- Your website is the best source of information on your brand. Your website represents who you are and what you have to offer. You want to own and control your brand.
- You don't have to be published to start formulating your brand.
- Start brainstorming. Check out the sites of other authors in and out of your genre. Look at your book covers. What attracts you? What resonates for you?
- Does the voice, tone, attitude and mood of your site resonate with the branding you are creating?
- Does it work for your ideal reader?
- Be concise and consistent.
- Your website and social media should work together.
- Your author website, business cards, bio, author photo, cover design and print materials, and colors, fonts and images should work together to tell your story.
- Website headers can often be adapted into Facebook, Google+, and Twitter cover images.



Questions?

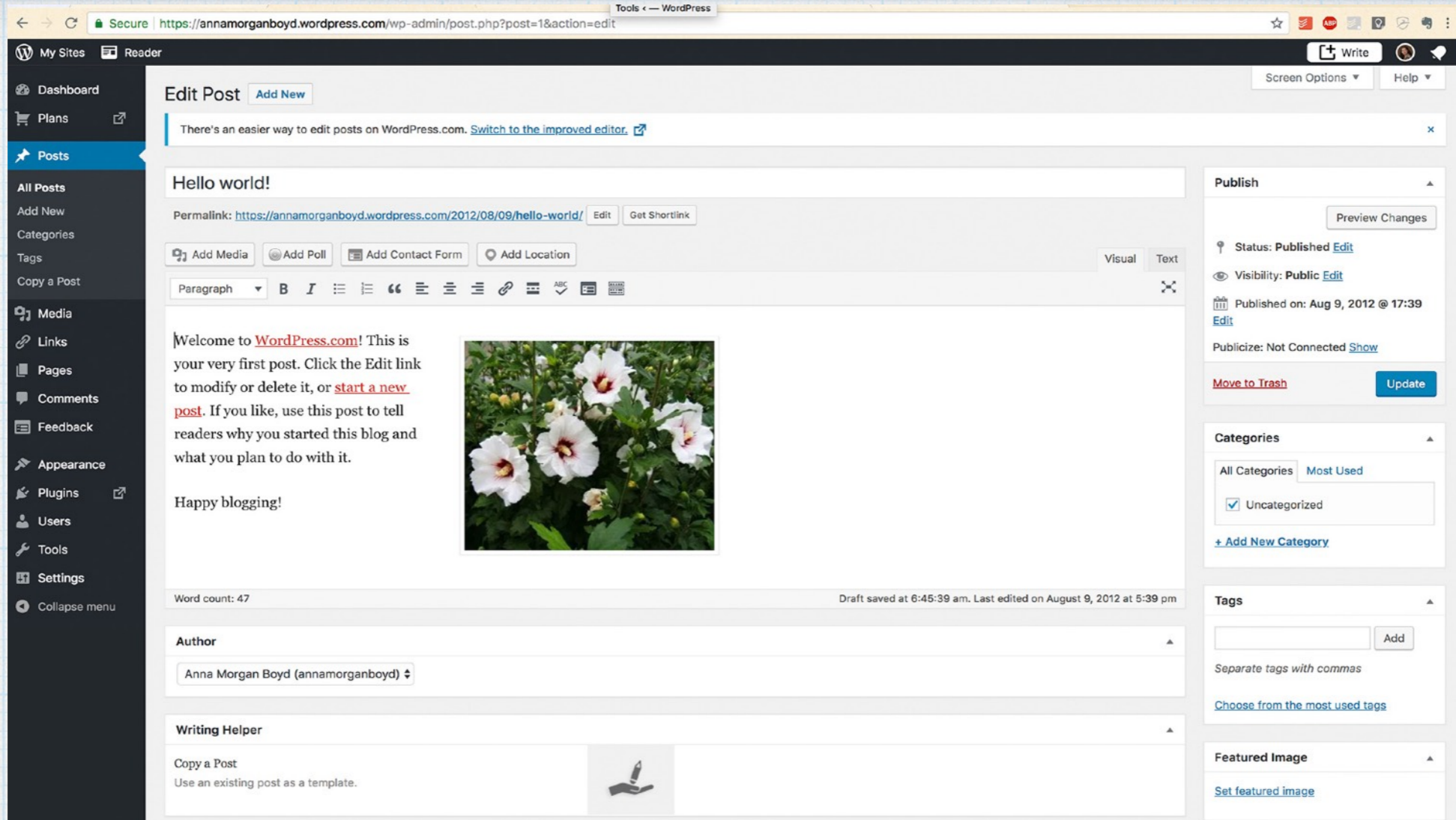


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Afternoon Program

8. Starting a Basic Free Wordpress.com Website Step-By-Step

9. Demonstration

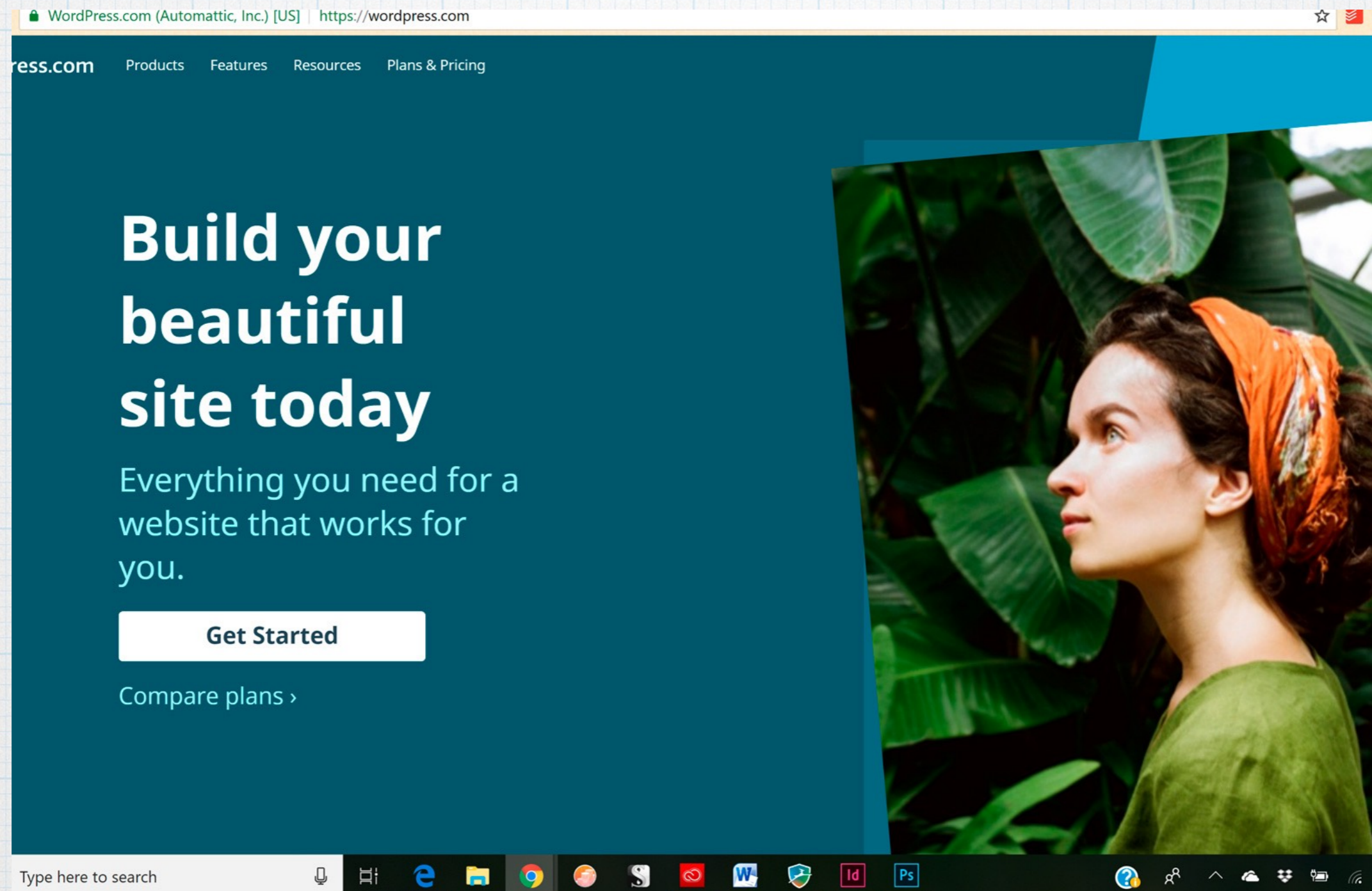
8. Starting a Basic Free Wordpress.com Website

- It's not just for blogging anymore. And it doesn't have to be cookie-cutter, even with a free theme.
- DIY is the focus here today. Yes, you can do it by yourself!
- Give yourself time to build and learn.
- Research first, find sites you like (or don't like). Make notes, bookmark images. Decide on colors and images you like, pages and menus you want to have.
- There are many places where you can make a simple, inexpensive website to ease into having a site.
- We're focusing on Wordpress.com today, Free or Personal plans, but Squarespace, Wix, or Weebly are others to look at when researching a website.
- Helpful Wordpress links:
 - <https://wordpress.com/pricing/>
 - <https://wordpress.com/themes>
 - <https://en.support.wordpress.com/five-step-blog-setup/>
 - <https://en.support.wordpress.com/five-step-website-setup/>

8. Starting a Basic Free Wordpress.com Website

- Don't expect to get it perfect the first time. It's easy to update your site as you have new ideas. You also can keep the site private as you tinker.
- Nearly all themes enable you to customize features. Some are simple, some are complicated.
- Browse <https://wordpress.com/themes> to familiarize yourself with what is available.
- Make a list of what you like. Custom background? Custom header? Custom colors? 1 column, or more?
- Decide what features you want to begin with and pick your theme based on your needs.
- Preview the theme. Try it on for size. You can always change your theme. I recommend sticking with the free themes until you feel comfortable working with your site and know exactly what features you want.
- Make note of the assets your site and theme will need. The theme details will let you know the image sizes.
- Stay organized so you don't have to hunt all over for your assets.
 - Make a folder in your Pictures folder for all the images you use on your site.
 - Make a folder in Documents for your contents (page text, blog posts).

Step 1- Get Started



Step 1- It's About You

ps://wordpress.com/start/about?ref=homepage

Step 1 of 4

Let's create a site.

Please answer these questions so we can help you make the site you need.

What would you like to name your site?

e.g. Mel's Diner, Stevie's Blog, Vail Renovations

What will your site be about?

e.g. Fashion, travel, design, plumber, electrician

What's the primary goal you have for your site?

- ☐ Share ideas, experiences, updates, reviews, stories, videos, or photos
- ☐ Promote your business, skills, organization, or events
- ☐ Offer education, training, or mentoring
- ☐ Sell products or collect payments
- ☐ Showcase your portfolio

How comfortable are you with creating a website?

Beginner

1

2

3

4

5

Expert

Continue

Step 2 - Get a Name

Automattic, Inc.) [US] | <https://wordpress.com/start/domains>

Step 2 of 4

Let's give your site an address.

Enter your site's name, or some keywords that describe it - we'll use this to create your new site's address.

🔍 Enter a name or keyword

⚙️
Filters

A domain name is the site address
people type into their browser to visit
your site.

[Already own a domain?](#)

http://example.com

Automattic, Inc.) [US] | <https://wordpress.com/start/domains>

← Back

Step 2 of 4

Give your site an address.

Enter your site's name or some keywords that describe it to get started.

🔍 Jane Writer

✕

⚙️
Filters

.com

.net

.org

.blog

.club

.co

.life

.me

More Extensions ▾

janewriter.com

Included in paid plans

Best Match

✓ Exact match

✓ ".com" is the most common extension

Select

janewriter.blog

Included in paid plans

Best Alternative

✓ Exact match

✓ ".blog" is a common extension

Select

janewriter.home.blog

Free

Select

janewriter.org

Included in paid plans

Select

janeartist.blog

Included in paid plans

Select

janewriter.net

Included in paid plans

Select

jane-writer.blog

Included in paid plans

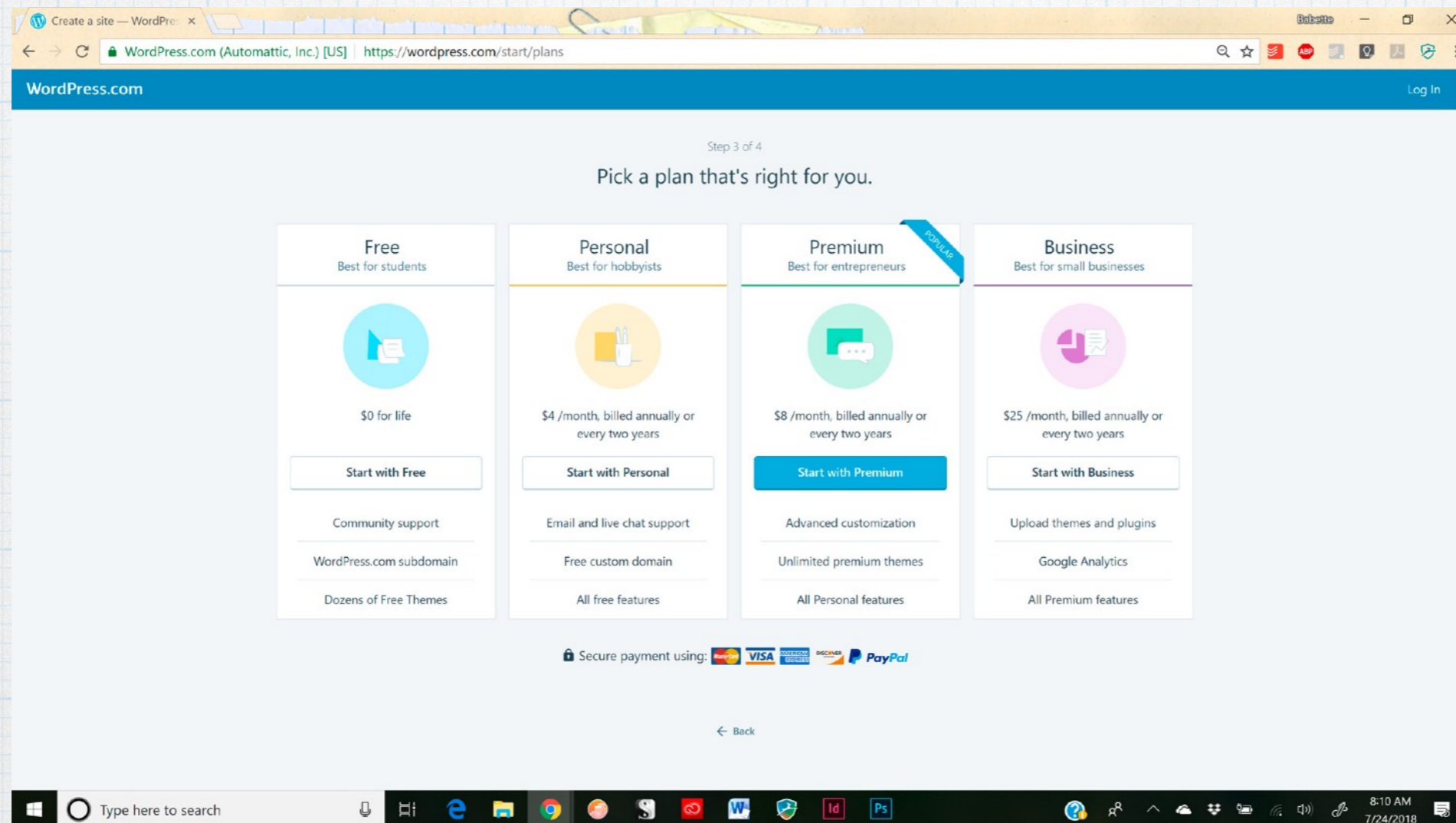
Select

jane-writer.com

Included in paid plans

Select

Step 3 - Pick a Plan



Step 4 - Go to work!

Demonstration

This afternoon will just be a brief overview of some of the early steps in making a Wordpress.com website. As you can see from the Dashboard, there's a lot to explore.

1. First, let's make our new site private while it's under construction. Go to Settings>Reading>Site Visibility and check ***I would like my site to be private, visible only to myself and users I choose***. When you're ready to show the world, uncheck this.

2. Next, we're going to quickly make five blank pages.

- A Home (landing) page. (You'll add content to this later.)
- A Blog (news) page (Leave the content field blank. This will be the "posts" page. Content comes when you write a post.)
- An About Page. (This will be your bio page.)
- A Books Page
- A Contact Page. (You can add a contact form here.)

To make a new page, on the dashboard under Pages, click Add New. Enter the title of the Page, ex. Home and then click the publish button.

3. Now we can play with the appearance of our site.

- Click Appearance, and we'll choose a free theme to work with.
- Click Theme Details to learn about the theme.
- Click Preview to see a sample, and then Activate the theme
- Then click the Customize Your Site button.

Demonstration

4. We can see the site appearance here and then work on the settings for:

- **Site Identity:** Site Title, Tagline, and Logo, and Footer Credit
- **Colors & Backgrounds:** Pick your color palette and background
- **Fonts:** Choose your Headings font and Base (everything else) Font
- **Header Image:** Choose one of WP's images or upload your own
- **Menus:** Set up the menu with the pages you've made
- **Content Options:** Some post settings
- **CSS:** Only available with a paid Premium Plan
- **Widgets:** Shows the locations available to add various widgets. Widgets are independent sections of content that can be placed into widgetized areas provided by your theme (sidebars and footers).
- **Homepage Settings**

Some of the contents of these settings may vary depending on the theme you have chosen.

Demonstration

5. We want to start by making the landing (home) page display a static page and not posts.

- So go to Homepage Setting first and click Static page.
- Click the Homepage dropdown and choose the Home page we made.
- Then click the Posts page dropdown and choose the page we made for our Blog.
- You could also leave the Posts option blank rather than selecting a page, and your site will have only static pages.

6. Now that we have a start on the look of the site, hit the Publish Button. You can always go back and edit these settings. Now click the X to close this window and we're back at the dashboard.

Demonstration

7. Now we're going to click on Pages and open our Home Page and practice adding some text and a photo.

For more detailed instructions on this and the following steps, see:
<https://learn.wordpress.com/>

8. Next we'll make a blog post.

9. Next we'll make a Contact form.

10. Next we'll add a book to our Book Page.

11. Finally, we'll preview our newly drafted website.

We now have a rough draft of website that is ready to be filled with our content and fine-tuned into the site that will share our stories with the world.

You Can Do This!

Take your time, experiment, work on it bit by bit. Have fun with it.

When you hit a snag or have questions, Wordpress.com has good resources for help.

<https://en.support.wordpress.com/>

About

Babette James • Jamie Banta • JamieBee Designs

Babette James writes sweetly scorching contemporary and fantasy romance and loves reading tales with a satisfying happily ever after. As a teacher, she loves encouraging young new readers and writers as they discover their growing abilities. Her class cheers when it's time for their spelling test! Born in New Jersey and raised in Southern California, she's had a life-long love of the desert and going down the shore. Babette lives in New Jersey with her wonderfully patient husband and extremely spoiled cat.

When not dreaming up stories, she designs book covers, formats books, and works with websites. As an author, artist, and photographer, she put her love of art and books to good use and started JamieBee Designs. Because the story's not over when you type "The End." It's just begun.

<http://babettejames.com>

<https://jamiebeedesigns.com>

10% discount on services for NJRW members

