How to Create Your First Website: Part 2

Customize Your Website

Rich Malloy, Tech Help Today, Summer 2017

In Part 1 of this series, we set up an account at WordPress, the easiest and most cost-effective way to set up a website. In that post, I showed you how to access the WordPress site, set up an account, and forge the basic foundation of your first website. (If you missed the first part, you can find the instructions at: http://techhelptoday.com/computer-training-file-menu/1-hour-website-class/your-first-website/)

Now we have to customize the site to make it look the way we need it to look. To give you an idea of what needs to be done — or what *can* be done — WordPress has already populated your new site with some text and photos in a blog post and added a few pages of generic text. We need to change all that, but first let's discuss the various types of websites we can build.

Website or Blog?

WordPress was originally designed to create a **blog**, a series of timely articles or **posts**, one on top of another with the newest one on top. In addition to blog posts, blogs often have a few web **pages** that present less timely information such as a description of the blogger. Note the distinction between blog posts, which tend to be time sensitive, and web pages, which tend to be more static and timeless. Blogs can be very popular and useful for a business, but they need to be updated on a regular basis. A blog with outdated information looks stale and reflects badly on the blogger. A stale website is even worse than having new website at all.

The traditional website is not a blog but a collection of web pages. And while most popular websites have dozens or even hundreds of pages, some websites can get along quite nicely with just one page. Indeed, a one-page website has two major advantages: it is easy to set up, and a breeze to maintain.

Establish the Goals for the Website

Before we get too far into the design process, it is always a good idea to put down on paper exactly what we hope this new website will do for us. Considering our experience level, we should set our goals as somewhat basic. We would like the site to describe our business, to promote it, to answer typical questions that customers would have, and to indicate ways for people to contact us. In the future we will add another goal: to provide useful information in an effort to garner attention and a higher search-engine ranking. Eventually, we might even want to sell things on our site. But, right now our goals are much simpler.

Another goal is that we want to get the site up as quickly as possible. To do that, we are going to take advantage of WordPress's blog orientation. WordPress makes it easy to set up a website, but it is even easier to set up a blog — which looks like a website. We going to set up a one-post blog that for all intents and purposes is indistinguishable from a website. The purpose for the site will be to promote a small mythical inn call the Smith Country Inn. To see a completed version of the site, go to smithcountryinn.wordpress.com.
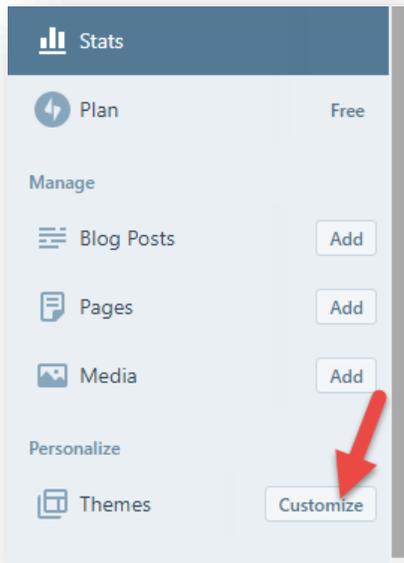
Customize the Site Identity

A quick glance at the site that WordPress created for us shows that we have some work to do, The first thing we need to adjust is the site name. When we created our WordPress account, we already selected a domain name for the site. This is the *address* that people might have to type in to access our site. But the *name* of the site is still the default one that WordPress gave it. That's going to change:

- Click the **My Site** button in the upper left to access the My Site menu.

W My Site

- Click the **Customize** button near the **Themes** button.

Stats

Plan	Free

Manage

|	
Blog Posts	Add
Pages	Add
Media	Add

Personalize

Themes	Customize

- In the **Customize** menu, click: **Site Identity**
- In the **Site Title** box, type: **Smith Country Inn**
- In the **Tagline** box, type: **A Nice Place to Stay**
- Click: **Save & Publish**

Customizing
Site Identity

Save & Publish   3

Site Title
Smith Country Inn   1

Tagline
A Nice Place to Stay   2
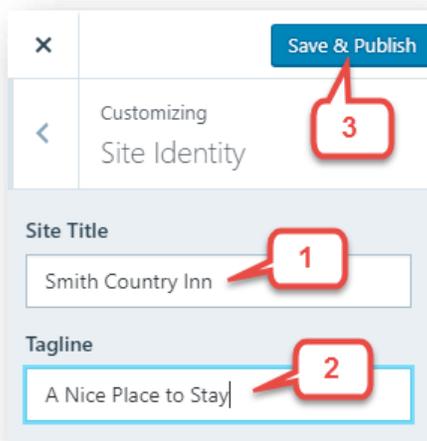
As you can see, your website now has a suitable title.

- Click the left arrow at the upper left to return to the **Customize** menu.
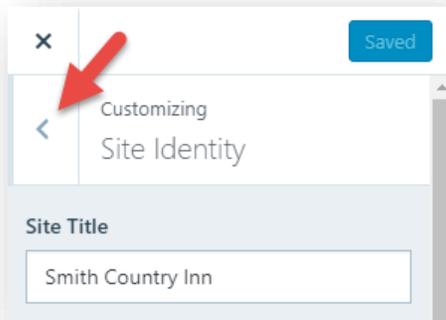
Download the Website Files

To make a decent website, we're going to need some good text and some nice pictures. If you don't have your own material, you can use mine. My files are designed to create a promotional site for a mythical Smith Country Inn, located in Anytown, USA. Go to http://techhelptoday.com/computer-training-file-menu/1-hour-website-class/your-first-website/ and download each of the files there. My favorite way to download is simply to right-click each filename and then choose to Save Link as …, which then lets you save the file in a suitable place on your computer.

You can keep these files in the Downloads folder, but best practice is to put them in in their own special folder. My suggestion is to create a folder called Websites in your Documents folder. Then, in that new folder, create another folder called Smith Inn. Finally, move all the website files from Downloads to the Smith Inn folder. As you create new websites, each should have its own folder in your Websites folder, making them easy to find and organize.

TIP: Pick Good Names for Your Web Files. When you are devising names for the files on your websites, take a little care in picking their names. If you use descriptive names, it could enhance your ranking in the search engines. Also, if you include codes, such as WP01, it will make it easier to find a file in the WordPress Media Library. As you may have noticed, I use the WP01 code to identify all files associated with this project, which makes it easy for me to find these files among the hundred other files on my own site. — RM
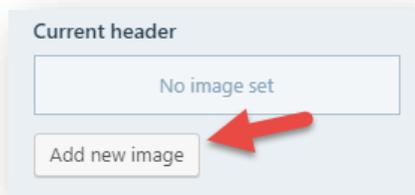
Add a Header Image

One of the files you downloaded will be perfect for our site's header image. A header image is a wide picture that appears near the top of a website. Although not required, a nice header image will attract attention to your site. Each WordPress theme has different requirements or suggestions of a header image. The theme that we have chosen by default, Twenty Sixteen, prefers a header image that is 1,200 pixels wide and 280 pixels high. Using a simple photo editor, you can crop and resize a photo to these dimensions. Fortunately, we have a photo already set up.
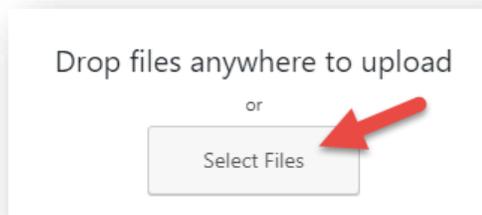
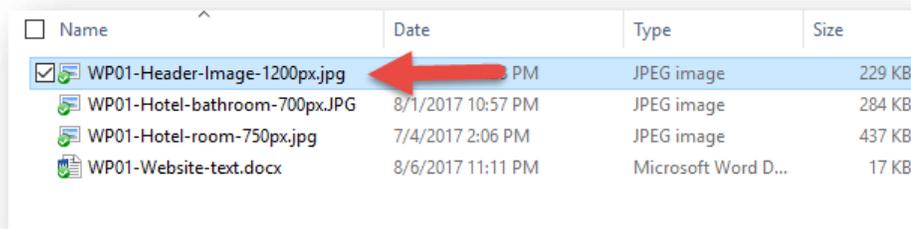- In the **Customizing** menu, click: **Header Image**

Site Identity	>
Colors & Backgrounds	>
Fonts	>
Header Image	>
Menus	>
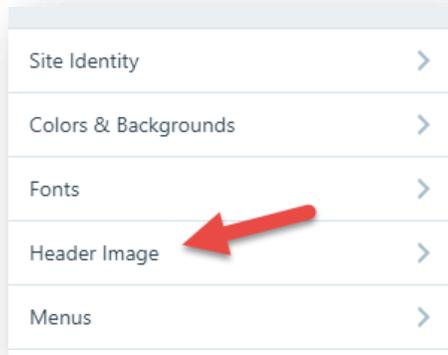
- Click the button: **Add new image**

Current header

No image set

Add new image

- Click the button: **Select Files**

Drop files anywhere to upload

or

Select Files

- Browse to the folder on your computer where you stored your files for the website.
- Double-click the file **WP01-Header-Image-1200px.jpg**

☐ Name	Date	Type	Size
☑ WP01-Header-Image-1200px.jpg	PM	JPEG image	229 KB
WP01-Hotel-bathroom-700px.JPG	8/1/2017 10:57 PM	JPEG image	284 KB
WP01-Hotel-room-750px.jpg	7/4/2017 2:06 PM	JPEG image	437 KB
WP01-Website-text.docx	8/6/2017 11:11 PM	Microsoft Word D...	17 KB

The image will now appear in your Media Library. Note that the image size is listed on the right panel as 1200 by 280 pixels. On the left panel, the suggested image dimensions is stated as 1200 by 280 pixels – a perfect match.

- At the lower right, click the button: **Select and Crop**
Because the image you uploaded into WordPress exactly matches the suggested dimensions, there is no need to crop the image.

- Click: **Skip cropping**
The header image now appears near the top of your website.

Save Your Work
- In the upper left, click: **Save & Publish**
- Return to the **Customizing** menu by clicking the left arrow
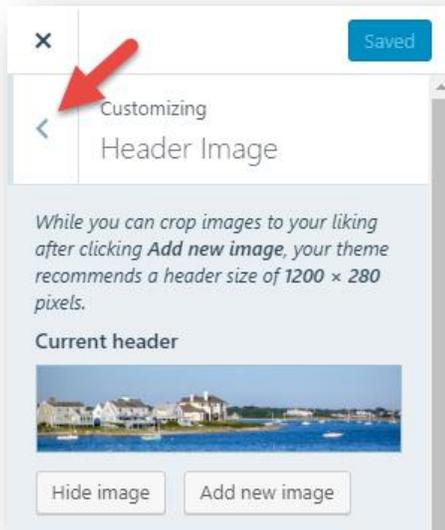
- To return to the main **My Site** menu, click the **X** button in the upper left corner.
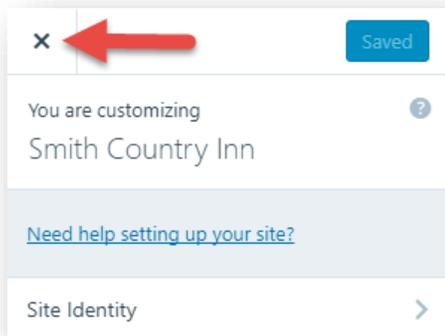
Edit the Blog Post
To give you an idea of what can be done with a blog, WordPress sets up your first blog for you. It looks nice, but you probably want to add your own text and pictures. So that's what we'll do. The first task is to get rid of the existing text and add our own.

- Click the **My Site** button in the upper left to access the My Site menu.
- Click: **Blog Posts**
  This lists all the blog posts in your site, and right now you only have one.

- Click the **Edit** button to edit the blog post.
  You are now in the Editing mode.

Edit the Title
- Click the title (First blog post)
- Use the **Backspace** and/or **Delete** keys to remove the default title.
- Type a new title: **Come to the Smith Country Inn**

Expand the Toolbar
Below the post title is a single row of tools you can use to edit the main text of the blog post. But there's also a second row of toys, er, tools you can use. Here is how to reveal it:

- Click the **Toggle Advanced** (**…**) button on the right side of the toolbar.
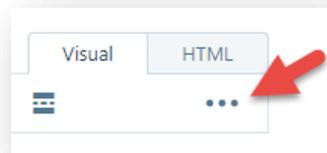
The second row of tools will appear, including the all-important Undo button.

Delete the existing text and picture
- Double-click the first word of the main text.
  Note that this selects the first word.

- Triple-click any word in the main text.
  Note that a triple click selects a whole paragraph.

- Press the **Delete** key to delete the text.
- Click the picture to select it.
  A small toolbar appears above the picture.

- Click the **Remove** button.
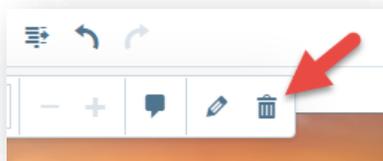
With the old text and picture gone, you can now start typing the new text.

Add the New Text
- Type: **We're waiting for you!**
- Press the space bar on the keyboard.
  We could type the rest of the text, but let's do it the easy way: It happens that we already have some excellent text all set to be copied and pasted.

- Using Windows Explorer or a similar program, browse to the folder where you place the files you downloaded for the website.
- Open the **WP01-Website-text.docx** file by double-clicking it.
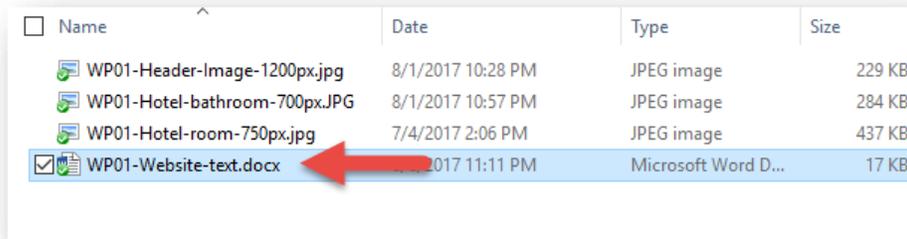
The file will open, usually in Microsoft Word.

- Select all of the text for the Home Page, including the three bullet points at the end but not the title at the beginning.
- Copy the text by pressing **Ctrl + C**
- Go back to your web browser and the WordPress site.
- Paste the copied text by pressing **Ctrl + V**
- If you make a mistake, click the **Undo** button and try again.
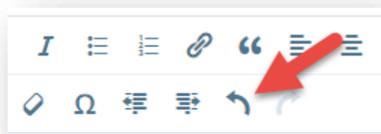
Does WordPress Have a Spelling Checker?

Speaking of mistakes, you might have noticed a spelling error in the last paragraph, the one right before the bullet points. WordPress does have a spell-check feature, but beware — sometimes it does not turn on right when you need it. Be patient. Eventually the spell-check will kick in and help you spell the word *luxurious* correctly. Then all you have to do is right-click the word that is underlined in red and then click the correct spelling. (Tip: Sometimes I purposefully misspell a word to be sure that the spell-checker is working.)

Add Pictures to the Website

Now that you spent all this time creating the text (all of maybe five minutes, but you get the idea), you want people to read it. After all, if nobody reads it, you have wasted your time. One of the best ways to get people to read something is to add pictures. For that reason, pictures are very important for any website. And, the better the pictures, the more they attract people to your website.

Professional pictures are available for fairly low cost from a number of stock photo websites. Also, with a good camera, Adobe software, and some training, you can create good pictures yourself. And although the temptation is great, one place NOT to get pictures is from someone else's website. Getting sued is not good for your reputation or your bank account.

In this project, I am using some pictures I took on vacation with a Pentax digital camera, a Canon G12 camera, and an iPhone. The photos were enhanced with the help of Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop. The pictures are available at the techhelptoday.com website on the WordPress training files page.

Once you download the pictures into your Webfiles folder, the rest is easy.

Add the First Picture

- Click at the start of the paragraph beginning **The inn currently**
- Click the **Insert content** button in the first row of the editing toolbar.
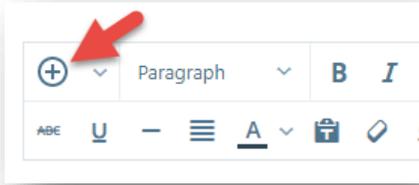
This opens the Media Library, which should have only one photo – the picture you used for the header image.

- Click: **Add New**
- If the **Select Files** button appears, click it.
  If needed, browse to the folder containing the files for the website.
- Double-click the file **Hotel room 750px.jpg**
- At the lower right, click the button: **Insert**
  The photo will appear in the blog post, but it is a bit too large.
- Click the photo to reveal the photo editing toolbar.
- Click the **Decrease size** (–) button.

The picture is now smaller, but there is too much wasted space to the right of the picture. We can easily wrap the text around the picture.

- Click the picture again to reveal the toolbar.
- Click the **Align right** button.

That was easy. Let's add another picture.

Add the Second Picture

- Click at the start of the paragraph that begins: **In addition to …**
- Click the **Insert content** button in the first row of the editing toolbar.
- Click: **Add New**

- If the **Select Files** button appears, click it.
  If needed, browse to the folder containing the files for the website.

- Double-click the file **Website-text.docx**
- At the lower right, click the button: **Insert**
- Click the photo to reveal the photo editing toolbar.
- Click the **Decrease size** (Minus) button.
- Click the picture again to reveal the toolbar.
- Click the **Align left** button.
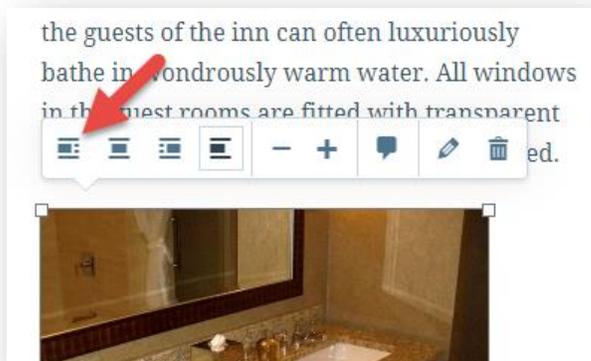
You now have two small pictures, one on the right, and one on the left.

Adjust the Blog Post Excerpt

The Twenty Sixteen theme that we are using displays an excerpt for each blog post. This excerpt appears right below the title. It may also appear when our site appears in Google listings, so we should use the excerpt to attract attention.

- On the right side of the editing window, click **More Options**
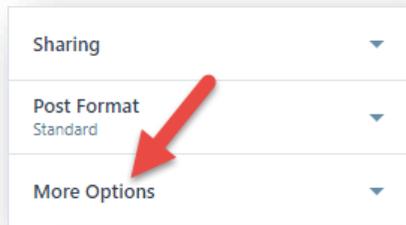
- Replace the text in the **Slug** box with **welcome**
  The slug is the name of the post that will appear in a web address or URL. Although few people will see it, we should change it to something meaningful for our web site.

- Replace the text in the **Excerpt** box with: **Our seaside inn is shore to please.**
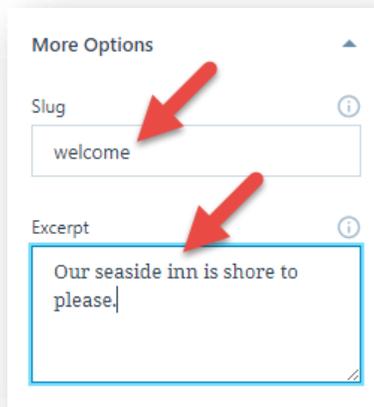
- Click the **More Options** button again to close it.
  The blog post is now done. Let's save our work and take a look at the site.

- In the upper right, click the **Update** button.
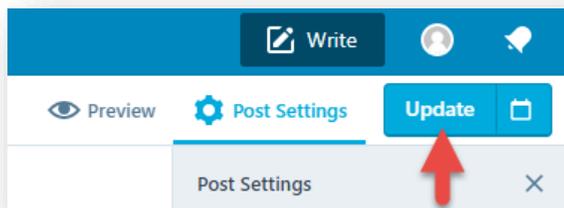
WordPress will now show a preview of our site. By default, we are first shown the site as viewed on a computer. But there are other views possible:

- At the upper left, click the view options button labeled **Desktop** and change the setting to **Tablet**.
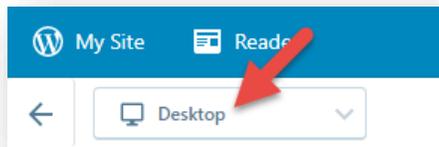
- Click the view options button now labeled Tablet and change it to **Phone**.
- Change the view back to **Desktop**.
  As you can see, WordPress automatically reformats the website so that it looks good on various devices. This happens because the theme we are using (Twenty Sixteen) is *responsive*. Choosing a responsive theme is important as websites are increasingly being accessed by mobile devices.

That's it. The website is essentially done. All that remains is to make some adjustments so that it looks more like a website than a blog.

Remove the Widgets

On the right side of your website you might have noticed a Text Widget and a Search box. These are examples of widgets, tiny apps that perform some type of service on your site. By default, WordPress included two widgets with your blog posts, but there are many more available. We'll take a look at them shortly.

Most of the widgets are intended for blogs, which is not surprising as WordPress was originally intended to create blogs. Sure enough, if you have a great many posts on your blog, the widgets will be indispensable in helping people find a particular post they need. But we are creating a simple website rather than a blog – we don't need any widgets. Also, because we want to finish this website as soon as possible, we'll save some time by simply deleting the widgets.

- Click **My Site** to show the My Site menu.
- Click the button **Customize** near the **Themes** button.
- Click: **Widgets**
  In our theme, Twenty Sixteen, there are three places for widgets to appear. (This is a fairly typical arrangement for widgets, but other themes may have widgets in different areas.) On this page, however, only one of these areas is visible. Let's delete the widgets from this area. We'll take care of the other areas later.

- Click: **Sidebar**

The left side of the window shows two widgets, **Text** and **Search**.
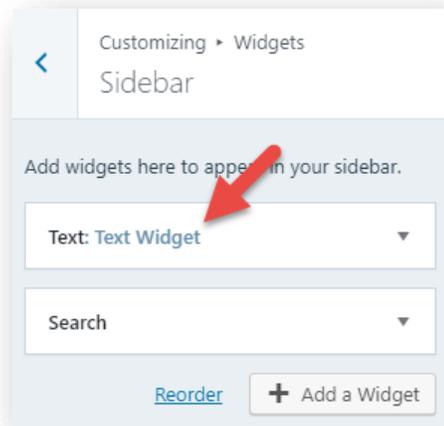
- Click the **Text** widget to expand it.
  A group of settings for the widget appears.
- Click: **Remove**
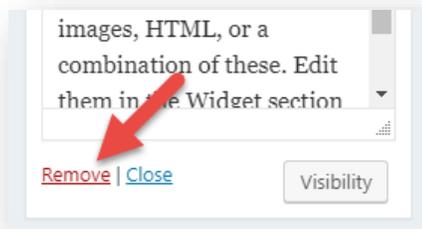
- Repeat the same for the **Search** widget.
- Click the **Add a Widget** button to see a list of widgets available. Note the large number and variety of the widgets available. But, again, our simple site does not need widgets.
- Click the left arrow in the upper left corner twice slowly to return to the Customizing menu.
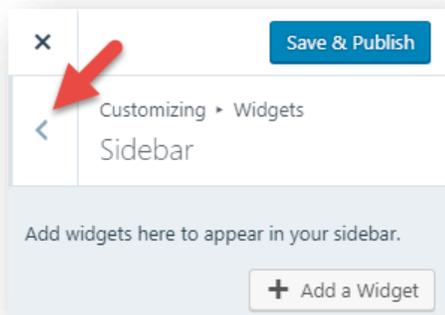
On the preview screen at the right, the widgets should be gone.

Remove the Menu

The widgets may be gone, but there is still a Menu button in the upper right. Menus are useful for navigating from one page to another, but because this simple site has only one page, a menu will be completely unnecessary. So, let's remove the menu for now. Later, when the site gets bigger, we can always add it back.
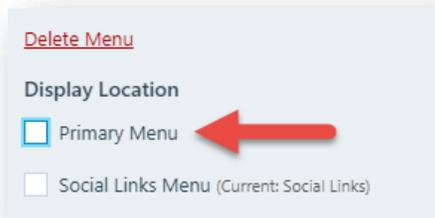
- In the Customizing menu, click **Menus**.
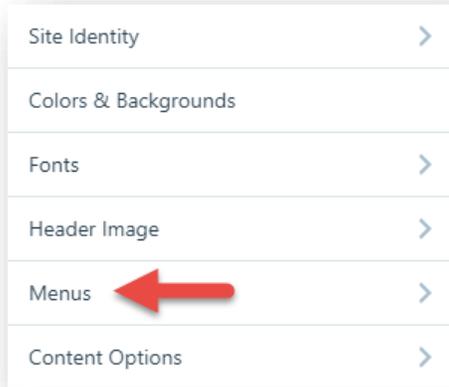

- Click **Primary** to access the primary menu location.
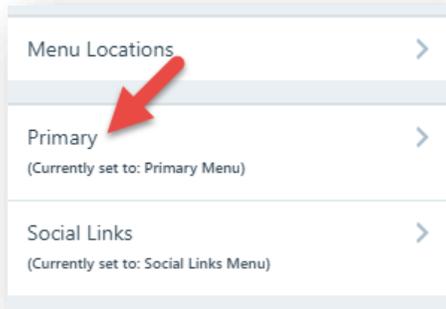
- Clear the check box for **Primary Menu**, which tells WordPress that the primary menu location for this site will not use the primary menu. (Later we can bring the menu back by just checking this box.)

- Click **Save & Publish** to save your work.
- Click **X** in the upper left to finish customizing the theme.
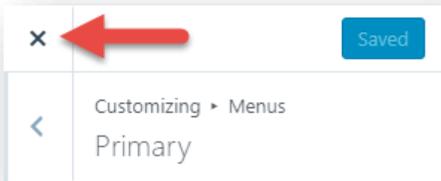
- In the **My Site** menu, click **Site Preview**
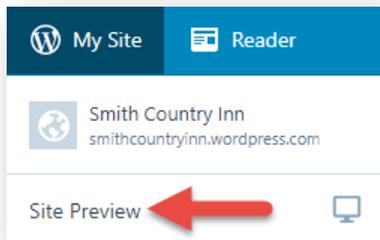
The site looks great, and we are just about finished. But there are two blog-related items that should be removed, which we will take care of right now.

Fine Tune the Site

Our goal was to produce a simple one-page site, which we have pretty much accomplished. We took a blog post and made it look like a web page. But because WordPress was originally designed to produce blogs, there are two minor blog items that we should eliminate.

The first is a date. If you have a series of blog posts, it could be important to see when each was posted. But we have only one post, which will be up for quite a while. A date will only make our site look prematurely out of date. So, let's remove it.

The second item is the footer at the bottom of our site. As you might have seen, it now says: Create a free website or blog at WordPress. Obviously, WordPress is offsetting the free cost of our site by putting a little of their advertising on it. That's a fair deal, and we can eliminate this by using a paid account. But we can also modify this advertising so that it is not quite so blatant.
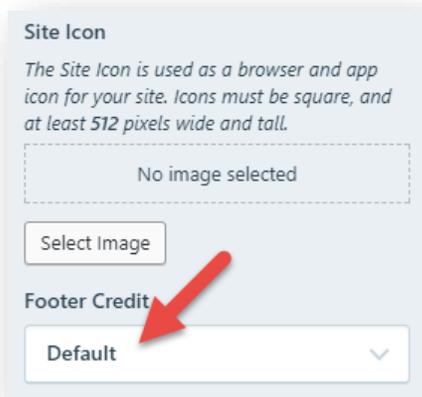
- Click the **Customize** button near the **Themes** button.
- Click: **Content Options**
- Clear all the check boxes under **Post Details**.
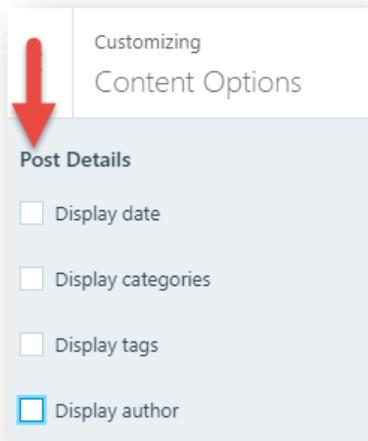
- Click the left arrow at the upper left to return to the Customizing menu.
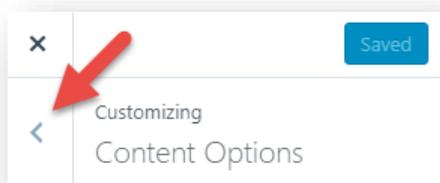
- Click: **Site Identity**
- At the bottom of the Site Identity menu, click the **Footer Credit** list box (which now displays **Default**).

- Choose an alternative footer of your liking. I prefer: **Powered by WordPress**
- Click: **Save & Publish**
- Click **X** to return to the **My Site** menu.
- In the My Site menu, click **Site Preview**

That's it! The simple site is finished. Relax and savor your work. (To see a live version of the site, go to smithcountryinn.wordpress.com)

Of course, a website is never really finished. As aspects of your business change, your website will need periodic updates. Also, as you become more familiar with the capabilities of WordPress, you will no doubt want to enhance your site with other features. We cover some of those in future How-To posts.

[End]