School of Information Community Site
Guide to WordPress

Background

One of the requirements for INFO200 is to publish a blog/website using WordPress. You were introduced to the basics in INFO203. WordPress is very popular open source website creation software which comes in many flavors. The School has created a student instance using https://ischoolblogs.sjsu.edu/info/ which you will be using for various classes at SJSU. This platform uses a suite of plugins called BuddyPress to create a community platform for all students across all sections of 203 and 200. At this site you'll create and post to your blog as well as utilizing the other social features as part of your blogging experience.

Why is the iSchool asking you to learn how to use WordPress? It has become ubiquitous on the web. According to http://w3techs.com/ , WordPress powers 23% of sites on the web, and 61% of those which have a content management system (CMS).   The percentage may be even higher in the library world, which relies heavily on open source software. As an information professional, chances are you are going to be asked to maintain and/or contribute to a WordPress site. Not only can you use a blog for your e-portfolio, but you can also add it to your LinkedIn profile.

WordPress Basics

The popularity and open source nature of WordPress means that it can be used for a wide variety of websites.   Here are the major components of a WordPress site:

> **Content**
>
> *Posts (your assignments)*
>
> *Comments (from your classmates and instructor)*
>
> *Media Library (images or other objects included in posts and pages)*
>
> *Pages (About, Writing, Presentations, etc.)*
>
> **Appearance**
>
> Theme
>
> Widgets

This YouTube video is a good description of the relationship of the different components, and conveys the enthusiasm of a WordPress developer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OBfr46Y0cQ . There are many, many tutorials available on the web and it's easy to get overwhelmed by the options. Just master the basics for this course, and focus on creating content.

Content Basics

When your blog is created, it includes some templates to demonstrate different features. You will need to configure the site to meet the requirements of your classes and also to reflect your voice. Use the left hand navigation within the Dashboard to go to the different sections of your blog/website.

Posts

Start at the top with Posts. You will see a template post with the title "Hello World." Remove this post by hovering over the title, and then clicking on the Trash option.   Now click **Add New** to create your first blog post to introduce yourself to the class. Get in the habit of creating interesting titles for your posts to attract readers.
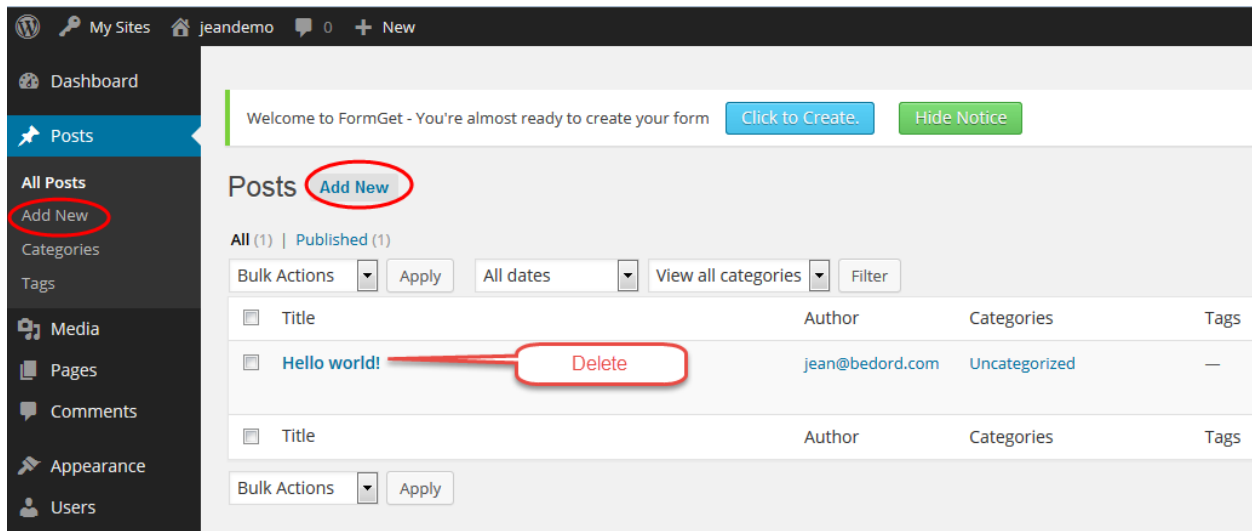
There are many tutorials on how to format postings in WordPress and then embed images and video. Either search YouTube or go to https://codex.wordpress.org/Posts for most information (the Codex is the "bible" for all things WordPress).

Categories also need to be added to your blog/website rather than leaving everything as "Uncategorized". Go to the categories on the left hand side. You need to add a meaningful categories., such as INFO200 or a similar category to identify class postings. If you use this for other purposes, add additional categories. There should be a limited number of categories for a blog. (This is similar to categorizing books as fiction, children, reference, etc.)

After creating the new category, go back to your first blog posting to change the category to INFO200. Then delete **Uncategorized** from this list. Otherwise, it remains the default setting .

Tags are not utilized in this class. They can be useful for large WordPress sites.

Media Library

This stores images that you will be using for your blog, i.e. a headshot for the About page, your own image for the header, images for blog posts, etc. Putting an image here allows reuse in multiple places on your blog. The media library is good for a limited number of images, not high volume.
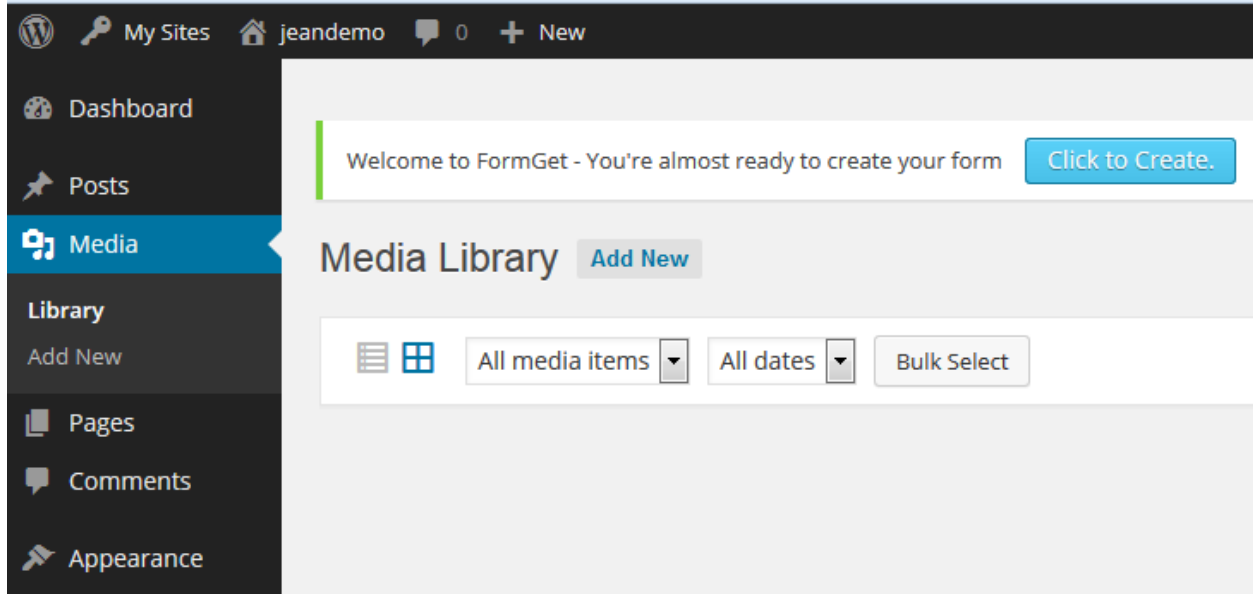
Pages

These are static webpages. Delete the Sample Page since this is just a template. Create a new page with a title of About or Bio or something similar. A page title should be short since it is displayed on the navigation bars. As you build out your blogging website, you can add additional pages for Presentations, Publications, Contact, etc.
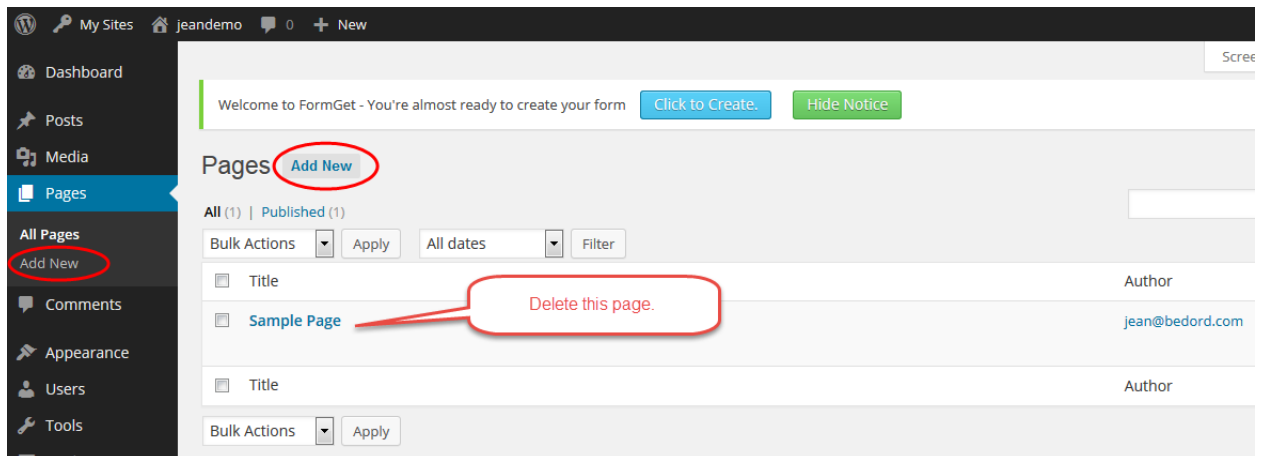
Comments

Interaction with readers of your blog is done through commenting. Initially, you need to manually accept comments. Subsequent comments by the same person should be automatically accepted, but this may not always work. Get in the habit of checking comments and responding to them.
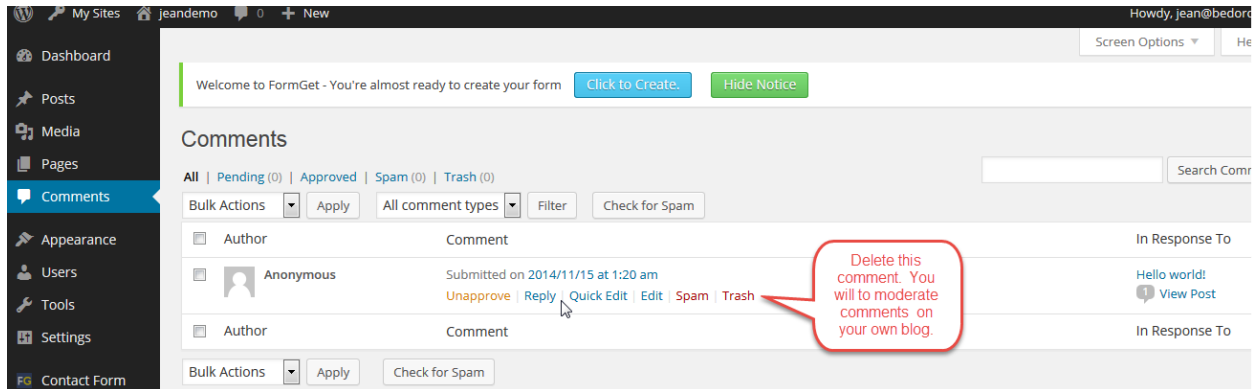
Appearance Basics

Themes

The appearance of your blog/website is controlled by a theme, which is independent of the actual content in the posts and pages. The popularity of WordPress is directly related to this feature.   You can change the appearance of your blog/website by simply changing themes. The changes in appearance are automatically applied to all webpages on your site.

For your classes, you need to choose and configure an appropriate "blogger-style" theme to establish a professional presence. Keep in mind there are literally thousands of themes available, both paid and free. Some themes are primarily static pages, i.e. a service business or a restaurant with a menu. Other themes are creative themes, showcasing images for an artist or photographer .

A blogger-style blog highlights the content you are creating, using a two column design. This is based on eye-tracking studies which show that webpages are read in an F pattern.   It's also the original style of the early blogs.

The left hand side of the webpage receives the most attention so that is where blog posts should be located. The right hand side is Recent Posts and Recent Comments, again highlighting the content. Here's how I've configured an School of Information WordPress site using a blogger-style theme. The theme has a light background which is more contemporary. The font is easy-to-read, though the color is a bit light. The header image doesn't overpower the blog content. There is a good amount of white space so the blog is easy to navigate.

The default theme for your blog is Twenty Fifteen. WordPress tends to release new default themes every year. The primary purpose is to highlight new features in the software. The Twenty Fifteen highlights photo galleries in grid or slider format, as well as multiple widget areas.   These features will not be used for your class blogs, so you need a different theme.

The School provides a selection of free themes, but there are different styles for different purposes. You can browse the themes and see how they would appear using your content using the *Live Preview* button on each theme.

 It's easier to visualize how the content will appear if you have at least two blog postings, and two comments, as well as your About page from the previous steps. Also, I would recommend that you

customize your Site Title and Tagline before browsing the themes. This allows you to pick a theme that has the Site Title placed so it is clearly readable in terms of font, color and placement since these are the first design elements a user encounters when reading your blog. Additional customization is dependent on the theme.
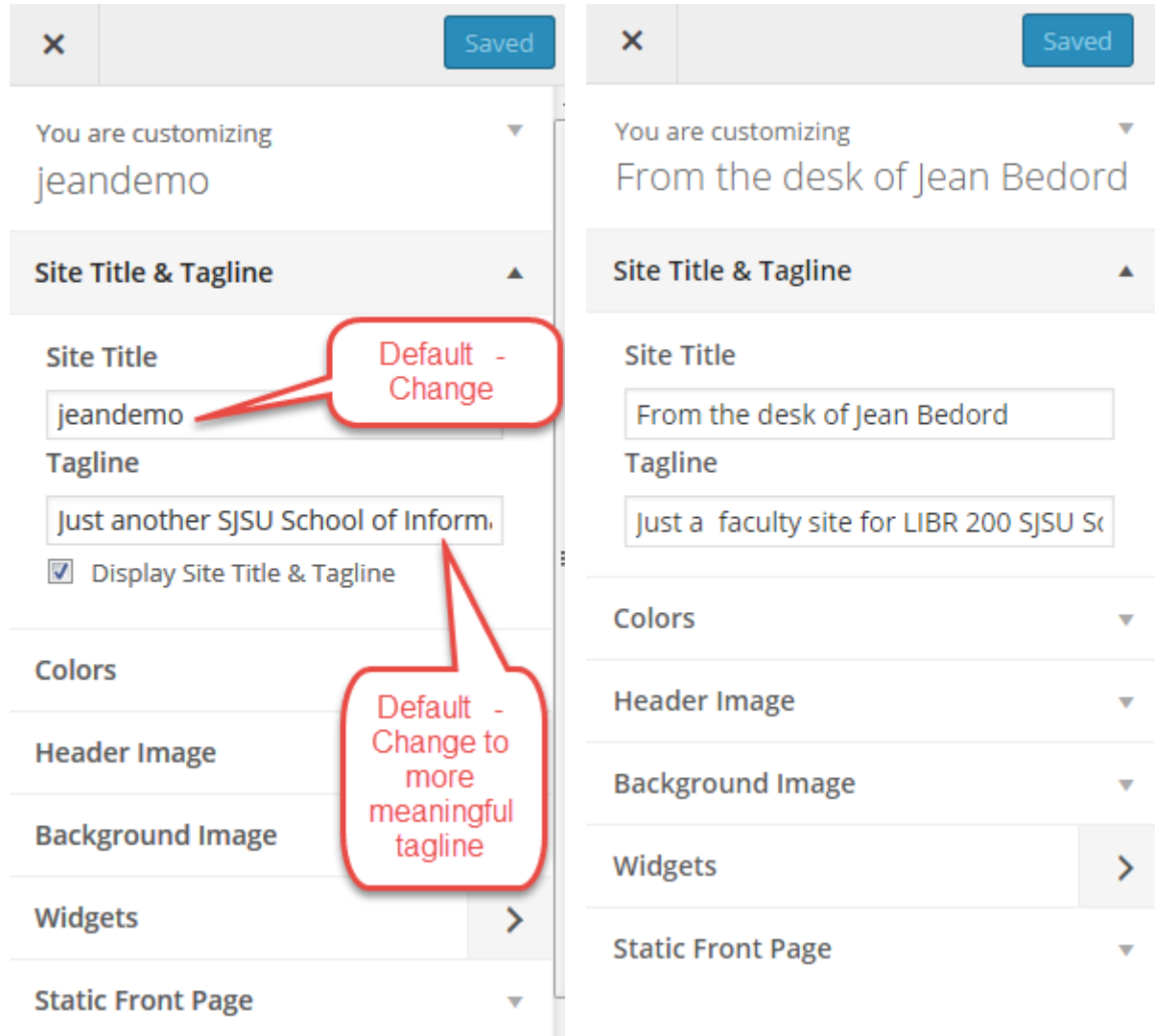
Here are some tips for reviewing themes:

> Thumbnails of the themes can be misleading.   Click through to Live Preview on any theme that has a two column format to see how your content would really look.

> Choose color and font first, since these are embedded in the theme. Light backgrounds and dark fonts are easier to read and look more contemporary.

> Notice whether the Site Title and Tagline are displayed.

The header image should provide a look-and-feel to the site, but not dominate the site title, tagline and content.

Some themes have a default image. Other themes have   multiple header images which can be viewed using the dropdown menu under Header Image so the look can be changed. Most themes allow you to add your own header image in the dimensions specified in the dropdown menu. This is a recommended practice for the long run.

Tip: If you see a blog you like, go to the bottom of the page. Often you can often see the name of the theme. You may also be able to find it by searching the HTML. However, many themes are highly customized.

Widgets

While the theme provides the overall look-and-feel for a website, widgets provide additional options for arranging the content on the left side, the right side, and bottom of the webpage. This can be done in two ways. The first is within the Theme itself. Notice the order of the elements for my faculty blog. These can be rearranged using drop-and-drag. Search is not important for this type of site, so I've moved it to the bottom and may make it inactive.
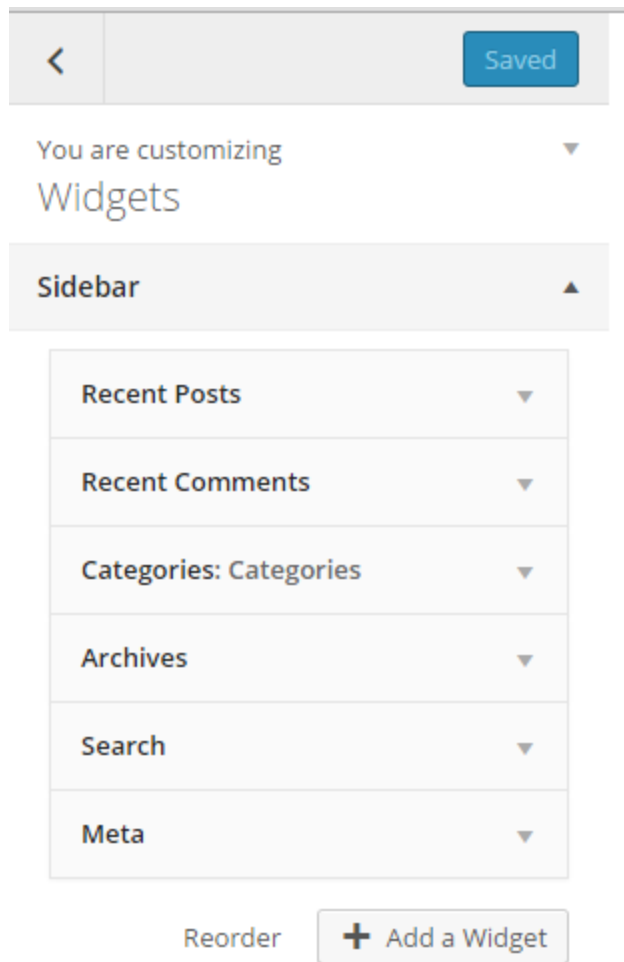
The second option for selecting options is Widgets under Appearance on the left hand navigation. The next screenshot shows the Widgets available with the current theme. Available widgets can be dragged to different areas of the theme. This can get complex! The objective for this class is straight-forward display of your content, not additional features.

Permalinks

On a WordPress site, each of your Posts and Pages exist on separate web pages.   WordPress generates the permanent URLs (permalinks) for those webpages automatically, using a Settings / Permalink structure. Go to the Settings/Permalinks navigation on the left hand side to choose an option.   I prefer the post name option since it is the shortest link that contains a version of the post title. This means that the permalink for the first blog posting looks something like this:
https://ischoolblogs.sjsu.edu/info/blog/2015/01/20/welcome/
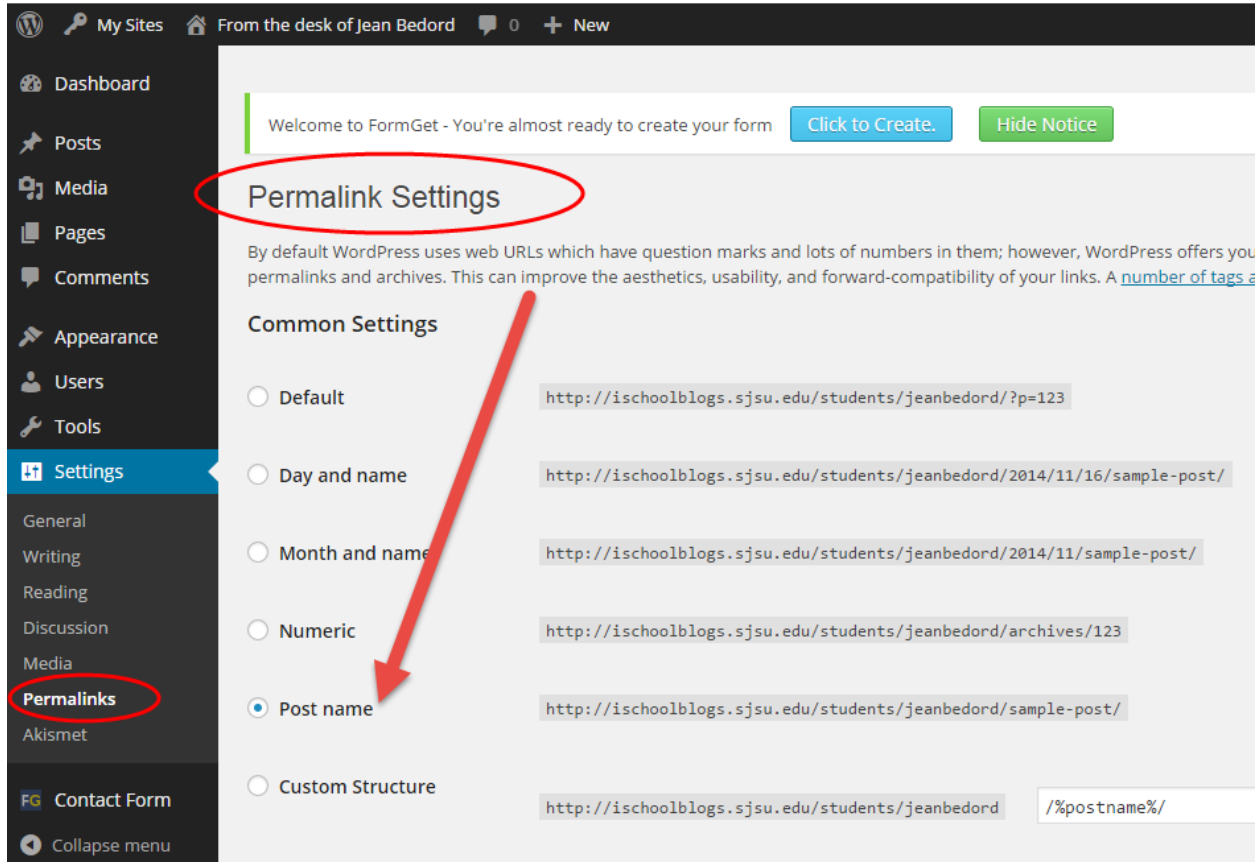
In contrast, the URL / domain for my entire blog/website looks like this: https://ischoolblogs.sjsu.edu/info/blog. This is also known as the homepage. It is the link that you would use for an e-portfolio or LinkedIn profile.

To submit a permalink, access the webpage outside the Dashboard or Editor. Click on the title of your post, then cut and past the complete URL.

There are many other options available for WordPress, so feel free to explore them as you get more familiar with the software platform.

Now that your WordPress blog/website is customized, focus on your posts. Enjoy your explorations!

Originally created by Jean Bedord, Fall 2014. Updated August 2015