CREATING A WORDPRESS BLOG

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook covers how to create a blog on hosted on WordPress.com, including setting up your account, creating the blog, posting to your blog, and editing posts. It does not cover setting up a WordPress blog with your own hosting company or installing it on your own server, but most of what is covered here is applicable to WordPress blogs not hosted on WordPress.com.

What is a Blog?

The term blog comes from the term "weblog," which is no longer used, and refers to a personal journal published on the internet. Blogs consist of individual posts which are typically displayed in reverse chronological order, with the most recent posts appearing first. Blogs tend to be created by a single person or a small group, and generally cover a specific subject area. Blogs can be used for commentary, promotion, or practically anything else one might talk about. Readers are almost always able to leave comments on blogs, allowing for further interaction and exchange of ideas.

The World of WordPress

The WordPress software itself is free, and available for anyone to download and install on their own servers. Many web hosting companies include WordPress as an option, allowing you to place a WordPress blog within your regular web site. The WordPress software is very powerful, and has uses beyond basic blog creation—many web sites now use WordPress as their main platform. The WordPress software is available at *http://www.WordPress.org*.

WordPress created the blog hosting service at *http://www.WordPress.com* to provide blogs to those who do not need a full web site, or to incorporate their blog into their web site. Blogs hosted here are free, and will occasionally contain advertising (but usually don't).

GETTING STARTED

Account Options

The regular WordPress.com blog is free. You can sign up for a domain name for your blog for an annual fee. There are other optional paid upgrades available, too.

Your Own Domain

The free WordPress.com blogs have an address like *http://example.WordPress.com/*. You can always register a .com, .org, .net, or .me domain for your blog. This way, your blog address can instead be *http://example.com/*, a little more professional and easier to remember and share. A .com, .org, or .net domain costs $18.00 per domain per year; a .me domain costs $25 per year. If you already have a domain registered and want to use it for your WordPress.com blog, that costs an extra $13 per year.

Other Upgrades

- Custom Design

  Rather than relying on a set of themes available to all users, you can customize the look of your blog. This upgrade costs $30 per year.

- Premium Themes

  Gives you more options for site customization and exclusive designs. Each premium theme is purchased individually.

- No-ads

  While ads on WordPress.com blogs are not very common, purchasing the no-ads upgrade for $30 per year makes sure none appear on your blog.

- Space Upgrade

  Increase the storage space for your blog and its associated images and audio. This is available in tiers of 10 GB, 25 GB, 50 GB, 100 GB, and 200 GB. The free account includes 3 GB of storage.

- VideoPress

  This upgrade allows you to upload and embed your own videos directly within your blog posts and pages. It makes things a bit simpler and more seamless than inserting videos from YouTube. It costs $60 per year.

There is a $99 per year "Value Bundle" that includes domain name and mapping, a space upgrade, no ads, custom blog design, and VideoPress.

Starting Your Blog

For New Users

Signing up for your first WordPress blog is easy. Just go to *http://wordpress.com/* and click "Get started here."
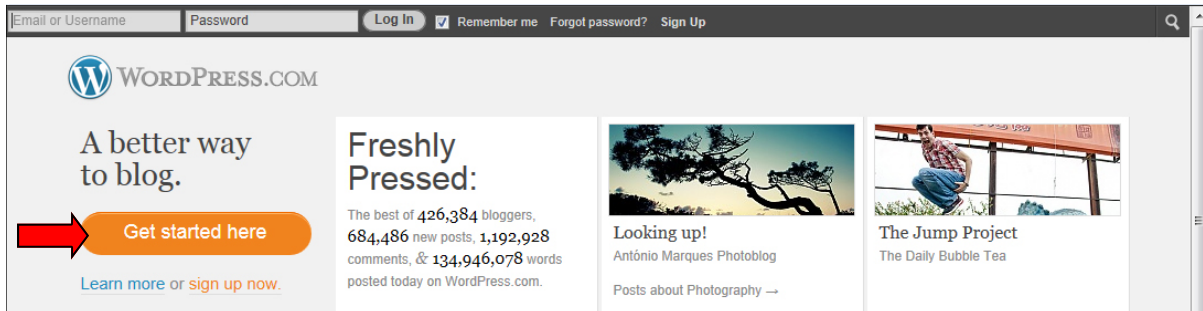

Fill out the form below, choosing an address for your blog, a username and password, and entering your email address. You'll be given the option of purchasing an upgrade package at this point, but if you don't want to upgrade, just click "Create Blog" at the bottom of the page after agreeing to the terms and conditions.
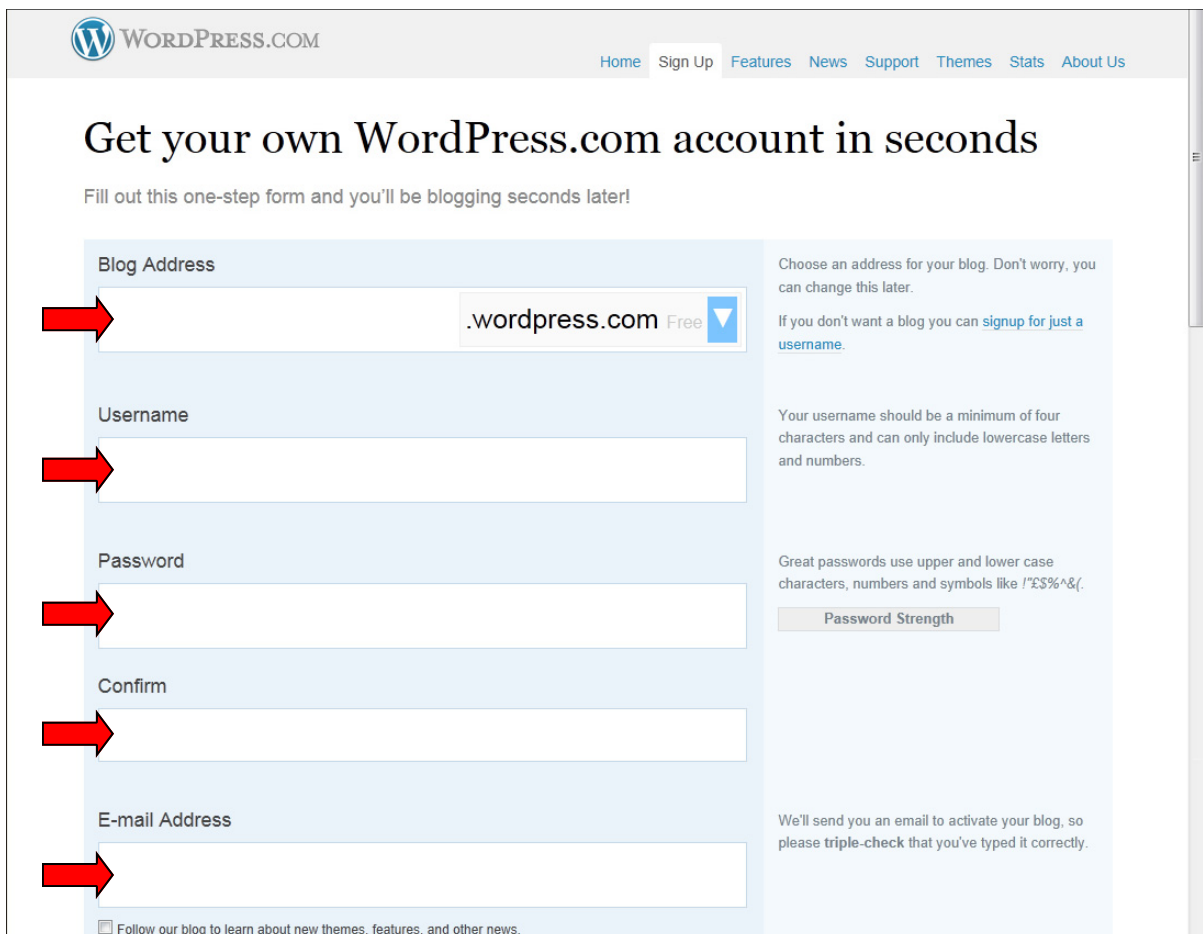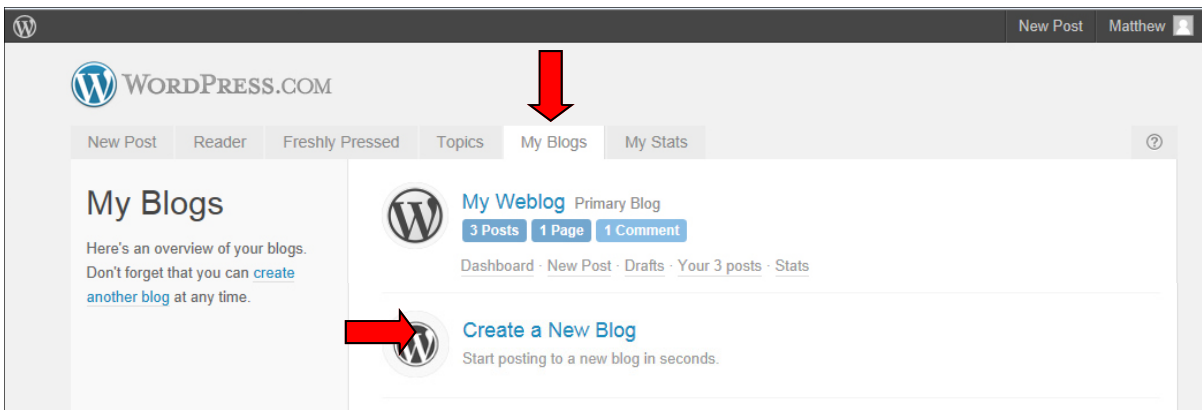
For Existing Users

If you've already signed up for a WordPress.com username in the past, log in at the top of the page at *http://wordpress.com/* with your username and password.
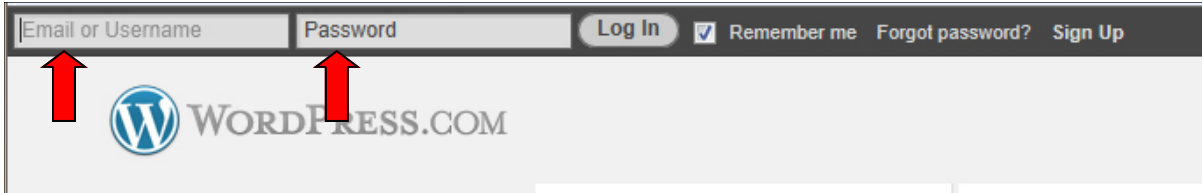
Once logged in, select the "My Blogs" tab, which lists any blogs you're already created, and then click "Create a New Blog".

You'll then be prompted to create an address and a name for your new blog.

Blog Name and Address

In both cases, you'll be prompted for a blog address (the URL where your blog can be found) and a name (the title that appears at the top of your blog). Both can be changed later, but it's worth thinking now about what you want it to be.

You will also be asked about the privacy settings for your new blog. You can choose to make it "viewable by everyone" (allowing it to appear in Google search results and public listings on WordPress.com), "viewable by everyone, but to block search engines" (allowing anyone with the URL to visit it, but keeping it out of internet searches like Google), and "private" (letting you choose exactly who can view your blog—but they must have an account at WordPress.com in order to do so).

CREATING YOUR BLOG

The Dashboard

When you create a new blog, you will automatically be taken to the dashboard, which allows you to manage almost all aspects of your blog. You can get to each blog's dashboard from the "My Blogs" section of WordPress.com or from the dropdown menu at the top of your blog (as long as you're logged in).

The main dashboard page contains several modules that allow for quick access to information or publishing tools. "Right Now" is a quick look at your blog, listing the number of blog posts, pages, categories, tags, and comments. "Quick Press" lets you post a simple blog post directly from the dashboard, while "Recent Drafts" lets you edit and post drafts. "Recent Comments" should comments recently posted to your blog. "Stats" gives you a quick overview of the recent visits to your blog. "Your Stuff" shows your recent activity—not just on this blog, but on all your blogs.
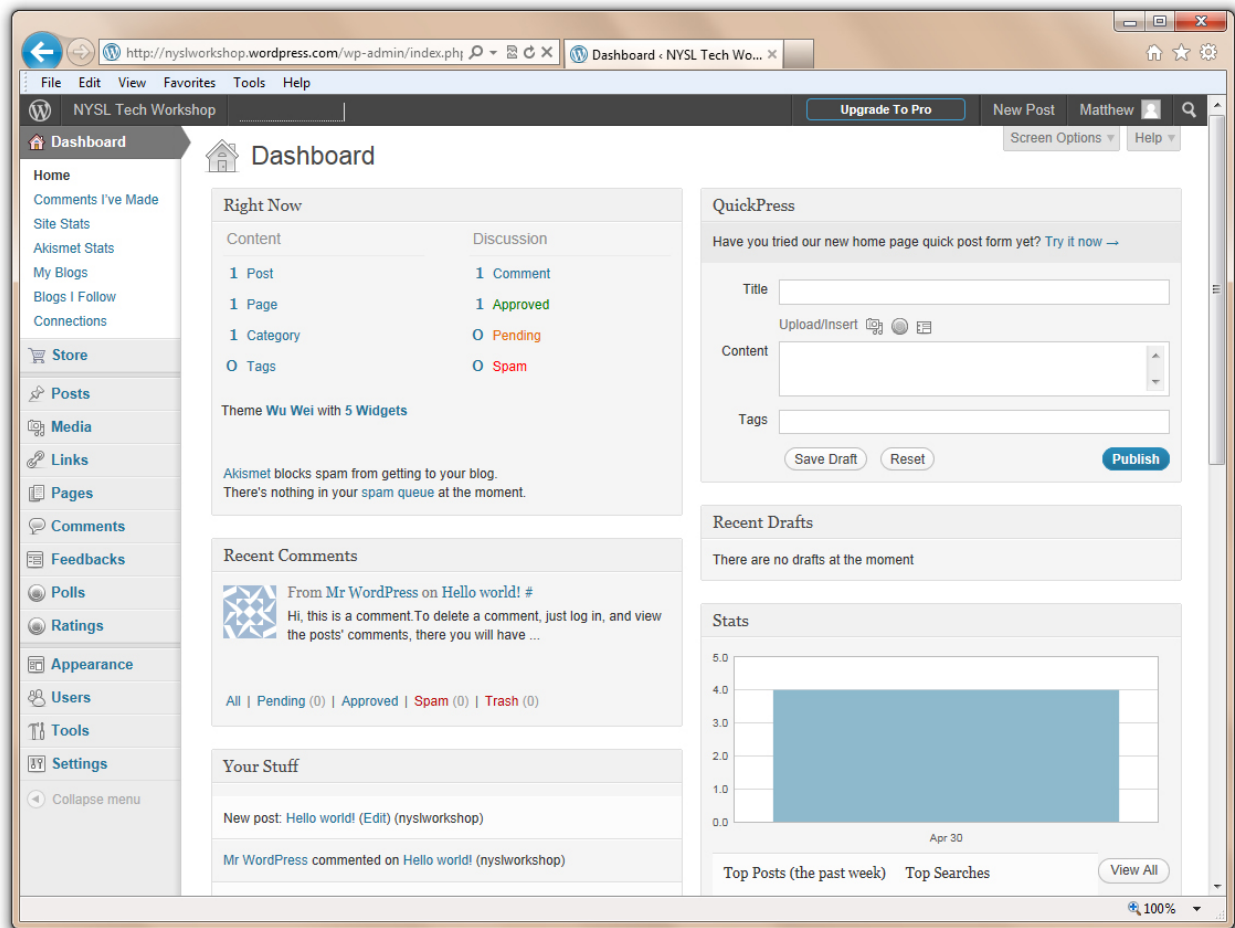
The Dashboard (continued)

The menus on the left side of the dashboard allow you to go into further detail with the information and options on the main page and to change the look of your blog. A few of the most important menu options are explained below. Some of these features will be discussed in more detail later in the handbook.

Dashboard Menu
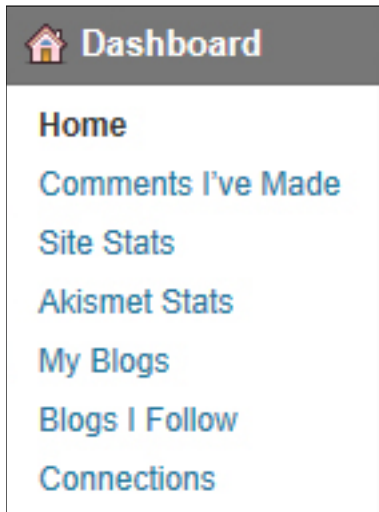
The main dashboard menu has a link to the main dashboard page. "Comments I've Made" lists and helps you keep track of comments you've made—not just on this blog, but on all WordPress.com blogs. "Site Stats" gives you detailed information on who's visiting your blog, and will be covered in depth on page 18. Statistics will soon only be available on your WordPress.com home page, and not the individual dashboards for each blog. "Akismet Stats" show statistics for the spam filtering of comments built into WordPress. "My Blogs" lists all your blogs, allowing you to edit the settings of multiple blogs simultaneously. "Blogs I Follow" allows to you manage your settings for blogs you follow, and "Connections" shows any external applications you've authorized to access your WordPress account.

Other Menus
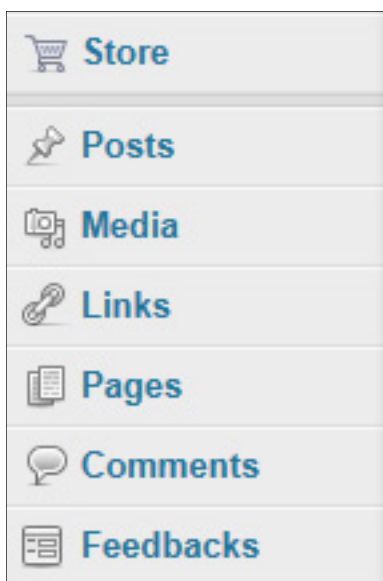
The "Store" menu allows you to manage your upgrades and domains, as well as purchase premium themes. "Posts" shows you all your posts to this blog and lets you create a new blog post, copy an existing post, and create and manage categories and tags. Blog posts are covered on page 8. "Media" lets you manage images, documents, and sound files you have uploaded to WordPress.com. "Links" is the list of links that will be included in your blogroll, should you choose to use that widget. "Pages" allows you to create and edit static pages on your blog; these will be covered on page 11. "Comments" shows all your blog comments, and is where you will approve comments if you've chosen to require approval before comments appear. "Feedbacks" is where messages sent to you via your blog's comment form will appear.

Other Menus (continued)
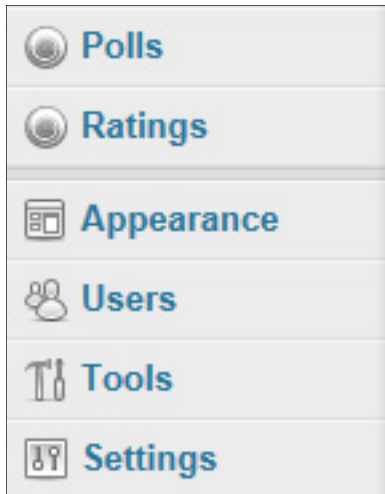
"Polls" allow you to create polls with the WordPress sister site Polldaddy.com, and insert them into your blog. "Ratings" lets you manage whether you want users to be able to rate blog posts and comments. "Appearance" is covered in detail in the "Making it Look Right" section of this handbook, starting on page 14. This is where you can choose themes, change the header, and choose widgets for your blog. "Users" lets you add additional users who will be allowed to add posts to your blog. "Tools" has a few different tools that you might find useful, the big ones being import and export tools for your blog. "Settings" allows you to set many options for your blog. Included here are the blog name, tagline, time and date format, the number of blog posts to show on a page, and comment settings.

Creating and Editing Posts

Creating a New Post

You can create a new blog post through the dashboard, or in the "My Blogs" section of WordPress.com (as long as you're logged in). Just click on "New Post" and you'll be taken to the "Add New Post" screen.

Give your post a title, at the top of the page, then write your post in the box below. You can make text bold or italic, insert bulleted or numbered lists, change the alignment of the text, create links, and check the spelling of your text with the buttons above the body text box. You can also select the "HTML" tag to view and edit the HTML code for more control over how your post will look. Hover over any of these buttons for a second and a tool-tip will display telling you what it does.
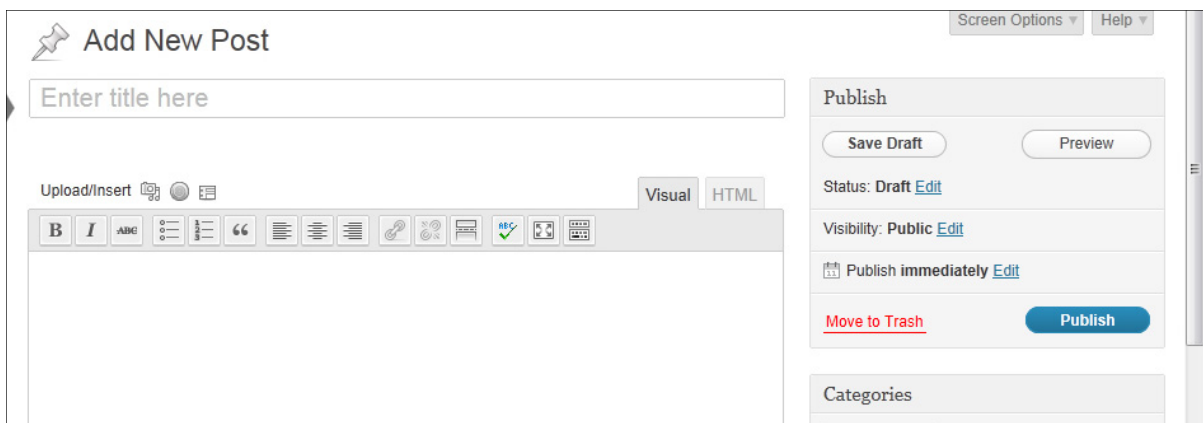
Additional Editing Tools

For more options with the body of your blog post, click the "Show/Hide Kitchen Sink" icon above the text box. This will bring up additional text options, including a style dropdown menu (letting you choose paragraph text or different sized headings), underline, font color, custom characters, indentation, and undo and redo tools.

Inserting Images

Click the "Add Media" icon above the text tools menu, next to where it says "Upload/Insert." A window will pop up allowing you to insert images (and other documents like .doc, .pdf, .xls, etc.). Choose your image file, and then create a title, alternate text, caption, alignment, and size.

Creating a Custom URL for Your Post

Once you've saved a draft of your post, you will be able to change the URL of this specific blog post. This way, you can create an address that makes more sense if you plan to share the link to this post rather than your blog as a whole. Click the "edit" button next to the permalink that appears below the title of the blog post, and enter the desired file name for the post.

Enter title here

Permalink: http://nyslworkshop.wordpress.com/2012/04/30/6/ (Edit)

Adding Categories and Tags

Categories and tags will be discussed on page 12. For now, just know that you can add either of these—or a combination of both—to your blog post while you're writing it. Use the menus on the right to select or create categories, or to add tags.

Publishing Tools

The publishing tools on the right of the window give you some options of how and when to publish your blog post. You should save your draft periodically while writing. "Preview" shows you what your blog post will look like once published. You can choose to make your blog post private or password-protected. You can also choose to publish your blog post at a specified later date and time. This way you can create a series of posts before travelling, but have them posted with the same frequency with which you usually update your blog. The big "Publish" button, of course, publishes your blog post, making it publicly visible.

Publish

(Save Draft)   (Preview)

Status: **Draft** Edit

Visibility: **Public** Edit

📅 Publish **immediately** Edit

Move to Trash   **Publish**

Editing Drafts and Posts

In addition to editing drafts, you can edit posts that have already been published. Both drafts and published posts are listed in the "All Posts" menu link in the dashboard, and you can edit either by clicking on the "Edit" link that appears when you move the mouse pointer over it. This brings up the same window you were previously using to create a new blog post. If editing a draft, the publishing tools remain the same as they were for a new blog post. If editing an already published blog post, the publishing tools are mostly the same but don't allow you to save a draft. Instead of clicking "Publish," you would now click "Update" to confirm your edit.

Creating and Editing Pages

Pages are static web pages that are part of your WordPress.com blog. They are linked to from each page and post of your blog, and are best used for more timeless information that you want to make readily available. By default, a new blog includes an "About" page. A page with contact information is also often a good idea.

In the dashboard, just click on "Add New" under the "Pages" menu and you'll be taken to the "Add New Page" screen. Give your page a title, at the top of the page, then create the content of your page in the box below. The same tools that are used in creating blog posts are available for pages, with the same publishing tools. Because pages aren't blog posts, you cannot assign categories or tags to them.

Page attributes give you two options in how the page is accessed, and can be customized using the "Page Attributes" tools on the right of the window. You create a hierarchy of pages, choosing a parent for your new page from the drop-down menu. This affects the navigation links in your blog, showing the new page as subsidiary to whichever page you choose as the parent. You can change the order in which the links to all your pages appears on your blog by changing the "Order" number of each page.

Editing pages is done much the same way as editing blog posts. Both drafts and published pages are listed in the "All Pages" menu link in the dashboard, and you can edit either by clicking on the "Edit" link that appears when you move the mouse pointer over it. This brings up the same window you were previously using to create a new page.

Categories and Tags

Categories allow for a broad grouping of post topics, and can be created with a hierarchy. Tags are useful for describing a post in more specific terms. You might decide to use just one or the other. The example below is from the WordPress.com support web site.

Adding Categories and Tags

These two menus on the right of the "Add New Post" and "Edit Post" windows allow you to add categories and tags to the post you're working on. The "Categories" list includes all categories you've created, showing their hierarchy. To assign any of these categories to your post (and you can assign as many as you'd like), just click in the check box next to them. If you wish to create a new category, click the "Add New Category" link, call it whatever you'd like, and select a parent category if you'd like it to appear in a hierarchy under any existing category. Then just click the "Add New Category" button and select it for your blog post.

Tags are simpler. Just enter the text of each tag you would like to assign to your post, separated by commas, and click "Add". You can still add additional tags later, and remove unwanted tags by clicking the "X" to the left of the tag in the tag list. You can also click on "Choose from the most used tags" to do just that.

Managing Categories and Tags

The "Categories" and "Tags" menu options in the dashboard, found under "Posts" on the left, allow you to create and manage them. While the basics can be done from the blog editor, there are advanced options that can only be changed here. Descriptions can be added for each category and tag, and are displayed in some themes. You can also delete multiple categories and tags using the lists on the right of the window.

MAKING IT LOOK RIGHT

Although there are premium themes and customization options that require a fee, there are plenty of free themes and options. The most significant ways to customize the appearance of your blog are discussed here.

Themes

WordPress.com currently offers over 100 free themes. In the dashboard, click on "Appearance" on the left to bring up the list of themes available to you. The list includes premium themes, but they are clearly labeled as such. Your current theme is featured at the top of the page. You can customize the header and background by clicking the buttons here or by choosing those options in the "Appearance" dashboard menu on the left.
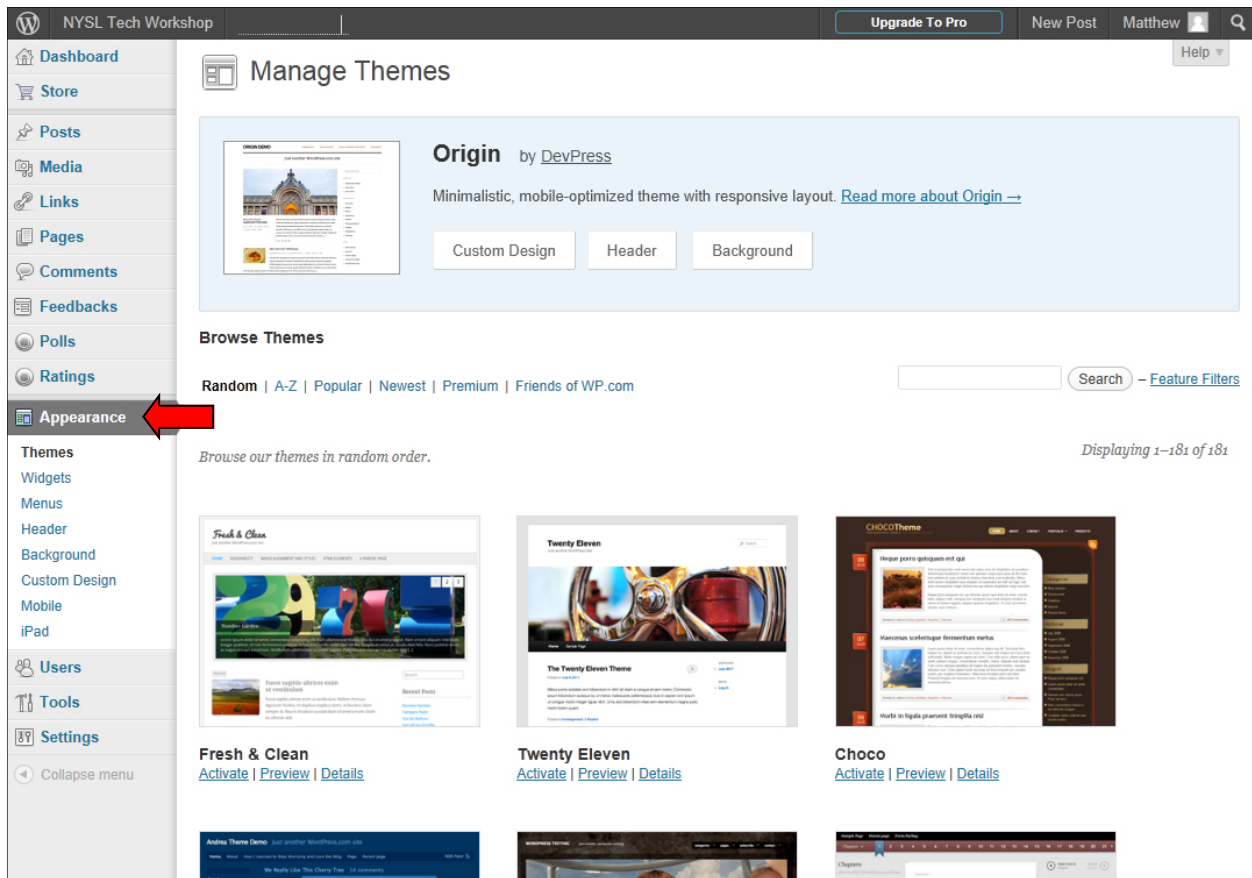
Header

Most themes allow you some ability to customize the header with a header image. This can be just a photograph, with WordPress placing your blog title over it, or you can create a custom image using software like Photoshop that incorporates multiple images and text.

The size of the image needed for your header varies depending on the theme you have chosen. Sometimes a height and width is specified, and sometimes just a width (if the height of the header is not set in the theme and will be determined by the image you use). The requirements for the header image can be found on the "Custom Header" page. In the case of the theme used below, the image should be at least 940 pixels wide, with suggested dimensions of 940x150 pixels. Going with the suggested dimensions will look best, and be most compatible across different web browsers.
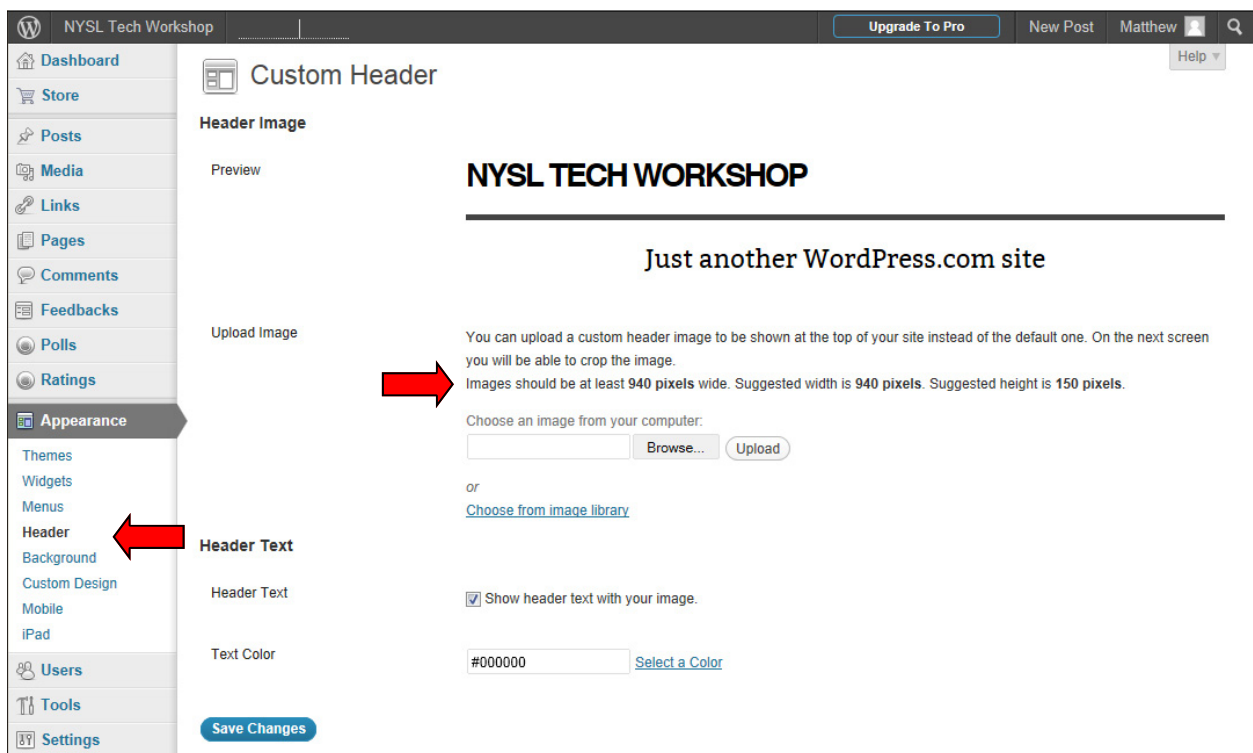

Create or edit an image in your image-editing software (like Photoshop, GIMP, or Paint) that matches the recommended dimensions and save it. Then, in the "Custom Header" portion of the WordPress.com dashboard, click "Browse…" under "Choose and image from your computer," select the image file you created, and click "Upload." You will then be able to crop the image, which will be necessary if the image file you chose is larger than required. If you are uploading an image with the correct dimensions, just leave the defaults as is and click "Crop and Publish".

If your header image includes header text, deselect the "Show header text with your image" text box—otherwise your blog will have two titles. Save the changes, and you will be able to view the new look of your blog.

Background

You can choose your own background image or background color for your blog. These settings are accessed from the "Background" link under the "Appearance" menu on the left of the dashboard. To set a background color, just click "Select a Color," and choose the color you want from the color wheel. To set a background image, browse to an image on your computer and upload it, or you can choose an image that has already been uploaded to your WordPress.com library.
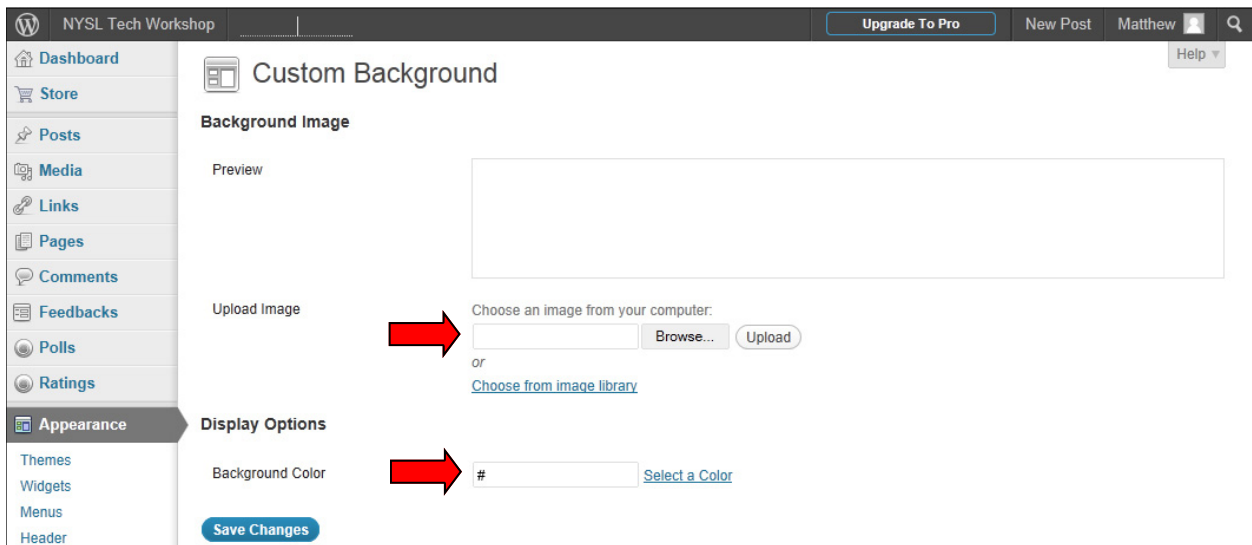
Once you have uploaded your image, you can choose how you would like it to be displayed. You are given options for position (left, center, or right), whether to repeat it (horizontally, vertically, or both), and whether the background image should scroll with the page or remain fixed. Play with these options to see what they do in the preview.
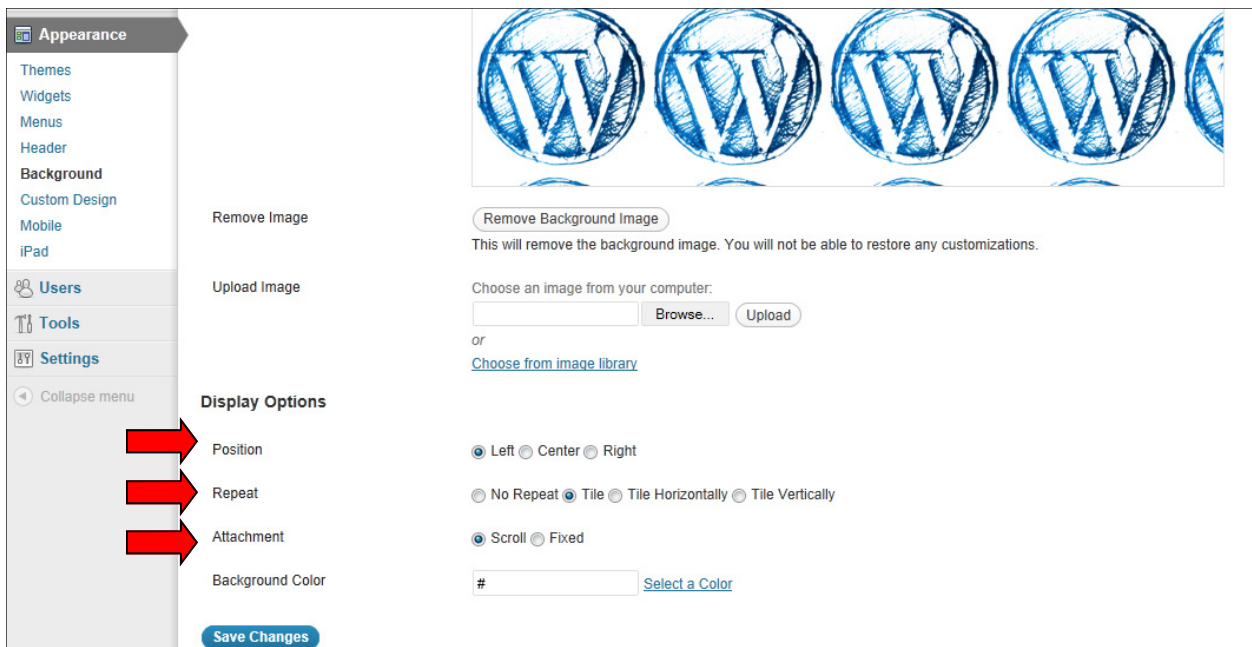
Widgets

Widgets are extra applications that you can incorporate into your blog. Depending on the theme, these can be placed on a sidebar or in the footer. Some of the more useful widgets are discussed below, but be sure to look at the whole list of widgets to see what will be useful to you. Available widgets can be viewed by clicking "Appearance," then "Widgets" on the menu on the left of the dashboard. To add one to your blog, drag it to the location you want it in on the right.

Category Cloud and Tag Cloud

Lists all the categories or tags used in your blog, with the more frequently used categories and tags appearing in a larger font size. This is useful both to show what categories your blog deals with, and for viewers to find blog posts on a particular topic.

Categories

A drop-down or list of categories used in your blog. These can be arranged to show the hierarchy of your categories.

Archives

A monthly archive of your blog posts. This is a great way to include a browsable history of all your posts.

Images

Allows to you insert an image in your sidebar or footer.

Links

Displays your blogroll—the list of links found on the dashboard—on your blog sidebar or footer. This is a good area to promote others' blogs or web sites you might recommend.

Search

Displays a search form that allows visitors to search the content of your blog.

Text

Displays any text you might want to appear in your sidebar or footer. You might use this to write a basic "about me" section, for example.

MAINTAINING YOUR BLOG

Creating your blog is just the first step. In order to keep people coming back, you need to update and maintain your blog. Continue to post frequently—people stop visiting blogs that don't have new content added regularly. You can use the WordPress statistics tools to track visitors to your blog, and can use this information to inform the type of content you post and the frequency with which you do so. Publicizing your blog is important for building your readership. Perhaps most importantly, you must stay on top of comments—approving them, deleting spam, and responding to them.

Statistics

Your statistics can be viewed from WordPress.com under the "My Stats" tab; just be sure to select which of your blogs you want to view the statistics for. For now, they can also be accessed from the dashboard, but this access will soon be discontinued.

At the top is your "At A Glance," showing viewers by day, week, or month. Below that lists views by country, showing where your viewers are. "Top Posts & Pages" shows which posts and pages are the most popular, and can be useful for tracking trends.
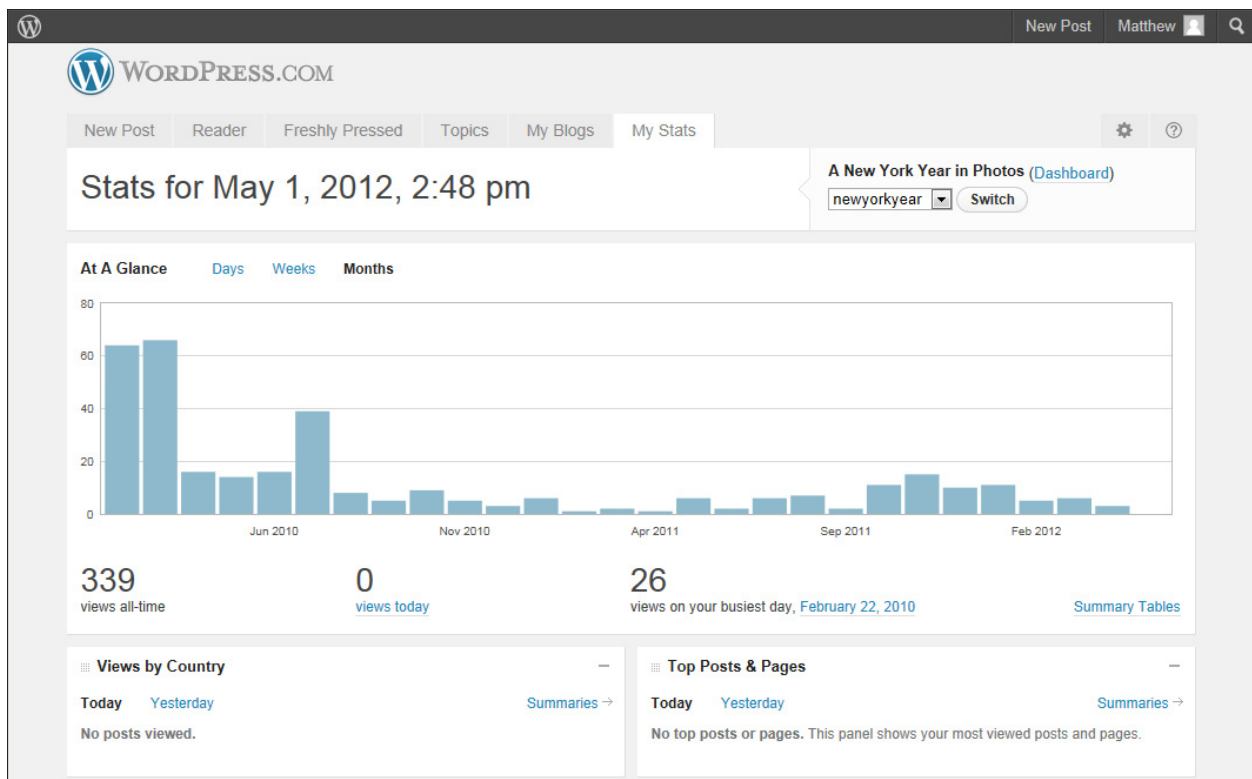
Statistics (continued)

"Referrers" shows where viewers came to your blog from, and "Clicks" shows where they headed next. "Search Engine Terms" shows the keyword searches that viewers entered that brought them to your blog. "Tags & Categories" shows the most popular topics you've written about, and is based on the tags and categories associated with blog posts that have received the most views. The last list at the bottom, "Totals, Followers & Shares" shows your total viewership and the number of people following your blog.
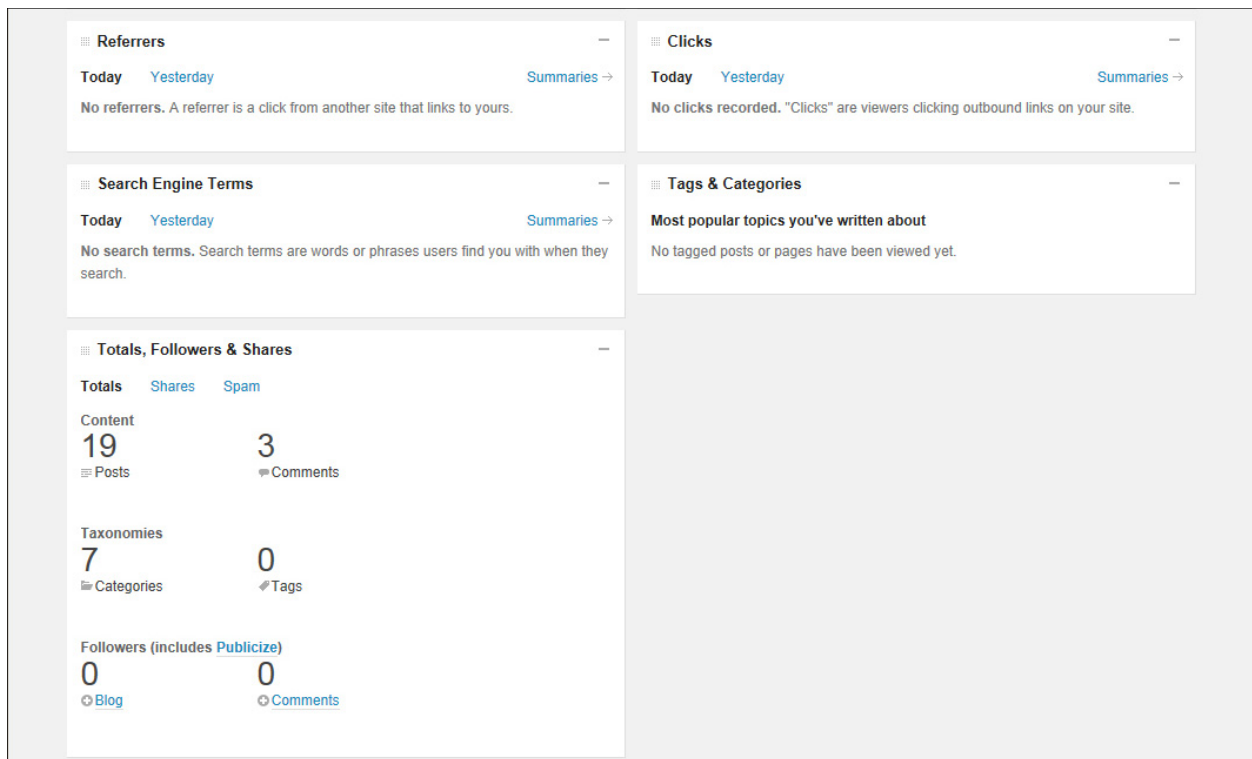
Publicizing Your Blog

Publicizing your blog is absolutely necessary to grow your readership. You can't expect or rely on people finding your blog via a Google search on the topic. Here are a few hints on how and where to advertize your blog.

- Link to your blog from your main web site.
- Put your blog URL in your email signature.
- Be an active commenter on other blogs, letting others find you and in turn your blog.
- Share your blog posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Google+.
- Bug your real-life friends to read and promote your blog.
- Blog often, to retain readers and keep them coming back for more.

Comments

Comments are probably the easiest way to interact with viewers of your blog. They'll be your primary form of direct feedback, and a good comment relationship can go a long way to establishing and maintaining trust. Comments can be managed in the "Comments" section of the dashboard. By default, all comments for your blog are listed in chronological order. You can reply to any comment by hovering over the comment with the cursor, then clicking "Reply" in the links that appear. Your reply will be publicly posted to your blog in the comments section where the original comment appeared.

Depending on your blog settings, you may have to approve comments, either made by everyone or just by people who have not yet had a comment approved. You can do this within the list of all comments, but it may be easier to isolate those that are pending approval. Do this by clicking "Pending" above the list of comments to only display comments that are awaiting your approval.

You can delete a comment or mark it as spam by hovering over it in the list, and clicking "Trash" or "Spam" in the links that appear. Be careful, though: deleting comments that are critical of you or your blog is dangerous. It can turn viewers away and make them less likely to trust you. As long as they are not abusive, a much better approach is to address the concerns of the commenter.