

BBHCSD WordPress Guide

Last updated August 2008

Introduction

Wordpress is blogging software that makes it easy for teachers to communicate online with parents, students, colleagues, and community members. It allows them to have a presence on the web without learning a lot about creating and managing web sites. Teachers who want to have a professional-looking site on the web that is easy to maintain should consider using this tool.



What's a blog? Traditionally, blogs have been online diaries. People can write journal entries and post them online. These entries may contain pictures, file attachments, embedded media, or links to other online resources. When people read these entries, they can post comments about them and form an online discussion. Blogs have a negative connotation for some people because they make it very easy to post things online. Some people don't have much to say, and their blogs are meaningless rants about the people in line at the grocery store, or something that happened to them at work, or an argument they had with an acquaintance. But it doesn't have to be that way.

In the educational arena, blogs are being used for a variety of applications. In addition to replacing the teacher web site with a more robust -- and easier to use -- tool, teachers are also finding them useful for facilitating student discussions online and for building professional learning networks with other teachers who share similar professional goals and challenges.

Blog software is easy to use. It can be used to post text, pictures, and files quickly and easily. That's perfect for teachers. There's practically no learning curve, the sites are professional-looking, and they can improve communication with teachers and students while saving time.

This guide is specifically written for teachers in the Brecksville-Broadview Heights City Schools. Some of the procedures outlined in this guide refer to specific tools and plugins installed on our Wordpress installation. While most of the information in this guide should be useful for anyone using Wordpress, your Wordpress server may have some differences.

The best way to learn how to use software is to jump in with both feet and try it out. Look at the menus, play around with the settings. Try different things to see what works. These instructions lead you through the basics of our Wordpress installation, but they should not be used as a definitive guide that covers everything that can be done.

Account Set-Up

If you are a staff member in the Brecksville-Broadview Heights Schools and would like to have a blog, simply go to the staff web server at <http://staff.bbhcsc.org>. Log in with your network username and password. If you do not already have a blog, one will be created for you. If you do already have a blog, you'll be logged into its administrative interface. Your blog will be located at <http://staff.bbhcsc.org/username>, where "username" is your network username.

NOTE

If you already have a web page on staff.bbhcscd.org, you should contact the technology staff to have it removed before you create your blog. While the blog creation procedure will work, you will not be able to access your blog until your existing site is removed.

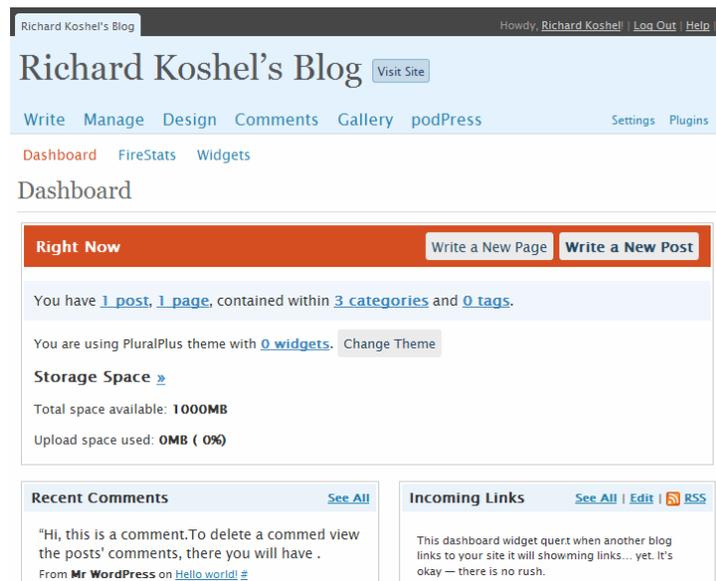
Once your blog has been created, there will be a number of things that you'll want to customize to tailor it to your needs. The remainder of this document will cover those customizations and address some of the things you can do with your blog once you have it configured.

Personalizing Your Blog

When you first visit your blog, you'll find that it's pretty generic. There is a "Hello World" post on the left side welcoming you to your new blog. There are a few menus on the right. We want to change some of these things.

Start by going to the administrative interface. This is where you'll

make changes to your blog. On the right side, at the bottom, is a link called "Login". Click it, and enter your network username and password. You can also get to the administrative interface by adding "wp-admin" to the end of your site's address. For example, <http://staff.bbhcscd.org/schinkerj/wp-admin> will take you to the admin interface for John Schinker's blog.



When you log in to the administrative section, the first thing you see is the **DASHBOARD**. This gives you an overview of the things happening in your blog. It will tell you how many posts, pages, categories, and tags you have. We'll explain all of those a bit later. The dashboard also shows recent comments made on your blog, as well as other web sites that have linked to it. Across the top, you'll see a number of menu items. These are the tools that help you manage your site.

Let's start by going to **SETTINGS** near the upper-right corner. The **General** tab includes the name and

tagline for your site. You'll probably want to change these to something more interesting than the defaults. Your email address should already be configured. The other items on the page should not have to be changed. At the bottom, click **Save Changes** to update your options.

Changing the Appearance of the Blog

Let's do something more fun. Click on the **DESIGN** menu. You'll see a list of different themes that you can apply to your site. Themes provide all of the elements of your blog's visual layout. This includes graphics, colors, fonts, and other elements. These themes have a dramatic affect on how your site looks. The default theme is called "Plural Plus." You can select another theme by clicking on it.

The themes show thumbnails that give you a sense of how they look. If you click on one of the themes, it will show you a preview of your blog with that theme in a popup window. From there, you can either activate the theme by clicking the link in the upper-right corner, or cancel by clicking the X in the upper left corner. Using this tool, you can try out as many themes as you like until you find one that suits you.

Themes can be changed any time without affecting your blog's content. So when you're ready for a new look, just select a different theme. All of your content will be shown with the newly selected theme.

A quick word about additional themes: There are literally hundreds of different themes available. The selection that is installed on our server includes 100 themes from the popular Edublogs service, as well as a few dozen others that are suitable for classroom use. Most themes that are designed to work with Wordpress 2.6 or later and support widgets will work. If you want a theme that's not listed, create a help desk ticket that includes the name and location of the theme, and the tech staff will try to accommodate the request.

Writing

So let's post something. In blog language, a post is just some piece of information that you want to make available online. It's usually text, though it can be accompanied by a picture or file attachment, too.



Posts are displayed on your blog in reverse-chronological order. That is, the most recent item is displayed first, with older ones following. This ensures that your most recent content is always at the top of the page, right where your readers can easily find it. By default, your most recent ten items are displayed, with older content on successive pages.

Because of this arrangement, posts are great for timely information. If you want to tell students and parents about upcoming events, assignments, due dates, and the like, posts make this very easy. It is also possible to create pages. Pages are displayed individually on the screen, and are meant to be more static. You might use pages for content that doesn't change frequently, like an "About Me" page or a class overview.

Click on **WRITE**. We're going to focus on writing a post here, but the procedure is nearly identical for writing a page.

Type a descriptive title for your post. The title will appear at the top of the post. You might compare the title of a post to the subject of an email message.

The Kitchen Sink

The icon on the far right in the editing toolbar allows you to show or hide “the kitchen sink.” Clicking this button will display a second toolbar, with additional editing tools. These include text color, underlining, indenting, and undo tools.



The main window is an editor. You have all of the normal font, size, color, and text tools available. If you hold the mouse pointer over the icons, it will tell you what each tool does.

In the editing window type (or paste) your post content. This is the body of the post – the content that will be displayed under the title. Use the available tools for applying formatting to your text. A spelling checker is also available.

When you’re finished writing, take a look at the **Categories** section below the editing window. Categories allow you to organize your content. You might have different categories for different units or subjects you teach (math, social studies, famous Americans, Beowulf, etc.). Or, you might have

different categories for different types of information (homework, study guides, class notes, etc.). Some people use categories for their target audience (parents, students, community, etc.). This allows them to specify who the post is intended for.

You might choose to use one or more of these schemes for your categories. A post can belong to as many categories as you want. Using the examples above, you could have the post categorized in “math” and “homework” and “students”.

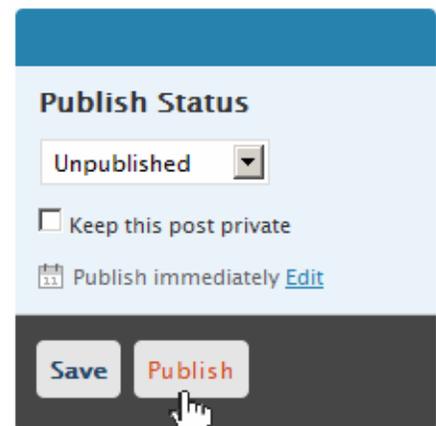
There are two special categories on your blog: *Events* and *Front Page*. The events category is used to tie posts to your event calendar (more on that later). The Front Page category is used to display the post on your blog’s front page.

Most people display all of their blog’s content on the front page. This ensures that your blog’s visitors see your most recent content first when they visit your site. Some people prefer, however, to have a more static front page, with items that change less frequently. In these cases, they don’t want all of their posts on the front page. On our Wordpress installation, you must select the “Front Page” category for your post to appear on the front page of your blog.

If you would like to add additional categories, you may do so by selecting “Add New Category” and typing your new category name.

When you’re done writing, click **Save** to save your post as a draft, or **Publish** to save it and publish it to your site. Drafts are saved on your site so you can edit them later, but they are not visible to your blog’s visitors.

So far, you’ve set up your blog, customized the name and layout, created categories to organize information, and posted content. Those are the basics. If you’re ready to take on some of the other neat things the software can do, keep reading....



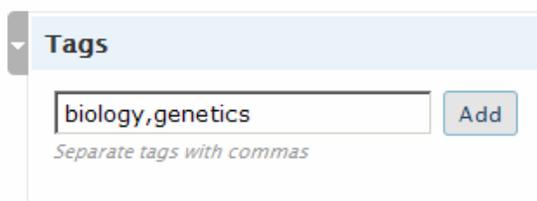
Categories and Tags

We've already briefly discussed categories. You can configure a number of different categories that determine how information is organized and displayed on your blog. There are few categories that are pre-configured, and you can create others to meet your needs.

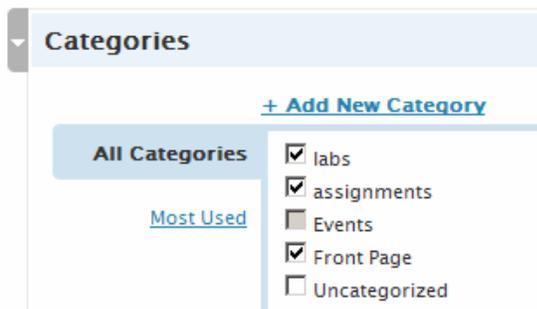
When you post something, you determine which categories your post will belong to. Sometimes, information fits in more than one place, and this can be accommodated by simply selecting all of the appropriate categories.

Tags are similar to categories, but they serve a different purpose. While categories allow you to organize content on your blog, tags help to organize content on the web as a whole. Tags are short keywords for your post that help people find it.

Let's look at an example. Suppose you are a science teacher, and you're posting a lab assignment for a genetics unit. You might put this post in the "Assignments" category, as well as the "Labs" category. But someone searching for that kind of information isn't likely to find it by doing a Google search for either of those terms, because in the wider context of the web, they're too general. You could add tags like "biology" and "genetics." People searching for these terms would be more likely to find your post.



While you may have up to a dozen or so categories, you might have a hundred or more different tags that you use.



When you're writing a post, you can select categories or create new ones in the Categories section. You can also add tags in the Tags section. Tags are simply listed, with commas separating them. You can have as many tags associated with a post as you like.

You can also manage both categories and tags in the **MANAGE** menu. Here you can add categories and tags and see how many posts there are associated with each. Note that categories and tags that do not

have any posts associated with them will not appear in the category and tag lists on your blog. Only the items that have posts will be displayed.

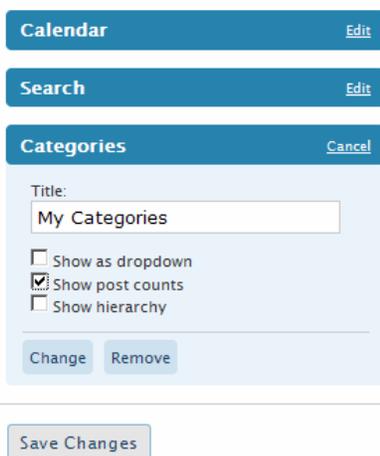
Widgets

Most of the themes in Wordpress include a sidebar. This is the menu on the side that has links to the various categories, archives, and other things. Different themes have different things in the sidebar. The default theme, for example, has a search box, a list of pages, an archive of posts organized by month, a list of categories that you use on your site, a list of tags you have used in your posts, and a meta section that includes a login link and links to a few Wordpress-related resources.

Maybe you're happy with these, but chances are you'd like to make some changes. Maybe you've decided not to use tags on your blog, so having that item there doesn't make sense. Maybe you'd like to add a calendar or some other information in your sidebar. That's where widgets come in.

Widgets allow you to easily customize the look of the sidebar by including elements you want to show, and leaving out the ones you don't. For example, some teachers may want to have an online survey in their sidebars. Others will want to leave it out. Widgets give you that flexibility.

In the management interface, click on **DESIGN**, and then **Widgets**. On the left side of the screen, you'll see a list of available widgets. On the right side, you'll see a list of widgets you're currently using. If there are no widgets listed, your blog will use the sidebar items defined by your chosen theme.



You can add widgets to your sidebar by clicking *Add* next to the widget name in the list. As you add widgets, they should appear in the list of current widgets. Many of them have editable features that allow you to change their titles and appearances on your blog. For example, the Categories widget can be shown as a drop-down list so it takes less space. It can also show the number of posts in each category.

You can rearrange the order of the widgets in your sidebar by dragging and dropping them. Once you have everything configured the way you want it, click **Save Changes** for your settings to take effect. Then, visit your blog to see the affects of your changes.

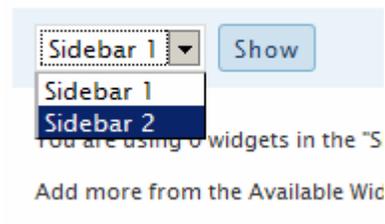
NOTE

Some themes have more than one sidebar. If this is the case, you can manage the widgets for each sidebar separately by using the drop-down box to select it.

Here is a description of some of the available widgets:

- **Adadda Recent Posts:** Displays recent posts from all of the site's blogs. This will include blog posts from everyone using Wordpress on the Brecksville-Broadview Heights Schools staff web server. If you just want recent posts from your blog, use the "Recent Posts" widget.
- **Archives:** Lists all of the posts on your blog, organized by month.
- **Calendar:** Displays the current month's calendar. This calendar is for display only, and is not tied to your content. You may want to use Event Calendar instead.
- **Categories:** Displays a list of the categories on your blog that have content in them. This allows your visitors to find all of your posts on a particular topic.

Current Widgets



- **Category Cloud:** Displays your categories as a “cloud.” The most used categories will be larger, and the most recently used categories will be darker. This allows your site visitors to more easily see what you’re blogging about and find that content.
- **del.icio.us:** Displays bookmarks from your Del.icio.us account. You can specify particular tags for it to display. This requires an account on Del.icio.us, which is free and powerful, but not covered in this guide.
- **Democracy:** Displays a survey question. Visitors to the site can answer the question and see the results of the survey.
- **Event Calendar:** This widget integrates with your blog’s calendar. You can add items to the calendar, and visitors will be able to click on a day to see what’s happening on that day.
- **Feed Buttons:** Displays links to allow your visitors to easily subscribe to your blog’s RSS feed.
- **Links:** If you have added links in the “links” section of your site, they’ll be displayed by the Links widget.
- **Meta:** Contains information *about* the blog. This includes the link to the admin interface, as well as RSS feeds for your blog.
- **Pages:** Displays a list of pages that you’ve created on your blog. Pages are just like posts, except each one is displayed on its own page. They’re typically used for information that doesn’t change frequently.
- **Popular Posts:** Displays a list of your most popular posts, so site visitors can find them easily.
- **Recent Comments:** Displays comments recently posted to your blog. If you’re using comments, you can see what’s new here.
- **Recent Posts:** Displays items that have recently been posted to your blog. It’s a lot like a “what’s new” section.
- **RSS:** Allows you to incorporate an RSS feed from any source into your blog’s sidebar.
- **Search:** Provides a search tool so visitors can search your blog.
- **Statistics:** Displays information about how many visitors your site has had.
- **Tag Cloud:** Displays your tags as a “cloud.” The most used tags will be larger, and the most recently used tags will be darker. This allows your site visitors to more easily see what you’re blogging about and find that content.
- **Text:** This widget can contain any text. Want to add “Where fine education is a heritage” to your sidebar? You can do it in a text widget.
- **Twitter:** If you use the Twitter microblogging platform, you can incorporate your most recent Twitter posts in your blog’s sidebar.
- **Upcoming Events:** This shows the same information as the event calendar, but in a list format. This is a great way to remind people about things that are coming up within the next few days.

One more note about widgets: if you don’t have *any* widgets configured, Wordpress will use the default settings for your theme. The information displayed in the sidebar will vary depending on the theme. If you do use widgets, they’ll replace the entire sidebar. By default, widgets *are not* configured.

Links to Other Sites

There are two ways to link to other web sites on the Internet. Wordpress allows you to maintain a list of links that appear in your sidebar (if you have the appropriate widget configured). You can also link to sites from within a post.

Under **MANAGE**, select **Links**. By default, your blog has links to Wordpress.com and Wordpress.org. If you have added other links, those will also be displayed in the list. From this list, you can edit or delete any of the links. You can also add new links.

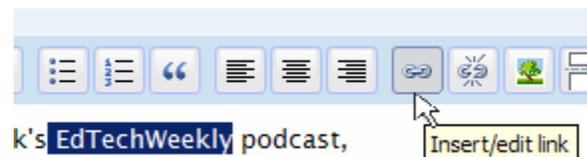
Each link has a name that is displayed and a web address that the name is associated with. The name is the text people click on in order to visit the site. For example, you might have a link whose name is “Math Practice” and whose web address is “http://www.bigbrainz.com”. When someone clicks on “Math Practice” in your list of links, they’ll go to the Big Brainz web site.

You can also add a description for a link. When a site visitor moves his or her mouse over the link, the description will be displayed. In the example above, the description might be “Fun 3-D game for practicing multiplication facts.”

You can also organize links into categories. The categories for links are different from those for posts, which can be confusing.

TIP	<i>Don't get too carried away with organizing links in Wordpress. It is tempting to collect a lot of links to educational resources and categorize them so people can easily find them. You would probably be better served using a social bookmarking tool like Del.icio.us to do this, though. That approach would provide much more flexibility, it would be easier to manage, and it could easily be incorporated into your blog with widgets.</i>
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Creating links to other sites within posts is easy. Simply highlight the text that you want people to click on in order to follow the link. Then, click on the Link button in the toolbar. Then, paste in the web site address, enter an optional title, and click Insert.



RSS

RSS is a method of syndicating content online. Essentially, it allows you to have content automatically updated, based on the updates made to another site.

For a really simple example, look at one of the Brecksville-Broadview Heights Schools' portal pages (<http://www.bbhc.org/start>). At the top of the screen, click on “News.” Depending on the building, you should see various news feeds with local, national, world, or school news. The portal pages use RSS to connect to the various

RSS Application

Teachers working on the same team could have RSS feeds from each other's blogs. A widget on the math teacher's blog could show new posts from the social studies teacher's blog. That way, visitors to one blog would see that there's new information on the other one.

news sources (CNN, Reuters, etc.). When a news item is added to one of those sites, it automatically appears on the portal pages, too.

You can use RSS with your blog in two ways. You can incorporate feeds into the blog, so when other sources update their content, your blog automatically reflects those changes. You can also provide RSS feeds, so others can have their sites updated automatically when you post content.

To incorporate an RSS feed into your blog, use the RSS widget. Enter the title that you want to appear, the address of the feed, and how many items to display. To share your RSS feed with others, simply add the word “feed” to the end of your blog address. For example, <http://staff.bbhcsc.org/schinkerj/feed> is John Schinker’s RSS feed. There are also links to your RSS feeds in the Meta widget.

It’s also possible to generate RSS feeds for specific categories or comments the same way. Just go to the category you want the feed for, copy the address, and add “/feed” at the end.

While RSS feeds are really useful, it’s important to note that they’re not immediate. When a new item is posted to the web page, it may take a while for it to show up on your blog.

Pictures and File Attachments

Sometimes you want to add pictures to your posts to highlight a classroom event, illustrate a point, or improve the visual appeal of your blog. Fortunately, it’s pretty easy to insert a picture into a blog post.

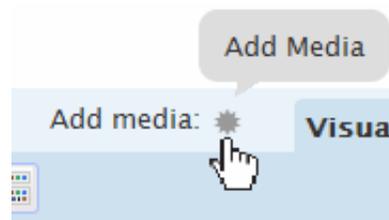


If the picture is already on the web, you can directly embed it into your post. All you need is the web address (URL) for the picture. Start by clicking on the “Insert/Edit Image” icon. Paste in the address for the picture, and optionally add a description. You can adjust the alignment to determine how the picture will appear in relation to the surrounding text. You can also adjust the displayed dimensions of the picture, as well as the amount of space around it. Click the “Insert” button to place the picture in your post.

If the picture is on your computer rather than on the web, you will need to upload it to the web server in order to include it in your blog. To do this, use the “Add Media” icon at the top of the editing window. You can then browse to your computer and choose a file to upload. If you’re using the Flash uploader, you can select more than one file at a time to upload. You can give each picture a title, caption, and description. At the bottom of the screen, click “Insert Into Post” to insert the picture into your post. Once you’ve done that, you may adjust the picture’s display size and alignment by clicking once on the picture and using the Insert/Edit image button in the toolbar.

Copyright & Credit

Remember that images on the web are copyrighted. You are not legally able to republish them on your blog without permission from the owner. Look for Creative Commons pictures that can be used for noncommercial sites, and always give credit to the photo source.



Whenever posting pictures of students online, it is important to follow your school's policy on the posting of student information online. In the Brecksville-Broadview Heights schools, you may post pictures of students online as long as the students are not identified and the students' parents have not requested that their child's picture not be published. If you have doubts about whether a particular picture should be posted, seek permission from the student's parents and approval from your building administrator.

TIP	<p><i>Modern digital cameras have a tremendous capacity for resolution. They can take great pictures that look wonderful when printed on photo paper with high quality methods. On the web, though, most of this resolution is wasted.</i></p> <p><i>Most monitors display between 0.5 and 1.3 megapixels. But even the cheapest digital cameras record 6-8 megapixels for each image. So if you look at a typical picture taking up the whole screen on a typical monitor, you're only seeing about 14% of the pixels.</i></p> <p><i>Since pictures take a long time to download, you should reduce the resolution before posting them on your blog. Using an image editing program, change the picture resolution so that the larger dimension is 350 pixels or less. This will give a nice sized image that won't take the whole screen to display. It also won't take all day to download.</i></p>
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This same procedure may be used to upload file attachments to your post. If you have a document that you would like people to be able to download from your blog, add it just like you would add a picture. When you insert it into your document, it will insert a link to the file, which people can click on to download.

When posting files, it is important to remember that different programs store data in different ways. You might, for example, use Microsoft Publisher to create a newsletter and post that newsletter on your blog. In order to open it, though, your readers will need to have the same version of Microsoft Publisher installed on their computers that you used to create the file. Since different people use different software, it's not a good idea to assume that everyone can open these files.



One way around this is to use PDF files. PDF files use a file format developed by Adobe that can be opened using Adobe Reader (as well as other packages). Nearly everyone who uses the World Wide Web can open PDF files. That makes it a good choice for posting documents online.

You can think of a PDF file as a digital version of a printed document. The software that creates them works like a printer, and you "print" your document to a PDF file. This document cannot easily be edited, and since nearly everyone can open it, it's a good choice for posting online.

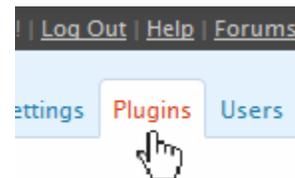
You can use the free PDF Creator (<http://www.pdfforge.org>) software to make PDF files.

Photo Galleries

Inserting pictures into blog posts is a great way to share a few pictures on your blog. But if you have many pictures to share, it might be better to use a photo gallery. A photo gallery can either

display a series of pictures as a slideshow, or it can display a series of small thumbnail pictures that can be enlarged by clicking on them. Both formats are supported in the blog software.

Before you can use photo galleries, you must activate the NextGEN Gallery plugin. In the upper-right corner of the screen, click **PLUGINS**. Plugins are modular add-ons to Wordpress that add additional functionality. Many plugins are enabled by default when your blog is created, but in order to use the galleries, you have to manually turn on this one.



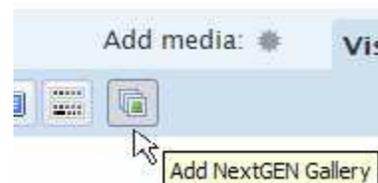
Scroll down to the NextGEN Gallery plugin, and click “Activate” to enable it. While you’re there, you may also want to activate the NextGEN Gallery Widget, which would allow you to have photo galleries in your sidebar.

Once you’ve activated the plugin, click on the **GALLERY** item in the main menu. This is where you can create and manage galleries, upload photos into those galleries, and combine the galleries into albums.

Start by selecting “Upload Pictures”. We’re going to create a new gallery and upload pictures into it. Give your new gallery a name. The name should describe this set of pictures. Maybe it’s “Halloween Party 2008” or “Spring Science Fair”. After typing the name and clicking “Add Gallery,” you’re ready to upload some pictures into it. Select “Upload Images.”

Use the Browse... tool to select a file to upload to the gallery. You may use the browse tool repeatedly to select multiple files. They will be listed as files to be uploaded. Once all of your files are listed, select a gallery into which you’d like to put these pictures. Then, select “Upload Images” at the bottom of the screen.

Now, click on “Manage Gallery.” All of your galleries should be listed. If you choose to edit the gallery you just uploaded, you will see a list of the pictures in that gallery. You can add titles and descriptions of the pictures here.



Once you have uploaded pictures to a gallery, you’ll have a new icon on the Write page for adding a gallery. When you click this icon, you can select which of your galleries you’d like to insert in your post.

You can also select whether you want them to be an image list or a slideshow. After making your selections, you’ll see some text inserted into your post like this:

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[gallery=1]
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When you publish your post, this code will be replaced with your pictures.

You will notice that the “Add Media” tool also has the ability to select pictures from your galleries, if you’d like to include an individual picture from a gallery in a post.

If you would like to change the way images are displayed in the galleries, you may do so by changing the settings in the “Options” section of the **GALLERY** menu.

Calendars

You can use the Event Calendar in Wordpress to associate posts with specific dates and times. This can either be used to keep parents and students informed about upcoming events (don't forget hats and boots for the field trip on Friday), or to maintain a record of material covered in class (here are the notes from the lesson on Lexington & Concord we covered on Tuesday).

The event calendar is another one of the plugins that must be enabled on your blog before you can use it. In the upper-right corner of the screen, click **PLUGINS**. Activate the "Event Calendar" and "Event Calendar Widget" plugins.

Now, let's take a look at the Event Calendar settings. In the upper-right corner, click **SETTINGS**, and then select "Event Calendar." The event category should be set to "Events." This means that every post associated with the "Events" category will be added to the event calendar. You can also elect to show or hide the schedule within the posts themselves, whether or not to show events as normal blog posts, and options on how the calendar will be displayed.

Depending on how you use your blog, you may or may not want calendar items to also be posted as normal posts. If you're posting notification of upcoming assessments, for example, you may not want a separate post saying, "there's a quiz on Friday." On the other hand, if you post class notes every day, you may want to associate them with the school day. In this case, you *would* want the item to show up like a normal post.

Once you're happy with the settings, click "Update Options" at the bottom of the page. You can return here to change these settings at any time.

Now, you're ready to add events to calendars. Go to the Write screen and create a new blog post as you normally would. Let's say you have a field trip coming up. Your post contains details about the trip. Don't forget your permission slip. Wear a hat and boots. Bring money for lunch. Before publishing the post, scroll down to the "Event Editor" box. Click the "+" to add a time for this event. You can indicate starting and ending times. If you'd like, you can add more than one date, and the post will be associated with all of them.

Finish your post and publish it. If you're using the "Event Calendar" widget, the field trip will show up on the calendar on the date you've specified. If you're using the "Upcoming Events" widget, your field trip will show up in that list. See the widgets section of this guide for more details.

Future Publication

You can schedule posts to be published automatically at a time you specify. This is great for "working ahead," because the scheduled posts will appear at the right times without your having to do anything.

For example, you might want to have a post thanking parents for attending open house. You could write it ahead of time, and set it to post early in the morning on the day after open house. Then,



Publish Status

Unpublished

Keep this post private

[Publish immediately](#) [Edit](#)

July 24, 2008

@ 09 : 06

Save Publish

while you're busy getting ready for a hectic school day, the blog takes care of publishing the post for you.

On the right side of the Write screen, there's a "Publish Status" box. This is where you normally save or publish your posts. Next to "Publish Immediately," click "Edit." You can then specify the date and time at which you want the post to be published. When you're finished, click "Publish" and the publication will be scheduled for the time you specified.

Surveys

Some staff members like to ask survey questions on their blogs. Using the Democracy plugin, it's easy to create a simple, multiple choice survey and make it available to your blog visitors.



Begin by going to **Democracy Poll** in the **MANAGE** section.

Type in the question you want to ask, and the various answers people can select. You may also allow visitors to add their own answers, but concerns about people adding inappropriate content probably make this a bad idea.

Once you've entered the poll information, click "submit" to add the poll. You may have multiple polls, but only one can be active at a time.

In order for the survey to be visible on your blog, you must be using the "Democracy" widget. See the Widgets section for more details.

Caveat	<p>The "Democracy" survey tool attempts to keep people from voting multiple times by logging their IP addresses. Visitors who have already voted will not be able to vote again. At school, we use a proxy server for Internet access. Technically, all of the requests for your blog from school computers come from the proxy server, which then relays the content to the computer requesting it. From the blog's perspective, all school users appear to be using the same computer.</p> <p>While the survey tool will work fine for people accessing the blog from home, it won't allow multiple people to vote from school, even if they're using different computers. If you take a class to the computer lab and ask them to answer the survey question, only the first student will be able to actually answer the question.</p> <p>It's possible to fix this by unchecking "Log Ips" in the General Options for the Democracy polls. The downside is that this would also allow people to stuff the ballot box by voting as many times as they like.</p>
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Post Notification

There is no need to ask people to "check back for updates." Your visitors can sign up to receive email notifications when the site is updated. They start by signing up on your blog. After entering a valid email address, the site sends them an email message asking them to confirm their subscription. Once this is done, they're added to your subscriber list.

To enable this feature, start by going to **SETTINGS**, and then "Post Notification." In this area, you can manage addresses, tweak options on how email is sent, and set up a way for people to sign up for updates.

Post Notification

[Info](#) · [Manage addresses](#) · [Export addresses](#) · [List addresses](#) · [Delete addresses](#) · [Settings](#) · [Instruct](#)



Settings

Under Post Notification, click on “Settings.” You can determine the default action for when to send. Do you want it to send all posts to your subscribers unless you specify otherwise, or ONLY send the posts you specify? What do you want it to do when you create new pages? In most cases, you can leave the defaults alone.

Scroll down to the “Front End” section. We need to have a way for people to sign up. One easy way to do this is with a Subscription page. This tool will create a new page on your blog that allows people to sign up for updates. Give the page a name (“Subscribe” would be good). Change the “Post Notification link in the meta-section” to “Yes.” This will add a link to your Meta widget for subscribing. Then, check the box next to “Add Post Notification page.” This will add the signup page. When you’re done, click “Save” at the bottom of the screen.

Post Notification link in the meta-section:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Replacement in Posts:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
	The Stings @ Also see the I
Add Post Notification page:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Adds a Post N theme. You m This checkbo: Also see the I

Now people can use the new page on your site to sign up for updates. They can choose to get updates from specific categories, or from the whole blog. When you publish a new post, an email message will be sent to the subscribers from your email address. Each message also includes a link for unsubscribing.

If you’d like to see how it works, sign up on your own blog. Then, post something, wait a few minutes, and check your email.

Podcasting

A podcast is a digital media file that is distributed through an RSS feed. I know, that’s a complicated, technical definition. Let me try again. A podcast is an audio program that you can subscribe to. When new episodes are released, they can automatically downloaded to your computer.

If you want to set up your own podcast, you can use your blog to publish it. Use some type of audio editing software to create your podcast (Audacity is a good, free choice). Save the podcast as an MP3 file. Now you’re ready to publish it on your blog.

To do this, we need to use the podPress plugin. Begin by activating “podPress” under **PLUGINS**. Now, go to the Write page and create a post as you normally would. This post might have show notes about your podcast, or pictures, links, or other information that goes along with the audio. We want to attach the MP3 file to this blog post.

Use the “Add Media” tool, just like you would to add a picture. Select the MP3 file and upload it. Instead of inserting it into the post, though, select the text in the “Link URL” field and copy it (Control-C on the keyboard). Then, close the media window.

Back on the Write page, scroll down to the podcasting section and click “Add Media File.” Click in the “Location” box and paste (Control-V) the link. Enter a title in the space specified. Use the two “Auto-Detect” buttons to detect the file size and duration.

When you publish your post, your audio file will be embedded in the post. Visitors to your blog can play the audio right on the page. They can also subscribe to your RSS feed to automatically download your podcast episodes.

If you’re going to post podcast episodes regularly, you may want to customize the options for your podcast. Use the **PODPRESS** menu. You can enter a title and description of your podcast, upload artwork for it, and add iTunes specific information to make it easier to find in iTunes. Use “Update Options” at the bottom of the page to save your settings.

The screenshot shows the 'Podcasting Files' section of the WordPress admin interface. It includes a 'Media File:' section with the following fields: 'Location' (m/files/2008/07/ett-devel-2008-06-...), 'Title (optional):' (ETT Development Meeting), 'Type:' (MP3 - Standard Audio (iPod Compliant)), 'Size:' (25969270) with an 'Auto Detect' button, and 'Duration:' (54:06) with an 'Auto Detect' button. There are also checkboxes for 'Included in:' (RSS2 checked, ATOM checked, Feed Only unchecked), 'Disable Player:' (unchecked), and 'Disable Preview Player:' (unchecked). A 'Tag (ID3) Info:' field with a 'Show' button is also visible.

TIP

The podPress plugin adds a line at the bottom of your blog that says “Podcast powered by podPress” with a link to the podPress web site. If you would like to remove this link, you may do so in the “Credit” section of the “General Settings” for podPress.

Comments

It is possible to allow visitors to your blog to make comments on the items you’ve posted. While most teachers wouldn’t want to use this feature for everything, there are situations where it can be useful. A teacher could facilitate an online discussion by asking a question or providing a writing prompt, and then letting the students comment on that post with their responses.

By default, your blog requires people to be logged in and registered in order to comment, and it doesn’t provide them a way to register. Comments are also disabled for all posts by default. This

gives you the ability to tightly control the information, and it makes it impossible for people to make comments unless you allow them to. If you don't want to have comments on your blog, there's nothing you need to do.

Leave a Reply

Logged in. [Logout »](#)

Submit Comment

The most liberal comment settings would allow anyone to post a comment. They wouldn't need to register or log in, and the comments would appear immediately. This isn't recommended, because inevitably someone will post something inappropriate, or your comments will start getting spam, or you'll have some other problems with it. Instead, this course of

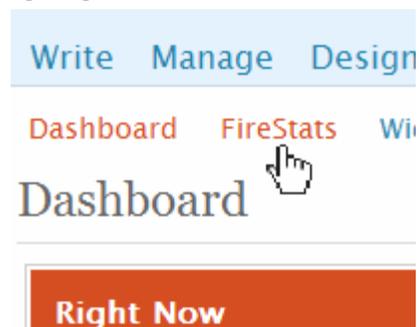
action is recommended as a reasonable way of enabling comments:

- Select **SETTINGS**, and then **General**. Under "Membership," uncheck the box that requires users to be logged in to comment. Since we don't have a way for people to register, this needs to be disabled to allow any commenting at all.
- Now go to the **Discussion** tab under **SETTINGS**. In the Meta menu, there will now be a "Register" link. Visitors can use this link to sign up for an account on your blog. Please note that this is a different list from the email notification one. You can specify the default article settings, which will apply to all posts unless you change the settings on the Write page. If you want people to be able to comment on most of your posts, check the box to allow people to post comments. If you are only going to rarely allow comments, don't check this box.
- Email alerts are a good idea. They let you know when someone has submitted a comment.
- Before a comment appears, you can specify that an administrator has to approve it. This means that you will have to approve the comments before others can see them. While this gives you a lot of control, it also results in a delay, because you have to approve each comment. This would be a bad idea if you're trying to use comments for an online discussion.
- One compromise is to allow comments if the author has previously had a comment approved. This means you'd have to approve the first comment for each person. After that, their comments would appear without your approval.

It's worth noting that the comments on your blog are public. If you're going to use this with students, it is important to discuss what types of information should be shared on a publicly accessible site. It's also worth noting that you'll probably have to adjust the settings from time to time to find the best solution for your situation.

Blog Stats

Sometimes it's nice to know if there's anybody out there reading your blog. The Firestats plugin is installed to give you an idea of how much traffic your blog is getting. To get to Firestats, go to your dashboard. Then, click the Firestats link at the top of the page.



The Status section will show the total number of page views and visits, and those same numbers for the past 24 hours. “Pages” count the number of pages retrieved from your blog. Because visitors may visit more than one page, “visits” attempts to determine how many people have visited your blog. Note that you will not be counted in these statistics when you are logged in to your blog.

The “Recent Referrers” section shows how people are getting to your blog. These are typically pages that have links to you. The “Search Terms” section shows what people are searching for to find you, as well as how many people have used that search and found your blog in the process. There are different icons for each of the popular search tools, so you know who is coming from Google, Yahoo, MSN, etc.

The “Recent Popular Pages” section shows which pages on your blog are most frequently accessed. The “Browsers” section shows which browsers people are using to view your site, and “Operating Systems” will tell you which OS they have. The “Countries” section will show where your readers are accessing your blog from. While most of your visitors will probably come from the United States, you may be surprised to see visitors from a number of other countries as well.

The “Hits Table” shows the most recent 50 access to your blog. For each one, it gives the IP address of the person accessing your blog (click it for more info), the date and time the page was accessed, which page on your blog was accessed, which page they came from, browser, operating system, and country information.

There is also a Firestats widget that will allow you to share some basic information on your blog’s traffic with your visitors.

Linking to Your Blog

The Brecksville-Broadview Heights Schools link to staff members’ web pages and blogs in three places:

- On each school’s web site (<http://www.bbhcsc.org>) there is a “Staff” link listing all of the staff members assigned to that building. If the staff member has a web site or a blog, there’s a link to it there.
- On each school’s portal page (<http://www.bbhcsc.org/start>), there is a listing of staff members’ web sites and blogs for that building.
- On the staff web server (<http://staff.bbhcsc.org>), there is a listing of all of the district staff web sites and blogs.

As a staff member, you can add your site to these lists with the User Management System. To do this, go to <http://www.bbhcsc.org/user> and log in with your network username and password. Then, select “Edit Directory Information.” In the field for “Web Site,” paste the address for your site. Don’t forget the “http://” part. While you’re there, make sure the rest of your information is correct, and save the changes. The lists are re-generated every night, and you should see your site listed in the correct places the next morning.

Staying Out of Trouble

This document is written within the context of a teacher or other school staff member setting up a blog for their professional use. Blogs are considered “web sites” in board of education policy, and all of the provisions and restrictions for teacher web sites referenced in policy apply to blogs as well. In the Brecksville-Broadview Heights Schools, staff members are encouraged to read policy *7450.02: District Web Page* as well as policy *7450.04: Staff Network and Internet Acceptable Use and Safety*.

In general, though, these tips will keep you out of trouble in most circumstances:

- Use your blog for professional things. Keep parents and students informed about things happening in your class. Provide instructional materials and resources. Link to relevant sites on the web. Showcase student work. Develop professional networks with your colleagues and share strategies, best practices, and resources. Don't post personal information that's not related to your professional responsibilities.
- Do not post or link to content that you would not show or distribute to students in class.
- Use copyrighted material responsibly. Post it only with written permission from the copyright holder.
- Obtain parental permission prior to posting student work online.
- Be careful with photographs of students. Make sure the students are not identified in the photographs. If in doubt, get parental permission. Do not post photographs of students online whose parents have requested that such photographs not be posted.
- Remember that anything you post on your blog is publicly available to a global audience.

Conclusion

That should be enough to get you started. There are lots of other things the software can do, and there are lots of settings you can change to make your blog work just the way you want it. Play with the settings, change things and see what they do. Don't be afraid to poke around in the menus. Just go slowly, and if something breaks, change it back.

Remember that the technology is worthless unless you have something to say. The whole point of software like this is to make it easy for you to share information online without having to spend a lot of time learning how to keep it up-to-date. Your real focus should be on what you're doing with students every day in the classroom.