

The Author Website Toolkit

Website Planner

A Quick & Easy Workbook for
Planning Your Website

www.TheSelfPublishingToolkit.com

The Self Publishing Toolkit Website Planner

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If you have any questions about the contents of this workbook or about building an author website, please contact me at daphne@theselfpublishingtoolkit.com or by [clicking here](#).

This workbook is part of the free Author Toolkit Series at [the Self Publishing Toolkit](#). [You can access the rest of the toolkit by clicking here.](#)

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How to Use This Workbook

This workbook will help you to define the layout and look of your site as well as the type of content that you would like to have on it. As part of this process, I'll give you an overview of themes and how they work in WordPress at the end of the workbook.

I recommend working through this before you pick your theme. That way you'll know exactly what you need from a theme before you spend time, energy and/or money on your site.

If you need help setting up your website, please see [The Author Website Toolkit](#).

Website Design

Welcome to the fun part of building a website: the design process!

This planner will assist you in figuring out how you want your website to look. You'll be choosing various design options, selecting colors and your layout. Making these simple decisions up front will save you a lot of time when you finally sit down to set up your site.

Keep it Simple

Keep in mind that you are designing your website for your readers. They are coming to your site to find out more about you and your books. Make this easy for them by putting the information they are looking for front and center.

You do not need to reinvent the wheel when it comes to your website. Always place usability before design. Translation? Put things where users expect to find them and label your menu items clearly.

Websites can be a gradual process—the most important step you can take is to [set one up](#). You can add pages and content over time to keep the process from becoming overwhelming.

Ready to go? Let's get started!

Brainstorming

The first step in designing your site is to figure out what you like. In this section, you'll spend some time looking at existing sites and choosing the features that you'd like to include on your own site.

Recon

List several sites that you like:

Tip: Make sure you look at sites for writers in your genre.

What elements did you like?

What didn't you like about the sites you viewed?

Make a Map

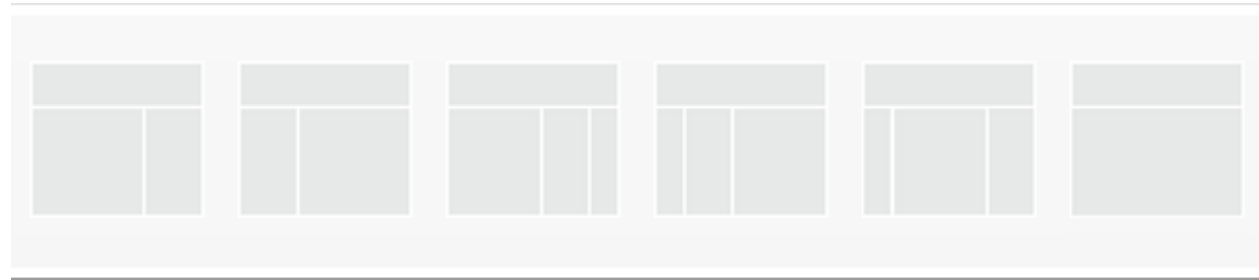
Draw a quick sketch of how you would like your site to look:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to draw a quick sketch of their website layout.

Notes:

The Layout

Choose the type of layout you would like for your site. Circle the one you prefer.



Tip: Not all WordPress themes support every possible layout so it's good to know this before you pick your theme.

With WordPress, you also get a footer area on your site for additional content, so you have lots of space to get in all of the elements you want without overcrowding your page.

The Home Page

- Static (Stays the same.)
- Dynamic (Blog displays most recent post.)

The Menu Bar

The best place for your primary menu is either above or below your header because that is where users expect to find it. Some sites have secondary navigation that covers a specific topic.

If you've written several different series or even in different genres, you could dedicate a secondary menu bar to listing each series or genre. That would make it much easier for readers to access information on the books they are interested in.

It is possible to have multiple menus on your site. If you'd like that option, note which menu you want where.

- Above the header
- Below the header
- Above and below the header
- Left sidebar (You can do this with a widget)

Colors

Color comprises the main design element on your site, so this is a very important decision. Colors should evoke the mood of your genre.

You can find pre-made color schemes at [Adobe's Kuler](#). If you need help with color selection, [see this post on Color Psychology](#).

In order for the browser to understand your color choices, you need to write down the hexadecimal value. This is a **6 character code that starts with a hash mark (#)**.

You can find the hexadecimal value on Kuler by hovering your mouse over the scheme and clicking **Info**. Then just hover your mouse over the color. The hex value will be displayed as a tooltip.

Choose at least two different schemes so that you have some flexibility in designing your site. Colors that look awesome on Kuler, don't always look the same once you have them on your site.

Record your color choices here:

SET ONE NICKNAME:

Hex Value	Notes
#	
#	
#	
#	
#	

SET TWO NICKNAME:

Hex Value	Notes
#	
#	
#	
#	
#	

Ultimately, you'll need three colors (in addition to black and white) for your site.

Kuler provides you with 5 colors in each theme.

It usually takes a little experimentation to get the color combination right in the design process so be sure to record the hex values for the entire scheme.

If you create a free account on Kuler, you can save your schemes as well as up load you own picture and have Kuler create a scheme for you.

Tip: If you want to choose colors on a gradient of the same shade, pick the darkest color, the middle color and the lightest color to get the best contrast in your colors.

Features

What other features would you like on your site? List those here.

- Mailing List Signup
- Social Media Icons
- Facebook Like Box
- Display of Books
- [A Slider](#) (Click **Theme Demo** to see it in action.)

Additional Notes:

Pages

What pages do you want on your site?

- About
- Contact
- Books
- Fun Stuff/Free Stuff/Downloads/Extras
- Blog (if not using as home page)

Additional Pages:

Notes:

Header

Most websites have a 'header' which is the bar that stretches across the top of the page and identifies the site. Some sites have a graphical header, others choose a pure text header.

Make sure your name and tagline are visible whichever option you choose.

Note the type of header you would like:

If you had your book cover designed by a professional designer, you can ask them to provide you with a header. Some will do this for a minimal cost. (If you did your own cover, you can easily do your own header.) You can also contract with a designer for this specific task or try to find someone to do it on [Fiverr](#).

If you go the Fiverr route, check the gig comments and choose a designer with samples. Expect some revisions and for it to cost more than \$5. For best results, choose two or three designers and then choose the header that you like best.

You'll have to obtain your header dimensions from inside of your theme. From your WordPress dashboard go to **Appearance>Header**.

Designing with WordPress

When you first install your website, WordPress will provide you with a default theme, usually Twenty Eleven. A theme is an easy way to give your site a design and make it do particular things with having to learn to code.

For example, a theme can:

- Determine the number of columns on your site
- Give you the option to have a 'slider' with large pictures at the top of your site
- Add specialized widgets to your site
- Insure that your site is mobile responsive

Themes can also increase the functionality of your site. They can also keep your site safe from hackers and help you rank well in the search engines.

Free Themes

Free themes are available at no cost which can be a huge benefit if you are just getting started or have a tight budget. There are thousands of free themes for you to choose from, easily accessible from your WordPress dashboard. (**Appearance>Themes>Install Themes**)

If you decided to go with a free theme, be sure to pick a layout you like right out of the box. Making a lot of changes can be difficult especially if you don't understand CSS.

Free themes can be frustrating for beginners because they don't come with support or a guarantee of updates as newer versions of WordPress are released. So if you run into a technical problem, you're on your own. Finding solutions through Google can be time consuming and beyond frustrating.

Free themes can contain hidden code and are often not well optimized for search engines. You also will have to leave a credit line/link back to the creator's site. Make sure you check out this link and feel comfortable referring your readers to that particular site.

Developers often make 'lite' versions of a theme available for free and then if you want further customization options, you have to pay to upgrade the theme.

If you are concerned about security and/or malicious attacks on your site, I would not recommend choosing a free theme.

Premium (Paid) Themes

Premium themes have a lot of benefits, the most important being that they are flexible and easy to customize. You can set your website up exactly how you want it and you have access to technical support when you run into a problem.

You also get lifetime updates to the theme and technical support when you run into a problem or a question.

Premium themes usually come with a framework + a child theme. What these developers have

done is created a secure, search engine friendly foundation (the framework) and then given you lots of options for the ‘paint job’ (the child theme) part of your site. By splitting a theme like this, they make it super easy for you to change the look of your site while keeping the functionality intact.

You can get [a great explanation of how a framework and child themes work](#) at StudioPress. They also have a cool, interactive [theme chooser](#) that will help you pick the best theme for you.

Theme Resources:

[The WordPress Free Themes Directory](#) (This can also be accessed from inside your WordPress Dashboard. Go to **Appearance>Theme>Install Themes** and then search for the type of theme you want.) If you are going with a free theme, this is the best way to find one. Themes in this directory must comply with WordPress standards to be listed.

[StudioPress Themes](#) Not only are the themes great, their support is awesome. I recently ran into a question on a Sunday afternoon and they solved my issue in just a few minutes. (I highly recommend the [Prose](#) theme but they have a lot of pro designs that include lifetime updates and tech support.)

Getting Started with Your Site

Based on the information you’ve gathered in this guide, you’ve got enough information to get started on your website.

Your first step should be to find a theme that works with all of your design and content requirements. If you’re feeling nervous or overwhelmed with choosing a theme, I recommend you start with default [Twenty Eleven](#) theme that came with WordPress.

Twenty Eleven will allow you to get a basic site online without too much trouble.

Once you’ve had some time to work with the theme, add some content to your site and see what options you can implement, you’ll get a better sense for WordPress and what kind of theme you’d like to upgrade to.

If you have any questions about setting up your site, getting started or need some direction, you can always contact me at daphne@theselfpublishingtoolkit.com or through the [Contact](#) form on the Self Publishing Toolkit website.