ED TECH 13:

Blog Platforms for College Distance Learning

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Note: The questions are from the course syllabus (Drake, 2018).

Question One

"1. What points do Macie Hall and Pamela Hogle make in their articles?"

Marcia Hall: Using Blogging As a Learning Tool

Marcia Hall (2013) begins her paper with a discussion of using blogs to help students meet the course objectives. Technology, including blogs, should not be used just because it exists. Individual, group, and whole class blogs can be effective in increasing writing skills, extending conversations beyond the classroom, and providing a mechanism for members of groups to communicate with each other and to work together on group projects.

Hall goes on to survey some of the current best practices for integrating blogging into college courses. Hall agrees with Mark Sample of George Mason University that individual, group, and class blogs need clear expectations outlined by the professor. Students need to know how often they are to post, how they will be commenting on or interacting with each other's posts, specific schedules for assignments that must be completed, how long posts should be (e.g., number of words or sentences), and any other details that will help the students to focus on their work and be successful in the class. Another idea that Hall mentions comes from Georgetown University: blogs can be helpful in large courses to give each student an opportunity to participate in discussions. Hall builds on these concepts by suggesting that blogging should be worked into the course grade.

Quoted below are four important aspects of creating class blogs that Hall gathered from Sarah Lohnes.

1. Blog posts should be original, "well-crafted," "well- informed".

2. [There should be] an authentic purpose for maintaining the blog.

3. A blog should offer a window into the author's identity and community affiliations.

4. A blog should take advantage of the medium to offer a sense of immediacy and intimacy.

One important addition to the blogging techniques above that Hall gathered from Hillary Miller of Baruch College of CUNY is to carefully explain to the students why you are having them blog -- how it fits into the curriculum and learning strategies. Blogging cannot be seen as a side project.

The final step to consider is the platform that will be used. Hall uses Blackboard because that is what her university uses (Johns Hopkins University). I use WordPress because it is what the university that I am attending uses (Blue Marble University). It is an interesting note that WordPress is also included in the list of blogging platforms that Hall recommends for her readers to investigate.

As a side note, most of my professors at the New York Institute of Technology (M.S. Edu. in Instructional Technology) had a blogging requirement. One often-used method was to post one idea of your own and offer a constructive comment to two classmates each week. I do not know whether this was a requirement of the university or just a common practice among the faculty. It is important that if an instructor or a school implements a blogging requirement that they understand the amount of time required to monitor the blogs. I had a situation once where a student asked a question about an assignment that was incorrectly answered by another student. Many of us incorporated the incorrect information into our papers. The professor posted the correct information several days later leading to a large number of paper re-writes. One way to avoid that problem is to state that only the professor can answer homework-related questions.

For the most part, I enjoyed class blogs – especially in online courses where I never saw my classmates, but they are not free of problems.

Pamela Hogle: Seven Reasons to Use a WordPress eLearning Platform

Pamela Hogle (2017) begins her WordPress discussion with an explanation of the differences between WordPress.org and WordPress.com. Web sites are created entirely online using WordPress.com while WordPress.org provides a web creation package, which web developers download to their computers or servers to use in creating websites. WordPress.com includes web hosting, but WordPress.org requires an outside web host. WordPress.org offers more themes, plugins, and other options than WordPress.com, but WordPress.com users who need tools that are not included can pay for upgrades. When "instructional designers" evaluate WordPress for their schools, they have to look at the features that each platform offers.

A discussion of the seven benefits of WordPress follows her introduction. Hogle's first point is really a combination of factors: WordPress is free, open source, simple, has a variety of pre-existing themes, and allows for customization. The second benefit is that WordPress is popular, allows for frequent posts, accommodates multimedia content, and many of its themes are device neutral ("mobile-friendly"). Third, there is a community of users that offer support through forums and tutorials and develop plugins (especially for WordPress.org). Fourth, there has probably been a WordPress.org plug in developed using the PHP programming language for just about anything one might need, or a user can create their own plugins using PHP. Fifth, developers do not need to know how to code, but if they have the knowledge, they can put their coding skills to use to further personalize websites built with WordPress.org. Sixth, WordPress can be used to create a complete learning management system (LMS). There are plugins that allow users to organize content and restrict access to specific content and functions that you want

students to use. Seventh and last, "WordPress has a small footprint and is highly customizable." It does not take up much space on servers because it begins small and only grows through the use of plugins that the developer chooses to add. The developer adds only those functions that are needed instead of purchasing a large learning management system that may include unnecessary functions. Although not mentioned in number seven, WordPress.com takes no server space because the learning management systems that use it are developed and hosted online.

Question Two

"2. Did Andrew Cullison make any interesting points that were new to you? If so, please explain what you learned."

Andrew Cullison's (2009) report about WordPress begins by stating that the internet and its educational uses have changed in the past five years; there have been even more changes in the almost nine years since his article was written. Some of the information Cullison mentioned is already dated, but much of this report is still useful. WordPress continues to be a free and open-source platform in which developers utilize only the plugins and functions that are appropriate to their needs. WordPress sites can increase cooperative work between users from different institutions better than many of the other learning management systems available today that can only be accessed by staff and students at each the particular school or university with which they are affiliated. WordPress sites can be developed that allow students in different courses to interact with each other if the instructor wants inter-course communication. Students can easily be added to course sites within WordPress. Much of Cullison's report is very specific to how he used WordPress back in 2009, but these points continue to be relevant to today's WordPress users.

Question Three

"3. Please, show us you understand the essential differences between deploying a blog-based website using:

A. wordpress.com

B. wordpress.org

C. Managed WordPress Hosting

We would like to see you pretend you have the ABC School, and how you would go about setting up a learning site for your school, establishing an URL, etc. You should probably visit the websites for input, do not write a book, the purpose of the question is for you to demonstrate you understand the differences. Keep it short; do not talk about actually setting up a site, just the basic steps to follow to create a website for ABC School on the internet."

WordPress.com

The initial setup process for WordPress.com (WordPress, 2018a) is quite simple, but I had to log out of my WordPress site to prevent WordPress.com from just attaching a new site to my current account. Start your free website at https://wordpress.com then click on the Get Started link. Follow the four simple steps below.

1. Fill in the simple form that asks for the site's name, a statement about the site, the site's "primary goal," and the user's comfort level with creating a website (I chose three out of five).

2. Give your site a URL (practicepracticeone.wordpress.com). You may have to change the name a few times to receive a URL that you like.

3. Choose a plan (free, personal, prmium, or busiess). I chose free the plan.

4. Provide personal information: email address, user name, and password then click on

"Continue" to create your WordPress account with the framework for a new site.

The first time that I tried this there was an additional step to chose a theme (the theme could be changed later or the theme skip could be skipped) between what is now steps one and two. The exact nature of the steps may change, but I expect it to remain a simple process. I have not to included screenshots of the current four steps because the steps do not appear to be static.

WordPress.org

WordPress.org (WordPress, 2018b) is different in that you need to register your domain name and find a hosting service for your website separate from WordPress. Before you actually sign up for the web hosting service, make sure that it meets the system requirements located at https://wordpress.org/about/requirements/. You need to have several things in place before you download WordPress according to the download instructions at https://codex.wordpress.org/Installing_WordPress#Things_to_Know_Before_Installing_WordPress: "access to your web server (via FTP or shell), ability to create MySQL databases, text editor, an FTP Client, your web browser of choice" and you need to have some familiarity or the time to learn PHP and MySQL. There are web-hosting services that simplify the download and development of WordPress.org sites, but some basic web development skills are still quite helpful. The main reasons that an organization might choose WordPress.org over WordPress.com are the additional user/developer control over the site and the additional plugins. WordPress.org is not for the casual web developer in my opinion.

Managed WordPress Hosting

If your company or school has a high volume of traffic, you may want to look into a Managed WordPress Hosting company. The price is generally prohibitive for smaller organizations, but they offer aids such as increased security, increased speed, daily back-ups, and

premium WordPress support (WPBeginner, 2018). For the sake of this assignment, I chose one

of the WordPress recommended sites (https://wordpress.org/hosting/), SiteGround (2018),

because it advertises "one-click install." SiteGround has three plans that vary in price, web space

size, number of visits they can handle, and WordPress features. New users can use a domain that

is already registered or register a domain with SiteGround for $15.95 per year. The final step for

setting up an account is to fill out a basic form, choose optional services such as "Domain

Privacy" (which protects your personal information) and "SG Site Scanner" (which checks for

hacking and malicious code) – for an additional fee, and supply your credit card information.

After these basic steps are completed, you have a domain registered with a WordPress-friendly

hosting service and are ready to download the WordPress package. There are many tutorials

available at https://www.siteground.com/tutorials/wordpress/ to help new users to get started.

Schools may want to look into sites that specifically cater to educational institutions such

as CampusPress (https://campuspress.com) and Edublogs (https://edublogs.org). Edublogs and

CampusPress are both "powered by WordPress" and are divisions of Incsub (2018); they are

complete online services, so there is no need for instructors or organizations to download and

maintain the WordPress software. Edublogs advertises free blogs for students, but I was able to

sign up for a free blog as a teacher. Edublogs lacks many of the options that schools and districts

may want to use. CampusPress is created for schools, universities, and other educational

organizations (not free, but with a free trial). CampusPress is further divided into "K-12" and

"higher education" services.

Question Four

WordPress's Multisite Function

"4A. What is "multisite" for WordPress, and why would you need this capability?"

WordPress' multisite function allows web developers to create a variety of sites that are connected to the individual's or organization's main WordPress site. An organization could use this function to set up individual sites for students, faculty, and/or courses that are all connected to the organization's main site. This allows for more in-depth use of the internet than simply giving each professor his or her own page on the university's web site. It also provides more structure than expecting each instructor and student to develop his or her own independent web site. This might not be appropriate for a course in web development or coding for the web in which students are expected to demonstrate that they can design and implement fully functioning web sites independently using specified programming languages. For most courses, an individual site within the larger organization's web site structure helps keep the focus on the course content by streamlining the actual site creation process. This aids students and instructors.

Managed WordPress Hosting

"4B. Please, find a "managed WordPress hosting" service and investigate if they allow multiple WordPress sites, if they are multisite capable, and how many "sites" are allowed for one account."

I decided to check out SiteGround, Edublogs, and CampusPress, since I mentioned all three services above. SiteGround offers multisite capability (which they call addon sites) in two of their three price ranges – not the least expensive option (https://www.siteground.com/kb/domain_comparison_parked_vs_addon_domains/). With CampusPress, the school or district can have one main site with teacher, student, course, and
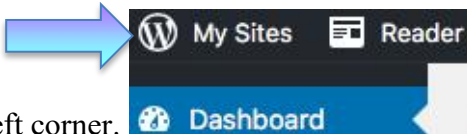
project (or school if a district plan) sub-sites, but the maximum number of sites is not easily

found on their website. I contacted the sales department of CampusPress for additional multisite

information and was told that there is no limit to the number of sites an organization can create.

Both the free and professional versions of Edublogs also allow for the creation of unlimited

multiple sites by its users, but each site is limited to only 1 GB of storage space in the free

version. Edublogs lacks some of the tools that schools and districts may want but it does retain

the unlimited multisite function that both SiteGround and CampudPress offer.

New Sites on WordPress.com

"4C. For wordpress.com, how many sites can you set up (for example, consider your Online

Portfolio account, can you set up new sites? If so, include a screen shot of the page where you

can register a new site for your Online Portfolio account."

WordPress.com also allows for an unlimited number of sites. The procedure us very

similar to the procedure for setting up a new WordPress.com site (see Question Three above)

except there are three steps instead of four. Log in to your WordPress.com account then click on

"My Sites" in the upper left corner.

Next, click on "Switch Sites." If you do not see the "ADD

NEW SITE" link (see the screenshot on the next page), return to "My Sites" then click on

"Switch Site" again. It always worked for me the second or third time.
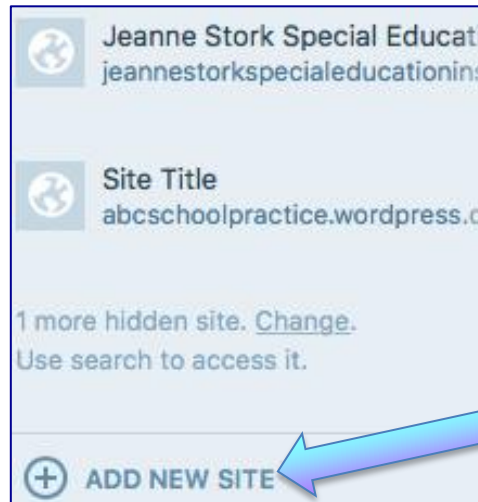
Click on "ADD NEW SITE."
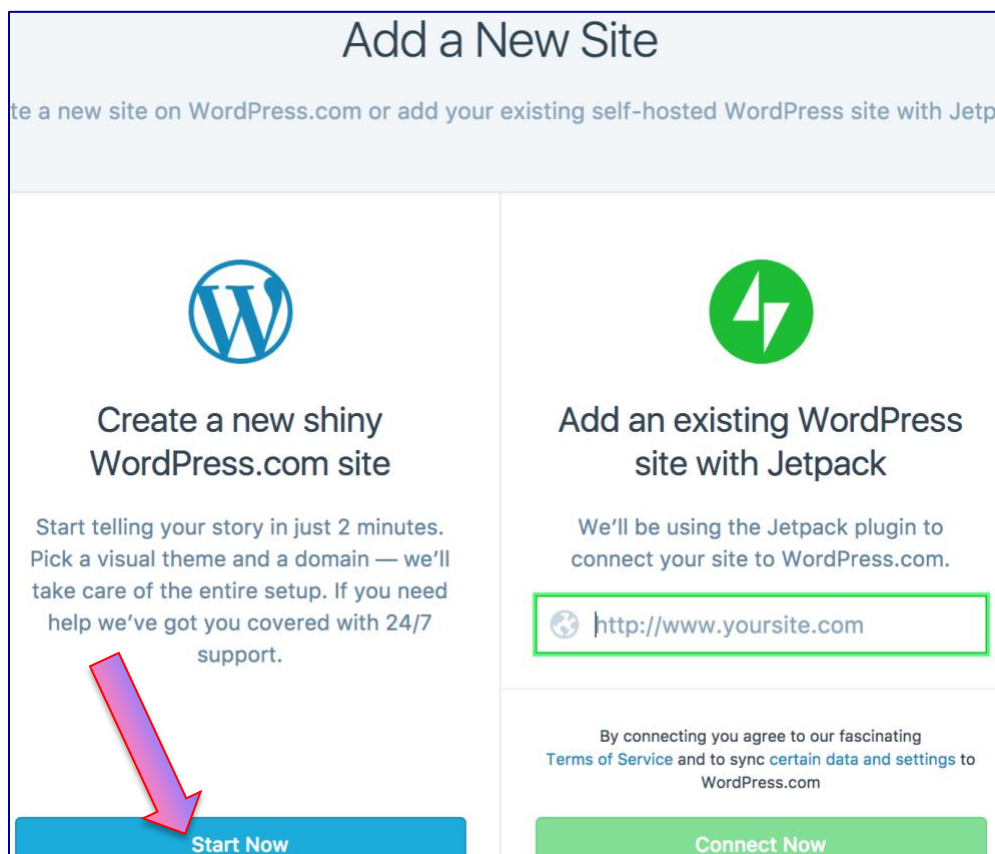
I clicked on "Start Now" below "Create a new shiny WordPress.com site" and followed what was then a simple four-step procedure to add abcschoolpractice.wordpress.com to my account. The first time that I tried to create a new site for my account, the first step was to choose how I wanted to begin my site: a blog, a website, a portfolio, or an online store. Step one became a form when I returned to take screenshots. Choosing one of three themes (which can be changed later or skipped) used to be step two but ceased to exist causing the old step three to

became step two. These changes lead to a three-step process.

     1. Fill in a simple form with basic information about the new site.

     2. Give your site a URL.

     3. Choose a plan (free, personal, prmium, or busiess).

Once again, I decided not to include my screenshots because the process may change again.

abcschoolpractice.wordpress.com has no content, nor even any titles, because I just used it to

practice making a new site within my account and have neither added nor changed anything from

the stub that was automatically created by WordPress.

<div align="center">Question Five</div>

 "5. We mentioned Edublogs and CampusPress above. They make a nice presentation. Please,

visit both sites and discuss your findings and if you saw any parts of the services that interested

you or seemed really useful. We suggest about one page for each but leave it to you to provide a

good answer. Screen shots for extra credit. Pretend you are sitting at the lunch table with your

colleagues and telling them about these two new web sites you discovered."

     I have already mentioned both Edublogs and CampusPress (Incsub, 2018) and will now

go into more depth about each service. Some of this information is repeated from previous

sections of this paper.
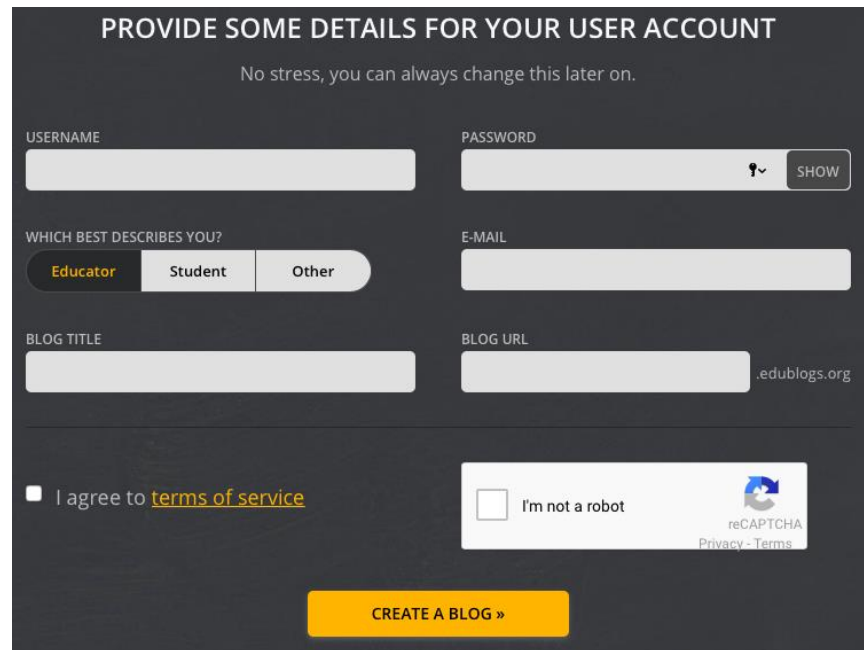
Edublogs

     Edublogs, at https://edublogs.org, is a free personal way to access WordPress with a

focus on educators and students. Signing up is very simple:

1. Give yourself a username and password; it can be changed in the next step.

2. Fill out the online form. The username and password from the previous step transfers

onto this form, but you can change it. Click on Educator, Student, or Other. Develop a URL for

this blog; the URL will always end in ".edublogs.org". Agree to the terms of service (you can

read first), complete the reCAPTCHA process. Finally, click on "CREATE A BLOG" to begin

your blog. I created a blog called Practice Blog at http://storkj19.edublogs.org then a second blog

titled Practice Blog Two at http://practiceblogtwo.edublogs.org to test the easy of setting up a

second site. The new site function brings up the same form as above. The interface is similar to

the WordPress.com interface. I went into Settings > Discussion and changed comments to

requiring manual approval before they are live for both blogs because I once had an

inappropriate comment on an unrelated site. All adjustments were easy to make.
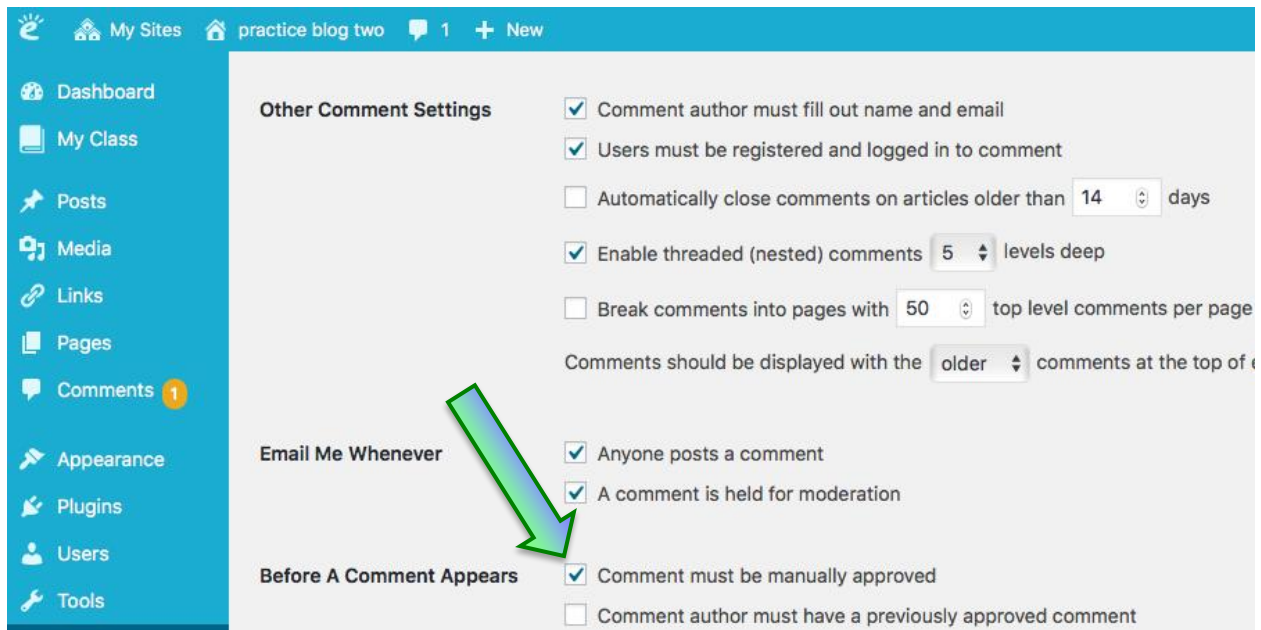
There are additional security measures that educators can require for student blogs that are registered under their accounts if the measures are needed and the instructor has the time to

moderate everything. https://help.edublogs.org/student-blogs/ provides additional information about creating student blogs, but the first step is to create a class blog using the "My Class" link on the left side of the page.
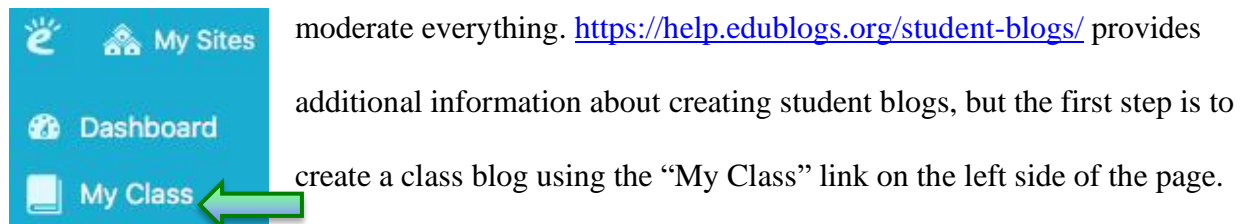
After the class blog is set, "Student Users" becomes an option when "My Class" is clicked on or hovered over. The teacher can add student users then create student blogs and perform other functions that will help to facilitate blogging in the course(s) he or she teaches.
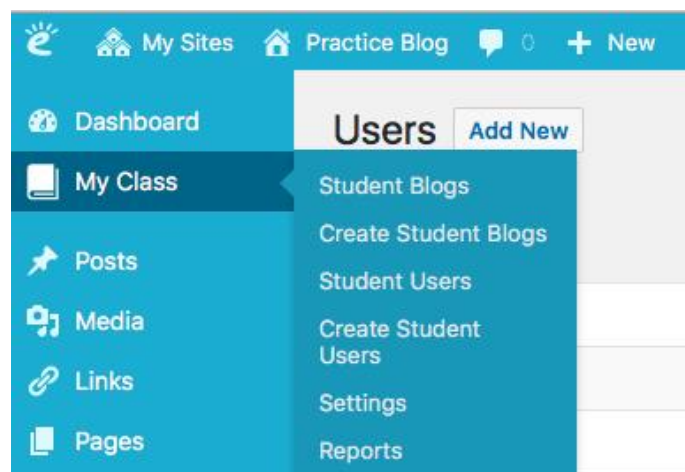
Based on my evaluation of Edublogs and what it offers, I think that most college/university instructors may not have the time to moderate everything but may still want to

retain the ability to edit potential inappropriate student posts and comments. Of course, even this takes time. Instructors need to know what will work best for their students and weigh it against their very real time constraints. Freshmen in some colleges and universities may need additional precautions, but less oversight will be needed as students mature.

The emphasis in Edublogs is educational plugins, so I decided to look at a few. Three of the six educational plugins that fit inside this screen shot are free for Edublogs users. When I looked at the other categories, many were free, but some required a paid upgrade to Edublogs Pro or CampusPress. There is more about CampusPress in the following subsection of this paper.


Both the free and "Pro" versions of Edublogs allow for the creation of unlimited multiple sites by its users, but the free subscription has a limit of only 1 GB of storage space (https://edublogs.org/features/). The description was not clear about whether it was 1 GB per account or per site, so I tested this by signing up for the free Edublogs account (https://storkj19.edublogs.org/) and adding two short video clips to my site. I then added a second site (http://practiceblogtwo.edublogs.org) to my account and discovered that the videos

were only included on my original site's media library; therefore, they did not reduce the storage

available on my second site. This means that an instructor can sign up for a free site and create

individual sites for each student without worrying about the cumulative effect on his or her

limited storage space. I think that an instructor who wants a WordPress blogging site with an

educational focus would do well with Edublogs. There are ample opportunities for upgrading to

the more expensive "Pro" version if the instructor needs those additional functions, but free

methods to accomplish tasks can usually be found.

CampusPress

CampusPress is designed for schools, universities, and school districts, with three price

points depending on the size of the organization. There is also a sales team that will help

determine what each organization needs then a tailor a package to meet those needs. Some of the

basic features of CampusPress are "WordPress Updates; Plugin and Theme Updates; Security

Scanning & Protection; Premium Plugins & Themes; … Unlimited Traffic, Bandwidth, Uploads; …

Education Only Focus" (the full list is at https://campuspress.com/highered/ about half-way down

the page). CampusPress is definitely more involved than Edublogs and may even require a full-

time "Super Admin" to coordinate everything, especially in larger schools.

One aspect of CampusPress that caught my eye is that schools and instructors can set up

online courses with multimedia, quizzes, learning units, and student assessments.
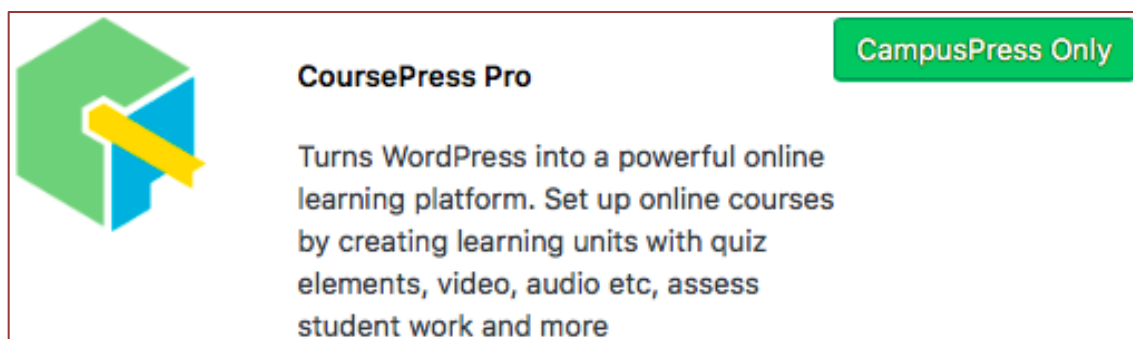
(screenshot from Edublogs' plugin interface in my dashboard)

Unlike Edublogs, CampusPress does not have a site size limit. I was also impressed by

the support documents that are located at https://campuspress.com/docs/. There is information

here to assist everyone from the "Super Admin" through end-users. CampusPress claims that the

tools that they provide will aid universities more than "just WordPress" (screen shot from https://campuspress.com/highered/ near the bottom of the page).
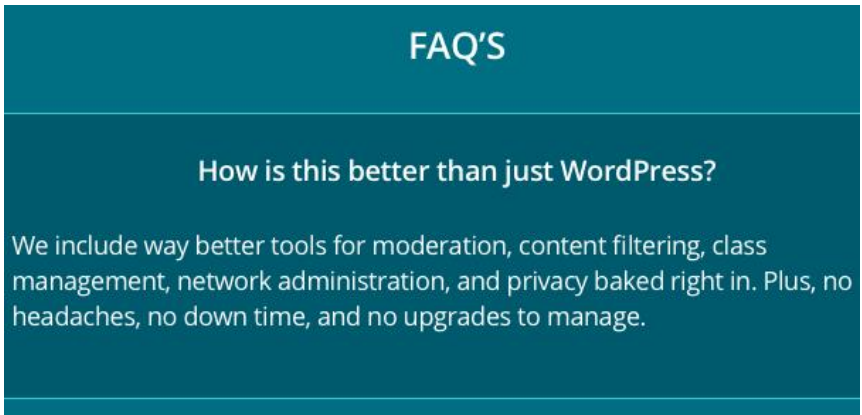
I tried to sign up for a free trial, but they first wanted me to have a virtual meeting with a

sales representative. I declined since I am not really looking to implement an online learning

management system for my school at this time. Since I was unable to test CampusPress myself, I

looked Columbia University's use of CampusPress. The image below demonstrates that the

landing page can be tailored to the needs of the university (full image at

http://campus2016.edublogs.org/case-studies/columbia/).

I would look at CampusPress more thoroughly if I was working for a university that wanted to commence online leaning or that wanted to change learning management systems.

Question Six

"6. Independent research (weighted 25%): Exams and quizzes for the WordPress platform. There are many standalone exam apps that one can use, and we covered some of these in a previous course. These can always be used in conjunction with a WordPress deployment by just using links to take the student off site in the event you have a favorite app. For this question, however, we want you to investigate and become familiar with the exam capability and relevant apps for the WordPress platform. Apps for a WordPress platform are referred to as **"plugins"** because they plug into the overall system software and become a part of it, rather than being a separate app on the side. Please, look at exam methodology offered by the following:

wordpress.com (basic free service) You should stumble across the "shortcode" for inserting exam questions.

wordpress.com (plugins that can be used with their business plan)

wordpress.org (there must be 100 or more, try to search reviews that can narrow this down for you)

Edublogs or CampusPress (select one to report on)"

WordPress.com (free)

I discovered four methods for inserting quizzes into free WordPress.com sites: page jumps, shortcode, contact forms, and polls. Page jumps and short code quizzes both provide students with immediate feedback and assist students to review material on their own. The

answers from quizzes based on WordPress.com's embedded contact form are emailed to the

instructor for grading and can be incorporated into students' grades like any other assignment.

The contact form does not have an automatic grading function, but there is more flexibility in the

type of questions than I found in online examples of the other two methods. Polls can be set to

show results or to keep them hidden. The method that the instructor chooses should be based on

his or her instructional goals for the quiz.

        The first method that I looked at was page jumps (WordPress, 2018c). This works well

for multiple choice and true/false questions. One way to organize this is to post a question on the

page followed by the potential answers. Each answer is a page jump so that students are brought

to a comment stating whether or not that answer was correct and why. After the explanation, I

would put a page jump to the next question for correct answers and all true/false answers. I

would have a page jump back to the question for multiple-choice questions so that students can

keep trying until they correctly answer the question. Each new question can be on a separate

page, or the developer can create one long page with the question/answers/explanations sections

one after each other scrolling down the page. I did not create a sample of this type of quiz

because I already have experience with page jumps.

        I was eager to try modifying a contact form for use as a quiz. The first time I tried to

build a form, the form became jumbled up with duplicate and missing items after several edits.

For my second attempt, I planned everything ahead of time to avoid having to edit any questions,

and it worked fine. I found the form builder incredibly easy to use and was able to create a quiz

with two multiple choice questions, one short answer question, and two questions with drop-

down menu answers in less than ten minutes once I taught myself how to effectively use the

interface. The entire quiz including finding the form within the WordPress.com interface,

learning how to adapt the form, researching the academic content, and practice time building

quizzes with the form; took about an hour to create – future quizzes will proceed more rapidly

now that I know the procedures. When I saved the form, the code for form appeared on my new

quiz page's page-building interface.

"[contact-form to='acciophoenix19@gmail.com' subject='Sample Quiz

Submission'][contact-field label='Name' type='name' required='1'/][contact-field

label='Email' type='email' required='1'/][contact-field label='What are the primary

colors in light? (choose multiple selections.)' type='checkbox-multiple'

options='Red,Orange,Blue,Magenta,Purple,Cyan,Green,Yellow'/][contact-field

label='Name pigment%26#039;s primary colors. (Choose as many as you need).'

type='checkbox-multiple'

options='Purple,Blue,Magenta,Green,Orange,Cyan,Yello,Red'/][contact-field

label='What is the difference between the common color wheel%26#039;s

primary colors that you learned as a child and the modern pigment%26#039;s

primary colors? (one or two sentences only)' type='text'/][contact-field

label='Which color wheel would you use with computer monitors?' type='select'

options='Traditional Common Color Wheel,Light Color Wheel,Modern Pigment

Color Wheel'/][contact-field label='Which color wheel is printer toner based on?'

type='select' options='Traditional Common Color Wheel,Light Color

Wheel,Modern Pigment Color Wheel'/][/contact-form]"

Everything was in place on the blog post and worked correctly when I viewed the quiz online at

https://jeannestorkspecialeducationinstructionaltechnology.wordpress.com/2018/02/03/practice-

building-quiz-questions-contact-form-and-shortcode-methods/. This method works particularly

well if the instructor wants to include quiz scores in student grades or if the instructor wants to

poll the class to see who understands the material and who requires additional help and/or

practice with the content.

I created a one-question quiz using WordPress' shortcode method (WordPress, 2018d).

One question with three possible answers was enough practice for me to get the feel for how this

particular shortcode works. I inserted the code that I copied from

https://en.support.wordpress.com/quiz-shortcode/ then modified it to suit my needs by removing

the incorrect answer that lacked an explanation, duplicating the incorrect answer format that I

wanted to use for additional responses, and adding my own text. Not including the time I spent

researching shortcodes, this question took about five minutes for me to produce (copy, paste,

modify) and can be found at

https://jeannestorkspecialeducationinstructionaltechnology.wordpress.com/quizpractice/ under

the five questions that were created using the contact form.
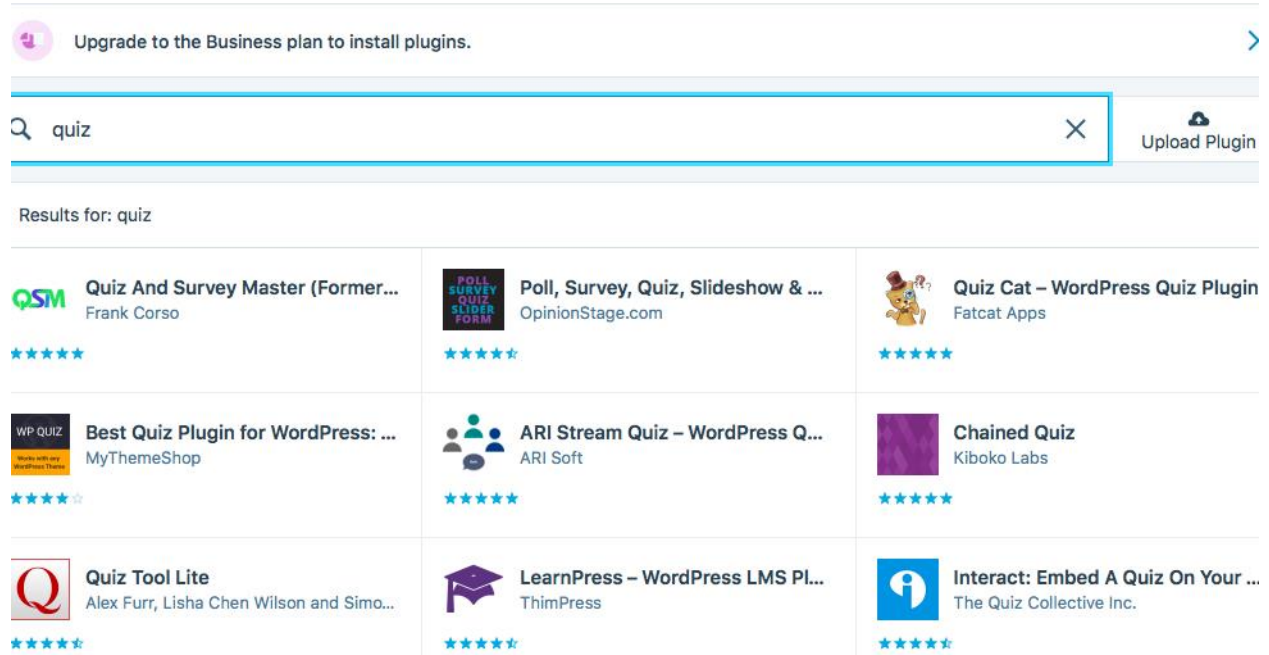
WordPress.com's poll function is another easy way to add true/false or multiple-choice

questions to pages where the answer can either be hidden from the student or provided to help

the student review his or her knowledge. The instructor can see the results by going to Feedback

on the left side of the WordPress.com's dashboard then clicking on Polls. This is a quick way to

determine how many students understand the material when it is not important how any

particular student voted because individual results will not be tallied.

I found all of these methods easy to implement. The method chosen by the instructor will

depend on what he or she needs to accomplish at any given point in the course. I spent the vast

majority of my Question Six time on this section because I wanted to experiment with as many

methods as I could find for adding quizzes to my free WordPress.com site in case I needed

quizzes in the future.

WordPress.com (Business Plan)

WordPress.com's Business plan can do all of the above, but it also allows plugins. Over one hundred quiz plugins can be found when using WordPress' plugin search function with "quiz" as the search term.

The Quiz and Survey Master plugin (WordPress, 2018e) is available for both WordPress.com Business subscribers and WordPress.org users as a free download (contributions accepted but not required). Quiz and Survey Master averaged 4.5 out of five stars from over five hundred votes, but many other plugins also received high ratings. I liked that instructors could create quizzes that are automatically graded if question types such as multiple choice or true/false are selected. The instructor can choose to have the results shown to the student as a percentage correct score for the entire quiz or for each section if the questions are divided into sections. Quizzes can include information regarding why answers are correct or incorrect if the quiz is going to be used as a self-assessment study aid. Some or all of the questions can be set as

required. The questions can be randomized if desired. A predetermined number of questions can also be randomly selected so that the entire list of questions is not given to each student. Quizzes can be graded using correct/incorrect or point values. Answers can be emailed to the instructor via a submit button so that instructors can track progress, grade short answer questions, and provide feedback via the email's reply button. Data can also be collected within the plugin so that a wide variety of "unlimited results pages" can be utilized. The instructor sets up the type of results desired and how they will be displayed. There are additional functions, including optional paid add-ons, but this covers many of the tools that would be helpful to instructors.

I like the flexibility of both creating quizzes and tracking data and would investigate this much more thoroughly if I subscribed to WordPress.com's Business plan or worked for a university that was a subscriber.

WordPress.org

This subsection should be further subtitled: "The Difficulties in Locating Educational Quiz Plugins in a Social World." Upon the advice of the course syllabus (Drake, 2018), I investigated several lists of potential quiz and exam plugins. Several sites that list WordPress quiz plugins have goals of driving site retention and audience expansion, not educating our youth. Both Quiz and Survey Master mentioned above and CampusPress in the next sub-section were listed as good educational tools available to WordPress.org users, but both plugins are mentioned elsewhere in this paper and will not be repeated here. WP Quiz (WordPress, 2018f) was high on many lists of quiz-creation plugins, so it warrants further investigation. WP Quiz or WP Quiz Pro should not be confused with Wp-Pro-Quiz (WordPress, 2018g). WordPress clearly states that Wp-Pro-Quiz has not been tested with recent versions of the WordPress software. Wp-Pro-Quiz actually received a user higher rating than WP Quiz, but since Wp-Pro-Quiz is out of

date I looked more closely at WP Quiz and WP Quiz Pro. WP Quiz and its premium version WP

Quiz Pro fall into the social category but can be adapted for educational uses. Wp-Pro-Quiz

would have been more useful, but I cannot recommend a plugin that might not work with current

or future versions of WordPress. I returned to the WordPress.org plugin search page

(https://wordpress.org/plugins/) to look up "education" only to discover that the plugins that

most interested me had not been recently tested for current WordPress compatibility. WatuPro

came the closest to meeting my criteria for being current, educational, and functional.

The WatuPro (Calendar Scripts, date unknown) is the premium (paid) version of Watu

Quiz (WordPress, 2018h). Both Watu products have many of the elements that a university may

want in a quiz plugin, including a wide variety of question types (e.g., true/false, multiple choice,

and open-ended essay questions) and grading options (e.g., percent correct and weighted point

scores). The students can obtain their scores after completing a quiz or later in an email from the

professor. Correct answers can be given to students after each question, after the student

completes the quiz, or not at all (to prevent sharing answers if the quiz is included in students'

grades). Instructors have a report interface installed into their WordPress dashboards for

checking each student's scores. Both versions are "mobile friendly" (large buttons that are easy

to click on small screens) and multisite capable.

Instructors can require that students taking Watu Quiz quizzes log in with their

WordPress credentials to track student scores. Watu Quiz is a good option for the type of self-

administered quiz that shows students areas that they need to study more and for professors that

just want basic score reports for each student. Watu Quiz Pro includes additional features such as

dedicated student logins, the ability to place questions into categories with category-weighted

scoring, and some additional reports (such as question-specific results). Even more detailed quiz

and reporting features are available to schools using WatuPro for an additional fee. There are larger course creators with more advanced quiz and exam capabilities, but Watu Quiz and Watu Pro may fit the bill for many universities.

CampusPress

One of the many functions of the CoursePress Pro plugin to CampusPress is to enable instructors to create quizzes. The CoursePress Pro plugin is one of the default educational plugins available to schools that use CampusPress (according to https://campuspress.com/docs/plugins/?plugin-category=category4), but it may have to be requested by the Superb Admin (according to https://campuspress.com/docs/plugins/optional-plugins/). Once CoursePress Pro is added to the network, it is available for all instructors and departments who manage sites within the institution's larger CampusPress framework. According to The Edublogger (Burt, 2014), the CoursePress plugin allows the creation of assessments and quizzes without the need to link to outside sources. Quizzes can be "multiple choice, true/false, free response, and file upload." CoursePress quizzes can be designed for automatic feedback or instructors can give students individual feedback. CoursePress Pro offers many other education tools that help CampusPress users create courses, lessons, and other educational content. CoursePress (not "Pro") is available as a free download for WordPress users who have "your own hosted WordPress site or Multisite Network." Neither CoursePress nor CoursePress Pro is available for Edublogs users.

Limiting Audience to Students

Most of these quiz techniques are open to the public if the pages they are on are open to the public. If you only want your students to respond, I strongly suggest that instructors should password-protect quiz pages and blog posts or post them on course sites with access restricted to

specified WordPress users (the students). This is especially important if the instructor is

collecting data via poll results and emailed responses and less important for self-evaluations

where the answers are provided, and the instructor is not being emailed the results. I will have to

password-protect my sample quiz blog

https://jeannestorkspecialeducationinstructionaltechnology.wordpress.com/2018/02/03/practice-building-quiz-questions-contact-form-and-shortcode-methods/ if my email gets bogged down

with responses to my contact form quiz.

Question Seven

 "7. Independent research (weighted 25%): How to deliver bulletin board capability with a blog-

based system. What we are talking about is class discussion and the ability of instructor and

students to interact via bulletin board or "comments". Note that basic wordpress.com allows

comments to posts, such that if a teacher posts a project or other work, students can make

comments (you must turn the "comments" on in the settings, and then a comments box will

appear or a "leave comment" prompt). Try searching "how to create discussions with

WordPress", or "bulletin boards" with WordPress and compare/contrast the different possible

formats between:

> wordpress.com
>
> wordpress.com (Business plan allowing plugins)
>
> wordpress.org
>
> Edublogs or CampusPress (select one)"

WordPress.com

There are several modifications that users can make to the free WordPress.com's

comments capabilities that can help instructors encourage discussions. The following

information will help people to use comments sections to discuss information contained in pages

and posts (WordPress, 2018i). These screenshots

are for users who log in using the /wp-

admin/index.php suffix, but the directions for

other users are similar. There are two ways to

reach the discussion settings from the dashboard

on the left side. Hover over Settings until the

menu appears to the right then click on Settings.
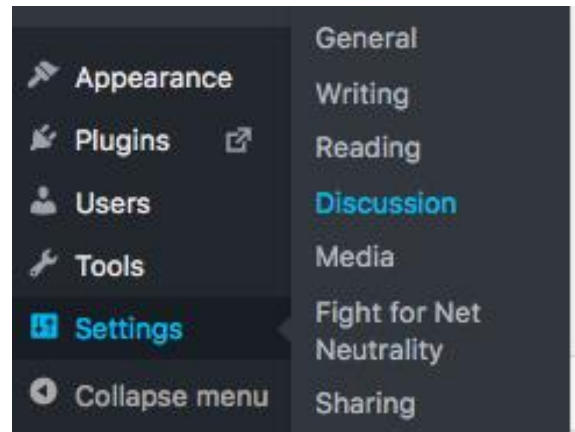
or

Click on Settings – the options will open below the Settings title –

then click on Discussion. Both methods will open the discussions

options panel to allow users to adjust comments so that they

encourage discussions. The changes made to comments through the

dashboard will take effect for all future comments on pages and posts

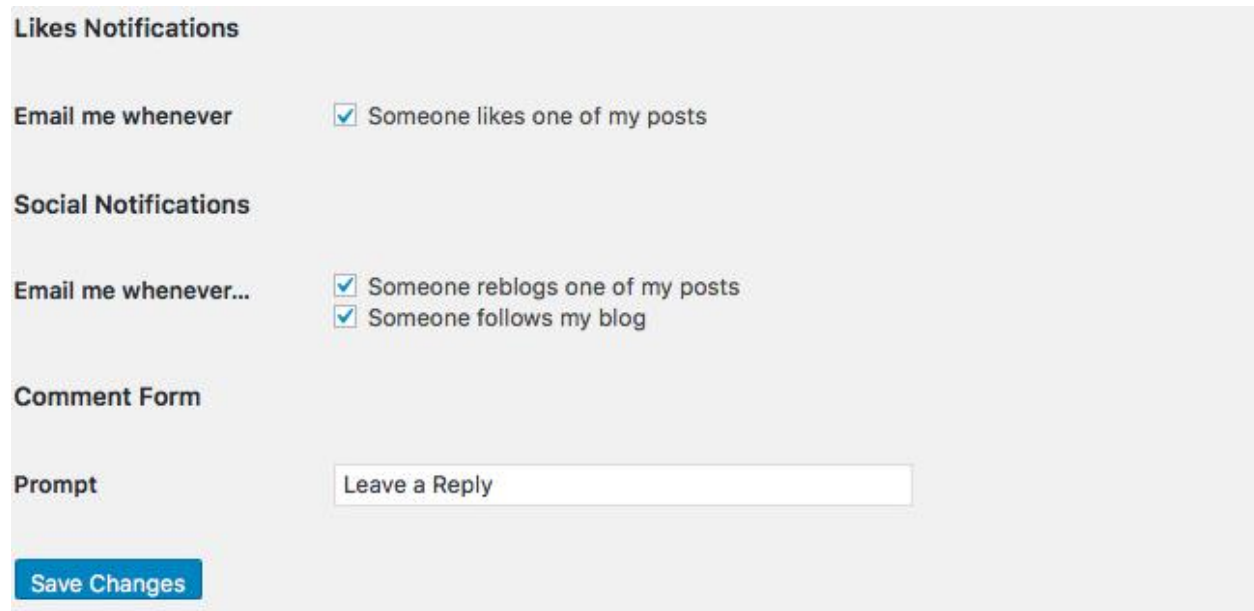as they are created. It is a good practice to set up discussion options
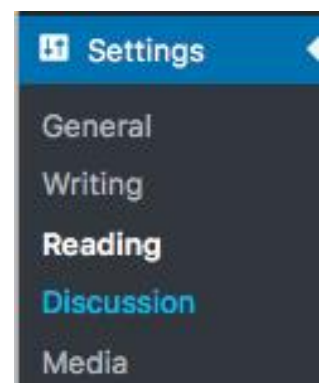
before creating pages and blog posts that will include active communication between individual

students and between students and the instructor.

      The following screen shots are from my WordPress.com administrative settings. The

written instructions are below the final picture in the series. Each web developer may choose

options that are different from the ones outlined below depending on the needs of the course and

of the people involved (the instructor and the students), so only key items are mentioned. The

most important item is to turn on comments. Without comments, there can be no discussion.

Default article settings
☑ Attempt to notify any blogs linked to from the article

☑ Allow link notifications from other blogs (pingbacks and trackbacks) on new articles

☑ Allow people to post comments on new articles

(These settings may be overridden for individual articles.)

Other comment settings
☑ Comment author must fill out name and email

☐ Users must be registered and logged in to comment

☐ Automatically close comments on articles older than 14 ⌄ days

☑ Enable threaded (nested) comments 3 ⌄ levels deep

☐ Break comments into pages with 50 ⌄ top level comments per page and the

last ⌄ page displayed by default

Comments should be displayed with the older ⌄ comments at the top of each page

Email me whenever
☑ Anyone posts a comment

☑ A comment is held for moderation

Before a comment appears
☑ Comment must be manually approved

☐ Comment author must have a previously approved comment

Comment Moderation
Hold a comment in the queue if it contains 2 ⌄ or more links. (A common characteristic of comment spam is a large number of hyperlinks.)

When a comment contains any of these words in its content, name, URL, email, or IP address, it will be held in the moderation queue. One word or IP address per line. It will match inside words, so "press" will match "WordPress".

Comment Blacklist
When a comment contains any of these words in its content, name, URL, email, or IP address, it will be put in the trash. One word or IP address per line. It will match inside words, so "press" will match "WordPress".

Follow Comments   ☑ Show a *'follow comments'* option in the comment form

Follow Blog   ☑ Show a *'follow blog'* option in the comment form

Markdown   ☐ Use Markdown for comments.
Learn more about Markdown.

Akismet anti-spam strictness
◉ Strict: silently discard the worst and most pervasive spam.

○ Safe: always put spam in the Spam folder for review.

Avatars

An avatar is an image that follows you from weblog to weblog appearing beside your name when you comment on avatar enabled sites. Here you can enable the display of avatars for people who comment on your site.

Avatar Display   ☑ Show Avatars

Gravatar Hovercards   ☑ View people's profiles when you mouse over their Gravatars
Put your mouse over your Gravatar to check out your profile.

Maximum Rating
◉ G — Suitable for all audiences

○ PG — Possibly offensive, usually for audiences 13 and above

○ R — Intended for adult audiences above 17

○ X — Even more mature than above

Default Avatar   For users without a custom avatar of their own, you can either display a generic logo or a generated one based on their email address.

◉ Mystery Person

○ Blank

○ Gravatar Logo

○ Identicon (Generated)

○ Wavatar (Generated)

○ MonsterID (Generated)

○ Retro (Generated)

Likes Notifications

Email me whenever   ☑ Someone likes one of my posts

Social Notifications

Email me whenever...   ☑ Someone reblogs one of my posts
                         ☑ Someone follows my blog

Comment Form

Prompt   Leave a Reply

Save Changes

"Default article settings": Check all three options. The first two options involve

pingbacks and trackbacks between blogs linked to and from this site. This is similar to the

reference section at the end of this paper and helps give credit to this and other blogs. The third

option actually turns on comments; without comments there will be no discussion.

"Other comment settings": Much of this section is user-preferences. It is recommended

that nesting comments not be greater than three levels deep because more than that can have a

negative effect on other aspects of the WordPress web page or blog.

Additional Settings: The majority of the settings will be turned off or on based on the

particular circumstances of the university and the users. Active WordPress users may want to

turn off email notifications to prevent WordPress from clogging up the person's email; all

information can be obtained via the WordPress interface. For instance, I currently check my

email more often than I check WordPress, so I want to be notified by email whenever someone

likes one of my posts, reblogs my posts, and follows my blog. If I were a professor with fifty

students in a freshman university course, I would probably not want my time taken up with these

email notifications. Comment approval and moderation are also optional and need to be adjusted

based on the user/developer's particular circumstances, including whether or not the instructor

has the time for constant moderation and the maturity level of the students. One would hope that

college and university students would not require their comments to be moderated. Likewise, I

have left the list of unacceptable words blank because I am currently moderating all comments. I

might create a list if I turn off moderation then find that people were abusing the posting

privilege. The specific settings chosen for everything else also will depend on the school, course,

and the individuals involved.

"Save Changes": Finally, when everything is the way you want it, click on "Save

Changes." You can revisit these options again in the future, but as already mentioned, changes to

the discussion settings from the site's dashboard will only effect new blog posts and web pages.

Comment/Discussion settings in previously created content will have to be individually changed

as necessary.

WordPress.com (Business plan allowing plugins)

Discussion Board is a highly rated plugin (4.9 out of 5 stars) that installs on

WordPress.com business plan accounts (WordPress, 2018j). Discussion Board allows you to

require that participants log into the forum directly (front-in login), login through their Facebook

accounts, or neither option (no login required). Email verification can be turned on to reduce

spam accounts when front-in login us utilized. Discussion participants can post new topics,

which will then appear on different pages within the discussion, and comment on currently

available topics. The administrator can set different permissions for viewing and discussing. One

possible combination is that anyone can view the discussion but only members can add their

comments and start new topics. The Discussion Board plug in seems to be quick to set up and

easy to use based on the documentation provided.

The pro version includes additional options for a price. Pro users can personally manage new accounts acceptance (instead of just the automatic email verification method the free account offers). Another benefit of the Discussion Board Pro is that a WordPress site can have multiple Discussion Boards, each with its own subject area. One Pro option that might help creative site administrators is the WYSIWYG editor (What You See Is What You Get). Discussion Board Pro offers a variety of administrative and following options, but colleges and universities have to weigh the benefits against their budgets.

WordPress.org

Discussion Board and Discussion Board Pro are also available for WordPress.org users. From what I have seen, all of the plugins that are available for WordPress.Com Business users are also available for WordPress.org users. Likewise, the discussion format outlined in the free WordPress.com section, which utilizes comment settings to encourage discussions, can also be set up in WordPress.org and WordPress.com Business accounts. Another plugin will be looked as was the procedure in Question Six above.

Asgaros Forum (WordPress, 2018k) also received 4.9 stars and is another discussion board builder that is available to WordPress.org site builders. The developer installs Asgaros Forum, creates a discussion board/forum within WordPress, and then uses shortcode to quickly add the forum to the desired page (using a new page is suggested). Simplicity and ease of use are emphasized throughout the plugin's documentation, but there are still many options that can be used to customize the forum as needed. For instance, the developer can select an appearance theme for the forum so that it blends nicely with the theme the WordPress site uses. The forum can also be moderated as needed. There is a reporting function for improper posts and moderators can ban users who do not follow the site's posting rules. Asgaros Forum is multi-site

capable so that it can be installed once on the account (probably by the account's owner or head

administrator (sometimes called a super admin) then used by everyone who has permission to

make pages and to use the plugin. Although I was unable to install and test Asgaros Forum, it

does appear to be a convenient way to add a fully functioning discussion board to a

WordPress.org site.

Edublogs

A plugin for the professional version of Edublogs was chosen for this section. Schools

need a pre-existing website that meets specific PHP criteria to run CampusPress and its

CoursePress Pro plugin. Turning comments into discussion boards in the free version of

Edublogs follow the same procedures as with the free version of WordPress.com with the

addition of the "My Class" function to help keep everything organized and more student

friendly. Some instructors (and small colleges/universities) may choose the middle ground of

having an Edublogs Pro site that allows a limited number of curated plugins but does not require

a college or university website that will run PHP.

Forums (Edublogs, 2018) is the Edublogs Pro plugin that organizes discussion boards on

Edublogs sites. Multiple boards/forums can be created with the plug in. Each forum can contain

multiple topics and each topic can have multiple replies from many different people. I upgraded

my Edublogs account and very quickly created a forum then added it to a blog post because I

wanted to thoroughly evaluate this plugin. Like the discussion board techniques previously

mentioned, Forums' discussions can be added to posts and pages. The following screen shots

outline the process, which only took a few minutes to set up. Adding academic content would

take additional time. The discussion is still a stub with no real content, but it can be seen at

http://storkj19.edublogs.org/2018/02/10/discussion-board-practice/. Right now, I have not

password-protected the post, but I will if it collects anything inappropriate. If monitoring my

Edublogs account become too time-consuming, I will have to close it down.

1. Click on Plugins in your dashboard; search for "forum".
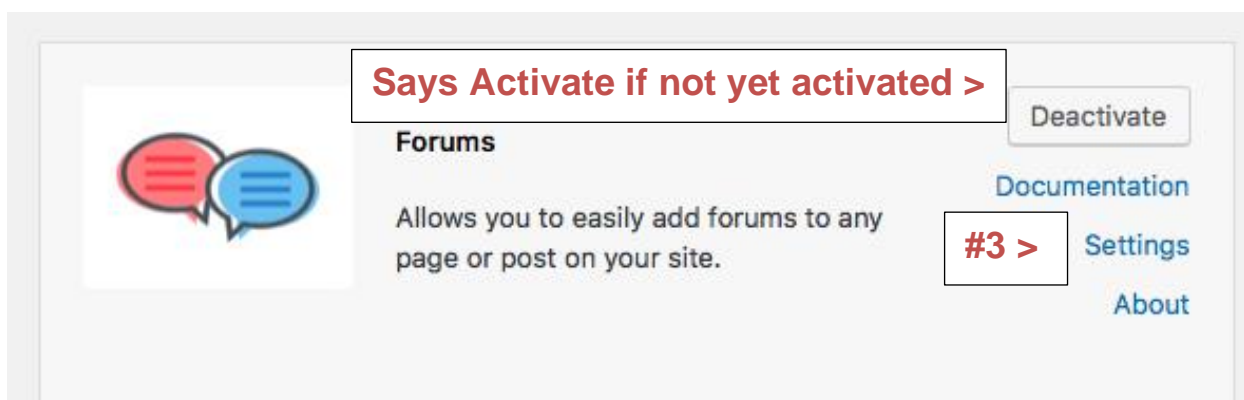
2. Activate the plugin (deactivate shown because it was already activated).

3. Click on Settings (appears if activated) to make sure that the basic user-defined settings are

adjusted to your needs. I allowed such function as "Allow users to mark topics as favorites" and

"Allow users to subscribe to forums and topics," but I reduced the editing time and increased the

throttle time between posts to reduce spamming opportunities.
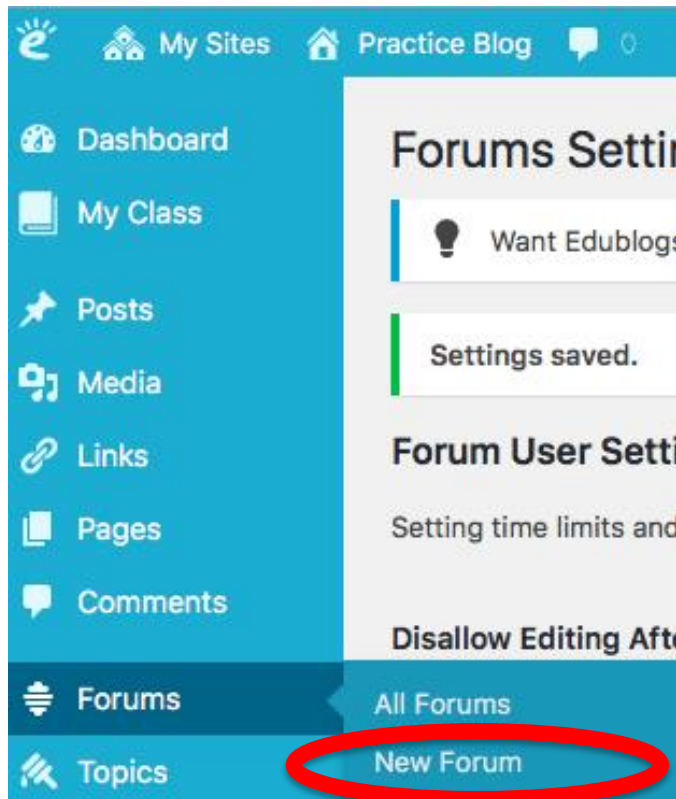
4. The "Forums" item now appears in the Dashboard. Hover over or click on "Forums" then click on "New Forum" to create a new forum, which will be added to your site in the final step below.
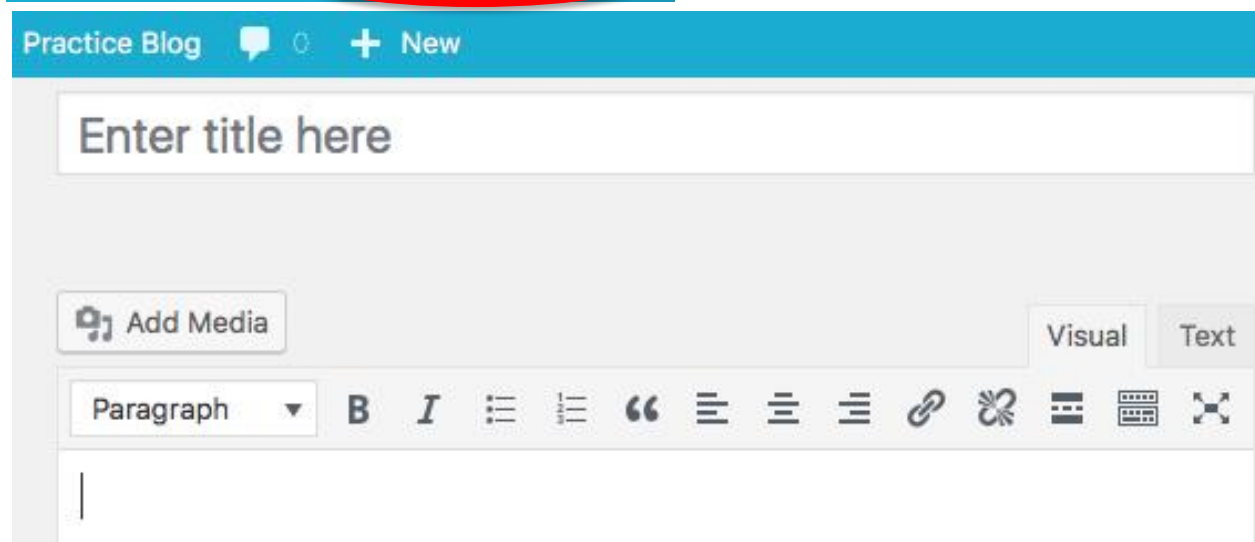
5. Give your discussion a title and add any content that you want to appear when participants

first see the discussion on your page or post.

6. Adjust discussion specific settings. One important consideration is the type of discussion. The picture to the left shows the type as "Forum;" the other option is "Category." If you have multiple related forums, you can group them into categories. "A Category contains forums, and a Forum contains topics," (Edublogs, 2018). You can place multiple forums in a single category.

I created the category Edublogs Practice then placed my forum, Discussion Board Practice, inside it so that the category is the parent to the forum.

7. Click on Publish.

8. Click on the Forums heading on the left side of your dashboard to see your list of forums and categories. Copy the shortcode for the forum or category that you want to place in a post or page. Make sure to include the brackets. I copied the shortcode for Edublogs Practice.
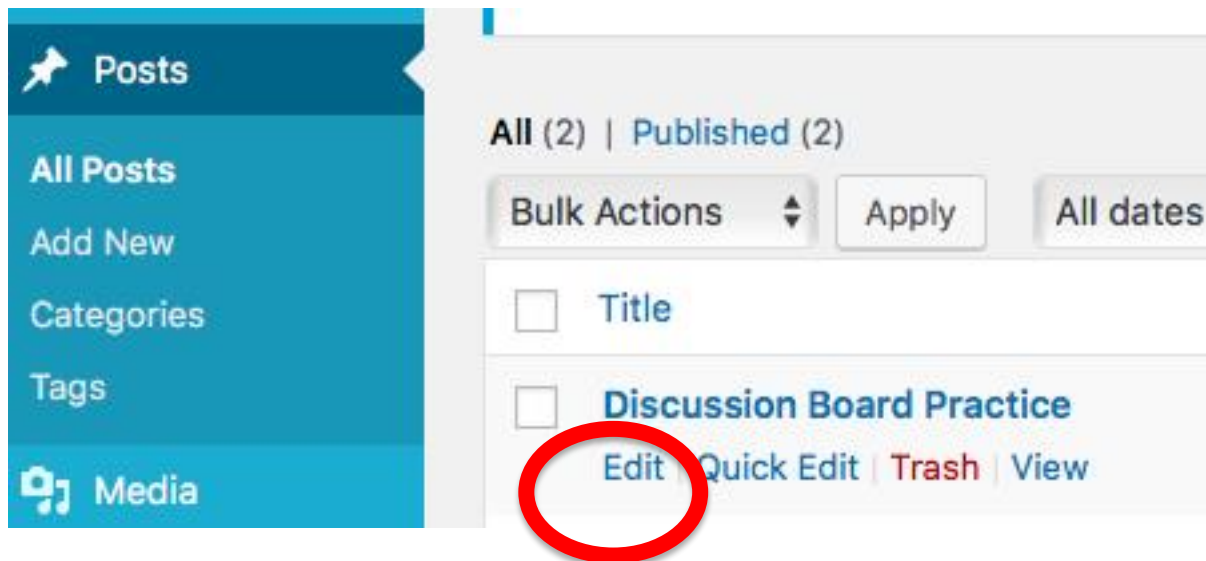
9. From your dashboard, edit the page or post that you want to host your forum or category.
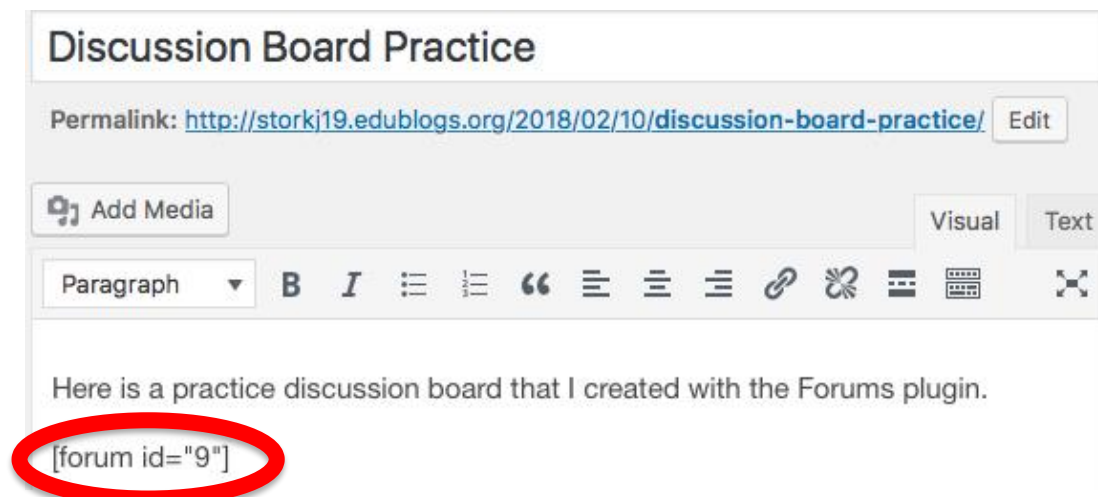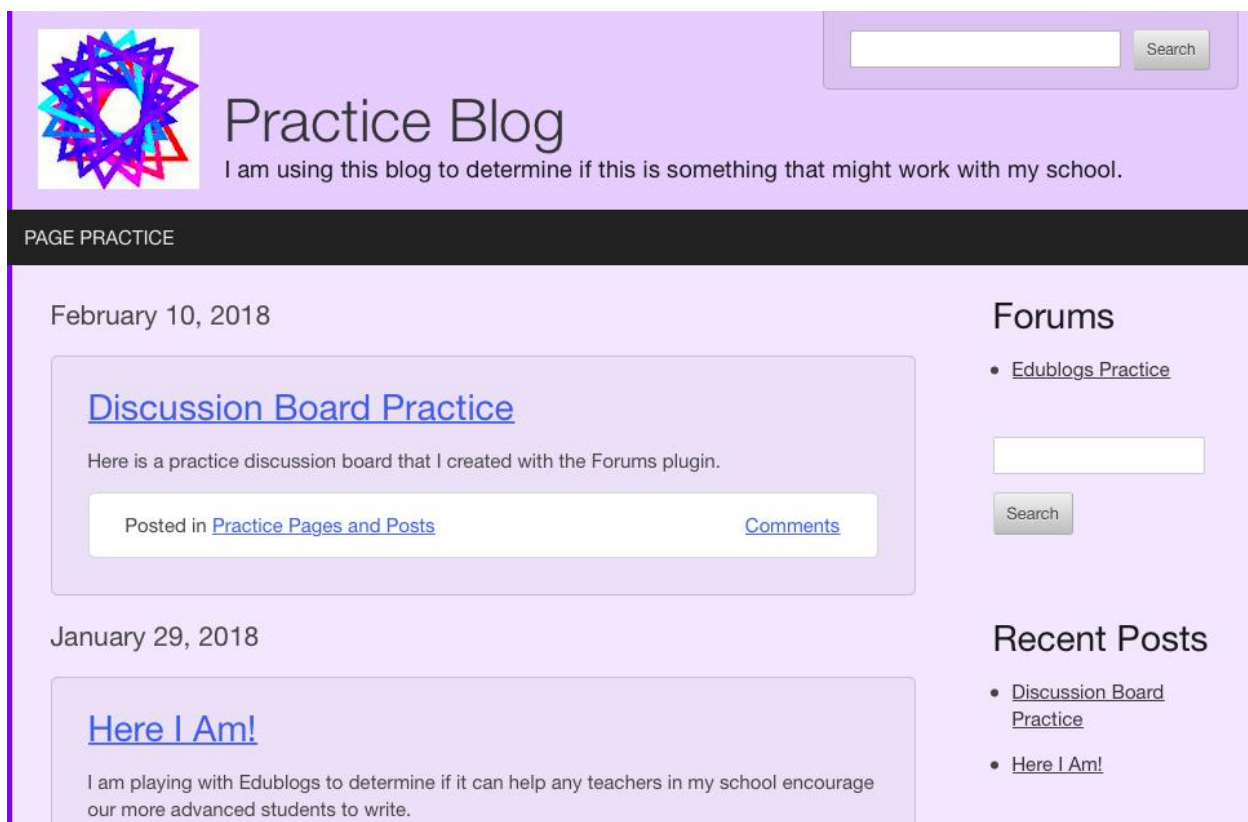

10. Paste the shortcode into the post or page. I have it below my description of the post.
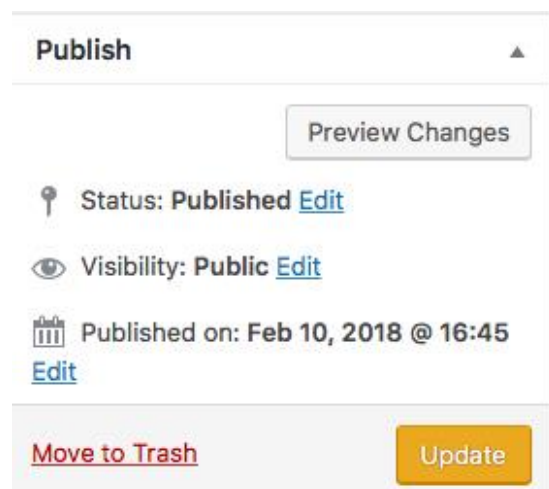
11. Click on Update.

All eleven steps took me about ten minutes to complete because I did not pay any

attention to content. It would take more time and planning to create a meaningful discussion with

an educational focus, but the same could be said of all of the plugins and free methods mentioned

in this paper. I would recommend Edublogs Pro with the Forums plugin provided the college or

instructor did not require a free option. My new blog on Edublogs can now be seen at

https://storkj19.edublogs.org/2018/02/10/discussion-board-practice/ . Here are two key

screenshots of my blog for people reading this paper after my Edublogs Pro subscription expires.

Discussion Board Practice

Here is a practice discussion board that I created with the Forums plugin.

This forum is empty.

Forum	Topics	Posts	Freshness
Discussion Board Practice	0	0	No Topics
Forum Practice Two	0	0	No Topics

I am just adding this forum to my category, Edublogs
Practice, so that I can see what it looks like. This forum
including the current typing is taking me about three minutes
to complete. I am not the fastest typer.

Recommendations

The decision of whether or not to include discussion boards in any course is not a simple

matter. Does the instructor honestly have the time to read, and if necessary to moderate, the

discussion? Will the discussion help students to learn the material? What safeguards can be used

to prevent students from passing along incorrect information? I have touched on these points

throughout this paper. In my opinion, discussion boards can be very helpful for small classes, but

there is no way I can fathom that a professor teaching a freshman English course to a hundred

and fifty students (or even to fifty students) has the time to review all of the discussion board

postings for accuracy and for appropriateness. I know that they are used in large courses, but I

wonder what the professor is not doing while he is reading everyone's posts. It can also be a

burden on your average full-time undergraduate student who needs to post in each of his classes

several times a week. The only way that I can see discussion boards as being an undergraduate

requirement is if another form of homework is reduced, which would give both the students and

the professors more time.

I have participated in many discussion board assignments as a graduate student and feel that graduate students are generally more mature (no inappropriate comments) and there are fewer students per course, so the instructor's work is easier. The instructor still has to quickly correct any mistakes that occur and help guide the discussions toward the topic at hand on occasion, but it is a much easier job. These discussion boards helped all of us improve our work because the class worked together as a team, helping each other, instead of competing for grades.

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Note: Due to the huge number of WordPress references in this paper, they are listed in the order in which they appear in this paper instead of alphabetical by title (often the rule in writing style manuals). Hopefully, this format will make finding specific references easier on the readers.