MODULE #3: SETTING UP YOUR WEBSITE, STEP BY STEP

IN THIS MODULE: We'll look at what to include on your website (and what not to include). After that, we'll cover different types of website: simple one-page websites, multi-page sites, and blogs – and we'll tackle setting up *your* website.

Last week, you came up with a name for your freelancing business. You probably registered a domain name (even if it was just a cheap one to practice with) and set up at least one social media account.

This week, we'll be taking another big step: building your website.

I know this might sound quite daunting, if you've never created a website before … but we'll tackle things step by step.

Before we get into anything technical, we're going to look at what to actually include on your website. I'm putting this first as, even if you're not quite ready to get your website online, you can start gathering and writing these things.

What to Include on Your Website

There are no absolute "rules" on what should go on a freelancing website, but there are certain things that your potential clients will find useful.

I'd strongly recommend including:

#1: A Clear Description of What You Do

This might sound obvious … but you need to be very clear about what you do! Imagine someone coming to your website who's never heard of you before. You need a couple of sentences, or maybe a short list, to explain what exactly it is that you offer.

#2: Your Email Address

You need to make it *very* easy for potential clients to get in touch, and that almost certainly means including your email address. *Don't* just have a contact form: some people don't like using them, and it's all too possible for them to break! It's fine to have the form, but include your email address too.

#3: Examples of Your Previous Work

Before someone hires you (or even gets in touch), they'll most likely want to see examples of things that you've written. You can include these as links to pieces published online – probably the easiest way – or, with permission from past clients, you can include a piece you've written for their print publication on your website.

Don't worry if you don't have anything you can use yet: we're going to come onto this next week (in Module 4).

#4: Testimonials from Previous Clients

Even though you're including examples of your work, it's still important to have testimonials from people who've worked with you in the past. These will hopefully not only emphasise the quality of your writing – they'll also make it clear that you're easy and pleasant to work with!

Don't worry if you don't have any testimonials yet: we're going to come onto this next week (in Module 4).

#5: A Photo of You

This is optional, but I'd recommend it: I think a photo really helps potential clients to make a connection, and it can also help give a sense of legitimacy (they can see you actually exist). I'd suggest using a clear, smiling headshot without other people in the photo – if you don't have one to hand, ask

someone to take a bunch of photos of you against a plain background, then pick whichever shot looks best.

What NOT to Include on Your Website

There are some things you should probably (or almost certainly) avoid on your website. I expect some of this will seem a bit obvious to you; if so, congratulate yourself on your good sense. ;-)

#1: Don't Include Your Phone Number (Unless You're Sure)

I'm putting this first because it's a bit controversial. Some freelancers feel strongly that you *should* include your phone number because some clients would much rather talk than email. Personally, I'm happy to talk to clients on the phone if it's pre-arranged, but I don't want just anyone phoning up at random, so I don't put my phone number on my site or in my email footer.

You may feel much more positive about phone calls than me, though. If you're sure you're happy for potential clients to call, then go ahead and put your number on there. You could also potentially set up a dedicated business line that you only use during certain hours.

#2: Don't Include Lots of Personal Details

Unless your site is mainly a blog with a page or two about your freelancing, avoid having lots of personal details on there. It's fine to mention that you have kids, or that you live in a particular city – but don't give them your entire life story. Potential clients won't be interested and, frankly, it may make them worry that you'll tend to go on a bit in your writing!

#3: Don't Have Lots of Colours or Fonts

I'm no designer, so when I have to create anything visual, I've learnt to keep it as simple as possible. With your website, it's best to pick a couple of colours to stick with (on the Aliventures website, my main two colours are the same as in this .pdf: the deep pink/red colour, and the bright blue).

With fonts, you'll probably want two: one for titles and subheadings, and one for the main text. You can probably just use the default that your website's theme comes with, at least for now.

One Page vs Multi-Page Websites

How big should your website be? Unlike a printed leaflet or brochure, a website can just keep going! But when you're starting out as a freelancer, you may feel that you don't have enough to say to fill multiple pages.

It's fine to have a single-page website, if that's what suits you right now. This means having just a homepage, where you give details about your freelancing, include a testimonial or two, and have clear contact details.

If you have a little more time, or if you want to start out with all your pages in place, you can create a multi-page website. In this case, you'll probably have a very brief summary of what you do on your home page, with links to more details on other pages.

The pages you'll most likely want to include are:

- About (or "About Me")
- Services (or "Writing", "Editing", etc)
- Testimonials
- Portfolio (or "Examples", "Samples", etc)
- Contact

(It's up to you exactly what you title the pages – pick something that works for you and your potential audience. Whether you call a page "Portfolio" or "Examples", though, it serves the same function.)

Crafting Your About Page

This is a particularly useful page to include if you have a blog on your site too (readers will want to find out more about you), or if you want a bit more space to talk about your qualifications and experience.

You can write it in the third person ("Ali Luke is a freelance writer…") or first person ("I am a freelance writer…") I prefer first person: it creates more of a connection, whereas third person can sound weirdly formal.

I'd avoid using "we" unless there really is more than one of you! Some freelancers want to make it sound like they're a big firm rather than a single individual, but clients will prefer to know that they're getting *you* rather than an employee of yours.

If you want to give a few personal details (e.g. "I live in Leeds with my husband and two small children"), that's fine – but keep the main focus of your About page on what you provide.

Since the About page is often one of the first pages that someone new to your site will visit, it's often helpful to briefly mention what services you offer, then link to a separate page detailing these too.

Crafting Your Services Page

If you offer several different types of service (e.g. writing blog posts, writing sales pages, writing email copy) then it's helpful to list and briefly explain these. Keep it fairly brief and straightforward, and encourage potential clients to contact you if they have questions, or if they want something a little different.

Try *not* to offer every possible writing service under the sun. I made this mistake starting out (actually, I not only offered writing-related services, I

offered website creation too). My business would have grown faster if I'd focused on the things I was best at and enjoyed most.

You may or may not want to include an indication of your rates (some freelancers do, some only discuss fees once a client gets in touch). We're going to cover what to charge in Module 5, so it's fine to leave this off for now and add it in once we've been through that module.

Crafting Your Testimonials Page

We'll come onto gathering testimonials next week, so if you don't yet have any, you may want to come back to this in a week or two.

Testimonials are essentially just nice things that previous clients have said about you and your writing (even if those clients were people you worked with for free).

If you only have a few, you don't need a whole page for them yet. Instead, you could include one on your Home page, one on your About page, and one on your Services page, for instance.

With each testimonial, aim to:

- **Give the person's full name (with their permission, of course) and link to their website, blog, Twitter account, or other web presence.** This helps convince other prospective clients that your testimonials are real!
- **Include a photo of each client (again, with their permission), or a screenshot / scan of the work you did for them.** This helps add visual interest to a page that can end up becoming a bit of a wall of text.
- **Minimally edit the testimonials.** If there's an obvious typo, for instance, it's fine to fix it. You might want to break up paragraphs or pull out a phrase in bold to help make the testimonials easy to read.
- **Let idiosyncratic grammar or phrasing stand.** It helps show that your client is a real person. If you do want to make changes, it's a good idea to send the testimonial back to the client by email and check they're happy for it to go on your site. (I've never had anyone say "no").

Crafting Your Portfolio Page

If you've had any pieces published – online or offline – you can create a portfolio page and include them as examples of your work. (If you're doing anything beyond linking to them online, then do check with the editor first.)

Here's one possible way to present your portfolio page:

- Take a screenshot of online work (e.g. a blog post).
- Scan print work (e.g. a magazine article).
- For each piece in your portfolio, include the image, plus the title of the piece, the name of the blog/magazine/etc, and possibly the publication date (though if it's from several years ago, I'd quietly omit the date)!
- If the piece was published online, link to it – potential clients may well want to read the whole thing.
- Write a couple of sentences about the piece of work, and/or give a quote from the editor who published it.

It's absolutely fine to include work you did for free in your portfolio, and you don't need to mention of the fee (or not) that you received for each piece.

Important: Don't copy the whole of a blog post or article onto your website as an example without agreeing it with the editor first. It's normally fine to quote a brief excerpt, but again, it's worth checking if you're unsure.

Crafting Your Contact Page

Keep your contact page short. Here's an example:

> Thinking of hiring me? Got a question? Want to set up a time to talk? Drop me an email, reach out to me on Twitter, or fill in the form below:
>
> Email: ali@aliventures.com
>
> Twitter: @aliventures
>
> (Contact form goes here)

Contact methods you might include are:

- **Your email address.** I'd always strongly recommend including this (I know spam is a worry, but most email providers these days are good at blocking it).
- **Your social media accounts.** Only include the ones that you check regularly, in case a potential client gets in touch. It doesn't look great if you finally spot their tweet a fortnight after they sent it.
- **A contact form.** This allows your prospective client to send you an email through your website. It also allows you to ask for specific information (e.g. "what times are you available to talk?") which can save you a fair bit of back and forth. It's worth testing the form occasionally to make sure it's working – they do sometimes go awry.

Getting Your Website Online

This is the big step! I'm going to list some possible options for you, and take you step by step through the two different methods that I recommend – WordPress.com and WordPress.org *(I know they sound nearly the same, but they are different … and we'll cover the differences too).*

Firstly, there are *hundreds* of possible ways to get a website online. A few popular ones are:

- **Blogger** – quick and straightforward to use, but not particularly "professional" as it's really designed for personal blogs.
- **Squarespace** – lots of options for "drag and drop" design, but quite pricy and not nearly so flexible as WordPress.
- **Wix** – they advertise all over YouTube, but I've also heard a lot of people saying they didn't have a great experience using the software.
- **WordPress** – which comes in two flavours, WordPress.com and WordPress.org. The latter is used by many, many websites (pretty much every blog I read uses it, for instance) and it's very popular with freelancers.

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If you already have experience using a particular tool for creating websites, that's fine – you're welcome to stick with it!

If not, I'm going to cut through a lot of the options by suggesting that you pick from one of these two:

Option #1: WordPress.com – the "commercial" wing of WordPress. They make money through ads (which run on free blogs) and through subscription payments (paid by owners of premium blogs). You can create a site on WordPress completely free of charge, which makes it a good place to practice.

Option #2: WordPress.org – the "organisation" wing of WordPress. They provide the (very fully featured) WordPress software completely free of charge … but you'll need to pay for your own website hosting (and also a domain name, but that's fairly cheap compared to hosting).

Long-term, WordPress.org is the better option. Short-term, WordPress.com is free to get started with, and slightly more straightforward. It's up to you which you go for.

If you want more help deciding, there's a link in the Further Reading at the end of this module to a post that compares the two. You're also welcome to ask questions in the Facebook group.
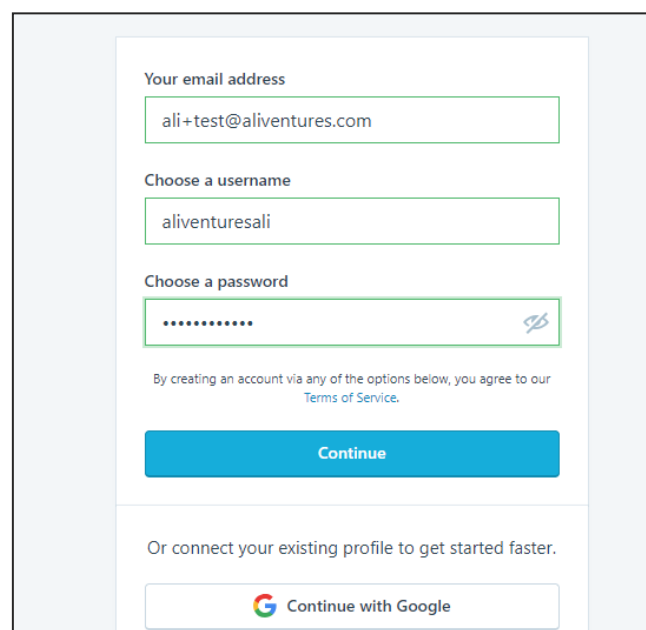
WordPress.com, Step by Step

WordPress.com is straightforward, but there are several steps to follow in the set-up process. To begin, go to www.wordpress.com and click "Get Started".

Note: WordPress has a habit of tweaking the way these steps are laid out from time to time, so don't worry if what you see on the screen looks slightly different at any given step.
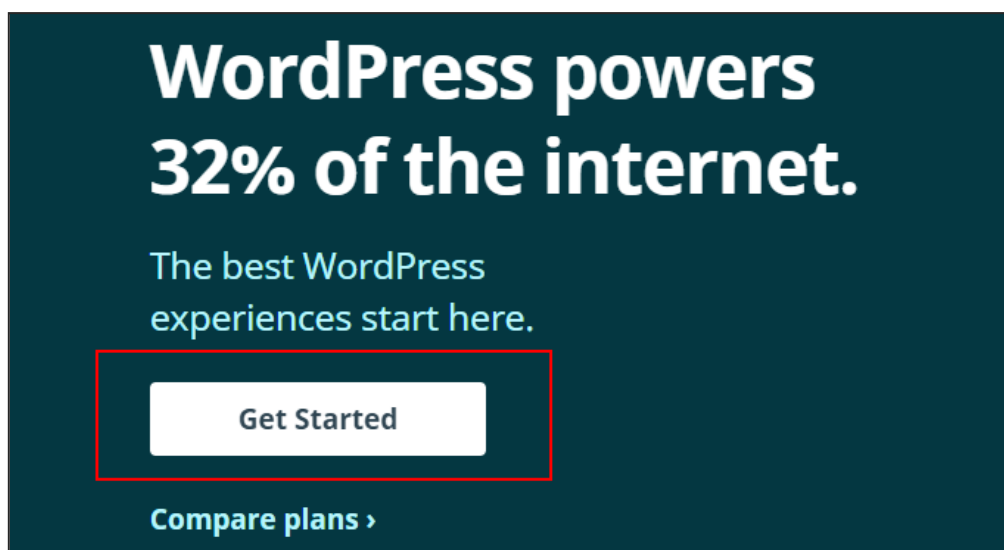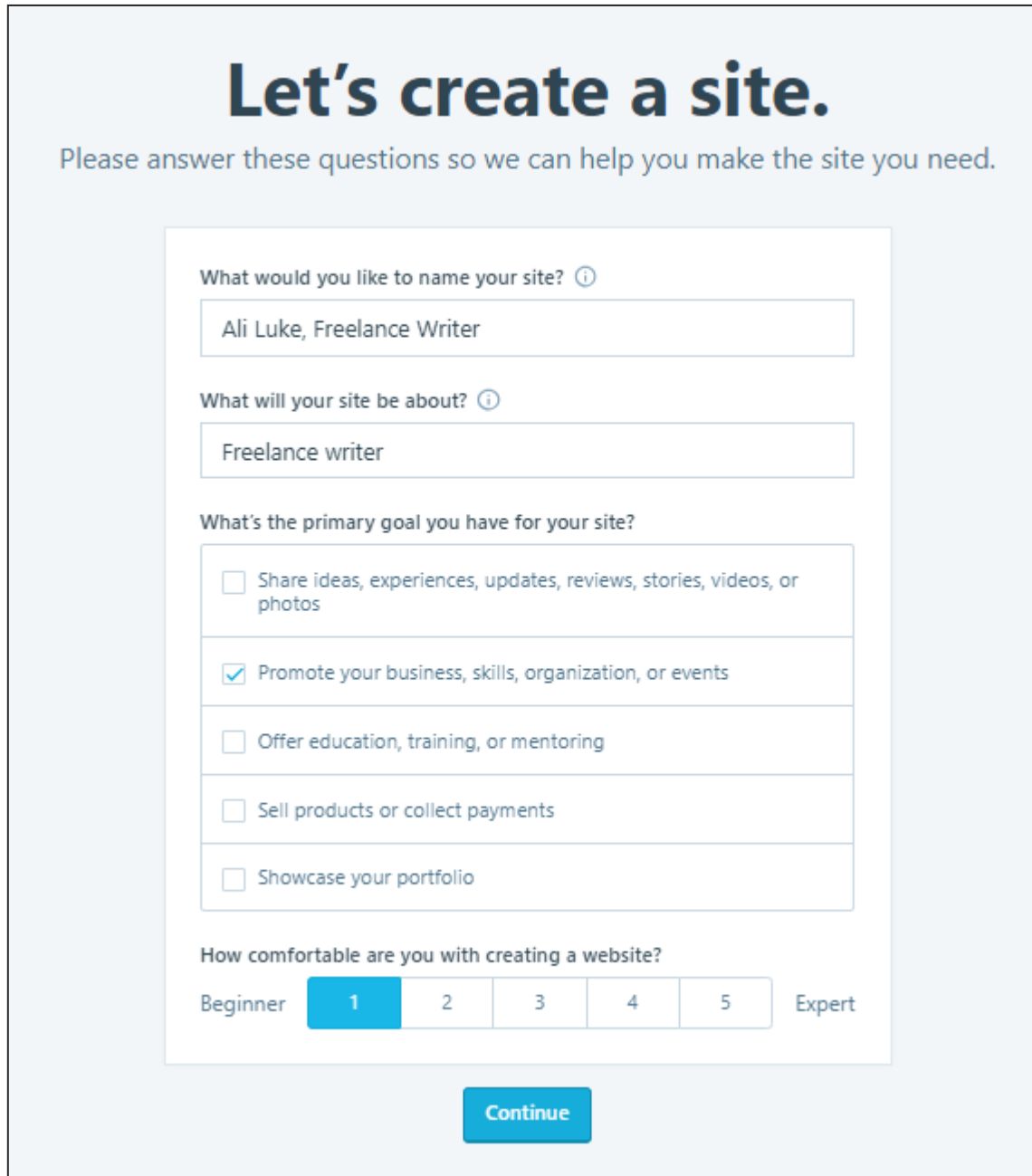
Step #1: Fill in your email address, and choose a username and password. (Alternatively, sign up by using an existing Google profile.)

Step #2: Fill in the name of your site, what it'll be about, and your main goal (It doesn't really matter what you choose here. I've gone for "Promote your business, skills, organization, or events.")

Step #3: Name your website. Type in your chosen name, and WordPress will show you various options, including lots of domain names you'll need to pay for.

If you don't want to pay, select the "wordpress.com" domain – you may find you need to try searching for a different name in order to get an available one:

Step #4: Select a payment plan. I'd suggest going for "Free", unless you want to use your own domain name, where "Personal" allows you to do this. You can always upgrade to a more pricy plan in the future.

Step #5: You'll need to wait (probably only a few seconds) for WordPress to set things up. You can then click "Continue" to go straight to your site.
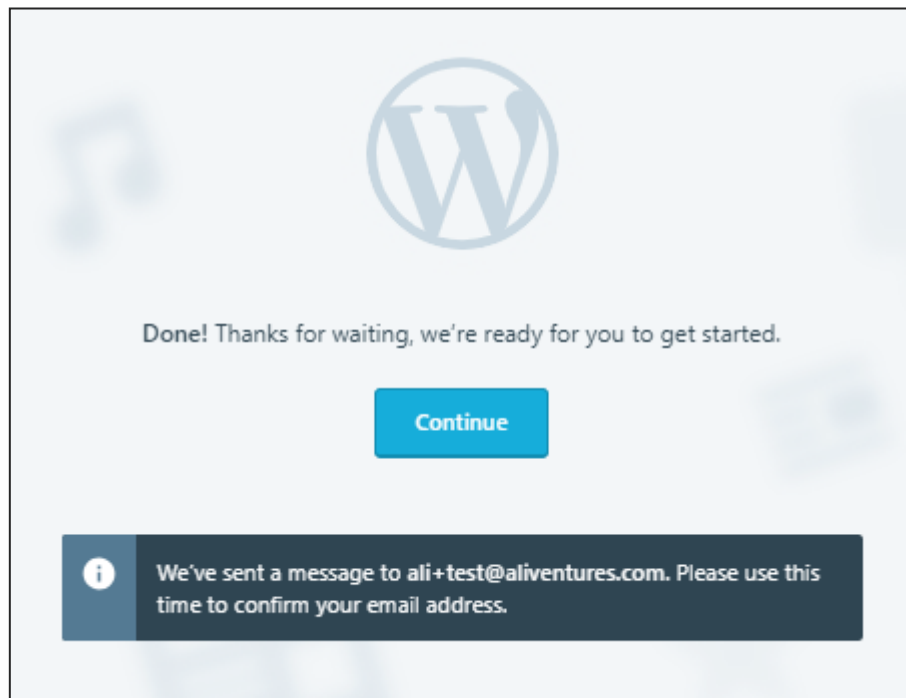
Step #6: You should see a page like this, showing you the steps you've completed and the things you'll still want to do. You'll need to confirm your email address, but the other items are optional:
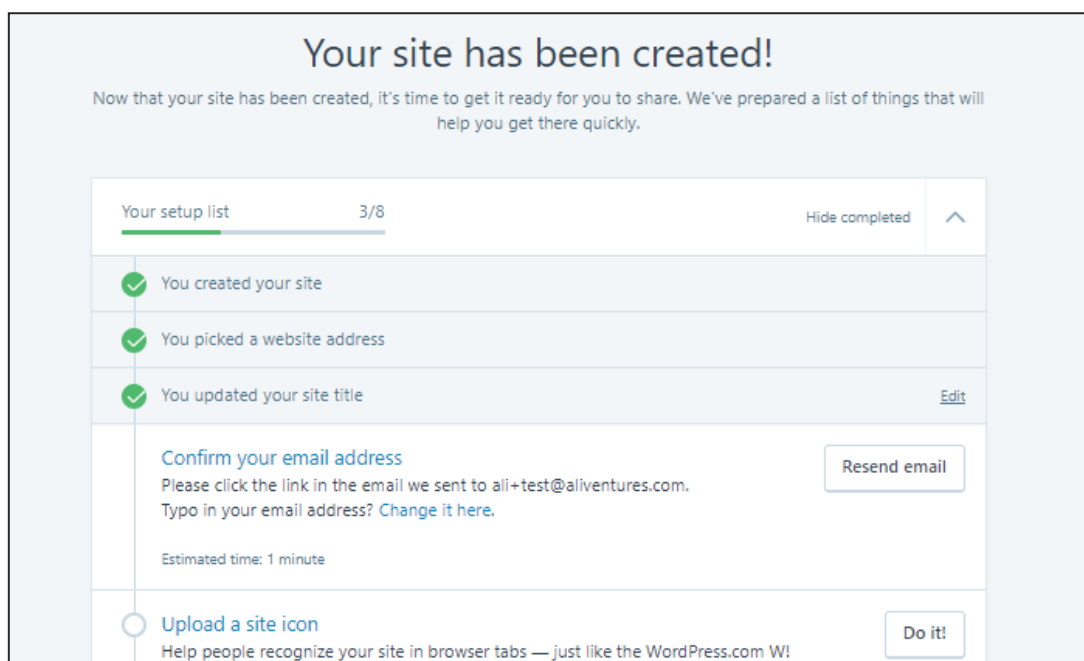
Step #7: Check your email and confirm your email address. You should have an email titled "Activate [your username]". Open it up and click the button:
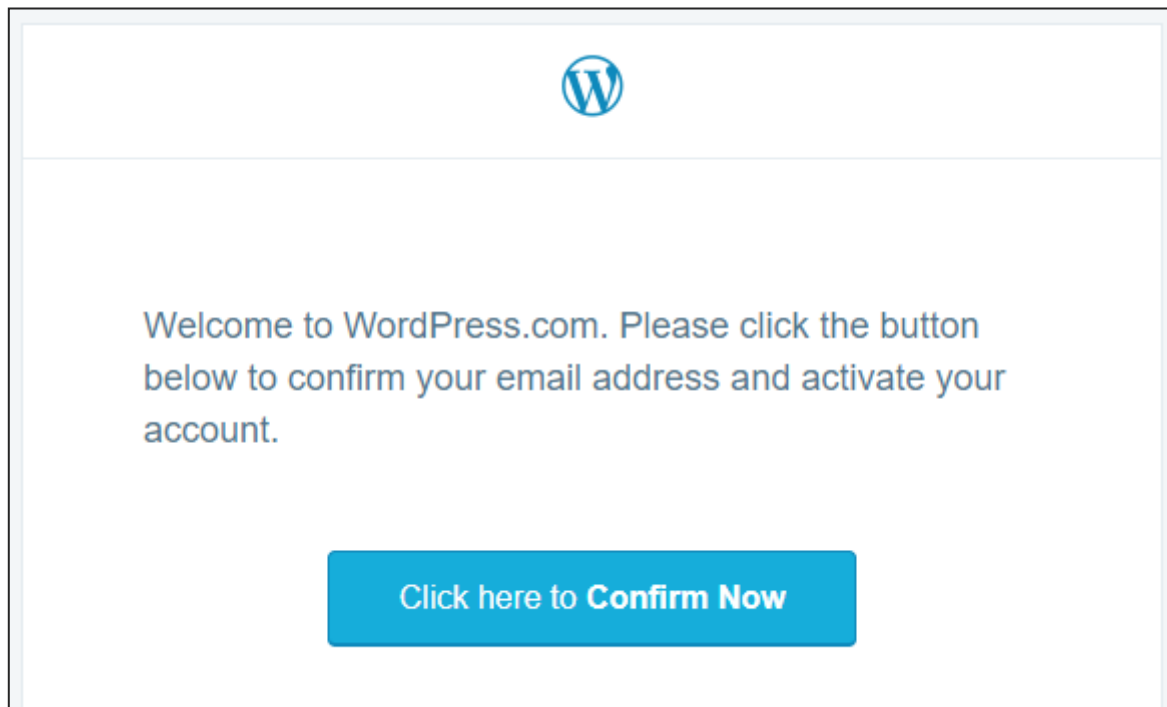
You should be taken to your website, and you should see "You validated your email address" at the top of the list of things you've completed:
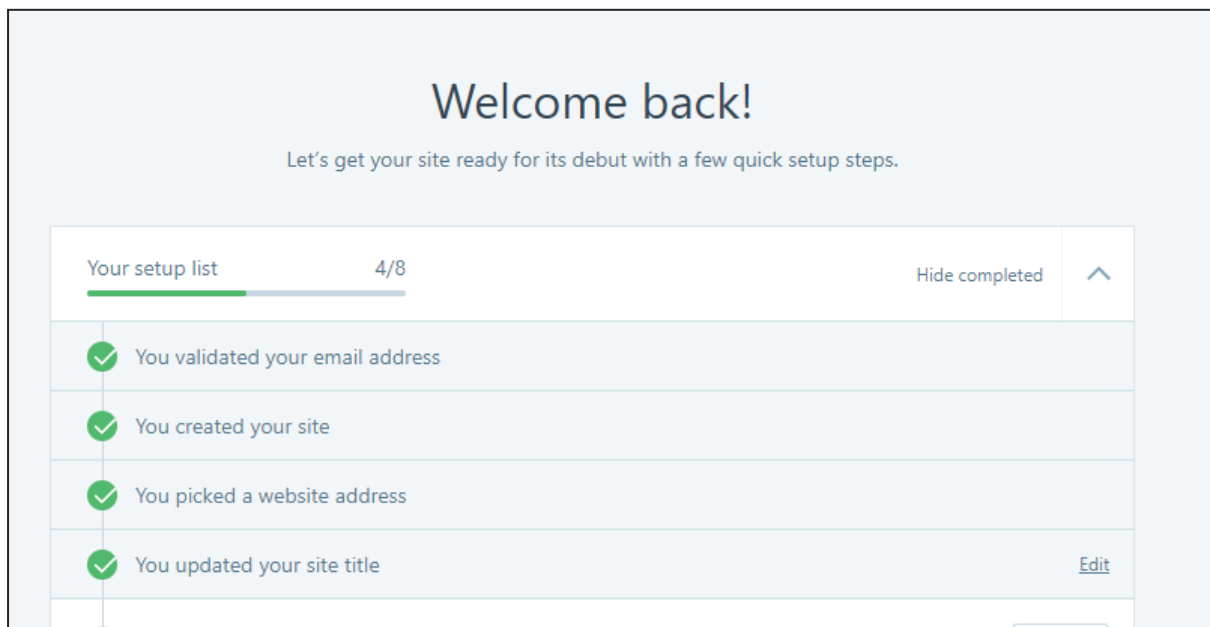
You're now all set to create your site. ☺ We'll run through a couple of things you'll want to do: adding pages, and changing your theme.

Adding Pages to Your WordPress.com Website

One of the first tasks you might want to try is to add pages to your website: in the sidebar, go to "Site" then "Pages" and click "Add New Page":
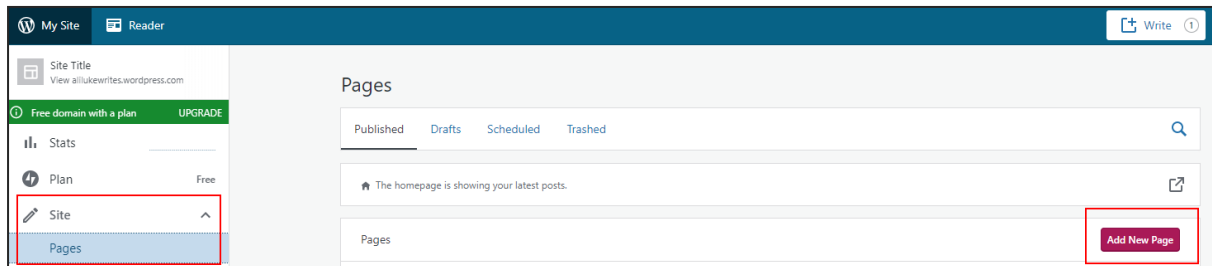
You'll see a screen like this:
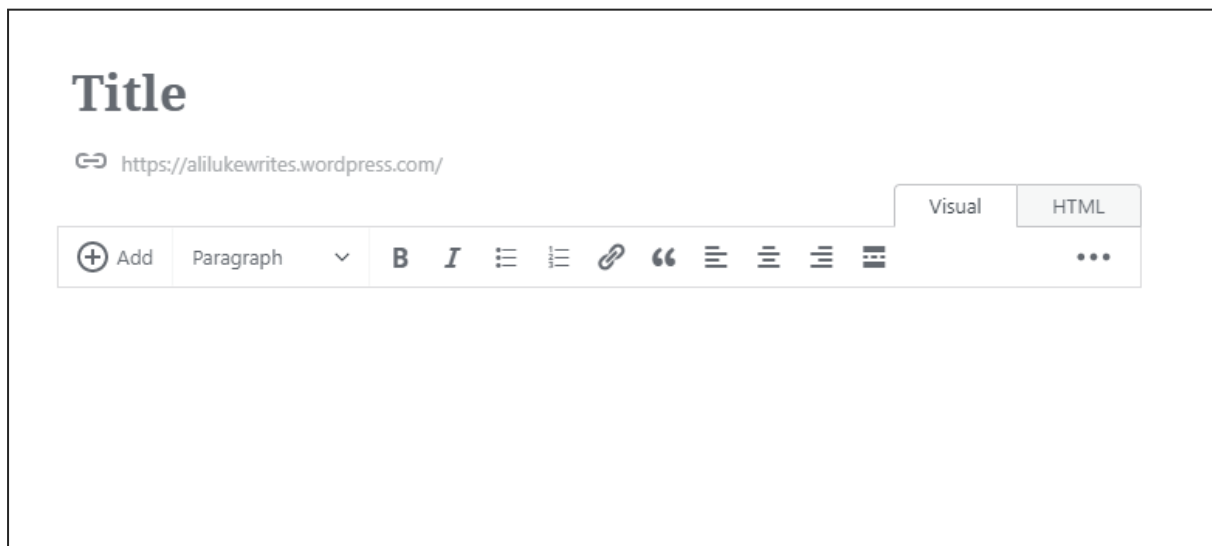
Type a title for your page (e.g. "Services") and the page URL should be updated automatically:
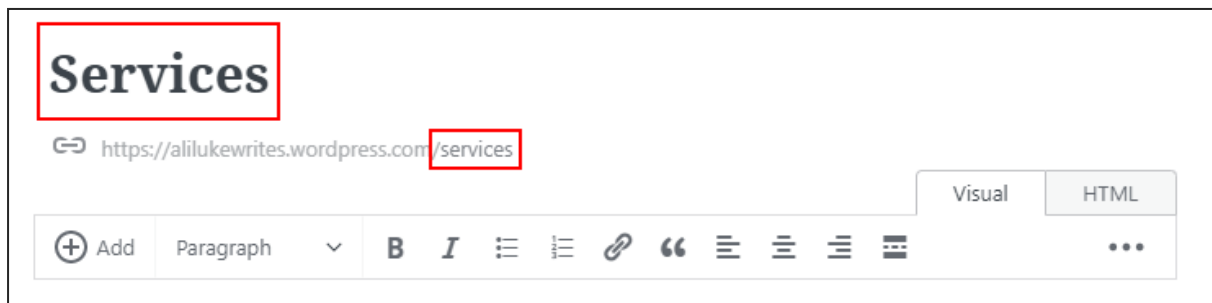
You can change this end part of the URL by clicking on it, if you want to use something different.

Next, add the text of your page. You can format it using the toolbar, e.g. to add bold or italic text, or to include a bullet-pointed list. To see additional formatting options, click the "…" button on the far right of the toolbar.
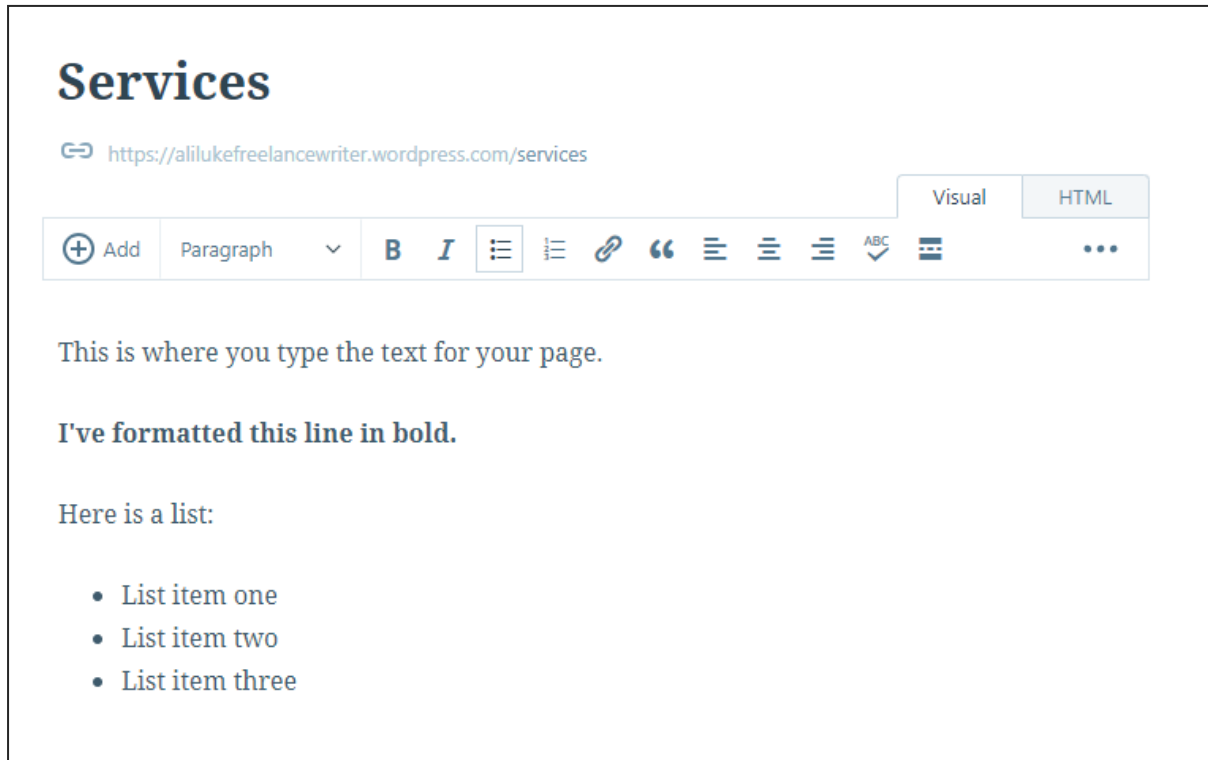
You can click the "Preview" link on the top right to see what your page will look like, and you can click "Publish" to add it to your website.
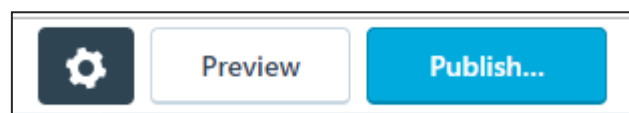
You can also update the existing pages on your site: by default, WordPress will have created pages titled "Home" and "Blog". You can update these by clicking on "Site Pages" the clicking the title of the page you want to edit.

Changing the Theme (Template)

By default, your website will look quite plain, like this:
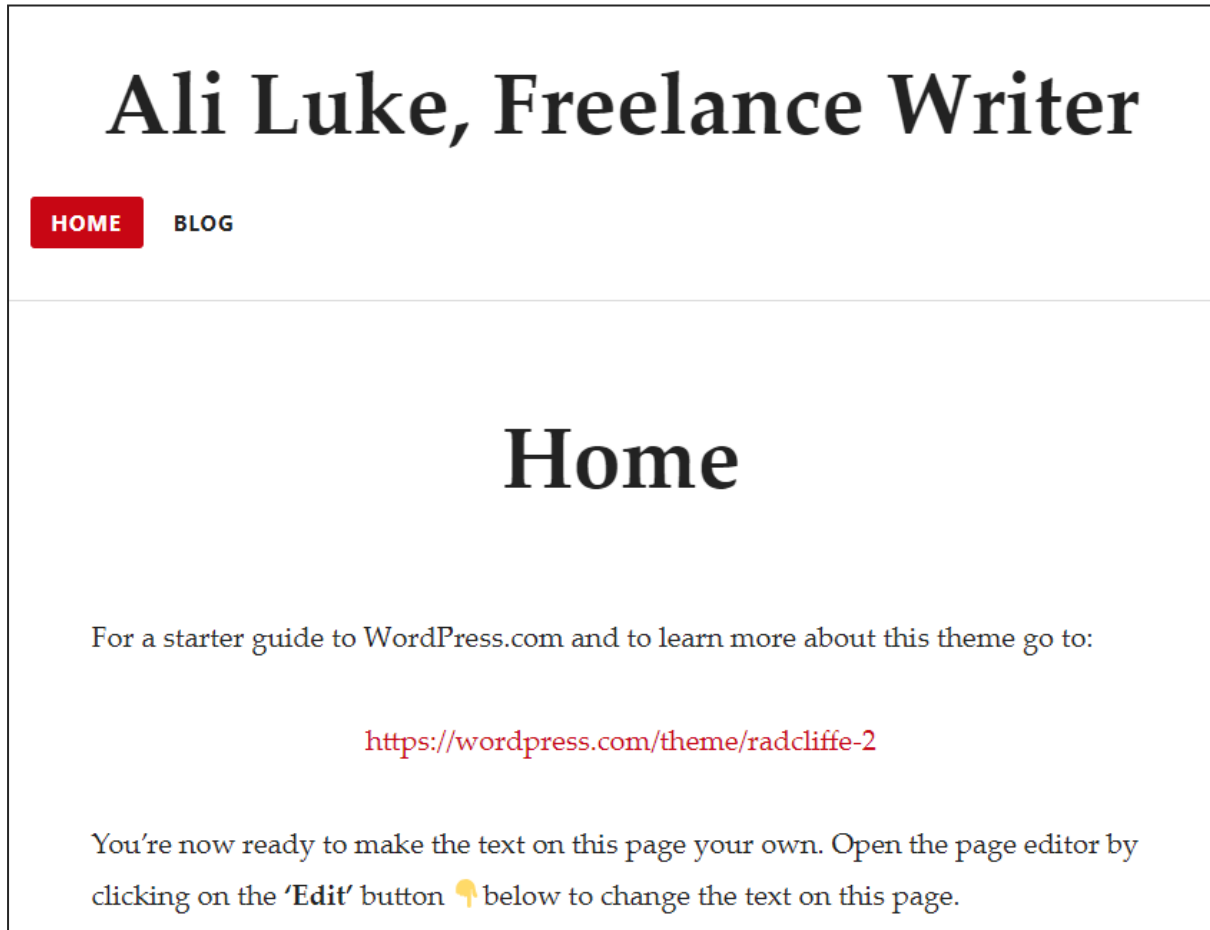
You can make it look completely different clicking "Themes" next to "Customise" in the sidebar.

There are loads of themes to choose from, and you can search them to find a list of themes that might suit you. E.g. I searched for "writing" and free themes:

To switch theme, just click on one you like to see the preview and information about the theme. Click "Activate this design" to use it:

You can see the changes to your site straight away:

As you can see, the *content* of your site – the text you have on the pages – will stay the same. The fonts, colours and layout will change, though.

You can always switch straight back to the theme you were using before if you don't like the new one.

You can also click on "Customize" in the sidebar to make loads of changes to your site, like uploading your own logo, changing the fonts, colours and so on: In the customizer, you can preview these changes before publishing them and changing your live website:
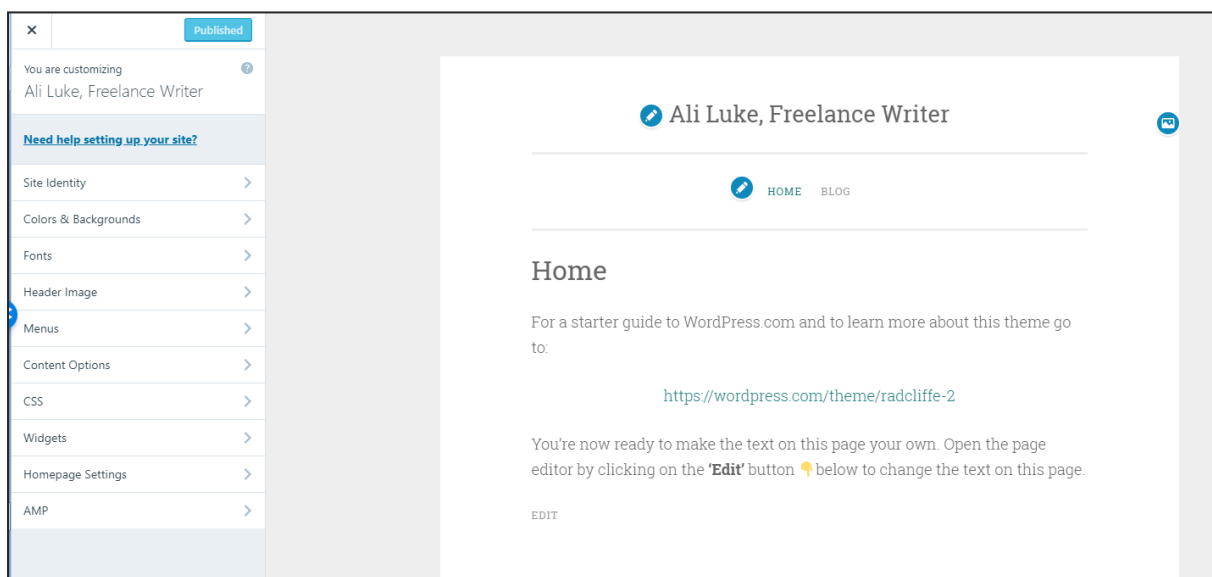
Hopefully this is enough (quite possibly more than enough!) to be going on with, but if you get stuck at any point setting up your website, just ask in our Facebook group:

facebook.com/groups/startfreelancing2019

WordPress.org, Step by Step

If you want to set up a site with WordPress.org, for maximum freedom and flexibility, that means buying web hosting. A "web host" is a company with lots of huge computers (called "servers") connected to the internet 24/7. These servers provide – or "serve" – your website to people visiting at any time of the day or night.

For WordPress, you need a web host that lets you easily install the WordPress.org software. My favourite host, Dreamhost, has a simple installation process … but if you prefer to go with a different host, there's a good list of WordPress.org compatible hosts:

Best WordPress Hosting, Robert Mening, WebsiteSetup

Purchasing Web Hosting

 If you don't already have hosting set up, I recommend using Dreamhost. I've been hosting my websites with them since I started out, over ten years ago, and they've been great throughout. They're also an ethical, environmentally friendly web host.

Since I'm an affiliate for Dreamhost, I can give you a special discount link, too. This will save you $50 on your first year of web hosting, making it $69.40 for the year instead of $119.40:

dreamhost.com/r.cgi?379958/promo/dreamsavings50
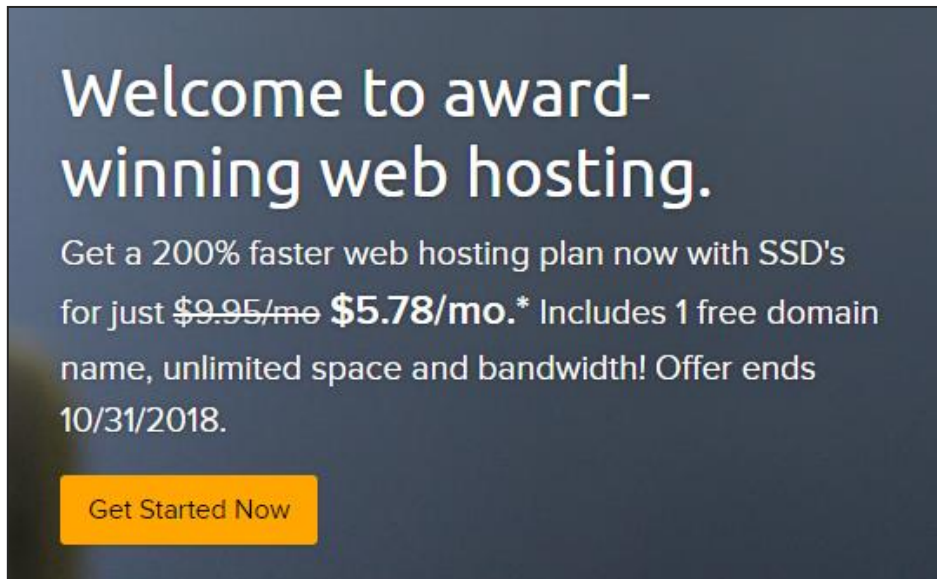
Then, follow the instructions below.

NB: You can get cheaper hosting at dreamhost.com/r.cgi?379958/hosting/shared by opting for the most basic package, which they've only recently added. I'd recommend paying for the standard package, though, as the basic one only allows you to have one website URL and doesn't include email addresses.

Both those links are affiliate links, which means I get a cut from Dreamhost if you click on them and then make a purchase (it doesn't cost you anything extra). You're very welcome to buy hosting elsewhere, though, if you prefer.

Step #1: Go to **dreamhost.com/r.cgi?379958/promo/dreamsavings50** and click the "Get Started Now" button.
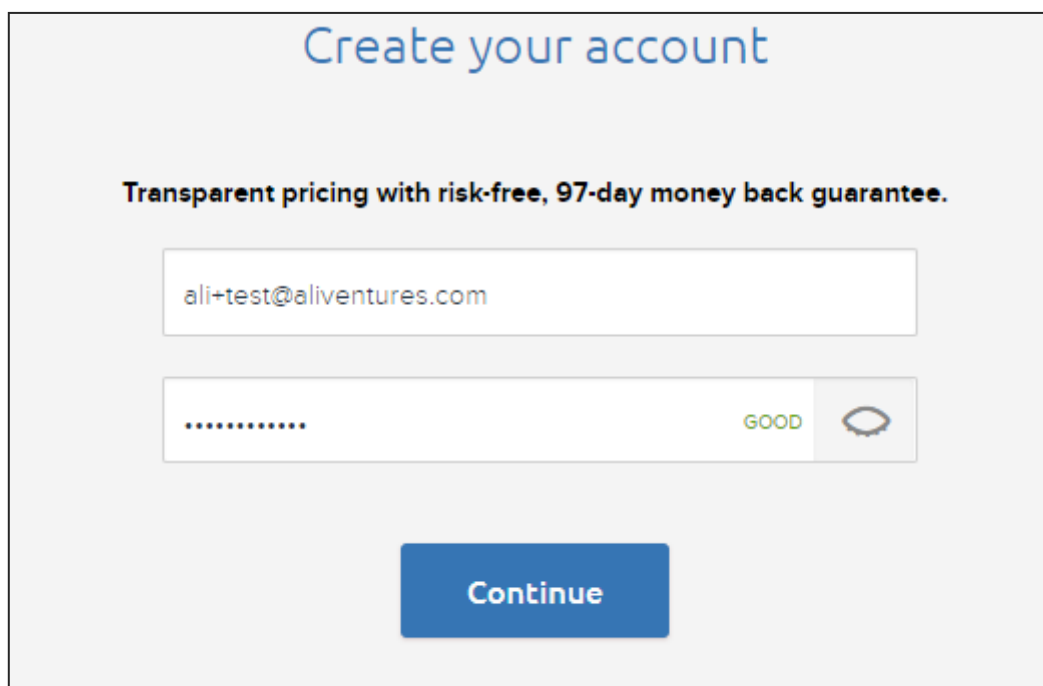
Welcome to award-winning web hosting.

Get a 200% faster web hosting plan now with SSD's for just ~~$9.95/mo~~ **$5.78/mo.** Includes 1 free domain name, unlimited space and bandwidth! Offer ends 10/31/2018.

Get Started Now

Step #2: Fill in your email address and choose a password:

Create your account
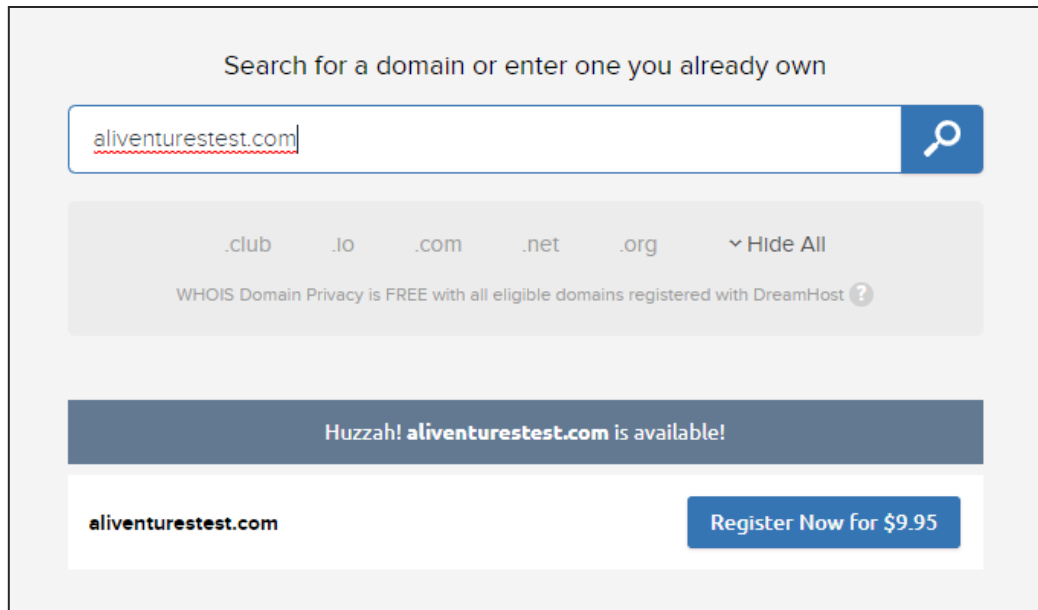
Transparent pricing with risk-free, 97-day money back guarantee.

ali+test@aliventures.com

•••••••••••   GOOD

Continue

Step #3: Type in your chosen domain name. *(Unless you registered it last week, in which case, click the little link that says "Skip this step, I'll set this up later.)*
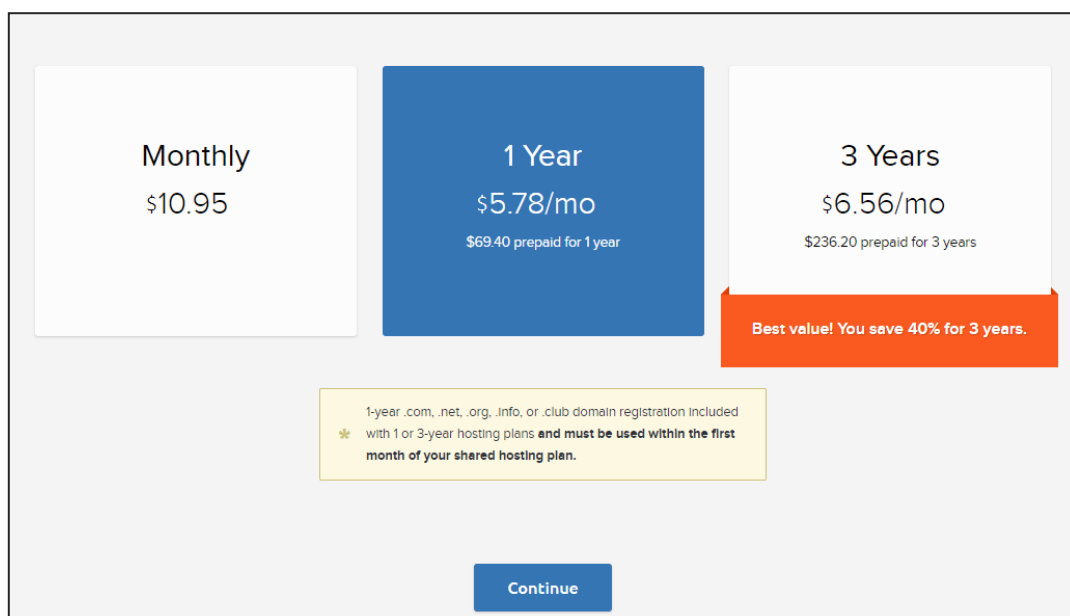
Click the "Register Now for $9.95" button. Note: you won't be charged immediately, and you'll find that this cost isn't actually included at the end of the registration process – as you get one domain name for free.

Step #4: Choose your hosting plan. The "3 Years" plan is *not* best value, due to your discount – so click the "1 Year" plan before you click "Continue":
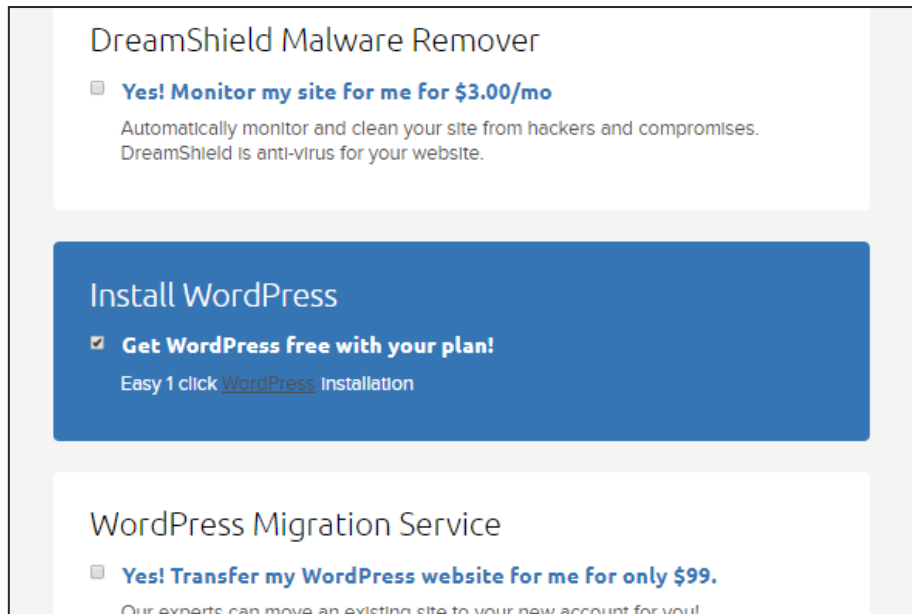
Step #5: You'll see the option to add/remove other things from your site. I'd suggest removing the "DreamShield Malware Remover" as it's fairly pricy.

You can click the box to "Install WordPress" at this point; if you miss it, don't worry as you can add WordPress from your Dreamhost dashboard later.
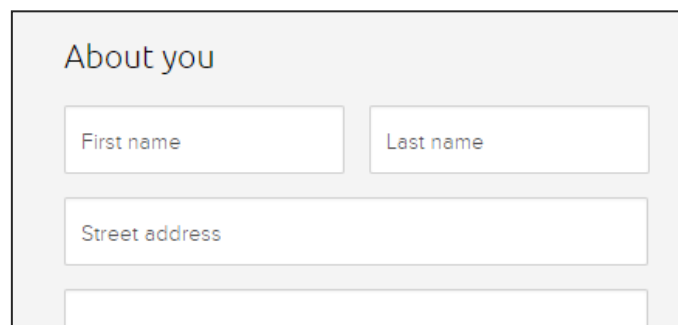
You don't need the "WordPress Migration Service" unless you want to transfer over an existing WordPress website.

Step #6: Finally, you'll need to fill in your personal details (name, address and phone number) and add your credit card details:

At the bottom of this screen, you can see the details of what you're purchasing. You should see at this point that your domain name is free:

Double-check that everything is correct before placing your order – particularly your chosen domain name.

Step #7: After placing your order, you should see this:
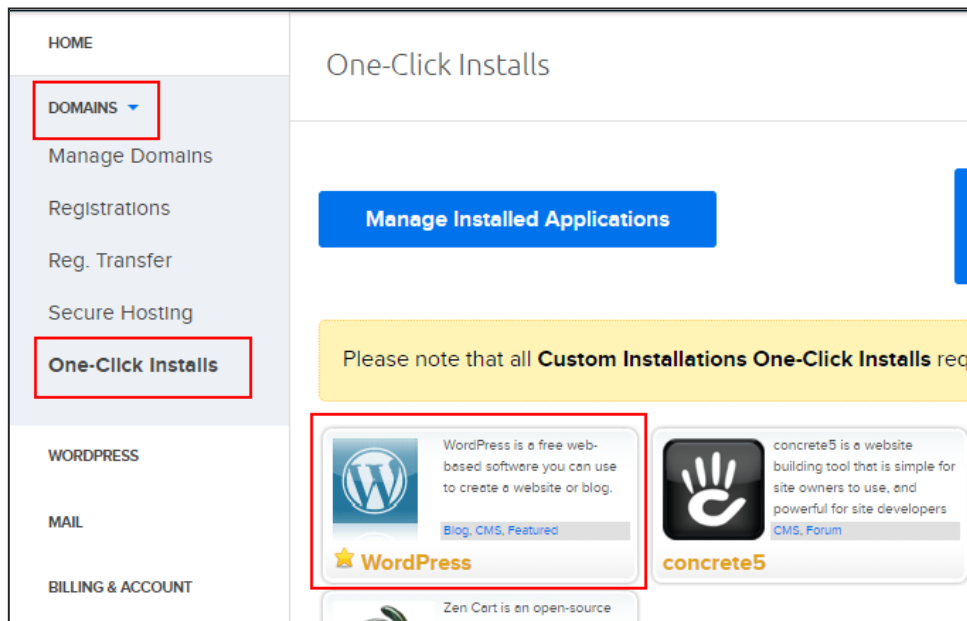

You can click "Continue to Your Web Panel" to login to Dreamhost.

Step #8: On the left hand side of your Dreamhost webpanel, click "Manage Domains". You should see your new website there – hurrah!

If you didn't already install WordPress during the setup process, you can do so by going to Domains → One Click Installs:

Click "WordPress", then in the pop-up, select your domain. I'd recommend leaving the option "Deluxe Install" checked and unchecking the option "Install WP Website Builder". (The latter is a recent addition to Dreamhost's options, and I've not included it in these instructions as other hosts won't all offer it.)
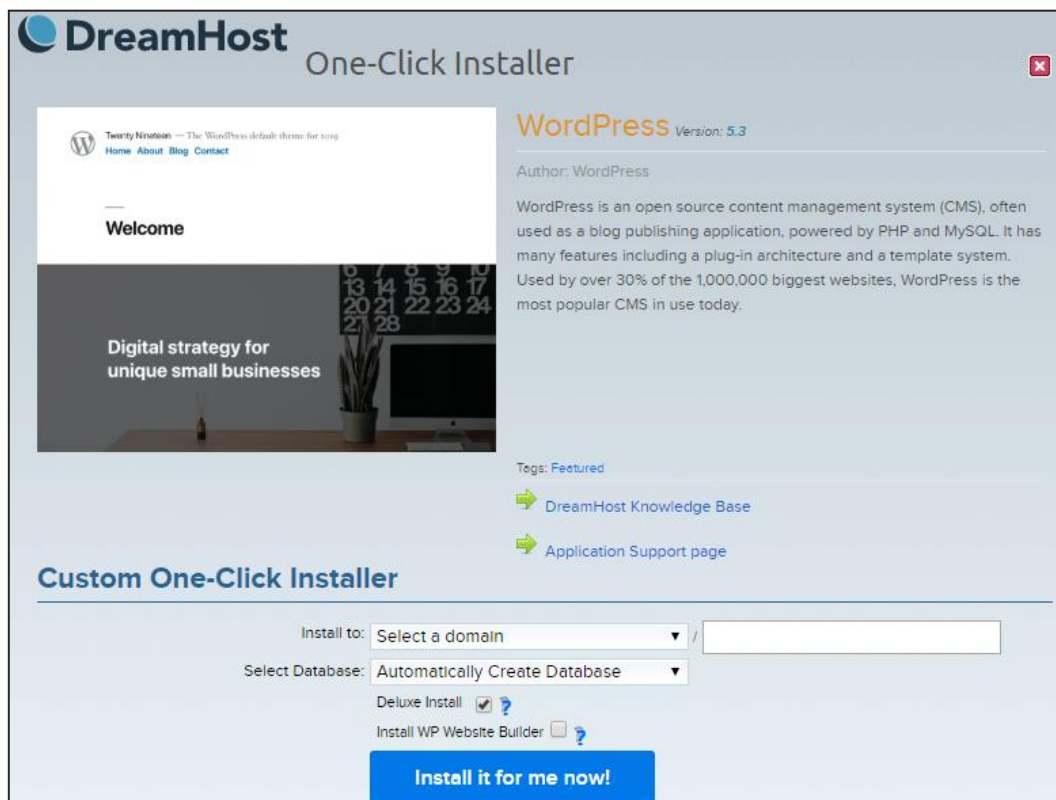
Click the "Install it for me now!" button.

Step #9: Dreamhost will send you a number of emails: some of these are quite techy, so feel free to glance at them for now (save them in case you need them in the future).

One email will ask you to verify your domain name – make sure you click the link in this, or your domain name will stop working in a couple of weeks' time. (See last week's module for more details on domain name verification.)
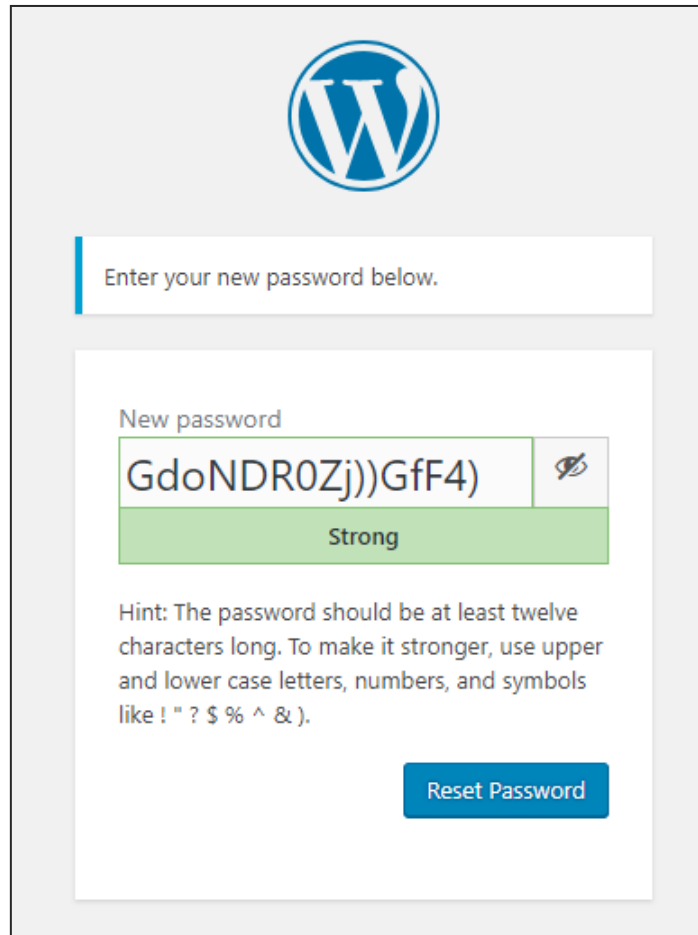
Step #10: Find the email from WordPress that has "Success installing WordPress on your site!" in the subject line. It looks like this:
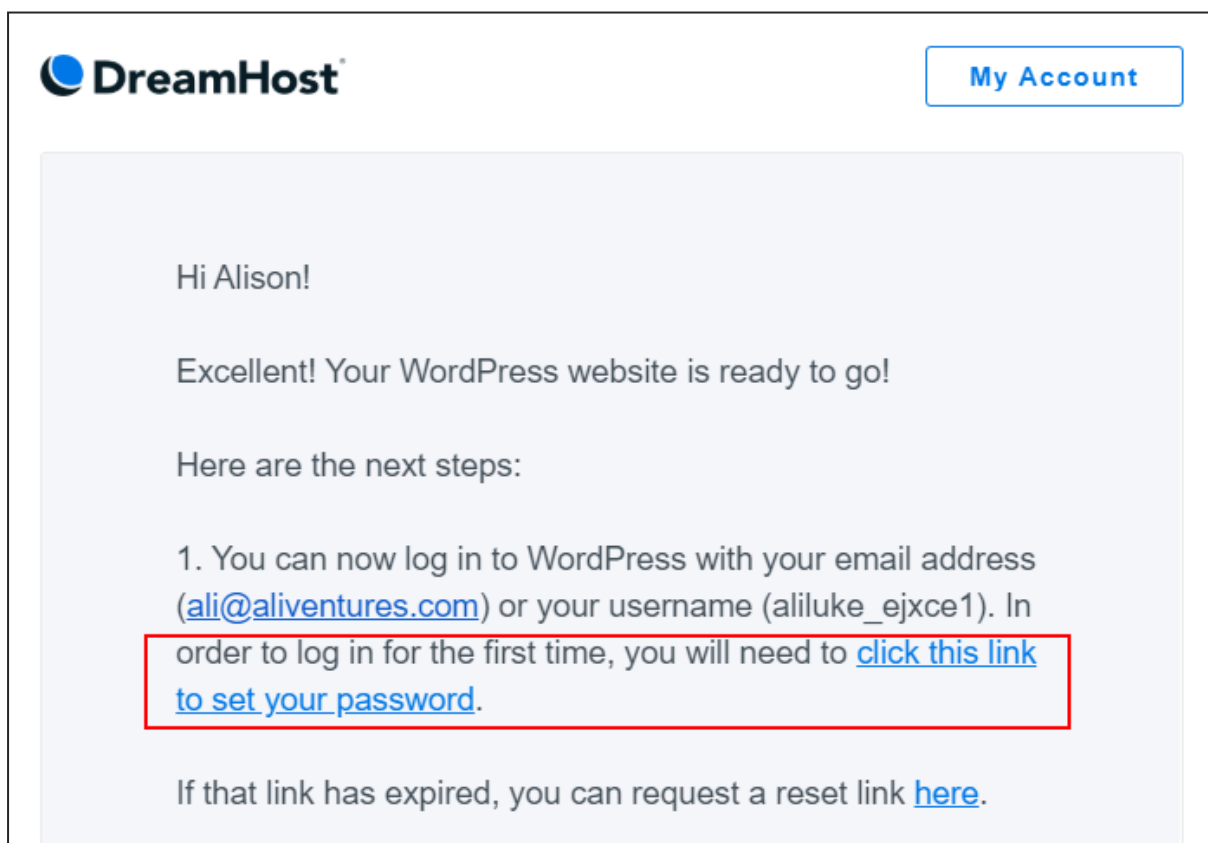
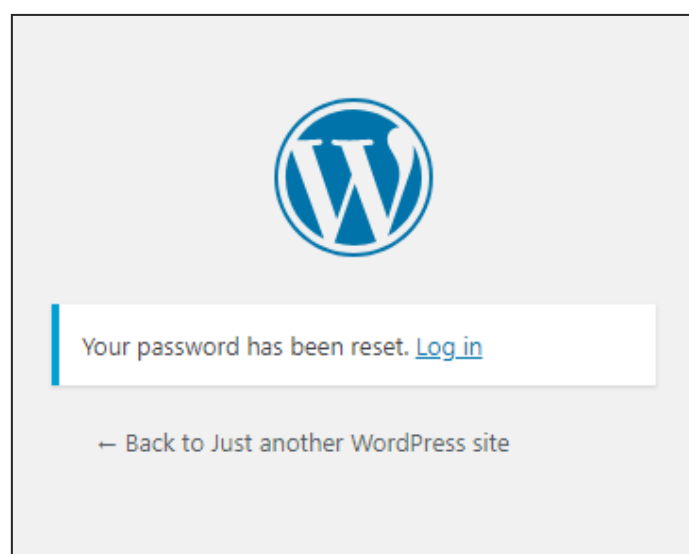Click the link (highlighted in red above).

Step #9: You'll be prompted to set a password. WordPress will automatically create a password for you, but you can edit it to something a bit more memorable.

You should now see this:

Step #10: Click the "Log in" link and enter your email address and password. (The email address will be the one you used to sign up for Dreamhost.) I'd also suggest checking the "remember me" box so that you don't need to login every single time you go to your site.

You should now see your WordPress dashboard. If you used Dreamhost's Deluxe Install of WordPress, you'll see a "WP Super Cache Warning" at the top of the dashboard: you can safely dismiss this.
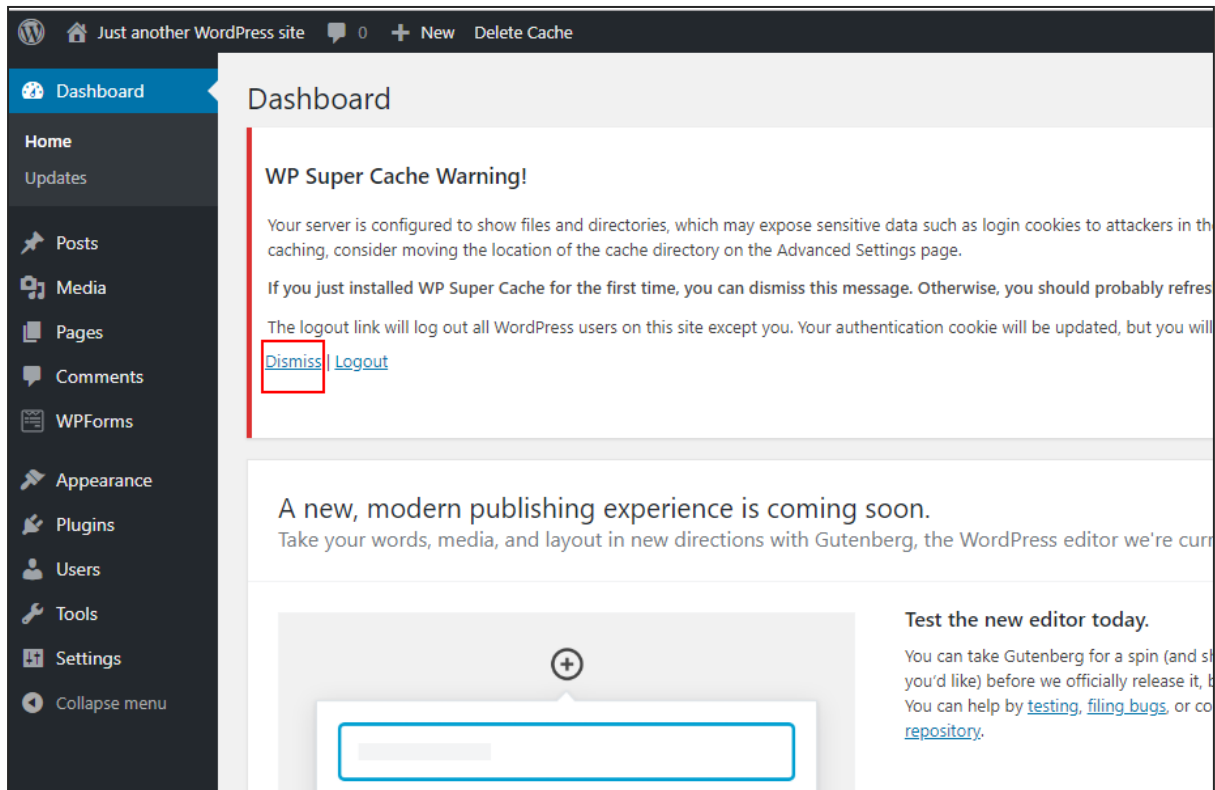
Your website is now set up! Next, we'll look at giving it a name/title, adding and editing pages, and changing the theme (the design of your site).

Giving Your Website a Name

By default, your site will be called "Just Another WordPress Site". You can change this by going to Settings → General:

You can then type in any site title you want, and any tagline you want (or you can simply leave the tagline blank). Make sure you scroll down and click the blue Save Changes button at the bottom of your page:

Note: if you don't see the new title when you go to your website, go to Settings → WP Super Cache and set it to "Caching Off" while you're building your website. Caching speeds up your site, but it means that some changes don't always appear immediately. You can switch the caching back on once you've finished building your site.

Adding Pages to Your WordPress.org Website

To add a new page to your website, go to Pages→ Add New.
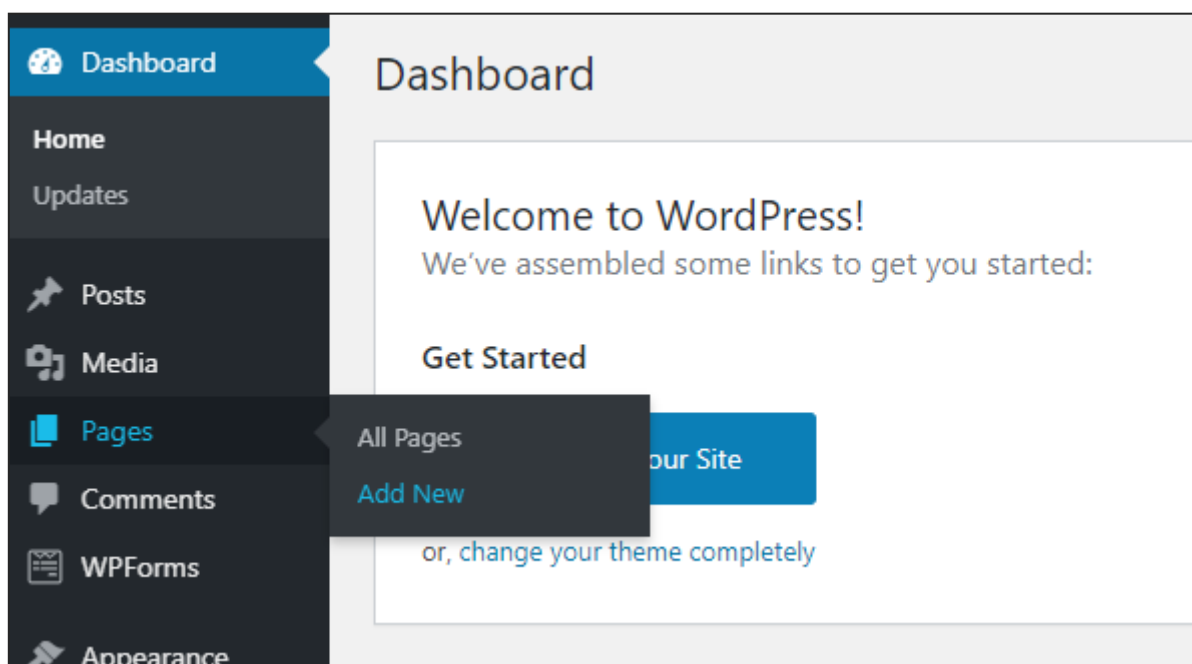
You should then see the following screen. Enter the title and start writing text for your page:

You can format the text for your page using the toolbar. The first box on the toolbar lets you select what type of "block" you're using (you may want to use

headings, lists, or quotes). You can also change the text alignment, make your text bold or italic, or add a link.

To make your page live on your website, click the "Publish" button on the top right of the page. You may optionally want to change the "Document" settings just below this (for instance, you could change your page's "permalink" by editing the last part of its URL).
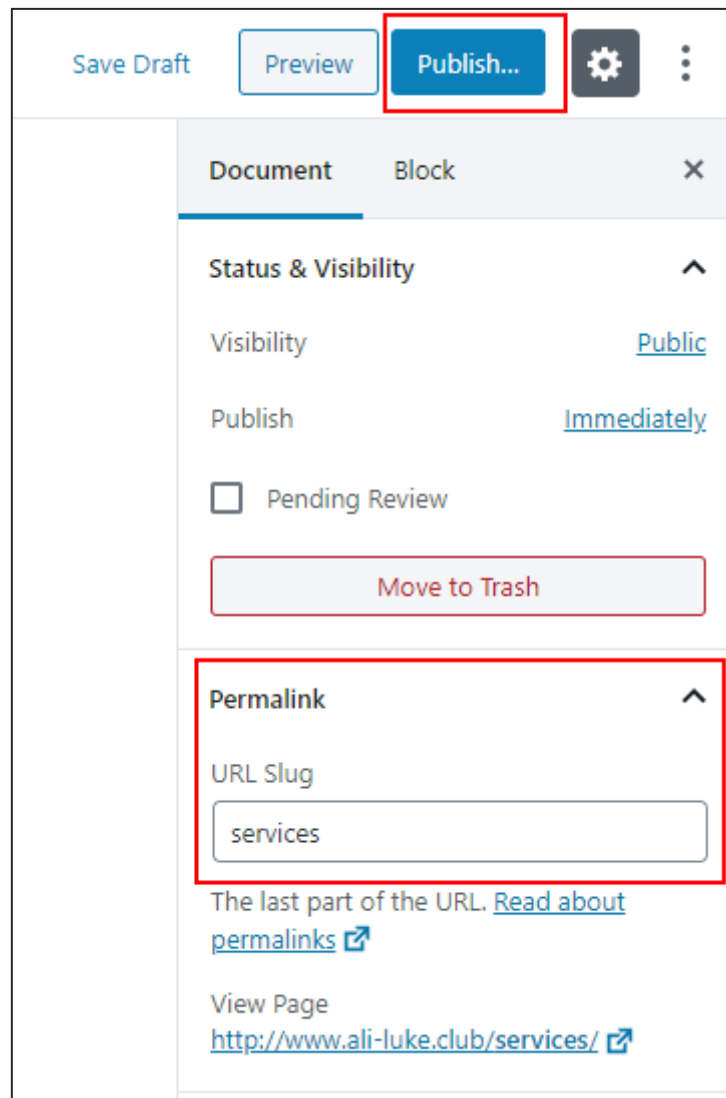
You can also update the existing pages on your website. By default, WordPress will have created a draft "Privacy Policy" (not yet published), and a "Sample Page".

You can find these under Pages → All Pages, and you can click on their titles to edit them … or you can delete them completely if you prefer., by hovering your mouse over the title and clicking the "Trash" link:
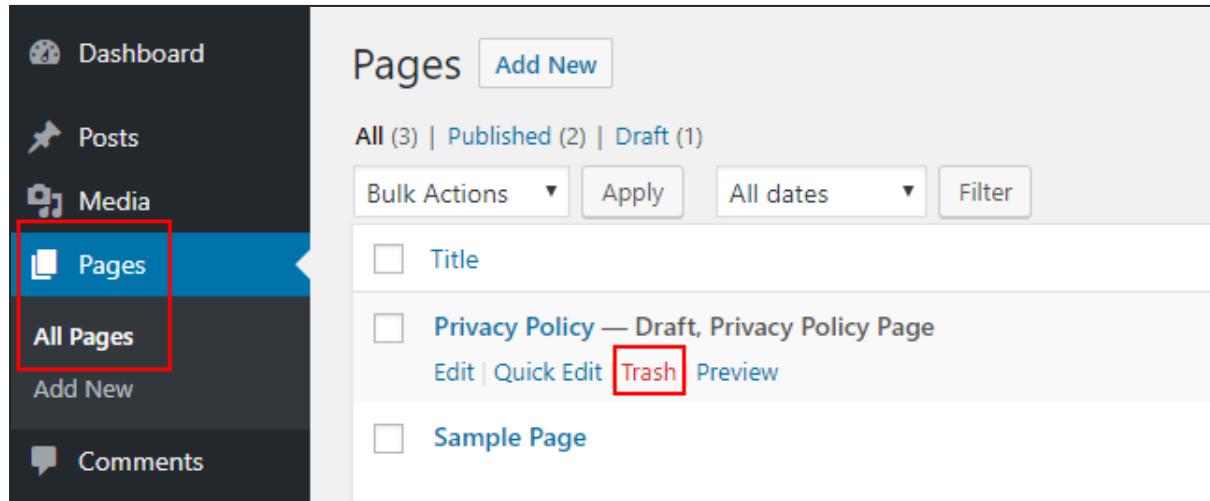
Changing the Theme of Your WordPress.org Website

Your website will have a default theme that comes pre-installed. Here's an example:
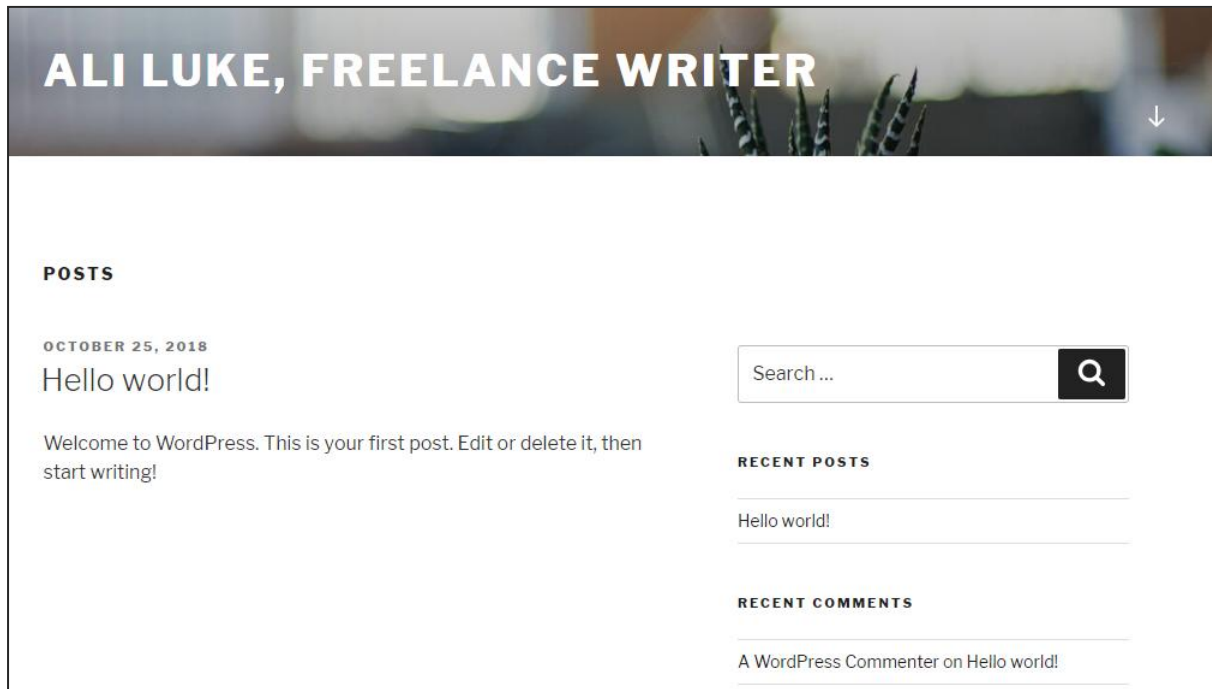
You can make your site look completely different going to Appearance →
Themes in the sidebar:
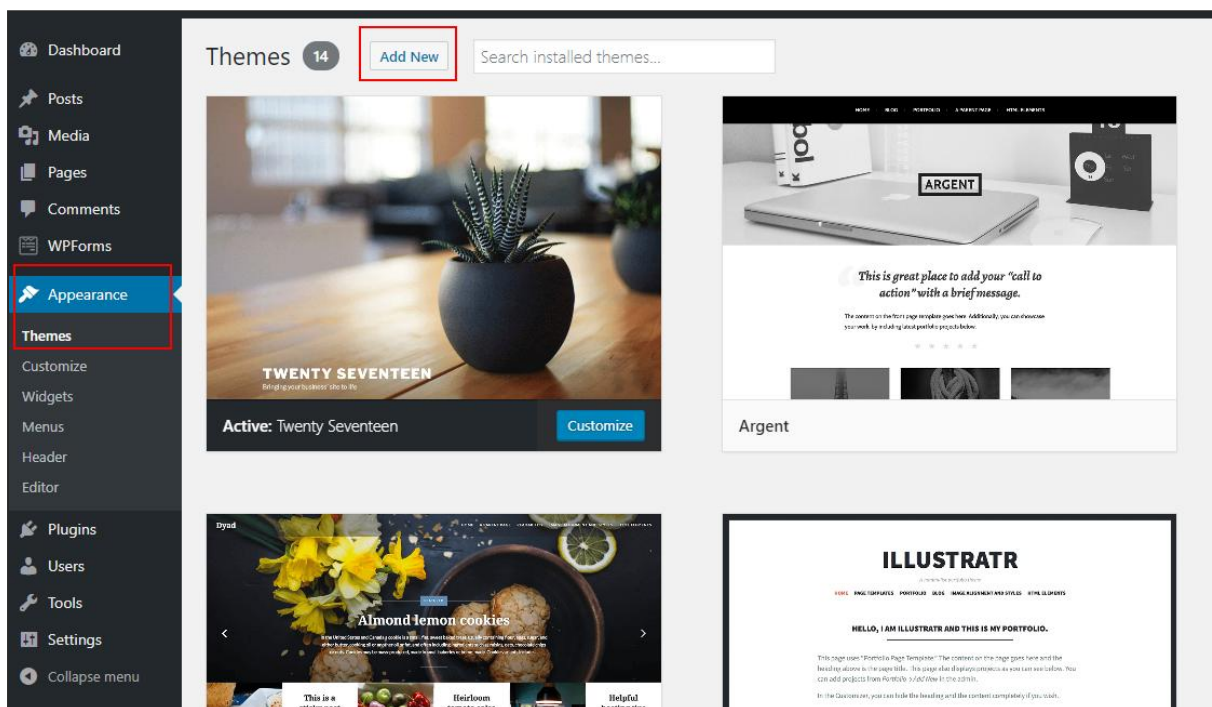
There will be some themes preinstalled that you can choose from. Just hover your cursor over a theme and you can "Live Preview" or "Activate" it (if you activate it, your site will change to use that theme).

Here's my site using the "Argent" theme:
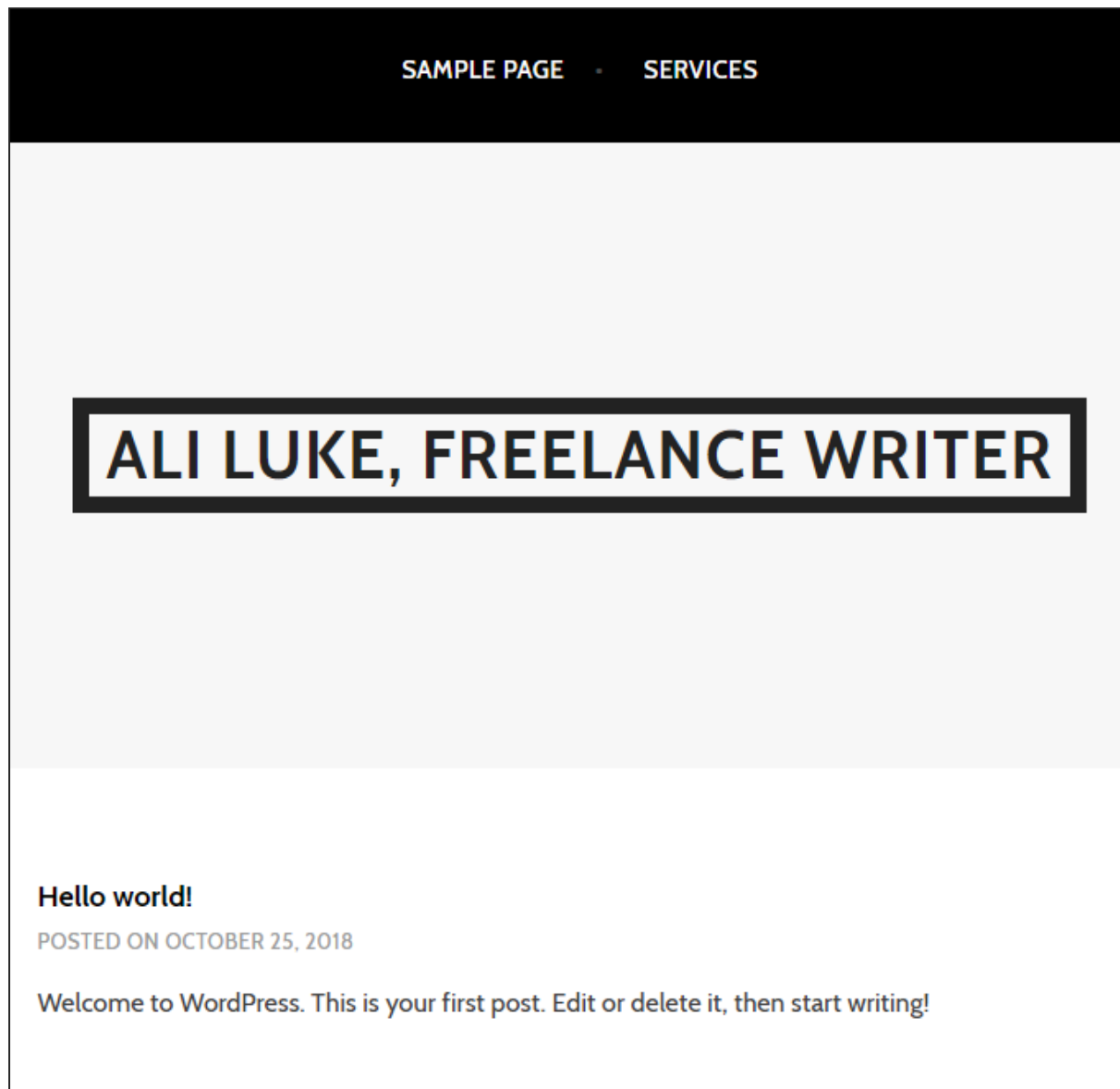
If you want more themes to choose from, you can add new themes by clicking the "Add New" button and then searching for a word like "writing" or freelancing":
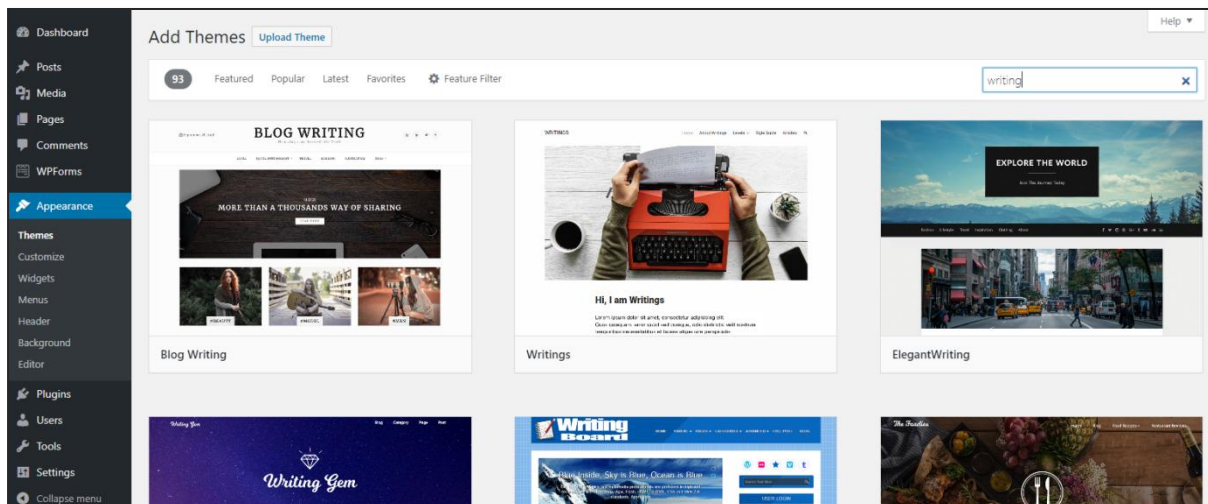
You can also "Upload" a theme that you've downloaded from a third-party site (either free or, more likely, for a fee). Premium paid-for themes often include lots of extra features that don't come as standard with WordPress.

When you change theme, the *content* of your site – the text you have on the pages – will stay the same. The fonts, colours and layout will change, though. You can always switch straight back to the theme you were using before if you don't like the new one.

You can also click on Appearance → Customize in the sidebar to make changes to your site: you can change the colours, images, fonts, and so on, and you'll see a preview of the changes as you make them:
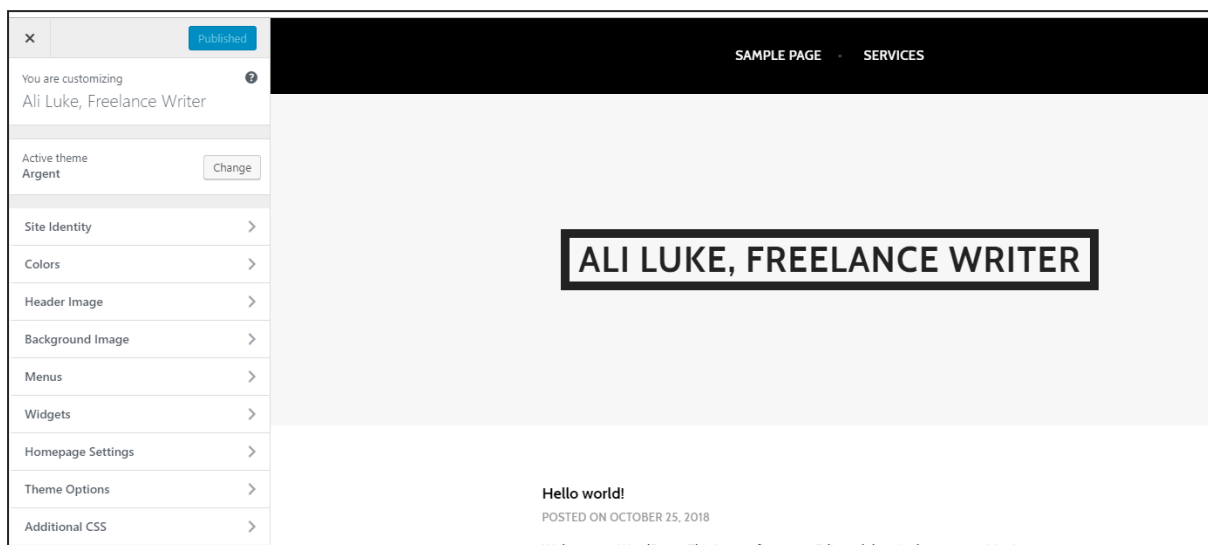
If you get stuck at any point with setting up your website, or if you want to do something extra (like adding a contact form) but you're not sure how – just ask in our Facebook group:

facebook.com/groups/startfreelancing2019

Your Module #3 Assignment

ASSIGNMENT

Your assignment this week is to set up your website, using WordPress.com, WordPress.org, or any other tool of your choice. It's fine if it's a single page!

If you don't yet feel ready to create even a single page website, you can set up a free "test" site on WordPress.com (by opting for the free plan and a free domain like *aliluke.wordpress.com)*.

Once you've completed the assignment (or done as much of it as you're going to manage this week), come and "check in" on Facebook and you'll get your reward stamp for Week 3. If you're willing to, please tell us what you did and how you got on.

[add link]

If you prefer not to use Facebook, you can email me (ali@aliventures.com) with "Module #3 check in" or similar in the subject line.

Module #3: Further Reading

All of the further reading is optional, but if you want to find out more about something we've covered, it's highly recommended! If you find other useful resources, you're very welcome to share them in our Facebook group.

WordPress.com vs WordPress.org – Which is Better (Comparison Chart), WPBeginner

This article runs through the key differences between WordPress.org and WordPress.com, giving a fairly balanced look at them – though it's clear that WPBeginner think that WordPress.org is the better option.

A Step-by-Step Guide to Setting Up Your Freelance Writer Website, Tal Valante, The Write Life

While this is a fairly high-level overview, there are some good tips here, and some thoughts on going a bit further with your website – e.g. by setting up a mailing list.

How to Create a Freelance Writer Website, Bamidele Onibalusi, Writers in Charge

If you're not sure *why* you need a website, Bamidele includes some compelling reasons here – plus detailed advice on what to include on your website, with an emphasis on making sure you're clearly communicating what you can offer to your clients.

What's Coming Up Next Week:

Well done on reaching the end of this week's module. Remember, if you have questions at any point, please do ask in our Facebook group. If it's something you'd prefer to discuss privately, you can send me a message via the Facebook group or you can email me at ali@aliventures.com.

Here's what to expect in Module 4:

MODULE 4:

Next week, from Monday 25th November, we'll look at how you can start getting experience so you have examples of your work to link to or to include on your website.

We'll also cover testimonials – nice things that clients have said about you and your work – and how to encourage these.

As well as this, we'll look at some different options for showcasing your work and your testimonials on your website, or on your social media platforms.