




# **BUILDING YOUR AUTHOR WEBSITE**

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*A Step-by-Step Guide*





# INTRODUCTION

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- Mary Ann de Stefano  
MAD about Words
- Editor & Website Designer
- Believer in DIY
- Not born a techie



# AGENDA

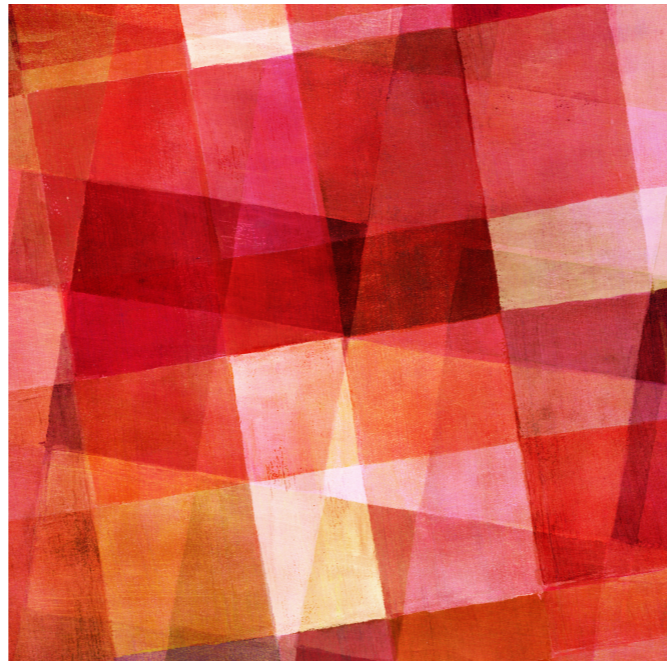
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- First session: technology
- Second session: content
- Website critiques & Q&A
- Fill out a green card to receive a copy of today's presentation & a list of website resources.

# I AM BIASED

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- I believe all authors should create & maintain a website
- I believe you should **own** your website
- I believe DIY is a commitment to learning



# ALL SERIOUS WRITERS SHOULD CREATE & MAINTAIN A WEBSITE

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- It's your hub, your home base, for everything you're doing for your career online or in the real world
- It's the first place people are going to go to find out more information about who you are and what you do
- It tells your official story, all in one place
- Unlike social media, you have full control over how your story is presented
- Unlike social media, you have full access to your followers (mailing list)

# WHO WILL BUILD YOUR WEBSITE?

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*Some self-reflection...*

# HIRE A DESIGNER

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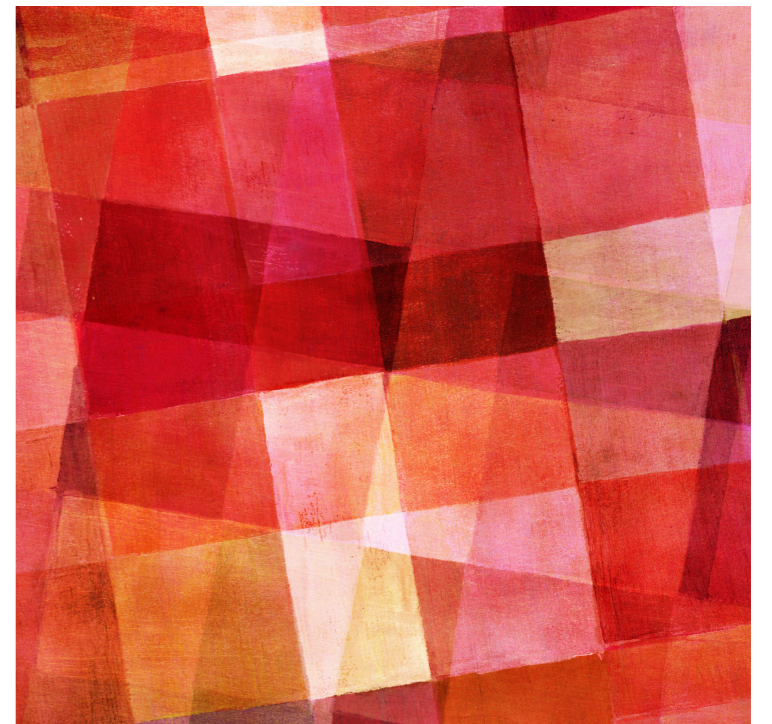
- More money
- Little to no learning curve
- Less time



# DO IT YOURSELF

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- Less money
- Steeper learning curve
- More time

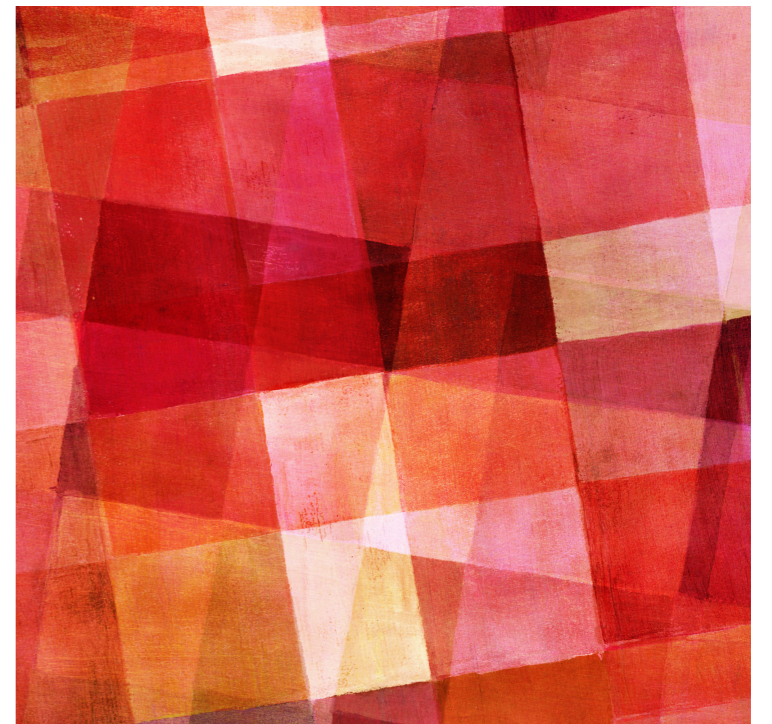




# WORK WITH A DESIGNER WHO WILL TRAIN YOU TO UPDATE YOUR WEBSITE

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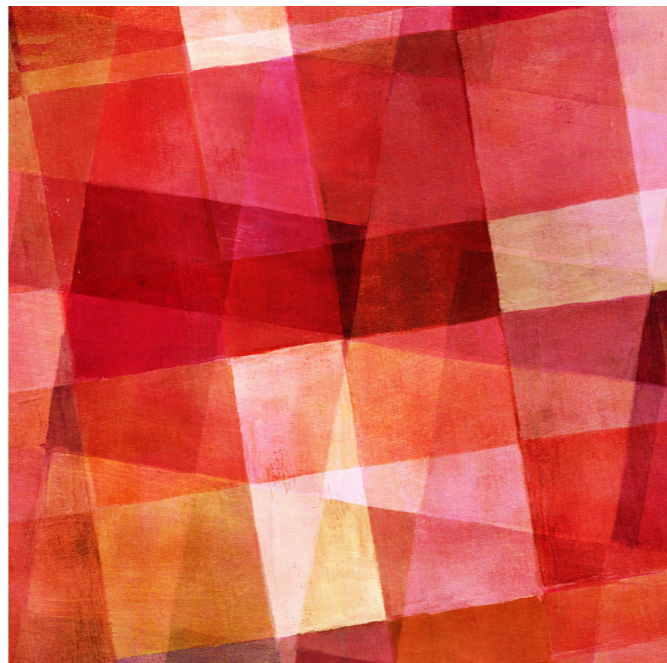
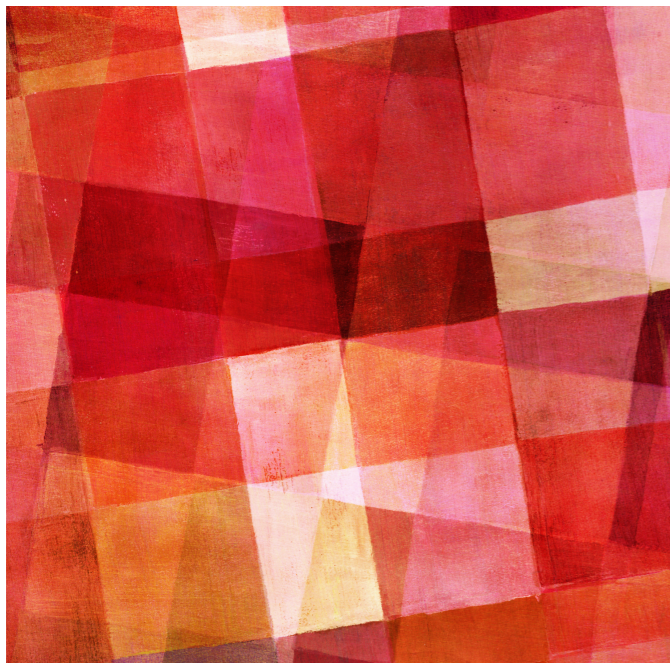
- Less money
- A more gentle learning curve
- Medium amount of time



# YOUR FIRST WEBSITE DOES NOT HAVE TO BE PERFECT

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- You can start small and benefit from a slower learning curve as you develop your content, technical skills, and online presence over time.
- Websites are always a work in progress.
- What is sustainable for you?



# DOMAIN

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*Your address on the internet*

# CHOOSE YOUR DOMAIN

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- Buy your name
- Choose a dot com domain
- If your name is unavailable, try for a variation
- Do not add hyphens, numbers, or special characters
- If all reasonable dot com domains are gone, try dot net domains
- You can have more than one domain
- Choosing the domain you use for your website is one of those things you want to get right the first time
- A tool for searching for available domains: [domize.com](https://www.domize.com)

# REGISTER YOUR DOMAIN (\$12-\$15/YEAR)

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- Do this immediately!
- Do it yourself! You should OWN your domain name.
- You do not have to register your domain with the same business you use as a web host.
- Recommended registrars: [name.com](https://www.name.com) & [namecheap.com](https://www.namecheap.com)
- (Why not GoDaddy?)
- When comparing registrars, besides looking at initial year prices, check renewal, transfer, and WHOIS privacy prices.
- Check your cart before submitting payment to make sure no additional products have been added.

# DO I REALLY NEED TO BUY DOMAIN PRIVACY?

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- Without privacy protection, anyone can see the name, address, and phone number of the domain's owner here: [whoisicann.org](http://whoisicann.org).
- SCAM: Domain slamming (a real-life horror story)
- SCAM: False offers to buy
- SCAM: Fake protection
- Communicate only with the business where you've registered your domain!



# CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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*Your content framework*

# WHAT IS A CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

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- A Content Management System (CMS) is a web application that uses a database (usually MySQL) or other methods to create, edit, and store code and other web content in an easy-to-manage way.
- Content is then created and edited for the web through the administrative portion of the web app (referred to as the “back end”) and this content is then displayed to visitors on the regular website (referred to as the “front end”).
- **Short version: it’s the software that allows people who do not know how to write code create websites.**





# MOST POPULAR CMS

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*By Percent of Websites*

**33.7% WORDPRESS**

**02.9% JOOMLA**

**01.9% DRUPAL**

**01.5% SQUARESPACE**

**01.5% SHOPIFY**

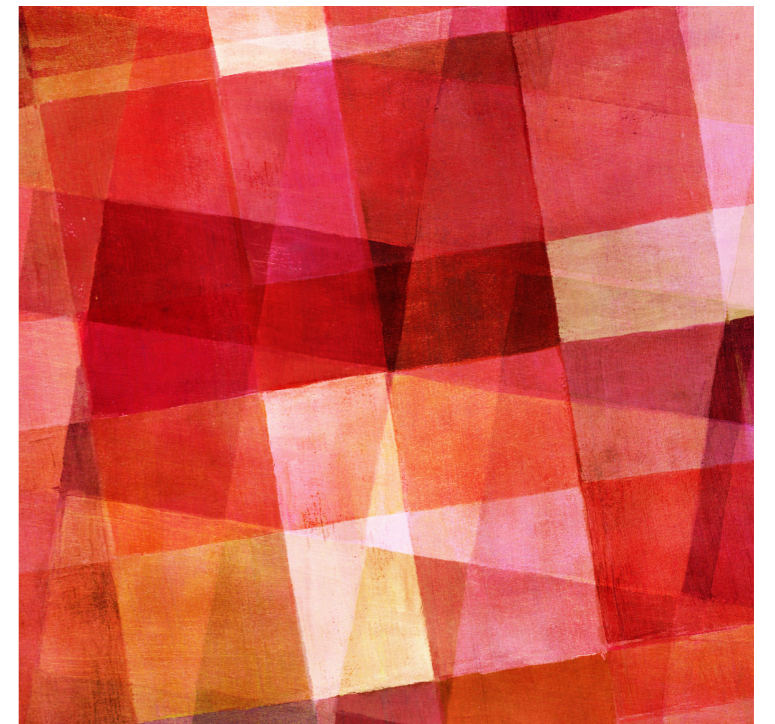
**01.1% WIX**

Source: <https://w3techs.com/>

# SITE BUILDERS HAVE LIMITATIONS

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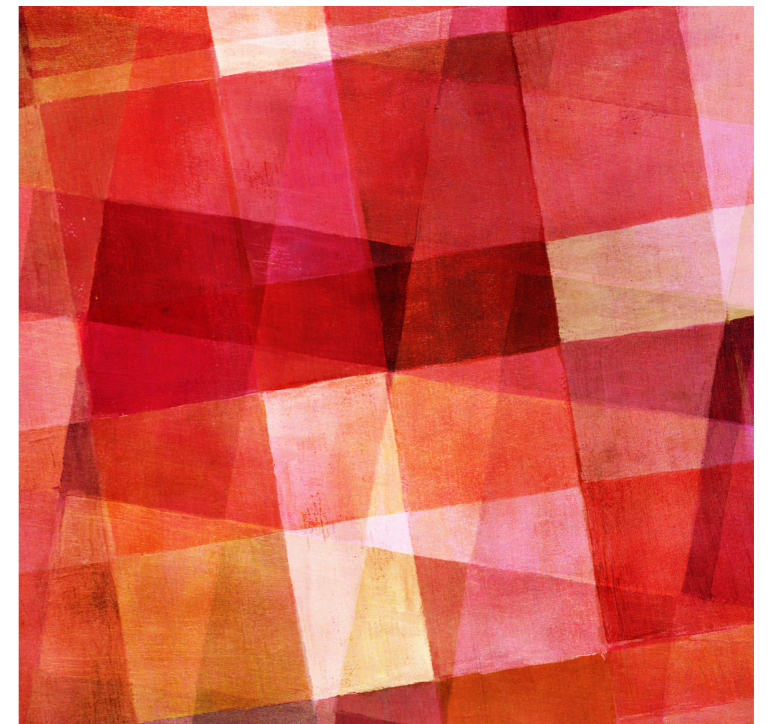
- Site builders such as Squarespace, Weebly, Wix can be a quick way for a newbie to build an attractive website—but I don't recommend them.
- “Free” sites place advertising and may not let you use a custom domain
- Hidden costs can mount up
- Lack flexibility, features & tools are limited
- Limited support
- May not include email
- Your site is in a proprietary environment; you don't own your site.



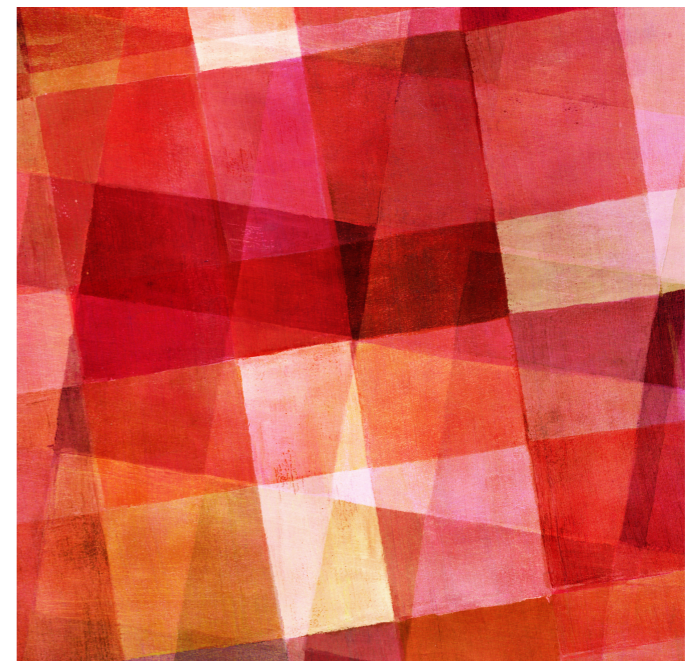
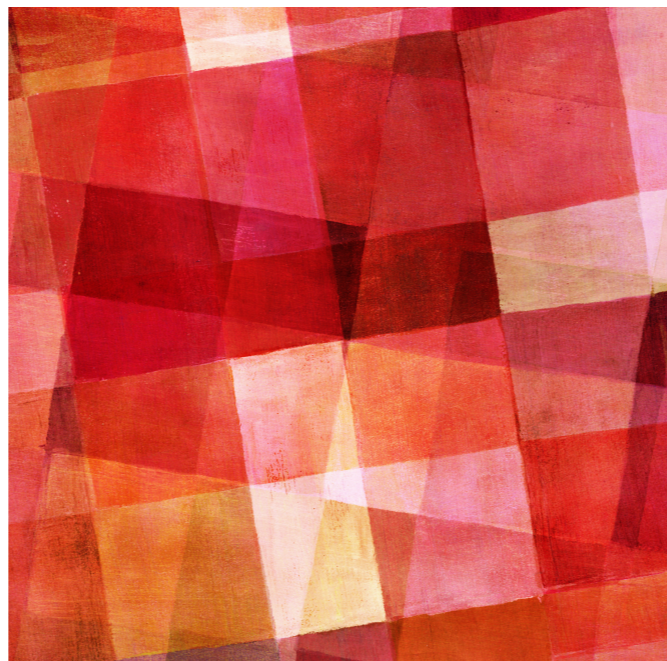
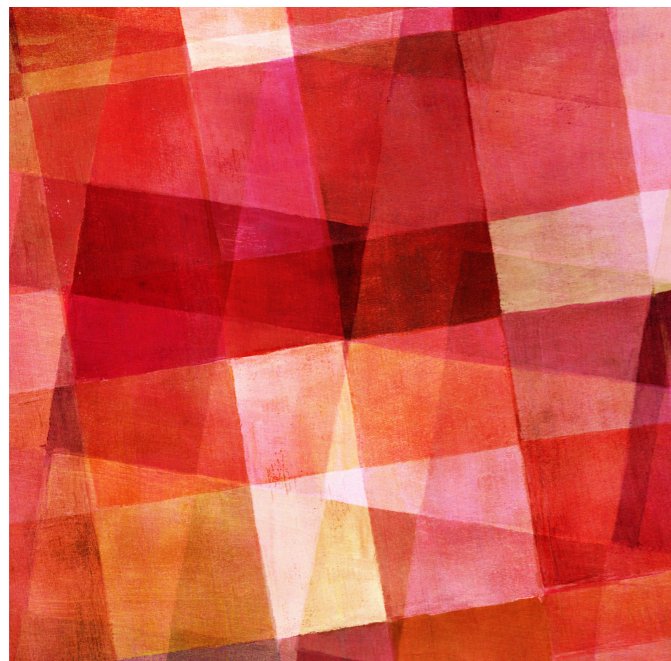
# POSSIBILITIES WITH WORDPRESS ARE VIRTUALLY UNLIMITED

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- The most popular CMS by far.
- The software itself is free
- It is “open source,” not proprietary. Anyone can build plugins, themes, and features for it, which means the potential for customizations is limitless.
- The WordPress community is huge and generous which means plenty of free support, documentation, and learning opportunities.
- The administrative back end and customizations are user friendly.
- WordPress can be used in many different ways from simple websites, to online communities and e-commerce.
- You own your site.  
(If you own your hosting account.)



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- Use WordPress to build a website in an environment that you have full control over, can manage, and that will allow you to grow.
- 



# WEB HOST

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*Your website's home*

# CHOOSE YOUR WEBHOST

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- Recommend: Bluehost [bluehost.com](https://bluehost.com)
- Affordable options, starting at \$2.95/month
- Used by many high-profile sites
- Good 24-hours a day customer support by phone & chat
- Clean interface
- Free domain for first year
- Email is included
- Free SSL certificate
- Easy WordPress installation
- Staging environment
- 30-day money-back guarantee

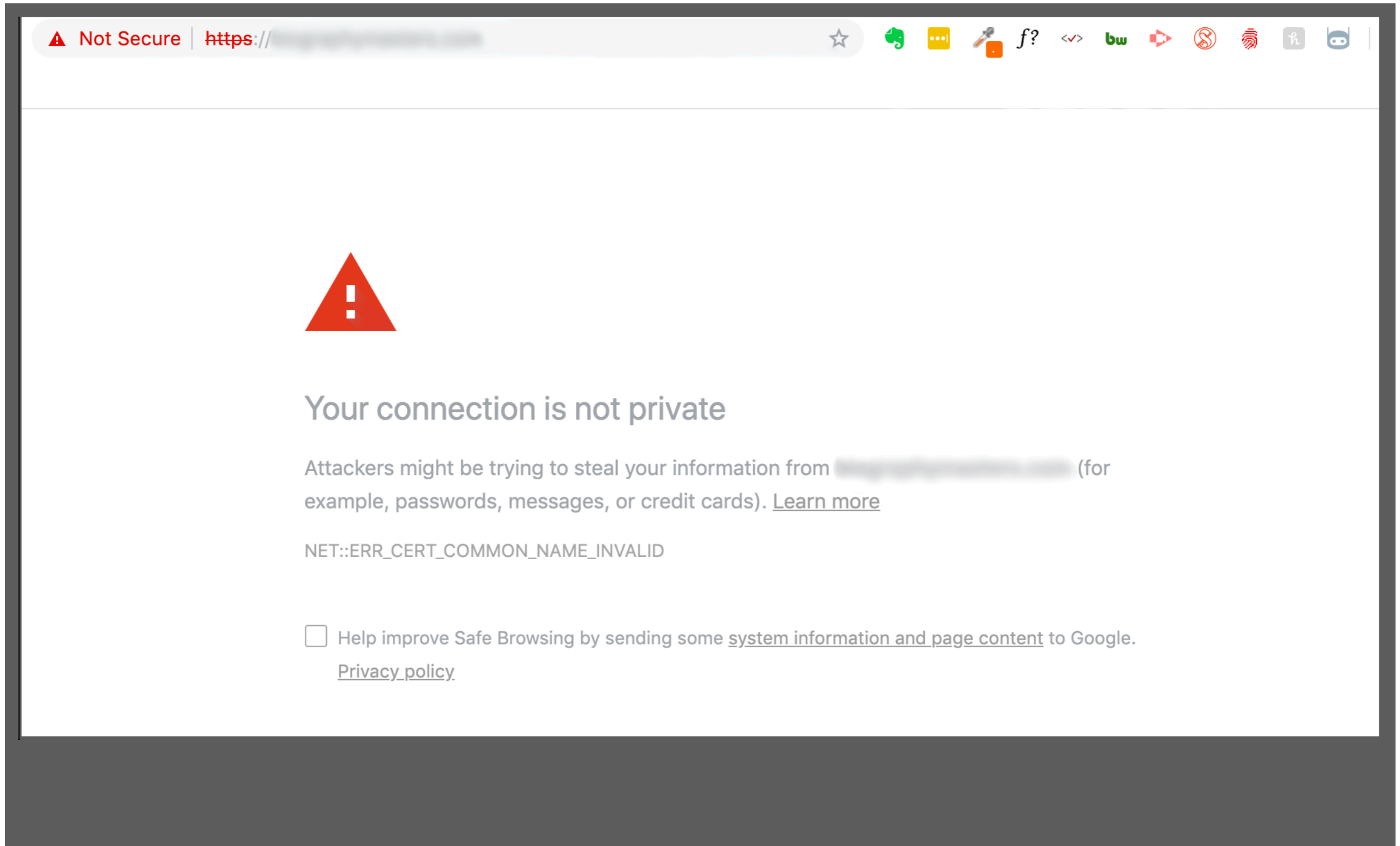


# BLUEHOST HOSTING PLANS

	basic	plus	recommended
	normally <del>\$7.99</del> <b>\$2.95*</b> per month	normally <del>\$10.99</del> <b>\$5.45*</b> per month	normally <del>\$14.99</del> <b>\$5.45*</b> per month
	<a href="#">select</a>	<a href="#">select</a>	<a href="#">select</a>
websites	1	unlimited	unlimited
website space	50 GB	unmetered	unmetered
bandwidth	unmetered	unmetered	unmetered
performance	Standard	Standard	Standard
SSL Certificate	Free	Free	Free
included domains	1	1	1
parked domains	5	unlimited	unlimited
sub domains	25	unlimited	unlimited
email accounts	5	unlimited	unlimited
email storage	100 MB per account	unlimited	unlimited
marketing offers	—	\$200 included	\$200 included
	<a href="#">select</a>	over \$24/yr in extras 1 SpamExperts <a href="#">select</a>	over \$80/yr in extras 1 SpamExperts 1 Domain Privacy CodeGuard Basic <a href="#">select</a>

# SSL CERTIFICATE – YOU NEED ONE


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The image shows a browser window with a security warning. The address bar at the top left displays a red triangle icon followed by the text "Not Secure" and a partially obscured "https://" URL. To the right of the address bar are several icons: a star, a green speech bubble, a yellow square with three dots, a key icon, "f?", a checkmark icon, "bw", a red play button, a red circle with a slash, a fingerprint icon, a person icon, and a blue robot icon. The main content area features a large red triangle with a white exclamation mark. Below this is the heading "Your connection is not private" in a grey font. The text below reads: "Attackers might be trying to steal your information from [redacted] (for example, passwords, messages, or credit cards). [Learn more](#)". Underneath is the error code "NET::ERR\_CERT\_COMMON\_NAME\_INVALID". At the bottom, there is a checkbox that is currently unchecked, followed by the text "Help improve Safe Browsing by sending some [system information and page content](#) to Google." and a link to "[Privacy policy](#)".

▲ Not Secure | https:// [redacted]

☆ [green speech bubble] [yellow square with dots] [key icon] f? <✓> bw [red play button] [red circle with slash] [fingerprint icon] [person icon] [blue robot icon]



## Your connection is not private

Attackers might be trying to steal your information from [redacted] (for example, passwords, messages, or credit cards). [Learn more](#)

NET::ERR\_CERT\_COMMON\_NAME\_INVALID

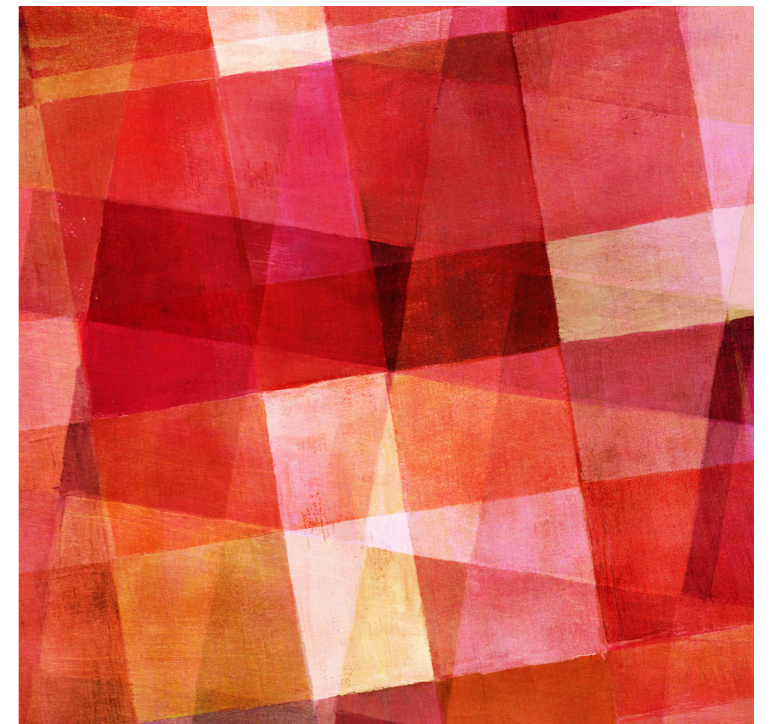
Help improve Safe Browsing by sending some [system information and page content](#) to Google.  
[Privacy policy](#)



# ANOTHER RECOMMENDED WEB HOST

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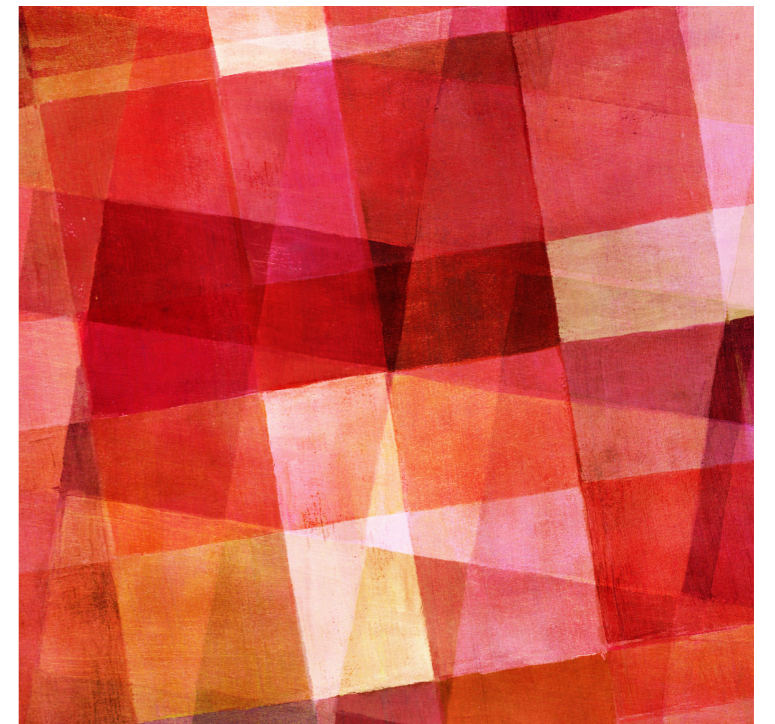
- SiteGround [siteground.com](https://www.siteground.com)
- Higher prices, less storage, but additional features
- Faster
- Better backup
- Site migration



# SET UP WEB HOSTING ACCOUNT

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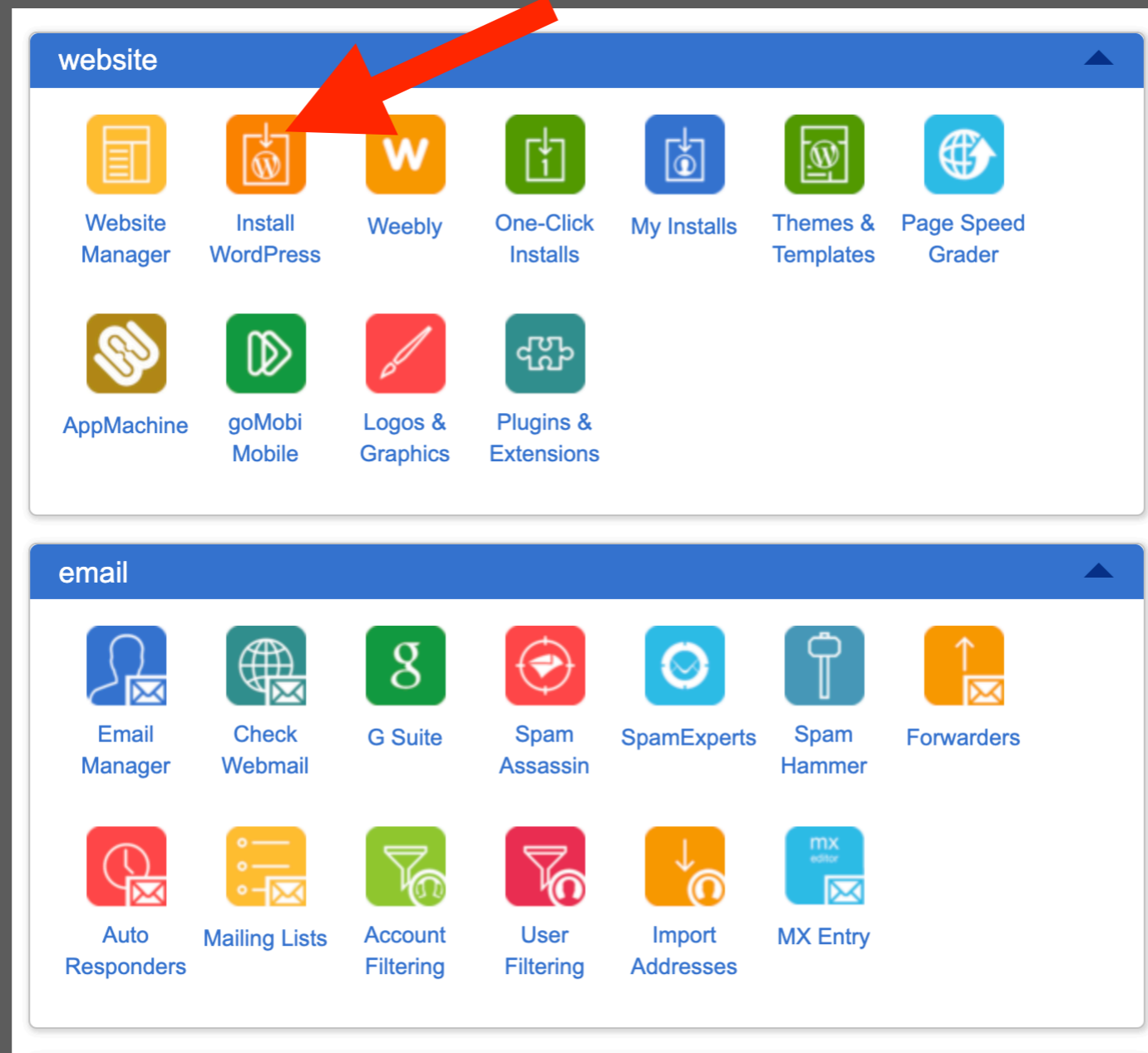
- Own you web hosting account(a horror story).
- Decide on your hosting plan & domain in advance.
- Check your cart to ensure no extras have been added.
- Once you complete your purchase, you'll receive an email with details on how to login to your web hosting control panel, referred to as a "cPanel."
- The cPanel is your hosting dashboard from where you manage everything related to your web hosting account such as setting up emails, etc.



# CPANEL

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Don't be intimidated by the cPanel. You will never need most of the buttons. But your WordPress install will start from here.



# INSTALL WORDPRESS

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- If you're working with a designer, they can do this part
- Click "WordPress" on the cPanel and follow instructions
- Make sure to change the default "admin" username to something more hacker proof.
- Enter a strong password for your website.
- While WordPress is installing, advertisements for themes will appear. Ignore.
- Once the installation is complete, you'll see a success message in the top header.
- Click the "Installation Complete" link, and it will take you to the screen with your WordPress login URL and credentials.
- You will log into your website at your URL which will look like this: `https://yourdomain.com/wp-admin`. Use the admin username and password you selected earlier at the webhost.

# SITE DESIGN

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*The “look”*

# SITE THEME

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- A WordPress theme is a collection of files that define the website's "look".
- Themes can be changed, managed, and added from the WordPress Dashboard under Appearance » Themes
- There are thousands of free WordPress themes to choose from with different looks and features.
- WordPress automatically installs a default theme. If you want to set up your website and start adding content right away, or just experiment and play, the pre-installed theme may work for you.

# RECOMMENDED PREMIUM THEMES

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- For less than \$100 you can have a premium theme that has a lot more functionality and comes with support, including customer forums and documentation.
- Kadence Themes (Free & Premium \$45)  
[www.kadencethemes.com/wordpress-themes/](http://www.kadencethemes.com/wordpress-themes/)
- Book Landing Page (Free & Premium \$59)  
[raratheme.com/wordpress-themes/book-landing-page/](http://raratheme.com/wordpress-themes/book-landing-page/)
- Author Pro (\$99.95)  
[my.studiopress.com/themes/author/](http://my.studiopress.com/themes/author/)

# LEARN MORE ABOUT WORDPRESS

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- Explore your dashboard—the “back end” of your website.
- Learn how to create: “Pages” (static) and “Posts” (blog)
- Don’t be afraid to play and experiment.
- WordPress has extensive documentation. Start with this tour: [codex.wordpress.org/First\\_Steps\\_With\\_WordPress](https://codex.wordpress.org/First_Steps_With_WordPress)
- Websites, WordCamps, Meetup Groups, etc.



# WORDPRESS DASHBOARD

The image shows a screenshot of the WordPress dashboard. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Demo website', '1' refresh, '0' notifications, and '+ New'. The user is logged in as 'Howdy, delete me'. The left sidebar contains a menu with 'Dashboard', 'Home', 'Updates 1', 'Posts', 'Media', 'Pages', 'Comments', 'Appearance', 'Plugins 1', 'Users', 'Tools', 'Settings', and 'Collapse menu'. The main content area is titled 'Dashboard' and features a 'Welcome to WordPress!' message with a 'Dismiss' button. Below this are three columns: 'Get Started' with a 'Customize Your Site' button and a link to change the theme; 'Next Steps' with links to 'Write your first blog post', 'Add an About page', and 'View your site'; and 'More Actions' with links to 'Manage widgets or menus', 'Turn comments on or off', and 'Learn more about getting started'. The dashboard is divided into several widgets: 'At a Glance' showing 1 Post, 1 Page, and 1 Comment, along with version and theme information; 'Activity' showing a 'Recently Published' post 'Hello world!' and a 'Recent Comments' section with a comment from 'A WordPress Commenter'; 'Quick Draft' with a 'Title' field, a text area, and a 'Save Draft' button; and 'WordPress Events and News' listing events like 'WordCamp Fayetteville, Arkansas' and 'WordPress Post-Launch Work'. At the bottom, there's a section for 'The Month in WordPress: June 2017' with links to WPTavern episodes and surveys.

# WORDPRESS PAGE EDIT

The screenshot displays the WordPress 'Add New Page' editor. The interface is divided into several sections:

- Header:** Shows the site name 'Codex Sample', a notification icon with '0', a '+ New' button, and the user name 'Howdy, wpace' with a profile icon. There are also 'Screen Options' and 'Help' dropdown menus.
- Left Sidebar:** A navigation menu with items: Dashboard, Posts, Media, Pages (highlighted), All Pages, Add New, Comments, Appearance, Plugins, Users, Tools, Settings, and Collapse menu.
- Main Content Area:**
  - Title:** A text input field with the placeholder 'Enter title here'.
  - Buttons:** 'Add Media' button and 'Visual'/'Text' tabs.
  - Editor:** A rich text editor with a toolbar containing icons for Bold (B), Italic (I), ABC, bulleted list, numbered list, quote, indent, outdent, link, unlink, table, and table of contents.
  - Metadata:** Fields for 'Path: p' and 'Word count: 0'.
  - Custom Fields:** A dropdown menu.
  - Discussion:** A dropdown menu.
  - Author:** A dropdown menu.
- Right Sidebar:**
  - Publish:** Contains 'Save Draft' and 'Preview' buttons. Below are status and visibility options: 'Status: Draft [Edit](#)', 'Visibility: Public [Edit](#)', and 'Publish immediately [Edit](#)'. At the bottom are 'Move to Trash' and 'Publish' buttons.
  - Page Attributes:** Contains dropdowns for 'Parent' (set to '(no parent)') and 'Template' (set to 'Default Template'). Below is an 'Order' input field with the value '0'. A note reads: 'Need help? Use the Help tab in the upper right of your screen.'
  - Featured Image:** Contains a 'Set featured image' link.

At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the text 'Thank you for creating with [WordPress](#).' and the version number 'Version 3.8'.

# Q & A

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*Website Critiques*

# WEBSITE CONTENT

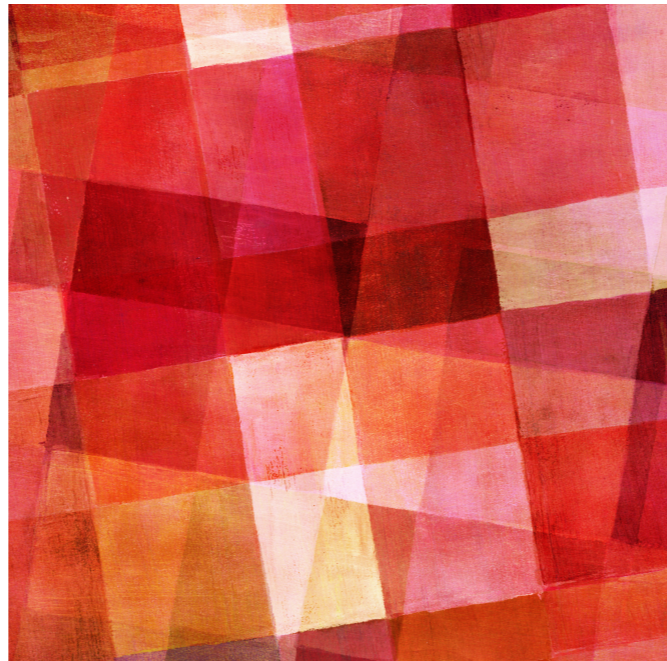
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*Your story*

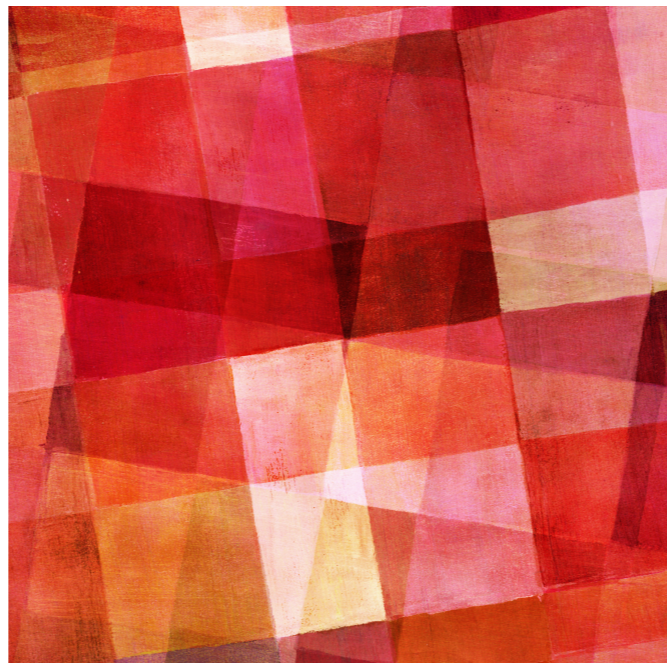
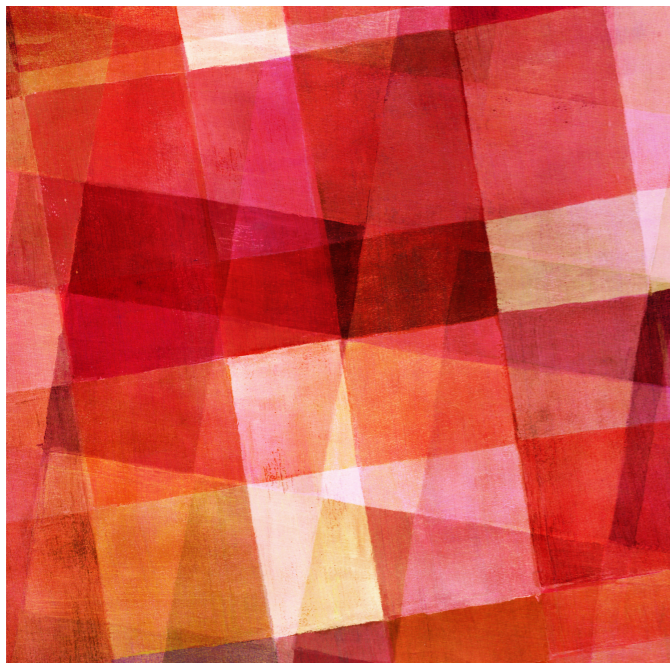
# YOUR AUTHOR WEBSITE HAS TWO MAIN GOALS

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- Sell books
- Build a mailing list



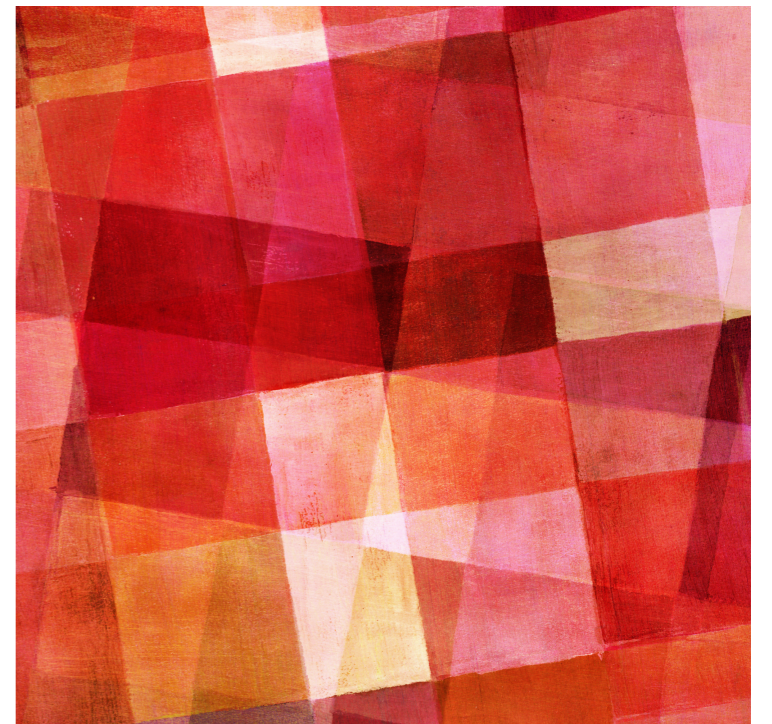
- 
- An author email list is the most important way to build a long-term connection with your readers
  - One-to-one without the noise & distractions of social media
  - “First check of the day” study: 58% email v. 14% social media
  - A mailing list opt-in should appear on every page of your site



# EVERY AUTHOR WEBSITE SHOULD CONTAIN THESE PAGES

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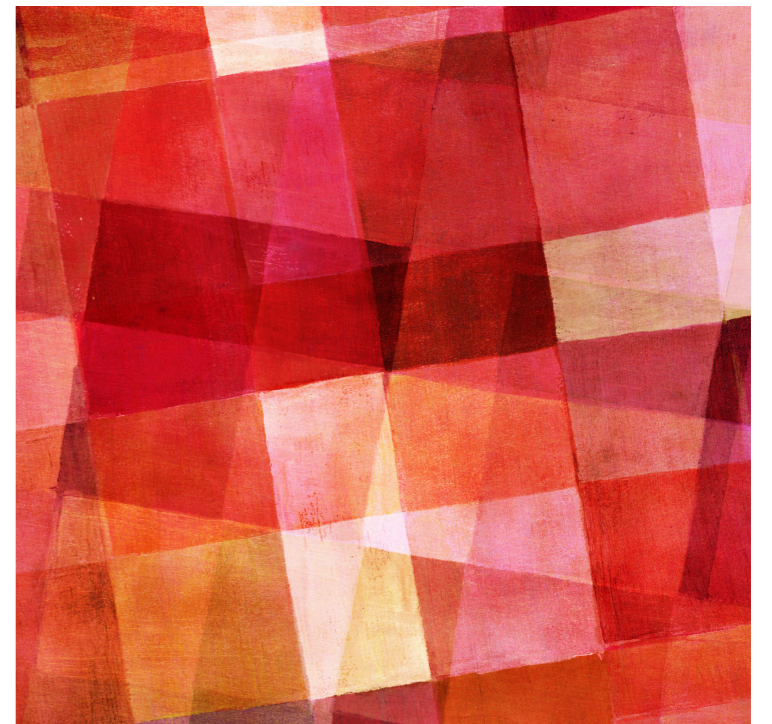
- Home page
- About page
- Books pages
- Contact page
  
- Don't get fancy with page names and top-level navigation links



# HOME PAGE

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- Your home page is your visitor's gateway to your world.
- Don't try to include everything on your home page
- Show highlights of the most important items and make it easy for visitors to click to find out more.
- Don't create a wall of text. Make it easy to scan for info.

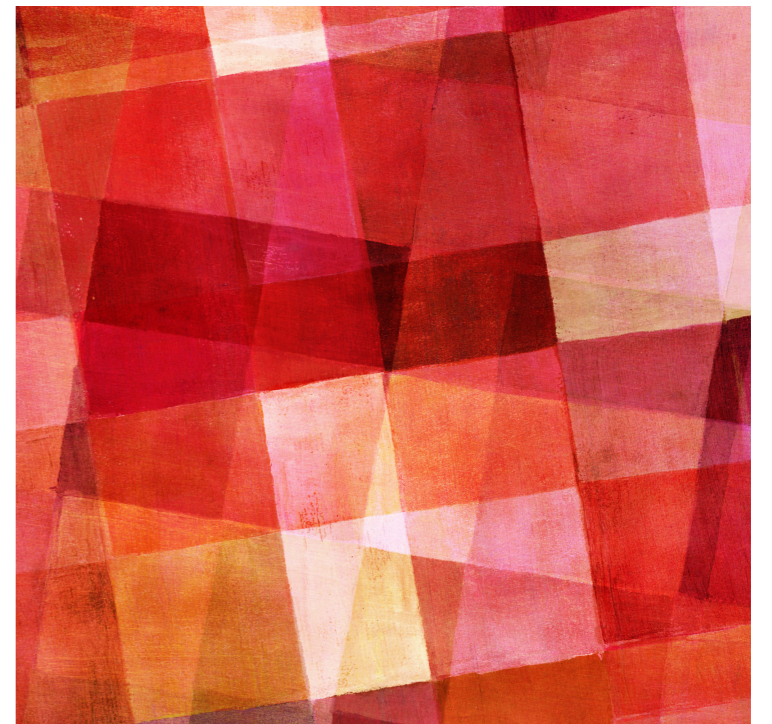




# YOUR LATEST BOOK SHOULD BE PROMINENT ON HOME PAGE

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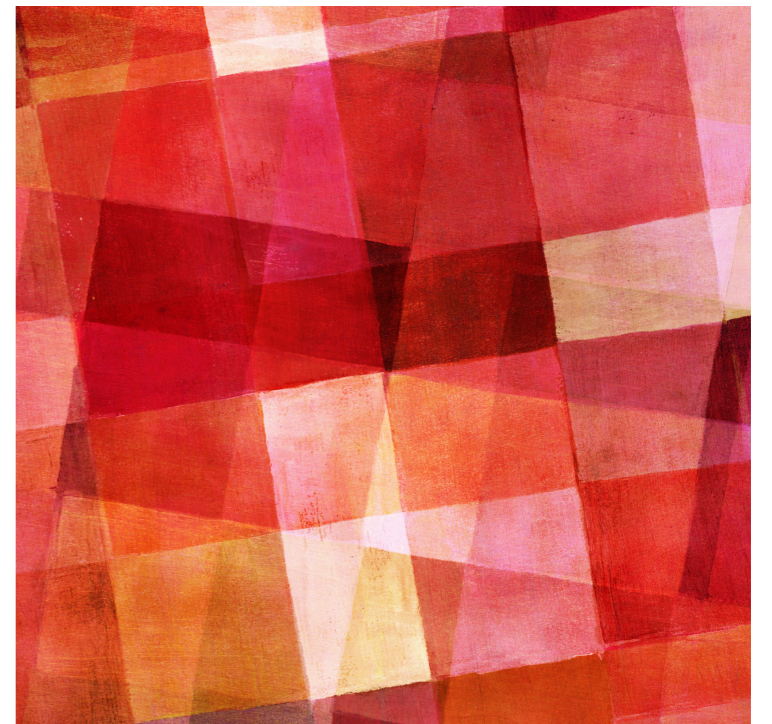
- Book cover
- Brief description
- Blurbs/reviews
- Call to action: Make links to purchase prominent. Make it easy for readers to buy your new book.



# EMAIL OPT-IN SHOULD BE PROMINENT ON THE HOME PAGE

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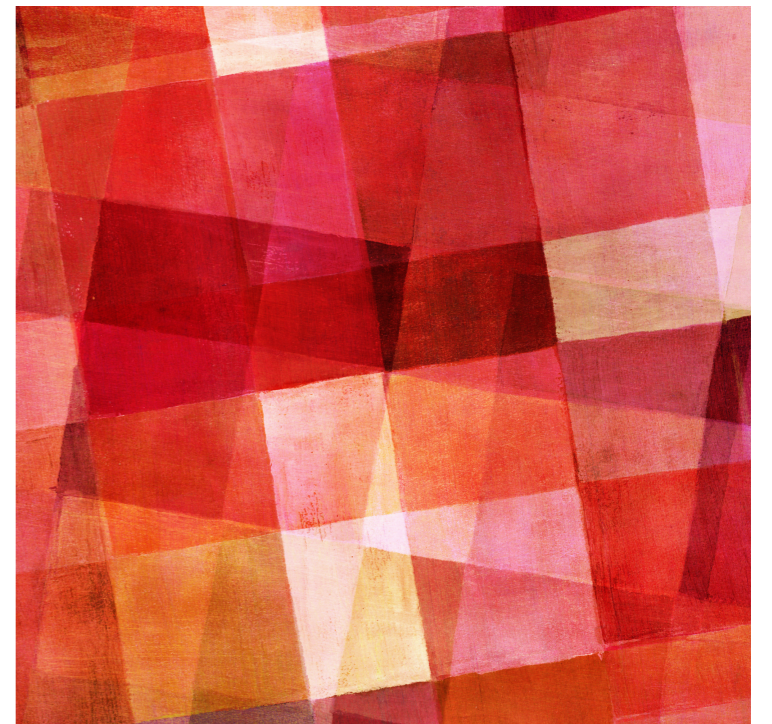
- Call to action: invite people to join your email list
- Place the opt-in above the fold and/or use a pop-up
- Calls to action answer visitors' #question: What's in it for me? (Why am I here?)



# EMAIL OPT-IN SHOULD BE PROMINENT ON THE HOME PAGE

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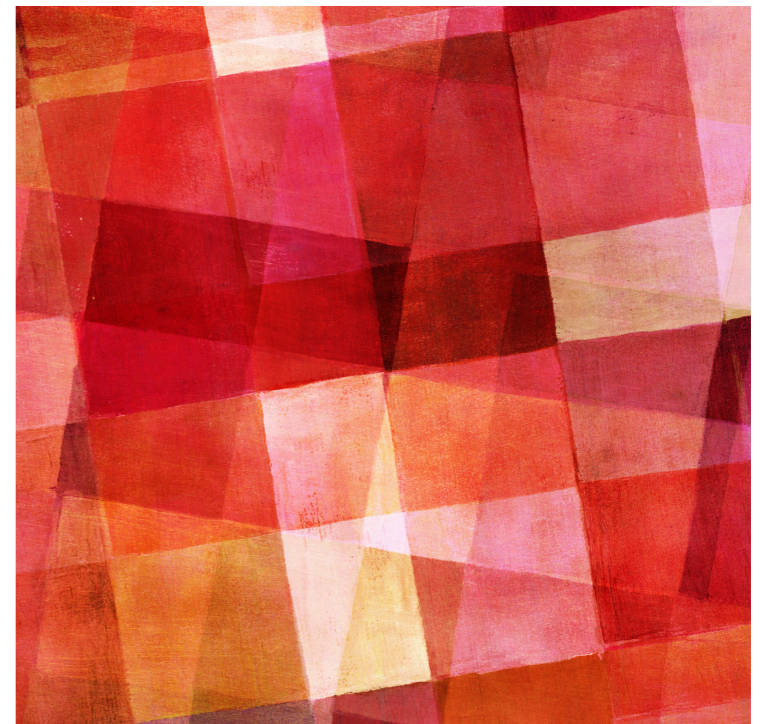
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- Place the opt-in above the fold and/or use a pop-up
- Calls to action answer visitors' #question: What's in it for me? (Why am I here?)



# HOME PAGE SHOULD INCLUDE YOUR PHOTO & SHORT-SHORT BIO

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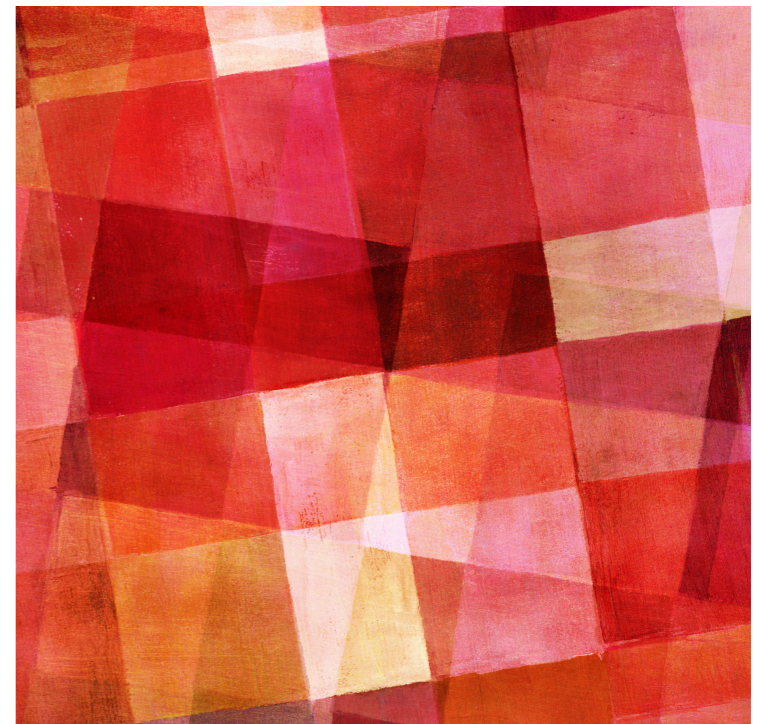
- Headshot and short-short bio should end with a “Read More” link that takes visitors to your “About” page.
- Use the same headshot everywhere: Facebook, Instagram, Amazon Author Page, Twitter, newsletter, website, etc.



# OTHER HOME PAGE CONTENT

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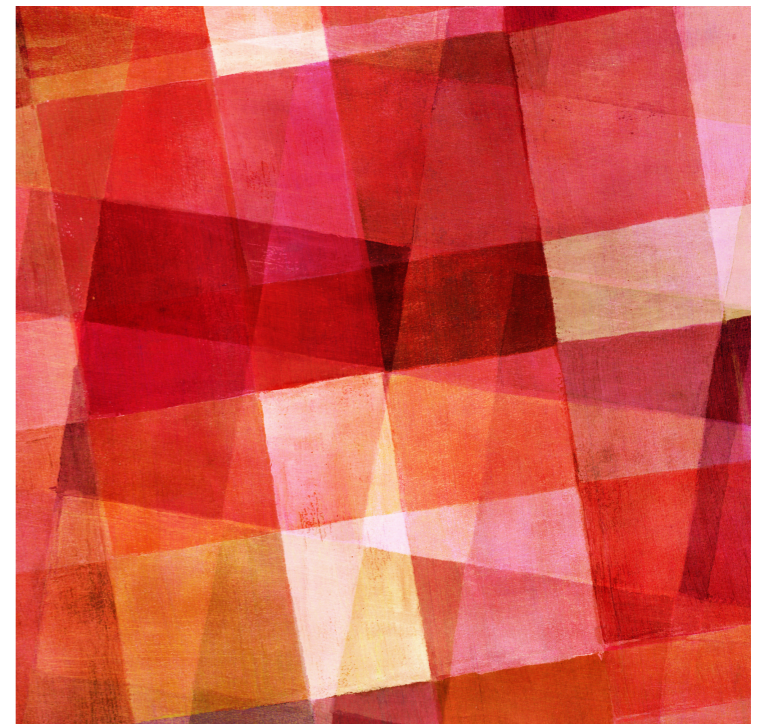
- Excerpts of other content such as latest blog posts or other publications you have available online.
- Current book signings, events, contests
- Encourage connection with social media links, link to contact page



# A HOME PAGE IS EFFECTIVE IF IT ...

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- Lets visitors know right away they're in the right place
- Establishes your brand
- Makes it easy for visitors to buy your books & learn more about you
- Encourages visitors to stay connected to you



# THE “ABOUT” PAGE IS OFTEN THE MOST CLICKED PAGE ON A SITE

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- People are curious about other people
- About page allows readers to learn more about who you are and what you do
- Allows media, bloggers, etc. to easily get your bio and images when needed



# YOUR ABOUT PAGE SHOULD INCLUDE

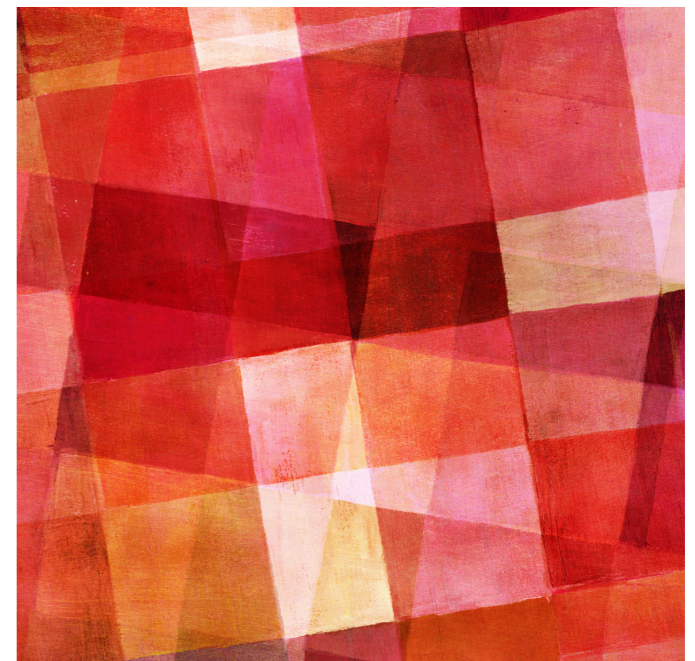
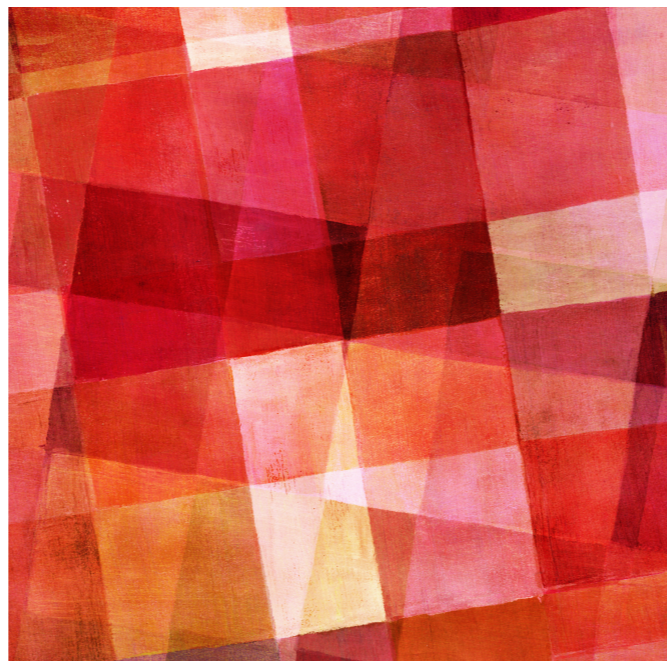
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- Headshot (use the same picture as the homepage)
- Make an additional hi-res headshot available for download if you are planning to do media, interviews, speaking engagements
- Short bio: two concise paragraphs
- Longer bio: delve deeper into your background
- Link to contact page
- An email opt-in form!





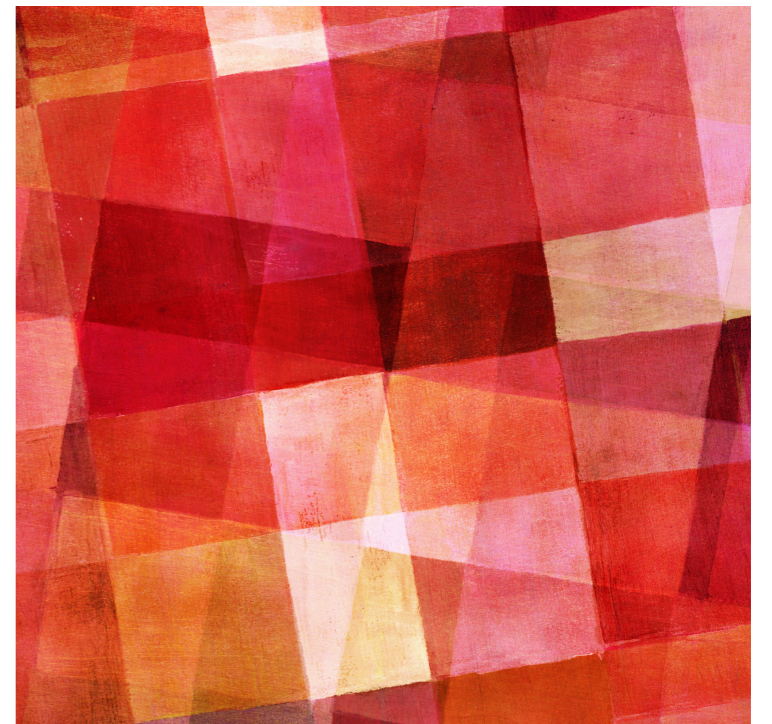
- 
- Remember, the About page is where people go to learn about you. Make a conscience decision about your voice and tone. (I recommend *friendly*.) And don't be afraid to share details of your life. People buy books from people.
- 



# “BOOKS” PAGE

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- Make it easy to find all your books in one place.
- Show all of your books in reverse chronological order.
- Book cover
- Title
- Short description
- Links to buy the book
- “Read More” link to the individual page for the book
- An email opt-in form!



# EACH BOOK SHOULD ALSO HAVE ITS OWN PAGE

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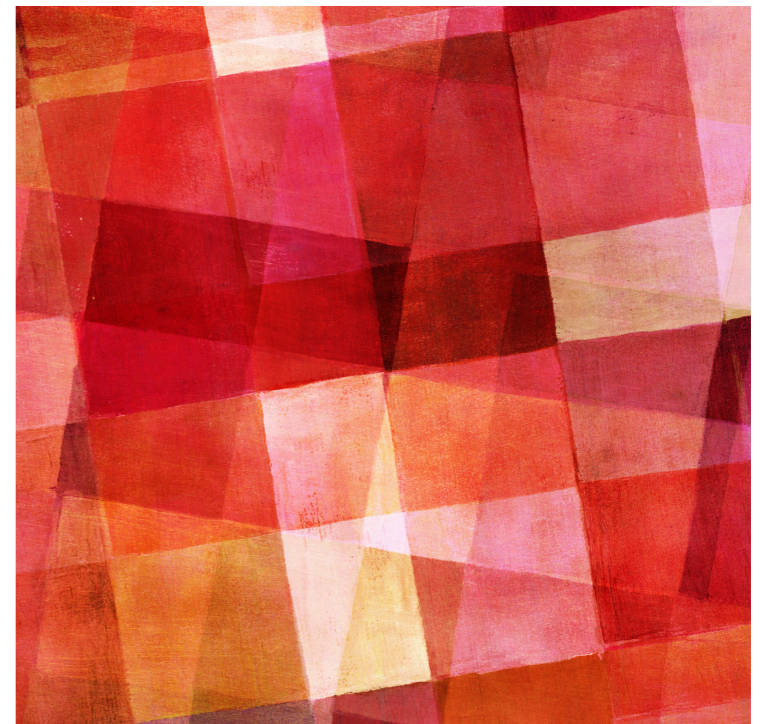
- You should have an entire page of your website dedicated to each of your books. (Don't forget anthologies!)
- You can link to it directly when promoting the book online
- You will also link to it with a "Read More" link on the home or all-books pages.
- Book Cover
- Title and subtitle
- Full description
- Blurbs and reviews
- Links to buy the book
- An email opt-in form!



# IF YOU DON'T HAVE A BOOK YET

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- You can still have a book page on your site
- If all you know is a tentative title and short description, add that.
- Add other information as it comes available



# CONTACT PAGE

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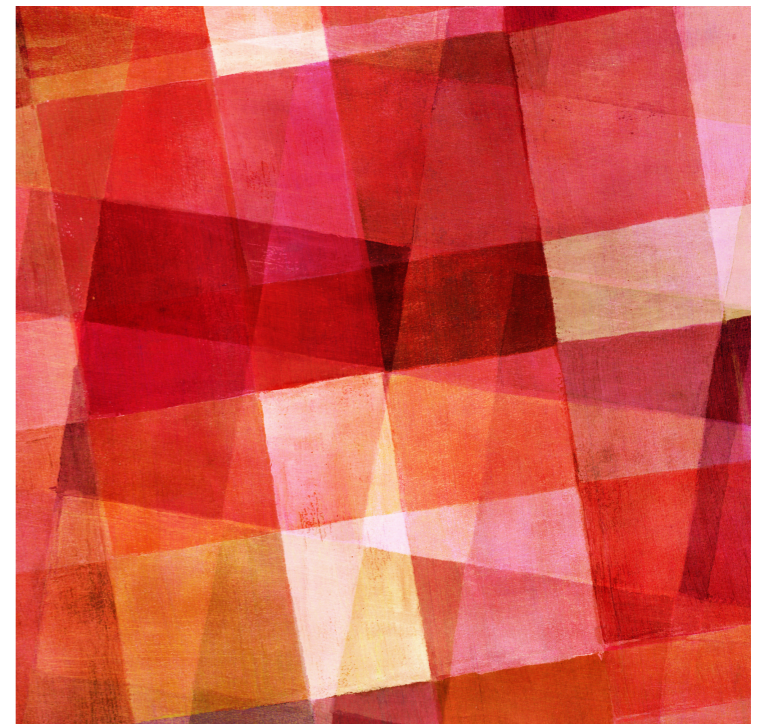
- Make it easy for people to contact you
- Contact form vs. email address
- Mailing address
- Social media links
- You might indicate here whether you're open to speaking engagements, book signings, guest blogging and link to appropriate pages on the site for more details
- An email newsletter opt-in form!



# OPTIONAL PAGES

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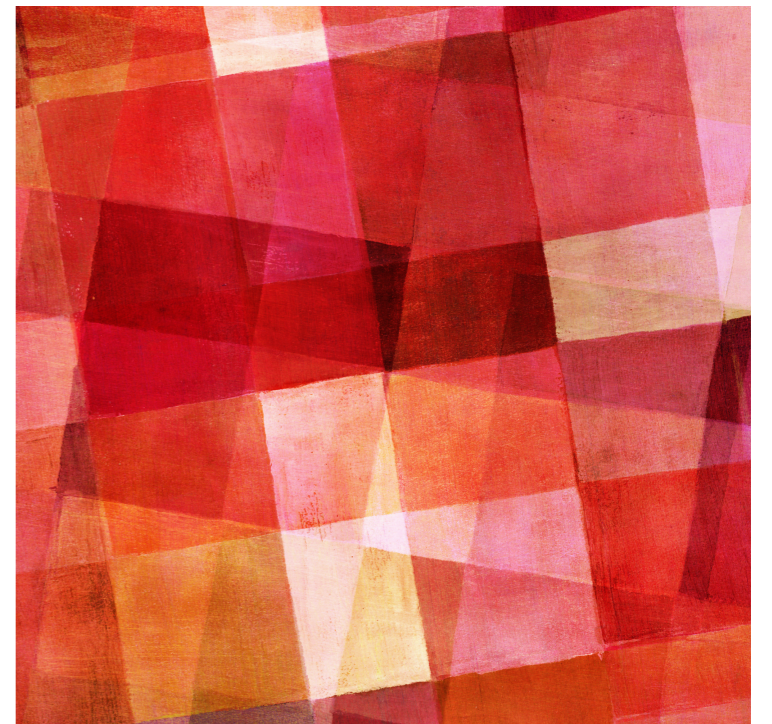
- Blog
- Events
- Speaking
- Resources



# BLOG

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- Is blogging essential or not? But your blog is one thing that can help direct traffic to your website.
- What to write about? It doesn't (and maybe shouldn't be, all about you).
- Consider a “literary citizen” focus for blogging.



# BLOG PAGES

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- List your name as the post author; make it clear to visitors that you're the one writing.
- Share buttons so that people can easily share your posts on social media
- Open comments so you don't have to "approve." You can block people or set up approval again if this becomes a problem.
- Your headshot and short bio
- A sidebar or footer could include your latest book, a list of popular posts and ... an email opt-in form!

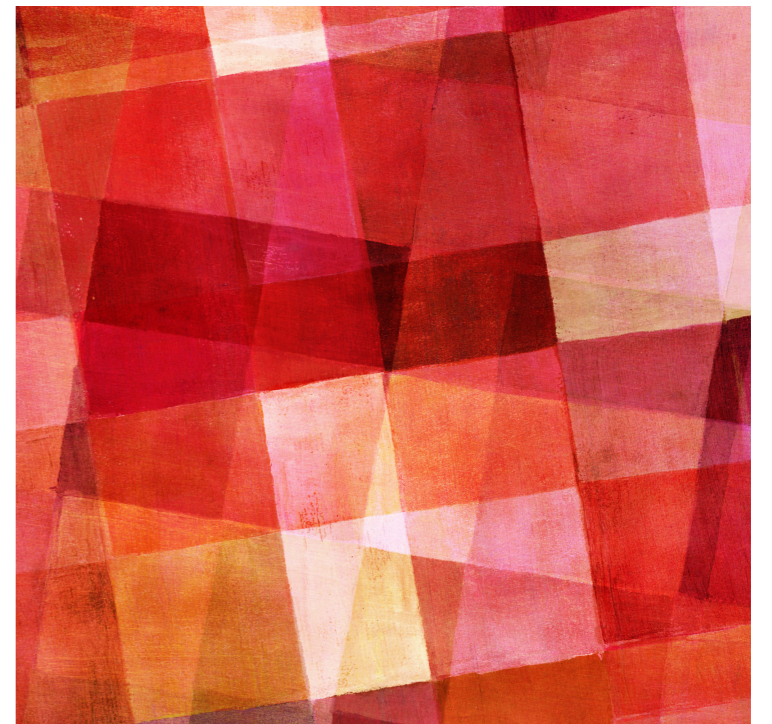




# EVENTS OR BOOK TOUR PAGE

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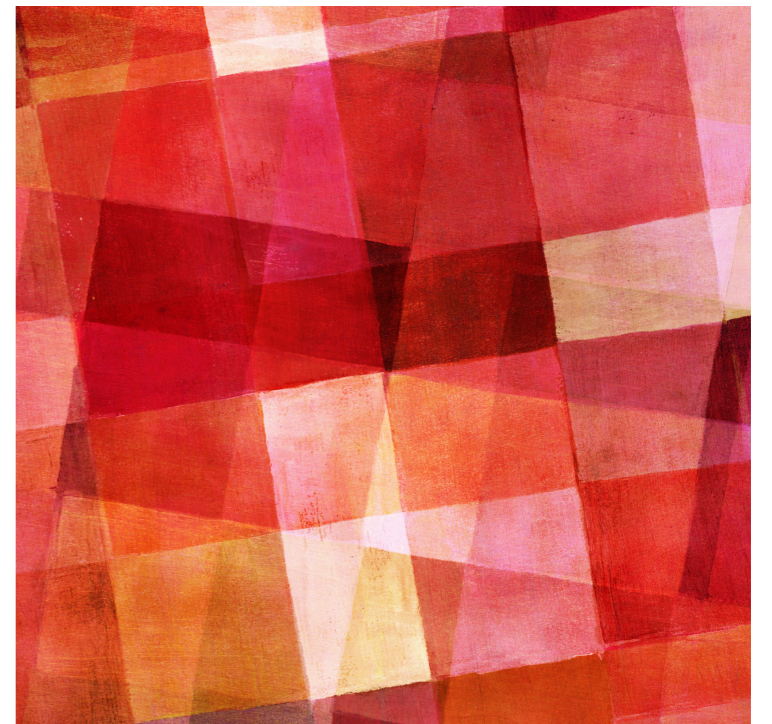
- List of upcoming events including dates, locations, and whether or not they are open to the public
- Clear instructions about how to contact and set up an event with you



# SPEAKING PAGE

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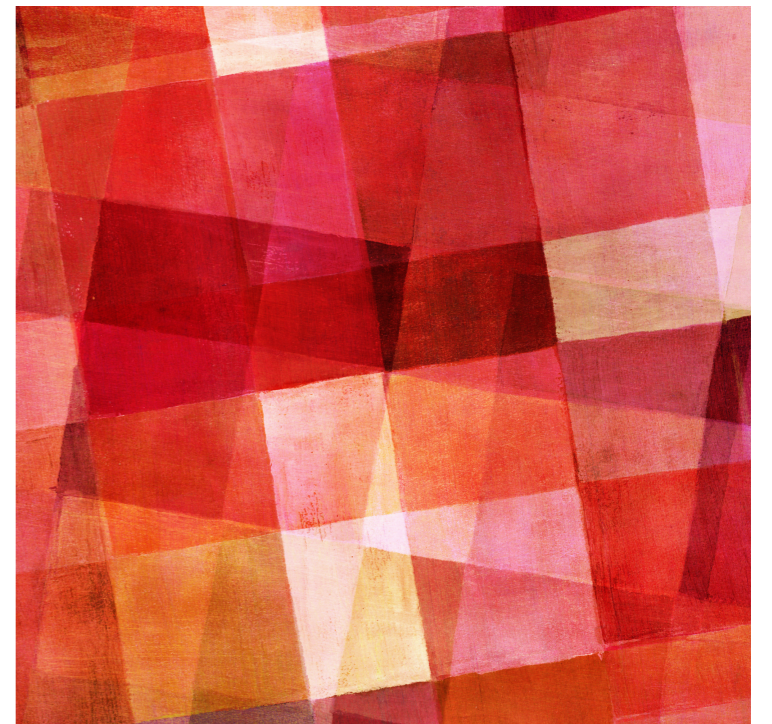
- List 3–5 topics that you like to speak about
- Speaker video, so event organizers see you in action
- Clear instructions about how to contact and hire you.
- List of previous speaking engagements



# RESOURCES PAGE

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- An optional page to share “evergreen” content
- Examples may be: short stories or articles, videos, interviews, or other content specific to your platform.
- An email newsletter opt-in form!



# TEN IMPORTANT TAKE-AWAYS

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- 1. Having a website home is a critical part of building your author platform and selling books. It's the first place people are going to go to learn about you.
- 2. Own your website, hosting, and domain.
- 3. Create a website that will grow with you.
- 4. DIY is great, but there's a learning curve. Where do you want to invest your time and money?
- 5. Your first website doesn't have to be glorious, but it does need to have the right information and content and a good sense of design.

- 6. Home page should let visitors know right away they're in the right place (header, headshot, book covers).
- 7. Website should make it easy for visitors to find and purchase your books.
- 8. Website should make it clear that visitors should sign up for your email list.
- 9. Website should make it easy to contact you.
- 10. The visitor's question that every website needs to answer: What's in it for me? (Why am I here?)

**Questions?**

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