Blogs.mcgill.ca guide

A step-by-step document to blogging at McGill

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BLOGS.MCGILL.CA

Blogging at McGill

Blogs are websites that feature content in a reverse chronological order where the most recent content appears at the top of the site. The format on blogs.mcgill.ca favors a timely and colloquial approach to publishing on the web at McGill. To view examples of some existing McGill blogs, go to http://blogs.mcgill.ca/ and browse the list on the left-hand side menu.

Within the McGill blogging system, members add content and contribute to the comments by authenticating using their McGill credentials. While many blog sites are open to the public, blogs can also be restricted to McGill users only or even further restricted to select users. This can be particularly useful to foster private communities, such as within a learning environment.

Blogs.mcgill.ca is hosted using the WordPress platform and each blog site makes use of a similar McGill theme. This theme includes a modifiable banner area, navigation, post area, and widget area.

Other web publication options

- www.mcgill.ca site: Blogs.mcgill.ca sites are not considered a good replacement for official McGill sites. If you are looking for a formal web presence, please use the Web Management System.

Finally, prior to creating and participating in a blog at McGill, please review the guidelines for Blogs & Wikis at McGill: http://blogs.mcgill.ca/guidelines/

Blogging in teaching and learning

Blogs as a teaching and learning tool can take multiple forms and are unique to each course's learning objectives. A course blog could be setup to host assignments such as: article critiques, peer review, self-reflection activities, citizen journalism, and other forms. The technology affords:

1. **Knowledge sharing**: postings are shared among the blog audience and can contain link to other resources (news sources, journal articles, videos).
2. **Asynchronous interaction**: blog audience can provide feedback to the learner through the comment feature and can even be extended as a peer review activity.
3. **Reflection**: initially introduced as an online journaling tool (*web log*), the blog format continues to facilitate the publication of thoughts and opinions, allowing individual voices to stand out.

Instructors and students have two options for blogging with McGill systems: 1) This one, on blogs.mcgill.ca using WordPress or 2) create a discussion forum as a blog topic within myCourses. While the blogging tool in myCourses requires little configuration and setup, it is a feature-limited blogging tool. Blogs.mcgill.ca uses WordPress; a common platform in the blogging community provides a more

authentic experience, can easily integrate links to the web and multimedia and may be opened to a particular audience outside of the McGill environment. If you are interested in starting a blog in your course or have any questions with this process, please contact the IT Service Desk at https://www.mcgill.ca/itsupport/servicedesk.

Logging in to blogs.mcgill.ca

Using McGill credentials

To begin blogging, you will need to register your McGill account. This registration process is completed by initially logging in to https://blogs.mcgill.ca/wp-admin/ using your McGill username and password. Once logged in, the account will be registered on the blogs.mcgill.ca domain and administrator(s) from any blogs.mcgill.ca site can then add you as a member.
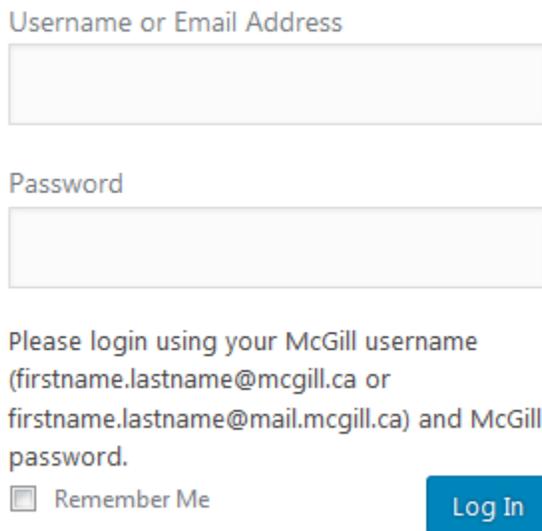
Username or Email Address

Password

Please login using your McGill username (firstname.lastname@mcgill.ca or firstname.lastname@mail.mcgill.ca) and McGill password.

☐ Remember Me   Log In

Figure 1 - First-time users login to register their McGill account

External users

Users that do not have McGill credentials can request access via their blog administrator/moderator. Administrator can send the following information to ITsupport@mcgill.ca:

- Name
- E-mail address
- Blog(s) to be added
- User role

Key blog terminology

1. **Posts**: entries in a blog consisting of a title, a message and a time stamp.
2. **Comments**: responses to a post.
3. **Pages**: static content spaces that do not change over time, similar to standard web pages.
4. **Categories**: classification used to distinguish posts throughout in a blog, similar to a table of content.
5. **Tags**: keywords that can be used for searches and/or word clouds.
6. **Widgets**: add-ons that can supplement the blog with extra functionality

Request a blog at McGill

Blogs can be requested using the Request a Blog web form.

You will be required to enter a Blog name, Blog URL (http://blog.mcgill.ca/yoursiteURL), name of Blog users and their roles.

Ideally, your Blog URL should be short, memorable and relevant to your site. It cannot contain spaces or special characters other than dashes (–). It does not have to be the same as the Blog title and could be a shorter version or acronym (see examples below).

Blog title – The title will be displayed on the banner at the top of the page (e.g.: 'Grad Life')
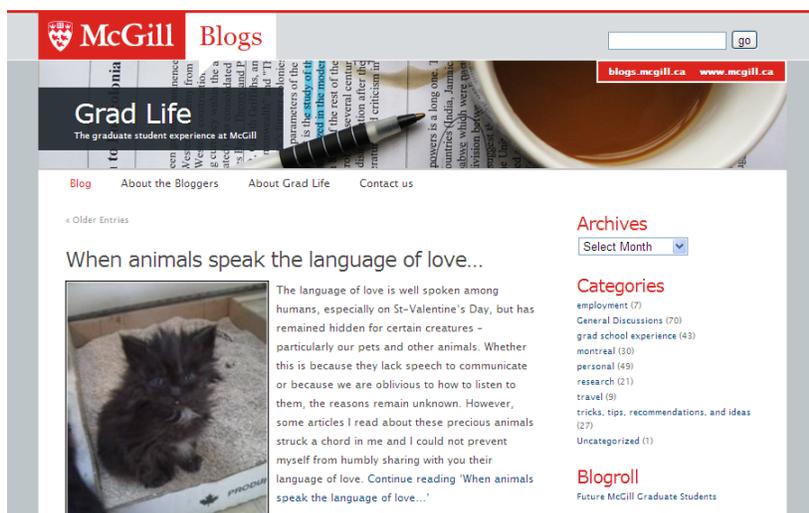
Setting up your blog

Logging in to the backend of your blog

When a blog is first created, it is made private and only available to the administrators and/or registered members. Therefore in order to access the blog, you will need to get to the blog via the link.

1. From the web browser, enter your blog link and add 'wp-admin' (as in the example below):
   https://blogs.mcgill.ca/yoursiteURL/wp-admin
2. Enter your McGill username/email and password.
3. Alternatively, you can go to log in to blogs.mcgill.ca and your site – In order to assign the administrator account, you will need to sign in to your profile at https://blogs.mcgill.ca/wp-admin/ or click 'Login to this site' at https://blogs.mcgill.ca/.

Dashboard

The Dashboard is the administrative space that allows you to:

1. *Modify your personal profile* – such as Display name and other user preferences.
2. *Get additional help for the blog system (wordpress.org)* - At any time, while you are in the Backend, you can click on the 'Help' link to receive context specific information.
3. *Add and modify the content of the blog.*
4. *Manage the blog* – including its settings, users and theme.
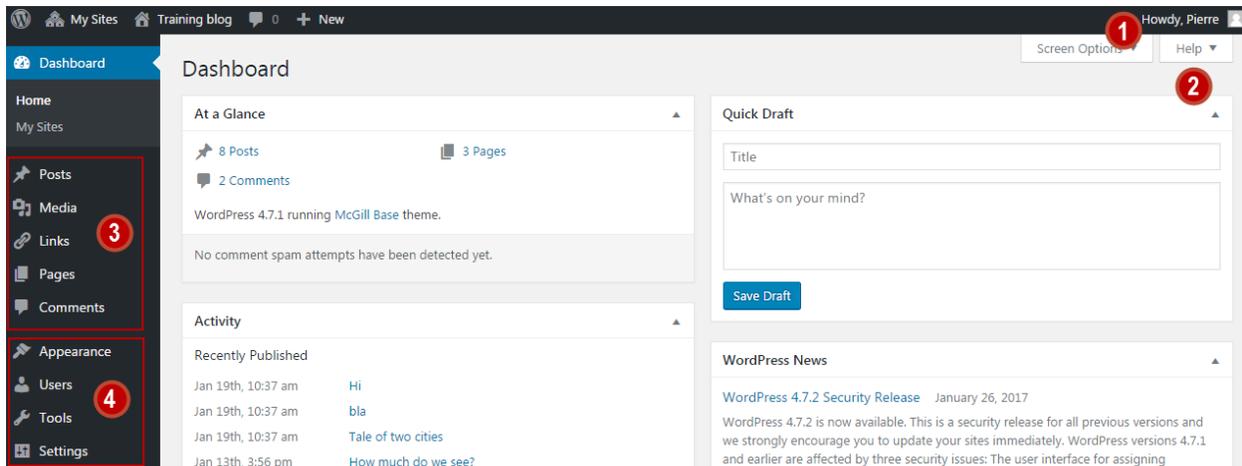
Theme

In order to streamline blogging services and create a unified look-and-feel at McGill, blogs.mcgill.ca uses a theme layout that has been pre-approved by the McGill Public Affairs Office but allows for unique customizable elements:

To add/modify the banner:

The background picture can be changed from the default McGill background to one of your choice.

1. As a blog administrator, go to **Appearance** > **Header**.
2. Click **Add new image**.
3. Select an image you previously uploaded to the Media Library, or click **Upload Files > Select Files**, and select an image from your computer.
4. Click **Select and Crop**.
5. Highlight the area of the image you would like to appear in the banner and click **Crop Image**.
6. Click **Save & Publish**.

To edit the theme options:

1. As a blog administrator, go to **Appearance** > **Theme Options**.
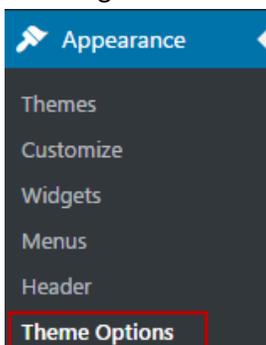
2. There are several options to customize:
   a. **Header Background**. This is the semi-transparent black background that sits behind the title of the blog. This may not be needed if the banner itself is dark.


   b. **Display Menu**. These are the links underneath the banner that links to particular blog Pages or other customizable links. These links are created under Menu (**Appearance** > **Menus**)
   c. **Use Excerpt on Homepage**. This allows blog authors to display only the initial text of blog posts. Readers will see a "More" link to view the full post.

Settings

The Settings are located near the bottom part of the left-hand side menu of the Dashboard. These settings are only available to the blog administrator(s).

1. **General Settings**
   Under this setting you may modify the 'Site title' and 'Tagline' of the blog.
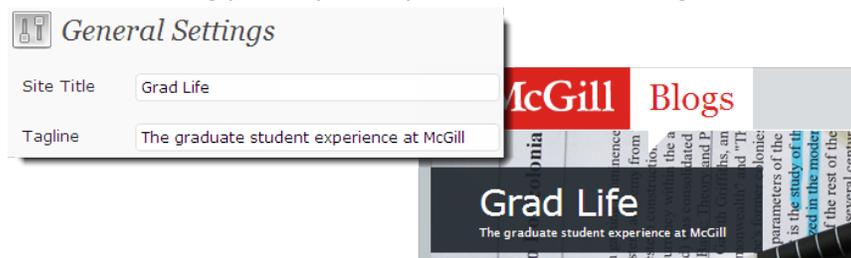
2. *Discussion settings*
   If you have comments enabled, you can customize the settings in order to moderate the flow of incoming comments and adjust restrictions.

   Default article settings
   De-select, "Allow link notifications from other blogs (pingbacks and trackbacks) on new articles".
   Reason: The majority of article pingbacks and trackbacks are usually spam. Do not activate this setting unless you are certain you will receive pingbacks and trackbacks from reliable sites or blogs.

   Other comment settings
   Select, "Comment author must fill out name and email".
   Reason: Though the name and email address are not verified, checking this box will force spammers to do a little extra work.

   Before a comment appears
   Select, "Comment must be manually approved".
   Reason: This will prevent all comments, including spam comments, from being automatically published on your site.

   All comments should be held for moderation if you've followed the best practice of selecting the "Comment must be manually approved".

   If you haven't selected this option, or you'd just like to be extra careful, you might consider following the best practices below:

   Select, "Comment author must have a previously approved comment".
   Reason: Checking this box will ensure comments are only posted if the comment author's email address matches the address of a previously approved comment, otherwise, the comment will be held for moderation.

Comment Moderation

Enter a low number for "Hold a comment in the queue if it contains X or more links".

Reason: Spammers typically include links when posting comments.

Comment Blacklist

List any appropriate words under, "When a comment contains any of these words in its content, name, URL, email, or IP, it will be put in the trash."

Reason: Adds an extra filter to catch possible spam comments when they contain any of the specified words in the content, name, URL, email, or IP.

3. **Reading settings**

Initially, when a new blog is created, only registered users can access the blog. When the blog is ready to become live, the administrator can switch the first option: "**Allow search engines to index this site**"
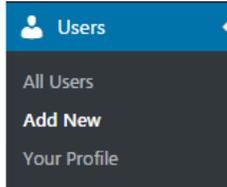

User roles

1. **Administrators**: access all functions in the blog. Tuning the theme options and settings, adding and removing users to the site, and adding widgets.
2. **Editors**: access to all content areas of the site, including Media Library, Pages and Posts. They can be considered as moderators of the site content without access to the branding and settings.
3. **Authors**: can create, edit and publish their own posts, but cannot edit posts created by other members.
4. **Contributors**: can create new posts but cannot publish them directly. Administrators or Editors of the site are required to approve and release the post on their behalf.
5. **Subscribers**: can only access their own comments for the blog. This user role is generally used to provide viewing rights in private blogs.

Enroll users

Important: In order for administrators to enroll McGill community members (students, instructors, staff) in a McGill blog, these new users will need to sign in to https://blogs.mcgill.ca/wp-admin first. This procedure will register their account into the blogs.mcgill.ca database and subsequently allow blog administrators to add them in their particular blog.

To add new users to a blog:

1. As a blog *administrator*, click **Users** > **Add New**.

2. Under **Email** field, enter the user's McGill email address.
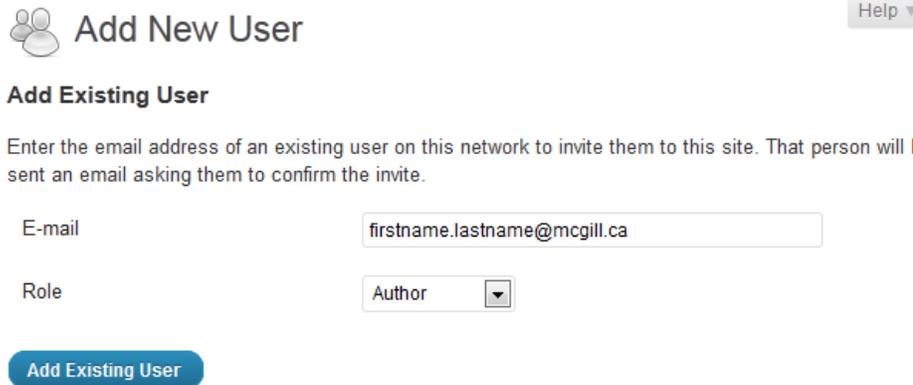
3. Select the user's role:
   a. **Administrator**: access all functions in the blog. Tuning the theme options and settings, adding and removing users to the site, and adding extra functionality using widgets.
   b. **Editor**: access all content areas of the site, including Media Library, Pages and Posts.
   c. **Author**: can create, edit and publish their own posts.
   d. **Contributor**: can create new posts but cannot publish them. Administrators or Editors of the site are required to perform this function on their behalf.
   e. **Subscriber**: can only view the blog and access their own comments. This user role is generally used to provide viewing rights in private blogs.
4. Click **Add Existing User**.

To add/modify widgets in the right column:

A WordPress widget is a small block that performs a specific function. On blogs.mcgill.ca widgets are most commonly used to display dynamic content. You can add widgets to your blog's right column.

1. As a blog administrator, go to **Appearance > Widgets**.
2. Apply widgets to your right column by clicking and dragging **Available Widgets** on the left, to your **Sidebar** on the right.
3. Most widgets have options that allow you to customize the content that will be displayed. The options (if available) will be revealed when the widget is dragged to the sidebar. Review the options carefully to ensure all required information is provided.
4. To remove or edit an already placed widget, click on the widget's drop down arrow to reveal the widget's options:

- If you'd like to edit the widget, modify the options and click **Save**.
- If you'd like to remove the widget, select **Delete**.

To add the RSS widget:

(not available with all blogs.mcgill.ca themes)

The RSS widget allows you to display content from an RSS feed in the right column of your blog. Popular uses of this widget include displaying content from:

- A list of recent posts from a specific **Category** on your site.
- An RSS feed generated by an external site.

To add the RSS widget:

1. As a blog administrator, go to **Appearance > Widgets**
2. Click and drag the **RSS** widget from the **Available Widgets** on the left to your **Sidebar** on the right.
3. Enter the following details:
   - RSS feed URL
   - Feed title (optional)
   - How many items would you like to display
   - Choose from the available checkbox options, **Display item content**, **Display item author if available**, **Display item date**.
4. Click **Save**.

To add/edit/and remove menu items:

You can add/edit/and remove menu items on your blog.
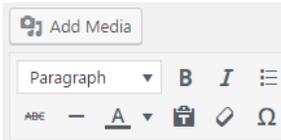
To add a menu item:

1. As a blog administrator, go to **Appearance > Menus**.
2. In the left column of your **Menus** page, you will find the types of links you can add to your menu.
3. On the right of your **Menus** page you will find your menus. Most blogs have one menu called, Main Menu. Add new menu items by choosing the type of content you want to add to your menu (e.g. **Pages**, **Categories** or **Custom Links**).
4. Indicate the content you want to display by clicking in the appropriate checkboxes (for example, if you would like to link to a **Category** click the checkbox beside that **Category** in the **Categories** box).
5. Select **Add to Menu**.
6. The new menu item should appear in your menu on the right.
7. Select **Save Menu**.

To edit or delete a menu item:

1. As a blog administrator, go to **Appearance > Menus**.

2. Under **Main Menu** on the right, click the **Page** drop-down arrow beside the menu item you wish to edit or delete:
    - If you'd like to edit the menu item, modify the options and click **Save Menu**.
    - If you'd like to remove the menu item, select **Remove** then **Save Menu**.

To change the order of your menu items:

1. As a blog administrator, go to **Appearance > Menus**.
2. Under **Main Menu** on the right drag and drop your menu items in the order in which you would like them to appear.
3. Select **Save Menu**.

Create a post

To add a new post to a blog, from the blog's Dashboard, click **Posts** > **Add New**.

Write and format a post

1. Enter a title.
2. Write the body of the post. The toolbar functions (such as bold and italics) can be used to quickly format text.
3. To increase the post's visibility and accessibility, you may add categories or tags to the post.
4. Click **Publish** to make the post visible to the blog audience.

Insert an image in a post

1. Click **Add Media**.

2. From the "Upload Files" tab, click **Select Files**.
3. Select the images to upload and click **Open**. The files are uploaded to media.
   Note: You may also hold the **Ctrl** key and select multiple files to upload several images at once.
4. Adjust the settings for the images, particularly:
   - *Caption*: includes a grey frame around the image
   - *Alignment:* None, Left, Center or Right. With left and right alignment, the text will wrap around the image.
   - *Size*: Images larger than the recommended width (530 pixels) can overlap with the blog content and may not appear proper. Either crop the image before uploading or select the Thumbnail or Medium options.
5. Click **Insert into Post.** The image will preview in Post area, including the functions enabled above. (e.g.: adding a caption will insert text below the image and draw a grey frame around the image)

Embed a video

Embed codes are not available on blogs.mcgill.ca. The video embed works with the following sites:

1. Copy the video link from the source (see Youtube example below)

2. Paste the link in the Post entry. **Important**: The link needs to appear as plain text for the video embedding to work. If the pasted text appear as a hyperlink (as seen below), select the link and click **Unlink**.

Create a page

Pages are separate content areas from the main blogging space. These web pages generally contain static content that are not time sensitive and evolving as the blog content. With the default theme, pages will appear underneath the banner as seen below (e.g.: About the Bloggers, etc.).
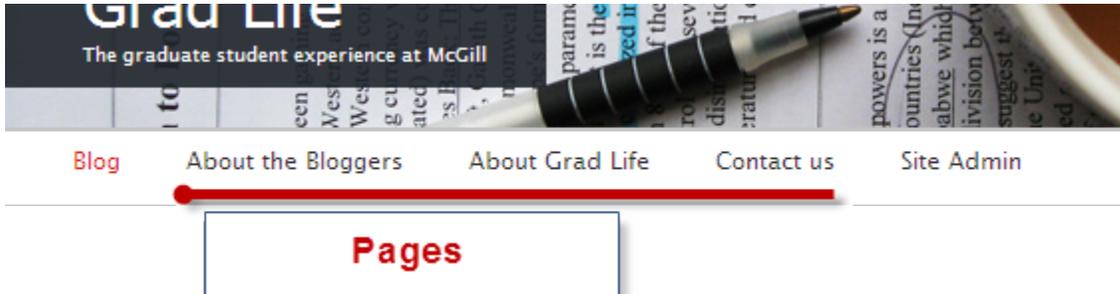

To create a new page:

1. Under "Pages" tab, click **Add New**.
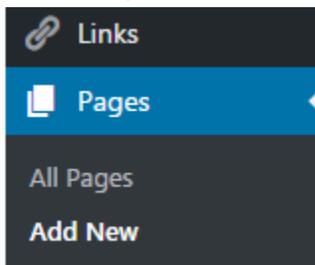
2. Enter the title of the page.
3. Complete the contents of the page in the page editing area. By default, pages are ordered alphabetically but can be manually specified an order by entering a page order number.
4. Click **Publish**.

Create categories

Unlike standard web pages, blog content is organized chronologically. As new posts are published, older posts become more difficult to retrieve. Categories allow users to reorganize, break down and explore the blog in a funneled manner. By using categories, new visitors can review older posts that would have normally disappeared from the blog page. Once categories have been created and assigned to posts, the administrator can add a category widget to allow users to browse the categories via a drop-down list or link list.
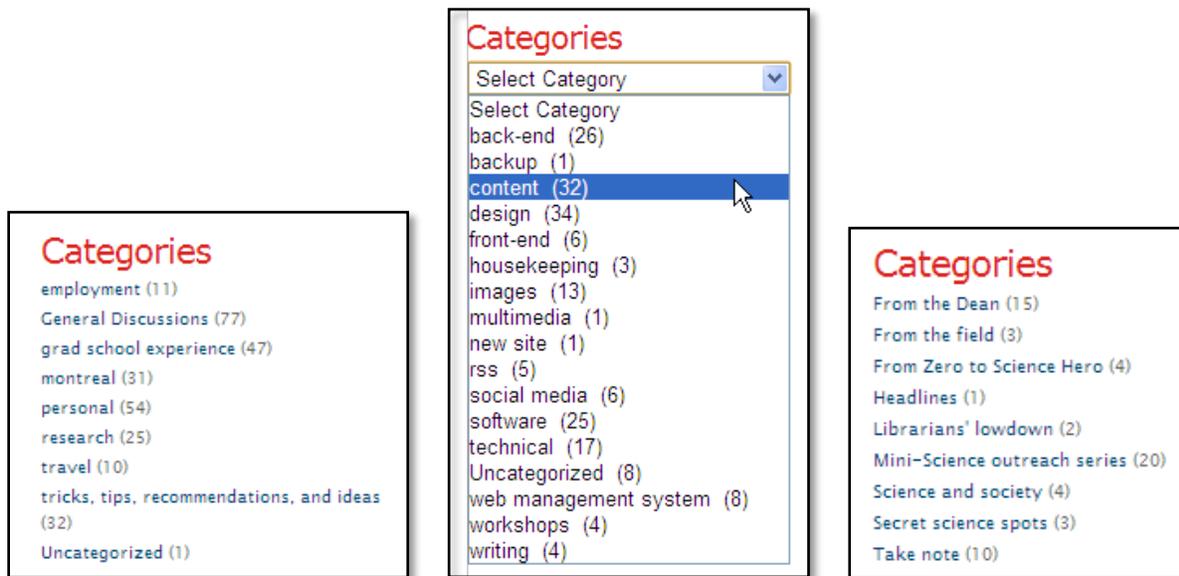
After reading a particularly interesting post, users can also view other similar posts in the same category.

To create categories:

1. Click **Posts** > **Categories**.
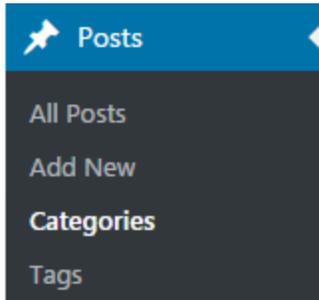
2. Enter **Name** and **Description**. Select **Parent** category if necessary.
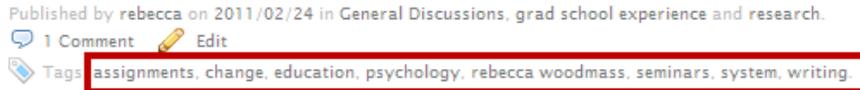3. Click **Add New Category** to add it to the blog.

To assign categories in a post:

When writing or editing a post, check off the pre-created categories under the Categories.
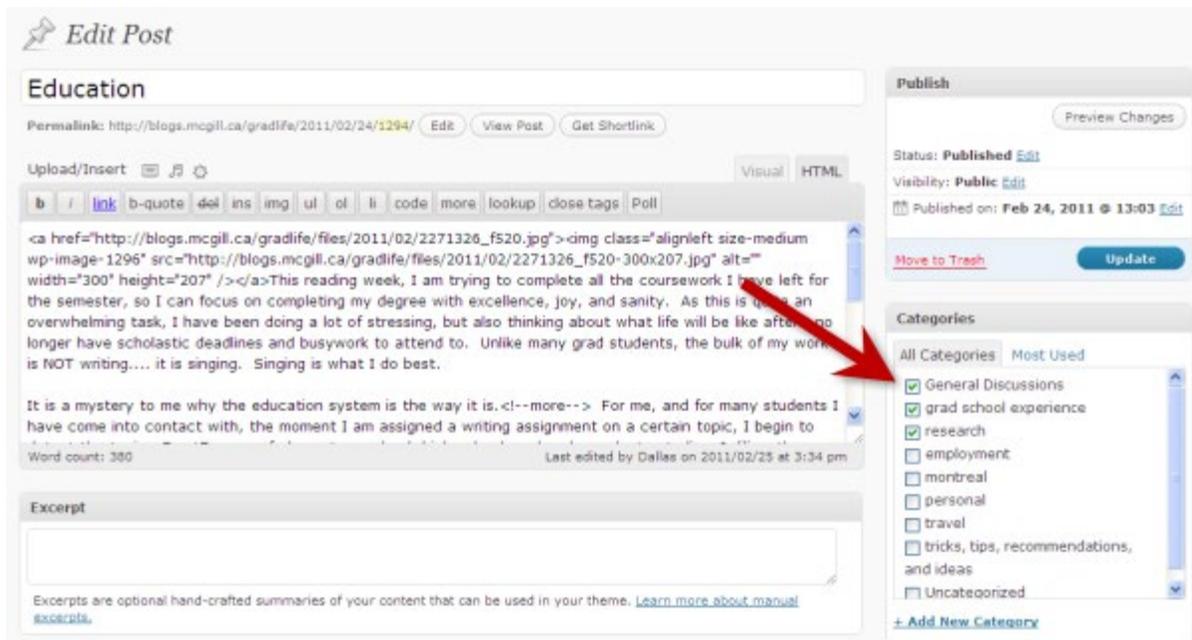
Create tags

Similar to categories, tags allow another level of structure and grouping in blog posts. While categories provide a pre-defined structure to blog content, tags are not bound by this organization. In practice, tags are often created on-the-fly, right before a post is published. While it is a good idea to limit the number of categories to keep the list concise, tags are generally limitless. Tags appear at the bottom of the full length post, below the categories.

Published by **rebecca** on 2011/02/24 in General Discussions, grad school experience and research.
1 Comment   Edit
Tags assignments, change, education, psychology, rebecca woodmass, seminars, system, writing.

In addition to providing search functionality, they can also be combined to produce graphic organizers, such as tag clouds, by using the Tag Cloud widget (the more a tag is referenced, the bigger the font becomes).
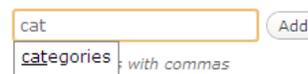
Tags

career exploration
career fairs cover letter CV
deadlines gen y
internships job
applications Job Finding Club
job search life goals
links McGill recent
grad student voice talentegg
underemployment work study

To create and assign tags:

1. While writing a post, under the "Tags" area, enter tags individually under "Add New Tag" textbox.

   Tip: If you are entering a previously used tag, begin typing the word and WordPress will provide a list of suggestions from previous tags.

2. Click **Add**. Added tags will appear below the textbox.
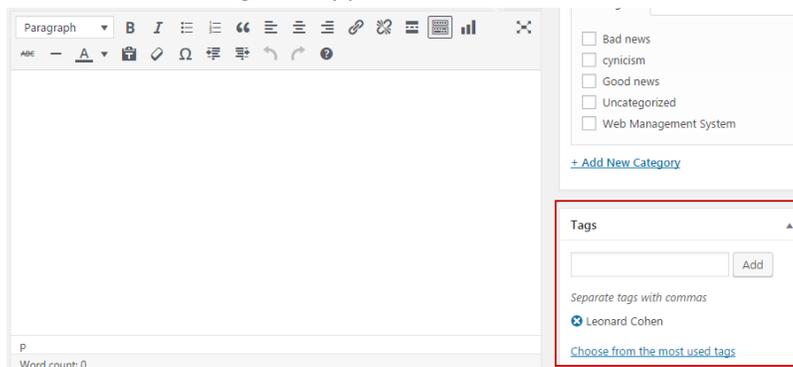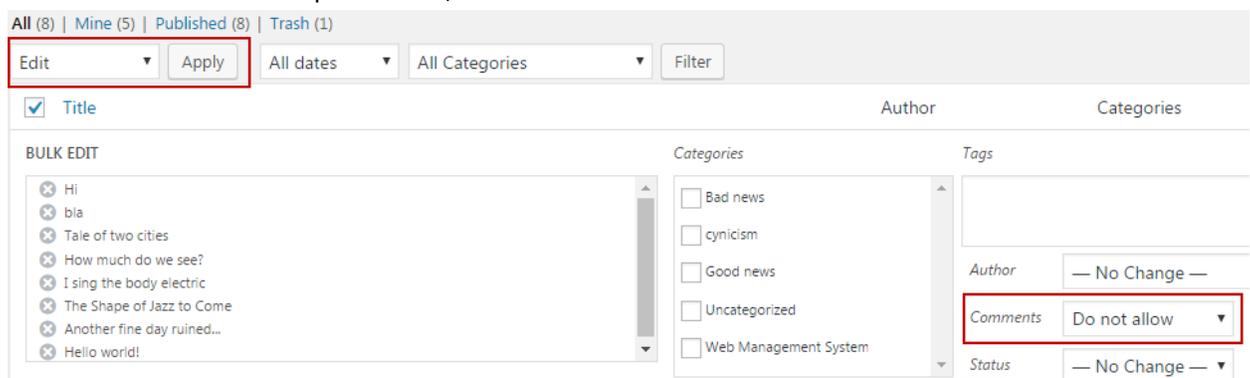
Manage comments

In contrast to standard websites, blogs allow their users to leave comments after each post. This gives the blog audience the ability to respond to the blog author(s) by providing their own thoughts, contributing their own resources, and linking back to their own blog. By default, comments are enabled for each site. However, the settings can be modified to only allow comments from a particular audience or disable it altogether.

To disable all comments on your site:

1. Go to **Settings** > **Discussion**, select **Allow people to post comments on new articles** and click **Save Changes**.

If there are previous posts with enabled comments, these will need to be disabled separately:

1. Go to **Posts**.
2. Select the topmost check box button to select all posts, select **Edit** from the 'Bulk Actions' drop-down list and click **Apply**.
3. From the 'Comments' drop-down list, select **Do not allow**.