

Blog Post Formatting Checklist With Explanations

This checklist focuses mostly on the post text in the WordPress editing window, plus some of the features on the sections "Publish", "Publicize", "Categories", "Tags", and "Featured Image". You might want to modify it for the additional post features that are important to you (or unique to your theme), and you might have to update it for new versions of WordPress. I last updated this list for v4.2.

As WordPress evolves, these other sections may include more default settings for you to add to your checklist.

Remember that the first step of this checklist is **always** to copy it and paste it to a new post. You'll never edit this original version of the checklist because it's always your starting point for your next new post.

Once you've copied this checklist and pasted it to a new post, you'll use all of the steps to format the new post. You'll also delete all of this checklist text once you've finished the steps. If you delete each checklist step as you complete it, that will help you keep track of what you're doing in the new post. If you're interrupted or if you decide to finish the post later, then you can simply save the draft. When you return to the post then you'll pick up in the checklist where you left off.

This document was written with its checklist steps in one font and its supplemental information in a different font. The supplemental paragraph is before each step so that you can learn about the background before you decide to modify the step for your purposes.

One last time: this entire checklist should be saved in a draft post (that's never published) and then you'll never edit that draft post. Instead you'll copy the entire contents of the draft post over to a new post via the "Add Post" menu.

Here's the first supplemental paragraph:

There are a couple places in this checklist with HTML formatting in their links. In order to copy the HTML formatting over to a new post, you might have to use the WordPress editing view of "Text" or "HTML" instead of "Visual". (This used to be an issue with earlier versions of WordPress.) I've defaulted to this option but you might be able to do this step while staying in the "Visual" mode. If something isn't copying over correctly then I'd try copying it while you're in the "Text" or "HTML" setting, pasting it to the new post with that setting, and then switching back to "Visual".

You might also see this problem if you're using more exotic HTML formatting in your own checklist (like bullet lists or tables).

1. From the "Posts" view of your WordPress control panel, select "Edit" on the title of your checklist post draft.
 - Switch the WordPress view of this checklist to "HTML" or "Text" (so that you can copy HTML and codes as well as text).
 - Select all of this checklist text and copy it.
 - Select "Add New Post" from the WordPress sidebar.
 - Paste the entire checklist text to your fresh draft of a new post.
 - Switch the WordPress view of this new post back to "Visual" (if you prefer to work from this view).

You might compose your drafts of your post in a word processor (Word, LibreOffice, Scrivener) or you may write it right here on the WordPress editing screen. Using a word processor ensures that you always have a backup copy of your text if you completely screw up the formatting in WordPress.

This step is for those who use a word processor and then copy the text into the WordPress editing screen. Sometimes the formatting codes in the word processor (bold, italics, underlining) do not match the HTML formatting codes in the WordPress editing window. That means your bold text may not be bold when you preview or publish the final version of your post, even if it looks bold in the editing window.

I don't do much SEO—I just try to write stuff that people want to read. However some keywords can be useful in the post's title and its first paragraph. You can edit this step for your own keyword reminders, but the result should still read naturally instead of looking like keyword stuffing.

2. Before you add any of the new post's text above this checklist:
 - Compose your post as a document on a word-processing program.
 - Add in bold, italics, and underlining with your word processor. (Or add this when you format the post in WordPress.)
 - The first paragraph could include the phrases "financial independence" or "military retirement".
 - Insert the post's link URLs in the document's anchor text.
 - Add links for "Related posts": copy their titles (anchor text) and URLs at the end of the document.

When you're done with this next step, the text of your post will be above the checklist text. You may have to move some of your post text to the bottom of the editing window (below your checklist text). Later on you might also add some HTML formatting above the top of your post.

3. Copy and paste the text of your word-processor document in the WordPress editing window above the top of this checklist. Add a few blank lines to make sure you separate your new post from this checklist text.

This next step is just a reminder that your word processor's text might have lost its font formatting. Even worse, it might look good in the post editing window

and it might not display correctly in the published post. You can check for this by saving your post draft and then previewing your post before you publish it. If the font formatting copied over correctly then you can ignore (or delete) this step.

4. Format the post text with bold, italics, and underlining. It might have been stripped out by the WordPress cut & paste. Save the post as a draft and then preview the result to check the text formatting.

You want your readers to recognize your links with the same color in every post. You might also use the same color-coding in your pull quotes or other post formatting. This step shows you how to guarantee that you'll have exactly the same color in each link or quote every time.

5. Format all of the link anchor text (including related links) with color code #bb133e.

- Select "Text color" and click on "Custom" at the bottom of the color palette.
- Edit the "#" field with the code for your chosen color. (For example, "bb133e".)
- Click "OK".
- Highlight your chosen anchor text.
- Click on "Text color" and click on the new custom color box at the bottom of the palette.

Some themes don't send readers to the top: they don't have a button at the bottom of the screen to click and return the reader to the top of the post. The HTML in this step does it manually with the id= feature, and you can also use it to return to a different section of the post.

6. Sending readers to the top (if the theme doesn't already do so):

- Switch the WordPress view of this checklist to "HTML" or "Text".
- At the beginning of the post or page, add this HTML: ``
- Anywhere in the post that you want a link to return the reader back to the top of the post, add this HTML: `(Click here to return to the top of the post.)`

I don't enjoy finding and formatting images. Whenever I find a good image site, I add its URL here (perhaps along with login information). I browse through these sites for free (or at least royalty-free) images which allow copying and editing for size.

Give your copy of the image a descriptive filename. It makes it easier to find on your device, and it might also improve your SEO. When you name your image file, make sure its name (and subsequent URL on the blog) is different from the permalink URL of your post. If your image URL somehow ends up being the same as your post URL, then WordPress will only show the image without the post.

Stay alert to photo opportunities when you're going about your day (especially on travel). Any interesting backgrounds or crowd scenes could be an image in your next blog post. If you mention your family, home, or work in your career then those photos can personalize your posts too.

7. Add images from your preferred stock photo website:

<http://www.idpinthat.com/>
<http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/>
Canva.com
<http://www.stockfreeimages.com/>
<http://search.creativecommons.org/>
<http://deathtothestockphoto.com/>
<http://pixabay.com/>
<https://unsplash.com/>

- Give your image a descriptive filename like "Chocolate-Chip-Cookies.jpg" and save to your drive. Make sure the filename of this image is different from the permalink URL of your post or WordPress will only display the image.

Earlier versions of WordPress would not always preserve the image's editing done during the insertion of the post. This step does the minimum to insert the image in the post, and then it gets edited later.

8. Insert your image(s) into your post:

- Put your cursor in the post text where you want to add the image.
- Select "Add Media" from the post editing screen and upload the file.
- Choose simple display settings from "Attachment Details" like "Alignment" (Right), "Link to" (Media file), and "Size" (Medium). You can edit the rest of the attachment details from here (WordPress doesn't always save the information from this screen) or from the image in the post.
- Click "Insert into post".

This step edits the image in the post. The "alt text" field is used for visually-impaired readers whose output is spoken through a speaker (or transcribed to Braille), so it should be a concise verbal description of the image. However you can also stuff keywords into this field for SEO and indexing bots. The text in this field won't display in the post but it might boost your post's search ranking.

Pinterest and other sites may use the alt text field for their image formatting. When you include your site's URL in the alt text field, then your site's URL will show up in everyone's pin of your post.

If you want your image to link to a specific URL (instead of just the full-size version of the image) then the "Link" setting has to be changed to "Custom URL". For example when I put an image of a book cover in the post, I also want readers to be able to click on the image to go to Amazon.com to order the book. I can never remember how to format the image for this feature.

Your "Image Title Attribute" field displays metatext over the image. This means that when your reader hovers their mouse cursor over the image, a new text field will pop up with your metatext. At the very least you could add the phrase "Click here!" but it's also a great place to hide Easter-egg surprises or snarky commentary.

9. Edit your image for descriptions, SEO, and a faster display time:
 - Click on the image and select the "edit" icon.
 - Add a short caption (this will display under the image in the post).
 - Alt text: A description of the image for visually-impaired readers (and search engine indexing bots). Describe the image but feel free to stuff keywords in this text.
 - Add "| The-Military-Guide.com" to the end of the alt text (the URL is used by Pinterest).
 - Check display settings one last time.
 - If your image will be linked to another URL, change "Link to" to "Custom URL" and enter the URL. Otherwise leave the "Link to" setting as "Media File" for viewing a larger version of the image.
 - Add metatext in the "Image Title Attribute" field. This text displays when the reader's cursor hovers over the image. Use it for additional commentary or SEO.
 - Click "Update".

Images can really slow down a site, especially if the image formatting neglects to specify all of its parameters. You want your site to simply process the post's HTML without having to substitute its own defaults (or, even worse, lock up over buggy HTML). This step checks that your image HTML is correctly formatted, and it also checks that the fields specify the pixel dimensions of your image. This way it'll display correctly on your site, and your mobile-responsive theme will know exactly how to modify it for other screen sizes.

10. Check the "img" HTML for correct alt, src, and size attributes:
 - Switch your post editing view to "HTML" or "Text" and find the image's HTML. It might start with "img" or "caption".
 - alt= description of photo for SEO bots| The-Military-Guide.com.
 - src= The-Military-Guide.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/chocolate-chip-cookies.jpg.
 - width="595" height="770" (insert exactly what dimensions you want so it loads faster).
 - Switch the WordPress view back to "Visual" (if you prefer to work from this view).

HTML tables are tedious and finicky. These two choices make it easier. You can add your own table-formatting sites to this step, or include the HTML of a small table for you to modify as necessary.

11. HTML tables:
 - <http://www.textfixer.com/html/html-table-generator.php>
 - Or use a plugin like TablePress.

Most of my posts are over 2000 words. I always forget to break up the paragraphs with h3 headers. The h3 HTML fields also tell index bots that this text is more important for search ranking.

12. Break up a long post using h3 headers with SEO keywords?

I answer lots of reader questions and turn them into blog posts. Some of my readers even volunteer to write their own posts, so I highlight their contribution at the beginning of the post and include a link to our post guidelines. Some post themes also include a field for you to insert the guest poster's byline and site URL and override your defaults.

13. Guest posts:

- Add to the beginning of the post:

"This post is brought to you by... "

"If you're interested in contributing at The-Military-Guide.com, please see our posting guidelines (<http://the-military-guide.com/guest-posts/>)."

- Add bio of guest poster to end of the post?

- Use red color #bb133e and italics font.

- If applicable, use the "Custom Author Byline" boxes to insert your post author's name and site.

I always schedule my posts, especially if it's a multi-part post or if I'll be on travel. Readers might check your site more frequently if you have a reliable posting schedule. This is also how you'll coordinate your publication with another blogger or a product sponsor. I can tell them both the permalink URL of the post and when it'll be live, and I won't have to send another alert when it's live.

14. Schedule the date and time for the post to go live.

The WordPress "Publicize" plugin is very useful for letting you know that the post was actually published. If you don't see the tweet (or other social-media announcement) soon after your post was scheduled to go live, then you'll know to check your site. (The WordPress "chron" utility occasionally glitches.) You might promote your posts with other social-media apps, but Publicize is a great way to make sure that you actually have a post to promote.

This step also includes the #hashtags which I use most often. I won't use every hashtag with every post, but I'll try to use as many as I can while limiting the tweet to ~125 characters. That length makes it easier for other Twitter users to retweet your tweet.

By the time I get to this step, sometimes WordPress has already pre-filled the tweet with the shortlink of the post. If that hasn't happened for your post then you might have to give your post a title (in the title block of the editing window) and save a draft of the post. That should also generate the "Get Shortlink" button under the title block. I think this is easier than manually formatting your own

post permalink URL.

15. Build a Twitter tweet and add hashtags:

- If the shortlink is not in the Twitter window of the Publicize plugin, then "Save Draft". Click on "Get Shortlink" from the Permalink line under the post title. Copy & paste that into the Twitter window.
- Limit the use of hashtags to a total tweet length of about 125 characters for easy retweets: #military #sot #MilitaryLife #vets #milfam #militaryretirement #earlyretirement #milspouse @USAA @MOAA #milSO.

I use post categories so that readers can search for keywords. Some themes may also enable you to link your post categories in the header bar of your blog's landing page.

16. Choose the category of the post.

WordPress and indexing bots use tags (among other tools) to index your post and to calculate the search ranking. WordPress.com might even feature your post on their site ("Freshly Pressed") by searching their millions of posts for your unique tag. I use a standard set of tags plus one or two unique ones for each post. WordPress suggests that five tags is a minimum and ten is a maximum, although there are no hard rules.

17. Add tags to the post:

- early retirement, military, military retirement, financial independence.

Your blog theme may specify the pixel dimensions of your featured image. This image may also be picked up by Pinterest, Facebook, and other automated social-media promotions.

18. Featured image:

Add an image of a book cover or some other photo. Consider editing it for Pinterest as well.

A 640x400 pixel size may be specified for some themes.

This is the other part of Step #6 (getting to the top of the post). You'll put this HTML and text at the bottom of your post text.

6a. Add the HTML code at the bottom of the post for returning to the top of the post (if the theme doesn't already do this):

```
<span style="color: #bb133e;"><em><a style="color: #bb133e;" href="#top">(Click here to return to the top of the post.)</a></em></span>
```

Many WordPress plugins use "shortcode" to execute their features. This WooCommerce plugin shows an ad for a book at the bottom of every post. (Yes, I

still have to remind myself to show the book ad with my post, even though it's the main reason I'm writing the post.) The shortcode is also a specific format that I'd hate to fumble-finger with a typo.

19. Add the WordPress WooCommerce shortcode at the end of post text (before the "Related articles") for displaying a book ad or some other product ad:

```
[wpsm_woobox id="10370"]
```

Many themes and plugins suggest "Related posts!" for you, but I add several manually-selected links to the bottom of the post (under the book ad). This helps readers find more posts on a subject (especially if the plugin is glitched) and it also reminds me of other posts that I might want to link from the text of my new post.

20. Related articles:

- Move the related article anchor text and URLs to a couple lines after the book ad.