

# 10 Advanced WordPress Hacks You Can Implement Immediately

*masterwp.co – Become a WordPress Master*

Over the full course to *Become a WordPress Master* we'll be teaching you a series of structured lessons with all the skills you need to master everything you'd want to do with WordPress (if you're not signed up, [grab the free course here](#)).

Sometimes, though, it's just handy to grab some quick tips you weren't aware of and get ahead in the WordPress world.

That's where this post comes in for you. These are ten *advanced* WordPress hacks you can implement right away.

## 1. Make sure the post editor matches your content

WordPress introduced the *editor style* function back in version 3.0 and lets you customise the look of the WordPress post editor. You can add a custom stylesheet and use that to make the post editor match the look of your blog, so what you see when you write is what you'll see when you publish.

It's a pretty handy feature that's underutilised.

Activating the feature requires heading to Appearance and then Editor, and then selecting the `functions.php` file<sup>1</sup>. WordPress will then let you add a line of code which will fetch an extra stylesheet, `editor-style.css`, whenever you edit a post or page:

```
add_editor_style();
```

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<sup>1</sup> This is misleading. Just directly editing your theme files is a pretty terrible way of customising your theme. Ideally you'd create a child theme. You'll find a [basic tutorial here](#) (so, create a child theme with a `functions.php` file and use *that*) and we'll cover theme customisation in more detail in the full email course.

Your new stylesheet wants to be in the theme's root directory (so `/wp-content/themes/themename/`). You can then add any styling you need to match the look with your site and we're good to go!

## Making things really really straightforward

Creating an extra stylesheet is, however, mildly strenuous. You can decide instead to reduce your workload a little bit and just import the stylesheet you have already, rather than create a whole new one.

Instead of the code we looked at previously, just paste the code below into your `functions.php` file:

```
add_action( 'init', 'masterwp_editor_styles' );
function masterwp_editor_styles() {
    add_editor_style( get_stylesheet_uri() );
}
```

This does the same thing as we saw before, but tells WordPress to use the stylesheet you've already created. Note when using this you're importing a stylesheet into somewhere where it's not designed to be used. It should be okay, but if you run into any problems remove the code and use the first (manual) method.

## 2. Know WordPress' keyboard shortcuts inside out

Keyboard shortcuts are a super useful way of working faster. WordPress has a ton built-in and getting to know them will allow you to move around the admin area, write and publish content much faster.

Here are WordPress' most useful shortcuts. In addition to these, WordPress uses the standard editing shortcuts (ie copy/cut/paste/bold/italics etc), but you likely already know them. You may want to select this + print selection for convenience:

Description	Shortcut
Unordered list	Alt + Shift + u
Numbered list	Alt + Shift + o
Insert link	Alt + Shift + a
Remove link	Alt + Shift + s
Insert image	Alt + Shift + m
Insert ← more → tag	Alt + Shift + t

Heading 1, 2, 3 etc	Alt + Shift + 1/2/3 etc
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**Bonus:** [WordPress Admin Switcher](#) is a free Chrome extension which adds a keyboard shortcut for switching between the front-end of your site (the bit visitors see) and the back-end (the Dashboard). Add it to Chrome and start saving time:

Description	PC	Mac
Switch to admin	Ctrl + Shift + a	Cmd + Shift + a

**Super advanced bonus:** if you're feeling in need of *total control* then you can set up [WP Hotkeys](#) for lightning-fast navigation around the WordPress Dashboard. If you spend a *ton* of time inside the Dashboard this will be useful, but the gains probably aren't worth it for regular users.

### 3. Use a free CDN for all your images

WordPress quasi-parent-company, Automattic, offers a free CDN through its (also free) [Jetpack plugin](#). Your self-hosted version of WordPress gets the same image hosting offered to hosted sites on WordPress.com. Plus, it handles image resizing and optimisation for you.

We cover Jetpack in the full course, but the benefits are obvious and it's super easy to use, so you may as well start using it straight away. Install Jetpack, activate the Photon module and you're good to go. Photon will start hosting your images and make them much faster to load.

**Bonus:** use a different free CDN service for your CSS, JS and other files. This requires a little more setup – we'll cover this in full in a later article in the full course :)

### 4. Make use of built-in shortcodes

Shortcodes are a very handy way of adding extra functionality to your posts and pages. You'll typically see them used by plugins and themes for adding things like columns, boxes and buttons. Unbeknownst to many, WordPress also has a bunch of shortcodes built-in.

Here are some of the useful ones (there are a couple like [audio] and [caption] which are redundant or impractical):

Shortcode	Description
[embed]	Take any of the content you can normally embed in a post (videos, tweets, audio etc) and add (maximum, not fixed) widths and heights! Handy feature. Example usage: <code>[embed width="100"]</code>

	height="400"]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=videoidhere[/embed]
[gallery]	Creates a gallery. You're not going to want to use by writing the shortcode manually, but good to be aware of. When using <a href="#">Jetpack</a> activate the "tiled galleries" addon and then when you're next creating a gallery (Media Library → Create Gallery) select the type as "Tiled Mosaic". Your resulting gallery will then look great.
[playlist]	Little-known shortcode which can add an audio or video playlist to your post. You'll need the IDs of the files from when uploaded to the Media Library and can set light/dark theme and audio or video. Example usage: [playlist type="audio" ids="123,456,789" style="dark"]

## 5. Save headaches by rolling back broken themes and plugins

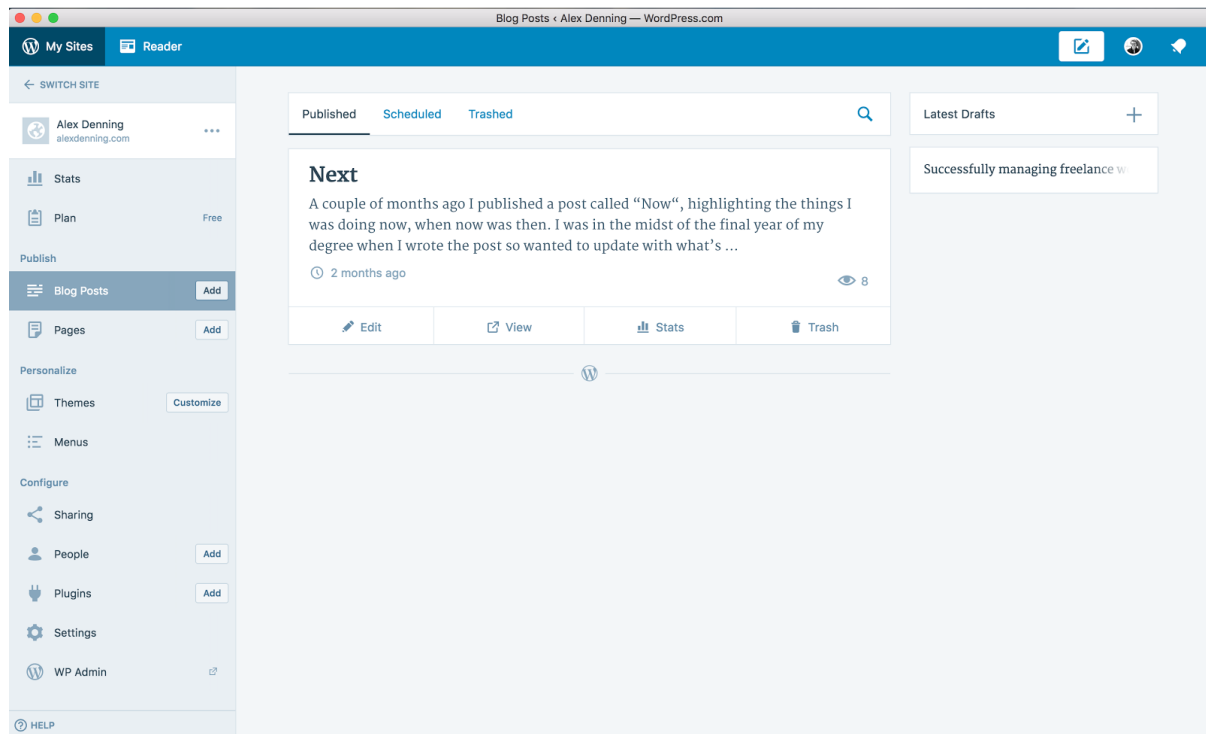
[WP Rollback](#) is a super handy plugin to keep in your arsenal. The plugin lets you roll back (or forwards too) any theme or plugin you've installed from the WordPress.org repositories. If you update and something breaks, grab this plugin and get it fixed.

Use the plugin by heading to the themes/plugins management screen on your WordPress Dashboard. Hover over the theme/plugin you want to amend and choose "Rollback. Select the version and you're good to go.

You're advised things may go wrong and to keep a backup – but it normally works and this is just a precaution.

## 6. Get the best WordPress writing app

It's probably a stretch to call this an "advanced hack", but it's super handy and under-utilised so that seems reasonable grounds for inclusion.

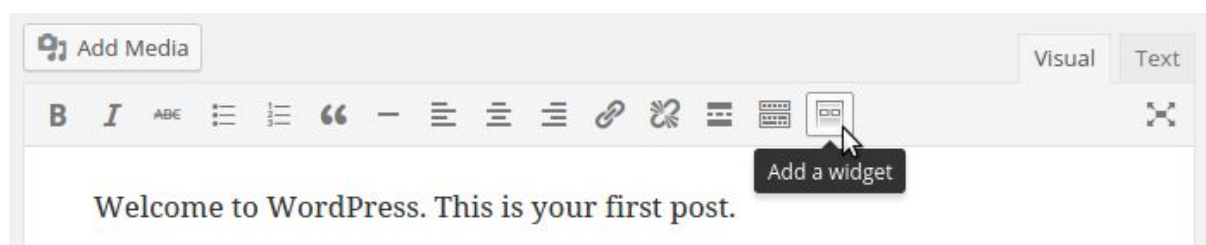


WordPress has a writing-focussed desktop app [available on WordPress.com](#). You can get the app on Windows, Mac and Linux (and iOS and Android). It lets you write and edit with probably the best WordPress-integrated UI there is *and* all your posts are synced. None of the copy/pasting you have to deal with with other writing apps.

To top it off, the Desktop app gives you a cut-down version of the WordPress Dashboard: you can edit themes and menus + configure plugins + see site stats from Jetpack all in one place. If (and when) you want to just sit down and write, this is what you want to be using.

## 7. Start using widgets on posts and pages

Widgets are one of the best ways of quickly customising your site, but hey! Why only use them in pre-prescribed widget areas! You don't have to – grab [Turbo Widgets](#) and you can start using widgets on your posts and pages.



The plugin adds a button to the post/page editing toolbar. Click it, select the widget you want to add and associated options, and you're good to go. This is especially useful if you're using

a static page for your homepage, need extra features on an about/contact page or want to enhance popular posts.

## 8. Automatically generate CSS sprites

CSS sprites are a really neat way of speeding up sites that have fallen out of favour because they're really annoying to set up. They work by combining all the images on a page into a single file and then only displaying a portion of the file, with a single big file loading much faster than multiple smaller files.

Historically the only way to create CSS sprites was manually, hence their unpopularity. If only there was a way to automate the process. In steps the enticingly named [CSS Sprite for Google PageSpeed](#). The plugin is in beta but seems to work well. Any problems just deactivate it.

Install the plugin, go to General → CSSSPRITE and register using your email. Activate and you're good to go. You should get an immediate speed boost and find Google is happier with your site. There are lots more things you can do to speed up your site. It's a super-important topic, so we've dedicated an entire lesson to it later in the series.

## 9. Automatic updates for WordPress, themes and plugins

WordPress typically gets three major updates and dozens of minor maintenance and security updates a year. As the software powering 1/4 of the web, WordPress is an attractive target for hackers, so it's imperative that updates can be delivered quickly to the huge number of sites running WordPress.

To that end, WordPress has automatic background updates on by default for all new installations – but only for “minor releases”. You want to have automatic background updates for *everything* (including themes and plugins), not just small WordPress releases. WordPress lets you do this if you know how.

You'll need to access your site using an FTP editor, navigate to the root of your WordPress installation (probably `yoursite.com/`) and edit the file `wp-config.php`. Add the lines:

```
define( 'WP_AUTO_UPDATE_CORE', true );
add_filter( 'auto_update_plugin', '__return_true' );
add_filter( 'auto_update_theme', '__return_true' );
```

Update the file and you're done.

For `WP_AUTO_UPDATE_CORE` you can change `true` to `false` to disable automatic updates entirely (not recommended but if you need to test everything first and will update manually promptly could be necessary) or change to `minor` to enable automatic updates for minor releases but not major releases (this is what happens by default).

**Bonus:** you can also manage updates from the WordPress Desktop app we mentioned earlier *and* Jetpack gives you a centralised dashboard for updating WordPress, themes and plugins across all your sites. Handy.

## 10. Mastering the wp-config file

The little-loved `wp-config.php` file is probably *the* most important file in your WordPress installation. Without it, WordPress is missing basic configuration details and can't connect with your database.

If you use an automatic installation service for your WordPress install you'll find `wp-config.php` handled for you. Otherwise, you'll need to enter your details to `wp-config-sample.php` and rename the file once you're done.

Normally the config file is touched when doing the famous five minute install and at not at any other time. This is sad, because it misses out on the huge amount you can do with the file. We've collated the most useful options available into a table below for your convenience:

Code	Description	Parameters
<pre>define( 'UPLOADS', 'media' );</pre>	Change where you uploads go from <code>/wp-content/uploads/</code> to <code>/media/</code>	Edit <code>media</code> to whatever you like and your uploads will go there.
<pre>define( 'WP_POST_REVISIONS', false );</pre>	Edit the number of post revisions saved. You probably don't need a copy of <i>all</i> your revisions so either disable or limit the number.	Change <code>false</code> to an integer to set a max number of post revisions to save (this is probably more preferable).
<pre>define( 'NOBLOGREDIRECT', 'http://example.com' );</pre>	Redirects "nonexistent" URLs to where you specify. Add your homepage URL and WordPress will send everything there.	
<pre>define( 'DISALLOW_FILE_EDIT' , true );</pre>	Disable the plugin and theme editor. Useful if you want to prevent users from interfering.	
<pre>define( 'DISALLOW_FILE_MODS' , true );</pre>	Disable the plugin and theme installation + updater. Also useful if you want to prevent users from further interfering.	
<pre>define( 'IMAGE_EDIT_OVERWRITE'</pre>	WordPress will create a new set of images every time you edit an image, and when you restore the original it leaves	

<pre>E', true );</pre>	all the edits in place. Using this line will remove unused edits.
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Because wp-config is such a powerful file, always be extra careful when editing (and create a backup of the file). Here's what WordPress.org recommends:

*Before you save the file, be sure to double-check that you have not accidentally deleted any of the single quotes around the parameter values. Be sure there is nothing after the closing PHP tag in the file. The last thing in the file should be ?> and nothing else. No spaces.*

So – double check and then save. Enjoy the tweaks :)

## Immediately improving WordPress knowledge

*Become a WordPress Master* is all about elevating your WordPress know-how and skills to the next level and leveraging our seventeen+ years of WordPress knowledge for your benefit. With these ten quick “hacks” hopefully you’ve gotten a taster of that and found some useful tips you can start using to make your (WordPress) life easier.

For your convenience here's a quick recap of the plugins, extensions and apps mentioned in this article:

- [WordPress Admin Switcher](#) for Chrome to switch between front-end and Dashboard super quickly.
- [WP Hotkeys](#) to navigate the WordPress Dashboard with your keyboard.
- [Jetpack](#) for lots of things (should be on every site you have).
- [WP Rollback](#) to save plugin and theme update headaches.
- [WordPress writing app](#) for the best WordPress writing experience.
- [Turbo Widgets](#) to display widgets on posts and pages.
- [CSS Sprite for Google PageSpeed](#) for the most informative plugin name you'll find.

Copy the above list to a safe place (or just Evernote) and you've got a convenient reference point :)

If you're reading this and haven't signed up for the full free course then we'd love for you to do so at [MasterWP.co](#). If you are signed up we look forward to offering you more killer tips over the coming lessons.

Any comments or queries – or other “hacks” we've missed – we'd love to hear from you [hello@masterwp.co](mailto:hello@masterwp.co).

Alex and Ben  
[masterwp.co](#)