

How To Use WordPress Theme Support

The most efficient way to get your site set up the way you want it is to utilise support that comes with your WordPress theme. If you're using a free theme you can probably get limited support from the developer and/or volunteers, but if you've paid for a theme you can expect personal support from the theme developers.

Different themes come with different levels of support, but it's typical to get six or twelve months of support and updates included with your purchase. After that period you'll likely need to purchase an extension for an extra fee. As we discussed in the last lesson, it's something to check when purchasing a premium theme. If you've already made the purchase, check now.

However long your support period is, the limited time frame means it's best to get all your queries out of the way as soon as you make your purchase. That means setting up and customising your site right away. By knowing what to ask and how to ask it you can get a lot more out of premium support. In this lesson we'll show you how to **minimise your time and maximise results**.

Troubleshooting your own problems

It's often easier to ask someone to fix your issues, but it's certainly faster to do it yourself. If you know the right questions to ask you can eliminate common problems with WordPress themes. These are your pre-support checks:

1. Check documentation and FAQs

Before you do anything, check your theme's documentation and general FAQs (if there are any). If you're using an especially popular theme, also Google your problem. A quick search can often yield the answer you're looking for and save going through the support process at all.

If it's a common issue then it's likely in your theme's documentation - so a developer is likely to just link you to the relevant docs. So it's worth checking first - it can save everyone time.

2. Make sure everything is up-to-date.

Check for updates to WordPress, themes and plugins. WordPress includes automatic updates but they don't always kick in (we'll cover how to automate this in a later lesson).

It's really easy to check if WordPress is up-to-date: from the Dashboard, head to Updates and you'll find all versions of WordPress, plugins and themes that have updates available. Follow the prompts to update each in turn. You should find the process straightforward and reliable. If your site gets stuck in maintenance mode [check this tutorial for how to fix it](#).

If you're using a **premium theme** then you may not have automatic updates available. It's exceptionally important you make sure your theme is up-to-date as if it's not that'll be the first thing you're told to do by support staff. You want to check the version number of your theme install, which you can do by heading to Appearance and then Themes, hovering over the active theme and clicking Theme Details and you'll see the version number in the top right. Make a note.

You should have some sort of "Member Area" from your theme provider. Log in there and check the downloads section. If the version number is higher than what you've got installed, you need to update. Your theme provider will likely have some sort of update tutorial, but the general process for manually updating a theme looks like this:

1. Download the latest theme version from your Member Area.
2. From Appearance and Themes on the Dashboard, deactivate your current theme (do this by activating another theme).
3. Hover over your premium theme and click Theme Details.
4. Press Delete, in the bottom right corner and then confirm.
5. Press Add New and then Upload Theme on the top left.
6. Upload the zipped file.
7. Done!

It's a bit of a clunky process but it does work. The way to avoid this, of course, is to get a theme with auto-updates built in :)

3. Check for plugin conflicts

This is an extremely common cause of WordPress theme problems and the second thing you'll be asked to check after updates. Do it before sending your query and you'll get an answer faster.

The standard spiel from theme developers is there are tens of thousands of WordPress plugins and inevitable some will conflict with themes and impossible to test compatibility with them all.

This is true, but what usually follows is a request to deactivate all your plugins and then re-enable them one at a time until you find the culprit. This is extremely annoying (and time consuming) to do. Here are some pointers to quickly identify culprit plugins:

- Plugins using jQuery (sliders, popup boxes) are most likely to conflict. If you're using any of these, deactivate them and test your site first.
- [WP Super Cache](#) or any other caching plugins aren't likely to cause conflicts but may hide changes from showing. Make sure you clear your cache to get the latest version of your site to show.
- Deactivate any plugins you have installed recently (before the problem happened) - perhaps they are incompatible.
- Switch to the default WordPress theme - at the time of writing that's TwentySixteen and see if the problem still happens, if so it's likely a problem with the plugin and not the theme.

Popular common plugins like [Yoast SEO](#), [Akismet](#) and [WooCommerce](#) are unlikely to be causing problems.

4. Debug the issue yourself

This is a little more technical but it can give you a really good idea of what the problem might be.

You'll find a file called wp-config.php in the root of your WordPress installation. Add `define( 'WP_DEBUG', true );` to the wp-config.php file and WordPress will then output errors, including the file that is causing the problem.

This can help narrow the issue down and, if it doesn't help you, sending the error to the developer can help them immensely. There's more info on using [WP_DEBUG on the WordPress Codex](#).

If you've looked through likely plugin conflicts, read the documentation and still not got a fix for your problem, it's time to reach out for support.

Efficient support requests

Most theme companies don't have the resources to keep large support staff, so you'll typically be kept waiting for a support response. If anything has to be clarified in your request, that adds time. **The way to get the fastest response is to include everything that's needed to give you an answer straight-off.**

There's some info you'll always want to mention:

- **The name of your theme** - the developer likely sells many themes so this will help them get started.
- **A reference number for your purchase** - just to prove you bought the theme.
- **You've got the latest version** of WordPress, the theme and all plugins.
- **You've tested for plugin conflicts** and had no results.
- **Your site URL**, and the url of the page having problems.
- **Screenshots of the problem** - particularly important if the issue is on a site that's not public (use [Awesome Screenshot](#) for this).

- **Temporary login details** (create an admin account and delete it after – nb obviously don't include this in any public forums).
- **You've checked relevant documentation.**

You then want to outline your problem. Do this in as much detail and as clearly as possible. Here's an example of a support request done badly:

I don't understand how to add the email form in the sidebar, it doesn't display?

And here's an example of a support request done well:

Hi, I purchased Exhibit on July 1st (reference 983478348) and am having some problems getting going.

Everything (WordPress, theme and plugins) is up-to-date and I've tested for plugin conflicts. My site is masterwp.co. I've created temporary login details: username – pass, password – wordpress. I'm attempting to use the Email Optin Widget in the Sidebar as per the theme demo but my Mailchimp API key is being rejected. I've followed the documentation but seem to be missing something. Could you take a look please?

Both are saying the same thing, but the second is packed full of relevant information that will make sure the issue is dealt with without the need for further (time consuming) correspondence.

Between us we've been answering WordPress support queries since 2008 and it makes such a difference having all the information to hand. Support people want to be able to answer your query as fast as possible, so give them the tools to do that.

Bonus tips for superb support requests

The above covers everything you need for a standard support request, but if you're unsure about what you can get away with asking see below.

Be polite - theme developers get a lot of support requests, and being polite is a lot more likely to get you a timely response. Being rude or aggressive will not encourage developers to help you - in fact I've heard of developers refunding rude customers and not giving them any help at all. They want their customers to be happy so be nice and they'll be nice in return.

Be patient - many theme shops are small teams (often just 1 or 2 people) and so they don't have the resources to reply immediately. In addition they may not be based in your timezone so might be asleep whilst you're working. If you've made sure to purchase a good theme then you will get a response!

Finally, it's worth making sure you have read the **terms of service**. Good theme developers will help fix bugs in their themes - but they may not support problems with plugin conflicts, or help with theme customizations. They are, after all, selling WordPress themes and not full customization services. Make sure that what you're asking for is something they will help with.

That said, if you think your request is borderline, follow the guidance we've offered here – be polite and patient and make it easy for the developer by offering lots of detail – and you can probably get away with it. No harm in asking.

Solving your own problems

Becoming a WordPress Master involves realising the limitations of your skills and using support to fix problems quickly. Being able to troubleshoot common support requests and send highly efficient support tickets is an exceptionally useful skill.