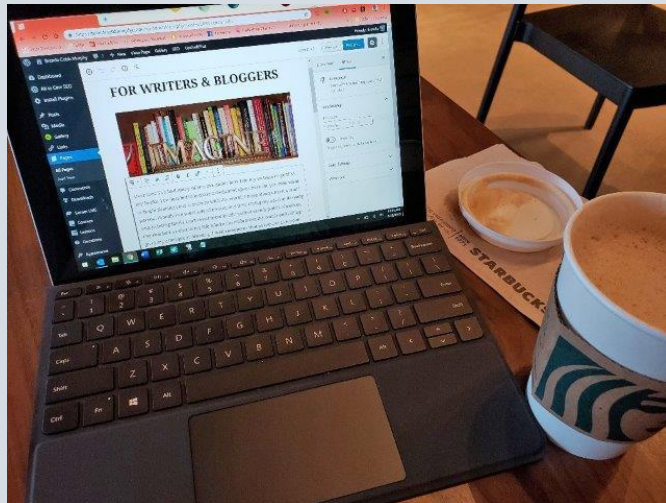




MY
WEBSITE
&
BLOGGING
TIPS

Brenda Cobb Murphy



I'm occasionally asked how I do things when it comes to my website and blogging, so I've put together some suggestions and tips. (Note: I have links to the things I recommend or use myself but they are not affiliate links and I do not get anything for recommending them, they're here because I like them and use them, or have heard positive things about them.)

There are plenty of resources online that will walk you through how to create a writer's website or how to create your own website. However, a word of caution. People with websites are there to sell you something, and many times it's helpful and worth the money. They will have courses and books and they all sound perfect, so choose carefully or you'll get bogged down in spending money and "researching" and not get your own work done. At the end of this I've put a list (with links) to the ones I trust who have quality resources. Again, see if it's something that will serve you now, there's no reason to spend money or sign up for something you don't need yet (and by the time you will, there will be newer and better ones available). Begin with the basics.

Notepad

When you're going to copy-and-paste you will need something like Notepad to remove the formatting from what you want to paste. By doing that it won't potentially mess up the formatting you're merging into. Notepad is a basic program that comes on all PCs. I use it because I already have it but you can use any note program that removes formatting. You will need to paste anything you copy from elsewhere into Notepad, then copy it out of Notepad before you paste it into WordPress, Scrivener, etc.

CREATING A WEBSITE

Here are some links that will help with the information you need, and below those are the steps to doing what you need to do.

[Writing Resources](#) (Jeff Goin's amazing list of resources that covers everything about blogging and writing)

[Beginners Guide: 26 Most Common WordPress Mistakes to Avoid](#)

[WordPress Block Editor: The Ultimate Gutenberg Guide \(2019\)](#)

[How to Start a Blog in 2019: Research Reveals 20X Faster Method](#)

1) Who Are You? The first thing you want to do is to decide what you want to do—is this a website with a blog or only a blog? The only difference is that a website has other pages like a Home Page, Resources, etc, while a blog is one page with blogs. Same basic set-up though. Is this an artist's or writer's or photography website? Know going into it what you want to do and what that looks like for you. This is your face to the world, what are you selling about yourself? Your thoughts, experiences, creativity, hobbies, or lifestyle? Will you be literally selling something? Is this a business? Do you plan/hope/want to make money from it or is it an outlet for your thoughts, creativity, and personality? Knowing that will determine what your website looks like.

To help figure this out, two of the best resources I've found are Seth Godin's free, downloadable pdf's:

[Knock, Knock](#)

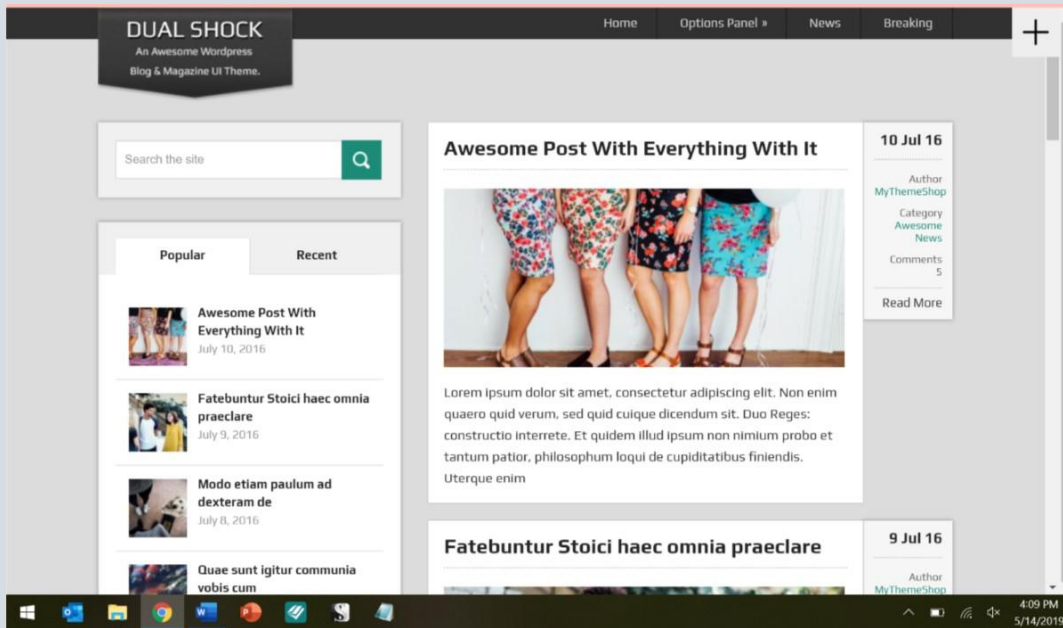
[Who's There?](#)

2) What is Your Website Name? Think about what you want to name your website. You will want to use the same name for your domain, which is the internet "address" of your website, for example, my website is Brenda Cobb Murphy and my domain is brendacobbmurphy.com. The website name and domain don't have to be the same but you'll probably want them to be. For example, if you're wanting to shop at the website "Buy Good Stuff Here" you'll probably head to buygoodstuffhere.com. You wouldn't name it "Buy Good Stuff Here" and then use the domain name wehavegoodstuff.com. No one is going to find you. However, you can say on your website page in big letters, "We Have Good Stuff!" and that's fine.

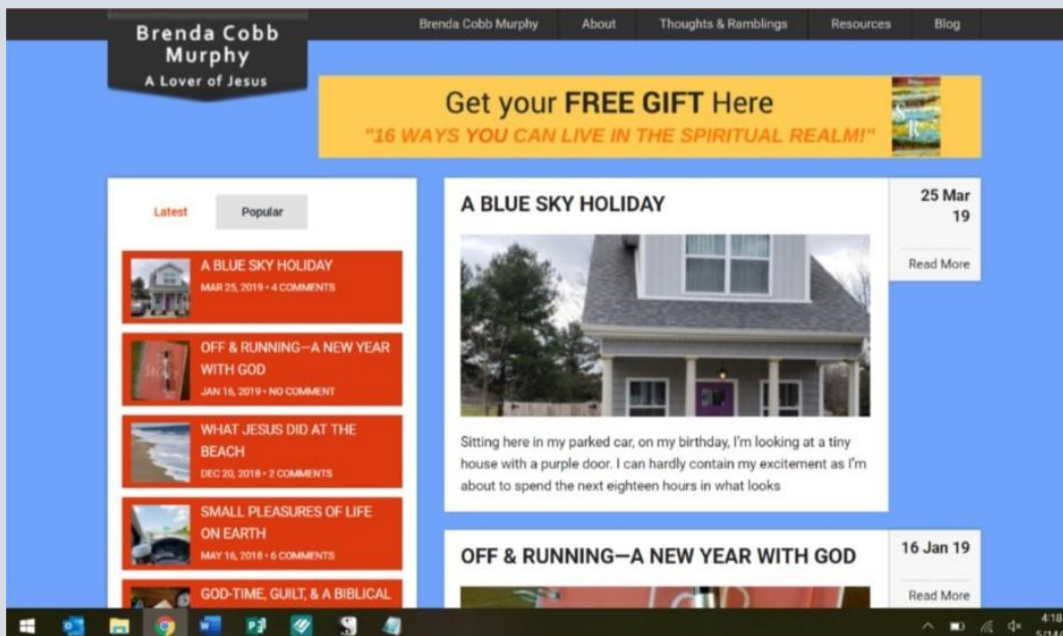
Because there are so many websites now there is a good possibility you won't be able to get your first choice of domain/website name (or even your tenth choice), unless it's your own name or something unusual. I wanted my website to be Brenda Murphy but brendamurphy.com was already taken by another author, so I added my maiden name—Cobb. Make a list of potential names and domains for your website so you can go down the list until you find one no one else has taken. Domain names are registered across the board so it doesn't matter who you buy your domain from, it then becomes unavailable to anyone else, no matter who they are buying theirs through.

3) Who Will You Use? Now decide on what platform to use to build your website, but don't sign up for it yet. You're still in the planning stage (nobody said this was easy, but it's doable, and I know you're up to it). I built mine using [WordPress](https://WordPress.com), the largest and most popular platform for beginner bloggers and websites. Note that there is a difference between WordPress.com and WordPress.org. WordPress.com is simple to set up and use, and it's free. The downside is that it's quite limited and there is very little customization available. With WordPress.org you have a much more customizable website where you can make it what you want. However, for WordPress.org you will pay a monthly fee to a host, for example, I use [HostGator](https://HostGator.com) and pay \$10.95/month, though when you sign up you can usually get a great discount for what you're willing to pay upfront, then the price becomes the regular price once that time you're paid for is up. Other good ones are [SiteGround](https://SiteGround.com) and [Bluehost](https://Bluehost.com). You can also do a search for "best WordPress hosting" and get the current favorite and *always* check out the comments and ratings to see if the people using them are happy. BUT, don't sign up yet, you're still planning and researching.

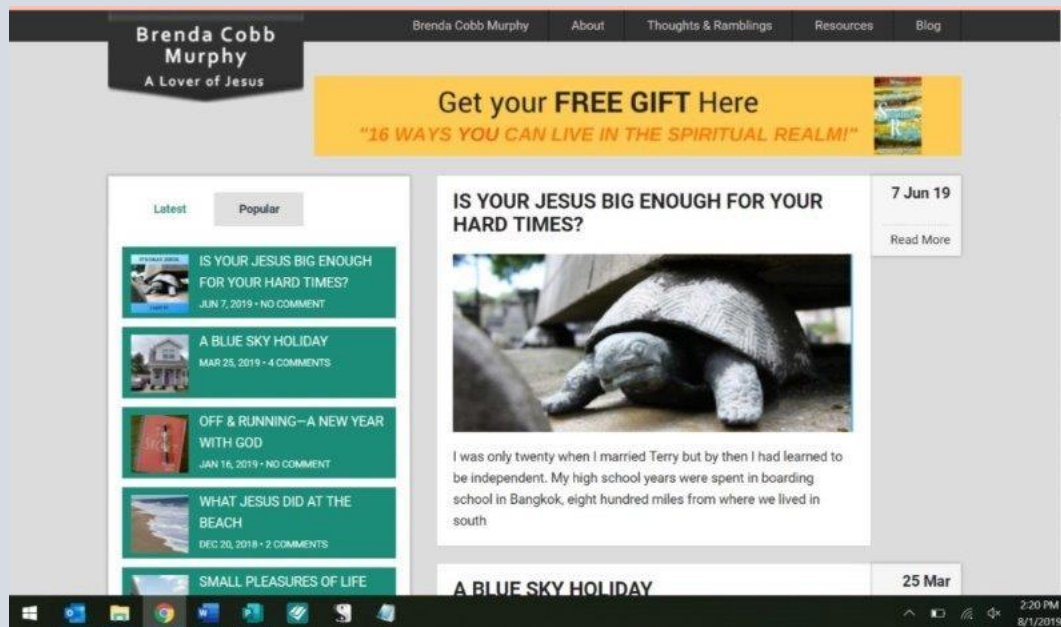
4) What Will You Look Like? Now you're going to look for a "theme" or "template" to use for your website/blog. This is still planning but more fun, though it can easily get overwhelming so don't let yourself get bogged down in the many choices. Also, this is easily changeable so it's not a commitment. Do a search for "free WordPress themes" or "free blog themes" or "free website themes" and start looking for which one is a good fit for you. This is the skeleton that you will build your website or blog on, and even though you'll see it one way, keep in mind that you can usually change the colors and many of the basics of the theme, so you're looking for one that is the basic look that you like. For example, this is the basic theme I use for my website:



In the past mine has looked like this:



Currently it looks like this:



I suggest choosing 3 or 4 that you think might work for you because you can change your theme easily, allowing you to experiment. *Be sure to look for themes where they've updated the theme within the last two years and where there is some form of customer service, otherwise the old ones may have problems with current technology but no one is working on them anymore.*

Here's a link that will get you started:

[8 Best Free WordPress Themes of 2019 \(Chosen by Experts\)](#)

Here's some good info:

[AUTHOR WEBSITE: EXAMPLES, TEMPLATES, AND HOW-TO BUILD ONE](#)

5) Let the fun begin! To keep it simple you will want to buy your domain from the host you've chosen for your website. Go to the website of the host you've chosen and there will be a place for you to try out your domain names to see if they're taken. For example, at the HostGator website you click on the "Domains" tab and it brings up a search bar to type in what you'd like, then "Search" and it will tell you if it's taken or not. Go through your list of possible names and see what's available, then choose one, or go back to the drawing board and create more options. There is no limit to owning domain names (that I know of) but you pay for them. It costs

around \$12 to \$15 a year for a domain name. Some that they deem are going to be super-popular may cost more, up to hundreds of dollars, but for the most part they all run about the same price. I currently own 4 domain names but only use one of them. The others are there if I want to do something with them in the future, but the names belong to me.

Buy the domain you want, and it will walk you through what to do. Then look at the website hosting packages and choose the one you want, I suggest the smallest, simplest one to begin with. Now let your host walk you through setting up WordPress, they'll have that option for you and will show you how to begin a website. If you get stuck they've got customer service people ready to walk you through how to do it (and I've called mine many times for help).

[Elementor](#) is a free program that makes it easier to build a website using drag-and-drop. I haven't personally used this (and I hear there's a learning curve) but it has been endorsed by someone I respect in the blogging world—Jon Morrow. My friend also uses this and I value her opinion. I plan to use it when I revamp my website. The free version is all you need, at least until you're going strong.

Pictures

A word of caution on using pictures. Unless specified, pictures on the internet are not for use by others and will violate copyright laws, so don't randomly choose something from Google Images and use it on your website or blog. You can be sued and yes, they are watching. Some places have computers trolling the internet constantly looking for their images (and they can tell when they've been altered, the computer knows the basics of the image and recognizes it) and will take you to court for using them without permission.

Because of that your best option is to take your own pictures. I find that a struggle because 1) I don't like to be *in* pictures and 2) it can be hard to think up ideas for pictures, much less be able to take that particular picture yourself. I suggest you begin to build your picture stash by taking pictures of anything and everything that you find interesting, setting your phone/camera to a decent sized image (otherwise you might not have enough quality in the picture to use it for other purposes). I find it much easier to write a blog than I do to come up with pictures for it.

I use purchased pictures for my book covers but for blog posts I use free images or take them myself. If you purchase one image it usually costs between \$12 to \$25, but they'll try to work a deal with you for a package. That may be a good idea if you're sure you're going to need a lot (don't pay for blog pictures, you'll go bankrupt) but I found that other than book covers or a free gift or website picture I don't buy images, so that usually isn't a good fit for me. I do buy the ten pictures a year from Colourbox (link below) because for barely over the price on one picture I get ten, then the week my year is running out I quickly find however many I have left (usually nine!) to download. As you're building your website it may be worth purchasing the right pictures since they're going to be your face to the world and you want to look the best you can, unless you're able to take the pictures yourself that you want to use.

When you need a picture you can't take yourself then use something that you either pay for or is in "public domain." I usually pay for pictures from [Colourbox](#), where I can get a good deal by buying 10/year and downloading them when I need them, but there are lots of good ones, like [Shutterstock](#) and [123RF](#).

The best free image selection is [Creative Commons](#). It will tell you under the image if you have to give credit for using it or not, which means that on the page where you use the picture you will have to put the credit link for it. I purposely choose images that don't need credit, I consider that a hassle and I'm always worried about getting in trouble over misusing something. You can Google "public domain" after your search word in Images but make sure it really is public domain. Also, when you look at a website with free images they'll trick you by showing you great pictures across the top of the page that aren't free, so don't be tricked. Another good free website is [FreeImages](#).

One thing I try to remember when I take pictures is that when I'm looking at someone's blog or website I want to see *them*, I want to see inside their lives and be able to emotionally relate to them. If a website doesn't show anything of themselves in pictures I'm disappointed. Even though I don't like to be in pictures I try to remember that and include myself in some of them.

[Canva](#) is what I use to create memes, headers, and parts of my website that have text over pictures. It's free. I also use it occasionally to create pictures

for my blog. I've heard that [Book Brush](#) does the same thing and is developed especially for writers but I've not had any experience with it. I guard against using my time for things that I don't need right now, and since Canva does what I need I'm leaving the other alone. I try to focus on working, not playing with fun programs. :) Here's an example of a header created in Canva.



[HERE](#) is a good article about Book Brush that will give you an idea of what it does.

Later you'll want to look at **email autoresponders**, which, when someone signs up for your blogs or emails, automatically responds with an email you've previously set up, using the autoresponder's template or creating your own. It allows you to send one email to everyone on your email list the way I do my blogs. I use [AWeber](#) (\$19/month), but there are several good options, just Google "best autoresponders." MailChimp has gotten a lot of people up in arms over their new policies so read the comments and reviews carefully before you choose them. This is also how you manage the list of the ones who have signed up for your emails.

Warning: There are many great add-ons to your website that will be helpful, but remember that most will cost you, and while you may currently have the money, there may be a time in the future when you don't, and you don't want your website shut down or unable to function because you're short on cash. Think through what you choose, I try to keep mine basic and either use the free versions or choose carefully what I pay extra for. Another good rule of thumb is to pay for something if it's a one-time price but try not to end up with a lot of monthly payments for add-ons.

BLOGGING

Once you have your website/blog set up you're ready to begin posting. I write my blog in Word and then copy and paste it (through NotePad) onto the Post page in WordPress, but you can easily write it on the actual Post

page. There are lots of opinions on whether a blog should be short or long, with good arguments for both sides. You'll also find strong opinions on how often to post. I can't offer a legit opinion here since my goal is to blog twice a month and I rarely hit that, but you should do better and post more often than I do.

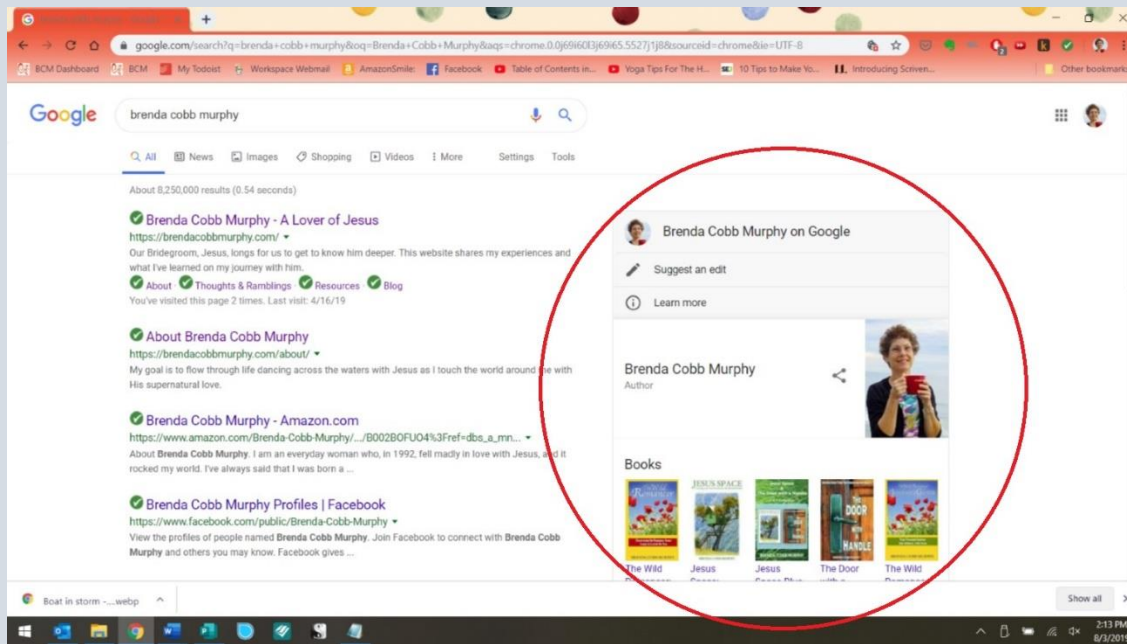
In my opinion the more pictures the better, so my rule of thumb is to have at least three pictures per blog, unless it's a short one. Most of my pictures I take or create myself, though I do use others occasionally. I'll also use Canva (see link above) to put text over a picture and create a meme-type image (see examples below).



You will hear talk of mailing lists, your "tribe," and building your "list." This refers to the people who trust you enough to sign up for your mailing list, whether it's through a newsletter, sign-up box, or free gift. Your goal is to build a list of followers who are interested in what you have to offer, and you're to treat them as gifts. People are busy and don't sign up for emails lightly, so don't abuse them by emailing too often or by giving them less-than-valuable content. This list is managed by your "auto responder." (See above where I talk about them.) You can search for "the best autoresponder" but ignore the ones that are ads for autoresponders themselves and find ones that are truly comparing the options. Seth Godin's book ["Tribes"](#) is the best I've seen on this subject. David Grughran also has one called ["Strangers to Superfans."](#)

The important thing, if you begin a website and/or a blog, is to be consistent with posting and keeping it up. For others to be able to find you through

search engines (and if no one sees your site, what's the point?) then Google has to see that you're committed to staying the course before they take you seriously. The more active you are and the more informative your site, the better. Your reward comes when Google begins to pull you up in other's searches. I've had my website for five years and if you search my name, Google shows what is called a "Google Knowledge Panel," where it shows info about my site. That makes all the time and effort worth it. :)



Below are some good articles on blogging. I'm proud of you for pursuing this, don't get overwhelmed or discouraged, just keep plowing away and you'll get there.

[How to Write Great Blog Posts that Engage Readers](#)

[How to Write a Blog Post in 2019: The Ultimate Guide](#)

[How Long Should A Blog Post Be?](#)

[How Long Should Your Blog Post Be? A Writer's Guide](#)

[Why Posting Every Day is a Silly Strategy \(And What to Do Instead\)](#)

WRITING RESOURCES

BOOKS:

[How to Write Great Blog Posts that Engage Readers](#)

By Steve Scott

[Newsletter Ninja: How to Become an Author Mailing List Expert](#)

By Tammi Labrecque

PEOPLE I FOLLOW THROUGH BLOGS OR NEWSLETTERS:

[Serious Bloggers Only](#) (Jon Morrow)

[David Grughran](#)

[Peter Sandeen](#)

[Stephen Guise](#)

[Steve Scott](#)

You can view this info on my [website](#), plus find a link to download this PDF at the bottom of the website page.