

# WordPress Class 3

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## CSS, Widgets (etc.) and Pages

OK, at this point, we know that WordPress themes are easy to find and install. However, as easy as they are to install, they are complicated to edit. There is no simple way to open up your WP theme and drag elements around, change colors and fonts from drop down menus. Your WP theme is actually not one document, but many. Multiple PHP files make up separate parts of your WordPress layout (like the header, sidebar, main content and footer) and even if you open these files in a web editing program like Dreamweaver you will find nothing from a design viewpoint to look at, just a few lines of code. These pages can be editing and adapted, but that's a deeper and nerdier subject than we have on our plate here in beginning WordPress.

## CSS

The primary driver of the appearance of things is CSS or Cascading Styles Sheets<sup>1</sup>. These also consist of code, but with a little familiarity one can recognize the relationships between code and appearance. The main CSS file for every WP theme is a file called style.css that lives in the main theme folder. You can actually edit your style sheet live online in admin mode.

One thing that CSS does is control the appearance of structural HTML tags (section formats) within the pages. Some sample HTML tags that can be styled via CSS are:

- **<body>** - The entire visible page, style this to set a base font or a global background image
- **<H1>** - The main header text for new sections of the page, style this to control a strong section title
- **<p>** Paragraph text, think of this as the stuff that usually appears 12px, Times New Roman
- **<a>** Links (or anchors) style this to make your links a different color, font or size.

If you open the style sheet for editing you may simply feel overwhelmed by all the different entries and levels of control specified there. So one problem we face in tweaking is simply understanding which element is which. Solving this problem beautifully is a free add on for Firefox, called "**Firebug**."

Firebug is a tool I use extensively as a developer to help me understand a site's layout and quickly implement design changes through CSS. So here are some tips and ideas to get you started on customizing your own WordPress themes.

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<sup>1</sup> for a dramatic visual example of the role they play, check out [csszengarden.com](http://csszengarden.com)

## Firebug's Features

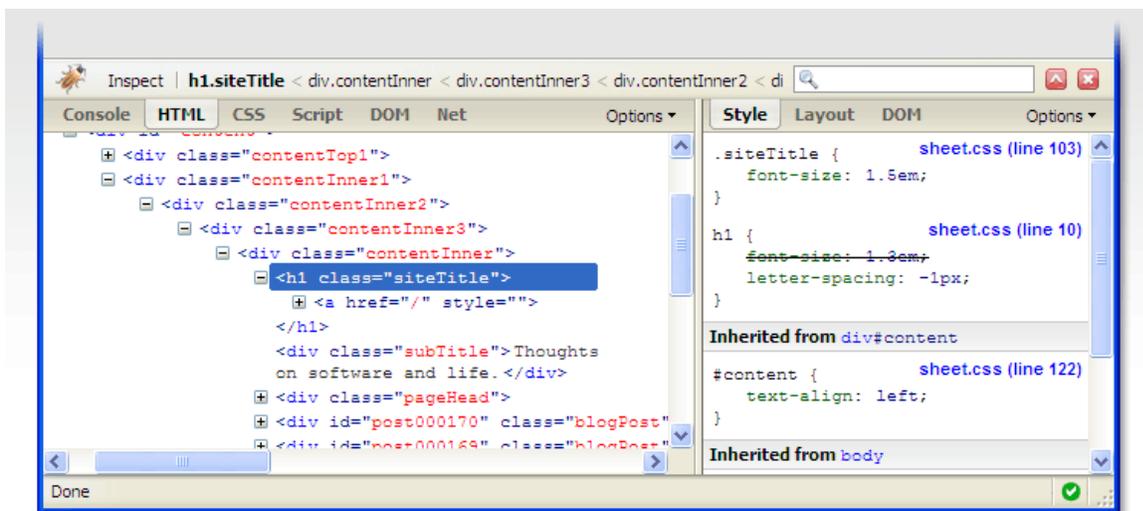
Firebug provides the most common features for almost every customization you can think of. While you browse you can edit, debug and monitor your CSS code and tweak styles to see what they would look like before you implement. Firebug basically allows you to:

- Tweak and position HTML elements with CSS and the Layout panels.
- Find specific elements on a webpage with ease and precision.
- Monitor the performance of each file to identify slow loaders
- Visualize CSS Metrics
- Plus a host of additional features

To download this neat tool and find more details regarding its powerful features, visit [Getfirebug.com](http://getfirebug.com) (<http://getfirebug.com/>)

## Identifying & Editing CSS Properties & Values

For WordPress blog theme users with Firebug installed, customization is a breeze regardless of who designed the template and how. Once Firebug is installed a small icon will be available in your web browser that gives you access to it's panel as shown below.



In the image above, the left panel shows the HTML that controls the site's layout and on the right we have its CSS. Usually WordPress themes' CSS are editable through the *style.css* file which is found in your theme's directory.

### Common Challenge Overcome

Trying to figure out what each selector and property represents can be an impossible task especially if the developer of the theme does not provide comments and descriptions within the code. To overcome this, Firebug allows you to select page elements, using its element inspector, to find out its HTML code as well as the CSS selectors and properties that control the elements.

Once you have found the selectors you want to edit, simply access your style.css file through the WordPress dashboard *Appearance >> Editor* option and use your browser's search feature to find the code.

Learning to edit and tweak your CSS within the theme's stylesheet file is the first step to creating a unique theme for your blog even if it's from a free design.

## Categories, Tags and Widgets

With an eye still on Blogging, one thing you can do to improve the ease of use for your visitors is add **categories** and **tags** to your posts. These two things are rather similar but categories are more the general topic of the posting and tags are the more specific details.

For an example post, your category might be **Travel** and your tags might be: *Jet lag, customs, Australia, scary spiders.*

Once you've created some categories and tags, they are reusable in other posts and anytime you need more, just look to the right of your posting. New category and tag buttons are there for easy updates.

### How are the archive URLs different for tags and categories?

If you publish a post attached to a category "food," the URL will look like this:

<http://blog.wordpress.com/category/food/>

The same post using the tag "food" will look like this:

<http://blog.wordpress.com/tag/food/>

If you publish a post attached to a category "food" and with the tag "rice," the URLs will look like this:

<http://faq.wordpress.com/category/food/>

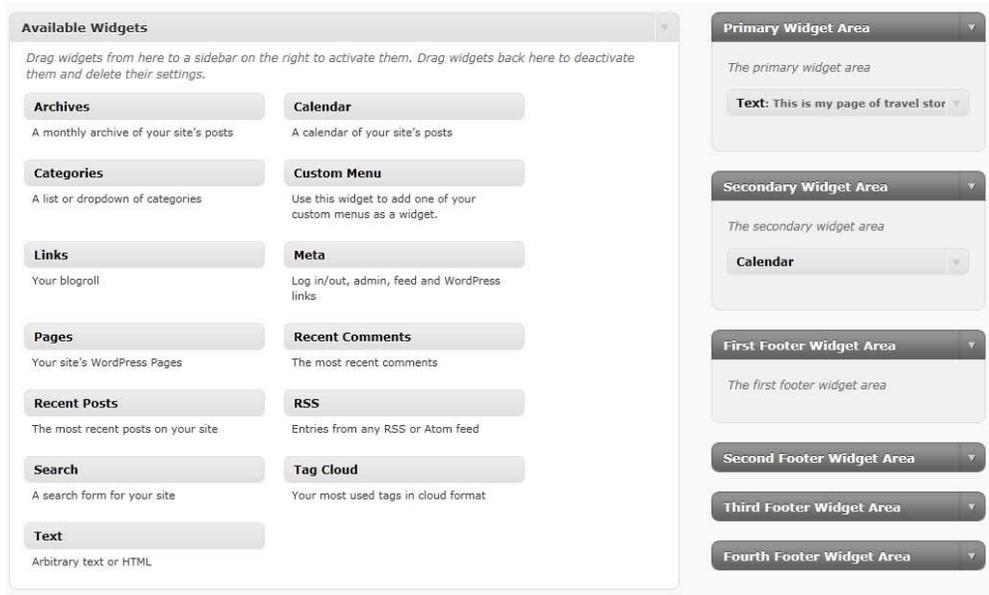
<http://faq.wordpress.com/tag/rice/>

So these are useful in general, and entirely optional but I'd like us to format some today in order to make **Widgets** more understandable.

**Widgets** are page elements like for example, a search box, post calendar, or tag cloud which you can

activate or deactivate for your theme or even move around to different pre-set areas of the design.

Go to **Appearance**, then **Widgets**. They are kind of fun to play with



and they reveal a little more of the structure of your theme. There are areas reserved for widgets in almost all themes. A couple to the upper right and several across the bottom. Simply drag the widget you'd like to try out from the collection at left to the widget area at right. Then save and check your designs results in the browser.

One thing to be aware of...different themes may include OR exclude the use and positioning of these elements.

## Pages

If what we are shooting for is a website rather than a blog (or a website INCLUDING a blog) then **pages** are the way to build. Pages are very much like the standard pages in a hand built HTML site, just with the usual WordPress approach to things. One important idea though...pages are not files. They are database entries just like your posts.

Let's create a simple design today. We're building a site for "Fly by Night Inc."

They want the links: Home | Legal | Plans | Contact

To appear across the top menu bar. I you want to keep your blog as the opening area of the site leave things as they are but if you want to hide the blog and create a constant interface of your pages go to:

### **Settings -> Reading**

From the Dashboard and look for "Front Page Displays" and change it from "blog" to "a static page" then choose the page you'd like to use.