

WordPress Maintenance Guide

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Introduction

WordPress is the most popular software to use in order to create websites. Its user-friendly interface make it a good choice for both amateurs and professional designers alike.

While WordPress is simple to use, it is also true that many of the people who use it skip important steps once they have their website set up. Like anything else with a technical side to it, WordPress sites need routine maintenance. If you fail to maintain your WordPress site, you could end with significant problems.

The goal of this short guide is to help you learn about the basic maintenance you need to do on your WordPress site so you can do it and ensure that your site is working properly.

We'll cover:

- How to work in maintenance mode in WordPress
- How to schedule and check backups, including recommendations of which tools to use
- How to optimize and maintain your databases, with tool recommendations

By the time you are done reading, you'll understand the fundamentals of WordPress maintenance. Let's get started!

Working in Maintenance Mode

Because many people are unaware of what they need to do to maintain their WordPress sites, I think it's important to start with the basics. The truth is that while WordPress is extremely intuitive and user-friendly, not everything is spelled out for you when you download it.

Many website owners find this out the hard way, when they have a problem with their website. You don't want to learn about WordPress maintenance on the fly. It's much better to learn in a calm and controlled way and not when you get a panicked call that there's a problem.

What Is Maintenance Mode?

Simply put, maintenance mode is the mode you put your site in when you need to work on it. Think of it as virtual scaffolding for your site. You can see it, but members of the public can't.

In maintenance mode, you can make changes and updates without worrying that someone will see your work in progress. It prevents there being any kind of malfunction or error if a customer visits your site while you're working on it. It's a temporary mode, but an important one that you need to know how to use.

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When Do You Need Maintenance Mode?

There are three primary reasons you might need to put your site in maintenance mode. They are as follows:

1. You are updating your site. An update might be anything from adding a new plug-in to choosing a new theme. Many updates take just a few moments to complete, but it's important to do them in maintenance mode so you can control how people view your site.
2. You are launching a new website. When your site is still in development, you don't want people to see it until it's ready. Leaving it in maintenance mode will ensure that it gets unveiled only when you are prepared to go live.
3. You are completing a back-up of your site. When your site is backing up, the content cannot be in use.

The rest of the time, your site will be live.

How to Get into Maintenance Mode

When you need to put your site in maintenance mode, there are two ways to do it.

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The first method is automatic, and will happen without you having to do anything. If you log into your WordPress account and decide to install a new plug-in, WordPress will put you into maintenance mode automatically. Anybody who visits your site will see a message that says:

Briefly unavailable for scheduled maintenance. Check back in a minute.

This method works very well if you are only making a quick change. However, if you're going to be in maintenance mode for longer than that, you may want to consider using the manual method, which breaks down as follows.

1. Click on Appearance > Editor
2. Choose functions.php
3. Paste this code at the bottom:

```
// Activate WordPress Maintenance Mode
function wp_maintenance_mode(){
    if(!current_user_can('edit_themes') || !is_user_logged_in()){
        wp_die('<h1 style="color:red">Website currently under Maintenance</h1><br />
We are performing routine maintenance. We will be back online soon.');
```

and click Save

4. Make your changes
5. **Go back to functions.php, delete the code, and click Save**

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While you are in making the changes, the people who visit your site will get a message like this image:

Website currently under Maintenance

We are performing routine maintenance. We will be back online soon.

but you (*as long as you are logged in as Admin*) will be able to see your site and track the changes as you go. You can test this by opening your site in a different browser than the one you are logged into as Admin. The other browser will display the above image.

There is a third option, which is to install a Maintenance Mode plug-in on your website. There are several to choose from. Go to the Plugins section on WordPress.org and type maintenance into the plugin search box:

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/search.php?q=maintenance>

However, I think it's important to know how to do it yourself.

Next, we'll talk about how to back up your files, and the tools I recommend to help you do it.

Backing Up in WordPress

Anybody who has ever lost a file thanks to a computer crash can tell you why it's important to back up your files. The truth is that WordPress sites are no different. Your content might be changing all the time. Whenever you share a new blog post or a user posts a comment, the files on your site are updated. If you don't back up, you might lose them if your site crashes.

The Importance of Backing Up

No web host is perfect. Even if you do research and select a host with 99.9% uptime, there is still a chance that they could run into a problem. If your site crashes and it hasn't been backed up, you could lose valuable information.

With regular backups, you have the peace of mind of knowing that you can recapture your data and get your website back on track in the event that there's a problem. Just as you click save when you're drafting a document or creating a spreadsheet, you need to make sure that the data on your website is backed up.

Backing up is so important that many site owners actually have more than one method of backing up their files. For example, they might do a regular manual backup where they send their files to the cloud, and combine it with a regular backup that's performed by a plug-in.

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What Tools to Use for Backups

Manual backups are up to your discretion, but let's look at a few tools that might be worth considering.

- [BackWPup](#) is one of the best back-up tools available for WordPress. It provides you with complete back-up of your databases, a list of all installed plug-ins, email notifications, and a variety of storage options to choose from.
- [VaultPress](#) is another good choice. It offers complete backups, real-time syncing of data on your site, malware checks, and more.
- [BackupBuddy](#) is my third choice. It offers complete backups, site restoration, and also protects against malware.

Any one of these three can help do regular backups of your site.

How to Test a Backup

Perhaps the only thing worse than not doing a backup at all is thinking that you have one and finding out that it didn't work. For that reason, it's essential to test your backups regularly to make sure they're working.

Backups can fail due to a bug in the system, an unexpected crash, or because your computer is infected with a virus or malware. Of course, you should have virus protection.

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It's impossible to provide a comprehensive guide to testing your backup here because the procedure can vary greatly depending on what software you use. However, the key is to do the following (within the confines of your backup software):

- Access your backup file and unzip it
- Create a local environment to test your site (you can find instructions [here](#))
- Find your database's name and user name in the uncompressed file
- Create a new database and database user
- Import your backup file
- Open the backup file on your test site
- Review the information by comparing it to your regular site to make sure it's up to date

I highly recommend that you review the instructions that come with your backup software to make sure that you know how to troubleshoot checking the backup. The procedure sounds complicated but can actually be fairly simple.

If your backup doesn't work, then you need to do some research to find out why. Don't put it off. If you're using software or a plug-in, you can call customer service to have them walk you through it.

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It's also a good idea to do a manual backup immediately if you find a problem with your automatic backup. Test the manual backup as well. Then do other troubleshooting such as running scans for viruses and malware.

***See Volume 02 Video 1 for Step-By-Step details on Manual Backups**

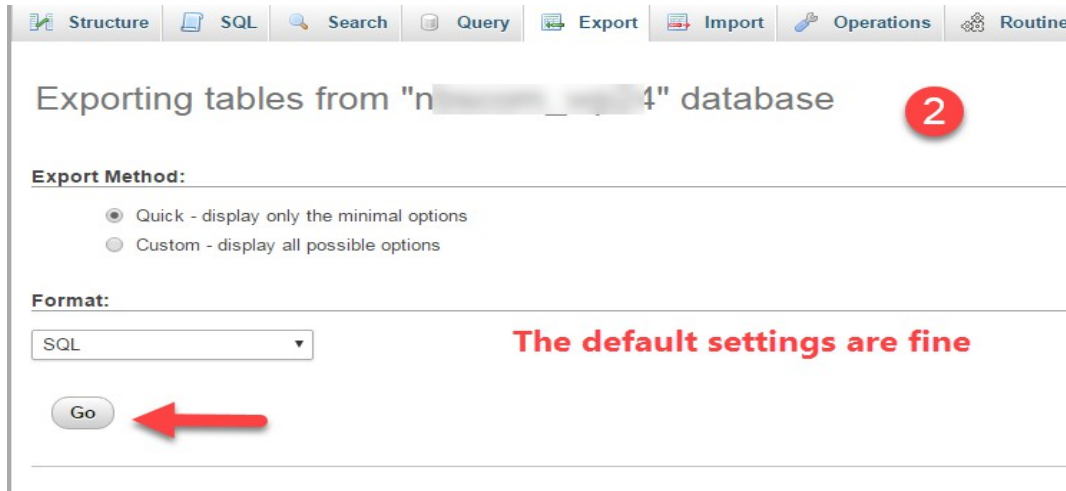
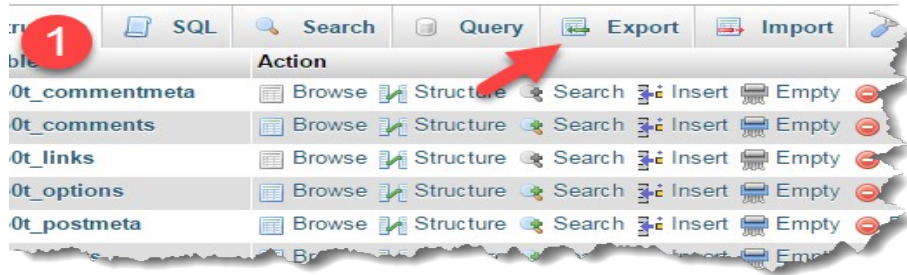
A simple manual backup can be preformed by logging into your cPannels File Manager (best option), or use an FTP client (like Filezilla) to log into your site files.

Next, zip or compress those files if in your cPannels File Manager or if using an FTP client, just select all files and download to a folder on your computer that is properly labeled with the site name and the current date. If you are doing this with your cPannels File Manager then remember to delete the zip file after completing the download.

That is just the files – you also need the site Database.

You get to the Database by going to the phpmyadmin from within your cPanel. Make sure you select the correct Database if you have more than one, then once selected, click on **Export** in the top menu, then click **Go** & download to the same location you downloaded your site Files to.

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The next step is to do routine maintenance on your databases. That's what we'll cover in the next and final chapter.

Managing Databases in WordPress

The databases on your website run in the background. They're not visible to the people who come to your site, but if they weren't there, you'd have very serious problems as a result.

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For that reason, it's very important to manage and maintain your databases. That means using the proper tools to keep them updated, backed up, and in good working order.

What Goes into Database Management?

Database management in WordPress isn't complicated, but it is important. The plug-ins that manage your databases will:

- Delete unused and unnecessary fields
- Drop empty tables
- Run necessary queries
- Back up your databases
- Optimize your databases so they run properly

Think of it as sweeping out the cobwebs and keeping things in good working order. If your databases get bogged down with unnecessary tables and data, they may not run as quickly as you need them to.

You want the people who visit your website to have a good experience. That means making sure that everything is optimized, from the content you publish to the way your website works.

Database optimization is an important part of that.

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To help you understand why database management is important, let's review some of the things that might be clogging up your site and slowing it down, even if they're not obvious to you:

- Unused tables and fields in your existing databases
- Spam comments on your blog
- Unapproved comments on your blog
- Items that haven't been deleted properly

It can be easy to forget to delete comments that you don't approve – and if you use the incorrect procedure, then the data from the comment might still be lurking on your site, unseen. When you make the effort to maintain your databases regularly, then you can be certain that your site is clean of junk and working as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The good news is that you don't need to manually manage and optimize your databases. There are plenty of plug-ins – many of them free – that can do the job for you automatically.

Tools and Plugins to Use

I highly recommend using one of the following tools to keep your site in good working order.

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- [WP-DBManager](#) is a free plug-in that will do everything we've talked about so far: repair your databases and optimize them, get rid of obsolete fields and tables, run queries, and create regular database back-ups so you don't run into a problem.
- [WP-Optimize](#) is also free, and it happens to be WordPress's most downloaded optimization tool. It has some very nice features, including file compression, table clean-up, automatic weekly or monthly clean-ups, and more. It's also accessible on mobile devices which means you can use it from anywhere.
- [WP Clean Up](#) is free, and it makes it very easy for you to perform routine maintenance. In addition to automatic options that include sweeping databases for redundancies and deleting spam comments from your blog, it also has manual options that you can trigger with just a few keystrokes.
- [WP Sweep](#) is a free database optimization plug-in with some nice features. For example, it cleans up unused drafts, unapproved comments, and spam comments. It also performs regular sweeps to delete unused, orphaned, and deleted data.

The benefit of using these plug-ins, which are all free and available directly from WordPress, is that they use WordPress-approved delete functions. Sometimes, when you download and install a plug-in that's not available on the WordPress(dot org) site, you run the risk of data not being properly optimized because the plug-in itself has not been developed using the correct protocols.

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I highly recommend installing one of the four free plug-ins I discussed here and putting it to work for you. You may end up being amazed by the results, particularly if your site has been up and running for a while without undergoing routine maintenance.

As you can see, routine WordPress maintenance isn't difficult. With just a little bit of time and effort – and a few inexpensive tools – you can make sure that your site is providing the reliable performance you want for your visitors.

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Conclusion

Thank you for reading the *WordPress Maintenance Guide*. I hope you have found the information here to be useful.

You spend a lot of time and effort on your website, both in its initial creation and in updating and adding content to it. For that reason, it makes sense to protect your work.

Doing routine maintenance on your site is the best way to prevent problems. If you skip maintenance, you may find that you have no recourse at all in the event that there's a problem.

I recommend doing the following:

1. Install a backup plug-in and configure it to your needs
2. Do regular manual backups as well
3. Test your backups regularly
4. Update themes and plug-ins as necessary
5. When minor Core updates are available, do those immediately (*like 4.71 to 4.72 = minor Core update*).
6. When major Core updates are available, wait a few days before updating (*the number on either side of the period changes – 4.7 to 4.8 = major Core update*).
7. Maintain and optimize your databases on a regular basis

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Maintenance isn't just window dressing. It can have a huge effect on how users experience your website, making their interaction with you quick, intuitive, and free of errors. In the end, that's what you want – and it's what will keep people returning to your site in the future.

As long as you follow these simple steps, you can be confident that you'll always have a site that's functional, up-to-date, and available when you need it.

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References & Notes