

# Creating a blog

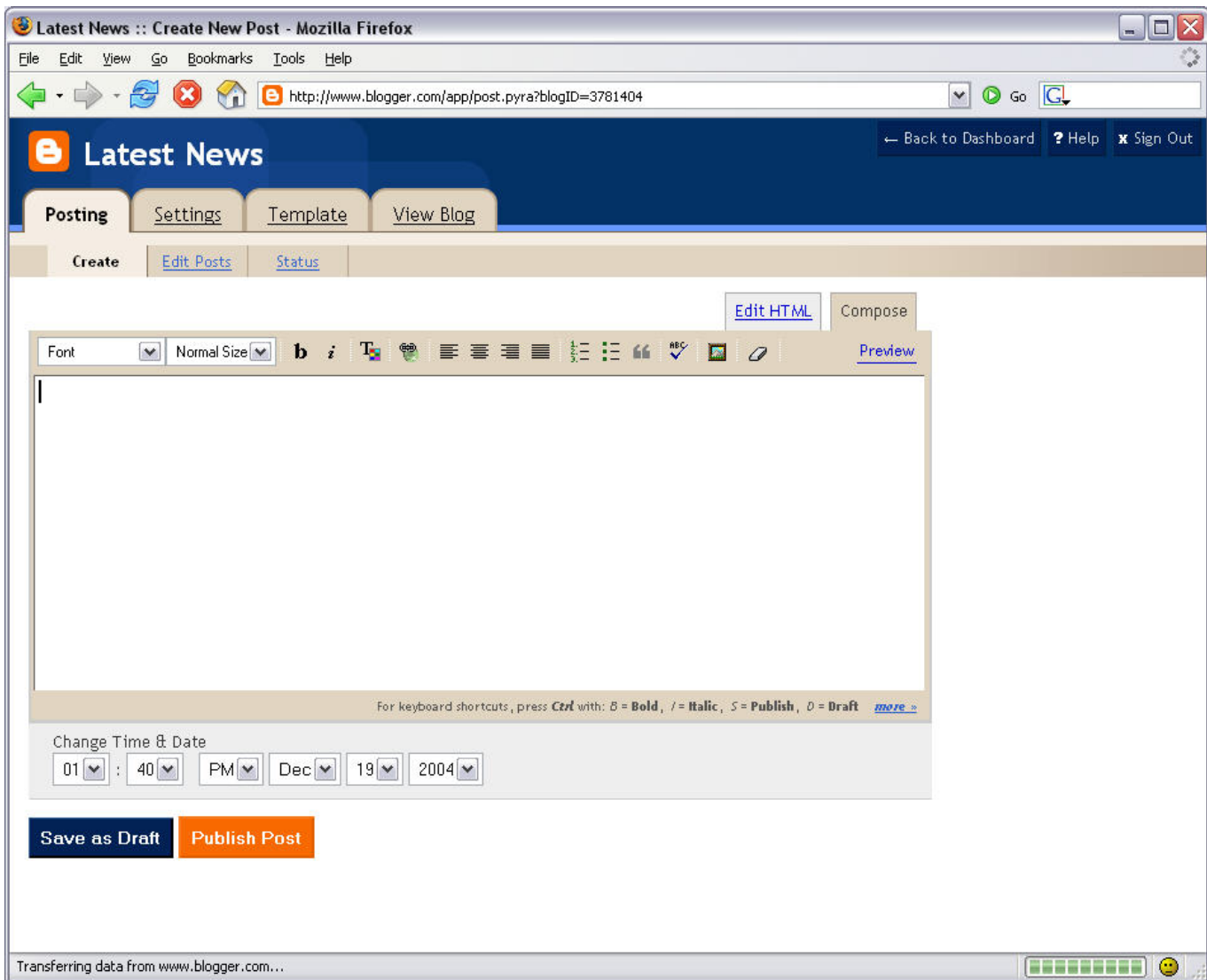
A 'blog', short for 'web blog' is an online diary or journal, organised in date order. Blogs are popular as a personal site – a way to share places that you have visited online, your daily life or thoughts on a particular subject. There are personal blogs on almost every imaginable subject. More recently businesses have discovered that a blog is a powerful way to communicate in a more informal manner with customers, to keep them up to date with industry developments, or highlight interesting features of products. Macromedia are a good example of a company that is using blogs in this way, you can read blogs written by several of their employees, such as John Dowdells here: <http://www.markme.com/jd/>.

In this article we will explore how to create a blog using one of the popular, and free to download blog applications that are available - Wordpress. This is the first of two tutorials looking at Wordpress, this one is suitable for absolute beginners with this tool and will look at the basic install and some of the most important configuration options once it is installed. Next time we will create a completely customised template for your blog and look at how to select which features you want to use.

## *Choosing your tools*

There are a large number of blog applications available for download and use on your own sites – so which should you choose? Obviously your hosting requirements are going to play a part in your choice, all blog applications are going to rely on some kind of server side scripting – PHP, Perl etc. Many also require a database being available such as MySQL.

If you are tied to a hosting account that doesn't have any server side scripting capabilities then you are going to be limited in your choice to blog software that doesn't run on your server. There are options for this, the most well know being Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>). The Blogger software runs on the Blogger server and after creating an account you make your blog entries by logging into your account on the Blogger web site.



[img01.jpg]

### Adding a new blog entry using Blogger

After creating a new entry Blogger sends it via FTP to your web server, so you don't need any special capabilities on your server at all as you just have the HTML pages created by blogger and sent via FTP.

Blogger is a really quick way to get started with a blog and an excellent choice if you are limited in your hosting capabilities. You are able to fully customise the template that is used to display your blog so it is possible to get your blog pages to conform to the look and feel of the rest of your site by editing the template after logging into your Blogger account.

Services such as Blogger are great to dip your toe in the blogging water however they can be limiting. Your own site contains just the static generated pages – no database to enable you to re-use the content in other ways. You are tied to the tools that Blogger provides for your blog and you are also reliant on a third party service being up and running for your blog to work. If you have the capability on your server then installing your own blog software, which will enable you to login to an administration area on your own server to post to your blog, is going to give you far more flexibility in how you use your blog site.

## *Blog software features*

While the different software packages available for download have a whole host of different features there are some basic features that you will probably wish to have on your blog. An archive facility so that users can get to older posts easily; a search feature and the ability for users to post comments. Assuming that you will get a hosting account once you have chosen a package then you can pick from any of the applications. One major player in the blog software world is Movable Type ([www.movabletype.org](http://www.movabletype.org)) . They offer a fully featured package which uses Perl and MySQL (or can run without the use of MySQL if you do not have a database available to you).

Movable Type does have a free version available; however there is no support for users of the free version and it may not be used for commercial blogs and you are limited to only being able to create one user and 3 blogs with this free version. Movable Type is also the most problematic software to use in terms of automated blog spam unless you sign up for their Typekey service which requires that people who wish to comment on blogs register which might be attractive to you or very unattractive depending on the type of use you are going to put a blog to.

One point in Movable Type's favour is the large number of plugins available for it - to add new functionality, however as other blog applications pick up more users they too are offering more plugins and extra code that can be used to add new features.

If you are creating a blog on behalf of a client and they would like to think that the software used had commercial paid-for support behind it, then you might choose Movable Type in order to have that support in place, however if you are just wanting a blog solution to learn for your own sites and to use in flexible ways on different sites then there are other solutions out there that do not have restrictions on usage and are free to download no matter how you wish to use them. One such application is the one that we are going to focus on in the rest of this article and in the next article, and that is Wordpress.

## **Wordpress**

The rest of this article will look at a basic install of Wordpress and the various options that you can change to begin the process of creating a customised blog. I use Wordpress on my own blog (<http://www.rachelandrew.co.uk>) after moving from Movable Type. Wordpress is free to download and has all of the basic features that you would expect a blog application to have.

## *Download the code*

The first thing that you need to do is to download Wordpress itself. Go to <http://www.wordpress.org> and click the Download link, you will then be able to download a zip file containing Wordpress.



[img02.jpg]

## Downloading Wordpress

Save this zip file and unzip it to create a directory named **wordpress**.

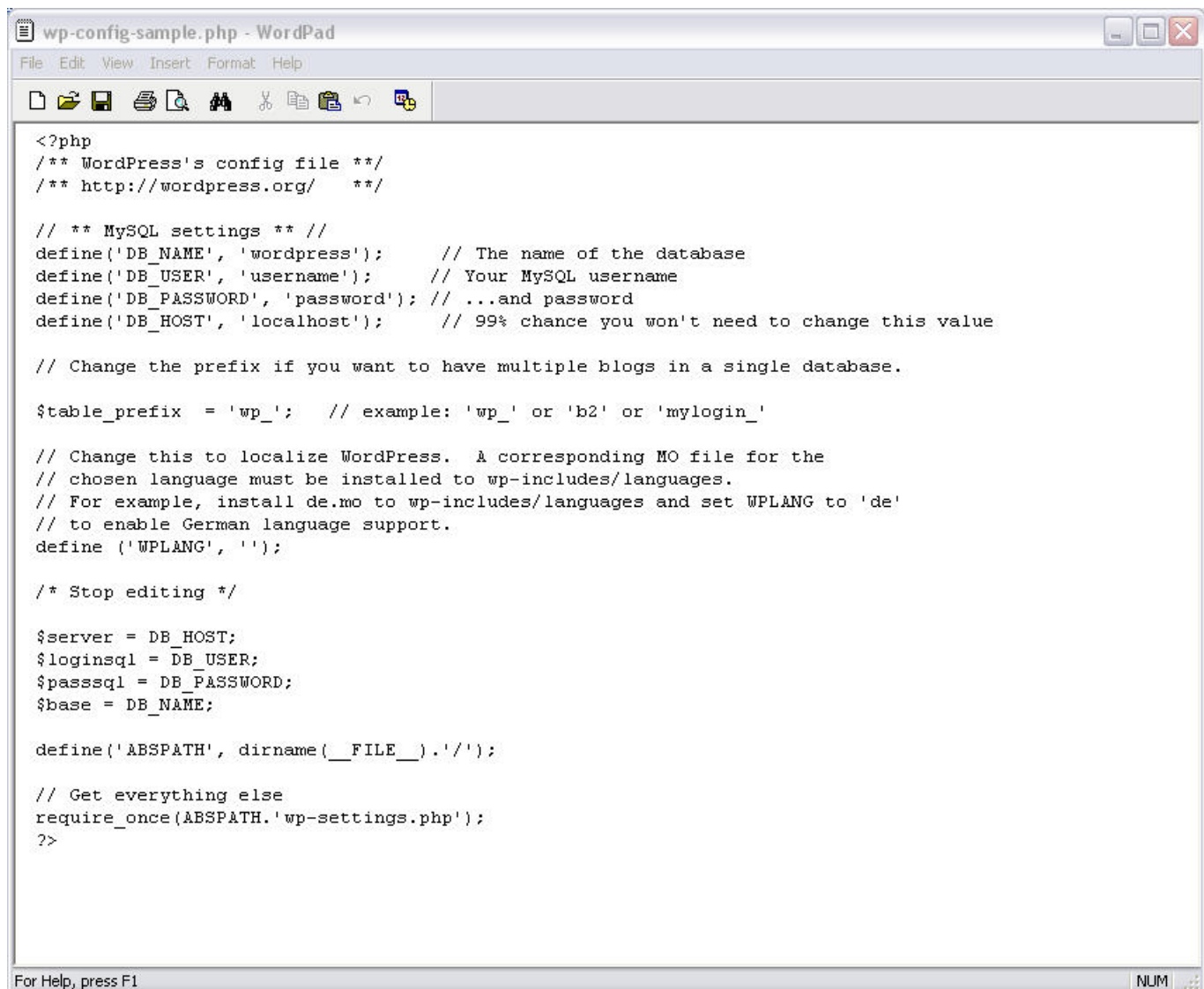
## *Install Wordpress*

Before you can install Wordpress you need to get a few things to hand. The most important thing you will need is the name of your database, the username and password and the hostname if the database server is not localhost. If you don't know these things then you will need to ask your host for these details – if you have a control panel as part of your hosting package you may find them there or be able to create a new MySQL database through the control panel and note down the connection details.

Once you have these details, open the wordpress directory created by unzipping the downloaded zip and open the file named wp-config-sample.php. In this file find the following four lines:

```
define('DB_NAME', 'wordpress'); // The name of the database
define('DB_USER', 'username'); // Your MySQL username
define('DB_PASSWORD', 'password'); // ...and password
define('DB_HOST', 'localhost'); // 99% chance you won't need to change this value
```

This is where you add your database connection details. In the first line change the DB\_NAME 'wordpress' to the name of your database; change DB\_USER 'username' to your database username and password to your database password. Unless you have been told otherwise leave the fourth line as localhost should be fine.



```
<?php
/** WordPress's config file **/
/** http://wordpress.org/ **/

// ** MySQL settings ** //
define('DB_NAME', 'wordpress'); // The name of the database
define('DB_USER', 'username'); // Your MySQL username
define('DB_PASSWORD', 'password'); // ...and password
define('DB_HOST', 'localhost'); // 99% chance you won't need to change this value

// Change the prefix if you want to have multiple blogs in a single database.

$table_prefix = 'wp_'; // example: 'wp_' or 'b2' or 'mylogin_'

// Change this to localize WordPress. A corresponding MO file for the
// chosen language must be installed to wp-includes/languages.
// For example, install de.mo to wp-includes/languages and set WPLANG to 'de'
// to enable German language support.
define ('WPLANG', '');

/* Stop editing */

$server = DB_HOST;
$loginsql = DB_USER;
$passsql = DB_PASSWORD;
$base = DB_NAME;

define('ABSPATH', dirname(__FILE__).'/');

// Get everything else
require_once(ABSPATH.'wp-settings.php');
?>
```

[img03.jpg]

### Editing wp-config.php

Save this file as wp-config.php. Then you can upload all of the Wordpress files to your web host. If you want the blog to appear as the homepage of your site eg: <http://www.mydomain.com> , then upload them directly into the root of your web site directory. If you would like them to appear in a directory, for example: <http://www.mydomain.com/myblog/>, then create that directory and upload the files into it.

There is another setting in the wp-config file that is worth noting. If you want to run multiple blogs using the same database you can change the prefix of the tables by editing the following line:  
`$table_prefix = 'wp_'; // example: 'wp_' or 'b2' or 'mylogin_'`

So you could have the default blog with the wp\_ prefix, and a second as wp2\_ and so on.

## Running Wordpress for the first time

Before you can start blogging you need to configure Wordpress. To do this use a web browser and go to the URL `www.yourdomain.com/wp-admin/install.php` (If you installed in a directory add the directory before the `/wp-admin/` directory). You should get a screen explaining that you are about to configure Wordpress and reminding you that you need to set up the database connection in `wp-config.php`.



[img04.jpg]

### The first Wordpress setup screen

If you are ready then click the **let's go** link to start installing Wordpress.

The next screen – Step One – creates the tables needed for the Wordpress links database in your MySQL database. This screen just prints out a list of tables as it creates them.

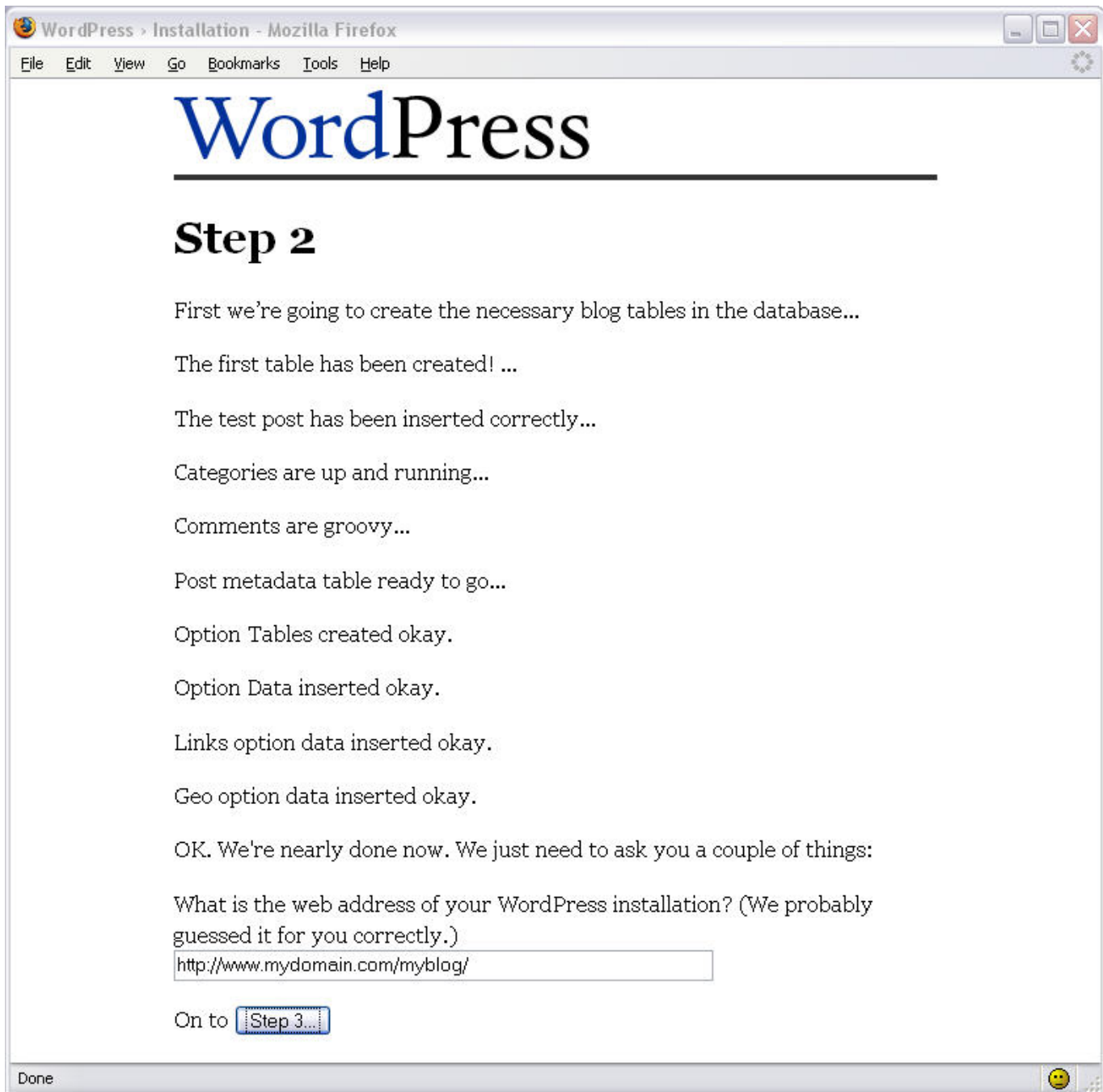


[img05.jpg]

### Step One – Creating the tables in MySQL

If it reports that it cannot create the tables it is most likely that your database connection information is incorrect so check this with your host and try again. If you successfully completed this step you can move on to **Step Two**.

In Step 2 the script will create some more tables, this time the tables to store the blog entries. If it is successful it will check with you to see if it has guessed the location of your blog (what you would type into the address bar of a web browser to view the site) correctly – it most probably will have, but edit it if it is incorrect.



[img06.jpg]

## Step 2 – more tables and checking the web address

Move onto step 3 and you might be quite surprised that this is the final step! On this final screen you will be given a random password. Write this down or print the page NOW! As the screen explains, if you lose this password you will need to delete all the tables and start over installing Wordpress. You will be able to change the admin password later but you will need it to initially log in.

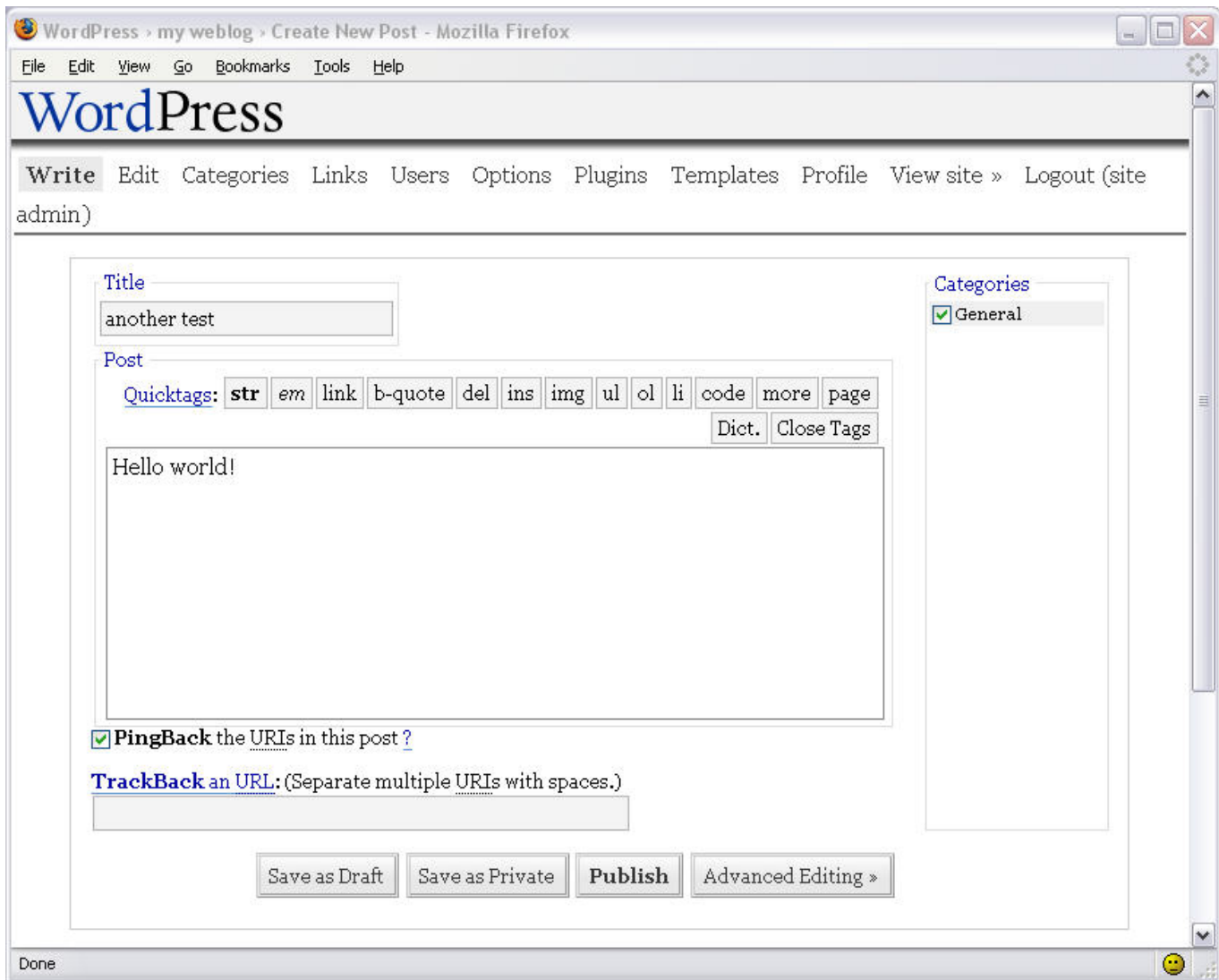


[img07.jpg]

Wordpress installation complete

## *Using Wordpress*

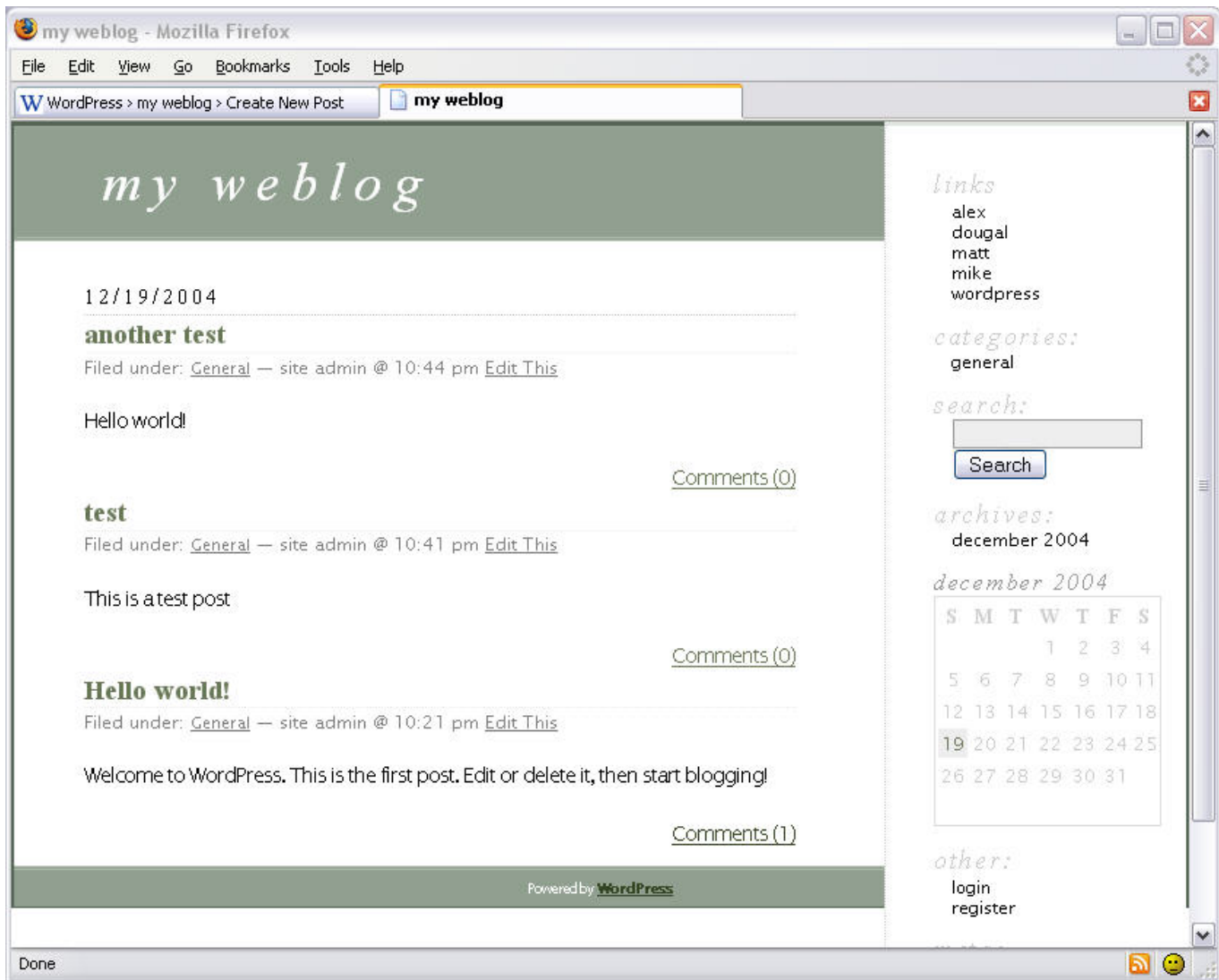
Log into Wordpress using the admin password and you will find yourself on the 'Create New Post' screen. Type a simple test post here.



[img09.jpg]

### Writing a test post in Wordpress

If you now open your weblog – by clicking View Site in the menu or opening a new browser and typing in the URL of your site, you should see the posts that you have added displayed in the default Wordpress template.



[img10.jpg]

The posts displayed in the default template

## Setting options in Wordpress

There are a lot of different settings you can tweak in Wordpress and the best way to figure them out is to have a go and see what effect they have. I will go through a few important settings with you here.

### Options

Click the link 'Options' in the main navigation. In **General** options make sure that the admin e-mail address is set to your email address so that any notification emails are sent to you.

Under **Reading** you can set the number of posts to display on the main page.

**Discussion** is where you set preferences for comments. Wordpress has various options to help you to prevent unwanted spam posts on your blog. You can stop people commenting at all on your blog by unselecting 'Allow people to post comments on the article'.

If you want to enable people to comment on your blog posts then you will probably want to stop people posting junk comments. You can be made aware of new comments by requesting that they are emailed to you when they are posted – so if you are not moderating comments you can go and remove unacceptable posting quickly.

If you want to moderate all comments before they appear check the box for the option, 'An administrator must approve the comment (regardless of any matches below)'.

You can add in the large text field at the bottom of this page words that you wish comments to be automatically held for moderation if they are found to contain any of these words. Spam postings tend to be advertising particular products the names of which would be very unlikely to be found in a legitimate posting, so you can be fairly confident that by holding these in a queue before allowing them to display on the site you are not going to be stopping any of your readers from posting.

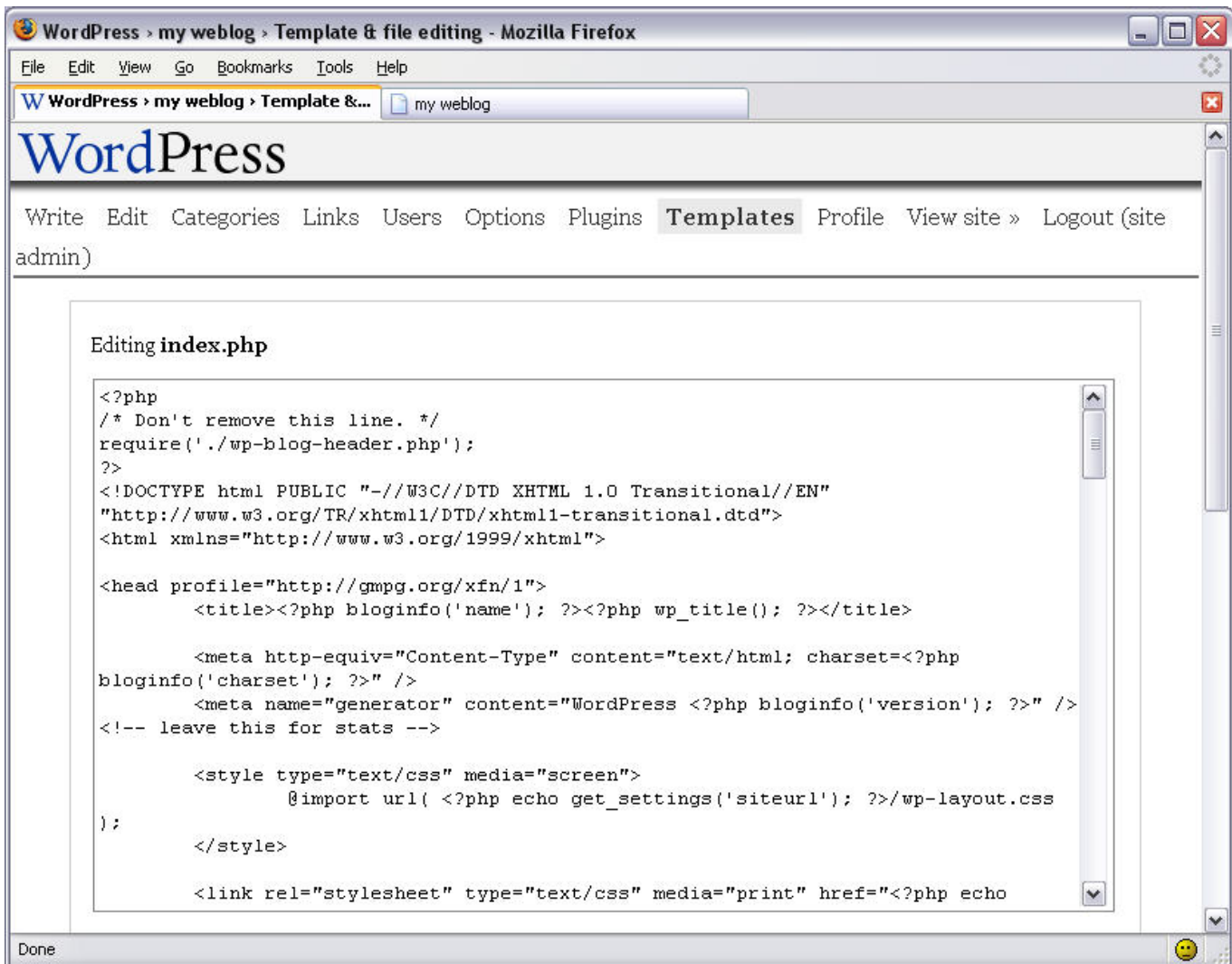
The decision on how you manage comments is up to you, on a personal site then allowing unmoderated comments is probably not much of a problem, you can remove spam or inappropriate comments through your admin section by selecting Edit, then clicking on the Comments link for the line in the table that is for the post that has the inappropriate comment, you can then find and delete the comment. If however, your site deals with a sensitive subject, or is for a company, then you might decide to moderate all comments so that people cannot post hurtful comments, or comments that could cause trouble for the business involved.

Back in the options, if you want to be able to upload and display images on your blog you will need to change the file upload settings under **miscellaneous**. You will need to complete the path to your uploads directory (Wordpress will have guessed as to the location and will probably be correct) and also the URL to access this directory.

## *Customising your templates*

In this final part of this article we will look at the templates for Wordpress. As we have seen, Wordpress initially runs with a default template. This means you can get a blog up and running very quickly. However, most people will want to use their own design for their blog and choose the features that they use.

If you click on the Templates link you will see that the default index template loads in a large text area.



[img11.jpg]

## The index.php template

If you want to be able to edit the template online in this text area you will need to change the file permissions on your server for this file to 666 in order that you can write to it. However, it is going to be far easier for you to edit the file if you download it and edit it locally as you can then open it up in Dreamweaver or another text editor to work on it.

The other files that you might want to download and edit are the comments files – wp-comments.php and wp-comments-popup.php. The stylesheet used by the default template is wp-layout.css and the print stylesheet for this template can be found at print.css. Depending on whether you are just editing the basic template or creating a totally new design you might want to use and edit these stylesheets or create new ones from scratch.

Once you have downloaded your files, open index.php in a text editor or in Dreamweaver Code View. You will find that the file is mostly XHTML with some PHP tags (anything between <?php ?>) included. For example, the part of the file that displays the blog entries looks like this:

```

<div class='post'>
    <h3 class='storytitle' id='post-<?php the_ID(); ?>'><a href='<?php
the_permalink() ?>' rel='bookmark' title='Permanent Link: <?php the_title(); ?>'><?php
the_title(); ?></a></h3>
    <div class='meta'><?php _e('Filed under:'); ?> <?php the_category() ?> &#8212;
<?php the_author() ?> @ <?php the_time() ?> <?php edit_post_link(); ?></div>

    <div class='storycontent'>
        <?php the_content(); ?>
    </div>

    <div class='feedback'>
        <?php wp_link_pages(); ?>
        <?php comments_popup_link(__('Comments (0)'), __('Comments (1)'),
__('Comments (%)')); ?>
    </div>

    <!--
    <?php trackback_rdf(); ?>
    -->

<?php include(ABSPATH . 'wp-comments.php'); ?>
</div>
    
```

The PHP tags are to enable the Wordpress functionality, calling in your blog entries and other elements of the page. You shouldn't remove any of these unless you want to remove that feature from the page, however you can easily change how they are displayed by editing the XHTML elements that are around them or by changing the CSS.

If you make a copy of the file that you are about to edit then you can always go back if you find that you have accidentally deleted something, however as long as you leave anything between <?php ?> alone, you can change this template as much as you would like.

In the next article in this series we will be looking at how to create a new template completely from scratch for your Wordpress blog and we will go into detail about how each of the different tags work and the functionality they enable and the content that they display.