



## **The Handbook**

### **Codex**

[http://codex.wordpress.org/Designing\\_Headers](http://codex.wordpress.org/Designing_Headers)

### **Version Date**

8 August 2005

# Designing Headers

They say you can not judge a book by its cover, and yet every day people do. They pick up a book, look at the cover, and then are moved to either put it down, turn it over, or open it up just because of how the cover looks. Websites are also judged by their covers and the first impression often comes from the **header**.

The **header** of your site is typically the first thing people see. From this masthead or [header art](#) across the top of your page, people make sweeping judgements about what they are about to see and read. The same people who say you can not judge a book by its cover, also say that you only have 30 seconds to make a good impression. In the world of the Internet where the next web page is a click away, you have much less than that.

We are going to take you inside the architecture of a WordPress header and offer tips on how to customize it to become your own book cover, enticing people into your site with a good first impression. Then we will offer some tips from some experts on what makes a good website header.

## *The WordPress Header*

By default, the WordPress header is a simple piece of code. You do not have to get into the code to change the header that comes with whatever WordPress Theme you choose. You set the blog or website title and description in the [Admin > Options](#) panel, and WordPress does the rest.

In its most simplistic form, the Classic WordPress Theme features the header code like this in the `header.php` template file:

```
<h1 id="header">
<a href="<?php bloginfo('url'); ?>"><?php bloginfo('name'); ?></a>
</h1>
```

The header is set in an `h1` HTML tag and features one [template tag](#) used with two different options or *parameters*. You can learn more about these parameters in the documentation for [bloginfo\(\)](#). Basically, the first one displays the [URL](#) of the website in a link, and the second one displays the name of the blog or website as set in the **Admin > Options** panel. When the user moves the mouse over the header title, the header can be clicked to return back to the main or front page of the site as set in the Options panel.

The Default WordPress Theme features an image in the background and presents the header like this:

```
<div id="header">
  <div id="headerimg">
    <h1>
      <a href="<?php echo get_settings('home'); ?>">
        <?php bloginfo('name'); ?></a>
    </h1>
    <div class="description">
      <?php bloginfo('description'); ?>
    </div>
  </div>
</div>
```



The header of the Default/Kubrick Theme

Again, the template tag featuring the name of the blog or website is in a link, but this shows another usage similar to the URL request above. It gets the same information, just in a different way. It also adds the *description* of the site from the [Options](#) panel.

Basically, these two header examples do the same thing in different ways. They provide information in the header, with the potential for an image, and make the [header title clickable](#) to help navigation on the site. It is just a matter of how much information you want in your header, and how that information is displayed.

Using the first example from the Classic Theme, an image can still be used in the background, set within the style sheet in the `h1` selector, but the second one gives more control to the use of an image in the header by giving it its own division. How these look are totally controlled by the style sheet.

## Styling the Header

As listed in the two above examples, the styles for the header are contained within the `h1`, `header`, `headerimg`, and `description` [CSS](#) selectors. These are all found within the `style.css`, though may be found in the styles in the `header.php` of the Theme you are using. You will have to check both places.

In the Classic Theme, the CSS for the header are found in one selector, the `#header`.

```
#header {
    background: #90a090;
    border-bottom: double 3px #aba;
    border-left: solid 1px #9a9;
    border-right: solid 1px #565;
    border-top: solid 1px #9a9;
    font: italic normal 230% 'Times New Roman', Times, serif;
    letter-spacing: 0.2em;
    margin: 0;
    padding: 15px 10px 15px 60px;
}
```

The background color is set to a green shade and there is a border all the way around the header which changes colors creating a recessed, shadow effect. The Times font is set with a size of 230% with a wider than normal letter spacing. The padding on the left side indents the text in from the left.

All of these can be easily changed, giving the border a thicker width and making it all the same color, changing the background color, the font size and style, the letter spacing, and more by modifying the information in each style attribute.

The same is true of the Default WordPress Theme header, except there are more styles to think about and they are found within the `header.php`'s "head" tag **and** the `style.css`, though once you have your styles set, you can move the information into your style sheet.

The styles that control the header's look are found within the `h1`, `header`, `headerimg`, and `description` CSS selectors. Just like the Classic Theme, find these references and make your modifications there to change the look.

Changing the header image of the Default WordPress Theme has been simplified with the introduction of a utility called [Kubrickr](http://www.redalt.com/Tools/kubrickr.php) (<http://www.redalt.com/Tools/kubrickr.php>). It simply asks you to supply a new image file name for the header and then switches it for you, so you do not have to dig into the code. If all you want to change is the header image, this is an extremely useful and easy tool.

If you do want to get your hands into the code, dig into your header styles and make the changes. Below is a simple tutorial on changing just the header image manually.



## Changing the Header Image

There are many different [header images and header art](#) available for you to use to change the image in the header. The styles for the header image for the Default or Kubrick WordPress Theme, and any Theme based upon that Theme, are more complicated to change than those for the Classic Theme. The styles are found within the styles in the `header.php` "head" section, as well as in the `styles.css`. To change only the header image reference, open the `header.php` template file and look for the styles like this:

```
#header {  
    background: url("<?php  
bloginfo('stylesheet_directory'); ?>/images/kubrickheader.jpg")  
    no-repeat bottom center; }  
#headerimg {  
    margin: 7px 9px 0;  
    height: 192px;  
    width: 740px; }
```

To change the image file, replace the "kubrickheader.jpg" with the name of the new graphic image you have uploaded to your site to replace it. If it is in a different directory, change that by replacing the `bloginfo()` tag with the specific address of the graphic's location.

If you are using an image that is the same size, then simply replace the image. If it is a different size, fill in the height and width of the image in the next section called `#headerimg`. If you do not know, and are using Windows, view the folder in which the image resides on your computer in **Thumbnail** view mode. Click **View > Thumbnail** from the Windows Explorer menu. In Thumbnail view mode, find your image and hold the mouse over it. A small balloon tip will pop up listing the dimensions. Use that information in the styles. Otherwise, just right click on the image file and choose **Properties** and it should give you the file size

**NOTE:** The use of the `bloginfo` tag only works when the style is used within the head of the template file. WordPress [template tags](#) will not work in the style sheet (`style.css`). To move this style to the style sheet, change the template tag to the actual address (URL) of the header image graphic.

and dimensions.

Save the template file and upload it and the image to your website and [take a look](#). Some changes may need to be made to fine-tune the placement and look.

With the header image in place, it is time to tackle the rest of the header. Open your `style.css` style sheet file and look for the following:

- `h1`
- `header`
- `headerimg`
- `description`

Your Theme may or may not have all of these, but the Default Theme has all of them in different places within the style sheet. All or some of these may need to have the attributes changed to change the look of your header.

If you change the size of the header image or header art, be sure and change the other structural CSS selectors like content and sidebar to accommodate the change in the header size.



## Header Image Specifications

A header image that fits within the Default WordPress Theme is about 192 x 740 pixels. If you are replacing the header within any WordPress Theme, check the size of the header image and then find a replacement that matches that size. If you choose a header image that is smaller or wider or taller than the replacement, you may have to modify the other structural elements of the web page to allow for the change in size of the header.

If you are modifying the entire site's Theme, the width of the overall page or content area needs to be taken into consideration for the header image's size. The two most common screen sizes are 1024x768 and 800x600 pixels. Yet, wide screen monitors are gaining ground and web designers now need to prepare for screen widths of 1280x1024 and 1600x1200.

If you set your website to "float," positioned in the middle of the browser window with space on either side, then you can set your header width to whatever you want. If you are designing a Theme with a flexible or "elastic" screen width, then the width of your header becomes important.

If you are using a header image that can be repeated, and you are using elastic widths, you can set the styles within the header to repeat to fill the space:

```
#header {  
background: url("/images/kubrickheader.jpg")
```

```
repeat-x top left; }
```

This sets the header image to repeat horizontally beginning from the top left corner and going across. You can adjust these to whatever [background position](http://www.w3.org/TR/REC-CSS2/colors.html#background-properties) (<http://www.w3.org/TR/REC-CSS2/colors.html#background-properties>) your header design and layout needs.

## Header Art

A new term growing in the web design field is **header art**. These are header images that are usually handmade using combinations of color, shapes, symbols, images, and text. They can take some time and labor to create. While there are some [free header art sites](#), some sites sell their handmade header art. Although a photograph may be unique in its own way and convey the needed visual style, handmade header artwork is easier to match to other web page colors and is usually more aesthetically pleasing because of its distinctive nature.

Choosing pre-made header art has some benefits. The artists have already done the work and all you have to do is choose the design that best matches your website. And the graphic is ready to use, already sized and saved as a small file size.

[Digital Westex's WordPress Header](#)

[Art](http://www.digitalwestex.com/gallery/index.php?cat=6) (<http://www.digitalwestex.com/gallery/index.php?cat=6>) features a wide range of header art sized and ready for free download specifically for WordPress.

## Header Art Copyrights

The best header art to use, if you do not want to generate your own, is any that bear the [Creative Commons License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/GPL/2.0/) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/GPL/2.0/>) that specifically allows its public use. Read the individual license for the image's use to make sure that you have permission to use the header art on your site. Usually you must attribute the author, share alike and not use it for commercial purposes. If in doubt, always ask permission from the author before use.

As header art is made and licensed "as is" by the designer/artist, some header art cannot be modified without the artist's permission. Check the website copyrights and licenses and ask if you are in doubt and wish to modify the artwork.

## Designing Your Own Header Art

You can also design your own header art. Any graphic design software program will work. Popular ones include Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Elements, JASC PaintShop Pro, The Gimp and Macromedia Fireworks. The graphic design software should have the ability to resize and control the resolution and type of the image when saved. The size of your header art should be the size of the header container you're going to put it in.

You can use your own photographs, artwork, fonts, and any combination of images to create your header art. When done, save it "for the web" as a jpg, gif, or .png file. For an explanation on which to use read [Sitepoint's GIF-JPG-PNG What's the Difference](http://www.sitepoint.com/article/gif-jpg-png-whats-difference) (<http://www.sitepoint.com/article/gif-jpg-png-whats-difference>) article. These file types will *compress* the image's resolution, reducing the file's size. In general, avoid file



sizes larger than 50K as larger sizes tend to slow a site access times.



## Hiding the Header Text

Many Themes and Theme designers want to feature their header with a picture only, no text. Some will put the text in the graphic image, therefore not requiring the actual use of the text. One option is to remove the template tags that generate the title and description. The other option is to leave it in, but hide it.

To hide the header text while leaving it in the code, do not change anything in your template files. Only change the CSS. Add `display:none` to the CSS selectors you do not want to appear. For example, to hide the text within the `h1` selector:

```
h1 {display:none; font-size: 230%; color: blue;.....}
```

It is still there, but the browser has been commanded to not show it in any way. The container literally is "not there."

It might be hidden, but some web page screen readers and search engines will still find the information. If you are serious about making your site be accessible, some newer text readers access the style sheet and *do not read* the elements marked `display:none`. There are two popular methods for working around this. One is to use the `display:none` as outlined above, but also include an **aural style sheet** that changes that selector to `display:block`, "turning the visibility" back on. The other method is to position the content literally "off the page" with positioning. Here is an example:

```
h1 {position: absolute;
    font-size: 0;
    left: -1000px; }
```

This technique moves the entire `h1` tag and its contents physically off the web page. The screen reader will still "read" the text because it is there, but it will not display on the page. Extensive testing has proven so far that this technique works across most browsers and with all screen readers.

For more information on either technique and aural style sheets:

- [What do Screen Readers really say? \(Accessibility and display:none\)](http://eleaston.com/bob/screenreader-visibility.html) (<http://eleaston.com/bob/screenreader-visibility.html>)
- [Testing Screen Readers and display:none](http://simon.incutio.com/archive/2003/09/13/screenReaders) (<http://simon.incutio.com/archive/2003/09/13/screenReaders>)
- [Facts and Opinion About Fahrner Image Replacement](http://www.alistapart.com/articles/fir/) (<http://www.alistapart.com/articles/fir/>)
- [Hiding Text But Not From Screen Readers](http://blog.rd2inc.com/archives/2005/01/07/hiding-text-but-not-from-Readers) ([http://blog.rd2inc.com/archives/2005/01/07/hiding-text-but-not-from-](http://blog.rd2inc.com/archives/2005/01/07/hiding-text-but-not-from-Readers)

*screen-readers/*

- [W3's Aural Style Sheets](http://www.w3.org/TR/REC-CSS2/aural.html) (<http://www.w3.org/TR/REC-CSS2/aural.html>)
- [About Web Design's Aural Style Sheets](http://webdesign.about.com/cs/css/a/aa093002a.htm) (<http://webdesign.about.com/cs/css/a/aa093002a.htm>)
- [ACSS: Aural Style Sheets](http://www.htmlgoodies.com/beyond/css/article.php/3470211) (<http://www.htmlgoodies.com/beyond/css/article.php/3470211>)
- [Richinstyles Guide to Aural Style Sheets](http://www.richinstyle.com/guides/aural2.html) (<http://www.richinstyle.com/guides/aural2.html>)

## Making the Whole Header Clickable

To make the entire header, graphic and all, clickable, you have two choices. You can either change the position of the link to surround the entire area, or add links to the specific areas to encompass them all.

To make the entire header of the WordPress Classic Theme into a clickable header:

```
<a href="<?php bloginfo('url'); ?>">
  <h1 id="header">
    <?php bloginfo('name'); ?>
  </h1>
</a>
```

To make the WordPress Default Theme a clickable header:

```
<div id="header">
  <a href="<?php echo get_settings('home'); ?>">
    <div id="headerimg">
      <h1><?php bloginfo('name'); ?></h1>
      <div class="description">
        <?php bloginfo('description'); ?>
      </div>
    </div>
  </a>
</div>
```

Or you can use the method offered by the Theme's author to make the entire WordPress Default/Kubrick Theme header clickable:

- Open `header.php` template file.
- Change from `<div id="header">` to:

```
<div id="header" onclick="location.href='http://siteaddress/';" style="cursor:
pointer;"></div>
```

What if you want only the text areas of the header to be clickable and not the entire header image? Add links only to the title and description:

```
<div id="header">
  <div id="headerimg">
    <h1>
      <a href="<?php echo get_settings('home'); ?>">
        <?php bloginfo('name'); ?>
      </a>
    </h1>
    <div class="description">
      <a href="<?php echo get_settings('home'); ?>">
        <?php bloginfo('description'); ?>
      </a>
    </div>
  </div>
</div>
```



```

</div>
</div>
</div>

```

And if you want to have different links to the two lines of text in your header, then change one of them to the link you want:

```

<div id="header">
  <div id="headerimg">
    <h1>
      <a href="<?php echo get_settings('home'); ?>">
        <?php bloginfo('name'); ?>
      </a>
    </h1>
    <div class="description">
      <a title="Home Page" href="home.php">
        </a>
      </div>
    </div>
  </div>
</div>

```



## Rotating Header Images

There are several scripts available that will allow you to rotate images within the header, sidebar, or on any template file. We will examine the use of one of these, the [Random Image Rotator](http://photomatt.net/scripts/randomimage) (<http://photomatt.net/scripts/randomimage>).

Save the script to a separate folder in which you have the header images you wish to rotate in your header. For this example, call it `rotate.php`. To use this as a background image that changes or rotates with every load of the web page:

```

#header {
background: url("/images/headerimgs/rotate.php")
no-repeat bottom center; }

```

To actually put this in your header, or elsewhere on your site, add an image link like this within the header division:

```



```

Image rotating scripts include:

- [Photomatt's Random Image Rotator](http://photomatt.net/scripts/randomimage) (<http://photomatt.net/scripts/randomimage>)
- [Image Rotator PHP from Automatic Labs](http://www.hiveware.com/imagerotator.php) (<http://www.hiveware.com/imagerotator.php>)
- [WordPress Randomize Plugin](http://linux.linux.dk/projects/randomize) (<http://linux.linux.dk/projects/randomize>)



## Adding Navigation to Your Header

Headers are another area where you can add navigation elements to your website. Typically these are horizontal menus at the top or bottom of your header. To add these, create a new division within the `header` to style your header navigation elements.

This can be as simple as displaying your categories across the top of the header using one of the **List Categories** [template tags](#). Let us look at one example using the [list\\_cats\(\)](#) tag.

In this example, the `list_cats()` template tag is set to short the list of categories by ID in an unordered list (`<ul><li>`) without dates or post counts, does not hide empty categories, uses category "description" for the title in the links, does not show the children of the parent categories, and excludes categories 1 and 33. It sits in its own "category" division. Notice that a link to the "home" page or front page has been included manually at the start of the list.

```
<div id="header">
<div id="categorylist">
<ul><li>
<a title="Home Page" href="index.php">HOME</a></li>
<?php list_cats(FALSE, '', 'ID', 'asc', '', TRUE, FALSE,
FALSE, FALSE, TRUE, FALSE, FALSE, '', FALSE,
'', '', '1,33', TRUE); ?>
</ul>
</div><!-- end of categorylist -->
<h1><a href="<?php bloginfo('url'); ?>"><?php bloginfo('name'); ?></a></h1>
</div><!-- end of header -->
```

To style this list, the `#categorylist` in the `style.css` might be:

```
#categorylist {font-size:12px; font-style:normal;
text-transform:uppercase; }
#categorylist ul {list-style-type: none; list-style-image:none;
margin:0; padding-bottom: 20px; }
#categorylist li { display: inline; padding: 0px 5px;}
#categorylist a:link, #category a:visited {color:blue}
#categorylist a:hover {color:red}
```

It might look like this:

**WORDPRESS COMPUTERS INTERNET NEWS**

You can also add your [Pages](#), archives, and other links within your header navigation. For more information on navigation menus:

- [Good Navigation Links](#)
- [Dynamic Menu Highlighting](#)

- [Creating Horizontal Menus](#)
- [Styling Lists with CSS](#)
- [wp\\_list\\_cats\(\)](#)
- [list\\_cats\(\)](#)

## ***Header Tips***

Here are some tips and information to help you choose and customize your WordPress site's header.

Pay attention to text placement and color.

The colors and placement of the text within a header can add or subtract to your presentation. Here are some tips.

- If you use white text, make sure there is a background color in the `header` and/or `headerimg` to showcase the white text again if for some reason the image does not appear on the screen or the user has "show images" turned off. This will allow your white text to still be visible.
- If the image has a main feature or element, position the text so it does not cover the main subject of the image.
- If the text is hard to read against a busy area of the graphic, position the text to a less busy area of the header image.
- Make sure the color of the text is easily seen by your visitors and does not clash with the header art colors. Fluorescent orange text on a lime green background is painful.
- Be aware that some color differences and patterns in your header art may make the text letters in your overlaid text "disappear." The same applies if you embed the text in your header art or header image.

Have a purpose and point.

A good header reflects the content of the site. The rest of the site has to meet expectations and live up to the header, so the header must reflect the content, purpose and intention of the site.

It should invite visitors to remain.

A good header is like the cover of a book or magazine. It should encourage people to stay and have a look around, read and look more, and find something of value. It is the teaser, the lead that grabs their attention and says "there is something worth exploring here."

It should blend in with the overall look.

Bold and dramatic headers lend themselves to boldly designed sites, whereas soft and pastel colored sites lend themselves to gentler graphic headers. A site dedicated to punk rock and grunge should have a header look punky and grungy. It is up to you, but think consistency.

Headers do not need to have pictures.

Not all headers must have pictures and graphics. Sometimes the words are more important, whether they are against a wash of color or a white background.

Cluttered headers are still cluttered.

Avoid cramming ads, navigation, text, scrolling news feeds, and the kitchen sink into your header. Simple is always better.

Maintain accessibility standards in your header.

We mentioned [hiding the header text](#), and there is more you can do to make sure

your header meets accessibility standards. Use the `h1` tag so screen readers will [recognize it as a header](http://diveintoaccessibility.org/day_27_using_real_headers.html) ([http://diveintoaccessibility.org/day\\_27\\_using\\_real\\_headers.html](http://diveintoaccessibility.org/day_27_using_real_headers.html)). Use titles and `alt` descriptions in links and images used in the template file (not in the style sheet as background images).

Headers can be any height, but remember content sells.

The average header is less than 200 pixels high, but headers range in height from very thin to a half page. Remember that the main reason people visit your site is its content, and the more they have to scroll down past your header to get to the content, the less interested they tend to be. Help lead them to the content with your header.

Think "Site Identity."

A header is part of the site's identify or "brand" and people like to know they are on the same site when they click a link to another page within that site. Consider your header or header art as your site's "brand identity".

## ***Header Resources and Information***

### **Header Images**

Many WordPress [Themes](#) come with header image graphics you can use because they are released for free use under the [GPL - General Public License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>). Or you can use one of the many resources available for free on the Internet, or design your own.

Here are a few resources for header images:

- [Digital Westex Image Gallery WordPress 1.5 Header Art Replacements](http://www.digitalwestex.com/gallery/thumbnails.php?album=6) (<http://www.digitalwestex.com/gallery/thumbnails.php?album=6>)
- [Image \\* After - Free Stock Image Library](http://www.imageafter.com/) (<http://www.imageafter.com/>)
- [Stock.xchng - Free Stock Image Library](http://www.sxc.hu/) (<http://www.sxc.hu/>)
- [About.com's Webclipart Welcome, Headers, and Logos](http://webclipart.about.com/od/msubwelcaa/) (<http://webclipart.about.com/od/msubwelcaa/>)

### **Header Information**

- [Designing Headings](#)
- [Kubrickr - Changes Default Theme Header Images](http://www.redalt.com/Tools/kubrickr.php) (<http://www.redalt.com/Tools/kubrickr.php>)
- [Experiments with CSS headings, background images, and more](http://www.cameraontheroad.com/index.php?cat=68) (<http://www.cameraontheroad.com/index.php?cat=68>)
- [Using Real Headers](http://diveintoaccessibility.org/day_27_using_real_headers.html) ([http://diveintoaccessibility.org/day\\_27\\_using\\_real\\_headers.html](http://diveintoaccessibility.org/day_27_using_real_headers.html))
- [Yale Manual: Headers and Footers - The best measure of home page efficiency](#)