

How to change your domain name

Overview

This guide takes you through changing your domain name. While there are many reasons for doing so, one generally stands out: you've pivoted your business so a domain name that was a great fit originally no longer works.

You may want to change to one that better matches, or you may be changing to a simple named domain (i.e. www.jonathanballinger.com).

Setting up the new domain

I know you're eager to get your website set up on your new domain, so we'll dive straight in.

Mostly.

We're going to spread this over three sections, and each section contains some action steps. The action steps in each section should take no more than 15 minutes to do.

This section will take you from where you are now: with a WordPress website that's hosted on WPEngine, using a domain that no longer fits your niche or your business, to: a WordPress website that responds on your new domain name and fits your niche perfectly.

There are a few prerequisites that you'll need to follow along with this guide, so I'll briefly cover those.

Prerequisites

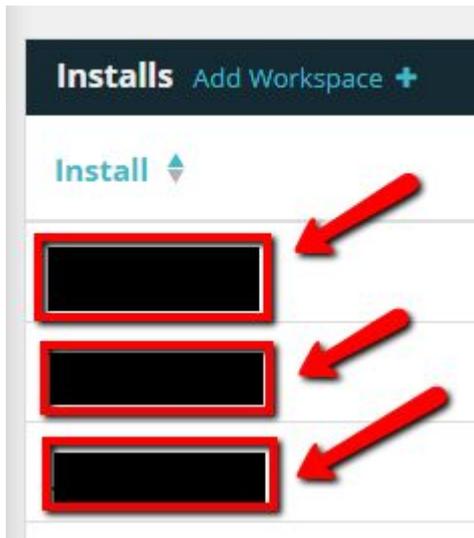
- **You have a Wordpress domain hosted on WPEngine.** Other managed hosts may follow broadly the same steps. Self-hosted websites will not.
- **You have a DNS service you are able to log into and use.** The steps in this guide will use 123-reg and GoDaddy. If you have a different DNS to those two, and are unsure how to transfer the steps in this guide to your particular DNS, [shoot me an email](#).
- **You have two or more domains, one of which is currently serving your Wordpress website.** All domains must be assigned to DNS services that you have the ability to log into.

If you have everything on that list of prerequisites, we're good to go.

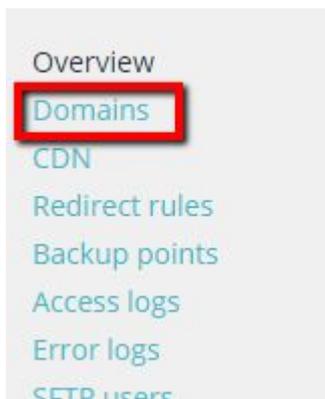
Setting up your DNS for the new domain

The first stepping stone in the process is to point the new domain at your WPEngine installation. To do that, follow the steps:

1. Locate your WPEngine installation CNAME or A entry details by clicking on your WPEngine installation.



- 2.
3. Then click on Domains to the left



- 4.
5. Write down the details you see here



- 6.
7. Add the corresponding CNAME or A entry to your DNS

For 123-reg:

1. Select your domain from the drop down on the Control Panel and pick Manage
2. Under Advanced domain settings, click Manage DNS (A, MX, CNAME, TXT, SRV)
3. Click the "advanced DNS editor" hyperlink

4. If you have an entry for @ that is of type A, click the pencil to edit it and change the IP address to whatever you have in your A record entry on WPEngine, otherwise add a new A record entry for @ with the IP address in the Destination field then Add it.
5. Add a record for www, of type CNAME, and point it at the CNAME record above, then click Add. If you have any other www entry, delete it.
6. Wait until the domain resolves to a WPEngine 404 page (should be instant if the domain was not previously used, could be a while if it was)

For GoDaddy:

1. Click your in the top menu, and pick Manage My Domains
2. Click the Gearwheel next to your domain, and pick Manage DNS from the menu that pops out
3. You will already have an @ entry of type A, click the pencil next to it to edit it and change the IP address to whatever you have in your A record entry on WPEngine, otherwise add a new record, then select Type as A. Enter @ in the Host field, and your WPEngine IP address into the Points to field, change the TTL to 1/2 Hour, and then click Save.
4. There will be a CNAME entry for www that is set to redirect to @. Edit this one (by clicking the pencil) and change the Points to field to the CNAME entry you obtained from WPEngine.
5. Wait until the domain resolves to a WPEngine 404 page (should be instant if the domain was not previously used, could be a while if it was)

Adding the new domain to WPEngine

Now that we have the domain resolving to WPEngine, we need to associate it with your installation. To do that, follow the steps:

1. Go to your WPEngine installation, and click Domains on the left hand side (as per step 1 and 2 previously)
2. Click the Add domain button
3. Type in the full domain you want to add (you'll steps 2 and 3 twice, once for www.yourdomain.com and once for yourdomain.com)

4. WPEngine will likely say "Failed check" next to the two newly added domains. Don't worry about this as it's likely just a false error. These checks are done every few hours.

Try your new domain. Does it resolve to the site?

If so, you're ready for the next part in which we continue the process.

If not, wait a few hours and try again. If it doesn't resolve after a few hours, check that you entered the domains correctly.

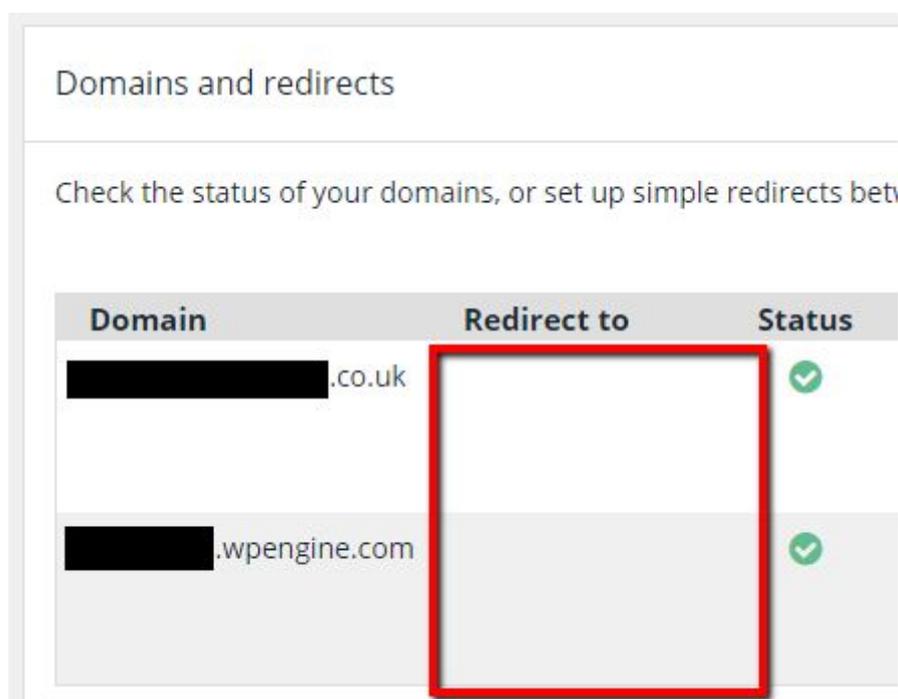
If all else fails, just [get in contact](#)..

Verifying the new domains and setting up the priorities

In the last section, we ended with your Wordpress website responding to your new domain, the one that fits your niche and business.

You'll notice that the site will redirect to whatever you had before. That's because the priority is whatever has been set up in Wordpress.

Now we're going to correctly configure the domain priorities.



In the image, you'll notice the blank spaces in the Redirect to column. This is bad as it means that there is no canonical URL in place. Both domains will resolve and not change.

What you want is to set it up so that the *.wpengine.com domain, plus any others you have on your site (for instance, the old URLs) all redirect to your preferred new domain.

I strongly recommend that this be the www.yournewdomain.com URL, but it can be whichever you would prefer.

To set it up correctly, we have a few tasks to do. **Do not skip steps here, or jump ahead.**

Doing so may result in your site ending up in a **Redirect Spiral of Doom**. If you do manage to get your domain caught up in that, I've added some info specifically relating to getting out of

that particular fix at the end of this section and you can always [email me if you run into problems](#) and can't get out of the RSoD.

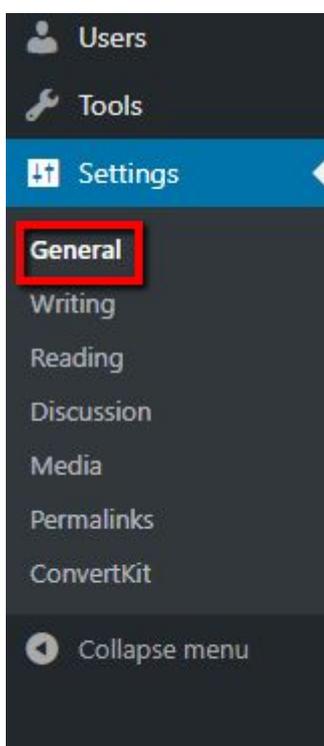
First, follow the following step for your preferred domain only:

1. Click Set as primary in the far right column for the row belonging to your preferred domain. The three options in the Edit column should now grey out.

Well, that bit was easy enough!

Now we need to set Wordpress to use that domain as the primary domain also:

1. Go to your Wordpress WPAdmin dashboard
2. Click Settings in the left hand menu and pick General

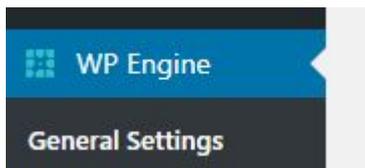


- 3.
4. Enter your new domain into both boxes highlighted in the image below, using the www variant, and replacing yournewdomain with whatever your URL actually is (changing the .com as well if needed).

WordPress Address (URL)	<input type="text" value="http://www.yournewdomain.com"/>
Site Address (URL)	<input type="text" value="http://www.yournewdomain.com"/>

- 5.
6. Save the settings.

7. Click the WP Engine icon at the top of the left hand menu in Wordpress



- 8.
9. Click Purge All Caches. This ensures that the site updates its address to what was entered in step 3.

Next, we need to add redirects to all the other domains in the list. Again be careful with the following steps.

For each domain other than your primary domain (the one with the grey text) carry out the following steps:

1. Click Add redirect
2. Pick your primary domain from the drop down list and click Save changes

You should see the primary domain appear in that domain's Redirect to column.

Continue for all your other secondary domains, including the *.wpengine.com one, until only the primary domain has no entry in its Redirect to column.

Now when you go to any domain that is not your primary domain, your browser should redirect you to the primary domain.

Give it a go, you'll know it's worked if the address bar in Chrome shows your primary URL.

All good? Great, you're done with this section.

Tomorrow we'll finalise the settings, including one great optional (but highly recommended) extra.

Redirect Spiral of Doom recovery

If you manage to get caught up in a Redirect Spiral of Doom, try the following steps. If none of them seem to do the job, [shoot me an email](#) and we'll get you straightened up.

First, a bit of explanation.

What's happened is your site has become muddled.

Let's say you have set `www.firstdomain.com` as your primary domain in WPEngine, and `first.wpengine.com` is set to redirect to `www.firstdomain.com`.

However Wordpress is set to `first.wpengine.com` as it wasn't changed before the redirect was put in place.

When you go to `www.firstdomain.com`, Wordpress interrupts and says "I think you meant to go to `first.wpengine.com`, I'll helpfully send you that way."

So you get bounced to `first.wpengine.com`, at which point WPEngine goes, "Ahh, hang on there my friend, you're in the wrong place. You should be at `www.firstdomain.com`, that's what it says here!"

So you get bounced back to `www.firstdomain.com`, only for Wordpress to repeat its bit. Then WPEngine repeats its bit, and in the end Chrome gives up and displays an error.

The easiest way to fix it is as follows:

1. Go through your domains in WPEngine and click Edit redirect on all the domains you redirected to your primary domain, and pick -- No redirect --, then Save changes
2. Click Utilities on the left hand side menu, and scroll to the bottom of the page. Click Clear cache
3. Go to your primary domain in Chrome, you should see a redirect to whatever your Wordpress settings were set to
4. Log into Wordpress
5. Go to Settings, General
6. Put your primary domain into both Wordpress Address (URL) and Site Address (URL) fields and Save Changes
7. Log back in to Wordpress, and you should see the URL change to your primary domain
8. Now, we can go back to WPEngine, and re-add the redirects to our primary domain on all of our secondary domains

If at this point you are still stuck in a Redirect Spiral of Doom, [reach out](#), and I'll help you recover the situation.

Finalising the settings, plus a bonus

At the end of the previous section, we left it with your Wordpress website behaving as if your new primary domain was the ONLY domain it was registered on, even if you went to an old URL. This is great, and we're 80% of the way there.

Today's email is about all those little settings that aren't critical, but are good to correct.

First of all, you'll want to go through your articles and correct any links directly referencing your old site URL, and correct them to the new site URL.

If you used relative links (links starting with / rather than http://) in your articles, you're good and don't have to do anything further with your links.

Next, you'll want to go to Wordpress and click Appearance, Menus.

Go through your Menu Structure, and ensure any absolute links (http style links) are corrected to refer to your new URL. Any that refer to a Page are handled by Wordpress.

With those two things done, we're now 85% of the way there.

Next, you'll want to inform Google of your change of Domain. That process changes every now and then, so I'll [link to Google's documentation for that](#).

After that, there's just 5% left to do, and it's optional, but strongly recommended.

We're going to add SSL to your site. You've gone to the trouble of fixing the URL, why not go all the way and massively increase your trust levels with your audience?



I'm sure you've seen that padlock before.

Here's how to get it on your site.

1. Go to your [WP Engine dashboard](#), go to your Wordpress install, and click SSL on the lefthand side
2. Click Add Certificates
3. Click Get FREE certificates

4. Click the checkbox next to your primary domain, and confirm you've read the Terms and Conditions, then click Request SSL Certificate
5. Wait a while until WPEngine emails you to confirm the certificate has been set up
6. Once the email has arrived, go to WPEngine dashboard's SSL section again
7. Click Secure specific URLs in the row for your primary domain
8. Ensure Auto renew is checked
9. Select the Secure all URLs radio button
10. Click Save all changes
11. Go to your Wordpress install, and log in to WPAdmin
12. Go to Settings, General and update your Wordpress Address (URL) and Site Address (URL) to be https:// rather than http://, keeping the rest of it the same

Now, your site should be showing the Secure padlock in Chrome on every page you visit. If it's not, you have references to javascript files that are http:// rather than https://. Just go through the content of any pages like that to find the reference and update it.

Any issues, just [email me](#).

Conclusion

And with that, you've reached the end of this guide to changing your domain name.

Well done.

You've achieved something with your site that many feel is beyond them.