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Block theme or classic theme in WordPress: what is the difference and which to pick

WordPress & Site Builders

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Block theme or classic theme in WordPress: what is the difference and which to pick

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Short answer: with a **block theme** you edit the whole site (header, footer, page templates) using the same blocks you write with. With a **classic theme** the structure lives in PHP files and you change it through menus such as Customize and Widgets. For a new site built by someone who does not code, a block theme is usually simpler. You keep the classic one when a plugin or a developer depends on it.

How to tell which you have

In the WordPress dashboard, open the **Appearance** menu. A block theme normally shows an **Editor** entry. A classic theme shows **Customize** (the Customizer), with **Widgets** and **Menus** as separate entries. Some themes mix the two, so check the theme's own page as well.

Side by side

	Block theme	Classic theme
Where you change the header and footer	In the Site Editor, with blocks.	In Customize, in Widgets and in the theme's own options.
Page templates	Built with blocks and editable in the Editor.	PHP files, editable only by someone who knows code.
Styles (colours, fonts)	In the Editor, through global styles.	In Customize or the theme options, depending on the theme.
Does it survive a theme update?	Your changes in the Editor are kept in the database, apart from the theme files. You can reset them to the original.	Changes to theme files are lost in an update. Customize options stay. For code, use a child theme.
Plugins and builders	Most work. Some older ones assume a classic theme.	Works with everything made for WordPress over the years.

How to choose, in four steps

1. **Look at what you already have** in the Appearance menu, as above. If the site works and nobody is complaining, there is no hurry to change type.

2. **Decide who edits.** Someone who does not code but wants to change the header or the templates is better served by blocks. Someone with a developer working in PHP may prefer the classic.

3. **Check with the plugins you use.** On the page of each essential plugin (shop, bookings, builder) see whether it mentions compatibility with block themes.

4. **Rehearse on a copy.** Switching theme changes the design, and switching type also changes how menus and widget areas are stored. Do it first on a test site: **a test site before touching what is live**.

Moving from one type to the other is not just a change of looks.
Menus, widgets and sidebars may have to be rebuilt, and the design changes. Take a copy first and follow **switching themes without losing the site**.

If you stay with a classic theme and want code changes that survive updates, the way is a child theme: **child theme or direct editing**. And if what you are after is an editor for pages rather than the whole theme, compare **the block editor and Elementor**.

NEED A HAND?

Not sure your theme can take a change? Tell us what you use.

Open a support ticket →

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