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A test copy (staging) of your WordPress site: changing things safely

Install, Move & Update

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Interweb Angola
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A test copy (staging) of your WordPress site: changing things safely

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The short answer: a test copy is a **second site, identical to yours, that only you see**. You try the new theme, the big update, the plugin you do not know there. If it goes well, you repeat it on the real site; if it goes badly, you delete the copy and nobody noticed. It lives on a subdomain, with a separate database.

What the copy needs

Piece	How
A separate address	A subdomain (for example, test.your-domain.com): **Subdomain or folder**.
The files	Copied into the subdomain's folder.
A new database	With a copy of the site's data and its own user. Never the same one as the real site.
The addresses swapped	The addresses inside the copy must point to the subdomain: **Replacing old addresses**.
Closed to the world	With a password on the folder and kept out of Google: **Password protecting a folder**.

Step by step

1. **Take a backup** of the real site: **What to back up before you update**.
2. **Create the subdomain** and copy the site there. A migration plugin does this almost by itself: **Migrating with a plugin**.
3. **Put the copy behind a password** and, under Settings > Reading, tick "Discourage search engines from indexing this site".

4 **On shops and sites with payments,** switch off e-mails and real payments in the copy. Otherwise the copy may charge or write to real customers.

5 **Make the changes there,** test, and then repeat them on the real site calmly. When done, delete the copy.

Do not bring the copy back over the real site

if the site receives orders, comments or sign-ups: you would lose what came in meanwhile. On read-only sites it may be acceptable. If in doubt, repeat the changes by hand.

A copy indexed by Google creates duplicate pages and confusion. Make sure it is closed: **robots.txt and sitemap.xml**. And test that your backup restores: **Testing a backup**.

NEED A HAND?

Want help setting up a test copy? Open a ticket with the address.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- Subdomain or folder: where to put a blog, a shop or a test site →
- Testing a backup: a restore drill on a test subdomain, step by step →
- Migrating WordPress with a plugin: how it works and where it fails →
- Password protecting a folder with Directory Privacy →
- robots.txt and sitemap.xml: what they do and how to check them →

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