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Generated on 15/11/2026 00:09

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Changing the WordPress site address, and what breaks when it goes wrong

Install, Move & Update

CODE	VERSION	COUNTRY · LANGUAGE
RLX-AO-KB-602	v2026.09.27	Angola · English

Interweb Angola
RLX Angola, Lda. · Group RLX Holdings
Tax ID (NIF) 500 260 5724 · Commercial registration no. 26464-25/250724

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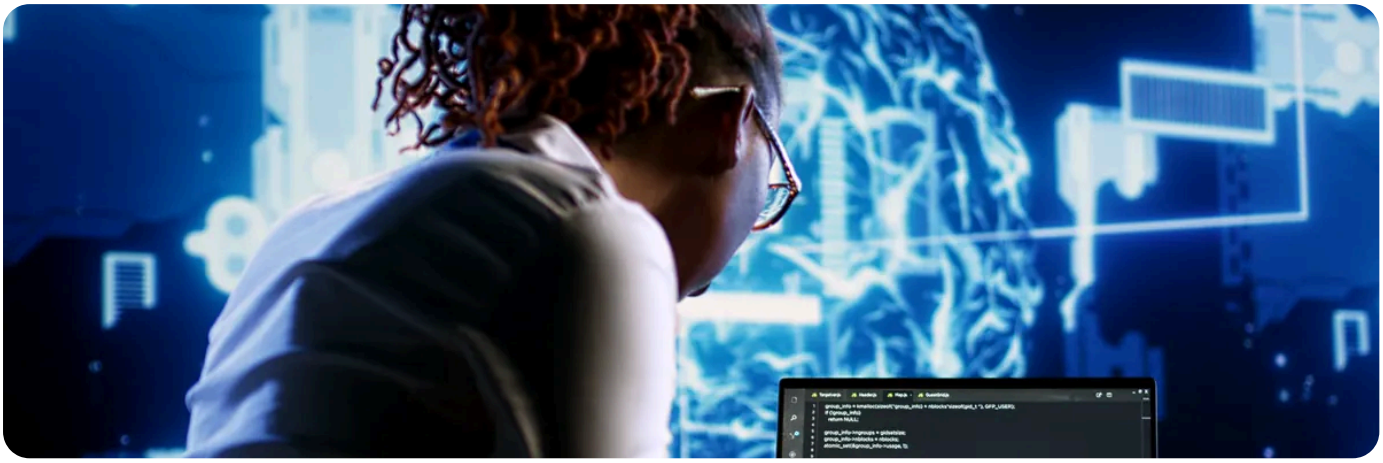
Changing the WordPress site address, and what breaks when it goes wrong

Install, Move & Update Created on **September 27, 2026** 3 min read



WordPress stores the site address in two fields, and confusing them is behind half the sites that become unreachable after an apparently simple change.

Field	What it means
WordPress Address	Where the WordPress files sit.
Site Address	The address people type to reach the site.

On the overwhelming majority of sites the two are identical. They only differ when WordPress lives in a subfolder while the site appears at the root, which is an unusual arrangement made on purpose.

When you need to touch this

1. You changed the site's domain.
2. You moved the site from a subfolder to the root, or the other way round.
3. You moved from `http` to `https` and WordPress keeps writing the old addresses.
4. You decided to always use `www`, or to stop using it.
5. You worked on a temporary address and it is time to put the real domain in.

The right order

1. **Back up the files and the database.** If that step fails, do not do the rest.
2. **Check the new address already works.** The domain has to point here and open something. Setting the address to a domain that does not resolve yet locks you out.
3. **Change both fields** in Settings, General, and save. WordPress will make you sign in again, now on the new address.
4. **Replace the old addresses inside your content.** Images and links written with the full address still point at the old one. Do the replacement with a tool built for it, never with a plain find and replace in the database.
5. **Save the permalinks again**, in Settings, Permalinks. Just open and save: that is what rewrites `.htaccess`.
6. **Clear every cache**: the plugin, the browser, and the delivery network if you use one.
7. **Walk the site.** Front page, an inner page, a post, an image, and the contact form.

> **Never run a plain text replacement directly on the database.**
> A good deal of WordPress settings are stored in a format that records the length of every string. Swapping the text without fixing the length breaks those values, and the result is settings that quietly disappear. Use a proper search and replace tool, which knows how to handle it.

From the panel, without entering the site

The WordPress tool in cPanel, in the **Domains** section, carries an option to change the site address. It is the safest road, because it does not depend on being able to reach the WordPress dashboard.

There is also an emergency exit: writing the address into `wp-config.php`. Two lines, `WP_HOME` and `WP_SITEURL`, override whatever is in the database and make the site reachable again. The settings fields become uneditable while those lines are there, which is how you know they are working.

What breaks, and how to recognise it

Symptom	Cause
The site redirects forever and the browser gives up	The two fields disagree, or an `.htaccess` rule or a plugin is still sending people to the old address.

Symptom	Cause
You cannot reach the dashboard	The stored address points somewhere that does not answer. Use the `wp-config.php` lines.
The padlock has gone	Images or files are still loaded over `http`. See **the causes, in order** and **forcing HTTPS**.
404 on every page except the front one	The `.htaccess` was never rewritten. Save the permalinks again.
Broken images	Old full addresses were left inside the content. Step 4 is missing.
You still see the old site	Cache. See **the cache that fools you**.

If what changed is the domain on the plan itself, and not only the address inside WordPress, start with **changing the domain on your plan**.

NEED A HAND?

Changed the address and lost the site? Send us the old address and the new one, and we will sort it.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **WordPress hosting** →
- **Hosting migration** →
- **Support Policy** →

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RLX-AO-KB-602 · v2026.09.27 · Generated on 15/11/2026 00:09