Bud E. Smith

Sams Teach Yourself

Tumblr®

in 10 Minutes

SAMS

Sams Teach Yourself Tumblr® in 10 Minutes
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Introduction

Tumblr has gradually, well, tumbled into a position of respect, even awe, among people who use blogging tools such as WordPress and Blogger, microblogging tools such as Twitter, and online destinations such as Facebook. Tumblr is a hot site and a new service that has steadily grown in usage and reputation. It's a solution to problems you only gradually realize that you have as you use the new communication tools.

Tumblr serves as a vital intermediary and connecting point between tweets, blog posts, and multimedia presentations, combining the immediacy of Twitter (or an in-person conversation) and the permanence of a well-managed blog. The rules for using Tumblr to its best advantage are still evolving; this book shows you how to get around Tumblr and make the most of it in just a few minutes at a time. By the end, you'll have a tumblog you can be proud of!

About This Book

As part of the *Sams Teach Yourself in 10 Minutes* guides, this book aims to teach you the ins and outs of using Tumblr without using a lot of precious time. Divided into easy-to-follow lessons that you can tackle in about 10 minutes each, you learn the following Tumblr tasks and topics:

- How to easily set up a Tumblr account
- How to create and manage a simple tumblog
- How to choose a theme for your tumblog
- How to select and use a custom domain name
- How to keep your tumblog within the Tumblr Terms of Service
- Finding useful tumblogs
- How to post text to Tumblr

- How to use links in your posts
- How to use HTML code in your posts
- How to quote other online sources in your tumblog
- How to post photos and video in your tumblog
- How to post audio clips
- How to post by email and from your cell phone
- How to reshape the look and feel of your tumblog
- How to add commenting capability to Tumblr
- How to use Tumblr and Twitter together
- How to tie Tumblr to your blog

After you finish these lessons, and the others in this book, you'll know all you need to know to take your tumblog(s) with you as far as you want to go.

Who This Book Is For

This book is for anyone interested in learning to use Tumblr effectively. Whether you've never seen a tumblog or have maintained one for a long time, this book shows you how to use each major feature of the site. For example, have you always wanted a home for your Twitter tweets? A place where you can blog freely and easily and readily share content from your own online experiences? How about a kind of staging area for all sorts of media content, which you can then add to a standard blog when you want to? You'll learn how to accomplish all this and more.

Each lesson focuses on one specific topic, such as getting your initial tumblog up or posting video to Tumblr. You can skip around between one topic and another or read the book through from start to finish.

What Do I Need to Use This Book?

Using this book is easy; you just need to be curious and interested in what you can do with Tumblr. To use Tumblr, all you need is a computer, a web

browser, and an Internet connection—even a smartphone has enough computing power to do the job. That's all. Tumblr is free to use, so if you have these three things, you're ready to go.

Conventions Used in This Book

Whenever you need to click a particular button or link in Tumblr or one of the other sites described in this book, you'll find the label or name for that item bolded in the text, such as "click the **Photo** button." In addition to the text and figures in this book, you also encounter some special boxes labeled Tip, Note, or Caution.

> TIP: Tips offer helpful shortcuts or easier ways to do something.

> NOTE: Notes are extra bits of information related to the text that might help you expand your knowledge or understanding.

> CAUTION: Cautions are warnings or other important information you need to know about consequences of using a feature or executing a task.

Screen Captures

The figures captured for this book are mainly from the Internet Explorer web browser (version 8.0). If you use a different browser, your screens might look slightly different.

Also, keep in mind that the developers of Tumblr and other tools shown in this book are constantly working to improve their websites and the services offered on them. Owners of tumblogs and other blogs are likely to be improving and adding to their sites as well. New features are added regularly to Tumblr and other web services, and old ones change or disappear. This means the pages change often, including the elements found on each, so your own screens might differ from the ones shown in this book. Don't be too alarmed, however. The basics, though they are tweaked in appearance from time to time, stay mostly the same in principle and usage.

LESSON 5

Changing the Appearance of Your Tumblog

In this lesson, you learn how to finish setting up your tumblog, including choosing a theme, changing various aspects of its appearance, and advanced settings.

Changing Your Tumblog's Appearance

Previous lessons described everything you have to do before starting to use your tumblog. After you have your account preferences set up, your basic customization settings the way you want them, and your URL decided, you can start posting and inviting people to visit your tumblog.

Before you start posting and inviting people to visit or at any time after, you can change other aspects of how your tumblog works. This includes the theme, or overall look of your tumblog, many other aspects of its appearance, and specific settings that control how your tumblog works.

> TIP: Other blogging platforms limit your ability to make big changes to the look of your blog. Some, such as WordPress.com, even charge money for it! Tumblr is a great, free, flexible place to experiment with changing the look and feel of your blog, as much or as little as you want to.

Changing Advanced Settings

Tumblr's settings under the Advanced menu are a bit confusing, but worth getting right and understanding, so you can change them if your needs change in the future.

To change advanced settings, begin by accessing the Advanced menu by following these steps:

1. From any screen in Tumblr, choose **Account**, **Preferences**.
2. On the Preferences page, click the **Customize Your Blog** button that displays in the top-right corner of the Preferences page or click the **Customize** link that displays at the bottom right of the page, above the Cancel button.

   The Customize page, with its generic tumblog, displays, as described in Lesson 3, "Customizing Info Settings for Your Tumblog."
3. Click the **Advanced** menu.

   The Advanced pull-down menu displays, as shown in Figure 5.1.
4. Change settings as described in the following section.

Setting Appearance-Related Advanced Options

Several advanced Tumblr settings relate to your blog's appearance and display in the upper part of the Advanced pull-down menu. Some of the settings display in Figure 5.1. Follow these instructions to set them:

- **Timezone**—(Default: U.S. East Coast, GMT-5.) Choose your timezone; Tumblr will use it to time stamp your blog posts, so this is important. You might want to change it when you travel, although that might be difficult to remember to do.
- **Add Custom CSS**—(Default: Empty, no custom CSS.) This text box enables you to enter Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) code that overrides code in your theme, if your theme allows this. (The

default Tumblr theme does, but others don't.) The role of CSS with Tumblr themes is explained in more detail later in this lesson.

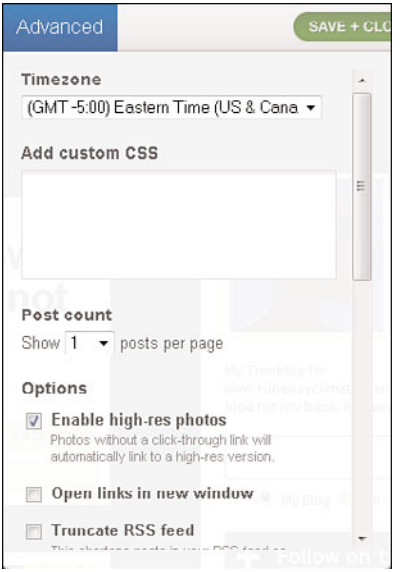

FIGURE 5.1 Tumblr Advanced options are a bit of a grab bag.

- **Post Count**—(Default: 10 posts.) Choose the number of posts to display in one web page before the user has to go to a new page to view more posts. You can choose from 1 to 15 posts; the default is 10. The actual length of the resulting page and how long it might take to load depends on the content of the posts. Because this includes posts from any tumblogs you follow, the length of the page is therefore unpredictable.

NOTE: If you've turned on Infinite Scrolling in Preferences, as described in Lesson 2, "Signing Up and Setting Preferences for Tumblr," the post count choice is overridden in browsers that support Infinite Scrolling and is, in effect, infinite in those browsers. However, Internet Explorer, the most popular web browser on Windows PCs, does not support infinite scrolling at this writing.

- **Enable High-Res Photos**—(Default: Set, which means yes.) If you clear this check box, Tumblr displays a lower-resolution preview photo; if you leave it enabled, the full high-resolution photo displays in your tumblog. Uncompressed photos can easily be several megabytes in size and overfill the screen, so be careful.
- **Open Links in New Window**—(Default: Cleared, which means links are open in the same window, replacing your tumblog.) If you want to make all links open in a new window and keep your tumblog onscreen, select this check box. However, this might annoy users who are sophisticated enough to open a link into a new tab or a new window on their own when they want to.
- **Truncate RSS Feed**—(Default: Cleared, which means no truncation.) There's an old debate about whether RSS feeds should "give away the store" by including everything or "tease" by only offering parts of a post. There's not much sense in truncating feeds for most tumblogs.
- **Use Descriptive URLs**—(Set: Cleared, which means descriptive URLs are used.) With this option set, Tumblr adds a version of your post title to its URL, which makes the URL far more understandable to people. With this option cleared, the description is not added, which makes the URL shorter.
- **Promote Tumblr!**—(Default: Set, which means promotion is on.) With this option checked, a Follow button for your blog is shown even to non-Tumblr users. If they click it, visitors are invited to join Tumblr.

Setting Control-Related Advanced Options

The remaining advanced Tumblr settings relate to controlling how your blog works with other blogs and within Tumblr and the Web. These settings include the following:

- **Allow Search Engines to Index Your Tumblog**—(Default: Checked, which means yes.) If you want people to easily find your tumblog through search engines, leave this option selected;

otherwise, clear it. (If you're looking for work, remember that hiring managers routinely "Google" the names of applicants—that is, look them up on search engines, in Facebook, and so on. So you may want to leave uncheck the box.)

- **Promote Me on Tumblr**—(Default: Checked, which means yes.) If you want Tumblr to potentially highlight your page in its directory or elsewhere, leave this option selected. Many Tumblr users try hard to get this kind of attention.
- **Not Safe for Work (NSFW)**—(Default: Unchecked, which means no.) This check box serves as a warning that your tumblog might contain "adult" or risqué content. All it does is exclude your blog from Tumblr's directory and other collections; users don't have access to any setting to exclude NSFW content from their Tumblr viewing.

  Set NSFW if you intend to include or reblog risqué content in your tumblog. This setting is not foolproof, even within its limited scope, because content from people you follow might be risqué even if you hadn't intended to include such content in your own tumblog.

CAUTION: Tumblr has a reputation for having a somewhat rough and, well, tumble approach to risqué content. The guiding principle seems to be "we're all adults here," and Tumblr content is only lightly policed. With this prevailing atmosphere, it's easy to end up posting some risqué content of your own, or reblogging someone else's. This is unlikely to be criticized within Tumblr, but might look odd to outsiders.

You can keep the outside world out to a certain extent by not allowing search engines, not allowing your site to be promoted on Tumblr, and checking the Not Safe For Work option; however, if someone emails your tumblog's URL around, or posts it online, some of your friends or family members, a boss, or a hiring manager might take a dim view of the content. Be aware.

- **Location**—(Default: empty.) Enter as much location information as you care to. If you're worried about identity theft or other problems, a full address might be too much information to provide. A town or city name is probably safe, and a U.S. five-digit ZIP code might be fine as well.

Changing a Theme's Appearance

You can make changes in the default theme using options in the Appearance menu in the Customize area.

If you change to a different theme, all bets are off—that is, what you can change depends on how your new theme is set up. Each setting in the Appearance menu is turned on or off by each theme. If a theme has not turned on a setting, you won't be able to change that aspect of the theme's appearance using the Appearance menu.

The Appearance menu is great for "quick and dirty" changes to the default theme and other themes that allow it. You can learn whether a given theme allows specific changes via the Appearance menu by looking at the theme's HTML (HyperText Markup Language) with the guidance of the custom HTML Help page shown in Figure 5.4.

Follow these steps to customize the appearance of specific aspects of themes that support each kind of change—your changes show up in the example page as you work:

1. In the Customize area, click the **Appearance** menu.

   The Appearance menu displays, as shown in Figure 5.2.

2. To change the background color, click the color swatch next to the word Background.

   A simple color picker displays, as shown in Figure 5.3.

3. Choose a shade by moving the pointer next to the vertical bar up and down; choose a degree of saturation by moving the circular dot around in the field of colors.

   The color chosen is shown in the vertical bar to the right of the color picker.

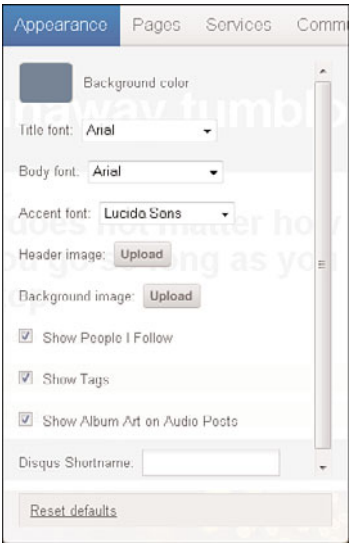

FIGURE 5.2 The Appearance menu is a big help with some themes.

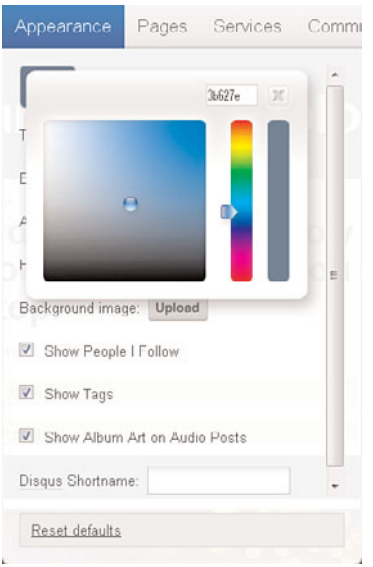

FIGURE 5.3 The color picker gives you a lot of options.

4. If you have a hexadecimal code you want to try, enter it in the upper part of the color picker. The other parts of the color picker adjust to show that color.

   A hexadecimal code is a way to specify a color in a concise, compact way. If you want to use hexadecimal codes, one good place to learn about and find them is the RGB Color Calculator at www.drpeterjones.com/colorcalc.

5. When you have the shade you want, click **the Close button** to close the color picker.

   Your chosen color displays as the background of the example.

6. Choose the title, body, and accent fonts from the pull-down menus.

   Experiment to see what looks good. Unusual fonts such as Copperlate Light and Impact are hard to balance with other fonts. Also, not all fonts are supported on all machines, with an especially big gulf between PCs and Macs. So your choices might not look the same on all users' machines.

7. Click the **Upload** button to change the header image and background image.

   Changing the header and background image can change the look of your tumblog and make it more personal. If you do change either or both of these images, consider changing the other settings to complement them.

8. Click the check box to change the settings for Show People I Follow, Show Tags, and Show Album Art on Audio Posts.

   Having these settings turned on increases the richness of your tumblog by adding information to it, so it's unusual to turn them off. If you're trying for a stark, uncluttered effect, that might be a reason to turn off some or all of them.

9. Enter your Disqus shortname.

   If you use the Disqus commenting tool, which you can learn more about at www.disqus.com, you can enter a shortname for it here.

10. Click the **Appearance** menu name to close the menu.

CAUTION: If you don't close the small Color Picker window by clicking the Close button in its upper-right corner, it stays onscreen even after you close the Appearance menu, hanging around like the ghost of Christmas past. Just click the Close button to get rid of it.

Four Ways to Change Your Tumblog's Appearance

Tumblr offers the following four ways to change the appearance of your tumblog; each of these overlaps in interesting ways:

- Use the Appearance menu in the Customize area to change the background color, background image, font, and so on of your blog, as described in the previous section. These settings always work on the default Tumblr theme, allowing extensive customization, but only some of them work on some other themes. (The choice of which customizations to allow is decided by the theme's author.)
- Use the Theme menu to choose a different theme from among hundreds of available themes. Then use the Appearance menu to change any settings that the chosen theme allows you to change.
- Use the Custom HTML button in the Theme menu to enter your own Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and CSS, either modifying an existing theme or choosing a new one of your own. This is explained in more detail later in this lesson.
- Use the Custom CSS area of the Advanced menu in the Customize area, described earlier in this lesson, to add a block of custom CSS to the current theme. As with the settings in the

Appearance menu, this can be allowed or blocked by the theme's author.

> TIP: In the beginning, you might want to see how far you can get with editing the options in the default theme before changing your theme, as described in the previous section. However, part of the fun of Tumblr is messing around with themes, so you might end up doing it yourself eventually.

The Appearance menu and the Theme menu were described in previous sections in this chapter. The next section introduces HTML, CSS, and the differences among them.

HTML Basics for Tumblr

HTML is the original language used to create web pages.

HTML is the text that normally displays in your web page, plus tags that have various effects. It has a fair amount of power but doesn't allow for detailed positional control of exactly where various text and graphical elements on a web page go. Following are a few examples of HTML in action:

- **The bold and italics tags**—The bold tags—`<b>` to begin bolding and `</b>` to end it—add bold style to text. Text that looks like `<b>this</b>` in HTML looks like **this** when displayed in a web browser. The `<i>` and `</i>` tags work the same way for italics.
- **The image tag**—To insert an image into a web page, put in the image tag and a link to where on the Web the image is. For example, use `<img href="www.google.com/intl/en_ALL/images/logo.gif">` to insert the Google logo in your web page.
- **Hyperlinking**—To make text a hyperlink, surround it with the `<a>` and `</a>` tags, including the destination of the link. For example, with the following `<a href="www.sardis.com">my favorite restaurant</a>`, the words "my favorite restaurant"

display underlined and in the link color, usually blue; clicking the link takes you to the website for Sardi's restaurant in New York City.

You can learn much more about HTML from many websites, books, and people you might know from whom you can learn it. It's too large of a topic to be covered in this book.

CSS in Tumblr

CSS is a clever way to allow specific formatting of web content, such as fonts, text size, the location of the various elements on a web page, and more. If you don't already know CSS, you can learn a great deal about it from websites, books, and by experimenting in Tumblr.

HTML and CSS can be used to create a page layout into which new content—your tumblog postings—is more or less "poured." In Tumblr, this kind of page layout is called a theme.

You can access the HTML and/or CSS—they're often used in combination—that make up any of the themes in Tumblr and modify them. You can also create a whole new theme of your own.

Modifying and creating themes is a great "sandbox" for experimenting with and even learning HTML and/or CSS. However, creating a page layout that can support the pouring in of new tumblog postings, and never break—that is, get rendered as an unrecognizable mess—is not easy. Even themes available to you within Tumblr can break occasionally.

A useful page in Tumblr's Help area introduces the topic of creating a custom HTML theme, including the specifics of how various elements work with Tumblr, in some detail. It's shown in Figure 5.4 and is available at www.tumblr.com/docs/custom_themes.

This Help page is fairly advanced, but if you're bright and brave, you can get pretty far with it.

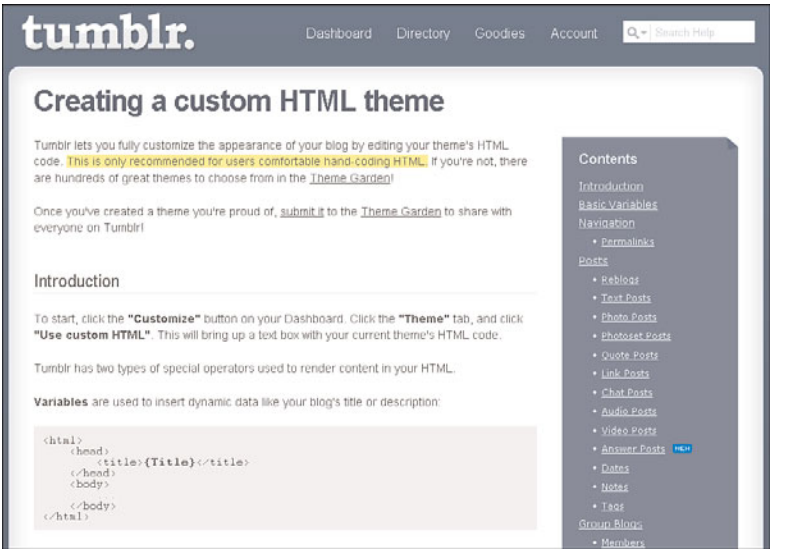

FIGURE 5.4 Tumblr gives you a leg up in theme editing.

Choosing a New Theme

Choosing a new Tumblr theme is easy, from a mechanical point of view. The difficult part is choosing from among the hundreds of available themes and deciding whether to take an existing theme as is, or add your own tweaks to it.

> TIP: Even if you're new at this, you might be able to choose a few simple aspects of a theme, such as the background image, color, and so on—either because the theme lets you change these directly in the Tumblr Appearance menu in the Customize area, or by going in and changing the HTML and CSS directly.

CAUTION: Fooling around with the HTML and CSS in your theme could possibly lead to the loss of your entire tumblog and its contents. The situation should be recoverable by switching from a broken theme to a different theme, or the default Tumblr theme, but I wouldn't bet a few hundred posts on it. Consider creating a new tumblog and experimenting with theme changes there before committing a lot of valuable posts to a new, unproven theme.

Follow these steps to choose a new theme for your tumblog:

1. In the Customize area, click the **Theme** menu.

   A selection of about 40 themes displays, as shown in Figure 5.5. You can choose one directly. Simple themes, such as the Easy Reader theme in Figure 5.5, are the easiest to customize, but you might not know where to make changes to liven it up. A theme that's close to what you want, but that has the wrong picture or color scheme, might be easy to modify.

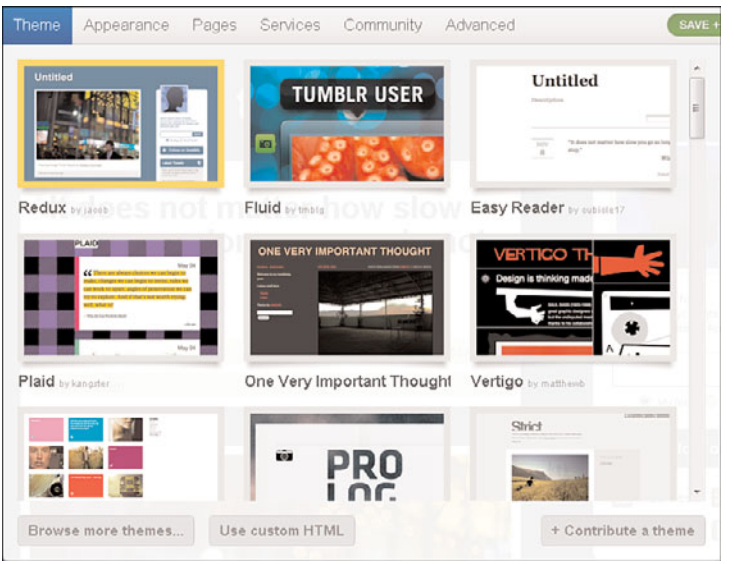

FIGURE 5.5 Tumblr's Theme menu includes a few dozen themes.

2. Choose a theme from the ones available, or scroll to the bottom and click the **Browse More Themes** button.

   If you click **Browse More Themes**, the Theme Garden displays, as shown in Figure 5.6.

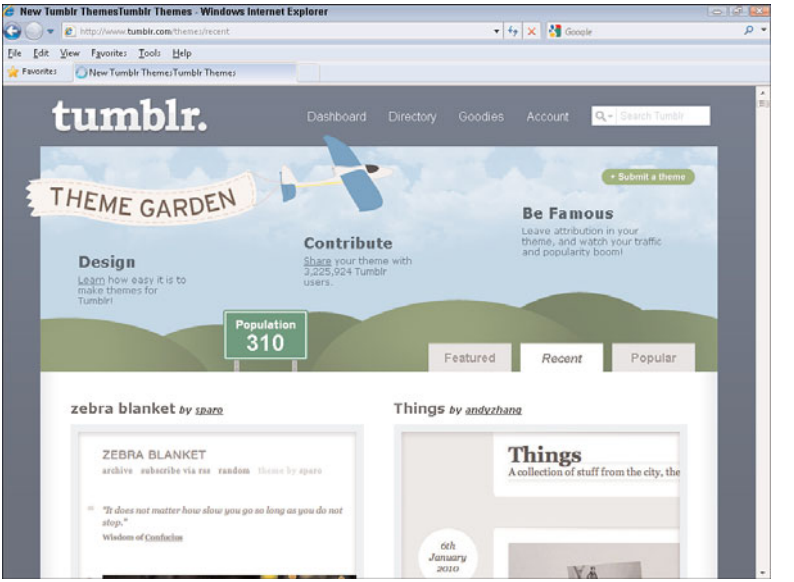

FIGURE 5.6 The Theme Garden includes hundreds more themes.

3. To examine the Theme Garden, click the **Featured**, **Recent**, and **Popular** tabs.

   Each theme shows how many people are using it from among Tumblr's millions of users.

4. Click a theme from directly under the Theme menu, or in the Theme Garden, to choose it.

   A list of additional themes from the same theme creator, if any, displays.

5. To preview the theme with your content, click **Preview** (I recommend previewing before making a selection).

   See how the theme looks with your content.

6. To put the theme into effect, click Install Theme.

Your tumblog now uses the selected theme.

Customizing a Theme

Starting to customize a theme is easy. The tricky part is stopping!

Follow these steps to customize a theme for your tumblog:

1. Choose a theme, as described in the previous section.
2. In the Customize area, click the **Theme** menu.
3. Scroll to the bottom of the Theme menu and click the **Use Custom HTML** button.

   The HTML and CSS code for your theme displays, as shown in Figure 5.7. To see the Help page for HTML shown in Figure 5.4, click **Theme Docs**.

4. Make changes to the HTML and CSS for your theme. To preview the pages, click **Update Preview**.

   The preview beneath your theme is updated.

5. Continue making changes until you're happy with the result.
6. Copy and paste your HTML and CSS into a document using Windows Notepad or any other text editor; then save it so you have a copy.

   You can get a free text editor for your specific type of computer on sites such as CNET's Download.com.

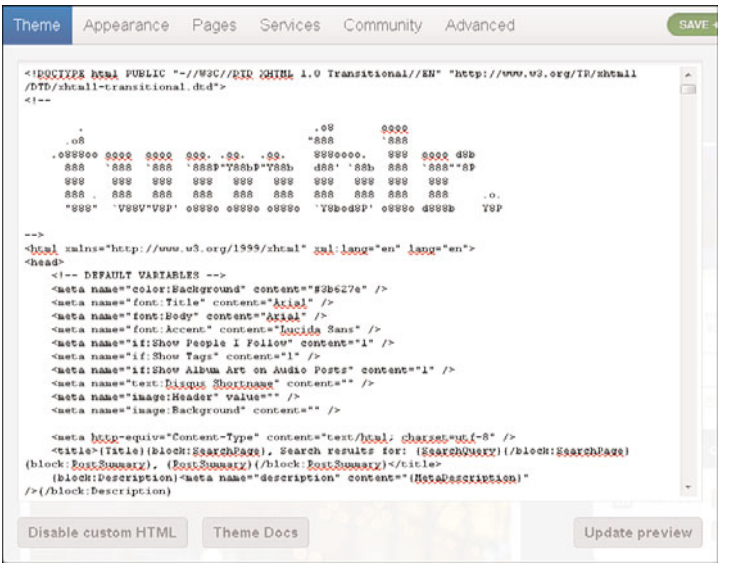

FIGURE 5.7 HTML and CSS code are behind your Tumblr theme.

7. Click the **Theme** menu to hide the customized HTML.

   You can continue using the changed HTML as long as you like.

Colors in Web Pages

Colors for web pages are sometimes specified by words, which gives you a limited choice, but more often by an odd kind of number called a hex code, short for hexadecimal codes. A hex code for a web color is six digits, and each digit can be either the usual 0–9 or the letters A–F, with A representing 10, B representing 11, and so on. Each position is a power of 16.

Colors are specified in Red, Green, Blue (RGB) order, two hexadecimal digits per color. So, the hex code #FFFFFF (the # indicates a hex code) means “full red, full green, full blue.” You might remember from science or art class that turning up all the colors all the way results in white.

You don't really need to know more than that; just use the simple color picker in the Tumblr Appearance menu in the Customize section described earlier in this lesson, or look up "color picker" in a web search engine and find a tool that lets you choose a color using sliders or knobs and gives you the RGB hex code of the color you choose. Then you can put it into your HTML or CSS, or even into the color picker in the Appearance menu, to specify a color.

That's just the mechanical part, though. The art of choosing useful color combinations is, well, an art! That's the fun part, but don't expect to find the best color combination for your blog quickly.

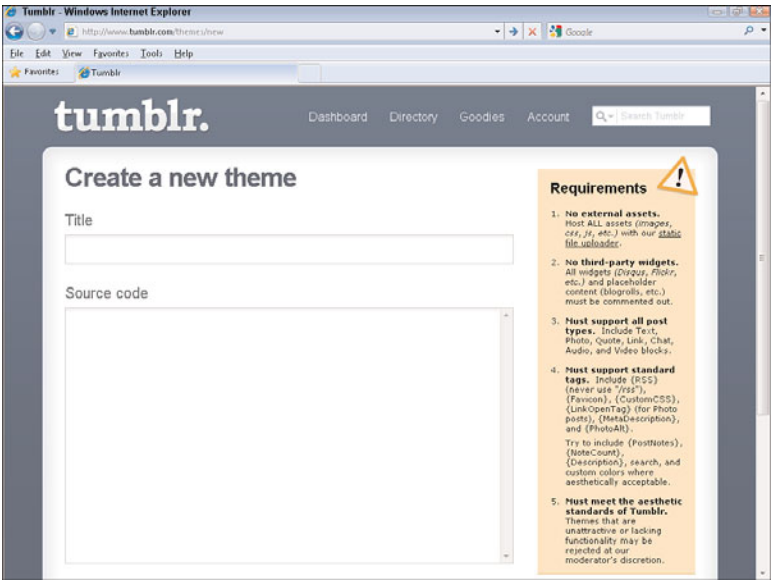

FIGURE 5.8 You can submit your Theme to Tumblr's Theme Garden.

If you think you've created a good theme, go to the Theme Garden, as described in the previous section. (Going to the Theme Garden loses any unsaved changes to your custom HTML, which is why it's always good to

save your custom work first.) In the Theme Garden, click the **Submit a Theme** button to upload your theme for consideration by the gurus at Tumblr. The submission screen is shown in Figure 5.8. Note the admonition: "Themes that are unattractive or lacking functionality may be rejected at our moderator's discretion."

Summary

In this lesson, you learned how to take advantage of Tumblr's extensive range of prebuilt themes and its even more extensive customization capabilities. You can make your tumblog do almost anything you can imagine a web page doing.

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