Southern Dragon Publishing

Let's Talk About It | Website 101 Workshop

HANDOUT 1 OF 2 | Decisions, Platforms & Domains

March 16, 2026 | Presenter: Jolene MacFadden

Name: _____ Date: _____

SECTION 1 | The Decision Tree: Do I Need a Website?

Work through each question in order. Stop as soon as you hit a YES.

#	Question	If YES...
1	Are you traditionally published or actively querying agents?	**YES — You need a website. Publishers and agents Google you.**
2	Are you building or planning to build an email list?	**YES — You need a website. Your signup form needs a permanent home.**
3	Are you selling books, courses, or services directly (not just Amazon)?	**YES — You need a website. You need a transactional home base.**
4	Do you have three or more published books?	**YES — A website is strongly recommended. Your backlist deserves its own home.**

NO to all four questions? Start with a free alternative (Linktree, Carrd, or Google Sites) and revisit in 6 months.

My decision:

☐ I need a website	☐ I will start with a free alternative

SECTION 2 | Free and Low-Cost Platform Quick Reference

Platform	URL	Cost	Storage	Free Email	Best For
Linktree	linktr.ee	Free / $5 mo Pro	N/A	N/A	Social bio link hub. All your links in one place. Zero setup required.
Carrd.co	carrd.co	Free / $9 yr Pro	~1 page	Free Pro plan	One-page sites. Beautiful templates. Custom domain for just $9/year.
Google Sites	sites.google.com	Free	Unlimited	No	Multi-page. Integrates with Google Workspace. Basic but very reliable.
WordPress.com	wordpress.com	Free / $4 mo	3 GB free	No (paid plans)	Most powerful free tier. Personal plan ($4/mo) adds custom domain.
Squarespace	squarespace.com	$16 mo / $13 annual	Unlimited	Yes (all plans)	Beautiful templates. Best all-in-one option for non-technical authors.
Wix	wix.com	Free / $17 mo	500 MB free	Yes (paid plans)	Drag-and-drop editor. Large template library. Free plan shows Wix ads.

** Prices correct as of March 2026. Always verify on the provider's website before signing up.*

SECTION 3 | Top 5 Hosting Providers for Authors: Research Worksheet

Use this worksheet to compare providers. Fill in current pricing directly from each provider's website.

1. Bluehost | bluehost.com

WordPress officially recommends Bluehost. Frequent promotional pricing. Good beginner support.

Monthly cost	**Annual cost (total)**
Free domain included?	**SSL certificate**
Professional email included?	**Storage (GB)**
Automatic backups?	**CDN included?**
One-click WordPress?	**Money-back guarantee**
My rating (1-5)	

Notes:

2. SiteGround | siteground.com

Excellent speed and support. Free daily backups. Slightly higher price but strong reliability.

Monthly cost	**Annual cost (total)**
Free domain included?	**SSL certificate**
Professional email included?	**Storage (GB)**
Automatic backups?	**CDN included?**
One-click WordPress?	**Money-back guarantee**
My rating (1-5)	

Notes:

3. Hostinger | hostinger.com

Most affordable entry point. Strong performance for the price. Good for tight budgets.

Monthly cost	**Annual cost (total)**
Free domain included?	**SSL certificate**
Professional email included?	**Storage (GB)**
Automatic backups?	**CDN included?**
One-click WordPress?	**Money-back guarantee**
My rating (1-5)	

Notes:

4. DreamHost | dreamhost.com

WordPress-recommended. 97-day money-back guarantee. Strong privacy stance — great for authors.

Monthly cost	**Annual cost (total)**
Free domain included?	**SSL certificate**
Professional email included?	**Storage (GB)**
Automatic backups?	**CDN included?**
One-click WordPress?	**Money-back guarantee**
My rating (1-5)	

Notes:

5. GreenGeeks | greengeeks.com

Eco-friendly hosting. Free domain, SSL, and daily backups included. Competitive pricing.

Monthly cost	**Annual cost (total)**
Free domain included?	**SSL certificate**
Professional email included?	**Storage (GB)**
Automatic backups?	**CDN included?**
One-click WordPress?	**Money-back guarantee**
My rating (1-5)	

Notes:

SECTION 4 | Domain Name Worksheet

Your domain name is your permanent address on the internet. Get your author name dot com if at all possible. Use Namecheap (namecheap.com) to check availability.

Your Author Name Options

List the name you publish under and any variations to try:

Primary pen name / author name:

Variation 1 (with middle initial):

Variation 2 (with 'author' or 'books'):

Series or brand name (if applicable):

Domain Extension Checklist

Prioritize .com above all others. Check each at Namecheap.com.

☐ .com (ALWAYS try this first)	☐ .net (second choice if .com taken)
☐ .org (if you run a community)	☐ .co (trendy but less trusted)
☐ .author (newer, niche)	☐ .books (newer, niche)

Domain I Plan to Register

Domain name selected:

Registrar I will use:

Annual cost:

Renewal date to calendar:

SECTION 5 | SSL Certificate — Non-Negotiable

An SSL certificate makes your site address start with https:// instead of http://. Without it, browsers display a 'Not Secure' warning. It also encrypts data between your site and your visitors.

SSL is REQUIRED if:

- ☐ You collect email addresses through a signup form
- ☐ You sell books, merchandise, or services directly on your site
- ☐ You use any contact form that collects personal information
- ☐ You want Google to rank your site (SSL is a ranking factor)

Good news: Most reputable hosts include a free SSL certificate via Let's Encrypt. Always verify before signing up.

My host's SSL policy: