

Joomla Basics

A training guide for managing your website

Getting Help

When you run into something unexpected, email is always the fastest path to a fix.

Email: support@thirdsun.com

When you write in, include:

- Your organization name and the URL of your site
- A clear description of what you need or what went wrong
- A link to the specific page you are working on
- A screenshot of what you are seeing
- Any error messages that appeared

Free monthly trainings: Register at thirdsun.com/support

Dashboard Overview

Logging In

1. Go to yoursite.com/administrator in your browser
2. Enter your username (all lowercase) and password
3. Click Log in — you will land on the Control Panel dashboard

Finding Your Way Around

Every Third Sun site is customized, so yours may look a little different — but the core areas are always in the same place.

Live Site Viewer	Top right corner — click here to see your live site
Users	Manage who can log in to the backend
Articles	All the text content on your site lives here
Categories	Folders that organize your articles
Modules	Blocks of content that appear in specific positions on the page (homepage sections, sidebars, etc.)
Components	Specialized tools like forms, pop-ups, and galleries
Note from Third Sun	Any important messages from your web team about your site

Tip: Keep two browser tabs open — one for the backend (administrator) and one for your live site. Refresh the live tab after saving to see your changes.

Articles & Categories

Think of categories as folders and articles as the documents inside them. Ex: A Staff category might hold one article per staff member. Most of your day-to-day editing happens at the article level.

Finding an Article

1. Dashboard → Articles
2. Use the Search bar to find by title keyword
3. Use Filter Options to narrow by category, status (published / unpublished), or author
4. Click the article title to open it

Publishing & Unpublishing

- A green checkmark in the article list means the article is live and visible to visitors
- Click the checkmark to toggle it to unpublished (grey circle) — the article disappears from the site but is not deleted
- You can also change the Status field from inside the article editor

Creating a New Article

1. Content → Articles → click the New button (top left)
2. Enter a title — this becomes the H1 heading on the page
3. Choose the correct Category from the dropdown on the right
4. Write your content in the editor
5. Set Status to Published when you are ready for it to go live
6. Click Save & Close

Important: Formatting can vary by category — if the backend view and/or the frontend styling looks different than you expected, check how other articles in that same category are formatted and copy their approach.

Categorizing

- Every article belongs to a category — choose it from the Category dropdown on the right side of the editor
- If you are not sure which category to use, look at a similar existing article and match it
- Contact support if you think you need a new category created

Versions

- Joomla saves a version history every time you save an article
- If you make a mistake and need to go back, click the Versions button (top center of the editor)
- Select the version you want to restore and click Restore

Warning: Never use the browser back button when you are in the article editor. Your changes will not be saved. Always use Save & Close or Save.

Basic Formatting

Consistency is the most important thing you can do for your site. When everything is bold, colored, or jumbo-sized, nothing stands out — and visitors tune it all out. A clean, consistent site feels trustworthy and is easier to read.

When in doubt: Open an existing article that already looks right and copy its formatting. Do not invent new styles.

Headings

- H1 is your page title — it is set automatically from the article title. Do not use H1 anywhere in the body.
- Start with Heading 2 for your first section, then Heading 3 underneath it, then Heading 4, and so on
- Never skip heading levels (do not jump from H2 straight to H4)
- Headings in order help screen readers navigate and improve accessibility for all visitors
- Heading 4 is commonly used for staff titles

Tip: If in doubt about which heading to use, look at how another page handles a similar piece of content.

Line Breaks

1. Enter = new paragraph (adds extra space below the line)
2. Shift + Enter = line break (stays visually tight with no extra space — useful inside a heading or for addresses)

Columns

1. Columns are created using the columns in the lefthand side of the text editor.
2. They are a great way to organize your information-dense pages to reduce scrolling
3. Columns automatically stack on mobile

Links

1. Highlight the text you want to turn into a link
2. Click the Link button in the editor toolbar
3. Paste the full URL — it must start with https://
4. For links that go to another website: set Target to New Window so visitors stay on your site
5. For links that go to another page on your own site: do not set a new window target

Tip: Use descriptive link text. Write Register for the event or Read our annual report instead of click here or a bare URL address.

Buttons

1. Type your button text on its own line
2. Highlight the text and click the Link button in the toolbar
3. Paste the URL
4. Click the Advanced tab in the link dialog

5. In the Classes field, type: btn
6. Click OK, then Save & Close and preview on the live site to confirm it styled correctly

Images — Intro and Full Image

Most articles have two image fields: the Intro Image (shown in list/blog views before a visitor clicks in) and the Full Article Image (shown at the top once they open the article). Both are set in the Images and Links tab at the bottom of the article editor.

- **Intro Image:** Appears in category blog views and news feeds. Keep it square or close to it for staff pages.
- **Full Article Image:** Shown at the top of the full article. Your site may use this as a header image — check with support if you are unsure.

File requirements for all images:

- Minimum width: 1,600 px (monitors are large now)
- Resolution: 72 dpi
- File size: 200–300 KB is ideal; under 1 MB is required
- Format: JPG or PNG

More info: thirdsun.com/help-docs/photos-and-images/size

Always add alt text for every image:

- Alt text is the description a screen reader speaks aloud and what search engines index
- Write it as a sentence describing what is in the image, not just a file name
- Example: Three volunteers planting trees at Liberty Park — not "volunteer-photo.jpg"

Extras

These features appear on some sites but not all. If you do not see one of these on your site, it may not be enabled.

Accordions

1. Accordions are the expandable / collapsible sections (click a question, the answer expands)
2. They are built with shortcode tags using { curly brackets } — do not delete or edit the brackets themselves
3. Find an existing accordion block in the editor
4. Select and copy just the opening title tag
5. Paste it where you want the new accordion to appear
6. Replace the title text and the answer text in the new block
7. Save & Close and preview on the live site to confirm it looks right

Important: New accordion blocks must be added above the closing tag at the very bottom of the article. Adding content below that tag will break the accordion.

Tabs

1. Like accordions, tabs are built with shortcode tags — do not edit the bracket syntax

2. To add a new tab, copy an existing tab block (opening tag through closing tag) and paste it before the final closing tag
3. Change the tab label in the opening tag and the content inside the block

Embed Codes (Newsletters, Maps, etc.)

1. Embed codes (from Mailchimp, Google Maps, YouTube, and similar services) must be pasted in the Source Code / HTML view of the editor
2. Click the Source Code button in the editor toolbar (it looks like < >)
3. Find the spot in the HTML where you want the embed
4. Paste the embed code
5. Click OK to return to the visual editor

Tip: Never paste embed code directly into the visual editor — it will display as broken text instead of rendering the embed.

YouTube Videos

1. Do not paste a YouTube URL directly into the editor text — it will not embed
2. On YouTube, click Share beneath the video, then click Embed
3. Copy the entire <iframe> code
4. In your article, click Source Code (< >) in the editor toolbar
5. Paste the iframe code where you want the video to appear
6. Click OK and Save & Close

Menus

1. Menus → Manage in the left sidebar shows all menus on your site
2. To add a page to the navigation: Menus → [Menu name] → Add New Menu Item → select the article
3. Renaming or moving menu items can change your URLs and break existing links — proceed carefully

When in doubt: Email support@thirdsun.com before making menu changes. It is easy to break things.

Convert Forms

- Your contact form and any other forms on the site are managed through Convert Forms
- Go to Components → Convert Forms → click the form name to edit it

To change where form submissions are sent:

1. Open the form editor
2. Look for the Tasks icon (plug symbol) in the right sidebar — there is no Emails tab
3. Click the email task to edit the notification address

Important: An article that contains a form shortcode must also be connected to a menu item for the form to appear on the site. If your form is missing, this is the first thing to check.

- After changing any form settings, submit a test entry to confirm delivery

Ordering — Staff Page

Joomla does not automatically sort articles alphabetically by default. If your staff page or any other list needs to be in a specific order, here is how to control it.

Option 1: Ordering Field

1. Go to Content → Articles
2. Filter by the Staff category (or whichever category you want to reorder)
3. Click the Ordering column header to sort the list by current order (Arrows to the left of “Featured”)
4. Drag the handle icon (six dots) on the left of each row to drag articles into the order you want
5. The order saves automatically as you drag

Option 2: Article Ordering Number

1. Open the article you want to move
2. In the right-hand panel, find the Ordering field
3. Enter a number (1 = first, 2 = second, and so on)
4. Save & Close

Tip: For the ordering to show up on the site, the category blog or list view must be set to sort by Article Order (not by date or title). Contact support if reordering does not seem to be taking effect.

Best Practices

- Your site is not a flier. Avoid posting images with text baked in — they are invisible to screen readers and nearly unreadable on mobile.
- Left-align your body text. Centered text is harder to read at length.
- Use heading order sequentially — never skip a level. H2, then H3, then H4.
- Do not bold, underline, or italicize entire paragraphs. Emphasis loses meaning when it is everywhere.
- Keep formatting consistent across all pages. Visitors notice inconsistency even when they cannot name it.
- Make sure images are sharp before uploading. Blurry or stretched photos undermine trust.
- When in doubt, copy formatting from a page that already looks right.
- When something feels risky or you are not sure — email support. That is what we are here for.

Help docs: thirdsun.com/help-docs — step-by-step guides for common tasks

Questions? support@thirdsun.com