Getting Started with Visual Composer on your Scripps WordPress site

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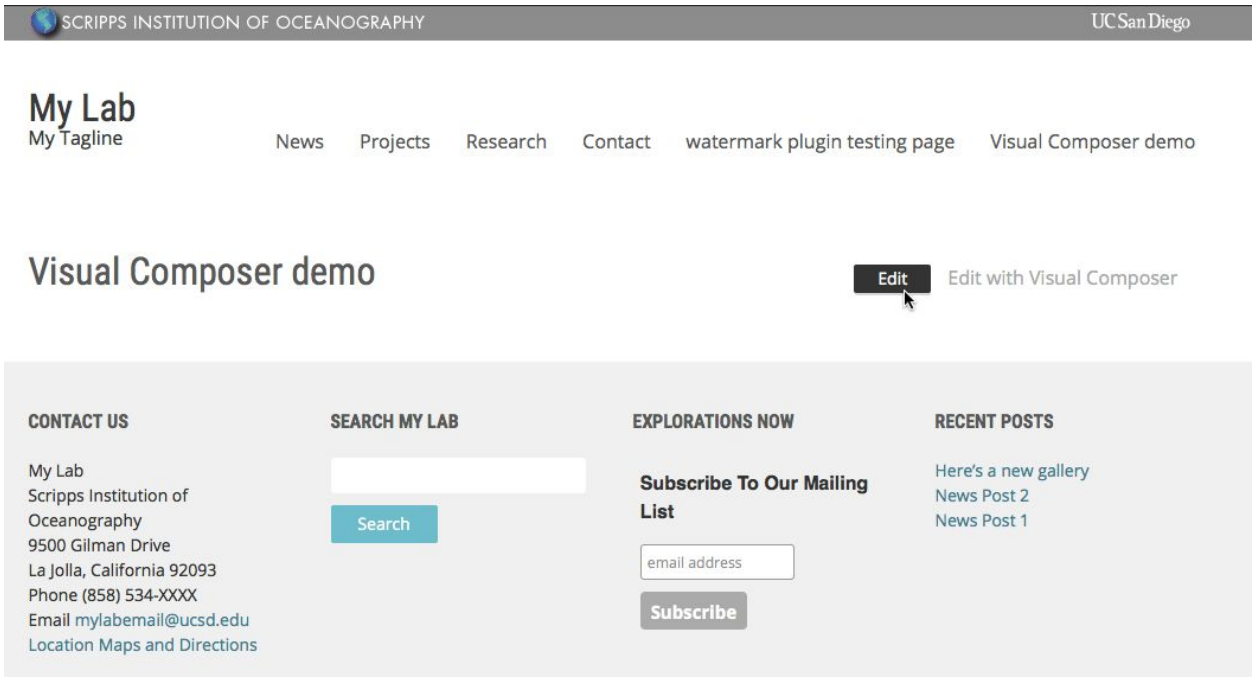
Visual Composer is an addition to WordPress that gives you detailed control over the layout of your front page. You will be able to divide up your home page into rows and columns and assign positions to pre-built components such as slideshows and carousels of blog posts.

Requirements: Visual Composer must be activated for you by Scripps IT and your website must be using a theme (template) that supports Visual Composer.

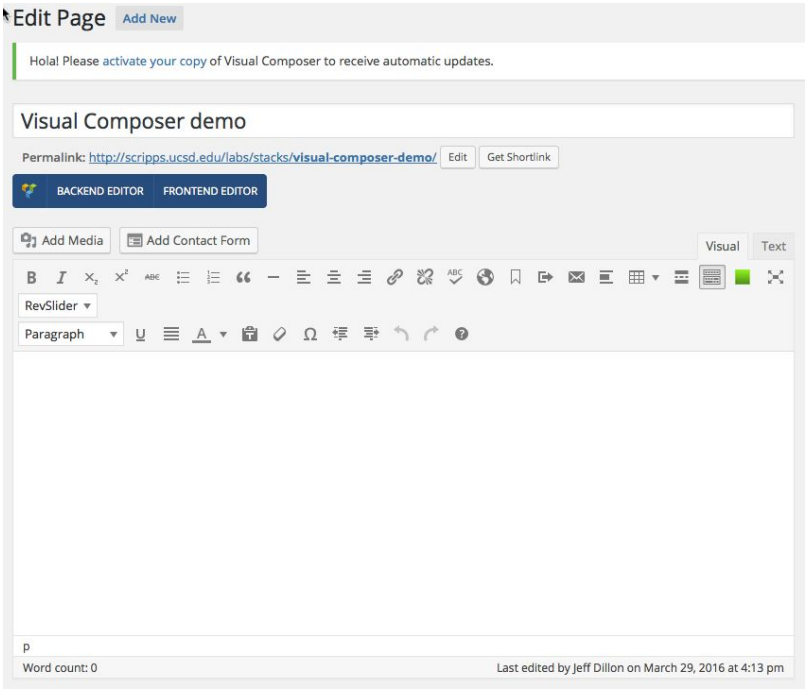
We can't address every Visual Composer option in this handout; a full set of tutorials and links to additional support are at https://vc.wpbakery.com/video-tutorials/.

Visual Composer pages are edited just like any other WordPress page -- but inside the body field will be a matrix for inserting page elements. An empty VC page will look like any other page, but if you are logged in to WordPress and you mouse over the right field you will see the option to Edit with Visual Composer:



You also can edit the page via the WordPress dashboard for your site.

In the editing view, your page will generally start in “Classic Mode” and show you a pair of blue buttons for the “Backend Editor” and the “Frontend Editor.”

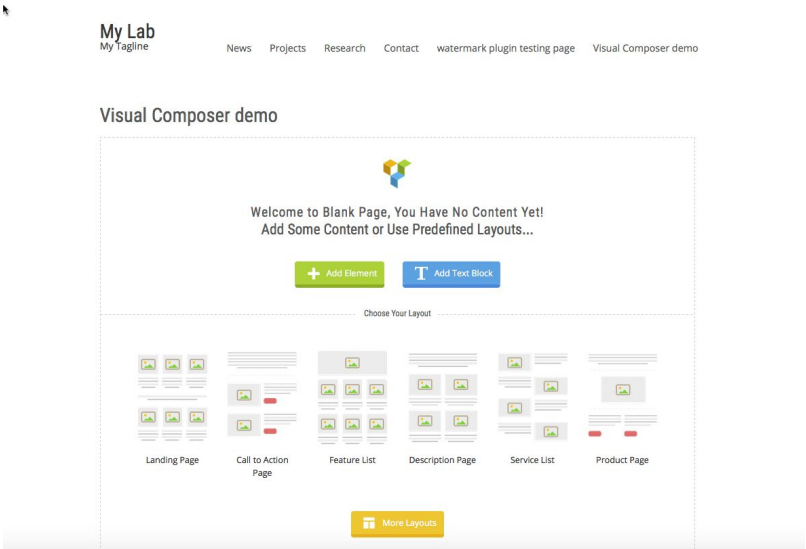


The difference is whether you edit on a page that looks like a regular WordPress editing page or with a background that looks like your website.

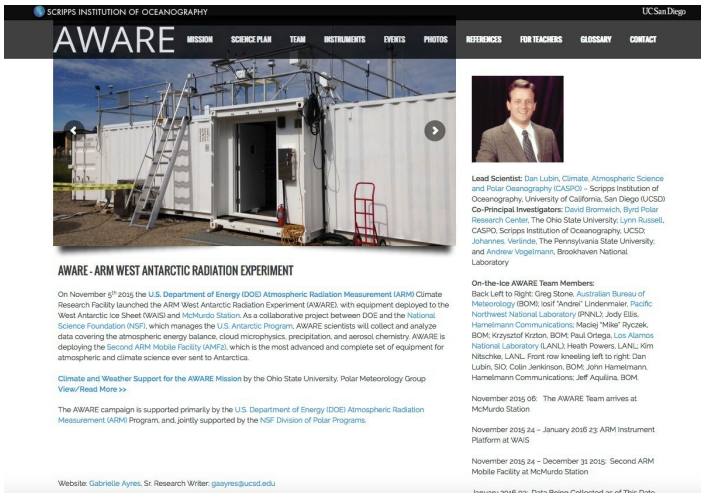
Either way, if no one has worked on the page before you’ll be prompted to either:

- Add some content
- Use predefined layouts

The predefined layouts are mostly designed for websites that are selling goods or services and aren’t necessarily going to be useful at an academic institution.

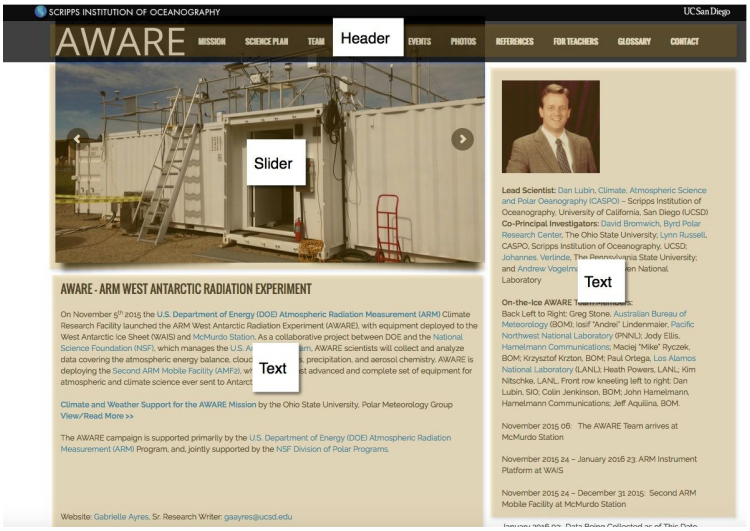


But let’s say we wanted to copy the layout of the AWARE website at https://scripps.ucsd.edu/expeditions/aware/

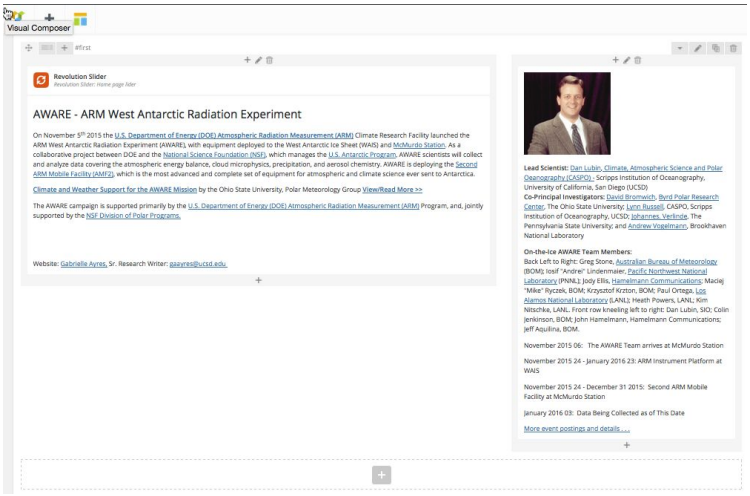


We can break this up into its component elements for evaluation:

- Header: site name plus navigation
- Slider: In this case, Revolution Slider, but more on that later.
- Text
- Text (in right column)



In Visual Composer, we see this:



One main *grid* of content that contains everything.

That grid contains two *columns* in what's actually a six-column grid. The first column (set at four-column width) contains two more rows, the second column (set at two-column width) contains a single row.

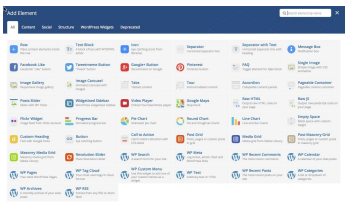
That first row in the first column spans the entire column a contains a *Revolution Slider*.

The second row in the first column spans the entire column and contains a *text block*.

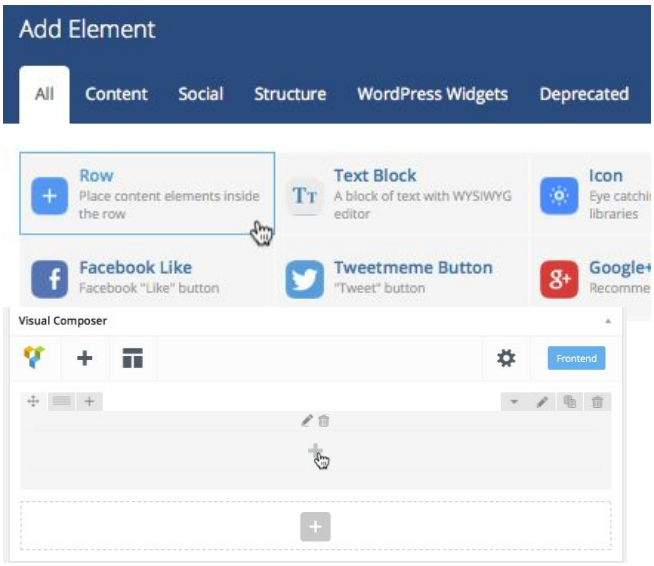
The single row in the second column spans the entire column and contains a *text block*.

We're going to replicate that, so on our site we go to our blank page and edit it in Visual Composer and click on "Add Element."

Which gives us a crazy grid of elements that we could add:

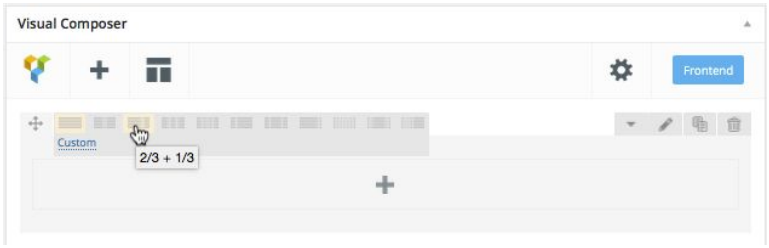


But all we really want to start with is that initial row.

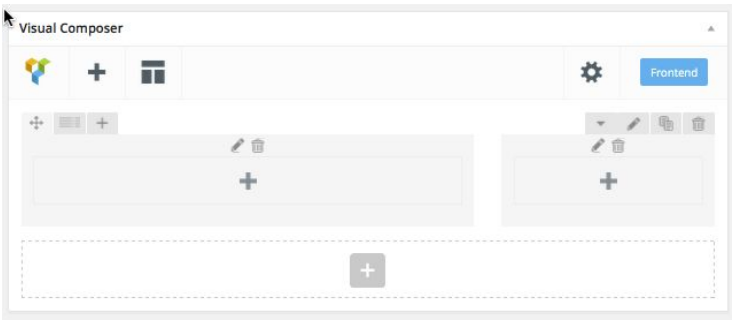


Which gives a single row with a big plus sign in the middle of it for adding elements.

But first we're going to split that row into two columns by mousing over the tiny "custom layout" grid on the far left and selecting the "⅔ + ⅓" option.

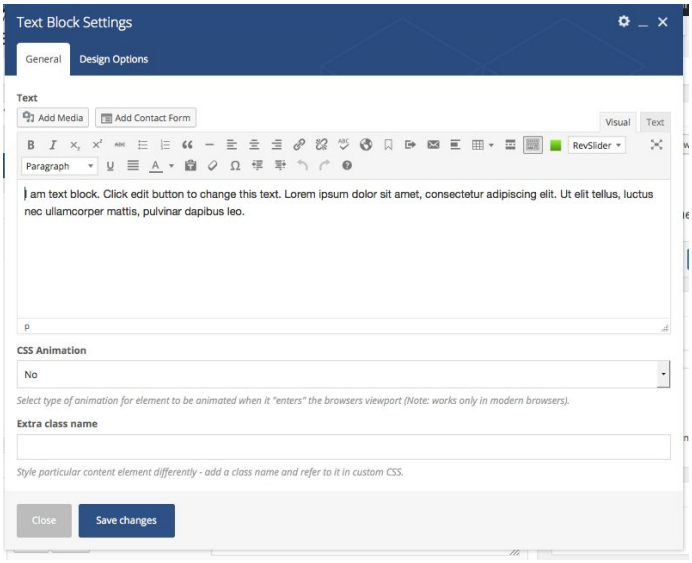


And now we have two columns.



Now we go back go the big plus sign in the middle of either column, click on it, and add a Text Block element.

This immediately opens up another window with the settings for the Text Block, which will contain *Lorem Ipsum* layout text.

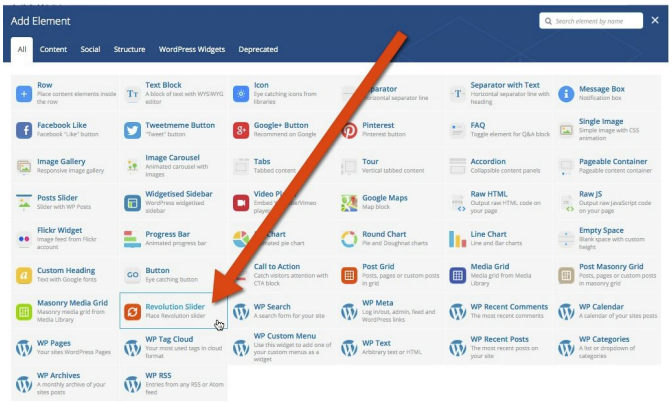


Here you can paste or type in any and all text that you like, format it, and add images using the “Add Media” button.

There’s another tab for Design Options that lets you change the background color for the box, as well as the margin (space outside the box), border (line around the box) and padding (space between the contents and the inside of the box). Save changes or close to exit. Insert another Text Block into the other column.

Now let’s add that Revolution Slider. In that first column, above the text block, mouse over the plus sign and you’ll see a “prepend to this column” option.

Click that plus sign and you’ll get the Add Element window for chosing an element to insert into the column above the text block.

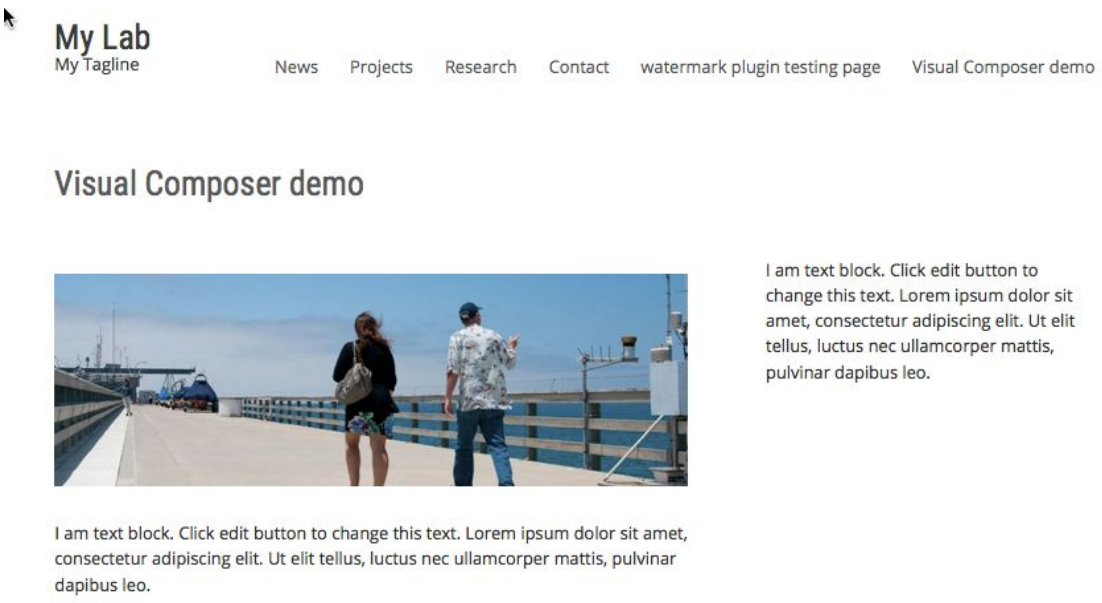


Here’s where to find the Revolution Slider, but you can choose any of the elements.

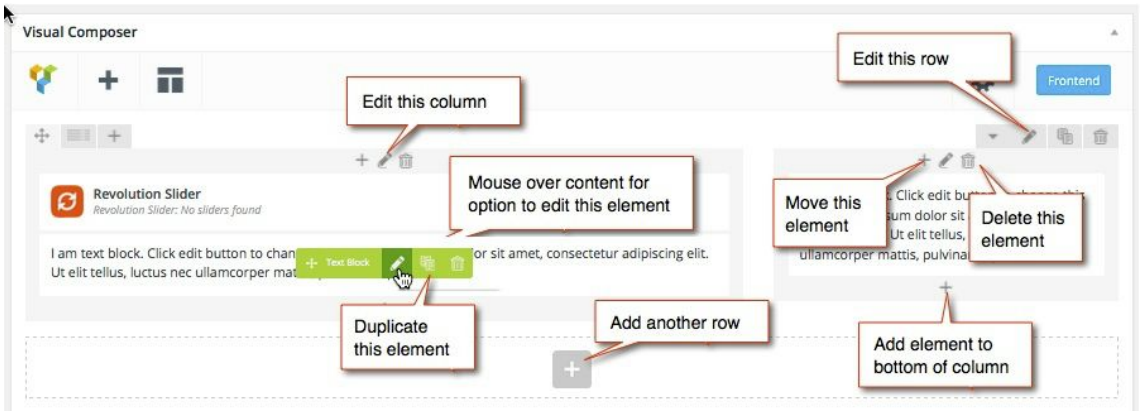
(Revolution Slider is a sophisticated slideshow generator and may be more than you want to deal with (there is a separate handout available on Working with Revolution Slider), but you can also choose Single Image, Image Carousel, or Media Grid, all of which operate slightly differently.)

Now we have three distinct *grid elements*, nested inside *columns*, nested inside a *row*.

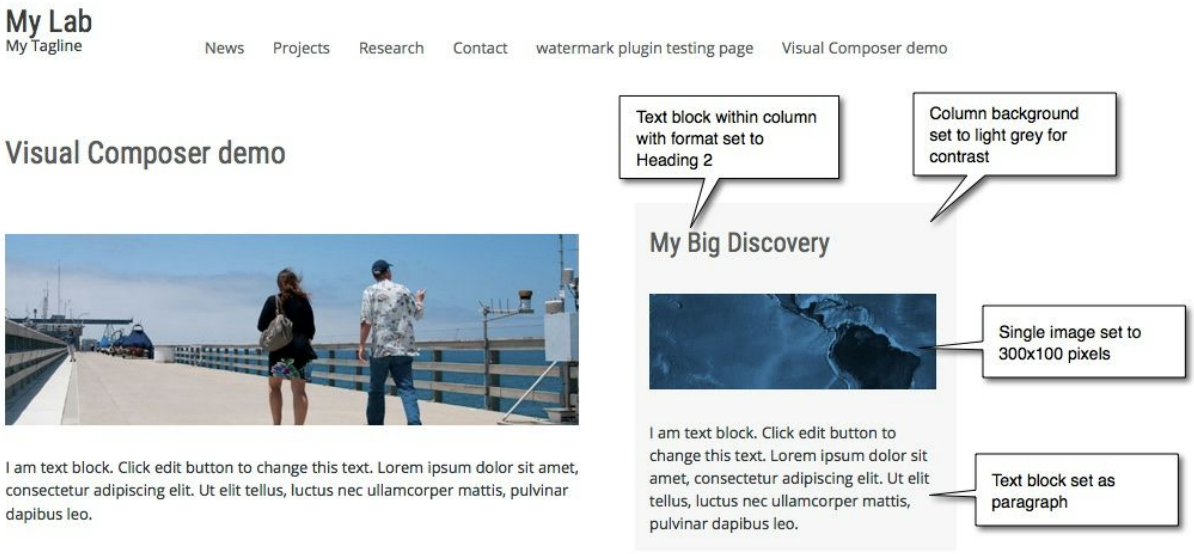
Here is what the published page looks like (with a Single Image set to 600x200 in place of the slider):



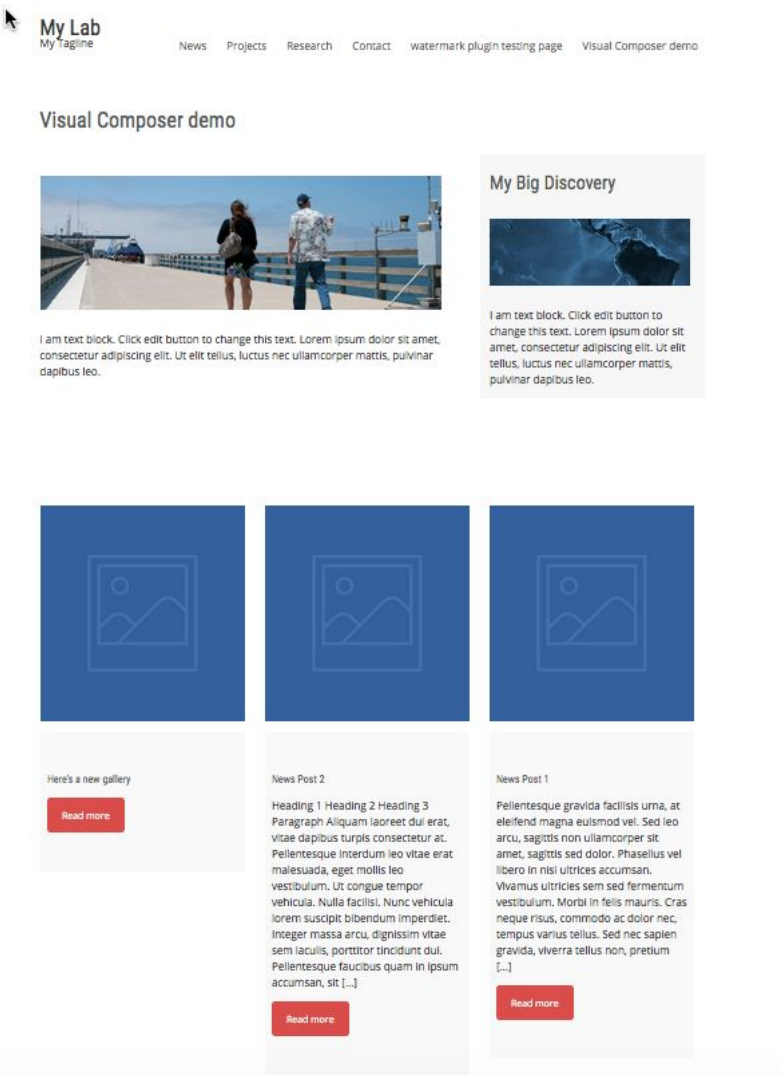
One thing that becomes confusing is that each level is editable and has its own design options. You can set details such as background color or padding by the row, by the column, or by the individual element, and it's easy to start working in the wrong element.



With a few tweaks, we can turn our page into this:



Incorporating posts -- blog posts or news items -- into a Visual Composer page is a little more challenging in terms of content management than a regular WordPress setup. That's because most of the post-displaying widgets require that each post have a featured image.

See this example with the Post Grid element. You can customize how many posts display per row and how many display in total, but the grid will display a generic placeholder if an image is not specified.

There are ways around this -- it is possible to edit the *grid element* to create your own format for the Post Grid element, but you will likely have to get much more comfortable with Visual Composer before attempting this.