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Alicia St Rose - Loop, There It Is! The Magic of the Query Loop Block

[00:01:20.010]

Hello folks, my name is Alicia St Rose of WPwithHeart and welcome to my presentation Loop, there it is! The magic of the Query Loop block. So we've got a lot to cover so let's just jump right in.

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So this is what we're going to be covering in this presentation. We'll talk about why custom post types matter for smarter content structure, how The Generate Blocks 2.0 query loop is structured. We'll discover what each layer does, the query, the loop and the loop item.

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And then how to configure the block to build layouts that really update themselves. And I'll show you a real world example from a live project.

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But before we get started, let me tell you a little bit about myself. I've been working in WordPress for nearly 20 years, building custom themes, consulting on content strategy and I've become a web accessibility advocate. I've spoken at scores of WordCamps in person and online and I host a twice monthly WordPress meetup called the South Central Coast WordPress Adventure Group. I've been to Burning Man 23 times and I live with two charming cats who are eager to make cameos during Zoom calls.

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So by umbrella company is called WP with Heart and under that umbrella I do custom development for barrier free sites that align with you and your goals. WordPress Consulting on content Manage or Content.

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Strategy Dev Stack consults one on one tutoring for the building of ambitious projects.

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Also I have a course the DIY Website Coaching and it's a one on one course for DIY website builders.

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And there is a membership Decked out WP and this membership focuses on generatepress Generate Blocks and Web Accessibility plus more. And finally I have Geek on the side. I can be your sidekick Geek Brain to help you navigate through technical stuff your boss made you do.

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Okay, let's get started. Out of the box WordPress gives us just posts and pages.

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But we all know a real site needs more than that.

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And if you're running a festival for instance, you've got a lot of different types of content. On this festival site you can see that there's different Custom post types.

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In the sidebar there's musicians, workshops, performers, gallery, artists. There are hordes of participants in each category.

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Can you imagine if I'd used pages or posts for all of this? So a custom post type can be anything.

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Maybe you're not doing a festival, but you might want services or events or team members and testimonials, recipes. If you know you're going to have many of something and you'd like to handle them as a group with the same functionality and style, then you should be strongly considering making them custom post types. And there's a bonus to this. You keep your admin clean and organised with the post types in one section instead of lost in a sea of pages and posts. So when you combine custom post types with a query loop, you gained immense power and flexibility and you can show your content anywhere on your website. So if you don't want to create your own custom post types with manual code, there's an easier way to do it. You can use plugins.

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My favourites are this custom post type UI and advanced custom fields. So we're concentrating on generate blocks and.

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The query loop block that comes with them, that plugin. So when you use generateblocks you gain access to the pattern library which has specific patterns for query loops.

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You'll find ready to go layouts with a query loop already inside and it's mobile friendly and it seamlessly integrates into your design. So instead of building everything from scratch, you just insert a pattern and start editing the content and customising. It's actually a great way to learn what query loop block does.

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And by looking at the settings in the pattern.

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For this presentation, we're focusing on the query loop block in generate blocks 2.0. So this list view of the the layers of the block may look a little different than the one you are currently using.

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If you haven't updated to 2.0 yet, please do.

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It's the Generate Blocks team rebuilt this whole thing from the ground up and it's really amazing. So the query is the outer layer of the block.

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You'll add all the parameters at this stage. The parameters are things like post type, category, post order, et cetera. The loop is the new layer added in generate blocks 2.0.

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This is where you define the layout of your looped posts.

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For example, how many columns that you want them to loop in.

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The loop item is the outermost container of the individual looped post and where you start to visually see the post. Looped posts are sometimes referred to as cards and think of the loop item as the actual card container and that you can apply the styles to. The loop item can contain any type of block to dynamically show the post content.

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Here we have an image with a container on top of it containing a post date and a post title. The section of this festival site is powered by query loop block and each musician is entered as a custom post in the admin and the loop brings them all together automatically in this three column layout. Same with these workshops.

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And I used a pattern and I enhanced the style to match the site design and the branding. Like the others, these visual artist content is dynamically pulled in and I chose to loop randomly so everyone gets a chance to shine. And here are art installations and every time I add a new one, it automatically gets randomly looped in. Okay, let's see it in action. Little live demo. Okay, so we are going to build out a query loop and we're going to build it on this page for our own little festival corner.

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So what we're going to be doing is looping through some workshops. And the first thing that I want to do is I probably want to grab a pattern because that way it's going to be a quick and easy start and I don't have to do too much building of a query loop. So in order to grab the patterns.

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Go over to the G, click the G, open the pattern library, and here we have several patterns for different types of content.

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But the one we're looking for is the query loop. Click on the query loop.

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Now, the query loop is available in the free and the pro version, so it doesn't matter if you have not gotten the Pro yet. So as you can see, there are many, many patterns for query loops, right? And another thing that's important is that they're very minimalist so that they do not compete with the styles you already have in your website.

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Here, if you check a preview by clicking this I icon, you can see here that it's taking the heading font, the body font, and even the colour of my links so that when I embed the this pattern, I don't have to do too much extra styling or remove things that don't belong there. Okay, so we don't want this one. I'm going to look for the one that I like here, and that's this one with the full two columns and two rows. So I'm going to insert that. And now, you see this pattern is ready to go. Now, when you grab a pattern from the pattern library, you don't really know how many blocks

or containers are in it. So you want to actually open up what I call the little staircase at the top.

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On the top menu, it's actually called the Document Overview.

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You click that open and then you have the opportunity to see how the pattern was actually built. So we're going to open it up.

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And you can see it. Well, first of all, you can see in one large container called section.

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And of course, everyone who's worked with the blocks and the block editor know that when there's a box around the block that you're hovering on, it gives you a better perspective of what you're looking at. So we're going to open this up and we can see one. Inside the section is a grid and we can keep going and the first container is actually the heading and the intro to this section.

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But the one we're really looking for is the second container. And inside the second container there's our query.

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So let's see what we can do to get started to start building this. All right, so we want to make sure on the right sidebar that we are actually can see the, the block configurations because when we hit the query we, we want to be in the cog. We're in the cog.

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All right, so the query is where we're going to filter our post.

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So we're going to have some parameters that we're going to set up so that we can get the specific post that we're looking for.

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And when you grab a pattern from the pattern library, they. There's already a couple of, or maybe one or two, maybe three parameters that are already set.

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And that's the case with this block. So we can see that the query type over here is a post query.

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That's a parameter.

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The pagination type is something we don't have to worry about. We're not going to show any pagination.

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On this four up blocks of featured artists. We're just not going to do that.

[00:13:04.680]

And finally down here is, this is extremely important.

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It's the post type.

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And as you can see, this is set for post. And the reason why we can't actually see anything is because this website does not have a blog.

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So there are no posts. So there's just a default filler image here and one item just waiting for a custom post type or a post to actually fill in this space. So we're going to remove the post.

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And we're going to go and we're going to look in the dropdown for our custom post type.

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So when you click in this field, you'll notice that every single custom post type that's available on the website is available to you. This means even custom post types that are provided by plugins like an events plugin or a product from Woohoo Commerce so they're all in here and you can utilise them.

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So we are going to use workshops. So now we can see four workshops have been added.

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So it's probably the last four workshops that were added to the site because usually the newest posts are the ones at the top. So that's what we've got here. Now the other parameter that was preset for us is the posts per page and it says four.

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Now you don't have to stick with that. You can actually have used this as a base for your layout. And maybe you want only two, so you would kind of remove that and there's just two. Oops, I went to one, two. Or maybe you wanted six, but we're going to stick with four.

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Okay, so the next parameter that I'm going to be looking for is something called order by. Because what I like to do when there's a lot of different participants in this festival who want the opportunity to be on the page, but we can't put like 90 items on this, this page because we're going to loop through different categories of people who provide some kind of. Of skill or performance in the festival. So here I would like. Once the page loads that randomly, there's just four from the 80 or so that are participating.

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So that's when I add a new parameter.

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I click the blue button and when I look in this dropdown, you can see all the parameters that you can use. The ones you've already used will be greyed out.

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One parameter per query loop. So we're going to look for order by. So when I do order by, you can do the order by date. So if you click in this field, there's a title, the author of the post. You can do so many different things, but what I want is random.

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So now when I click random order by random.

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You notice we got four different workshop presenters in this area.

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Now there's one thing I want to point out. If I had decided that I wanted to go by title. Okay, we can see here that it looks like it's at the end of the Alphabet. Starting at the very end is the first post. Second post is probably, you know, the penultimate post in the Alphabet. That's alphabetical. Now that's great if you want the order, but if you don't, then you can add another parameter called order. And if I choose order, I can choose descending, which is what we're looking at now, or I can choose ascending.

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Which will bring us to the top of the Alphabet, which is A.

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Now think about this. If you had dated post or any number of things that you would can swap the order starting from the beginning or the end.

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So these really play well together. Order by and order.

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But we're not going to be using that one right now. So I'm going to remove it and then I'm going to go back here to random, because random is what I'm looking for.

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Now. One other parameter that I think is really an important one is the taxonomy. So if I click in here and I choose taxonomy.

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So taxonomy is another word for the categories, but they only apply to custom post types. Categories apply to the post. So that's like the code name taxonomy. So now we noticed once I click that I'm looking for a taxonomy parameter that not all the four of those workshops have disappeared.

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And that's because I haven't chosen a taxonomy. So I'm going to click in the field and then all of the taxonomies that I've named given, you know, dashboard names are listed for everything, even for the blog post by.

[00:18:33.330]

And.

[00:18:33.590]

And that's because what's actually being looped here, what started off as a blog post, but if, if I wanted to go back to it, I could choose categories. Now, if I chose it now, nothing's going to happen because categories are not applied to this custom post type. So I have to really look for what I, what, what I need. And I have it here.

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It's called workshop and presenter category.

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So I'm going to click that.

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And still we have nothing in this area.

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We only have the default greyed out because it's not pulling any post in because we have not chosen a term.

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So I'm going to choose a term.

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Let's try yoga. So now did I get.

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Is it yoga?

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Yeah. So now you can see that yoga.

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The yoga workshops are what we're seeing in the four up squares. When you choose a taxonomy. There's also another important parameter which is include or exclude. So if I have a yoga and dance chosen, like yoga and dance is one category and I have it chosen and I choose include.

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That means the only category we're going to be seeing is yoga and dance. It's like yoga slash dance. But if I do exclude.

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Then I'll see every workshop but the yoga dance category.

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So you can filter the post by including or excluding terms, but I don't want to do that at all. I actually want to show all of them at this point. So I'm going to remove the taxonomies. And that was just for show. And then one more, I think, important parameter, and that's called offset. So I can actually show you that in action here.

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So here at the musicians, this section is actually two query loops kind of pushed together to give the appearance that it's one query loop of 12. But the first query loop has nine items. And these particular musicians cannot come show up in any other order because they are the primary, secondary and the tertiary stages and they are the headliners.

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And there's a contractual agreement that they have to show up a certain way on the website and on the lineup poster.

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So we had to stay married to that. Now, the last row, though, are other artists, other musicians who I want them to have the opportunity to shine.

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So these three at the bottom, if I. If I refresh the page, you'll notice they change different artists. So I don't want any of the top nine to show up here.

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So in this query loop, the last one, where there's randomly showing musicians, I have offset nine, which means that the first nine posts are ignored.

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And it starts at 10 because I have manually ordered that these nine are the top post, no matter what date.

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They were entered into the system.

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There's another plugin called Post Type Order that I used. And because it was manually written in stone, I can use this query loop down here and say offset nine. So you'll never see these nine in here. And another way of using offset is if you have a featured post like your recent post is featured.

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So it's styled differently, it's big, it's bold, it's at the top. And then the rest of the post just loop under it.

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So you would offset that query loop underneath the Featured post by 1. And so every time a featured post was added, it was always the offset.

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And so it could never show up in the loop below it. So I wanted to share that because that's a really good parameter.

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So let's go back and we look like.

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It looks pretty good here, kind of like this.

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So also the query can get styles.

[00:23:18.070]

So that's what this icon here. If you were to style anything, you go here.

[00:23:24.070]

It's the box that holds all the items. That's what you would be styling. I don't want that. So we're going to move on. Now, the next one is the loop, and this is actually new it's not in the legacy generate block query loop. And it was so needed because it was like you had to kind of hack your columns in the query loop block. Because it already had its grid kind of situated, you couldn't really do much with it. But this loop coming in between the query and the query item allows you to do as many columns as you want. You can also add styling to it.

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So if I hit the style icon. You can see all of the layout and the sizing and the spacing all can be applied to the columns. Like maybe you want to.

You can do alternating columns and different colours and things like that, or whatever you want to do. So that's a really good addition to this plugin, to this query loop block. So the main thing that you want to gather from that is that this one's going to help you choose the column. So you see, if I could do three. And also I want to always keep the front of the site in another tab when I'm working.

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So I'm going to head over there and it's going to refresh.

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And we can see. I think I have to actually hit preview. Let's do that instead. And so now you can see you always want to do that because the back end here is not really true to form and what you're doing, a lot of times the window's not as wide and so the centre part is taking the stylings that would be on a tablet. So always do that.

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Don't try to make this look exactly like you want the front of the website to look. And then if we noticed, I don't see the names and there's a reason for that. And we'll get to that when we get into the loop item. Okay, so we're going to stick with two. And now we're going to move on. And this is the loop item.

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Now we have arrived at the actual card itself. And this is what I was telling you about.

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This, like, delineates every single individual item. It can be. It can be styled as well, like it's the background, pretty much of the card.

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Now, in this loop item, there's an image and a container that has a date and the title of the post. We're going to start talking about dynamic data now, because this is the best part of the query loop, because you're dynamically pulling in the data for each post and you're matching it to a

block that's inside the loop item. So this image, I click this, it is actually pulling in the featured image of the post, this custom post type.

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If you want to deal with the dynamic data, look for the icon that looks like a three layer cake. Okay. And you can also see that this pattern already has its dynamic data set up.

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But let's go backwards and see what happened. So I'm going to click this icon.

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So imagine there was nothing in that field.

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So I click the icon and I have a image block and I would have chosen from all the dynamic options which are built in by WordPress.

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These are not things that you had to sit up or anything like that.

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And they apply to custom post types.

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A lot of them apply to the custom post types as well as blog post.

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So featured image was chosen and the source where are we pulling this data from? The current post.

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And that means it's the post currently that we're looking at in the loop.

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Sometimes it could be confusing and you might think it's the post that you're putting the loop on, but it's not. It is the actual post in the list, the item.

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So we want current post. The size of the image is up to you.

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And then there's the URL that is basically saying that the image has that long WP content. WP content uploads. That's all that's doing. So once I have these filled, this tag is created dynamically and I don't have to worry about remembering it. And then you click, you just click insert. And they had already done it. So insert didn't really change much. And so now you can see it says featured image. And then it will be linked to the image. Okay. Or the image linked to the post. So if I click this, because once you have the image that then these other. Let me go back. Once you have, you've chosen an image and filled this, then these options show up. Okay. And if you. This would have been empty. And then I open it up and what do I want to link to? I want to, I want to use the post link, right?

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The post link.

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That means it's going to be linking to the post itself, it's single view of the current post. And then I didn't have to do anything. This was dynamically created and I inserted that.

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And there are other things that you can do.

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You can see that the H, the anchor reference is the post link.

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It automatically filled that in. Don't have to do any of this.

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You can choose, open a new tab and all that stuff. But here you could apply attributes to this image if you need it to.

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Maybe even aria labels and roles, things like that you could probably keep going with those once you fill it in.

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Okay, so now we've got our, our background image. And now in this other container, the post date and the post title.

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We don't need the date, so you can just simply get rid of it. So we're going to delete that and that is making this a lot cleaner.

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So then we have the post title.

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Now, before you can actually add dynamic data to the block, you would have had to have put something in this container. So it could have been as simple as title of the post.

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Right? Just words. Because we had to make sure that we had a block there.

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So this was an H2 block and it probably said title of the post or something like that.

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So here, the three layered cake is not over here anymore.

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When we're dealing with headings and paragraphs three layer cake is on the menu.

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That I like it to float wherever I'm working, but it could also be at the top, stuck to the top for you.

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So I'm going in here to the three layered cake and we can see what has already been chosen.

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Now if I want to see what the settings are, I'm going to click it and once again see the select the dynamic tag.

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It's the post title from the current post and it's linking to the post and just insert. And there we have it.

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So now this is beginning to look a lot like the done site that I showed you with all the other, you know, artists and musicians. So let's go over and see what it looks like. So it looks really good. It looks really good. But once again, I'm not seeing the title of the post.

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So let's go back. The reason why we're not seeing the title of the post is this has something to do with css. Because the image is absolute positioned. That means it was lifted out of the flow of the document and everything just closed up beneath it. What that means our header is back there. So in order to fix this, we want to give the header a Z index. Z index can move things above or below items that are adjacent to them or on the plane.

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So you can think of CSS or HTML as having an up and down direction and also a lifting off toward you and moving back. So what's happening here is everything already has a zero index and it depends on the order that it fell in the document. But since we need this title to show up in the front, we're going to have to give the post title a z index of 1, because that pushes it up And a z index of minus 1 would have pushed it further back.

So we're going to find that in position, scroll down to Z index and we're going to put a one right there. And we're going to save that and refresh. And now we have the names and it's linked and the photo is linked and you notice we keep changing every time we refresh. Now here's an accessibility issue. It's a comfort issue regarding accessibility.

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So we're linking the image and we're also linking the title of the post to the post. That means the link will be read off, read off twice for each one of these.

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So I'm going to make a decision to only link one of these items, one of these elements and the one I feel is more important and it's bigger. And if you have fat fingers, you know the fat finger syndrome, when you're on the phone, it's easier to click the image than it is to try to find this little name in the image.

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So what I'll do is I'll go back and where the post title here I'll go in the dynamic data and I'll click the post title and link to. I will say none and then insert that tag. So now it just the tag just says post title before it said post title, colon, link. So if I go back and refresh, uh oh, you make sure save the draught. Don't think it took. So now not only is the. It's white and it's better because the blue link was a little hard to see, now the white's hard to see on here too. But when you look here, you'll notice I actually put a darker overlay and it got darker, darker as it got to the bottom so that the names popped. So that is a CSS decision and that's not. It's beyond the demo, but there are things to do. But we've got the name and now the whole image. And if I click on one of these, then I go to their profile.

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Just like I should.

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All right, so that's the end of our demo. Okay, well, that was fun. And I hope that you gained really some good knowledge on why it's important to be using the query loop.

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And you can see the flexibility and you can also see how powerful it is that you can just grab some content. Like you don't have to rebuild your layouts in the page. You simply have this one post item that you've styled and just designate a post type to it and it's like automatically doing the job for you. Okay, so if you purchase the Powerpack, I have a query loop cheatsheet in there, which is going to be a quick reference for the query loop structure and settings that we've gone over. There's going to be some tips on custom post types and taxonomy filters and some layout tricks.

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Plus as a bonus section on ACF filters and advanced use cases because you can actually filter by an ACF custom field. So that is pretty much a wrap. So I think you've got this.

[00:37:15.910]

Go build something cool. And thank you very much. I am Alicia at WP with Heart.

[00:37:22.600]

You can find me on my website at wpwithheart.com, I'm on LinkedIn at Alicia-St-Rose and this presentation was cat approved.