

SharePoint

Frequently Asked Questions

What is SharePoint?

SharePoint is a web-based collaboration and document management platform. Though highly flexible, it is primarily used to store documents, and communicate information across organizations.

With SharePoint, users can create an intranet (or internal internet system) which works like any other website. Sites can be created for specific departments or teams. Through this centralized secure space users can access, share, and edit documents.

What does SharePoint offer?

Organizations use SharePoint to create websites. You can use it as a secure place to store, organize, share, and access information from any device. All you need is a web browser, such as Microsoft Edge, Chrome etc.

Some of the features SharePoint offers include:

- External sharing of files and content with people both inside and outside your organization
- Content management features to help organize and manage content using libraries, lists, metadata, records management, and retention policies
- Team sites that provide a place for predetermined groups of users to view and collaborate on content, data, and news
- Communication sites to share and communicate messaging across organizations with customizable, dynamic sub-sites
- Mobile apps to allow users to access intranets, team sites and content on Android, iOS, and Windows devices
- Automate business processes by creating alerts and workflows
- Search functions that help surface relevant people and important content

What is a SharePoint Site?

A SharePoint Site is a website that contains different SharePoint Web Parts like Document Libraries, Calendar, Task List, etc. SharePoint sites can have 1 or more pages to display content to the user.

What is a SharePoint Site Collection?

A SharePoint Site Collection, just as the name implies, is a collection of SharePoint sites. Each site collection contains a single top-level site and subsites below it e.g.

Advantages of Subsites

1. A subsite can be provisioned by anyone with at least Full Control permission (more specifically, the Create Subsites permission level) on the parent site. I.e. You do not require a Global or SharePoint admin to provision one for you.
2. A subsite can automatically be added to the navigation of the parent site if you

have the navigation settings configured that way.

3. A subsite can automatically inherit settings from its parent site including permissions, features, and navigation (Ironically this can also be a disadvantage as well as described in the section below). You can optionally adjust some of the settings at the subsite level. (for example, decide not to inherit navigation settings)
4. This is quick and easy to setup which is attractive for small organizations who do not have a lot of resources to spend maintaining site collections.
5. A subsite automatically inherits content types and site columns from its parent site. This is more straight-forward to setup than a Content Type Hub which is what is required to do the same across site collections.
6. Managed Term sets can easily be shared across all subsites within a Site Collection if the term set is created at the site collection level. Term sets cannot be shared across site collections unless it is created at the farm/tenant level.

Disadvantages of Subsites

1. If you have intentionally built a site structure that mimics your organizational hierarchy and there is a re-org, then you may need to move a subsite from one site collection to another or from one parent site to another. Although you can certainly do this, it will require a migration and change to the URL of the subsite which will break links, etc.
2. A subsite is part of the bigger site collection when it comes to resources, so all subsites housed within a site collection are constrained by the same set of resources.
3. URL lengths may get long if you have many nested subsites. There is a URL length limit (as of the time of this writing it is 260 for SharePoint on-premises and 400 for SharePoint Online) that you may bump into. The longer the path to get to your file (will increase as the subsite structure increases), the greater the chance of hitting that limit.
4. If you need to use a site feature in your subsite, sometimes a site collection feature needs to be enabled/activated in order for the subsite to use it. (Document ID is an example of this). You may not always want to enable a site collection feature if it will affect all subsites.
5. If you have a subsite that is no longer being used and it happens to be a parent to another subsite that is being used, you cannot remove the parent subsite.
6. Deeply nested subsite structures leveraging dynamic structural navigation can have performance issues due to the load required to make it security-trimmed.

Advantages of Site Collections

1. Provisioning a site collection can be limited to a select group of users in your organization. This is a governance advantage as it gives you an opportunity to control site collections being provisioned, provide the appropriate guidance and training and implement the required controls (protection, retention) for the site collection. If you don't want to limit this to a select group of users, you can also allow users who don't have permission to create sites without an Office 365 Group. The site can be either a team site, communication site or a classic site. Whether this is an advantage or not will depend on your organization's appetite for self-service site creation.

2. It is a boundary for permissions – when a site collection is provisioned you will have visitors, members, and owners SharePoint groups created for it. These groups do not cross over into other site collections.
3. It is a boundary for features – you can enable/activate features at a site collection level so if each discrete workspace is within its own site collection, only the features required for it need to be enabled.
4. It is a boundary for resources that maintain the site e.g. CPU and memory allocation
5. It is a boundary for storage – the amount of storage is allocated per site collection.
6. It is a boundary for search although you can extend search results across multiple site collections and target search to a single site within a site collection with search configuration and using the new SharePoint Hub sites.
7. You can enable external sharing on a site collection basis.
8. You can identify “stale” site collections that aren’t being used. This will give you an opportunity to archive/delete these site collections independent of any other site collection.

Disadvantages of Site Collections

1. It is a boundary for navigation which means navigation is not shared across site collections. To visually tie together your site collections in a “virtual hierarchy” (i.e. navigation), you will need to handle this separately. See SharePoint Hub site below to address this disadvantage, which will turn this into an advantage where you can ‘plug and play’ your site collections into whatever kind of navigation is required.
2. If you are a small company, you may find it difficult to manage multiple site collections if you have advanced branding, navigation, feature requirements. See SharePoint Hub site below to address this disadvantage.

What is a SharePoint hub site?

SharePoint hub sites help you meet the needs of your organization by connecting and organizing sites based on project, department, division, region, etc. making it easier to:

- Discover related content such as news and other site activities
- Apply common navigation, branding, and site structure across associated sites
- Search across all associated sites

What is a SharePoint list?

All it is, is a table just like Excel, to store data. Just like a table in Excel, it contains rows and columns. Rows for data, columns for metadata. In SharePoint, this table is called a SharePoint list.

What is a SharePoint document library?

A document library in SharePoint is essentially a special list, created specifically to store documents. That’s all it is. It is a special web part that already exists in SharePoint that allows to store documents and has all the functionality around documents (document preview, versioning, check-in/check-out, document approval, file type breakdown, etc.)

What SharePoint Hierarchy should I choose?

It is hard to argue with the fact that site collections are more flexible. Each site collection can be viewed as a granular 'unit of work'. They allow you to control permissions, features, storage, branding and target data protection and retention controls at a more targeted level. A flat architecture like this allows you to 'plug and play' site collections into whatever kind of navigational hierarchy is required. SharePoint Hub sites allow you to build this navigation thru the User Interface. You can associate a site collection with a SharePoint Hub by the click of a button and easily move it from one Hub to another if required.

The main disadvantage of subsites is the rigid nature of where they live. Once created, it is not flexible to move them to another location if required. Additionally, if they are not being used and they are a parent to another subsite that is being used, there is no way to remove the unused site – a huge governance issue. If you're provisioning subsites, you should understand the pros and cons of that decision.

Here are some suggested hierarchies that set you up for long-term success:

