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Putting a CodeIgniter application on cPanel hosting

Frameworks, Composer & Git

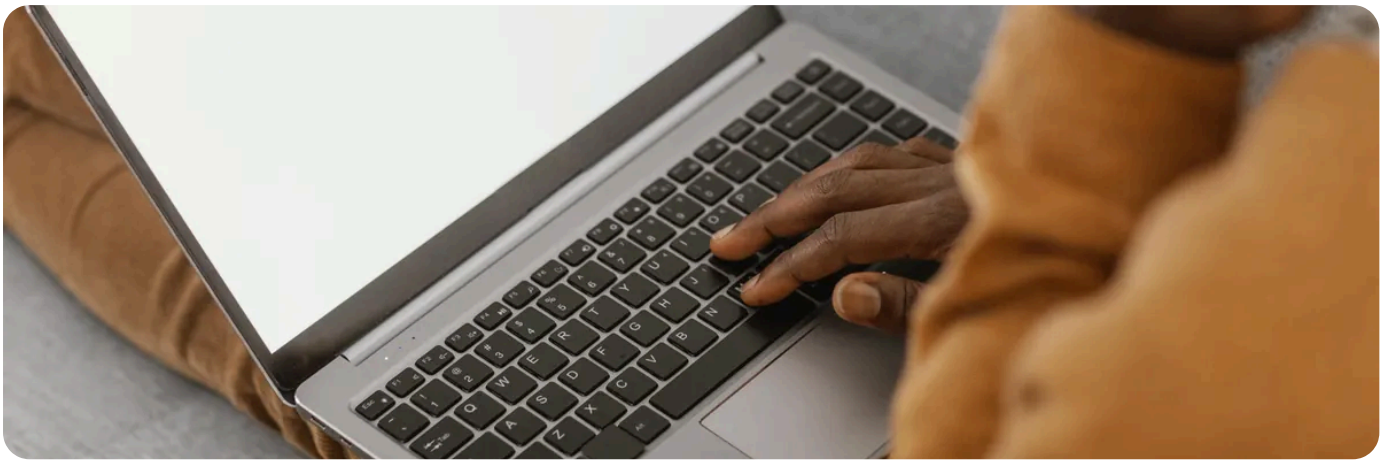
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Putting a CodeIgniter application on cPanel hosting

Frameworks, Composer & Git Created on **October 10, 2026** 3 min read



A **CodeIgniter** application runs well on cPanel hosting, as long as the domain points at the application's `public` folder and not at the project root. That is the one thing almost everybody gets wrong: the rest (the database, the `.env` file, the writable folders) is configuration. This article covers CodeIgniter 4, the current one; there is a note on 3 at the end.

CodeIgniter 4 separates what a visitor may request (the `public` folder) from what should never be requested (`app`, `system` and `writable`). If the domain points at the root, the site shows a folder listing or an error, and the worst case is leaving your configuration in plain view.

From your computer to cPanel, step by step

1. **Check the PHP version.** Each CodeIgniter 4 release states its minimum PHP version in the official documentation. Pick it in `Select PHP Version` for the site's folder: **which PHP version to use**.

2. **Upload the project OUTSIDE the public folder.** For example to `/home/ACCOUNT/app-ci`, next to `public_html`. If you use Composer, run `composer install` there and upload the result: **Composer on shared hosting**.

3. **Point the domain at the public folder.** With an addon domain or a subdomain you choose the folder when you create it: enter `/home/ACCOUNT/app-ci/public`. For the main domain, check in cPanel's domains screen whether it lets you change the folder; if not, use a subdomain for the application.

4. **Create the .env file.** The project ships a template called `env`, without the dot. Copy it to `.env` in the project root and edit it (see the table below).

5. **Create the database** and its user in cPanel, and put the details in `.env`: **creating databases and using phpMyAdmin**.

6 **Make the writable folder writable.** It is where the application keeps logs, sessions and cache. If it cannot write, the site errors on the very first request.

7 **Create the tables** with `php spark migrate` in the Terminal or over SSH, if the application ships migrations. Use the PHP version you chose: **running the right PHP on the command line**.

What goes in .env

Line	What it is for
CI_ENVIRONMENT = production	Puts the application in production mode: errors stop showing to visitors. In `development` details appear that you must not expose.
app.baseURL = 'https://yourdomain.tld/'	The site address, with the trailing slash and in https. A wrong address breaks links and forms.
database.default.hostname	Usually `localhost`. Database and user names carry the account prefix.
database.default.database, .username, .password	The details you created in cPanel. The password lives here and never in the code.
database.default.DBDriver = MySQLi	The engine. For PostgreSQL the value is different, and the `pgsql` extension has to be switched on in Select PHP Version.

The .env file must be out of the browser's reach.
With the domain pointing at the `public` folder, it is. If somebody pointed the domain at the project root, anyone can request `.env` and walk away with your passwords. Try opening that address: it must give 403 or 404. See **keeping passwords out of your code**.

404 on every page except the home page?
Friendly links need the rewrite rules in the `.htaccess` that comes inside the `public` folder. If it was not uploaded (names starting with a dot are hidden), the application only answers with `index.php` in the address. See **.htaccess for PHP projects**.

CodeIgniter 3?
It is older and runs on older PHP versions. The practical difference: `index.php` sits in the project root, the configuration is in `application/config`, and the `system` folder should stay outside the public folder. The idea is the same: code is never within the browser's reach. If the site is old and nobody updates it, plan to replace it.

NEED A HAND?

Uploaded the application and all you see is an error? Send us the address and the last line of the log in writable/logs.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- Getting a Laravel application running →
- Keeping passwords out of your PHP code: .env files →
- Where the PHP error log is →
- Hosting plans and what each includes →

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