



Basic Guide to User Accounts



User Accounts

To access content and services on many websites, a user account is required. A user account is created with an **email address and password**.

You'll know if a website requires a user account because you will likely see a message prompting you to **log in**.

If you don't already have an account with the webpage, you'll typically need to click on a nearby link that says, "**Create an Account**" or "**Sign Up**."

Log in to your member account.

Username

Password

[Forgot username or password?](#)

[Not signed up? Register now](#)

Log In

In the above example, the link to register for a user account says "Register Now"

Why do I have to have a user account?

When you navigate to the homepage of a website, you are viewing content that is relevant to a general audience. But websites often offer features and services that are unique to you individually.

In most cases, when you need to **access features, services, or information that is associated with you individually**, you can only view it by logging into the webpage with your user account.

Your Username

"Username" can be a confusing term. When some webpages ask for a username, they are referring to a **name of your choosing to be associated with your account**.

A username **must be a unique string of characters**, meaning a combination of words, letters, and/or numbers that is not currently in use by another user. This means you may have to be creative when asked to provide a username.

The username "Kelly" will very likely be taken. You may need to try "ReeseKellyM" "Kelly_58r" and so on. Pay attention during the user account creation process and look for new text that appears on the screen as you submit your details. These **error messages will provide you clues as to what needs to be changed or modified to continue**.

Because a username must be a unique string of characters, you may find it challenging to remember your usernames from one webpage to another. You can mitigate this issue by using the same username for all your user accounts online, but this won't always be a perfect solution.

A website may have parameters of what your username must include (such as "must be 10 characters," or "must not contain '.', or "must contain a number").

It is not a bad idea to **develop a system for managing your various user account usernames**. As with storing any kind of sensitive data, it is recommended to store this information behind at *least* one level of password protection (such as storing your usernames on password-locked smartphone.)



In other instances, “**username**” is actually referring to the email address that you signed up for the **user account with**. After all, to a machine storing the user account data, an email would meet the criteria of a username (a unique string of characters that cannot be used for more than one user). **If you did not have to make a username when signing up for an account, then it is very likely that your username is your email.**

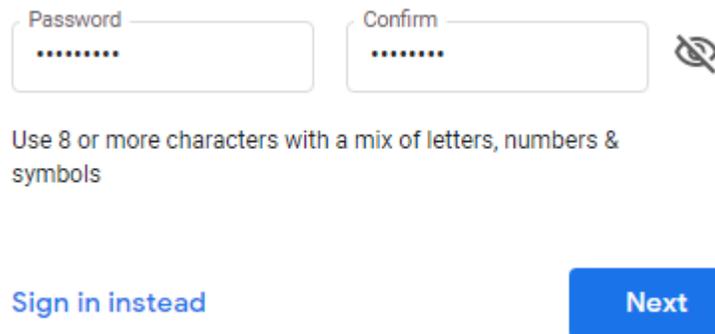
This may not be the case if a username was automatically generated for you (more often the case with user accounts that are managed by your workplace).

***Why the variance?** While there are norms for user accounts made and accessed online, there’s no hard or fast standards that must be followed. Therefore, user account creation and access across many webpages will differ.*

Password

Because very sensitive data may be accessible with access to your user account, it is important that you utilize a strong password to protect your information. In fact, the website may have **password requirements** in place to make you create a strong password.

Password requirements may or may not displayed on the screen when you go to create your password. Pay attention to the text on the screen and read its contents to understand what you need to do to continue.



In this example, the text on the screen is telling you that your password must be at least 8 characters long, and has to contain letters, numbers, and symbols (special characters). This typically means at least one of each type of character.

In most cases, you will need to create a password:

- 6-8 characters long (this means a combination of six to eight letters, numbers, or special characters).
- Must contain at least one number
- Must contain a least one capital letter.

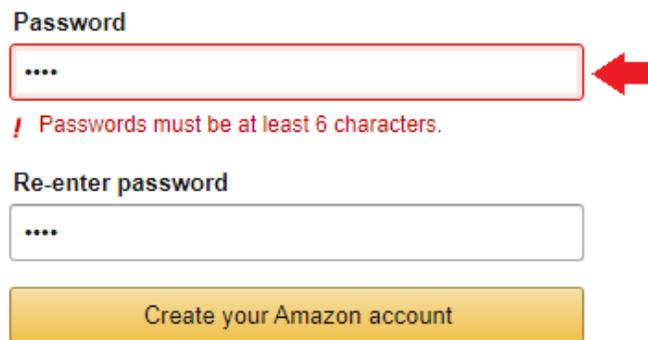
Note that all passwords are **case-sensitive**, meaning that if you utilize capital letters in your password, they must be entered as capital every time. “A” is not equal to “a” in the world of passwords. For this reason, many text boxes will display a warning indicating that your caps lock key is on when you enter your password, to ensure that this is your intent.

Some websites require a **special character**. Special characters include the exclamation point !, @ symbol, dollar sign \$, pound sign #, percentage sign%, asterisk *, underscore _, apostrophe



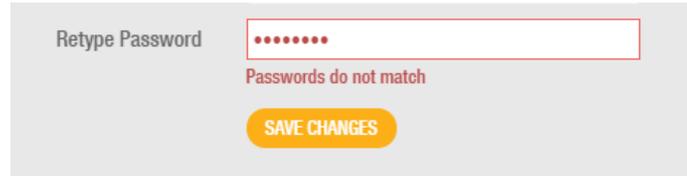
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, and so on. Most of these characters are displayed on the number bar at the top of your keyboard, above the number of the key. To enter these special characters, you will need to **hold the shift key and press the number key** that contains your special character. Note that not all special characters are allowed. Pay attention to any messages that appear during the account creation process.



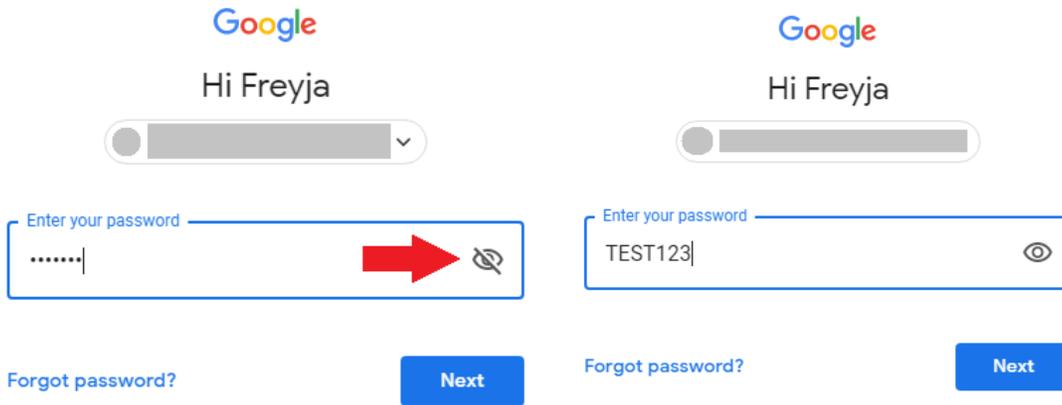
In this example, I entered a password that was four characters wrong. The box became outline and red, and the original message turned red, indicating that my input was invalid because it did not meet the length requirement.

A common second step for creating an account is **re-entering your password**. When you see this text box, you need to enter the exact same password that you entered in the previous box. This is required to ensure that the password you set is as you intended. Again, watch for messages on the screen. If your second entry does not match the first, you'll likely see a popup appear indicating that your passwords do not match.



In the above example, an error message is displayed beneath the password re-entry text box. It indicates that two passwords do not exactly match. To continue, I need to reenter the passwords to correct this error.

Keep an eye on in and around the text box for most password entry screens. There is typically a button that looks like an eye that you can toggle on and off by clicking. You may have to press and hold this button. **Clicking on the eye will display the characters in the password**, allowing you to see what you've typed. If you're not as confident on the keyboard, this is a great tool to ensure that you have entered what you intended to!



How the characters of a password are displayed before and after toggling the eye in the password line.

Your accounts are essentially worthless if you cannot access them. **If you have difficulties remembering your user account passwords, it is important to develop a system** to view and access them. In general, it is not advised to write down passwords for the risk of them being discovered. If you must write down your passwords, keep them in a safe and secure place that is only accessible by you.

A more **secure method of storing your passwords** is under at least one level of password protection. You can:

- Take a photo of your username and password and store it on your password-locked smartphone.
- Enter your username and password and store it in a note taking app on your password-locked smartphone.
- Store your username and password in a cloud-accessed service, such as Google Docs.
- Ask for your web browser to remember your usernames and passwords (on your personal, password protected devices).

Two-Step Verification

When you sign up for a webpage for the first time, it's becoming increasingly common for the website to require two-step verification.

Upon the successful creation of a username and password, you may see a **message telling you to check your email**. To be able to access the account you just created, you will need to complete this step.

Log into the email that you provided when you created the account. Check your inbox. If you complete this step immediately after you register for your user account, the email from the website asking for confirmation should be at the top of your inbox. It may take a few minutes to appear.

If it has been over 5 minutes and there is no new email in your inbox, you should look inside of your **spam folder** within your email (typically found in the toolbar on the left-hand side.) If it is not there, it's possible that you may have mistyped your email when registering for the account

When you locate the email, open it. Instructions inside will vary. Sometimes, you will need to **follow the link inside of the email to confirm your email address**. Sometimes, you may need to **retrieve a code** that went to your email that must be entered on the original account creation page. Read the email and follow the instructions contained to continue.



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Please confirm your email

 Pinterest <confirm@account.pinterest.com>
to me ▾

Wed, Oct 24, 2018, 6:57 PM

Before we **get started...**



Please take a second to make sure we've got your email right.

[Confirm your email](#)

Didn't sign up for Pinterest? [Let us know.](#)

In the example above, the email is asking me to confirm my email address by clicking the link inside. It also tells me to click the link to let them know if I did not initiate this user account creation. Note the subject line: "Please confirm your email"

Security Questions

Online accounts that provide access to very sensitive personal information may require that you **provide the answers to a variety of security questions in the event that you need to recover your account.** These online user accounts are typically those that are tied to your financial information (e.g. credit and bank cards, loan providers, etc.)

Typically, you will be **prompted to choose from a handful of questions**, ranging from "What street did you grow up on?" to "Where is your favorite destination spot?"

It is **very important that you either will be able to recall this answer without a doubt, or will remember your line of reasoning** when providing the answer to these questions in the event of an account recovery. If you fail to adequately answer your security questions in the future, you may not be able to access that account again.

Note that some responses to security questions require that you enter the response exactly as it was originally entered. So, if you choose to utilize spaces and capital letters, **ensure you use those same rules for all other accounts.**

Account Recovery

As modern-day internet users, we create user accounts for a number of different websites and services. (At present, I have well over 60 user accounts! And those are accounts that I semi-regularly access). With the number of user accounts you will create, **it's fair to assume that you will forget a set of user account credentials at some point.** The good news is that you have some options to recover your user accounts.

Account recovery will typically involve **verifying your identity through the email address or mobile telephone number you used to create the account originally.** For this reason, it is very important to keep your account information as up-to-date as possible, and to ensure that you can easily access your primary email account.

Tip: If you can only memorize one password, memorize the password to your primary email account! If you are locked out of your primary email, you likely cannot recover other accounts linked to that email address.



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Account recovery can involve the username (where applicable), the password, or both. Note that both fields typically cannot be recovered at the same time.

To initiate account recovery, look for a link around the text boxes that says, “**Forgot password?**” or “**Forgot Username?**” or something along these lines.

Username *

Password *

Remember me

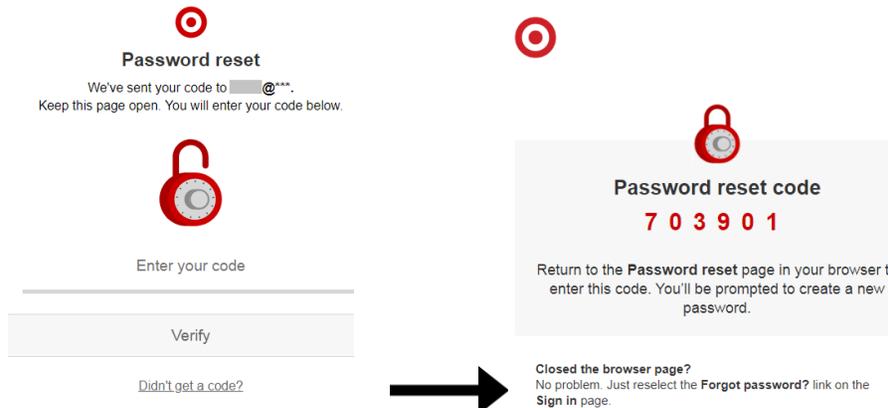
- 
- [Forgot your password?](#)
 - [Forgot your username?](#)

Whether you opt to recover a username or password, **you will be asked to provide the email address (or sometimes the mobile phone number)** that you used to sign up for the user account. Upon entering the email, you will receive a message indicating that an email has been sent to that email address.

In the event of a **username recovery**, your username will typically simply be in the body of that email. You can simply record that username into the login field to initiate your login.

In the event of a forgotten password, you will never be sent your original password. Instead, you may be sent a link for a **password reset** that will prompt you to create an entirely new password to access your account.

You may also receive what is called an **OTP (one-time password)**, which is a unique one-time use password that will grant you temporary access to your account for the sole purpose of resetting your password.



The image shows two screenshots of a password reset process. The left screenshot is titled "Password reset" and says "We've sent your code to [redacted]@***. Keep this page open. You will enter your code below." It features a red padlock icon, a text input field labeled "Enter your code", a "Verify" button, and a link "Didn't get a code?". The right screenshot is titled "Password reset code" and displays the code "7 0 3 9 0 1" in large red digits. It includes a red padlock icon and instructions: "Return to the Password reset page in your browser to enter this code. You'll be prompted to create a new password." A black arrow points from the "Didn't get a code?" link in the first screenshot to the second screenshot, which also contains a note: "Closed the browser page? No problem. Just reselect the Forgot password? link on the Sign in page."

In the above example, a recovery code (a type of OTP) was sent to the email address entered. To reset the email, I would need to login to the email shown, retrieve the code, then enter it in the box and press “verify.” This would then take me to a screen to create a new password.



Password reset

Almost done!

For your security, please change your password to something you haven't used before.

Create password [show](#)

Must contain:

8-20 characters

And 2 of the following:

Lowercase letters

Uppercase letters

Numbers

Special characters, except < >

Create password

In many cases you will **not be permitted to use a password that has ever been used** with that account before.

Pay attention to any messages that appear throughout this process to understand what you need to do to continue.

A word of caution: Options for account recovery are often very limited. If the account is associated with something like a bank, insurance company, healthcare provider or otherwise, **you may be able call a customer service number** to recover your account without access to the email address on file. However, in the case of most emails and social media accounts, you have **very limited or no other options than those provided**.

Remember, account recovery options may seem tedious, but these steps are in place to ensure that your account data is protected. Even basic retailer accounts may contain sensitive data, such as credit/bank card numbers, your social security number, various account numbers, and even your home address.