Facebook

Understanding Facebook Privacy

Why is Facebook privacy important?

If you choose to share things **publicly** on Facebook, anyone with an account will be able to find and view your Facebook information, posts, and activity. This could impact your privacy in a variety of ways. For example:

- You could be **sharing personal information** you'd rather keep private, like your birth date or address.

- Anything you post, such as photos, comments, and status updates, will be **visible to people you don't know**.

- **Embarrassing or unflattering posts** could negatively affect your personal and professional reputation.

- Third-party websites and applications can **access and share information** from your Facebook account.

Watch the video below to learn more about Facebook privacy.
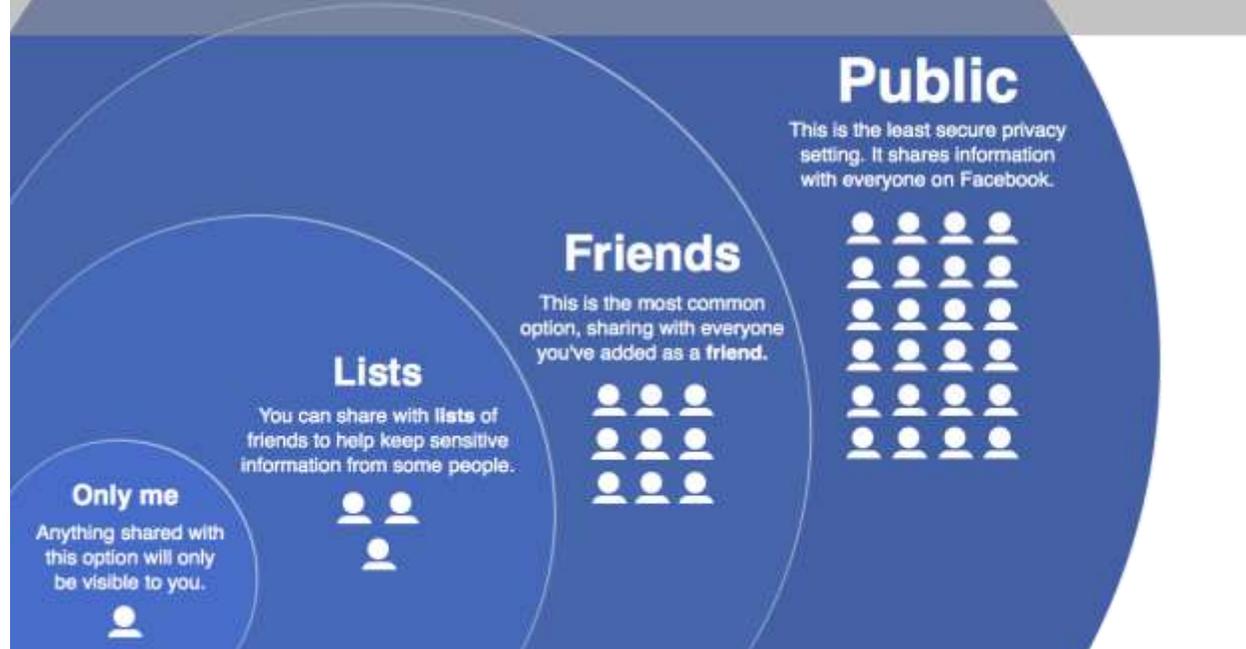
Understanding basic privacy settings

Whenever you share something on Facebook, you can choose who you'll share with. In the infographic below, you can see the most common sharing options, including **Only me**, **Lists**, **Friends**, and **Public**.

Facebook Privacy Settings

Do you know who you're sharing with on Facebook?

Learn more about the different sharing options below.

Public
This is the least secure privacy setting. It shares information with everyone on Facebook.

Friends
This is the most common option, sharing with everyone you've added as a **friend**.

Lists
You can share with **lists** of friends to help keep sensitive information from some people.

Only me
Anything shared with this option will only be visible to you.

Let's take a look at these settings in action. For example, let's say you set all of the information on your Timeline to be visible only to **Friends**. In this case, this is how your Timeline would appear to your friends:

By contrast, this is how it would appear to someone who isn't your friend on Facebook. Notice how most of the information is hidden, but the **name**, **profile photo**, and **cover photo** are still visible.

Sharing and privacy

Even if you customize your privacy settings, it's important to understand that the things you share on Facebook are visible to **a lot of other people**. This is because Facebook is designed to be more **open and social** than traditional communication tools.

For example, let's say you post a photo on a friend's Timeline. By default, that photo will be visible to **all of your friends** on Facebook, not just the person you shared it with. The photo will also be visible to **anyone who is friends with your friend**. This is one reason people enjoy using Facebook—it's easy to share with lots of people at the same time.

As long as you're somewhat careful about the things you share, Facebook doesn't pose a serious risk to your privacy. Before you share anything on Facebook, like a comment or status update, you'll need to consider how comfortable you are with many people seeing this information. If you wouldn't feel comfortable sharing something in a public place, you may not want to share it on Facebook either.

Apps and games privacy

At some point, you may receive invitations from your friends to use Facebook **apps and games**. These are applications that let you interact with Facebook and your friends in different ways. A majority of these applications are created by **third-party developers**, not by Facebook itself.

When you use an app or game, you're giving it **permission** to do certain things with your Facebook account. This might include **accessing your profile data**, **posting on your Timeline**, and **viewing information about your friends**.
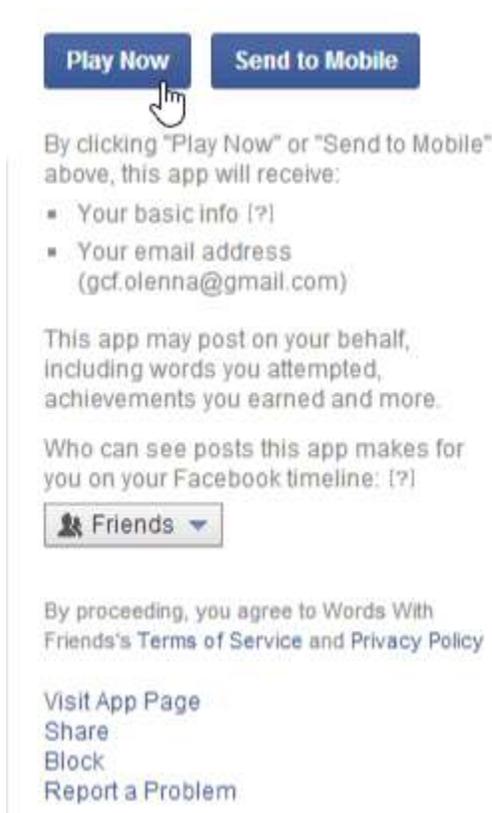
Although you can't use apps or games without allowing the requested permissions, most apps let you **customize** these settings after you've started using them. We'll explain how to do this in our lesson on Adjusting Your Privacy Settings.

Facebook privacy across the Web

You may not realize that your Facebook account extends across the Web. The **Facebook Platform** is a tool that lets other websites connect with your Facebook account and view your public information. If you've ever seen an option to **Login with Facebook** on another website, you've seen the Facebook Platform in action.

When you visit a site that uses the Facebook Platform, you're bringing all of your public information on Facebook, including your name, gender, profile picture, and friends list. There are three main ways other websites can integrate your Facebook account.

Instant personalization

Instant personalization allows sites to **personalize your experience** while signed in to Facebook. When a site uses instant personalization, it draws from the **public information** on your Timeline to predict the types of content you'll find interesting. For example, if you have **liked** reggae music on Facebook, a music site like Pandora might suggest similar artists or show information about the music your friends listen to on the site.
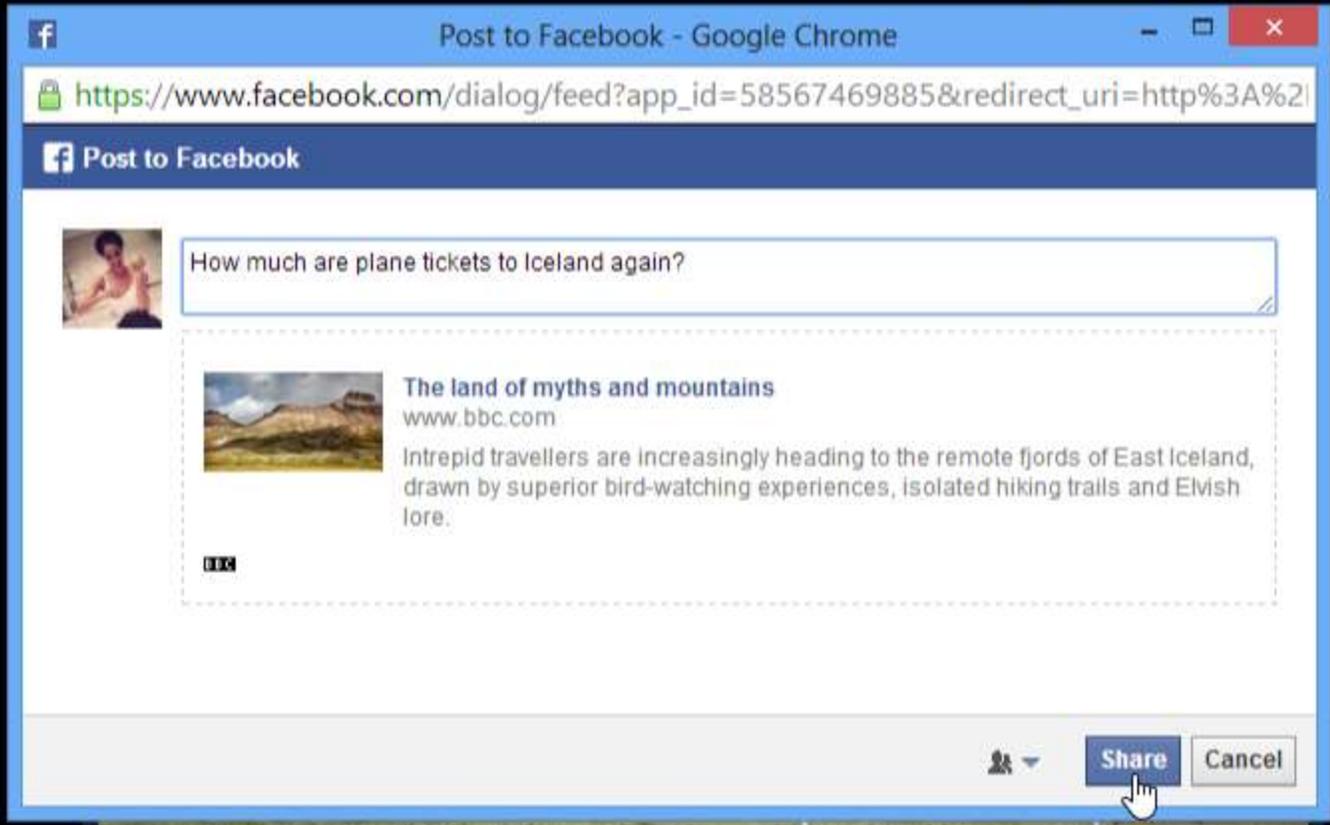

Social plug-ins

Social plug-ins are tools that let you easily **share a site's content** on Facebook. On many websites, this will usually appear as a small Facebook button. Social plug-ins can also show you content from the site that your friends have shared.

Platform apps

Platform apps let you link your Facebook account to an external site. When you add a platform app, you'll be able to use your **Facebook user name and password** to sign in to that site. Your activity on that site may also appear on your Timeline. For instance, a music-sharing site might post information about the music you've listened to recently, while a news site could share the articles you've read.
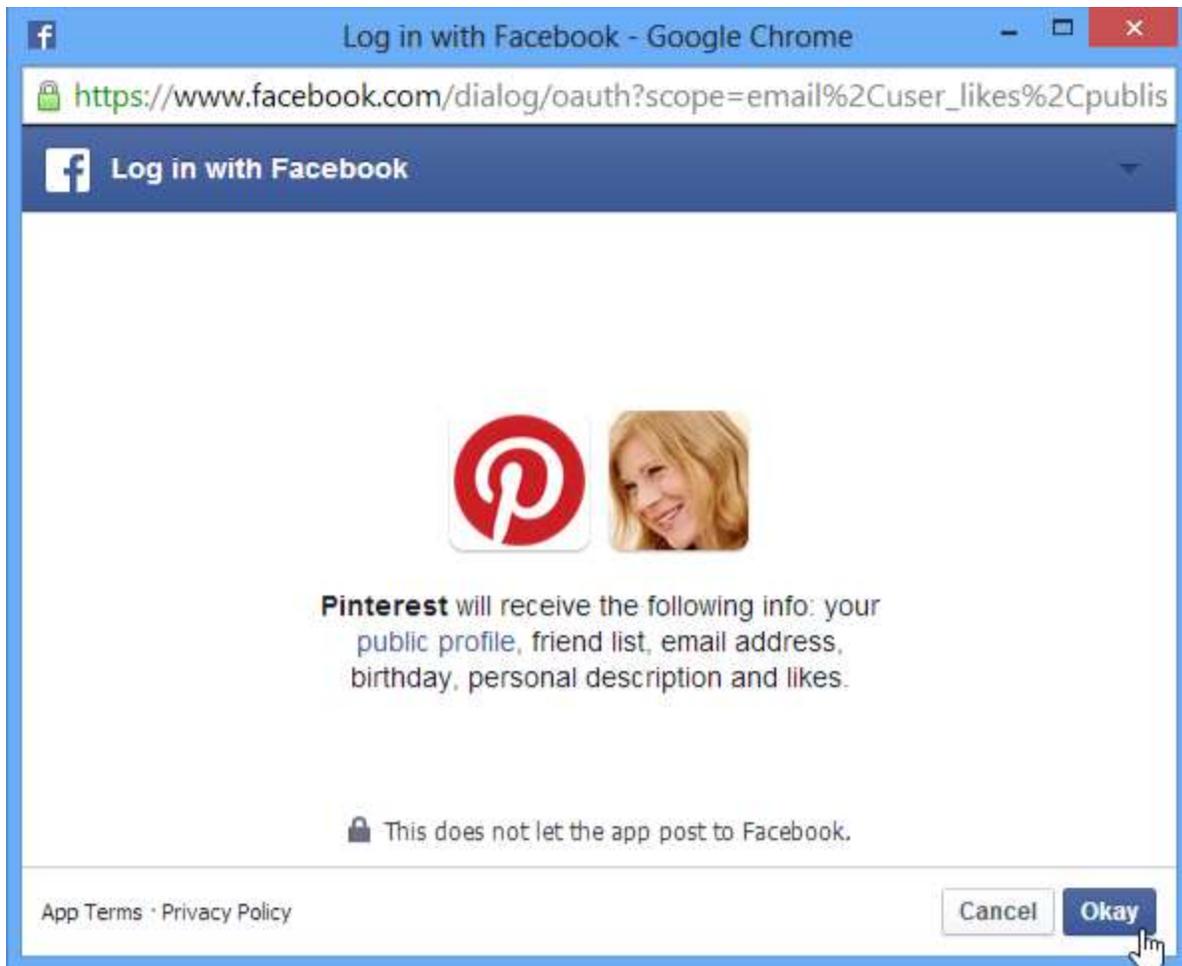
You can control how other sites work with your Facebook account by changing your app settings. We'll explain how to do this in our lesson on Adjusting Your Privacy Settings.

Facebook privacy for minors

Facebook has several policies in place to help protect minors. For example, children younger than 13 are not allowed to use Facebook. Facebook also offers **extra privacy protections** for users **younger than 18**. However, these protections aren't very strong. For example, minors do show up in public search results, and anyone can view their most basic information, including their names and profile pictures.

Unless minors set privacy controls, their other personal information—including contact information, photos, and updates—can be viewed by their friends and their friends' friends, which **includes people the minor may not know** or wouldn't otherwise want viewing their information.

We recommend that parents **talk with their children** about how to use Facebook safely and **help them set privacy controls** that make sense.

For a complete explanation of Facebook's privacy for minors, visit Facebook's Family Safety Center. Also review Facebook's Data Policy for more detailed information on Facebook privacy.

Now that you understand the basics of Facebook privacy, you're ready to start using Facebook's privacy controls. You'll learn how to adjust all of the most important privacy settings in the [next lesson](#).