



Your Email Is the Master Key — Lock It Down First

Lock down your inbox first, step by step

————— An Extended Guide · No. 1657 · PASSWORDS & SECURITY —————

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1. Why your email is the master key

Nearly every other account resets through your inbox.

Think about what happens when you forget a password. You click 'forgot password,' and the website sends a reset link to your email. You open your inbox, click the link, and set a new password. That is a wonderful convenience — until you realize it means your email can unlock almost everything else you own.

Your bank, your Amazon account, your Facebook, your doctor's patient portal — most of them send their reset links to the same inbox. So whoever controls your email can quietly reset your other accounts one by one, locking you out and letting themselves in. That is why I always tell folks to lock the inbox down first, before anything else.

GOOD TO KNOW

This is not a reason to worry — it's a reason to focus. Spend your first half hour of security effort on your email, and you've protected the key that opens all the other doors.

I help folks with this all the time, and the good news is that the email providers have made it far easier than it used to be. A handful of settings, done once, and your inbox goes from an easy target to a hard one.

2. The three locks every inbox needs

A strong password, a second step, and correct recovery.

Before we go provider by provider, here's the whole plan in one breath. Every email account needs three things, and they work together like the locks on a good front door.

- A strong, unique password — long, and used on no other account.
- A second step (two-factor) — so a stolen password alone can't get in.
- Correct recovery — a backup phone and email you still control.

Those three cover the overwhelming majority of break-ins. A crook who guesses or buys your password still hits the wall of the second step. And if you're ever locked out yourself, correct recovery is the path back in. The rest of this guide is just showing you where each of these lives for the email you use.

TIP

Do all three in one sitting if you can. Coming back 'later' for the second and third is how people end up only half-protected.

3. A strong, unique password for your inbox

This one password matters more than any other you have.

If you reuse the same password across several sites, your email must not be one of them. Because the inbox is the master key, it deserves a password you use nowhere else — long, and hard to guess. A string of four or five unrelated words, with a number and a symbol, is both strong and something you can actually remember.

The reason unique matters so much: when any one website is breached, the stolen passwords get tried on other sites, especially email. If your inbox password is the same one that leaked from some old shopping site, a crook can walk straight in. A unique password closes that door entirely.

- Make it long — several words is better than one clever word.
- Use it only for email, never anywhere else.
- Store it in a password manager so you don't have to memorize it.

TIP

A password manager is the easiest way to give every account its own strong password without keeping them all in your head. My guide on your first password manager walks through it gently.

4. The second step is the big one

Two-factor turns a stolen password into a dead end.

If you do only one thing from this guide, make it this: turn on the second step, also called two-factor or two-step verification. With it on, even someone who has your password is stopped cold, because they'd also need the code or the tap that lands on your phone. It is the single biggest upgrade to your inbox's safety.

Providers call it slightly different things, but you'll find it under a heading like 'Security,' '2-Step Verification,' or 'Two-factor authentication.' You turn it on once, confirm it with your phone, and from then on your account asks for that second step when something looks new or unusual.

GOOD TO KNOW

You won't be pestered for the code every single time on your own familiar devices. It mainly appears when a new device or a new location tries to sign in — which is exactly when you'd want it to.

There are a few kinds of second step, and some are stronger than others. The next chapter sorts them out so you can pick the best one your phone supports.

5. App, text, passkey, or key — which second step?

They're not all equal; pick the strongest you can use.

When you turn on the second step, you'll be offered a choice of how you receive it. Here they are, from good to best, so you can choose what fits you.

- Text message code — good, and far better than nothing. A code arrives by text and you type it in.
- Authenticator app — better. A free app makes a fresh code every half minute, right on your phone, with no text needed.
- Passkey — excellent. You sign in with your phone or computer's own face, fingerprint, or PIN. Nothing to type and nothing to steal.
- Hardware security key — the strongest. A small key you tap or plug in to prove it's really you.

Text codes have one weakness: a determined crook can sometimes trick a phone company into moving your number to their phone. It's uncommon, but it's why an app, a passkey, or a key is stronger. If your phone supports a passkey, that's a wonderful, simple choice for your email.

WATCH OUT

If this is all new, start with a text code today so you're protected at all, then upgrade to an app or passkey when you have a few minutes. Protected-but-simple beats perfect-but-never-done.

6. Recovery phone and email, set correctly

Your way back in if you're ever locked out.

Recovery settings are how your provider confirms it's really you if you forget your password or lose your phone. Done right, they're your safety net. Done wrong — or left pointing at an old phone number or a dead email — they can lock you out or, worse, give a stranger a way in.

- 1 Open your account's security settings.
- 2 Check the recovery phone number — make sure it's a phone you still have.
- 3 Check the recovery email — make sure it's an address you still control.
- 4 Remove any old number or address you no longer use.

Pay special attention to the recovery email. If it points at an account you abandoned years ago, that old account becomes a back door into this one. Either update it to an address you actively use, or remove it.

WATCH OUT

If you ever find a recovery phone or email you don't recognize, that's a serious red flag that someone else has been in your account. Remove it, change your password, and turn on the second step without delay.

7. The sneaky trick: forwarding rules

A crook's favorite way to keep reading your mail.

Here's a trick that catches a lot of people. When a thief gets into an inbox, they often don't change anything obvious. Instead, they quietly set up a forwarding rule — a setting that sends a secret copy of your incoming mail to their own address. Then they can get out, and you'd never notice they were there, while they keep reading everything that arrives.

This is how they stay ahead of you. Even if you change your password, a forwarding rule they left behind keeps feeding them your reset codes and private messages. That's why checking for these rules is a must-do, not an optional extra.

- 1 Open your mail settings and find the section named 'Forwarding' or 'Rules.'
- 2 Look for any forwarding address you didn't set up yourself.
- 3 Delete anything you don't recognize.
- 4 Do the same in any 'Filters' section (see the next chapter).

TIP

A forwarding rule you didn't create is proof someone got in. Remove it, change your password, sign out of all devices, and turn on the second step. If you're unsure how, that's exactly the kind of thing I can walk you through.

8. Filters that hide mail from you

The quiet cousin of the forwarding rule.

Right next to forwarding, most email services let you set up filters — rules that automatically file, delete, or mark certain messages. You might use one to send all your newsletters to a folder. A thief uses them for a darker purpose: to hide the evidence of what they're doing.

A common move is a filter that instantly deletes any email mentioning 'password,' 'security,' or the name of your bank. That way, when they reset one of your accounts, the warning email never reaches your eyes — it's gone before you see it. Checking your filters catches this.

- Open the 'Filters' or 'Rules' section of your mail settings.
- Read through each rule and ask, 'Did I make this?'
- Delete any rule that deletes, forwards, or hides mail and isn't yours.

GOOD TO KNOW

It's perfectly normal to have a few filters you set up yourself over the years. You're only looking for ones you don't recognize — especially any that make mail disappear.

9. Locking down Gmail

Google's inbox, step by step.

If you use Gmail, your settings live in your Google Account. Open your web browser and type myaccount.google.com yourself, then look for the 'Security' section. This one page holds your password, your second step, and your recovery options.

- 1 Go to myaccount.google.com and open 'Security.'
- 2 Set a strong, unique password under the password setting.
- 3 Turn on '2-Step Verification' and choose an app, passkey, or phone.
- 4 Set your recovery phone and recovery email, and check they're current.

- 5 In Gmail's own settings, open 'Forwarding and POP/IMAP' and 'Filters' and remove anything you don't recognize.

Google also offers a 'Security Checkup' that walks you through recent sign-ins, your devices, and any third-party apps connected to your account. It's a friendly, guided way to spot anything out of place.

WATCH OUT

On the Security page, look for a list of your signed-in devices. If you see one you don't recognize, you can sign it out right there — a quick way to push out anyone who shouldn't be in.

10. Locking down Outlook and Microsoft

The same ideas, Microsoft's buttons.

If your email ends in outlook.com, hotmail.com, or live.com, it's a Microsoft account. Type account.microsoft.com into your browser yourself and open the 'Security' area. As with Google, your password, second step, and recovery all live here.

- 1 Go to account.microsoft.com and open 'Security.'
- 2 Set a strong, unique password.
- 3 Turn on 'Two-step verification' and pick an app or another method.
- 4 Review your 'security info' — the phone and email used to verify you.
- 5 In Outlook's mail settings, check 'Forwarding' and 'Rules' for anything you didn't add.

Microsoft also offers 'recent activity,' a page showing where and when your account has been signed into. If a sign-in from an unfamiliar place shows up, that's your cue to change the password and tighten the second step.

GOOD TO KNOW

Microsoft offers a passwordless option using its authenticator app, where you approve sign-ins with a tap instead of typing a password. It's a strong, convenient choice once your basics are in place.

11. Locking down Apple Mail and iCloud

Your Apple ID is the key here.

If you use an iPhone, iPad, or Mac and your address ends in icloud.com, me.com, or mac.com, your email is tied to your Apple ID. You can manage it on your device under Settings, or by typing appleid.apple.com into a browser yourself and signing in.

- 1 On an iPhone or iPad, open Settings and tap your name at the top.
- 2 Open 'Sign-In and Security.'
- 3 Confirm two-factor authentication is turned on (on most Apple accounts it already is).
- 4 Check your trusted phone number is one you still have.
- 5 Set a strong password and keep your recovery details current.

Apple builds two-factor in quite firmly, which is a good thing — it means most Apple accounts already have a strong second step. Your job is mainly to confirm it's on, keep your trusted phone number up to date, and consider adding a recovery contact or recovery key for extra peace of mind.

TIP

Apple lets you name a 'recovery contact' — a trusted person who can help you back into your account if you're ever locked out. For many folks, a spouse or adult child is the natural choice.

12. Locking down Yahoo Mail

Older, but still worth securing well.

Yahoo Mail has been around a long time, and plenty of folks still use it. The settings sit in your Yahoo account security area. Type login.yahoo.com into your browser yourself, sign in, and look for 'Account security.'

- 1 Sign in at login.yahoo.com and open 'Account security.'
- 2 Set a strong, unique password.
- 3 Turn on 'Two-step verification' using an app or your phone.
- 4 Review your recovery phone and recovery email.
- 5 In Yahoo Mail settings, check filters and forwarding for anything you didn't create.

Yahoo has had large data breaches in its history, so if your Yahoo password is an old one you've used elsewhere, changing it to something strong and unique is especially worthwhile. The second step matters here just as much as anywhere else.

WATCH OUT

Yahoo also offers an 'account key' that sends a sign-in prompt to your phone. That's fine, but be sure the phone it points to is one you still carry — an old number here can lock you out later.

13. App passwords, in plain terms

What they are and when you'd ever need one.

You may run across a setting called 'app passwords' and wonder what it is. When you turn on the second step, some older programs — an old mail program on a computer, or a printer that emails scans — can't handle the extra step. An app password is a special one-off password you generate for that one program, so it can reach your mail without your main password.

Most people never need one, because modern apps handle the second step on their own. But if an old program suddenly stops being able to send or receive your mail after you turn on two-factor, an app password is usually the fix.

GOOD TO KNOW

Treat an app password like a spare key: generate it only for a program you trust, and if you stop using that program, delete the app password so it can't be misused.

If you do see a list of app passwords you don't remember creating, that's worth a closer look — it can be another sign someone else has been setting things up in your account.

14. How to tell your inbox has been compromised

The signs that someone else has gotten in.

Sometimes the first clue is subtle. Before you assume the worst, know that most of these signs have innocent explanations too — but together, they're worth acting on. Here's what to watch for.

- Messages in your Sent folder that you didn't write — or a Sent folder that's suddenly empty.
- Friends telling you they got strange email or odd links 'from you.'
- Password-reset emails arriving for accounts you never asked to reset.
- Being unexpectedly signed out, or your password no longer working.

- A forwarding rule, filter, or recovery address you don't recognize. Any one of these on its own might be nothing. But reset emails you didn't request, strange rules, or contacts getting spam from you are strong signs, and the right response is the same: change the password, sign out everywhere, and clean out the settings. The next chapters show you how.

WATCH OUT

A real warning worth heeding is an email from your provider saying 'new sign-in from a device in another place.' If that wasn't you, act on it. But be careful — scammers fake these too. Don't click the link; go to your account by typing the address yourself.

15. If your email has been taken over

A calm, clear order of operations.

If you're fairly sure someone else is in your inbox, don't panic — there's a clear path, and acting quickly limits the damage. Do these in order, and if you can still sign in, start at the top.

- 1 Change your email password to a strong, unique one right away.
- 2 Use 'sign out all devices' (or 'sign out everywhere') to kick everyone out.
- 3 Remove any forwarding rules, filters, and recovery addresses you don't recognize.
- 4 Turn on the second step if it wasn't already on.
- 5 Review recent activity and connected apps, and remove anything strange.

Changing the password without signing out all devices isn't enough on its own — some systems keep a crook signed in until you force everyone out. That's why the 'sign out everywhere' button matters so much. Do it right after the password change.

TIP

Once the inbox is locked back down, check the accounts that matter most — your bank, Amazon, and anything financial — since those resets flow through email. Make sure nothing was changed while the crook had access.

16. When you can't get back in at all

Using the provider's official recovery path.

If the password's already been changed and you're locked out, you'll need the provider's account recovery process. Every major provider has one — a page, reached by typing the address yourself, that walks you through proving you're the real owner.

- Google — go to accounts.google.com and choose 'Forgot password,' then follow account recovery.
- Microsoft — go to account.live.com/password/reset.
- Apple — use iforgot.apple.com or your device's built-in recovery.
- Yahoo — use the 'Forgot username or password' link at login.yahoo.com.

Recovery works best when your recovery phone and email were set correctly ahead of time — which is exactly why we set them earlier in this guide. Be patient and honest with the questions; the system is designed to be careful so a stranger can't use it against you.

GOOD TO KNOW

Recovery can take a little time, especially if the crook changed your recovery details. The provider deliberately slows things down to protect you. If you get stuck, I can sit with you and work through it together.

17. Watch for phishing aimed at your inbox

The front door scammers knock on most.

The most common way crooks get into an inbox isn't clever hacking — it's tricking you into typing your password on a fake page. You get an email that looks like it's from your provider: 'Your mailbox is full,' or 'Verify your account or it will be closed.' The link leads to a copycat sign-in page built to capture what you type.

- Never sign in through a link in an email. Type your provider's address yourself.
- Check the web address carefully — lookalike spellings are the giveaway.
- Real providers don't threaten to close your account in an hour.
- If a password manager won't auto-fill on a page, that's a hint the page is fake.

TIP

Urgency is the scammer's main tool — 'act now or lose your account.' A real provider gives you time. When a message rushes you, slow down and check by going to the site yourself.

My separate guide on spotting fake login pages goes deeper on this, because it's the skill that protects the master key itself. When in doubt, it's always free to stop and ask someone you trust, or to call me.

18. A second email as a safety net

Why many folks keep two addresses.

There's real value in having a second email address, kept separate and quiet. One address is your main, locked-down inbox — the master key — that your bank and important accounts use. The second is an everyday address you hand out for shopping, newsletters, and sign-ups that don't much matter.

Keeping them separate means that if the everyday address gets flooded with spam or caught up in a breach, your important master-key inbox stays clean and calm. It also makes the junk easier to ignore, since it's not mixed in with mail that matters.

- Main inbox — for your bank, government, medical, and key accounts. Guard it hardest.
- Everyday inbox — for stores, newsletters, and casual sign-ups.
- Both still deserve a strong password and a second step.

WATCH OUT

If you've been using one inbox for everything, you don't have to switch overnight. Just start pointing new, unimportant sign-ups at the everyday address, and let the split happen gradually.

19. Keep your recovery details fresh

The one thing that quietly goes stale.

Of all the settings in this guide, recovery details are the ones most likely to drift out of date. People change phone numbers, abandon old email addresses, and forget that their account is still pointing at them. An out-of-date recovery phone can lock you out at the worst possible moment.

- 1 Once or twice a year, open your account's security settings.
- 2 Confirm the recovery phone is a number you still carry.
- 3 Confirm the recovery email is one you still check.
- 4 Update or remove anything that's no longer yours.

Tie this to something you already do each year — tax season, a birthday — so it's easy to remember. Five minutes of checking saves you a frightening afternoon of being locked out later.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you change your phone number, updating your email's recovery number should be on your moving-day checklist, right alongside telling your bank. It's easy to forget until you need it.

20. Helping a spouse or parent lock down their inbox

The same steps, done together.

If you help a spouse or an aging parent with their technology, their email deserves this same care — arguably more, since they may be less likely to spot a problem themselves. The steps are identical; the difference is doing them together and writing down where things live.

- Set a strong, unique password and store it in a shared, trusted place.
- Turn on the second step, pointed at a phone they actually carry.
- Set yourself as a recovery contact where the provider allows it.
- Write down the plan so another family member could follow it.

For a parent with memory trouble, being their recovery contact — or holding their recovery details in a family password manager — means you can help them back in without a stressful phone call to a help line. It's one of the kindest bits of setup you can do.

TIP

My guides on sharing passwords safely and on emergency access pair perfectly with this one — they cover exactly where to keep these logins so the right people can reach them and no one else can.

21. Passkeys and signing in the modern way

Where email security is heading.

The newest and, in many ways, simplest way to protect your inbox is the passkey. Instead of a typed password, a passkey lets you sign in using your phone or computer's own unlock — your face, your fingerprint, or your device PIN. There's nothing to type, nothing to forget, and nothing for a crook to steal in a breach.

Google, Microsoft, and Apple all support passkeys for their email accounts, and they work beautifully alongside everything else in this guide. You can add a passkey and keep your password as a backup, or lean on the passkey as your main way in. Either way, you've made the master key much harder to copy.

GOOD TO KNOW

A passkey can't be phished the way a password can, because there's nothing to type into a fake page. That makes it one of the strongest protections available for an email account.

If passkeys are new to you, my dedicated passkeys guide explains them plainly and walks you through adding one. For your email, it's a wonderful upgrade whenever you're ready.

22. Reading an email's real sender

The 'from' name can lie — the address is harder to fake.

One skill pays off again and again: learning to see who an email is really from. The display name — the friendly name you see first, like 'Apple Support' or 'Your Bank' — is just a label anyone can type. The real tell is the email address behind it, and taking a second to look at that address catches a great many fakes.

- 1 Tap or click the sender's name to reveal the full address.
- 2 Read the part after the @ sign — that's the real source.
- 3 Ask whether it matches the company it claims to be.
- 4 Be suspicious of odd spellings or a free-email address claiming to be a big company.

A real message from a bank won't come from a random string of letters at a free email service. If 'Your Bank Security Team' writes from an address that has nothing to do with your bank, that's your answer. Trust the address over the friendly name every time.

GOOD TO KNOW

Even a sender address can occasionally be faked, so this check isn't foolproof. It's one good layer — paired with never clicking sign-in links and typing addresses yourself, you're well covered.

23. Your inbox on public Wi-Fi and while traveling

A few sensible habits away from home.

People often worry that checking email on the coffee-shop or hotel Wi-Fi is dangerous. The honest answer is that it's far safer than it used to be, because your email connection is encrypted by default. Still, a few habits keep you comfortable and safe when you're away from your own network.

- Make sure the web address of your email starts with 'https' — the lock symbol.
- Avoid signing into important accounts on a stranger's computer or a shared library machine.
- If you must use a public computer, sign out fully when you're done.
- Having your second step turned on protects you even on an untrusted network.

The strongest protection while traveling is the same one we keep coming back to: the second step. Even if someone somehow captured your password on a shady network, they'd still be stopped by the code or tap that only reaches your phone.

GOOD TO KNOW

Before a trip, confirm your second step points at a phone you're taking with you, and that you have your recovery details handy. Getting locked out far from home is a headache worth preventing.

24. Not losing the mail that matters

A calm word about backups and important messages.

Your inbox holds more than conversations — receipts, statements, confirmations, and records you may need years from now. Locking the account down protects access to all of it, but it's worth a moment's thought about not losing the mail that matters, separate from keeping crooks out.

- Keep important receipts and documents in a folder or label so they're easy to find.
- For anything truly vital, save a copy outside email — printed, or saved as a file.
- If you ever change email providers, don't abandon the old inbox until you've moved what you need.
- A password manager can hold account logins; it isn't where your emails themselves live. The point isn't to make a big project of it. It's simply to notice that the inbox quietly becomes a filing cabinet over the years, and to make sure losing access — or losing the account — wouldn't take irreplaceable records with it.

GOOD TO KNOW

This is one more reason the second step and correct recovery matter so much: they protect not just your privacy but years of records you'd hate to lose.

25. Your inbox as part of your bigger plan

Why email belongs in your family's records.

Because your email is the master key, it deserves a place in the bigger plan you make for your family — the same plan that covers where your important papers live and who can help if you can't. If something happens to you, the person helping your household will need a way into your inbox to reach everything it unlocks.

You don't have to write your password on a scrap of paper to do this well. A family password manager, or a provider's own 'legacy contact' or 'recovery contact' feature, lets a trusted person reach your account the right way, without leaving your password lying around where anyone could find it.

- Apple offers a 'Legacy Contact' who can access your account if needed.
- Google offers an 'Inactive Account Manager' to pass access along.
- A family password manager with emergency access covers all your accounts at once.

TIP

My guides on emergency access and the family password manager cover this in full. Setting it up is a quiet kindness that spares your loved ones a locked door at a hard time.

26. What not to do with your inbox

A few habits that quietly undo your good work.

Locking down your email is mostly about the settings we've covered, but a few everyday habits can quietly weaken all of it. None of these is a lecture — just the handful of things I see trip folks up most often.

- Don't reuse your email password on any other site.
- Don't read codes or passwords aloud to someone who called you.
- Don't click sign-in links in emails — go to the site yourself.
- Don't leave your inbox signed in on a shared or public computer.
- Don't ignore 'new sign-in' warnings from your provider.

The thread running through all of these is simple: treat your inbox as the valuable key it is. You wouldn't hand your house key to a stranger who phoned you, and your email deserves the same caution.

WATCH OUT

No legitimate company will ever call you and ask you to read back a code that was just texted to you. That code is the second step itself — reading it aloud hands a crook the key. Hang up.

27. A simple once-a-year inbox check

Five minutes to confirm the key is still locked.

Your email settings don't expire, but a quick yearly look keeps you confident and catches anything odd early. Tie it to something you already do each year so it's easy to remember.

- 1 Sign in and confirm your second step is still turned on.
- 2 Check your recovery phone and email are still current.
- 3 Open forwarding and filters, and confirm there's nothing you didn't add.
- 4 Glance at recent activity or signed-in devices for anything unfamiliar.

That's the whole routine. In five minutes you've verified that the master key to your digital life is still firmly locked. It's one of the highest-value five minutes you can spend on your technology all year.

TIP

Put a recurring note in your calendar — say, every tax season — to run this check. It pairs nicely with checking that your credit freezes are still on.

28. Putting it all together

The whole plan on one breath.

Let's bring it home. Your email is the master key, because that's where the reset links for everything else land. Lock it down first, and the rest of your accounts get safer almost for free. The core is simple enough to say in a sentence.

- 1 Give your inbox a strong, unique password used nowhere else.
- 2 Turn on the strongest second step your phone supports.
- 3 Set a recovery phone and email you still control, and keep them current.

- 4 Check for forwarding rules and filters you didn't create.
- 5 Learn the signs of a compromised inbox and the steps to recover it.
- 6 Glance at the settings once a year to confirm it's all still on.

That's it. No gadget required, no monthly fee, no ongoing chore — just a well-locked inbox doing its quiet work in the background.

GOOD TO KNOW

If any single step here feels like one too many, you don't have to do it alone. Walking through exactly this, at your kitchen table or over a screen-share, is one of the most common things I help folks with.

29. Frequently asked questions

Quick answers to the things people ask most.

Why does my email matter more than my other accounts? Because password resets for those other accounts are sent to your email. Control the inbox and you control nearly everything else.

Is a text-message code good enough? It's far better than nothing and perfectly reasonable to start with. An authenticator app or a passkey is stronger, so upgrade when you can.

What's the single most important thing? Turn on the second step. A strong password matters, but the second step stops a stolen password from being enough.

I think someone got into my email — what first? Change the password, then use 'sign out all devices,' then remove any forwarding rules or filters you didn't create.

Do I really need two email addresses? You don't have to, but keeping a separate everyday address for shopping and newsletters keeps your important master-key inbox cleaner and calmer.

TIP

If any of these steps feels like one too many, that's exactly the kind of thing I can sit down and do with you — in person or remotely — in under an hour.

CHEAT SHEET

Your Lock-Down-Your-Email Cheat Sheet

Keep this page by the computer. It's the short version of everything in this guide — the handful of things that make your inbox hard to break into.

Where to go (type these yourself)

- Gmail — myaccount.google.com (Security).
- Outlook / Microsoft — account.microsoft.com (Security).
- Apple / iCloud — appleid.apple.com (Sign-In and Security).
- Yahoo — login.yahoo.com, then Account security.

The four things to do

- 1 Set a strong, unique password you use nowhere else.
- 2 Turn on the strongest second step you can — an app, a passkey, or a key.
- 3 Set a recovery phone and recovery email you still control.
- 4 Check for forwarding rules or filters you didn't create, and remove them.

Signs someone else is in your inbox

- Sent messages you didn't write, or an empty Sent folder.
- Password-reset emails for accounts you didn't ask to reset.
- Contacts telling you they got strange mail from you.
- A new forwarding rule, filter, or recovery address you don't recognize.

If it's been taken over

- 1 Use the provider's recovery or 'account recovery' page to get back in.
- 2 Change the password and sign out all other devices.
- 3 Remove any forwarding rules, filters, and strange recovery options.
- 4 Turn on the second step, then check your bank and key accounts.
- 5 Stuck? Call Bill's Home Tech at (330) 200-8042.

WORDS TO KNOW

Plain-English Word List

Master key — A plain way of saying your email controls your other accounts, because password resets are sent there. Guard it accordingly.

Two-factor (2FA) — A second step after your password — a code, a tap, or a key — so a stolen password alone isn't enough to get in.

Authenticator app — A free app on your phone that makes a fresh six-digit code every half minute. Stronger than codes sent by text.

Passkey — A modern sign-in that uses your phone or computer's own unlock — your face, fingerprint, or PIN — instead of a typed password.

Recovery phone / email — A backup phone number or second email your provider uses to confirm it's really you if you're ever locked out.

Forwarding rule — A setting that quietly sends copies of your incoming mail to another address. Handy when you set it — dangerous when a crook sets it.

Filter — A rule that automatically moves, deletes, or marks certain mail. Thieves use filters to hide reset emails from you.

App password — A one-off password some providers give an older program so it can reach your mail without your main password.

Phishing — A fake message or sign-in page built to trick you into typing your email password where a crook can grab it.

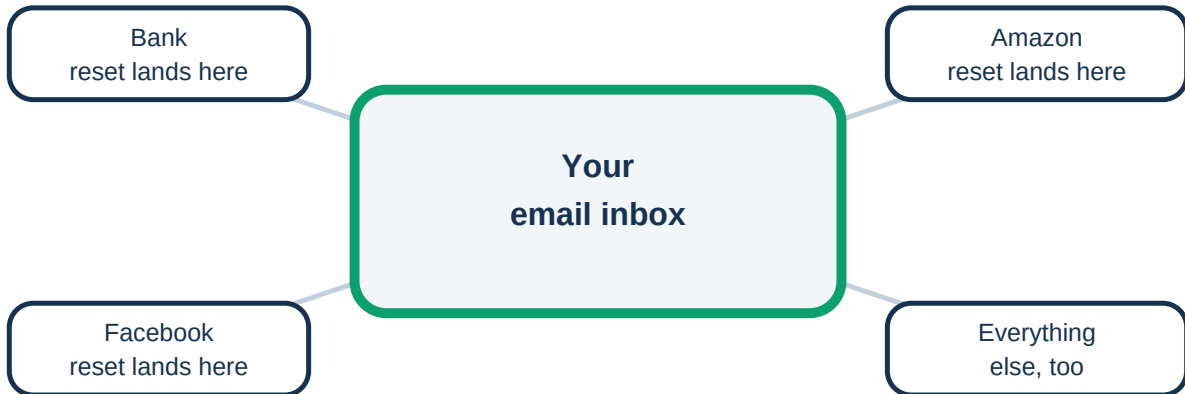
Sign out everywhere — A single button that kicks every device out of your account at once, so anyone who got in is pushed back out.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Your Email Is the Master Key

Reset links for your other accounts all land in your inbox.



Whoever controls your email can reset almost everything else.

Illustration - password resets for other accounts arrive by email.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

A Weak Inbox vs. a Locked-Down One

A few minutes of setup changes the whole picture.

Weak Inbox	Locked Down
- Reused old password - No second step - Old recovery phone - Never checks settings	- Strong, unique password - Second step turned on - Recovery set correctly - Checks for sneaky rules

Lock the inbox first and the rest of your accounts get safer, too.

Illustration - the same inbox, before and after a short tune-up.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: **billshometech.com/book** · **bill@billshometech.com**

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.