

We explain what to do if you've forgotten your Mac password - or don't know the password for the Mac you are using - and can't log on, install apps or make changes in System Settings/Preferences.

By [Karen Haslam](#) Managing Editor, Macworld FEB 5, 2025 3:44 am PST

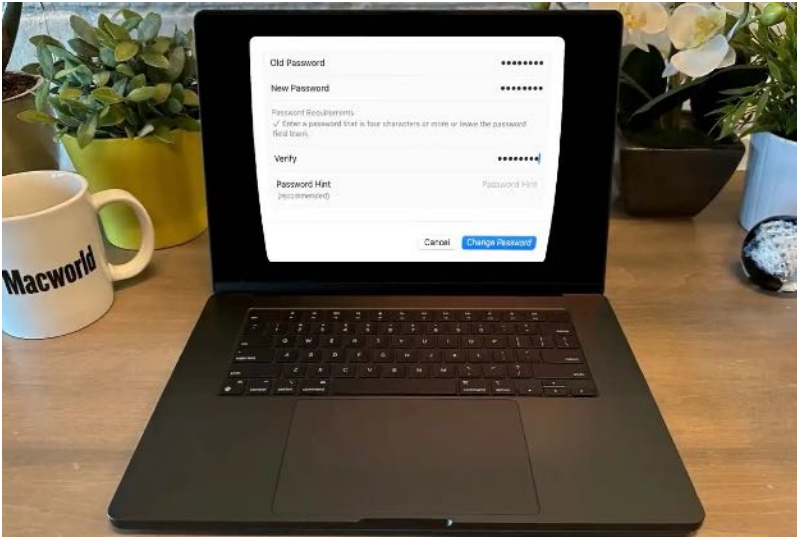


Image: Foundry

Apple's macOS is a secure operating system, and at the heart of its security is your password: you will need your password whenever you install new software or make changes to macOS via System Settings (known as System Preferences pre-macOS Ventura); you'll need it when logging in to your Mac (even if you [log into your Mac with an Apple Watch](#), and even if you use Touch ID to unlock your Mac you'll still need to enter your password when your Mac starts up. Sometimes you'll even need your password when deleting files.

But what do you do if you've lost or forgotten the password, or it doesn't work? Maybe you inherited or bought the Mac secondhand and you don't know the password. Don't panic. In this article we're going to look at how to recover and reset a lost Mac password.

On a related note, if your Mac is asking you for your iCloud login, or Apple ID, then read about [what to do if you forget your Apple ID password](#). We also have [How to find a password on a Mac](#) and [tips to make your passwords even stronger](#).

And if you really struggle to remember passwords have a look at our round up of the [best password managers](#) we have reviewed.

View the password hint



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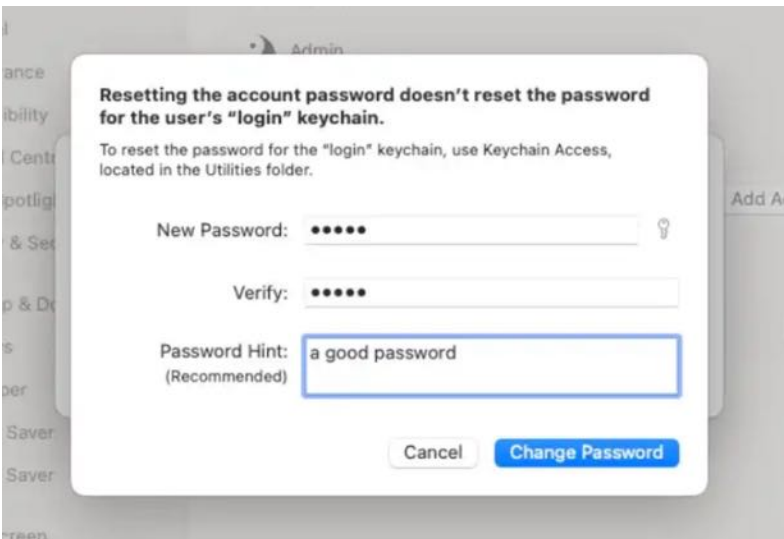
If you are lucky your Mac's password has been set up with a hint and you can view this on the log in screen.

You need to be in the log in screen to be able to access this option—just waking your Mac from sleep will not display the ? icon that you need to click on, you need to restart your Mac.

1. Restart your Mac.
2. When you are on the log in screen select the user you wish to log in as.
3. You should see a ? beside the Enter Password field.
4. Click on the ? and you might see a password hint.

If this helps you fix the problem excellent. If not we have more ideas below.

Change the password from another account



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Do you share the Mac with another person and do they have their own account? Is there an administrator who looks after your work Mac? An IT guy (or girl) who might be able to log on? Or do you have a different user account on the Mac that you do know the password to? The only problem here is that if the other user doesn't have Admin rights on the Mac they will not be able to change the password for you.

If you know (or can find out) the password to another account for the Mac you can use this account to

reset your password. Follow these steps to reset your Mac password from another account. Note the process is a little different depending on which version of macOS you are using.

In Ventura and later

1. Either restart the Mac, or if it is logged in click on the Apple logo and choose Log Out [name].
2. Select the account you do know the password to.
3. Enter the password for that account.
4. Open System Settings > Users & Groups.
5. Click on the i beside the account you've forgotten the password for.
6. Click Reset Password.
7. Enter the password you are logged in with.
8. Add a new password and verify it.
9. Add a Password hint (so that it doesn't get forgotten again).
10. Click Change Password.

In Monterey or older

1. Either restart the Mac, or if it is logged in click on the Apple logo and choose Log Out [name].
2. Select the account you do know the password to.
3. Enter the password for that account.
4. In Monterey or older open System Preferences > Users & Groups.
5. In Monterey or older click the lock icon in the bottom left of the window and enter the password again.
6. Select the account you've forgotten the password for in the sidebar.
7. Click Reset Password.
8. Fill in the New password, Verify and Password hint fields.
9. Click Change Password.

You have now changed the password for that account, and you can log into that account using the new password.

Note that this doesn't change the password for the Keychain and you will be asked when you log into the account if you want to update the [keychain password](#). To do this you'll need the old password (which you have forgotten) so you'll have to click Create New Keychain.

Reset your password using Recovery Assistant and your Apple ID



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When you start up your Mac and select the user you wish to log in as you should see a ? beside the Enter Password field. Click on the ? and you might see a password hint (as we detailed above).

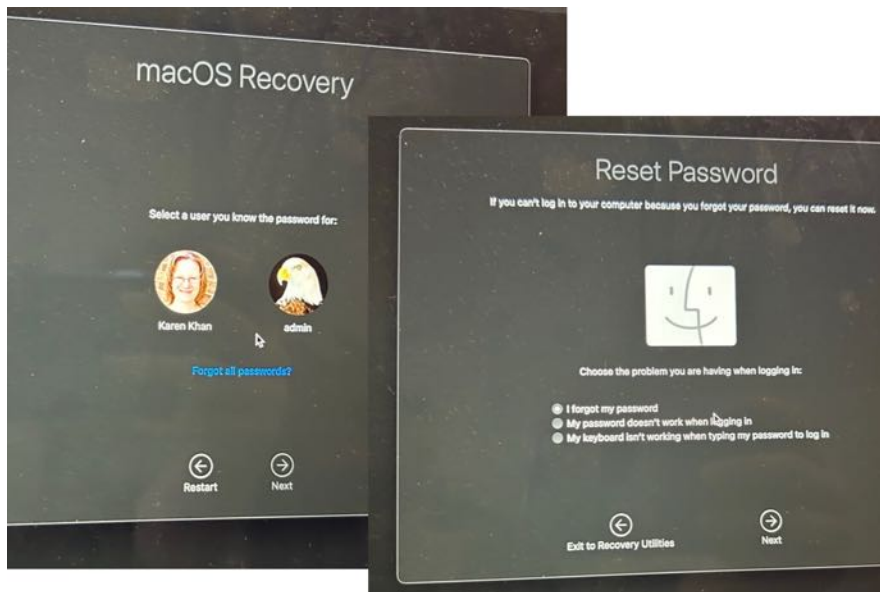
Below the password hint you should see the option to “Restart and show password reset options”. If you click on this your Mac will restart with Recovery Assistant open. Follow the steps below to reset your password.

1. When you are on the log in screen click on the ? beside the Enter Password box.
2. Click on Restart and show password reset options.
3. Your Mac will restart in the Recovery assistant.
4. Enter your Apple ID email address.
5. Click on Next.
6. Enter your Apple ID password.
7. You will now get an alert on another Apple product that is signed into your Apple ID. Approve the fact that there has been a login attempt (even if the alert says it happened in a completely different part of the country).
8. You will now see a six number code appear on your device, you should enter this on the the Mac you are trying to log in to.
9. Select the user you want to reset the password for.
10. Click on Next.
11. Enter a new password and then verify it.
12. Add a password hint so that you don't forget it again (but make sure that someone else couldn't easily guess it!)

If you don't see the ? this could be because you haven't started up your Mac from off—so switch the Mac off and turn it on again.

If you still don't see the ? and Recovery Assistant option at start up move to the next step.

Use Recovery mode, Terminal and your Apple ID to reset your password



If you didn't see the option to "restart and show password reset options" detailed above, you can still enter the Recovery mode and use the Recovery Assistant to change your password.

The process will depend on whether you have a Mac powered by an Intel processor or one that uses one of Apple's M-series chips, such as the M1 or M2 or later.

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On a M-series Mac: Restart the Mac and press and hold the power button until you see the startup options. Click on Options > Continue.

On an Intel Mac: Restart the Mac and press and hold Command and R until the Apple logo appears. See [How to use Recovery mode on a Mac](#).

Once in Recovery you can change the password for the Mac, even if you don't know the password. You just need to know your Apple ID and password.

1. In macOS Recovery either choose a user you know the password for, or click on Forgot all passwords.
2. Now enter your Apple ID email and click on Next.
3. Enter your Apple ID password and click Next.
4. If all is good you will see Authentication successful. You now need to click on Exit to Recovery.
5. When you get the the Recovery screen you don't want any of the options presented to you, such as Restore from Time Machine and Reinstall macOS. Instead click on Utilities in the menu at the top of the screen.
6. Click on Terminal.
7. In Terminal type `resetpassword`
8. Click on Return. Now the Reset Password options will open on the screen.
9. Choose I forgot my password.
10. Click on Next.

11. Now sign in with your Apple ID email and password.
12. You will see a warning that someone is using your Apple ID flash up on your other Apple devices, approve this and then you will see a six number code.
13. Enter the six number code on the Mac.
14. Choose the user you wish to reset the password for.
15. After you have entered the new password and a hint you can restart your Mac.

Use your recovery key to reset your password



Apple

If your drive is encrypted (either by you or your employer) through FileVault, you will see an option to reset your password using your recovery key. You will of course need that recovery key – which is a string of letters and numbers – so hopefully you haven't lost it.

If you have FileVault set up with a recovery key when you restart your Mac you will see Enter your FileVault recovery key as an option.

“Reset it using your recovery key” to use the drive's recovery key to reset your login password.

If you can't find your FileVault recovery key this may help: [How to find your FileVault recovery key in macOS](#).

How to make a Mac password hint appear

Now you know your password you might want to make sure that a password hint appears if you forget your password again. Follow these steps to set up a hint:

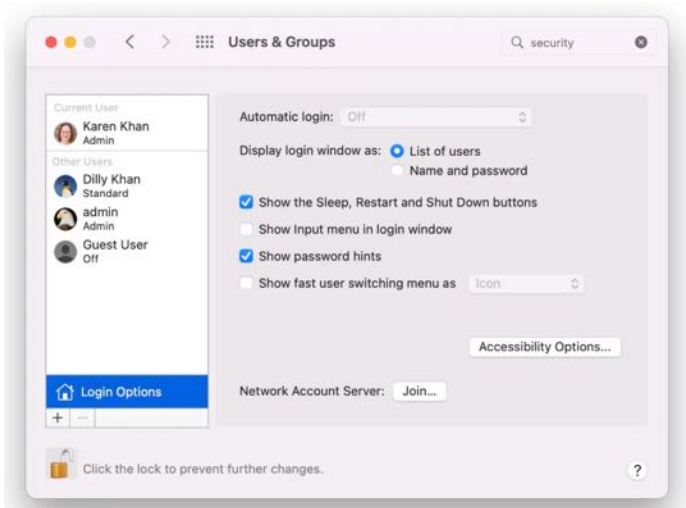
In Ventura or later:

1. Go to System Settings.
2. Scroll down to Users & Groups.
3. Click on the i beside the user's name.
4. Click on Change Password.
5. Enter the old password and then a new password, and verify that.
6. Add a password hint that makes sense to you but won't be easily guessed by someone else.

In Monterey or older:

1. Open System Preferences.
2. Click on Users & Groups.

3. Click on the lock and enter your password.
4. Click on Login Options.
5. Tick the box that says show password hints.
6. If there is no tip set up click on the user.
7. Click on Change Password.
8. Enter the old password and then a new password, and verify that.
9. Add a password hint that makes sense to you but won't be easily guessed by someone else.



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How to save your passwords so that you don't forget them

A good option is to create secure passwords and save them using a Password Manager such as [LastPass](#) or [1Password](#), which are included in our round up of the [Best Password Managers for Mac](#). You will need to remember your master password as that's how the password manager is kept secure, but you can look for any other password you use – so you could store your Mac password this way. Apple also offers it's own [Passwords app](#) that stores your passwords – but unfortunately it won't store the password to your Mac.

Apple's Passwords app can be helpful if you have forgotten your Apple ID though. On an iPhone open the Passwords app search for Apple and you should see one or more Apple ID usernames. Tap on these to find one with a recent date and hopefully that will be the one you are after.

Prior to iOS 18 this required iCloud Keychain. So open Settings, find Passwords and search for Apple as above.

Explore frequently asked questions

How to stop someone else resetting your Mac password

Now you know how to reset your password you may be worried that if you can use Recovery Mode to reset the password, someone else could do the same thing – and once a person has got access to your Mac, you've usually lost control over it. There are some steps you can take to protect your data, though.

The best way to protect your data is to turn on FileVault encryption. This encrypts the contents of your Mac, and the Password Reset utility will not show until you unlock it with Disk Utility. When you set up FileVault you can choose to receive a Recovery Key (which you should print out) or you can tie it to your Apple ID. Beware that if you forget or you lose these your data will be lost forever.

To turn FileVault on follow these steps (slightly different depending on the macOS version).

In Ventura or later:

1. Go to System Settings.
2. Click on Privacy & Security.
3. Scroll down to FileVault.
4. Click on Turn On...
5. Choose Allow my iCloud account to unlock my disk, or Create a recovery key and do not use my iCloud account. We advise using iCloud due to the risk of losing the recovery key.
6. Click on Continue.

In Monterey or older:

1. Open System Preferences.
2. Go to Security & Privacy.
3. Click on FileVault.
4. Click the lock and enter your password.
5. Choose Allow my iCloud account to unlock my disk, or Create a recovery key and do not use my iCloud account. We advise using iCloud due to the risk of losing the recovery key.
6. Click on Continue.

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Karen has worked on both sides of the Apple divide, clocking up a number of years at Apple's PR agency prior to joining Macworld more than two decades ago. Karen's career highlights include interviewing Apple's Steve Wozniak and discussing Steve Jobs' legacy on the BBC. Having edited the U.K. print and online editions of Macworld for many years, more recently her focus has been on SEO and evergreen content as well as product recommendations and buying advice.