

Tech Tips from Mr G

Facing Facebook



Have you avoided using **Facebook** because of all the things you've heard about how it invades your privacy, showing everyone in the world every stupid thing you've ever said or done? Are you afraid of being inundated with friend requests from people that you're happy you haven't seen in 20 years? Are you afraid to use it because of stories you've heard about people hacking into Facebook accounts and taking them over? And yet...do you realize that you're missing out on being connected with far-flung friends and family members by not being a Facebook user? Then this is the handout for you!

It's Not "All or Nothing"

When I was a very young child, I had a run-in with an odd-looking electrical outlet that threw me halfway across the room. That experience gave me a healthy respect for electricity that remains to this day. However, that experience, and the knowledge that people are regularly killed in electrical accidents, have not made me so fearful of it that I won't change a light bulb. Instead, I've learned how to use it carefully and safely.

The same applies with Facebook and other social media sites. It doesn't have to be all or nothing. You can use Facebook without giving away every family secret. You can use Facebook without having to accept everyone on the Internet as your friend. In fact, you can even use it without most people even knowing that you're there unless you specifically tell them.

If you learn how to use a few settings, it's all very simple to do. But before we take a look at those, let's take a closer look at how Facebook works.

In the Beginning...

The whole point of Facebook was to make it easy for friends who know you now to connect and share with you, and for people who knew you back in the day to find and reconnect with you. Why would you want that to happen? Because sometimes, through no one's fault in particular, we just lose track of people. You send them a card, only to find out that they've moved and the forwarding order has expired. You try to call, and their number now belongs to a Thai restaurant. You send them email, but it bounces back because they've switched email providers.

Facebook was designed to solve that problem by giving everyone an address that never goes away, no matter how many times they move, change phone numbers, or change email providers. This means that if you moved, your friends could still contact you through Facebook to get your new information.

Facebook has also been very good at preserving friendships that would've withered previously. I know of someone whose best friend moved to England after 9th grade, and back in the old days, that pretty much would've been the end of that friendship. But thanks to Facebook, she's able to keep in touch with her friend in England just as regularly and easily as she is with her friends in Boston, Philadelphia, Manhattan, or even here in Onondaga County.

And even though many of my old high school friends and acquaintances have already found me, I sort of wish that we had this available to use 40 years ago.

Shallow is Good

Many people complain about the shallowness of relationships on Facebook, and the fact that you can have hundreds of "friends" that you don't know really well. In my blog post **Let's Hear it for the Shallowness of Facebook**, I compare the many "friendships" I have on Facebook with the many people I knew in my 2000-student high school. But rather than rewrite the entire article here, I'll let you read that for yourself at tinyurl.com/word-20130409.

But the **Reader's Digest** version is that all that shallowness is not necessarily a bad thing! You don't have to have a long, deep conversation with everyone. Sometimes too deep all the time can be very intimidating!

So What is Facebook?

If you understand a few simple things here, life will be a whole lot easier for you, and you won't embarrass yourself and others.

1. It's not email. While you can send private messages to people, Facebook is basically a place where you put your information out there for everyone...or at least all your friends...to see. Do you think that Cousin Sue's boyfriend is a jerk? Don't put that in a regular Facebook post; send it as a private message to the one person you really want to see it.
2. Be careful about those photos. If you wouldn't want your parents...or children...to see them, then you probably shouldn't be sharing them on Facebook. And how will you feel about those photos turning up five years from now? You might also want to think about future employers.
3. Not everyone will see everything you post, and you won't see everything they post either. The more friends you have, the more true this is. Facebook doesn't add everything to your **Newsfeed**, so don't take it personally when some of your friends don't respond to a post.
4. Think before you post, and please, don't air your dirty laundry online. There's way too much of that going on anyway. Remember...as Thumper's father said, "If you can't say anything nice...send it as a private message...or in email."

So now that you know all this, let's take a look at setting up a Facebook account.

Signing Up

The first thing you're going to have to enter when you create your Facebook account is your **name** and **email address**. These two are very important when it comes to people trying to connect with you. A search for **Susan Smith** may bring up hundreds, if not thousands of possible hits to comb through, many of whom might be playing coy by not giving enough identifying information for you to find the right one. On the other hand, if you have the email address of the Susan Smith you're looking for, doing a Facebook search on that will take you to her immediately...even if she's changed her Facebook name to **Susan Marie** (more on that later).

You'll also be asked to create a **password**. I cannot stress enough how important it is to not use the same password on Facebook that you use for your email or other social media accounts. In fact, your email and Facebook passwords should not be used anywhere else. It's using the same password over and over that makes it easy for hackers to break into your accounts, and wreak all kinds of identity theft damage. I know, it's a pain to have to keep track of so many passwords, but that's the safest way to do things.

After you've gotten this far it takes you through the three steps shown below, any of which you're free to skip.



1. **Find Your Friends.** This step asks for permission to go through your email address book to try to match email addresses you have with those of people who are already on Facebook. It's fast and efficient, but if you want control over who you friend and who even knows you're here, feel free to skip this step and add people by hand later on.
2. **Fill Out Info.** This is where you add basic personal information like **current city**, **hometown**, **high school**, **college or university**, and **employer**. Once again, you can feel free to skip any or all of this, but filling it out makes it easier for your friends to find you.
3. **Add Profile Picture.** This is where you get to upload the photo that will represent you to the rest of the Facebook world...or not. You could upload the best photo you have of yourself, you could just skip this and leave it with the generic blank head icon, or you could be truly maddening and use a photo of your cat. Once again, using a recognizable photo of yourself makes it easier for your friends to find you.

A Few Words About Playing Coy

I know that many of you reading this think that you don't want anyone to find you. But before you start playing too coy with this, and acting like you're part of the Witness Protection Program, I'd like you to consider what you'd feel like later on when you try to find a friend, and are greeted by lots of intentional dead ends. Throw people who know you a bone, and give them something to work with. There are other ways of keeping unwanted people out, and we'll talk about them later.

Finishing Up

There are a few more steps left after this. Next you'll get a screen that lets you set your **privacy** settings. Right now your choices are between **Public**, which means that everything you post can be seen by the entire world, and **Friends**, which means your posts can only be seen by people you've accepted as friends. There are many shades of gray between these two extreme settings, and we'll talk about them in a bit, but for now, set your privacy to **Friends**.

At about this point, there should be a message at the top of your screen telling you to check your email for a confirmation message and code. Follow the instructions in the email message and then you've become a full-fledged Facebook user...although, with a few trepidations.

Fine-Tuning Your Existence

This is where we try to make things a little more comfortable for you so that you have more control over who sees your stuff, whose stuff you have to see, and how easy it is for people to find you. Let's deal with last things first.

Your Name

You may have plenty of good reasons for not wanting people to find you by your name. I know of teachers who don't want their students to find them. I know of people who don't want their employers to find them. I know of teenagers whose parents won't let them use their real names, so they can hide from potential stalkers. These people have all solved their problems by using **partial names**.

With a partial name you might just use your first and middle names, or your first name and what sounds like your last initial, your first name and the name of a place, or your first name and a nickname. For example, **Lisa Marie Dominici** from **Pearl River, NY** might go as **Lisa Marie**, **Lisa Dee**, **Lisa Pearl**, or **Lisa Snuggums** (it's what her boyfriend calls her). That would slow down the people trying to find her, who didn't have her email address. Anyone who has the email address she signed up under can find her no matter what name she used.

So how do you change your name from what it really is to some alias designed to give you a little privacy?

1. Click on the little, barely visible, triangle in the upper right-hand portion of your screen (I've circled it in the example on the right). This will give you a menu of things to choose from.



2. Select **Settings** from that menu.
3. Now you're on a screen that has a list on the left-hand side of all the different settings you can change. Select **General** from this list to get the screen for General Account Settings.



4. Now that you're here, one of the first things you'll see in the center of the screen is a line for your name, with an **Edit** button to the right of it. You can use this to change your name, but use it with care; once you've changed it, you can't change it again for another 60 days.

General Account Settings		
Name	Lisa Dominici	Edit
Username	http://www.facebook.com/lisa.dominici.█	Edit
Email	Primary: ldominici@█	Edit
Password	Password never changed.	Edit
Networks	No networks.	Edit
Language	English (US)	Edit
Download a copy of your Facebook data.		

Groups

In the beginning your privacy settings were pretty much everyone in the world or just your friends. But the world isn't divided up into two neat little categories like that. There may be people who you grudgingly "have to" let be your friend so that you don't hurt their feelings. This is where creating **groups** comes in handy.

When you first get started in Facebook, all your friends are in one group: **Friends**. But you can add groups to put people into different categories as needed. You can create groups called **Besties** for your best friends on earth, **Family** for all those relatives of yours who are on Facebook, **Acquaintances** for people you just sort of know, and so on. For now, we're just going to take a look at creating an **Acquaintances** group.

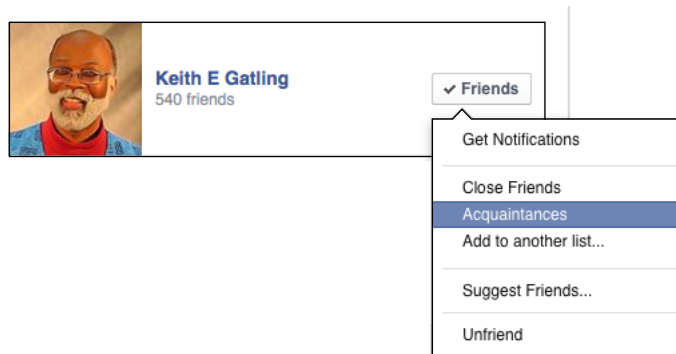
1. If you're not already on your **Home** screen, then go to the top of the screen and click on the **Home** button.
2. Scroll down the list on the left-hand side to where it says **Friends**, and click on that.
3. Now you should see a list of all your friend groups (if you have any), and a button at the top of the screen that says **Create List**. Click on this button.



+ Create List

Give your new group a name...like **Acquaintances**...and then click on **Create**. You don't have to add anyone yet...especially if no one even knows you're on Facebook yet. But this will be where you put people that you've friended under duress. Or people that you want to unfriend without actually unfriending them.

How does this work? First of all, when you're faced with people who you don't really want to friend, but know you'll get grief about not friending, you can just add them to your **Acquaintances** list by finding them in your **Friends** list; just like in the example on the right.

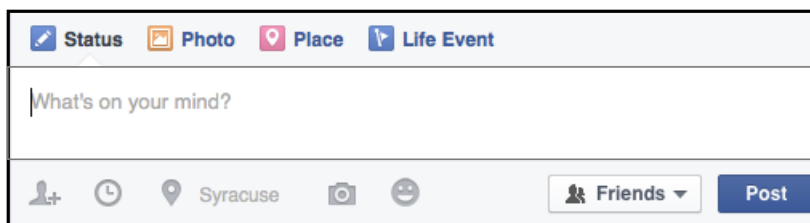


Second, now that you have a new subgroup of friends, you can customize your sharing settings to create one that is **Friends except Acquaintances**.

That will be covered in the next section.

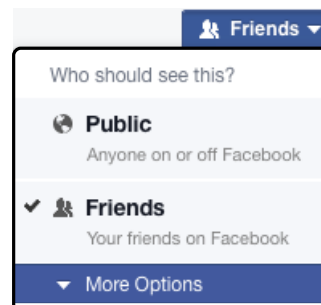
Custom Sharing Settings

Your default sharing setting is for **Friends**, and it will stay that way until you change it to something else. In fact, each time you change your sharing settings, it stays that way until you change it again.



Changing and Creating Settings

You can change your sharing settings by clicking on the little box that tells what they currently are. If I wanted to change from just **Friends** to **Public**, I would just pick that. But if I wanted to choose something else, I would select **More Options**. This lets me choose from any of my other groups, or lets me create a **custom** setting.

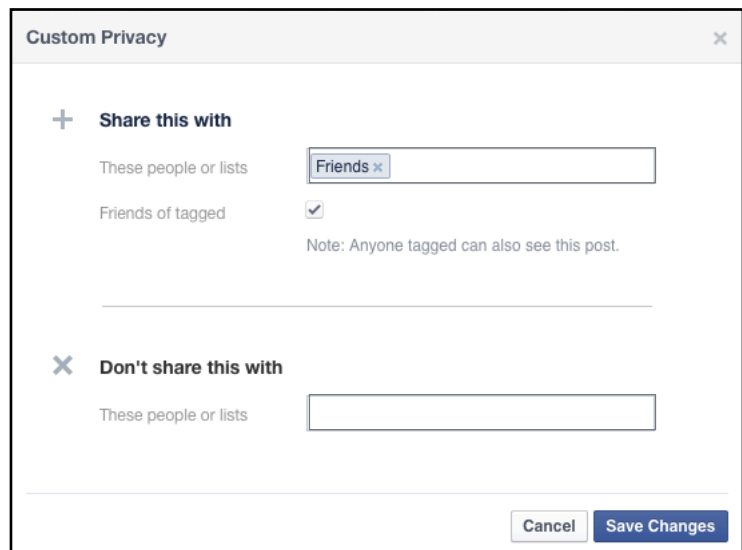


The **Custom Privacy** screen lets you decide who you want to share with, who you don't want to share with, or any combination.

Right now it's set for sharing with **Friends**, which really isn't all that customized. But I could change it to just sharing with Glenna and Cindy, or just my **High School** group, or **Friends except** Glenna and Cindy, or any other combination, including...drumroll please... **Friends but not Acquaintances**.

Once I've set this, that will be my privacy setting until I decide to change it later on.

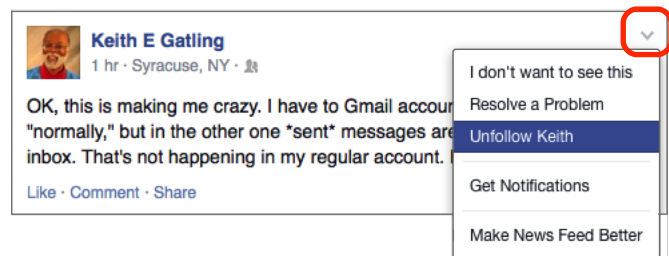
And this is how you keep people you don't know, or don't want to share that much with, from reading your stuff and seeing your pictures.



TMI (Too Much Information)

Sometimes you just get tired of seeing posts from certain people. Maybe they're annoying. Maybe they're even offensive. But whatever they are, you don't feel that you can totally unfriend them. No problem, there's a way around that.

Find a post from that person and click on the little downward arrow in the top right corner (I've circled it). That will give you a list of options.



The one that's selected in the example above is to **unfollow** that particular person. That means that you won't see anything from them unless they specifically **tag** you in the post. There are similar settings that let you say that you don't want to see any of your friends' notifications from **Candy Crush**, **Farmville**, **Words with Friends**, or any of the other games that your friends always want to "invite" you to play.

The Nuclear Option

Let's face it, there are just some people who you don't want to be found by, and that you want absolutely no contact with at all. In that case, you can **block** them. Go to **Settings/Blocking**, and enter their name. That will bring up a list of people with that name for you to choose from.

Now, this is where playing coy can come back to bite you. Because if the person you want to block has a fairly common name, and hasn't put up a recognizable photo or any other identifying information, you won't know who to block.

Is That Enough?

What we've gone through here is just scratching the surface of the many ways you can control who sees what and what you see on Facebook, but these basic steps should go along way toward assuaging your fears about joining your friends and family members who've been urging you to get in on this Facebook thing.

It's definitely a good thing to be cautious, but it also helps to know that there's a great difference between **cautious** and **paranoid**.

For More Information on Facebook...

Check out **Facebook 101** at www.gcflearnfree.org/facebook101.

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