NYC Digital Safety
Privacy & Security

Reading Privacy Policies

Learn how to effectively and efficiently read and understand privacy policies to better protect your online privacy and security.

1. How to Approach a Privacy Policy

Have you ever quickly clicked "I Agree" when confronted by a long document of terms and conditions or a privacy policy? You aren't alone! Privacy policies are designed to be difficult to read and understand. They're essentially legal documents written by lawyers. So, not exactly light reading.

Privacy policies might be difficult to access, read, or understand (or even locate in some instances) but they contain important information relevant to your personal security. How can you make sure you are seeing the relevant information in a privacy policy?

Step 1: Find the Privacy Policy

Your first challenge is to actually locate the privacy policy you want to read. Here are a few tips to help you with different kinds of sites or tools:

- **Apps:** Most apps have a privacy policy listed in the appropriate app store (Google or Apple)
- **Websites:** Most websites have a privacy policy listed at the very bottom of the site. Make sure to scroll all the way down.
- **Devices:** Check the developer's website for your digital device to see the privacy policy

If you are having trouble finding a privacy policy, it could be a warning sign that the app, website, or digital device isn't reputable.

Step 2: Review the Policy

Here are some things to keep an eye out for when you are reviewing a privacy policy:

- **Look for mentions of a data collection policy**
  These are often listed at the beginning. Make sure you're comfortable with what is listed here. If you don't understand what it is saying or you have some concerns, do some research or ask for a second opinion

- **Look for key terms**
  You can use Control + F to search for some of these terms. Pay attention to what is being said here:
    - **Sell:** Is your data being sold?
    - **Share:** Is your data being shared with another business or place?
    - **Advertising:** Is your data being provided to advertisers?

2. Questions to Ask and Things to Look for in a Privacy Policy

When reviewing a privacy policy, consider the following overarching questions:

- **Is your personal information being collected?**
  What exactly is being collected?

- **How is your personal information being collected?**
  Is the site or app using cookies or tracking technology?

- **Why is this information being collected?**
  What explanation does the privacy policy offer? Will this information be used to perform a task on the site, for example?

- **Who has access to this information?**
  Is your personal information being shared with others?

- **Can you opt out of this data collection?**
  Does the site or app give you a choice or options on how your personal information is collected and handled?

- **What security measures are in place for your data?**
  How is your data stored?

3. Making a Plan for Privacy Policies

Make a list of the apps, websites, tools, or online services that you use most frequently. Try to think of sites or tools that you use heavily where you have a good deal of personal information stored.

Now, make a list of the privacy policies you are able to find. Include links or directions on where you found the privacy policy here:

Finally, select a privacy policy and try to use the tips and answer the questions listed above. What are you noticing? Is anything concerning to you?