Important note

This guide is intended for self-managed Windows machines only (i.e. you’re both the user and sole administrator of your computer). If your computer is managed by another group (e.g., MITS, ATS, etc.) and you require an administrative account, please contact your local IT support staff for assistance as your department may have specific policies or requirements governing such access.

How to not run as an administrator

Before getting started, there are some things to understand. First off, a computer can have multiple administrative accounts, that is accounts that belong to the Administrators group and have the same rights as “Administrator,” but there is only one “Administrator” account and it cannot be deleted or demoted (but it can be disabled). Recent versions of Windows disable the built-in “Administrator” account by default, and walk the user through creating a new account during setup. This new account is added to the Administrators group, so while it is not “Administrator”, it is just as dangerous.

Secondly, a lot of programs and computer configuration options are tied to a user account. Switching to a completely new user account will likely result in a lot of wasted time reconfiguring applications and moving data around. This is not the preferred solution. If, however, you are using the built-in “Administrator” account (very unlikely), it is the only way to move forward with this. In that case, we recommend you wait until you are installing a new version of the operating system or moving to a new computer before continuing. The rest of this document assumes that you are not using the built-in “Administrator” account (very likely).

| Windows 7/Vista (standalone) | Windows 7/Vista (active directory domain member) |
Create a new administrative user account

1. Open the Control Panel (Start -> Control Panel)
2. Click on User Accounts and Family Safety
3. Click on User Accounts
4. Select "Manage another account"
5. Select "Create a new account"
6. Enter an account name, select "Administrator", click Create Account

Assign a password to the new administrative account

7. The new account should appear in the list of accounts, click on the new account
8. Select "Create a password"
9. Enter a strong password and click Create Password when done

Make the original user account a standard user

10. Select "Manage another account"
11. Click on your original account in the list of accounts (not the one you just created)
12. Select "Change the account type"
13. Select "Standard User" and click Change Account Type
14. Close the Control Panel. Log off and back on for changes to take effect.

Create a new user account

1. Open the Control Panel (Start -> Control Panel)
2. Click on User Accounts
3. Select "Give other users access to this computer"
4. Click the Advanced tab at the top of the dialog window
5. Click Advanced
6. Click Users in the tree view in the left pane
7. Right click anywhere in the middle pane or click on "More actions" in the right pane and select "New User"
8. Enter a user name and full name and specify a strong password
9. Uncheck "User must change password at next logon"
10. Click Create and then click Close

Add the account to the local Administrators group

11. Double click on the newly created account in the middle pane
12. Click on the Member Of tab at the top of the dialog window
13. Click Add
14. Type "administrators" in the text box and click Check Names
15. When the group name resolves, verify that it reads "<hostname>\Administrators" and click OK
16. Click OK again

Make the original account a standard user

17. Double click on your original user account in the middle pane
18. Click on the Member Of tab at the top of the dialog window
19. Select "Administrators" in the list of group memberships
20. Click Remove
21. Click OK
22. Close the Local Users and Groups control panel applet
23. Close the User Accounts control panel dialog (or click OK)
24. Close the Control Panel
25. Log off and back on for changes to take effect.

Walkthrough for Windows 7

Scenarios

After following the above set of steps, some tasks may not work right away because administrative access is required. Anytime administrative access is required, a dialog box will open prompting you to authenticate with an administrative account. Using the new account you just created will almost always allow the process to continue, but in some cases you will need to run programs as an Administrator for them to work properly. Below, we've provided examples of how to handle the most common usage scenarios.

Install a new application
Change networking settings
Install a printer driver
Install Windows Updates
Update Firefox (Run as Administrator example)