

Tech Coach Column—What is a VPN, and Should I Use One?

By LTCL Librarian Karen Scott

A virtual private network (VPN) is a service that is used to keep your internet activity hidden and your internet connection private. Some might call VPN a “secure tunnel between your device and the internet.” This tunnel helps protect you from snooping, trackers, and other outside interference. A good VPN will be easy to install and have virtually no changes to how you access the internet. Read on for answers to common questions:

Do I really need a VPN?

If you’re concerned about your online privacy, a VPN is great to have. You can rest assured that your internet activity is confidential.

Should I use a VPN while traveling?

One of the best uses for a VPN is maintaining protection while on unknown or open networks. A VPN will help you stay secure while traveling and connecting to WiFi networks in airports, hotels, coffee shops, etc.

How do I find a good VPN?

Not all VPNs are created the same, so it’s important to find one that works for you. For example, if you want security without sacrificing connection speed, you’ll want to make sure your VPN can provide the fastest connection. Here’s more information on [how to choose the best VPN](#) for your needs, with a breakdown and comparison of different clients.

Why should I pay for a VPN when there is a free option?

Unfortunately, nothing on the internet is truly free. While a VPN client may be advertised as free, there is a chance that the company is logging your activity and selling your data. Most VPNs cost a few dollars a month and offer free trials and/or money-back guarantees.

Can you use a VPN for a specific connection? Or is it on forever?

Once you have a VPN set up, you should use it any time your device is connected to the internet. This will ensure maximum internet security.

Should I use a VPN on my smartphone?

Since smartphones are becoming more sophisticated and computer-like, a VPN is beneficial across all internet-connected devices.

Does VPN secure texting?

Because text messages are sent over cellular data, VPNs are not able to encrypt this information. Text messages are sent over cellular networks and are relatively secure but not necessarily private, since they are logged on hardware by mobile service providers. Read here for [more information about VPNs and texting](#).

If you're interested in the nitty gritty details of VPNs and how they work, I suggest reading these articles in full:

1. [VPN Mentor](#)
2. [Express VPN](#) (This article is written by a VPN company, so it may be biased, but has great introductory information.)
3. [Business.com](#)

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