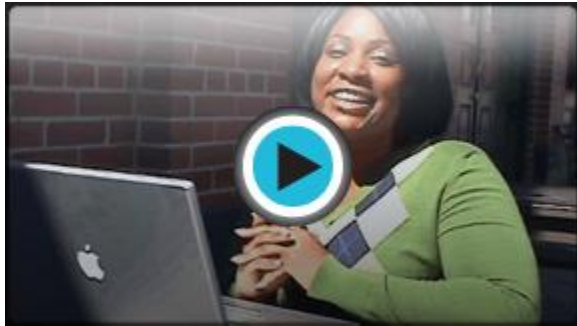


How do I connect to the Internet?

Introduction

How Do I Connect to the Internet?



Watch the video (2:35). [Need help?](#)

You have all the basic parts of your computer set up and want to start **surfing the Internet**. You might even see an Internet Explorer icon on your desktop. You may be wondering if getting online is as simple as clicking that icon. Well, yes and no. There are basically three things you need to use your computer to become active online -- **an Internet Service Provider (ISP)**, a **modem**, and an **Internet browser**. Before you can connect to the Internet, you have some decisions to make about these three topics.

Types of Internet Access

Before you can connect to the Internet, you need to determine the type of **Internet access** you would like, and which **Internet Service Provider (ISP)** you want to provide you with this access. An ISP is the company that provides you with your connection to the Internet for a fee. Often ISPs offer different types and tiers of access, so it is a good idea to consider the **common types of service** before exploring specific companies.

Dial-up Access

Dial-up access is usually the **least expensive** way to access the Internet; however, it is also the **slowest**. With dial-up service, you need a **phone line** and **PC modem** to dial-up and be connected to the Internet by your ISP. A modem ties up the phone line so can't use the phone and computer at the same time.

While dial-up access can be an affordable option, the **web pages load slowly** due to the limitations of the modem. Some websites with a lot of videos or graphics may have a difficult time loading, if they load at all. Additionally, with dial-up access, your Internet connection isn't immediate. Since you have to use the telephone line to dial into a server, it can take from several seconds to minutes before you can access the Internet.

If you only use the Internet to check your email and occasionally view other websites, a dial-up connection may serve your needs. If you are going to spend any significant amount of time online, you should consider another option. Keep in mind that some ISPs have increased the fee for dial-up access in an effort to transition more people to broadband access.

DSL Access

DSL, or **Digital Subscriber Line**, provides high-speed, Internet access through a **phone line**. With DSL service, you can talk on the telephone and access the Internet at the same time. It is considered a type of broadband Internet access, which refers to high-speed Internet connections that allow for transmission of data at rates 10 to 50 times faster than dial-up service. Verizon and AT & T are two popular DSL providers.

A **DSL modem** and an **Ethernet card** are required for installation. A splitter may also be required to filter the DSL signal from the low frequency voice signal; however, this is handled by the Internet Service Provider.

Cable Access

Cable access is provided through your local TV cable company and transferred through your TV cables. Like DSL access, it is considered broadband, high-speed Internet access. If you don't have cable TV, you may be able to purchase cable Internet service as long as it is available in your area.

With cable access, **web pages** load quickly and you will find it easy to download and upload files. One thing to be aware of though is that cable access is a **shared service** and can be affected by others who use the same cable lines. For example, if it is a holiday and everyone in your neighborhood is at home surfing the web, you

may notice that some aspects of service are slower than normal. In most areas, this won't be an issue.

Satellite Access

Satellite access can be used in locations where there is no broadband cable or DSL Internet available. Satellite access is **available across the world** and can provide you with a broadband connection that is equal to a high speed connection. Satellite service is the **most expensive** and will require costs such as installation and satellite equipment, which will cost several hundred dollars.

Choosing an Internet Service Provider (ISP)

Once you have decided which type of Internet access you are interested in, you can determine which **ISPs** are available in your area that offer the type of Internet access you want. Then, you need to choose the ISP best meets your needs based on their prices and service packages, and secure Internet access through that company. Talk to friends, family members, and neighbors to see what ISP they use.

Some things to consider as you research ISPs:

- Speed
- Price
- Billing
- Installation Software
- Physical Service
- Service Record
- Extras such as email accounts and web space
- Technical Support
- Remote Access
- Contract Terms

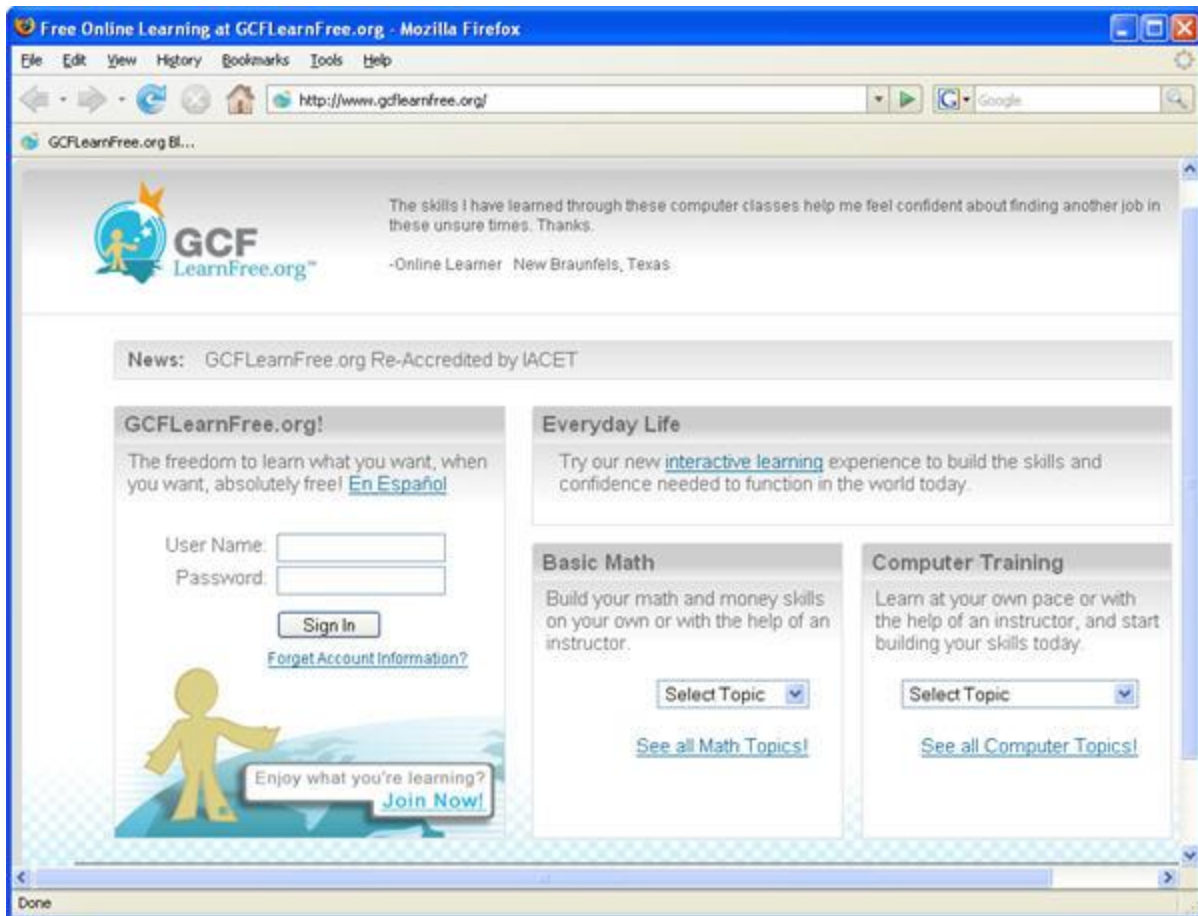
Read our [Comparing Internet Service Providers](#) article to learn more.

Internet Browser

A **browser** is the tool that allows you to view and interact on the Internet. Once you have an account with an ISP and can access the Internet, you'll need to use a browser to access web pages. Browsers can be referred to the window of the web

because they allow you to view all the pages on the Internet.

Most computers come **preloaded** with Microsoft Internet Explorer, so you don't have to worry about purchasing a browser; however, you don't have to use Internet Explorer. If you would prefer to try another browser option, you can. For example, Mozilla Firefox is a free browser that you can download and use.



GCF LearnFree.org Website Viewed Through Mozilla Firefox Browser

Read our [article](#) that compares Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox.

Wireless Connections

If you want to use your laptop at **home**, **work**, the local **coffee shop**, or at any public place, you can do this if your computer is **configured for a wireless connection** and there is **Internet access available**.

What Does Your Laptop Need?

The first thing you need to do is make sure your computer is configured for **wireless access**. Most new laptops include **built-in wireless adapters**. If your laptop does not have the wireless adapter, you can buy and install one that plugs into a port on your computer.

Once your computer is configured for wireless access, all you need to do is turn your computer on. It should be able to automatically locate the **existing networks**. A couple of clicks later and you'll be surfing the web.

Where Can You Use Wireless Internet Access?

You can access the Internet wirelessly from any location that has an existing network. If you go to a public place that advertises free wireless access, or free WiFi, and turn on your laptop, the computer will display a list of existing networks, and ask whether you want to connect to one of them. If so, just click on the network name listed on the screen, and you will then be able to open your browser and surf the web.

What about Wireless Access from Home?

If you want to use a wireless Internet connection **from home**, you will need to install a **wireless router**. A wireless router is a device that receives the signal sent by your computer and decodes it. It The router sends the information to the Internet using a wired Ethernet connection. Even when we talk about connecting to the Internet wirelessly, there is a wired connection somewhere that makes it all happen. Another benefit to a wireless home network is the ability to connect multiple computers. They allow you to easily connect multiple computers to the Internet using only one IP address.