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How to check bootloader is locked or unlocked.

While cell networks are now required to unlock devices for customers, they do make an effort not to release the phone right away. Most carriers currently require a minimum amount of paid service days before unlocking and have differing methods for going through this process. We will highlight the unlocking policies of major American cell providers below. Verizon: In both prepaid and postpaid plans, Verizon will automatically unlock a device 60 days after the phone's purchase is made. Sprint: Forty days after purchase, the device will be automatically unlocked within another two business days. Sprint is now part of T-Mobile so the brands will have similar policies. T-Mobile: On postpaid plans, T-Mobile will remotely unlock the phone 40 days after purchase. For prepaid plans, the device will be unlocked after at least $100 is spent by the customer on that account and 14 days have passed since initial purchase. If that $100 is not spent, then the phone will only be eligible after waiting 365 days from purchase. AT&T: Postpaid customers will have to wait 60 days after purchase, then make an unlocking request through their AT&T account page. Prepaid customers can go through the same process after six months of service. Boost Mobile: Boost requires a full year of paid service before allowing the device to be unlocked, at which point the customer can make a request through their support hotline at 1-888-BOOST-4U. U.S. Cellular: This provider automatically unlocks phones on both prepaid and postpaid plans after 120 days of service. All of these carriers may refuse to unlock a phone that is currently reported lost or stolen. They will also allow special allowances for military personnel who have been reassigned to another location outside of the network's service. Originally Published: Apr 2, 2009 Related Articles At its most basic level, the storage on your Android smartphone is like a hard drive, made of up several partitions. One of those partitions holds the Android system files, another holds all the app data you accumulate (which is how you're usually able to update without losing all your stuff), and others to do more behind-the scenes stuff.Think of the bootloader as a security checkpoint and manager for all those partitions. Every computer has one, and it's what tells the hardware where to look and how to get running when you start things up.On Android phones (and tablets, and TV boxes, and even microwave ovens) the bootloader checks a few things by default to make sure the software you're trying to start up is genuine. Most mobile or embedded devices are the same way, and that's because if you're able to swap out what the people who made your phone put on those partitions, you're able to break things if you don't know what you're doing, or bad software might try to mess with all your stuff. The flip side is an unlocked bootloader that doesn't verify the software makes it easy to install and use custom ROMs. This is why people want to be able to unlock them.There's always a lot of talk about bootloaders being locked. But all Android phones ship with a locked bootloader, including the developer-friendly Nexus devices. What really matters is when the bootloader is encrypted as a security measure. While some devices (like Nexus phones and tablets) are easily unlocked with a single command, most bootloaders are locked and encrypted, meaning you need the right security token (think of it as a password) to unlock them.Why does this matter?An encrypted bootloader can often be bone of contention for those who love a manufacturer's hardware and want to tinker with their devices. HTC and LG and Samsung and Motorola — just about everyone, really — regularly ship devices with locked and encrypted bootloaders. Quite often, it's done because the carrier who had the phone built for them wants it locked up tight. This does enable an extra layer of security for the end user (and carriers love anything that cuts down on support calls), but it makes it tough to flash new firmware (think custom ROM here) to the phone.People either need to find a way around the encryption (often with something like an "engineering" bootloader or a flashing tool that was leaked from the manufacturer) or find a way to load custom software on top of the secure software. It's very often a tough nut to crack. In recent years, we've seen most of the folks who make Android phones offer models that support unlocking — they will give you the unlock token for the bootloader, provided you agree to their terms. Since many times those terms are just a fancy way of saying you lose your warranty as soon as you unlock things, there are still a lot of folks who aren't happy with it.It's one of those situations where nothing will make everyone happy. Buying a Nexus phone is easy to say — the warranty is not voided by unlocking the bootloader — but not everyone wants the hardware Google ships out every year. The same goes for other phones that can have the bootloader unlocked through a developer program. People want a certain model that works best for their carrier, and aren't interested in a specific model that isn't tied to a particular carrier. This option mainly applies to users with a GSM carrier like AT&T or T-Mobile. CDMA providers like Nextel, Sprint and Verizon are less inclined to let you available as a subsidized phone from the carrier's store and folks don't want to shell out the full retail price for it. Meanwhile, the carriers and manufacturers want to provide a controlled experience where people aren't calling in for support with a phone running software they didn't approve, or people are getting their phone "hacked" by malicious software because bootloader security has been bypassed.Should I care?For most of us, having a locked bootloader isn't much of a problem. Some even like knowing there is one more layer of protection each and every time the phone is restarted. But for the people who do want to do a little more with their Android — or support it themselves after the manufacturer decides they are done with it — the bootloader is a very important piece of software. Our advice is to support companies who will sell you the phone that offers the things you like. If that means an unlocked bootloader, buying a phone that offers that ability tells the folks making them that there is a market, and they should continue to make them. AUTHORIZED PARTNER5 stars4 stars3 stars2 stars1 starsConsumerAffairs is not a government agency. Companies displayed may pay us to be Authorized or when you click a link, call a number or fill a form on our site. Our content is intended to be used for general information purposes only. It is very important to do your own analysis before making any investment based on your own personal circumstances and consult with your own investment, financial, tax and legal advisers.Company NMLS Identifier #2110672Copyright © 2022 Consumers Unified LLC. All Rights Reserved. The contents of this site may not be republished, reprinted, rewritten or recirculated without written permission. You don't always have to pick from the limited phone buffet offered by your cellular service provider. Consider picking up an unlocked phone that isn't tied to a particular carrier. This option mainly applies to users with a GSM carrier like AT&T or T-Mobile. CDMA providers like Nextel, Sprint and Verizon are less inclined to let you activate an unlocked phone on their networks. Meet the Dermatologist Who Wants to Save You Money — and Just Hit a $200 Million Milestone for Patients Your Employees Want This Perk, and Giving It to Them Can Improve Your Bottom Line The Hidden Dangers of Not Taking Your Vacation Days This Family-Owned Manhattan Jewelry Shop Struggled to Rebuild After 9/11. Today, 2 Sisters Who Run the 46-Year-Old Business Reveal What It Takes to Persevere. Businesses Need More Women Investors. Here's How That Can Happen. Franchising Isn't for Entrepreneurs, It's for Systempreneurs This Former Disney Exec Shares Her 5 Most Valuable Takeaways on Leadership Following Viral LinkedIn Post You're running late for work and scamper out to your car, throwing your brown-bag lunch into the passenger's seat. Thrusting the key into the ignition, you hurriedly start the car and look left and right for oncoming traffic. Quickly, you shift the gear into drive and press down on the accelerator, but the engine just revs up and the car stays put. You try punching the accelerator to no avail. The transmission is locked and you have to unlock it. Turn the vehicle off and take your foot off the brake. Turn the key to "IGN" and depress the brake firmly, listen for a clicking sound from the brake shift interlock solenoid. This component "tells" the car the brake is engaged and the transmission can be shifted into gear. Shut the engine off. Take your foot off the brake again. Turn the ignition to "ACC." Depress the brake firmly. Try to shift the car into "Neutral," then start the car. Attempt to shift the transmission into "Drive." Listen again for the solenoid click. If you do not hear the click, the fuse may be out; go to the next step. Retrieve your vehicle's owner's manual. Open your vehicle's fuse box. Find the fuse going to the brake shift interlock solenoid using the owner's manual as your guide. Replace the fuse. If you cannot replace the fuse, find the override lever under the dash. This is usually an orange or red lever that will manually disengage the locking mechanism. With your foot on the brake, press the override lever toward the front of the vehicle, then shift the car into gear. Unlocking your Android phone's bootloader is the first step to rooting and flashing custom ROMs. And, contrary to popular belief, it's actually fully supported on many phones. Here's how to unlock your bootloader the official way. Not Every Phone Will Let You Do This There are two kinds of phones in this world: Those that let you unlock your bootloader, and those that don't. Whether you're allowed to unlock your bootloader depends on the manufacturer of your phone, the model you have, and even your carrier. Nexus phones are all unlockable by nature, and many phones from Motorola and HTC allow you to unlock your bootloader through a similar process as the Nexus. Other phones, however-and some carriers-don't allow you to unlock your bootloader the official way, which means you have to wait for developers to exploit a security vulnerability if you want to root and flash ROMs. If you have one of those phones, this guide will sadly not help you. The best way to find out which category your phone falls into is to browse its section at XDA Developers. If you have an HTC or Motorola phone, you may be able too research its unlockability on HTC or Motorola's website. If it doesn't support unlocking, you'll have to use an unofficial unlocking or rooting method, which you'll usually find on the XDA Developers forums. If your phone does support unlocking through more official channels, read on. Step Zero: Back Up Anything You Want to Keep Before we begin, it's important to mention: this process will erase all of your data. So if you have any photos or other files on your phone that you want to keep, transfer them to your computer now. In addition, if you have any app settings you want to keep, use their backup function to create a backup settings file, and transfer those to your computer as well. Here's an extra tip: Since I know I'm eventually going to root my phone, I always unlock my bootloader as soon as I buy a new device. That way, I don't waste time setting it up only to erase the phone in a few days and do it all over again. If you're an obsessive Android tweaker who knows you're going to root soon, consider unlocking before you go through the trouble of setting up your phone. Open your phone's app drawer, tap the Settings icon, and select "About Phone". Scroll all the way down and tap the "Build Number" item seven times. You should get a message saying you are now a developer. Head back to the main Settings page, and you should see a new option near the bottom called "Developer Options". Open that, and enable "OEM Unlocking", if the option exists (if it doesn't, no worries-it's only necessary on some phones). Next, enable "USB Debugging". Enter your password or PIN when prompted, if applicable. Once that's done, connect your phone to your computer. You should see a popup entitled "Allow USB Debugging?" on your phone. Check the "Always allow from this computer" box and tap OK. Step Three: Get an Unlock Key (for Non-Nexus Phones) If you're using a Nexus device, you can skip the following step. Non-Nexus devices will likely need to go through one extra step before you continue. Head to your manufacturer's bootloader unlocking page (for example, this page for Motorola phones or this page for HTC phones), choose your device (if prompted), and log in or create an account. The rest of this step is a bit different depending on your phone, but the manufacturer's site should walk you through the process. It will go something like this: First, turn off your phone and boot into fastboot mode. This is a bit different on every phone, but on most modern devices, you can get there by holding the "Power" and "Volume Down" buttons for 10 seconds. Release them, and you should be in fastboot mode. (HTC users will need to select "Fastboot" with the Volume Down key and press power to select it first.) You can usually find more information on your specific phone with a quick Google search, so feel free to do that now before continuing. Connect your phone to your PC with a USB cable. Your phone should indicate that the device is connected. On your computer, open the platform-tools folder in your Android SDK folder and Shift+Right Click on an empty area. Choose "Open a Command Prompt Here", and use that Command Prompt window to retrieve your unlock key as described by your manufacturer. (For example, Motorola phones will run the fastboot oem get_unlock_data command, while HTC phones will run the fastboot oem get_identifier_token command.) The Command Prompt will spit out a token in the form of a very long string of characters. Select it, copy it, and paste it into the applicable box on your manufacturer's website-make sure there are no spaces!-and submit the form. If your device is unlockable, you'll receive an email with a key or file that you'll use in the next step. If your device is not unlockable, you'll get a message stating so. If you want to root your device or flash a ROM, you'll need to use a more unofficial method, which you can usually find on a site like XDA Developers. Step Four: Unlock Your Phone Now you're ready to actually perform the unlock. If your phone is still in fastboot mode, run the command below. If not, turn off your phone and hold the "Power" and "Volume Down" buttons for 10 seconds. Release them, and you should be in fastboot mode. (HTC users will need to select "Fastboot" with the Volume Down key and press power to select it first.) Connect your phone to your PC with a USB cable. On your computer, open the platform-tools folder in your Android SDK folder and Shift+Right Click on an empty area. Choose "Open a Command Prompt Here". To unlock your device, you'll need to run one simple command. For most Nexus devices, this command is: fastboot oem unlock If you have a newer Nexus, such as the Nexus 5X or 6P, the command will be slightly different: fastboot flashing unlock If you have a non-Nexus device, your manufacturer will tell you what command to run. Motorola devices, for example, need to run fastboot oem unlock UNIQUE_KEY, using the unique key from the email you received. HTC devices will run fastboot oem unlocktoken Unlock_code.bin using the Unlock code.bin file you received from HTC. After running the command, your phone may ask if you are sure you want to unlock. Use the volume keys to confirm. When you're finished, use the on-screen menu to reboot your phone (or run the fastboot reboot command from your PC). If everything worked correctly, you should see a new message at boot stating that your bootloader is unlocked, and after a few seconds it should boot into Android. It's important that you boot into Android before doing anything else, like flashing a custom recovery. Congratulations on unlocking your phone! You won't notice much of a difference yet, but with an unlocked bootloader you'll be able to flash a custom recovery, opening the door to root access and custom ROMs. Image credit: Norebbo

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