

Whether you're the buyer or the seller, there are a number of ways you can protect yourself – and your wallet.

Practice good cybersecurity hygiene.

- Don't click any suspicious links or attachments in emails, on websites, or on social media. Phishing scams and similar crimes get you to click on links and give up personal information like your name, password, and bank account number. In some cases, you may unknowingly download malware to your device.
- Be especially wary if a company asks you to update your password or account information. Look up the company's phone number on your own and call the company.

Know who you're buying from or selling to.

- Check each website's URL to make sure it's legitimate and secure. A site you're buying from should have https in the web address. If it doesn't, don't enter your information on that site.
- If you're purchasing from a company for the first time, do your research and check reviews.
- Verify the legitimacy of a buyer or seller before moving forward with a purchase. If you're using an online marketplace or auction website, check their feedback rating. Be wary of buyers and sellers with mostly unfavorable feedback ratings or no ratings at all.
- Avoid sellers who act as authorized dealers or factory representatives of popular items in countries where there would be no such deals.
- Be wary of sellers who post an auction or advertisement as if they reside in the U.S., then respond to questions by stating they are out of the country on business, family emergency, or similar reasons.
- Avoid buyers who request their purchase be shipped using a certain method to avoid customs or taxes inside another country.

Be careful how you pay.

- Never wire money directly to a seller.
- Avoid paying for items with pre-paid gift cards. In these scams, a seller will ask you to send them a gift card number and PIN. Instead of using that gift card for your payment, the scammer will steal the funds, and you'll never receive your item.
- Use a credit card when shopping online and check your statement regularly. If you see a suspicious transaction, contact your credit card company to dispute the charge.

Monitor the shipping process.

- Always get tracking numbers for items you buy online, so you can make sure they have been shipped and can follow the delivery process.
- Be suspect of any credit card purchases where the address of the cardholder does not match the shipping address when you are selling. Always receive the cardholder's authorization before shipping any products.