



(/column/answer-line/)

ANSWER LINE (/COLUMN/ANSWER-LINE/)

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HOW-TO (/HOWTO)

If you forgot your Windows admin password, try this

All is not lost. You just have to wiggle the lock on the virtual back door.

Okay, so you forgot your password for logging in to Windows. All is not lost. You can still log in to Windows—even if there is no other administrative account on the PC.

From a security point of view, this is actually scary news. But there are legitimate reasons to use the tricks below, and none of them will let a criminal log in without your knowledge (the password is changed, not revealed) or gain access to encrypted data. (You do [encrypt your sensitive files \(http://www.pcworld.com/article/2835162/how-to-encrypt-sensitive-data-put-it-in-an-encrypted-container.html\)](http://www.pcworld.com/article/2835162/how-to-encrypt-sensitive-data-put-it-in-an-encrypted-container.html), right?)

I've provided instructions here for Windows 7 and 10. Windows 8 users should have no trouble following the Windows 10 instructions.

[Further reading: Our best Windows 10 tricks, tips and tweaks] (<https://www.pcworld.com/article/2875600/windows/windows-10-the-best-tips-tricks-and-tweaks.html>)



Microsoft Windows 10 Home | Download

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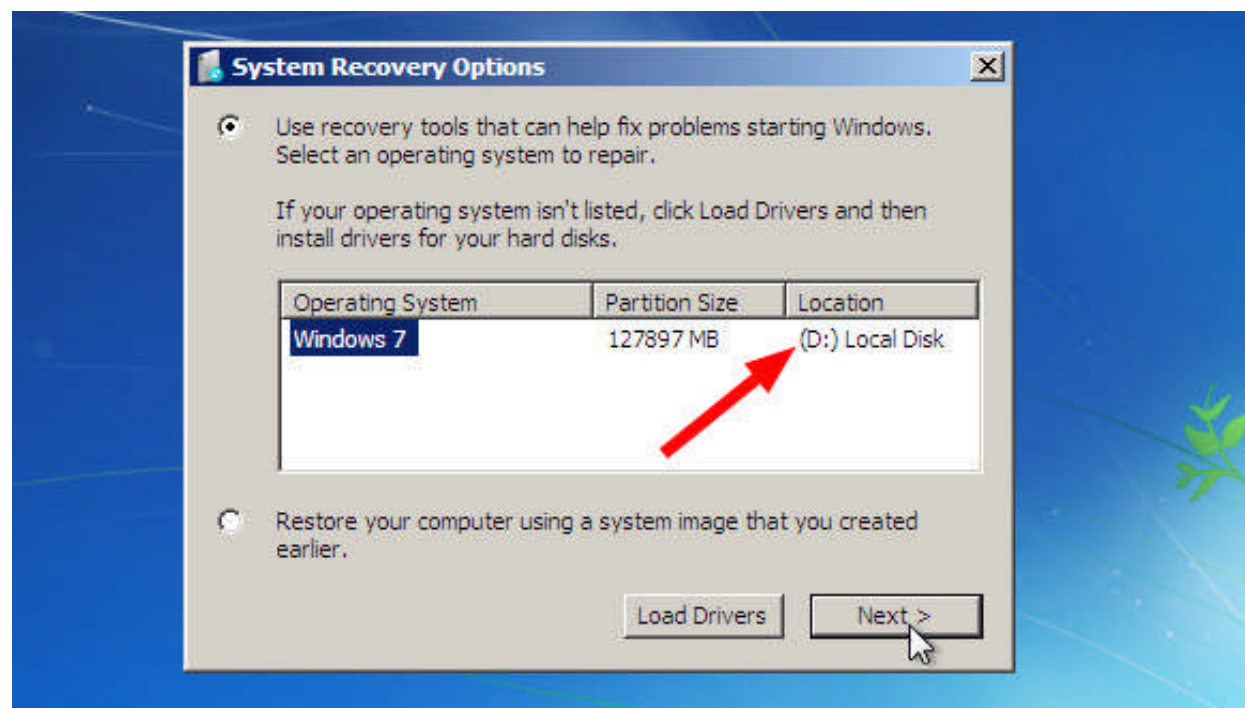
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Windows 7

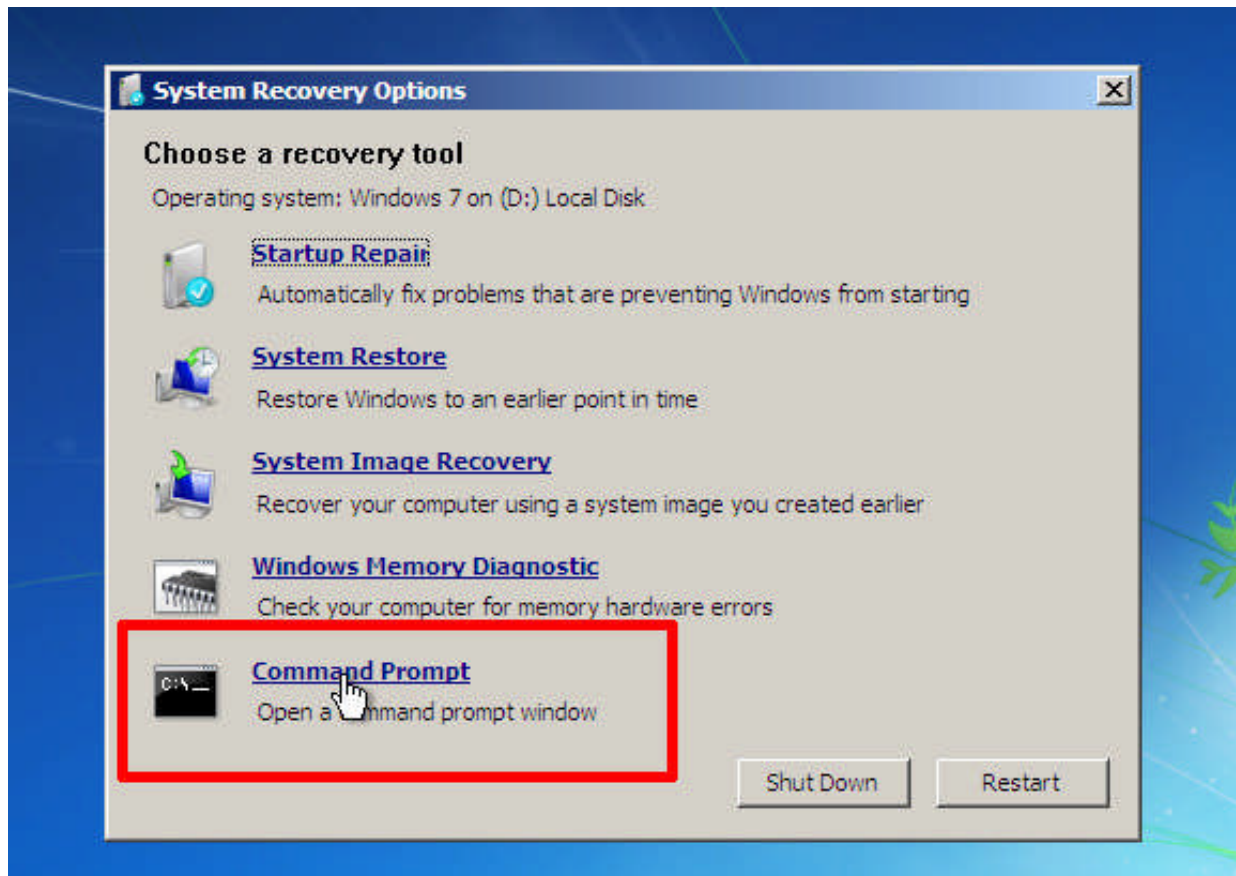
You'll need a Windows 7 System Repair Disc. You can use one created on someone else's Windows 7 PC—providing that one of the PCs isn't 64-bit and the other 32. You'll find instructions for making one in my [Boot discs explained \(http://www.pcworld.com/article/2032523/boot-discs-explained-an-overview-of-booting-your-pc-from-something-other-than-your-hard-drive.html\)](http://www.pcworld.com/article/2032523/boot-discs-explained-an-overview-of-booting-your-pc-from-something-other-than-your-hard-drive.html) article.

To change the password, boot from the System Repair Disc. When prompted, press any key.

Eventually you'll get to the System Recovery Options screen. Note the operating system location; it might be C:, or D:, or whatever. Click *Next*.

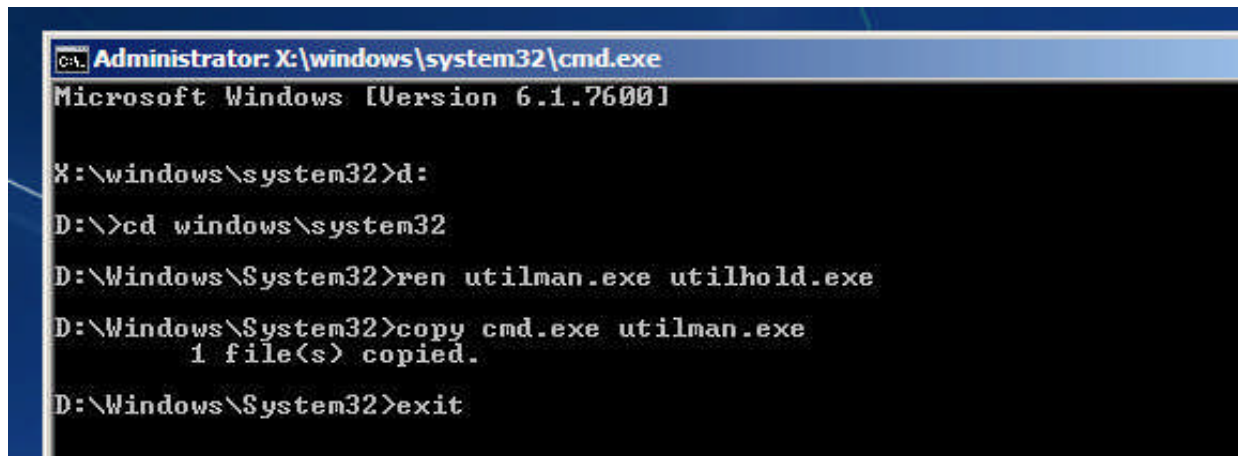


At the next page, click *Command Prompt*.



Once there, type each of these lines, pressing **Enter** after each one. Replace the x in the first line with the operating system location you noted above.

- x:
- cd windows\system32
- ren utilman.exe utilhold.exe
- copy cmd.exe utilman.exe
- exit



```
C:\ Administrator: X:\windows\system32\cmd.exe
Microsoft Windows [Version 6.1.7600]

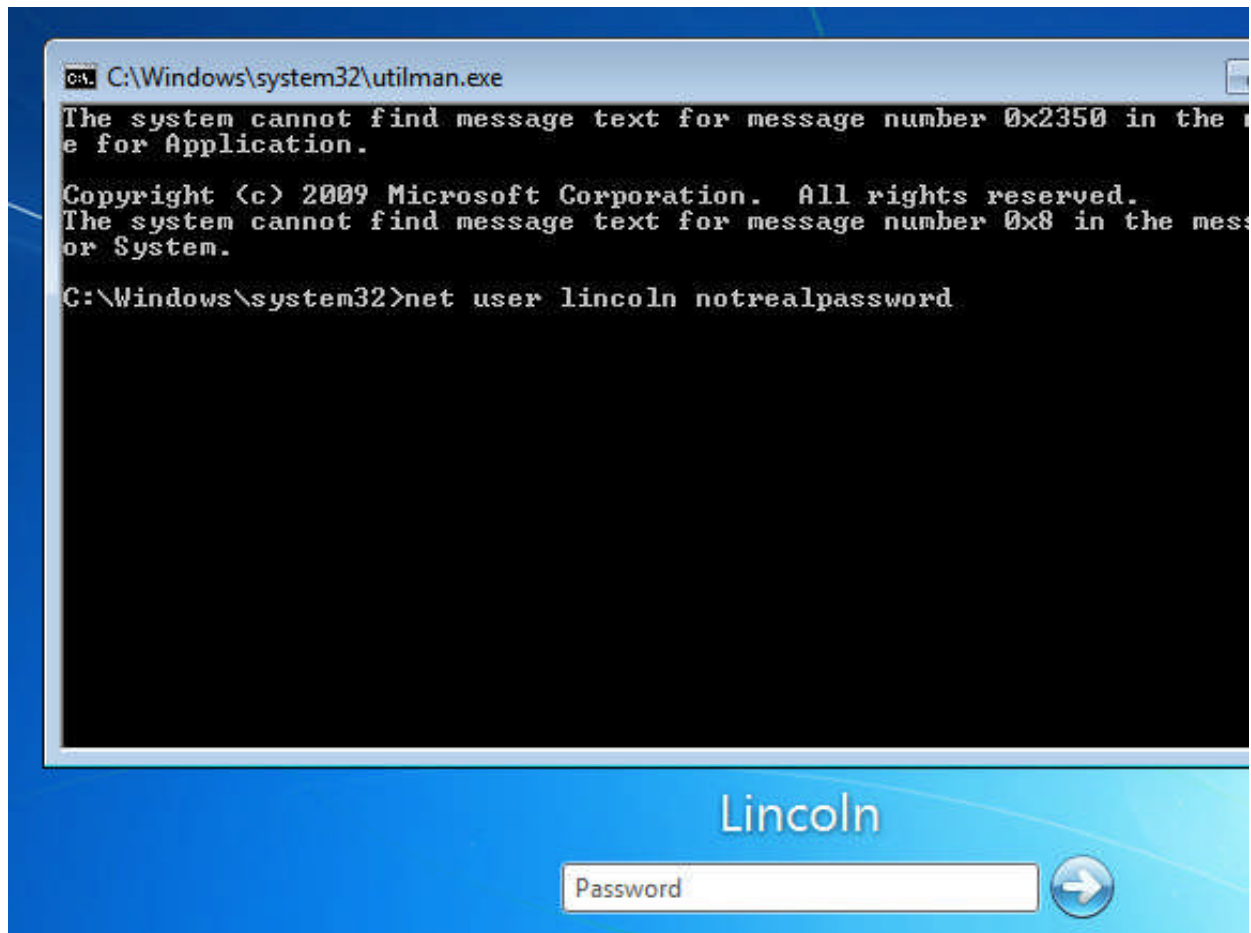
X:\windows\system32>d:
D:\>cd windows\system32
D:\Windows\System32>ren utilman.exe utilhold.exe
D:\Windows\System32>copy cmd.exe utilman.exe
        1 file(s) copied.
D:\Windows\System32>exit
```

Remove the disc and reboot.

At the log-on screen, click the *Ease of access* icon in the lower-left corner to bring up a command prompt.



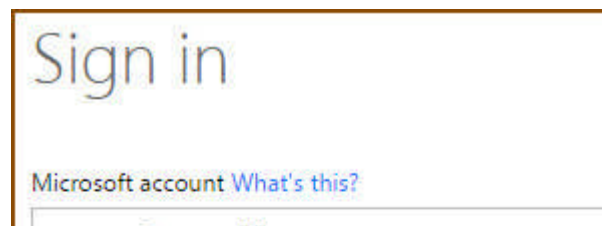
Within that command prompt, type **net user *username* *newpassword***, replacing *username* with your current username (it's clearly visible on the screen), and replace *newpassword* with—I'll leave that up to you.

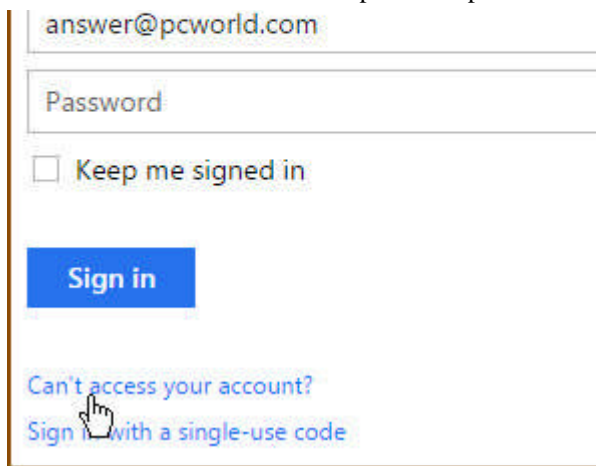


Finally, close the command prompt and log in with your new password.

Windows 10

Your Windows 10 user account is almost certainly connected to your online Microsoft.com account. This makes replacing a forgotten password easier—and arguably more secure.





answer@pcworld.com

Password

Keep me signed in

Sign in

Can't access your account?

Sign in with a single-use code

On another computer, go to Microsoft's [Sign in page \(http://login.live.com/\)](http://login.live.com/). Once there, enter your email address and click *Can't access your account*.

Then follow the wizard. You'll have to prove that you really are you, based on answers and phone numbers that you've previously provided. Eventually, you'll be asked to create a new password.

That technique won't work if you took the pains to create a local account. In that case, use the Windows 7 instructions above, with these exceptions:

- Boot from a Windows 10 Recovery Drive and use that to get to the command line. You'll find the instructions in my [Windows 10 Safe Mode article \(http://www.pcworld.com/article/2984712/how-to-enter-windows-10s-safe-mode\)](http://www.pcworld.com/article/2984712/how-to-enter-windows-10s-safe-mode).
- The ease of access icon is in the lower-*right* corner, between the Power and Connect to Internet icons.

This article originally posted on October 16, 2015, and has since been updated.

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