

CPF 00004-16-CID361-9H-Google+*

19 September 2016

Configuring Google+ for a More Secure Social Networking Experience

Multipurpose Social Networking

Google+ (Google Plus), a relative latecomer to the social networking scene, has not achieved the popularity or market penetration of some other social networking sites. Google+, however, is not irrelevant in the social networking space. It is a successful enterprise that links information from disparate sources. Never underestimate Google's ability to make connections.

Think of Google+ as a combination of Facebook (friends, acquaintances, groups, etc.) and Twitter (short posts, hash tags, followers, etc.) with some professional networking like LinkedIn.

Google+ connects content and users from across all of its product lines, including: Gmail, YouTube, Blogger.com, Google Maps, Google Translate, Google Flights, Google Play, Google News, Google Books, Google Scholar, Google Calendar, Waze and many, many more. One of the reasons Google so effectively makes connections is it uses a single unified profile. Therefore, profile settings selected in one Google product could change settings in other Google products you use.

Think of Google+ as a small part of a much larger suite of Google products interconnecting the threads of your life.

In some situations, restricting access to your Google+ personal profile could cause unexpected and unanticipated restrictions to information on other Google sites. This is unlikely to happen often, but it is something to be aware of.

As mentioned, Google is very good at connecting data. Location information is no different. ALWAYS assume that Google knows where you are! This might be just a general notion of geographic location, say a city or region, or it could be as specific as the café at which you are enjoying your cappuccino. Location specificity increases dramatically when accessing Google sites from mobile devices.

If you are going to use Google+, a critical requirement (this is not simply a setting) is that you closely monitor the circles you establish and the circles to which you assign your friends. Circles are how you categorize your Google+ friends. More on circles and extended circles later in this document where you will see how settings that affect one circle can affect others as well.

* This Google+ configuration guide supersedes CID Crime Prevention Flyer CPF-00009-15-CID361-9H.



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"DO WHAT HAS TO BE DONE"

Unlike most user agreements, Google's **Policies & Principles** is not page after endless page of incomprehensible legalese. They are written in plain and understandable English. If you read nothing else, please read the [Google Privacy Policy](#).

To Friend or Not to Friend?

That is the question. And the decision should not be taken lightly. When you add someone to your circles (friending), or when someone adds you to one of their circles, you should consider the implications. People will judge you by the company you keep. You should be as careful and thoughtful about developing social networking relationships as you are about developing other relationships.

Like other popular social networking sites (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Tumblr and most others), all that is required to open a Google+ account is a valid email address. And, Google will provide one free-of-charge with only minimal effort dedicated to verifying the identification of the individual. Therefore, before accepting any request to be added to someone's circles and before adding anyone to your circles, ask yourself, if you truly know the other individual.

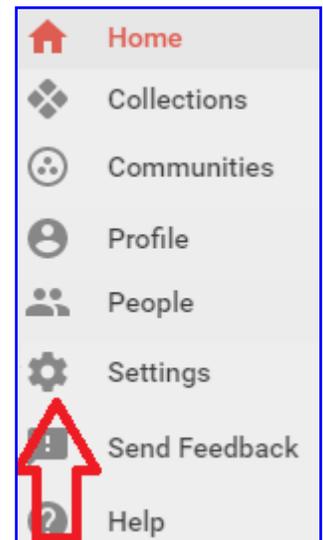
Accessing the Google+ Menu Bar

The menu bar is along the top of the Google+ home page and is normally visible when you land on your home page. If the menu bar is not visible it's most likely because you have scrolled down the home page. When you scroll down the page, the menu bar rolls up and disappears. This adds extra space on your home page. If this is the case, simply scroll up the page until the menu bar reappears.



Settings

If the Google+ navigation menu is not on-screen it is accessed by clicking on the  symbol on the Google+ menu bar. Once the navigation menu has opened, open settings by clicking the settings cog. .



Circles and Circles

Throughout this document you will see references to "circles" and "**circles**". They are not the same. They are not interchangeable and the difference is more than simply one is boldface and the other is not!

Circles are how you organize or categorize your friends while **circles** (boldface) are Google+ settings. Circles, can be either "your" circles or "extended circles" and the same boldface convention applies within this flyer, boldface pertains to the circles setting – regular is a means to organize friends.

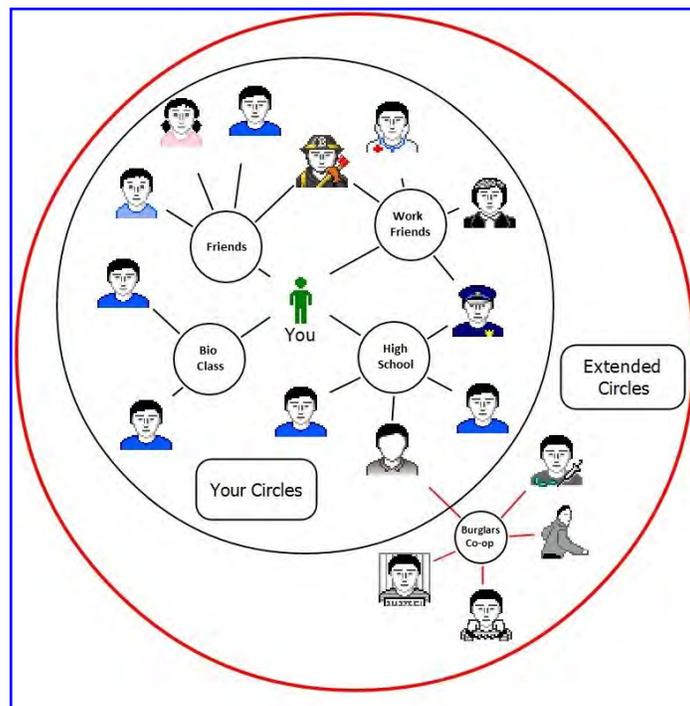
While on the topic of your circles, differentiation of "your" circles and "extended" circles is necessary.

Whereas, your circles are where you organize your friends, extended circles are the circles where the people in your circles organize their friends. The important distinction here is that you have total visibility into the members of your circles but you may not have the same visibility into your extended circles.

While you might be very diligent about whom you invite into your circles, you have no control over (and probably insufficient time to research) who is in these extended circles. For instance, enabling extended circles for your family circles could inadvertently expose personal information to unintended recipients.

When you post images of the family's European vacation, you may not know that the shady friend from high school, who you invited into your circles because you did not want to hurt any feelings, is also a member of the Burglars Co-op circle and now, since you have enabled *extended circles*, thousands of cooperating burglars know you are out of the country and your home is unoccupied.

Therefore, assume that **extended circles** is the equivalent of **public**.



Google+ Privacy Settings

With sound judgments and a measure of caution, privacy settings are an excellent opportunity to secure your account. By adjusting your privacy settings, you can control what people can see when they visit your Google+ page. Restricting access to your page to only people within your circles and properly managing who you allow into your circles will go a long way to securing your account.

There are six broad categories of personal information: personal contact info, work contact info, education, work history, internet sites, and gender, birthday and more. You can configure each broad category to restrict who can see that information. Sites, and gender, birthdays and more allow for more granular settings; you can control who can see each individual data element in each category and in a few instances you can set sharing settings for each item of information.

Controlling the Information on your Profile Page.

Like most social networking sites, Google+ wants to know a lot about you. Social networking sites are, after all, businesses and therefore seek to maximize profits. The more information they collect the more effectively they can expose you to targeted advertisements and the more likely they can link you to others. Linking you to others allows social networks to develop a better profile of you and those to whom you are connected. Chances are, your preferences and aversions are more similar to those you are linked than to the general population.

Depending upon how much information you've provided Google+ and the attention you've paid to the personal information the public is allowed to see, you could inadvertently expose considerable personal information. There are essentially two kinds of *about you information* you might expose: personal about you information (employment information, education, date of birth, email addresses, etc.) and general about you information (posts, photos, YouTube activity).

“Who can see this?” Settings

The five *who can see this* settings are:

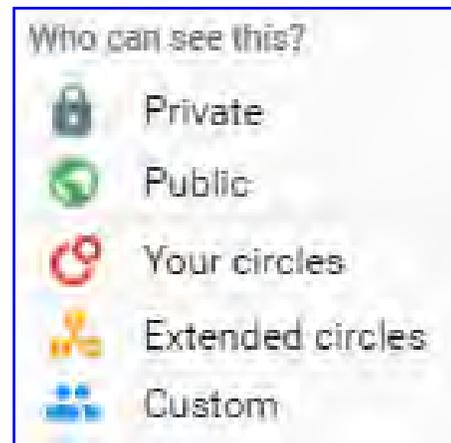
Private - With this setting, only you can see this category or item on your home page. Even people in your circles will not be able to see this information. If you believe this is the appropriate setting, consider why you even have that data on Google+. With website compromises seemingly rampant, why would you want to have personal information on any social networking site if you are the only people who can see it? Presumably, you already know it anyway.

Public - This means public. Any information with this setting can be seen by anyone visiting your page and will be accessible to search engines. Unless you are a public figure or using Google+ for marketing, this is rarely a good setting.

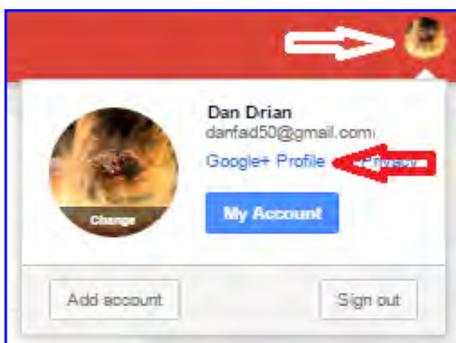
Your circles - Recall our earlier discussion of circles. Others cannot be members of your circles unless you allow them to be. If you have been careful about whom you’ve allowed into your circles this might be a good setting.

Extended circles - Again, recall our earlier discussion of circles. Extended circles are the circles of people whom you’ve allowed into your circles. Although you have diligently endeavored to manage your circles there is little assurance that others have managed, or will manage, their circles equally well. With extended circles, you might inadvertently expose your personal details to some shady characters.

Custom - This setting allows you to make details of your profile visible to specific individuals you select and does not include anyone beyond that. Specifying individuals is a good compromise between private and extended circles.

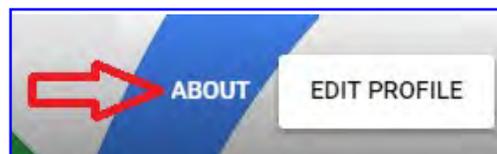


To change or remove the personal data you might have provided to Google+ is easy. Checking the personal information you’ve revealed on your public profile is also easy.



From any of your Google+ pages,

1. Click on your Google+ image icon located at the top right corner of your Google+ page.
2. Click **Google+ Profile**.



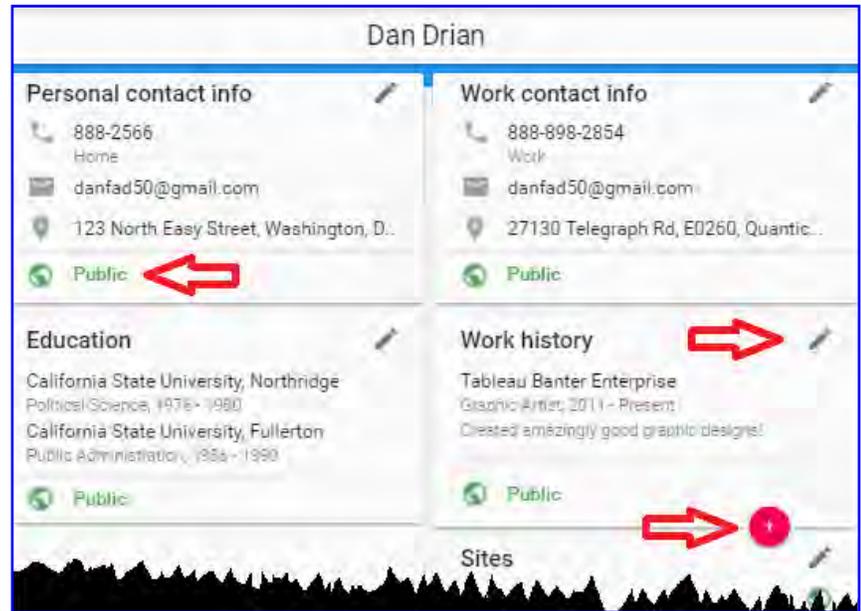
3. Click **About**.

The window that opens will show each category of information for which you have provided data. Beneath each it will show to whom it is visible.

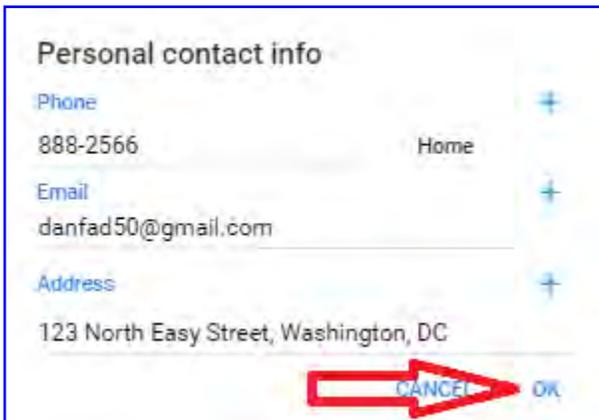
To change who can see what information,

1. Click the  symbol for the personal information category.
2. Click on the symbol for the new setting.

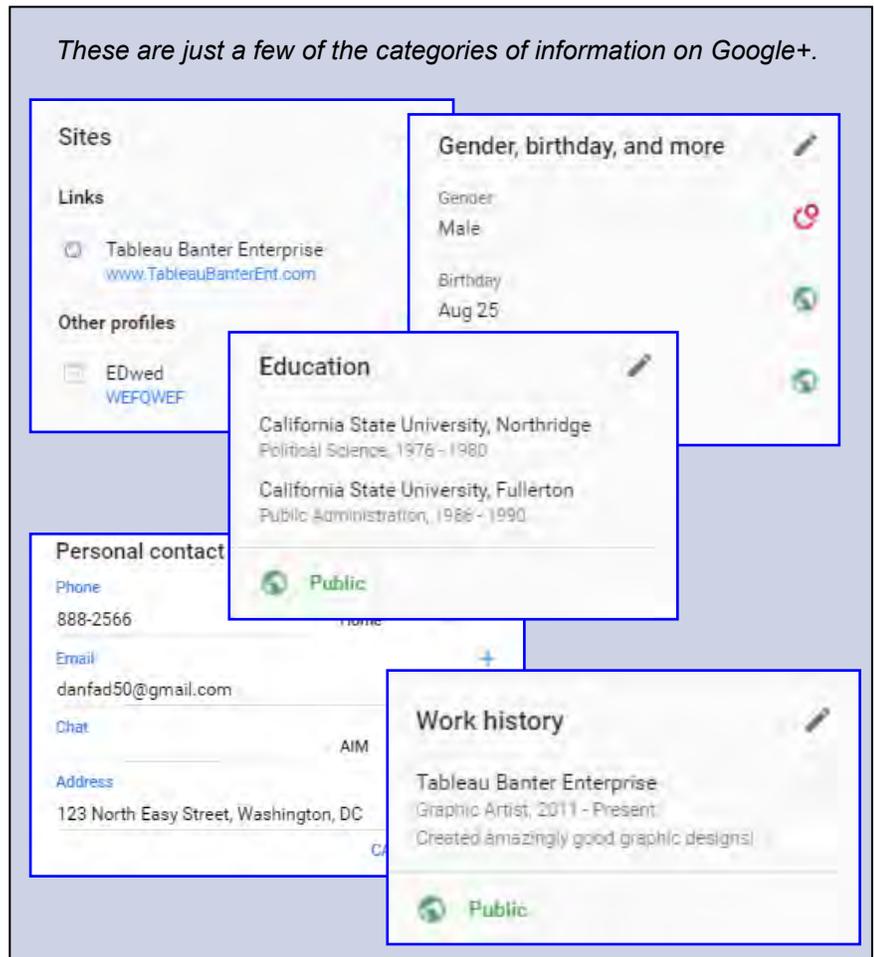
The setting updates the instant you click it.



To edit any of the entries,



1. Click the pencil icon  for the category of information you want to change.
2. Update any field with data in it. (Entirely delete data in any field you no longer want Google to have.)
3. Click **OK**.



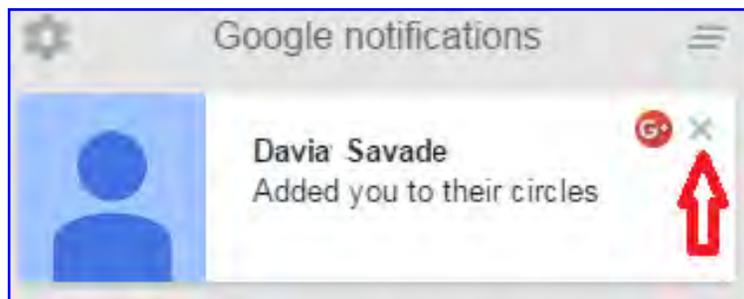
Being Added to Someone's Circles

When someone adds you to their circle, you will see a notification indicator in the notifications bell of your Google+ profile. Depending upon your notification settings, you might also receive an email.

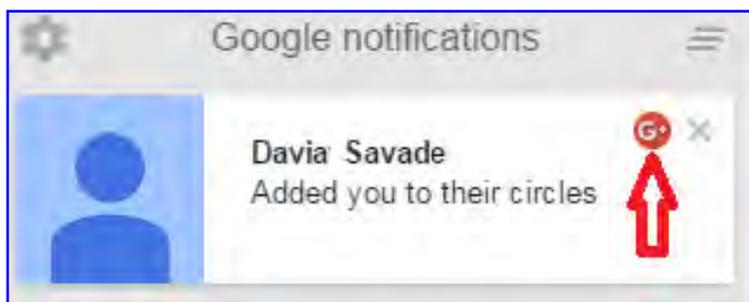
To accept or reject a request to be added to someone's circle,



1. In the upper right corner of your profile page, click on the **message bell**.
2. View the Google+ notifications.



3. Notice the **Added you to their circles** under the name of the Google+ member that added you.
4. If you do not want to add this person to your circle, simply ignore the notification or click the grey **X**.



If this is someone you know and want to add to your circles:

1. Click on the notification and the view will change.
2. Hover your mouse over the **G+** button.
3. Click the check box opposite the circle or circles you want this person to be a member of or create a new circle.
4. The addition is complete the moment you click the check box.

Use caution when choosing circles. Inadvertently adding someone to an incorrect circle, and failing to correct your mistake, could be embarrassing. Once someone has added you to their circles, regardless of your decision to add them to your circles, you will continue to be in their circles. Not adding them to your circles does not remove you from their circles.

However, the other person will not have elevated access to your information by them simply putting you in their circles. They will not have access to anything other than what you have posted for **public** access.

The only way you can remove yourself from their circles is to block that user. See the **Blocking a Google+ Member** section below for more details on how to block someone.

Blocking a Google+ Member

You might choose to block a Google+ member. Whatever the reason, blocking a Google+ member is pretty straightforward. The person you block will not know of the blocking except that he or she will no longer be able to access your profile or contact you directly.

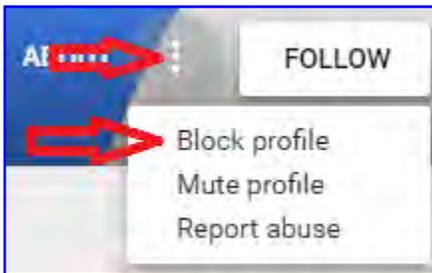
To block a member, from the Google menu bar,



1. Click **People**.
2. Along the top of the people page, click **Followers**.



3. Click on the profile picture or name of the person you want to block. Do not click **Follow**. Doing so will cause you to instantly become one of their followers.



4. When their profile page opens, click on the **vertical dots**. This will open a drop-down menu.
5. Click **Block profile**.



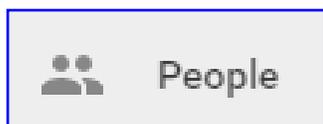
Once blocked, you will both be removed from the other's circles; neither will be able to see the other's posts or see comments either has made on other people's posts; and neither will be able to communicate with the other through Google+. It is important to understand that blocking someone does not eliminate them from your online life. They can still communicate with you using your Gmail account and in posts on community sites to which you both belong.

Report an Abusive Google+ Member

There may come a time when you feel a user should be reported to Google+. Perhaps repeated, unwanted and frequent follow/unfollow cycles, perhaps abusive language, perhaps content that is abusive, threatening, or exceedingly demeaning. Reporting an abusive member is easy and very similar to blocking a member.

Google+ will review any reports. Depending upon their determination, the abusive content could be removed or the member's account could be deleted entirely. Keep in mind, Google+'s perception of unacceptable content or behavior could differ from yours.

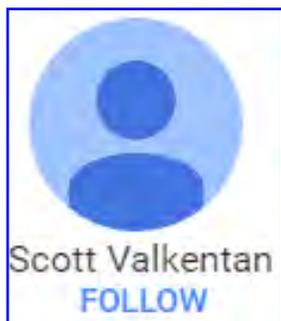
To report a member, from the Google menu bar:



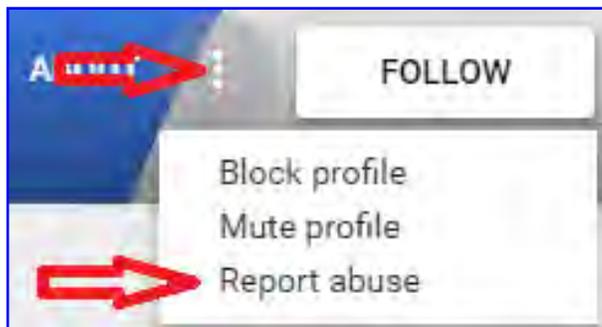
1. Click **People**.



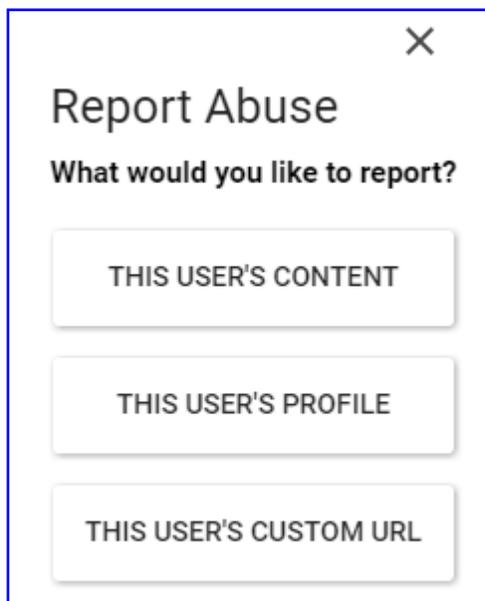
2. Along the top of the people page, click **Followers**.



3. Click on the profile picture or name of the person you want to block. Do not click **Follow**. Doing so will cause you to instantly become one of their followers



4. When their profile page opens, click on the **vertical dots**. This will open a drop-down menu.
5. Click **Report abuse**.



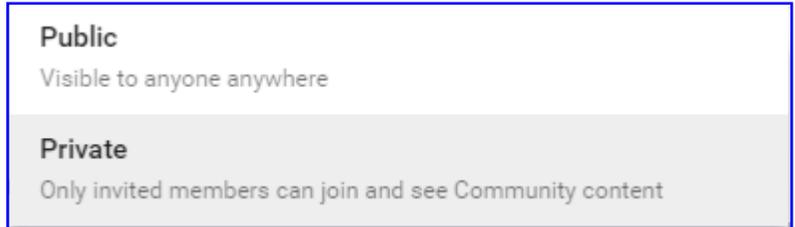
6. Click the reason you are reporting the abusive behavior.

After clicking the reason for the report, there will be more drop-down menus that allow you to refine the reasons for the report. Select those that best describe your reasons and add descriptive comments where possible.

Creating Google+ Communities

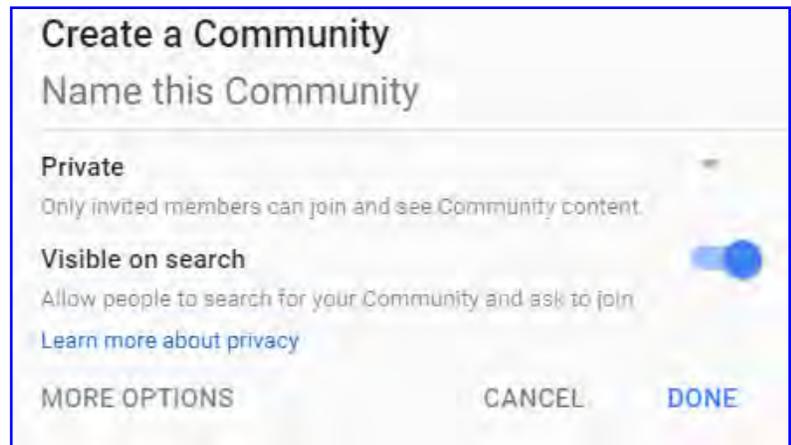
Communities are like circles except that, instead of circles of friends, you have circles of people with common interests. Perhaps you have heard the term [community of interest](#) used elsewhere. If you have, then the concept of a Google+ community will not be new.

When creating a community, there is an option to make the community public or private. Private communities are, as the name implies, private. Depending upon configuration settings chosen by the community owner or moderators, the private community may or may not show up in internet searches. Even if the community setting allows discovery by internet search engines, the only thing a non-member will see is that the community exists. They cannot see any posts, photos or the community's member list. If the community is configured so that it is invisible to search engines, you will only know it exists if the owner or moderator invites you. A private Google+ community would be an excellent way to keep in touch with family members, your bowling team or your *Zombies in Popular Media* classmates.



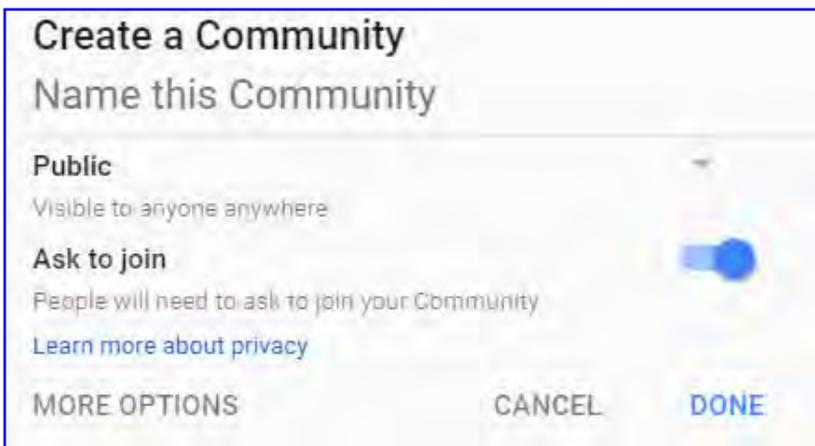
When you create a community, the recommended setting is *not visible on search*. The setting for this is a toggle slider—it is either on or off. If the slider is to the right and blue is showing then people can find your community and ask to join. If this is off then a community administrator must invite people to participate in the group.

The safety benefits of a private community, unavailable to search engines, is obvious. Outsiders will not be able to find your community. The tradeoff is that people you want to bring inside that community must be invited.



Public communities are just that – public. You cannot hide your activity in a public community.

Anyone with internet access can find your community using an internet search engine or from within Google+ if they have an account. If the community is not configured so that people must ask to join, then the entire community and all content is available and anyone with a Google+ account can read the content of the community and see its membership roster.



The community can be configured in such a manner that anyone who wants to join must be permitted by the community owner or moderator. This is a compromise between the private community unavailable to search engines and the completely public community. The community can still be located by search engines but content is unavailable until the request to join is approved.

Managing Google+ Communities

The Google+ communities you join could say a lot about you, your interests, where you attended school and what you studied, professional associations, employer and employment responsibilities and perhaps more. All of these are categories of information that can be used for [social engineering](#) and identity theft. Bear in mind, while you may be an uber-aware internet user whose practices immunize you against social engineering, those with whom you associate may not be so diligent. Information about you and other associates could be mosaicked into a larger picture and that information used for social engineering.

Google+ allows you to choose whether the communities of which you're a member display on your profile page. You can opt to display all communities on your profile page, just some of the communities or none of the communities you've joined.

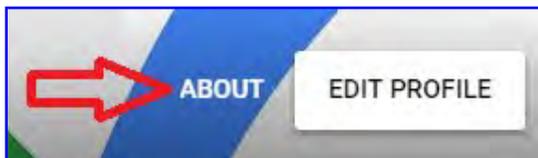
The recommended setting is to disable **Show All** and then turn on select communities; the communities you think should be visible to anyone who views your profile. When a community is turned off, only other members of that same community will know you are a member. After your initial selections, newly joined communities do not automatically appear on your profile. You must consciously decide to make the newly joined community public.

Private communities are the exception. A private community, one that the creator has chosen to restrict membership to only those approved by a community administrator, does not appear on your public profile except to other members of the same private community. Private communities will not appear in your profile even if **Show All** is fully enabled.

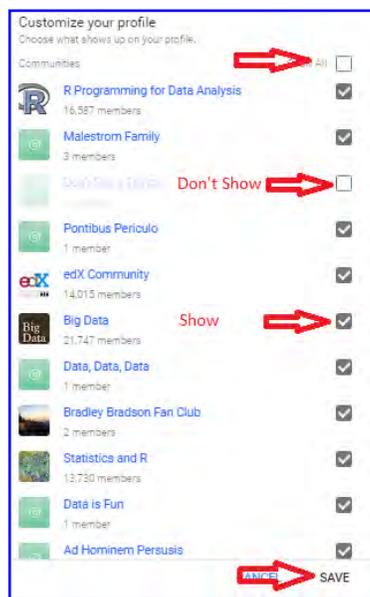
To entirely disable communities showing on your profile, from any Google+ page,



1. Click your profile image.



2. Click **Edit Profile**.



3. Uncheck **Show All**.
4. Click **Save**.

To allow some communities to appear on your profile and hide others, from the same menu,

1. Check or uncheck communities according to your needs.
2. Click **Save**.

Photos and Videos Shared on Google+

Photos and videos can present substantial security risks. They clearly illustrate that which is important enough to you that you document it: places you go, people you meet, things you do (good and bad, be cautious), your likes and dislikes and more. While individual images might not contain very much information, a collection of images taken as a whole is a different situation.

The best first line of defense is adherence to the “never post anything you would be embarrassed to see on the morning news” mantra. The second line of defense, a corollary, is “the internet does not forget.” Once you post something on the internet assume that it is there, somewhere, forever and it will return to haunt you at the least opportune moment.

Photos and videos depict you and your family with an intimacy that words cannot match. The settings you choose for photos and videos can be very revealing. People who would do you harm can use image collections to build a fairly detailed mosaic of your life. That seemingly innocuous image of your kindergartner’s school play reveals that you have a kindergartener and what that kindergartner looks like. But in the series of school play images there is also the school mascot and an image of the front of the school. In another series of images is a picture of you standing by the marquee of the on-post theatre.

With just minimal effort, an internet search for the school mascot and military installation theatre will likely identify the school, or perhaps several schools in the area. Then, using internet street view or satellite imagery tools, the specific school can most likely be identified. All of this without leaving the comfort of the home (or office).

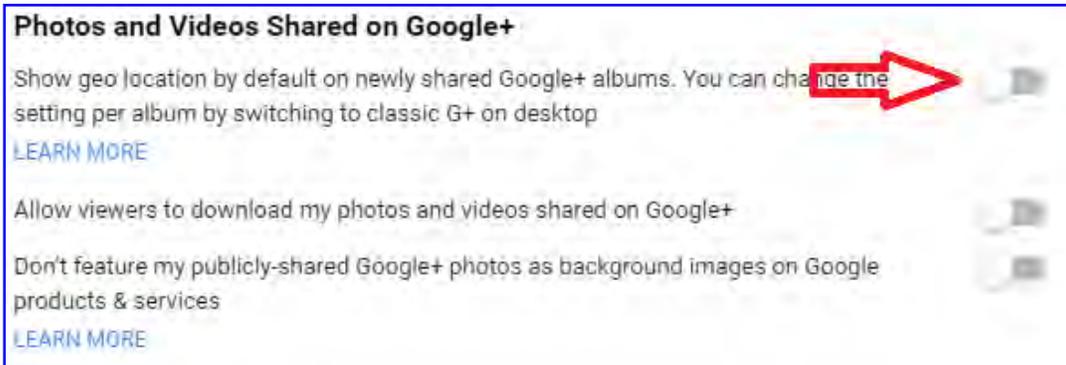
Anytime you post content to the internet, be cautious! Google+ has configuration settings to help you. Rather than touching upon just the few settings of import, all are covered and a brief description included because controlling images and videos is so important.

From the **Google+ menu bar**,

1. Click the settings cog. 

Show Geo Location...

Adding location data to any social media posting is a bad idea. Configuring any social networking experience to automatically add your location is a really bad idea. Turn this feature **off**. If, after careful consideration, you decide you must include location information in a post, doing so will be your conscious decision.



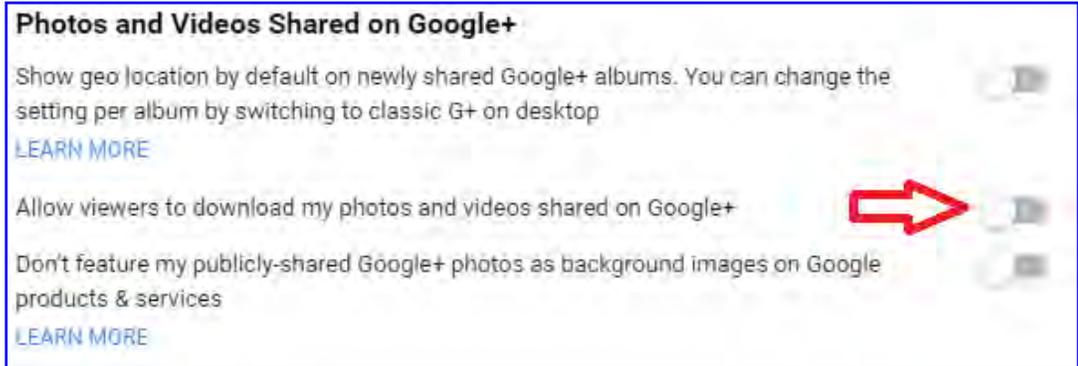
1. Slide the button opposite **Show geo location by default...** to the left so there’s no visible blue background beside the slider button.

Allow Viewers to Download

Internet searches reveal instances where images posted to social media have been used without the owner's consent for both commercial and other purposes. A seemingly innocent picture from a beach vacation could, to someone with certain proclivities, be used for unintended, unpleasant and unseemly purposes.

Controlling who has your images is important. After all, they are your work and you should control who has them and what they do with them.

1. Slide the button opposite **Allow viewers to download...** to the left so there's no visible blue background beside the slider button.



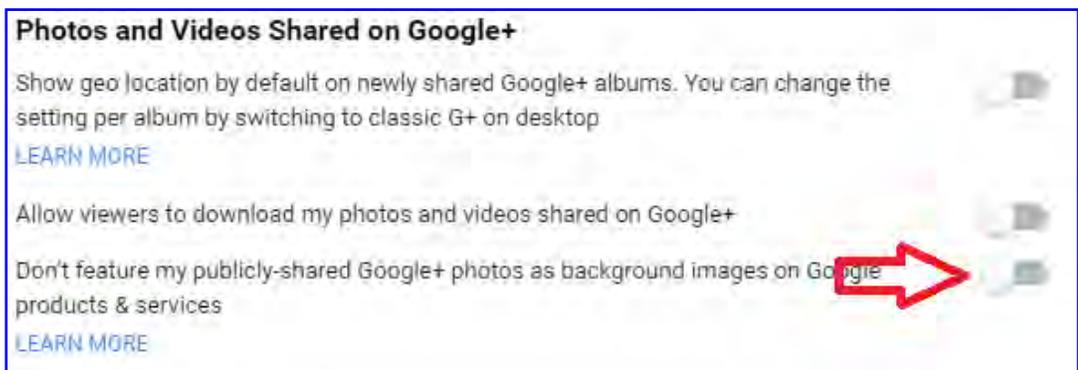
Even with this setting, be cautious about what you post. Preventing the download of images does not prevent someone from capturing screen images or "scraping" content. It just makes downloading more difficult.

Don't feature my publicly-shared...

Be sure to read **Learn more** about this setting. You may or may not want to allow Google to use your publicly-shared images. Google says in its help statements that it will not use images that include people or text (e.g., street addresses and business names that might identify your location) and will notify you if one of your publicly available images is used. Moreover, featuring your content only applies to images you have made publicly available. If you have images you want to keep control over, do not share them publicly.

If you are uncertain about this setting, or do not feel you can trust Google to abide by (unintentionally or otherwise) their promise to exclude images with identifying content, err on the side of safety and disable this.

1. Slide the button opposite **Don't feature my publicly...** to the left so there's no visible blue background beside the slider button.



Notifications

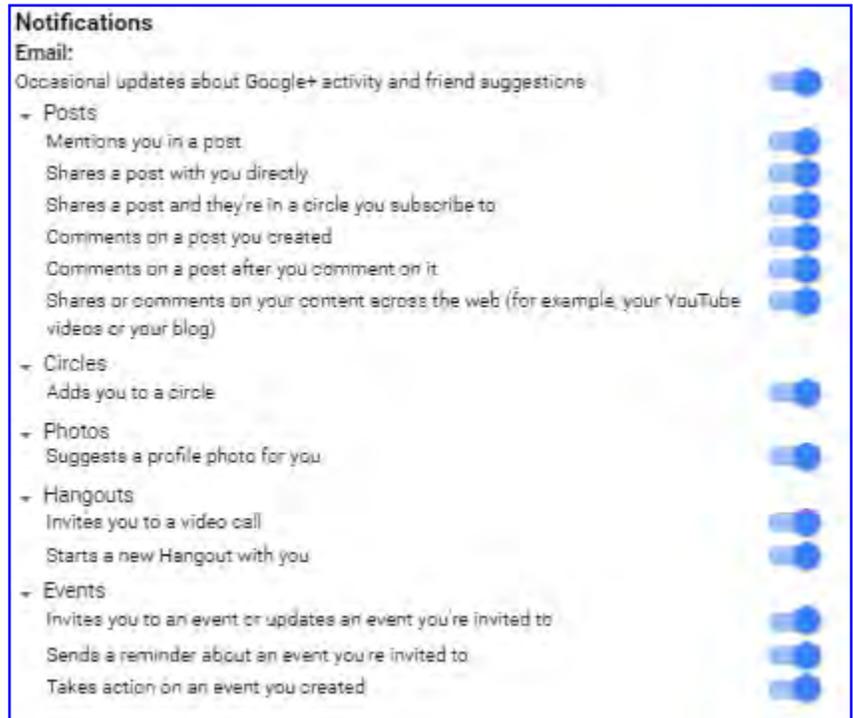
Receiving notifications of Google+ activity that involves or mentions you is an excellent, proactive idea!

Within the **receive notifications** area, there are several categories of notifications (posts, circles, photos, etc.) and multiple configuration choices within each category. The importance of any setting is affected by how well you have managed your circles.

If you have restricted access to your posts and profile to the maximum extent possible and managed your circle memberships, then these settings are of lesser importance. However, if this is not the case, or if you just want an extra layer of safety, then receiving notifications is important.

One very good reason to receive notifications and to monitor posts is that, even with your profile correctly configured, when someone inside your circles mentions someone outside your circles, that outsider will be permitted access to all of the posts in that thread. For instance, if you are not monitoring posts and several weeks into what you believe to be a private family discussion, a family member in your family circle mentions someone outside your family circle, then that outsider will have access to that entire thread. The outcome could be problematic.

There are many settings under notifications. Each has a separate purpose but in general, setting them all to **on** is probably a good idea unless your Google+ activity is so high that the volume of email notifications becomes onerous. If that's the case, turn **off** those settings that are causing you problems.



How your Profile Looks to the Public

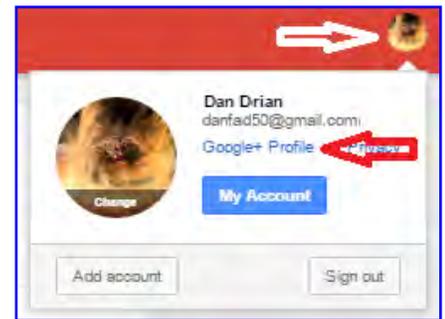
If you would like to see how your Google+ profile page appears to members of the public (anyone who visits your profile page) Google+ provides a means to do so. It's a little convoluted to get to but it's the only way to know with certainty what information you're revealing to the public.

To see how your profile looks like to the public,

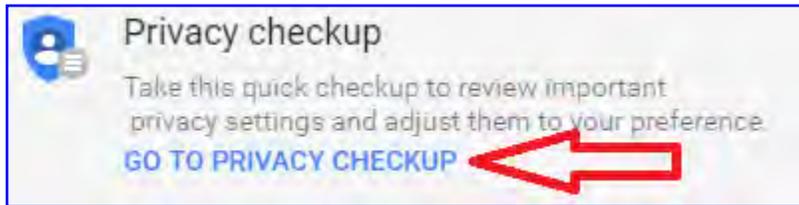
1. Click on your Google+ profile picture in the upper right corner of any Google+ page and click on **Google+ Profile**.



2. Click **ABOUT**.



3. Scroll to the very bottom and click on **GO TO PRIVACY CHECKUP**.



Welcome,

Choose the privacy settings that are right for you

Review and adjust what data Google uses to personalize your experience, and update what information you share with friends or make public.

START NOW



4. Click **START NOW**.

1. Choose what Google+ profile information you share with others

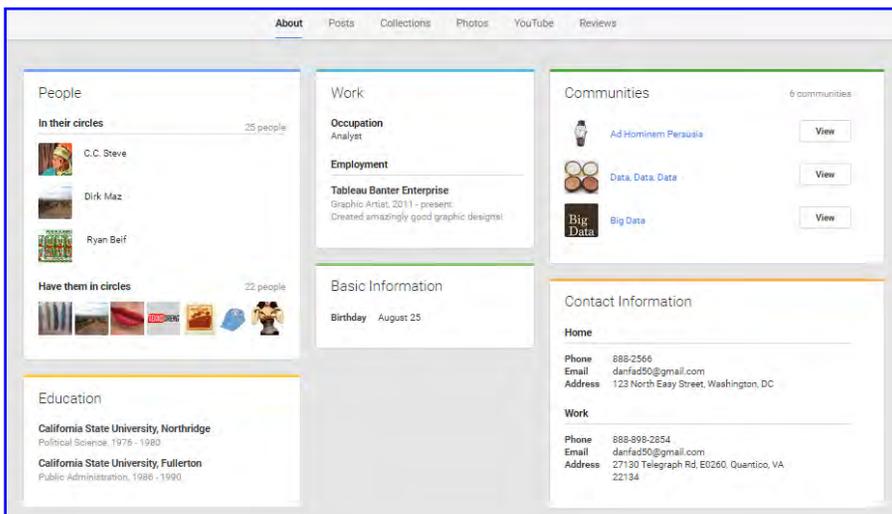
Decide who can see your information, and choose what information you make public or keep private.

[Learn more](#)

[See how your profile appears to the public](#)



5. Click **See how your profile appears to the public**.



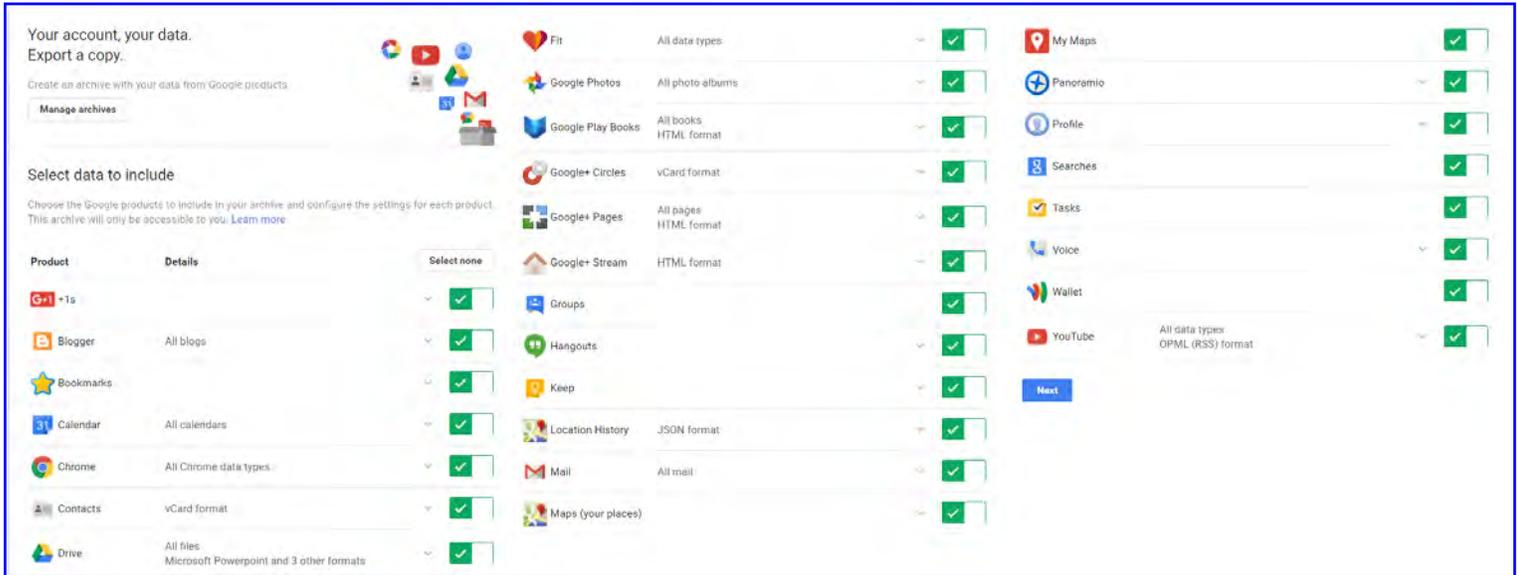
What you see in your public view will be substantially similar to this image.

Depending upon the amount of information you've provided Google+, your page might very well be longer. Scroll down the page to make certain you see it all.

From this view, you cannot make changes or edits to information. To make changes, see the Who Can See This? Section.

Downloading an Archive of Your Google Activity

You might find yourself in a situation where you'd like to review all of your Google+ activity. Or maybe you'd like an archive of all of your activity on all of Google's online sites. Fortunately, there is a means by which you can accomplish this without scrolling through innumerable Google+ pages. You can download to your local computer an archive of your information and activity.



This image illustrates the many different Google sites that you can include in your Google activity download. The choices are arranged here side by side but on the web you will need to scroll down the page to see them all.

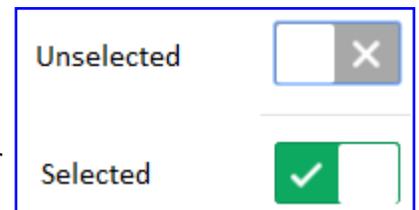
A word of caution—DO NOT download an archive of your Google activity to any computer that you do not have total ownership of. Do not download an archive to a borrowed computer, a public computer like those you might use at a library, community center or school, or your work computer.

Before you start the download process, consider the following:

- Google's preparation of the downloadable archive could, in Google's word, "...take a long time (hours or possibly days) to complete."
- The downloadable file, even with compression, could be many gigabytes or many, many gigabytes.
- Some of the downloaded content will be in file formats not easily read by most office suites (e.g., JSON, OPML).

To download an archive of your Google activity, after logging into one of Google's sites,

1. Navigate to [Google Takeout](https://takeout.google.com/settings/takeout).
You may need to copy and paste this URL (<https://takeout.google.com/settings/takeout>) into the same browser that you opened the Google site in.
2. Scroll up and down the page and select or unselect the Google sites you want or do not want included in your archive.
3. Click **Next**.



As an added layer of security you might be required to enter your password several times over the course of selecting and executing your archive. When your archive is ready, you'll receive an email in your Google mail inbox.

These Google+ configuration recommendations are based upon best information available at the time of publication. They are not a guarantee of social networking safety. Google+ may have instituted configuration changes since publication. Users must exercise caution whenever interacting with social media.

Return to [Social Networking Safety Tips](#)



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