

It takes only six minutes to renew your passport. Here's how.

The once-tedious all-day affair has never been faster or easier.

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Reporter Natalie Compton received her new passport 17 days after applying online.



By [Natalie B. Compton](#)

The last time I renewed my passport, about a decade ago, I spent the day fighting for parking and waiting in lines as I bounced between a Walgreens (for photos) and a dreary government building in Los Angeles. The time before that had also been a chore; I remember sitting in a Fresno, California, post office with my mom, poring over our paper documents to make sure we filled out everything perfectly. But since those applications, the State Department has brought the process up to speed for the digital age.

In 2021, President Joe Biden [signed an executive order](#) to allow Americans to renew their passports online, eliminating the need for physical documents and paper checks to be sent through the mail. Over the next few years, the government experimented with a pilot program before [officially launching](#) online renewals in 2024. More than 6 million Americans have used the option, and last year more than 43 percent of all renewal applications were made online.

Last month, it was finally time for me to try the new system myself. It took six minutes to fill out the renewal form online, and 17 days later my fresh booklet showed up in my mailbox. No expediting fees, no lines. I even took my own photo from the privacy of my living room. Now I can't stop spreading the good word: Renewing your passport has never been easier — you just have to do it online.

Who's eligible for online renewal?

To use the online renewal system, applicants must be U.S. citizens or residents at least 25 years old, among other requirements listed on [the State Department website](#), including:

- Applicants must have already had a passport with 10-year validity.

- Applicants must be applying for a regular passport, and they must possess their current passport. (It cannot be lost, stolen, damaged or mutilated.)
- Applicants can't request a change to their name, gender, date of birth or place of birth.
- Applicants can't be traveling internationally for at least six weeks from the day they submit their application.
- Applicants must have a U.S. state or territory mailing address.
- Applicants can pay with a credit card or debit card, and must be able to upload a digital passport photo.
- The applicant's recent passport must have been issued between nine and 15 years before the application date.
- The applicant's passport must be expiring within one year or have expired less than five years ago.

If you don't meet these criteria, you may still be able to [renew by mail](#) or [in person at a passport agency or center](#).

Also important: Through the online system, you can renew only the type of passport you already have. For example, you can't be the holder of a passport book but request a passport card instead. You'll have to request new document types by mail.

How much does it cost?

The cost of a passport book is \$130. A passport card costs \$30. Applicants can also pay for faster mailing of their finished passport (one- to three-day delivery for \$22.05).

What do you need?

To streamline the application process, have your current passport handy as well as a credit or debit card, a digital photo of yourself that meets the [State Department requirements](#), your Social Security number, and information for an emergency contact. And before you get started, double-check you are on the [official .gov website](#) — there are impostor websites out there that will charge you extra fees.

How long does it take?

You can apply only for a routine passport renewal online; there is no expedited service (yet — that could change in the coming months). The processing time estimate is four to six weeks, and the actual application process can be done in about 10 minutes.

I submitted my application for renewal on Jan. 21 and got an email saying I should receive my passport on March 9. It actually came in the mail 17 days later, on Feb.

7. My husband applied the same day I did, and his passport arrived the same day as mine.

You may get yours back even faster. I've heard from dozens of travelers who have used online renewal, and most said they got their passports in about two weeks. Many said their wait time was even shorter, sometimes within a week of applying.

I have a checkered history with ID photos — some flattering, some more mug shot — and was delighted to have the option to take them myself. (Or rather, take 50 myself and pick the best one.) Before you do a DIY photo shoot, take a look at the [State Department website](#) for best practices. The main tips include:

- Your photo must be in color and have a white background (such as a white wall).
- Your photo must have been taken within the last six months.
- You can't wear glasses or hats, but you can wear head coverings for religious or medical purposes.
- You can smile, as long as it looks natural.
- Your photo must be high resolution, not blurry or pixelated.
- Your photo must have a file size between 54 kilobytes and 10 megabytes, and it must be saved as a JPG, JPEG or HEIF file (if you use a mobile device to take your photo, it will automatically save in one of these formats).
- You cannot use any kind of filter or retouching tools to alter your appearance.

The agency also says you should ask someone else to take the photo for you.

What this really means is: Don't take a selfie with your phone's front-facing camera. Selfies often turn out with the wrong angle and don't capture the proportions of your face quite right. If you're using a phone to take the photo, you'll have to use the back camera, which is more accurate.

I used a tripod and a self-timer to take my own photo after studying the "good" and "bad" examples the State Department provides (and watching [a few TikTok videos about posing](#); pro tip: Crane your neck forward and smize!). The agency also offers a tool that evaluates your photo before you submit your application and flags any glaring errors. If your photo is denied by the passport specialist after you apply, you'll be notified by email and given the opportunity to submit a new photo.

A last word of warning: Don't go too hard on the glam. You could have a problem at the airport if your post-redeye reality does not resemble the hot doppelgänger in your passport photo. [Seriously](#).

Alternatively, you can visit a professional to take your passport photo (for example, at a camera shop, AAA office, the post office, UPS or FedEx, or drugstores such as CVS); just ask them to share a digital file to upload with your application.