

# IRC HACKS™

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HACK  
#8

## Register with NickServ

All nicknames on an IRC network must be unique, so if someone steals your nickname, you won't be able to use it. Protect your nickname and get it back with NickServ.

It may have happened to you already—someone trying to impersonate you or just “stealing” your nickname for the fun of it. NickServ will solve this problem for you.

Impersonating someone on IRC is quite easy. When logging in, you can specify your nickname, and the server will never check whether you really are who you pretend to be. This could be considered a weakness. Fortunately, NickServ tries to fix this weakness.

NickServ is one of the Services available on a large number of IRC networks. It sits on the IRC network and sees all the connecting and disconnecting users and nick changes. Of course, just that isn't enough. When you register your nickname with NickServ, you can ask NickServ to *kill* someone if they are already logged in with your nickname. This can be useful when someone's impersonating you, but it's probably even more useful if your Internet connection fails and you have to log back in—your old session will probably still be active on the server, so you won't be able to use your regular nickname. But if you ask NickServ to kill your old connection, you can take your nickname back.

A more important advantage of registering your nickname with NickServ is that it allows you to register new channels with ChanServ and/or be in channel access lists. This means, among other things, that you can get channel operator status from [ChanServ](#) [Hack #9].

### Registering Yourself with NickServ

The first step is to register your nickname. This is quite easy on most IRC networks, as all you have to do is send a register message to NickServ. To do this on the freenode IRC network, open a query with NickServ and send the register message like this:

```
<Wilmer> register password
<NickServ> Your nickname is now registered under the hostmask [~*blabla@*.
ipV6.gaast.net].
<NickServ> Your password is [password]. Please remember this for later use.
<NickServ> Freenode is a service of Peer-Directed Projects Center, an
<NickServ> IRS 501(c)(3) (tax-exempt) charitable and educational
organization.
<NickServ> For frequently-asked questions about the network, please see the
<NickServ> FAQ page (http://freenode.net/faq.shtml).
```

If someone else has already registered this nickname, you'll receive an error message and you'll just have to pick a different nickname. Sadly, nicknames on IRC are very much a first-come first-served affair. After you have registered, you can check to see if everything worked by reconnecting to the IRC server. You should receive the following message:

```
<NickServ> This nickname is owned by someone else
<NickServ> If this is your nickname, type /msg NickServ IDENTIFY <password>
```

You should then do what NickServ told you to do, so type:

```
/msg NickServ IDENTIFY password
```

If everything goes correctly, NickServ will recognize you and mark you as registered. You can check whether you (or someone else) are indeed identified correctly using the `info` command. This is also sent as a private message to NickServ, for example:

```
<Wilmer> info Wilmer
<NickServ>           Nickname: wilmer << ONLINE >>
<NickServ>           Registered: 1 year 50 weeks 3 days (23h 21m 18s) ago
<NickServ> Last Seen Quit Msg: ballard.freenode.net irc.freenode.net
<NickServ>           Email Address: wilmer@gaast.net
<NickServ>           UIN: 267762
<NickServ>           Nickname Options: Secure, AllowMemos, MemoNotify, MemoSignon
```

If you don't see the `<< ONLINE >>` text behind your nickname or any other sign of you being identified, you can be sure something went wrong. NickServs on other IRC networks may behave slightly differently, so be prepared to accept some different formatting of the output. In particular, some NickServs require you to specify your email address as a second argument when you register.

If you still have problems, it's probably a good idea to read the help information. Most (if not all) NickServs will give you more information about how they work when you send them a `help` command in a private message:

```
/msg NickServ help
```

Usually, you can get more information about a specific command by adding it as an argument to the `help` command:

```
/msg NickServ help register
```

One command you might find interesting is the `set` command. This is used to change your settings. You can use it to set a new password, enable stronger security, and automatically authenticate using your hostname. You can use it to set your contact information, such as your email address, which people will get when they use the `info` command shown earlier.



Automatic authentication based on hostnames may sound convenient, but it's sometimes a bad idea. If you're running your IRC client on a Unix machine that is also used by other people, it makes it very easy for others to fool NickServ. If you think having to send a password every time you log in is annoying, there are scripts that can do this for you.

## Fixing Nick Collisions

Now that you're registered with NickServ, you're ready to use some of the useful NickServ features. For example, let's say you accidentally unplugged your computer's power cable. When you start your IRC client again, the IRC server will probably complain that your nickname is already in use. This happens because your old session is still alive and using your nickname. The IRC server doesn't know about your mistake, so you'll receive a message like this:

```
-!- Your nick is owned by Wilmer van der Gaast [~blabla@tosca.ipv6.gaast.net]
```

If your IRC client is clever, it will have chosen an alternative nickname or appended an underscore to your nickname to enable it to connect successfully using a unique nickname. This will let you open a query with NickServ again so you can remove your "ghost" from the server:

```
<Wilmer_> ghost Wilmer password  
-!- Wilmer [~blabla@tosca.ipv6.gaast.net] has quit [Nick collision from services.]  
<NickServ> [Wilmer] has been killed
```

Because the "ghost" has been removed from the server, you can take back your own nickname.

## Changing Nicknames

If you change your nickname frequently, a feature called *nick linking* allows you to link multiple nicknames together. When two nicknames are linked, you can change from one nick to the other without having to identify yourself again. Also, the channel privileges are shared.

To link your nickname with another one, open a query with NickServ and enter the link command. The link command requires two arguments: the nickname you want to link to and the password for that nickname. This is required because you shouldn't be allowed to link to any other person and gain his channel privileges.

```
<lintux> link wilmer password  
23:56:28 -NickServ(NickServ@services.)- Your nickname is now linked to [wilmer]
```

One thing you should be careful with when linking nicks is to try to avoid losing some privileges. On freenode, the nick under which you run the link command will lose all its own privileges and get the privileges assigned to the nick you're linking to. So it might be a bad idea to link two of your nicks if both have special privileges assigned in some channels already. If you want to know how your IRC network handles this, read the help information about the link command:

```
/msg NickServ help link
```

Now that you have mastered NickServ, you can be assured that your nickname is safe.

—*Wilmer van der Gaast*