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# Authentication

## Definition - What does *Authentication* mean?

In the context of computer systems, authentication is a process that ensures and confirms a user's identity. Authentication is one of the five pillars of information assurance (IA). The other four are integrity, availability, confidentiality and nonrepudiation.

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## Techopedia explains *Authentication*

Authentication begins when a user tries to access information. First, the user must prove his access rights and identity. When logging into a computer, users commonly enter usernames and passwords for authentication purposes. This login combination, which must be assigned to each user, authenticates access. However, this type of authentication can be circumvented by hackers.

A better form of authentication, biometrics, depends on the user's presence and biological makeup (i.e., retina or fingerprints). This technology makes it more difficult for hackers to break into computer systems.

The Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) authentication method uses digital certificates to prove a user's identity. There are other authentication tools, too, such as key cards and USB tokens. One of the greatest authentication threats occurs with email, where authenticity is often difficult to verify. For example, unsecured emails often appear legitimate.

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