Using Duo with a Hardware Token

Northwestern students, faculty, and staff authenticating with a University-issued hardware token should:

1. Click the “Enter a Passcode” button.
2. Press the button on your hardware token to generate a new passcode.
3. Type the passcode into the space provided.
4. Click “Log In.” Note that using the “Device:” drop-down menu to select your token is not necessary before entering the passcode.

Important: Hardware tokens can get “out of sync” if the button is pressed too many times in a row, and the generated passcodes are not used to log in. Please review the self-service suggestions on the next page to remediate the “out of sync” condition.

If your token stops working, please contact the IT Service Desk at 847-491-4357 (1-HELP) or consultant@northwestern.edu.

Hardware Token FAQs

What is a Duo Multi-factor Authentication (MFA) token?

A Duo MFA token—or hardware token, physical token, or “fob”—is a piece of hardware used to authenticate when an individual chooses not to use a phone as part of the MFA process. The token is a small, battery-powered device that you can attach to a keychain. Pressing a button on the token generates a code on the built-in display. Please note the hardware token does not require cellular or internet service to receive Duo-generated passcodes.
Who should use a Duo MFA token?
No one must possess or use a Duo MFA token, and most people will not want—or need—a token. Only when a phone cannot be used for MFA should a token be used. Using a mobile phone to access Duo Mobile push notifications is the most secure way to authenticate into University systems.

How do Duo MFA tokens work?
A Duo MFA token generates a different series of digits each time the token’s button is pressed. To authenticate using a token, please review the instructions on the previous page.

Is there a charge for the Duo MFA token?
Tokens are purchased by the various school and units.

Who distributes Duo MFA tokens?
Duo MFA tokens are managed and distributed by Northwestern IT. To obtain a token, please contact the IT Service Desk at 847-491-4357 (1-HELP) or consultant@northwestern.edu. In some cases, tokens are issued to school and unit information technology partners who can distribute the tokens to their colleagues, as needed.

What if I need to replace my Duo MFA token?
If your Duo MFA token is no longer working, it is likely exhibiting some of the symptoms below and needs to be replaced by Northwestern IT. If your token needs to be replaced, please contact your local IT department. If you do not have a local IT department, contact the IT Service Desk at 847-491-4357 (1-HELP) or consultant@northwestern.edu.

- Battery is completely dead
- No digits—or some, but not all, digits—display when pushing the button to request a passcode
- Button does not release when pressed

Why does Duo say the passcode is invalid when I am entering it correctly?
The Duo MFA token may go “out of sync” and not work correctly under certain circumstances. This error usually occurs when the token has not been used for an extended period of time. It can also occur when the token's button is pressed repeatedly, and the generated passcodes are not used to authenticate. This issue can happen if you keep your token somewhere where the button is pressed continuously against other objects (e.g., pocket, bag, etc.).

How do I fix an “out of sync” token?
If your token goes “out of sync,” you may attempt to resync the token yourself by attempting to log in with three consecutively generated passcodes. On the first and second tries, enter the generated passcodes and note that Duo will say the passcodes are invalid. On the third try, enter the generated passcode, and you will then be allowed to proceed. If this method does not work, please contact the IT Service Desk at 847-491-4357 (1-HELP) or consultant@northwestern.edu.

I am leaving the University. Do I have to return my Duo MFA token?
If you are leaving the University for any reason, please return your Duo MFA token to your school or unit’s information technology contact.