HOME > WINDOWS

3 Ways to Reset a Forgotten Windows Administrator Password

Forgetting your password is scary, but you still have options to get back in. Here are three ways to reset your admin password in Windows.

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How many times have you forgotten a password in the last year? Losing a website password isn't a huge deal, because you can reset those with your email address. But forgetting your computer password is scary, because they're more difficult to reset.

If you've forgotten the password for a Windows administrator account, don't fear. There are several methods you can use to recover it. We'll show you how to reset administrator passwords in Windows, even if you don't have admin rights. While we focus on Windows 10 here, these tips should largely work the same in Windows 11 and other versions, too.

1. Reset the Windows Administrator Password With a Microsoft Account

One of the major benefits of using a Microsoft account with Windows is that you can reset your password by going through Microsoft's tools without much hassle.

First, make sure that you really can't access your Microsoft account (perhaps your keyboard has a stuck key or something similar). Go to login.live.com on your phone or another computer and try to sign in with the Microsoft account you use on your PC, making sure you don't mistype anything.

If you still can't get in here, then proceed with resetting your Microsoft password. Head to the Microsoft password reset page to get started, though you can also reset your password from the Windows login screen by clicking the **I forgot my password** link.
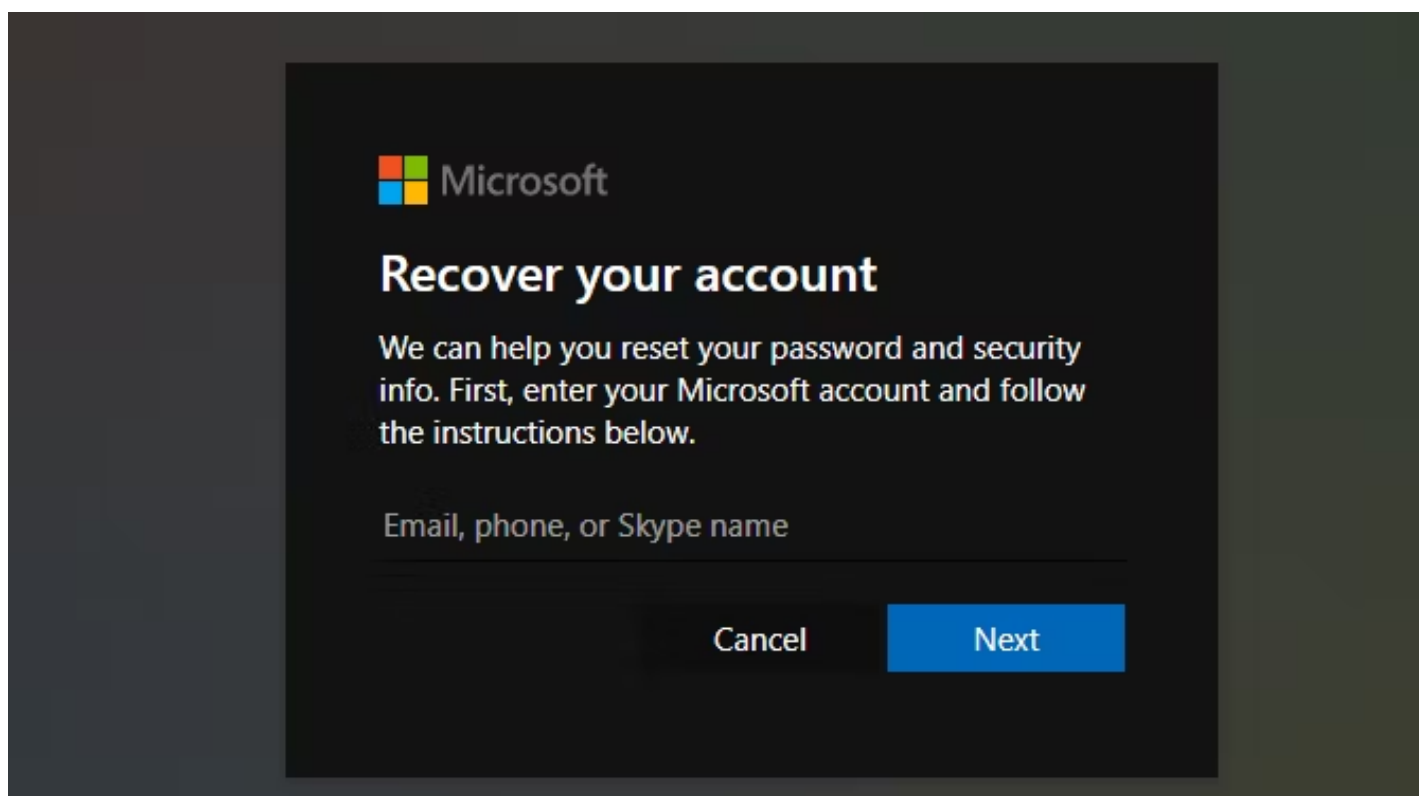
After confirming your identity with the details you've provided on your account, this page will walk you through resetting your Microsoft account password. Once that's done, use the new password to sign into your PC.

It's worth noting that if you have a Microsoft account, you should take a few minutes to update your security info on your Microsoft account page. Adding a phone number and secondary email address gives you options to reset your password easily; without them, it's much more of a hassle. A little bit of forethought now will make it much easier to reset your admin password in the future.

2. Reset a Local Windows Admin Password Using the Lock Screen Workaround

If you don't use a Microsoft account to log into Windows, you'll have to reset the password for a local account. Windows 10 and 11 allow you to set security questions for local accounts

that help you get back in easily from the lock screen if you forget the password. If you haven't
set these up already, however, they won't do you much good now.

If the locked account is the only administrator account on your PC, you'll need to first use a
workaround to launch an elevated Command prompt. We walk through this process below.

However, if you have another administrator account on the computer aside from the one
you're locked out of, you don't need to go through all these steps. In that case, log into the
other admin account on your computer and change the password using the command line,
which doesn't require jumping through as many hoops.

Setting Up the Password Reset Workaround

First, you'll need to create a bootable Windows 10 disk on a flash drive. This will obviously
require another computer, since you can't get into yours.

Once you've made that, insert the drive into your PC so you can boot from the new
installation. On most machines, you need to press **F12** or a similar key as soon as you power
on your computer to choose a device to boot from.

Boot from your flash drive, let the Windows installer load, and when you see the initial
Windows Setup screen, press **Shift + F10** to open a Command Prompt.
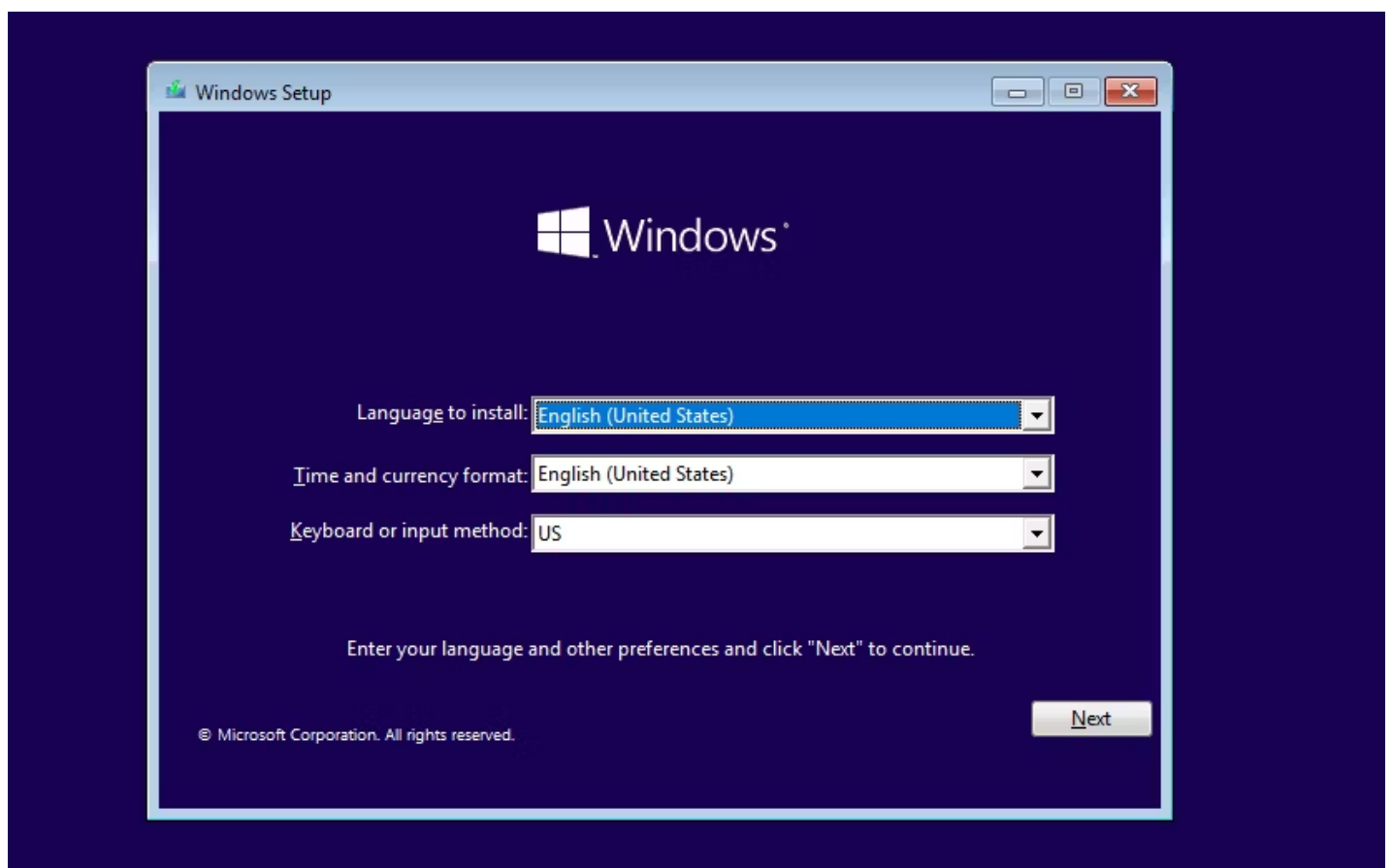
Next, you need to know which partition your Windows installation is on. Usually, this will be
the **C:** drive, but it might be different for you. To check, type the following command, which
will change the current directory of the Command Prompt to the root of the C: drive (or
whichever letter you insert).

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If the command returns **The system cannot find the drive specified**, then that letter isn't right; try **D** and continue down the alphabet. Once you find the right drive, you'll want to change the directory again using the **cd** command. Type this line to access the **System32** folder:
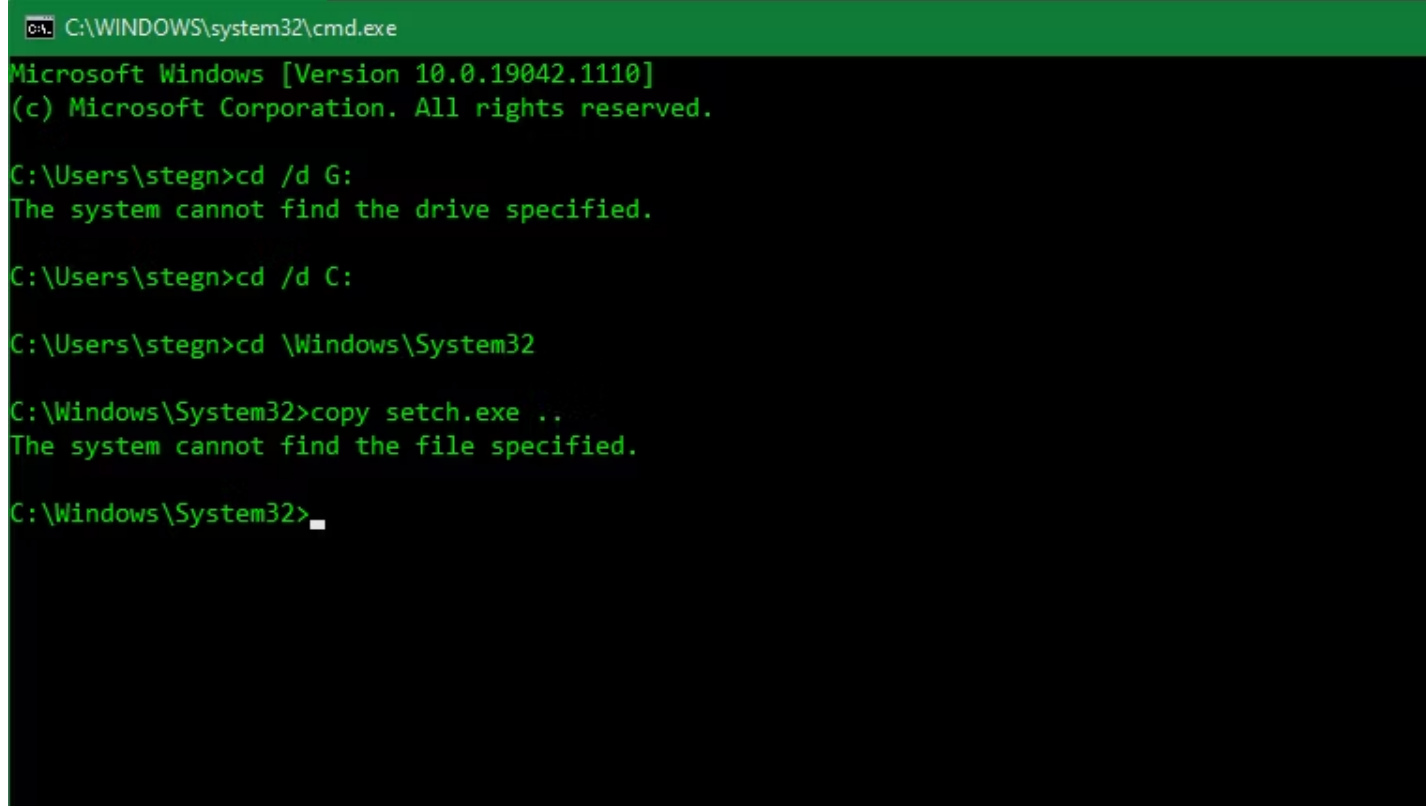
```
cd Windows\System32
```

If you see **The system cannot find the path specified**, you've selected a drive other than the one Windows is on. Change the drive to a different letter and try again until you find the right one.

Once you're in the System32 folder, you can pull a little trick. Windows includes an accessibility feature called Sticky Keys, which you can launch by hitting the **Shift** key five times quickly. By swapping the executable that runs Sticky Keys with a link to the Command Prompt's executable file, you can run a command line to reset your password right from the login screen.

To do this, type these two commands, one at a time. The first backs up the Sticky Keys shortcut in the **C:\Windows** folder (the **..** is a shortcut to move to the parent folder) so you can restore it later; the second replaces the Sticky Keys shortcut with a Command Prompt shortcut. If asked to give approval for either, do so.

```
copy sethc.exe ..
copy cmd.exe sethc.exe
```

You're done here, so type this command to reboot the computer and head back to the normal
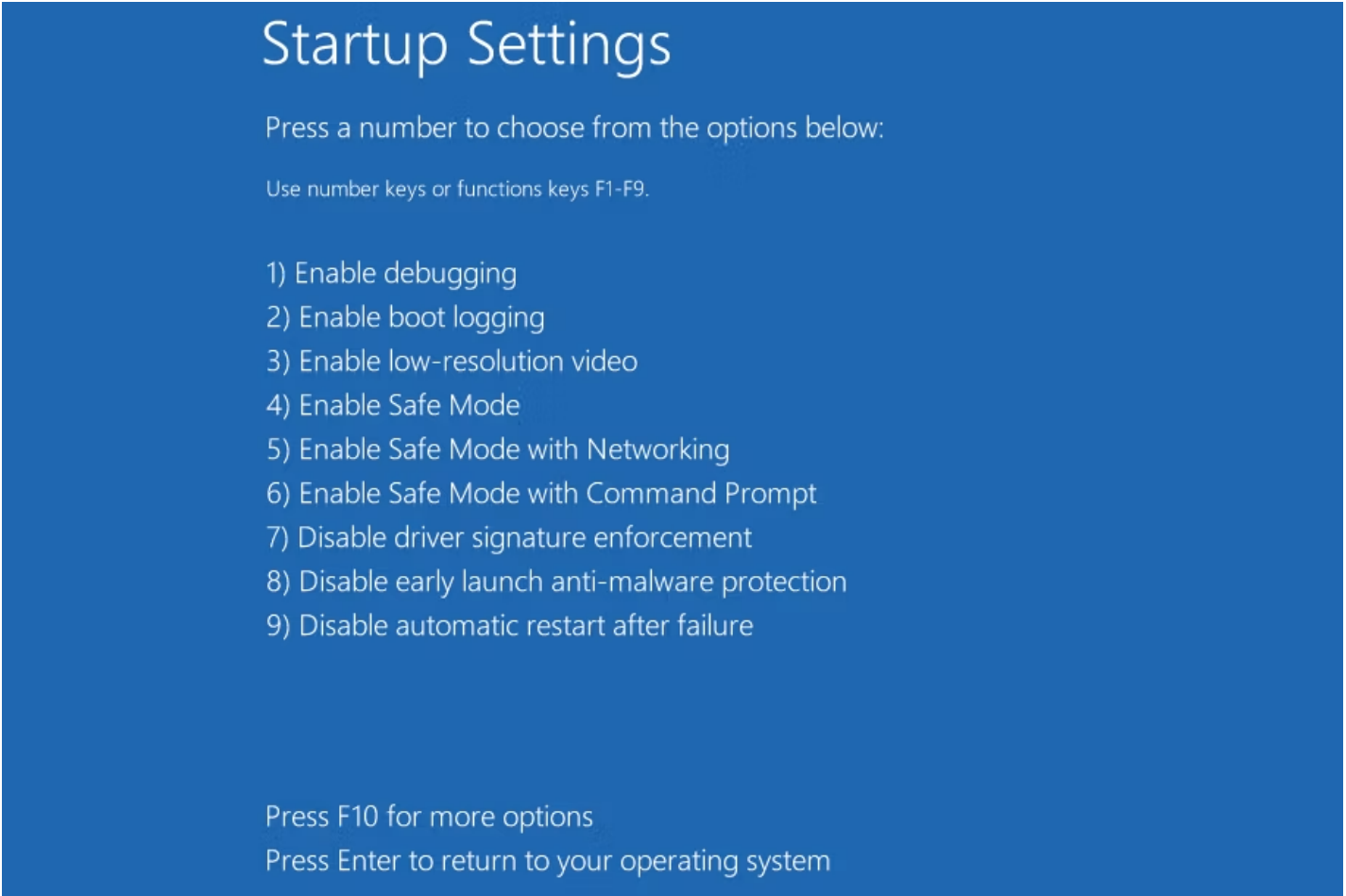
sign-in screen:

```
wpeutil reboot
```

Running a Command Prompt to Change Your Password

In previous versions of Windows, you could simply run the renamed shortcut to access a
Command Prompt right from the login screen. However, Microsoft Defender now blocks these
attempts, so there's an extra step required. If you're on an old version of Windows 10, or still
using Windows 8 or earlier, you can press **Shift** five times on the login screen to open a
Command Prompt.

On modern versions of Windows 10 or Windows 11, you'll have to reboot into Safe Mode for
this to work. To do this, click the **Power** menu in the bottom-right corner of the login screen.
Then, hold the **Shift** key and click **Restart**. If you see a warning that restarting may cause
people to lose work, click **Restart Anyway**.

Then, you'll see the advanced settings menu. Click **Troubleshoot > Advanced Options >
Startup Settings**, then **Restart**. Your PC will reboot, then ask which startup option you want to
use. Hit the **4** key to select **Enable Safe Mode**. This loads Windows with only the essential
drivers and services, preventing Microsoft Defender from blocking the workaround.

When you reboot to the Windows sign-in screen in Safe Mode, hit **Shift** five times quickly.
This should bring up a Command Prompt, which has administrator access. If this doesn't

bring up the Command Prompt, repeat the steps in the above section, but use **utilman.exe**

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the file you rename.

Then, reboot into Safe Mode and click the Ease of Access icon at the bottom-right of the login screen, which should hopefully bring up the Command Prompt. On Windows 10, this icon looks like the clock icon in the bottom-right of the image below. On Windows 11, it looks like an outline of a person.
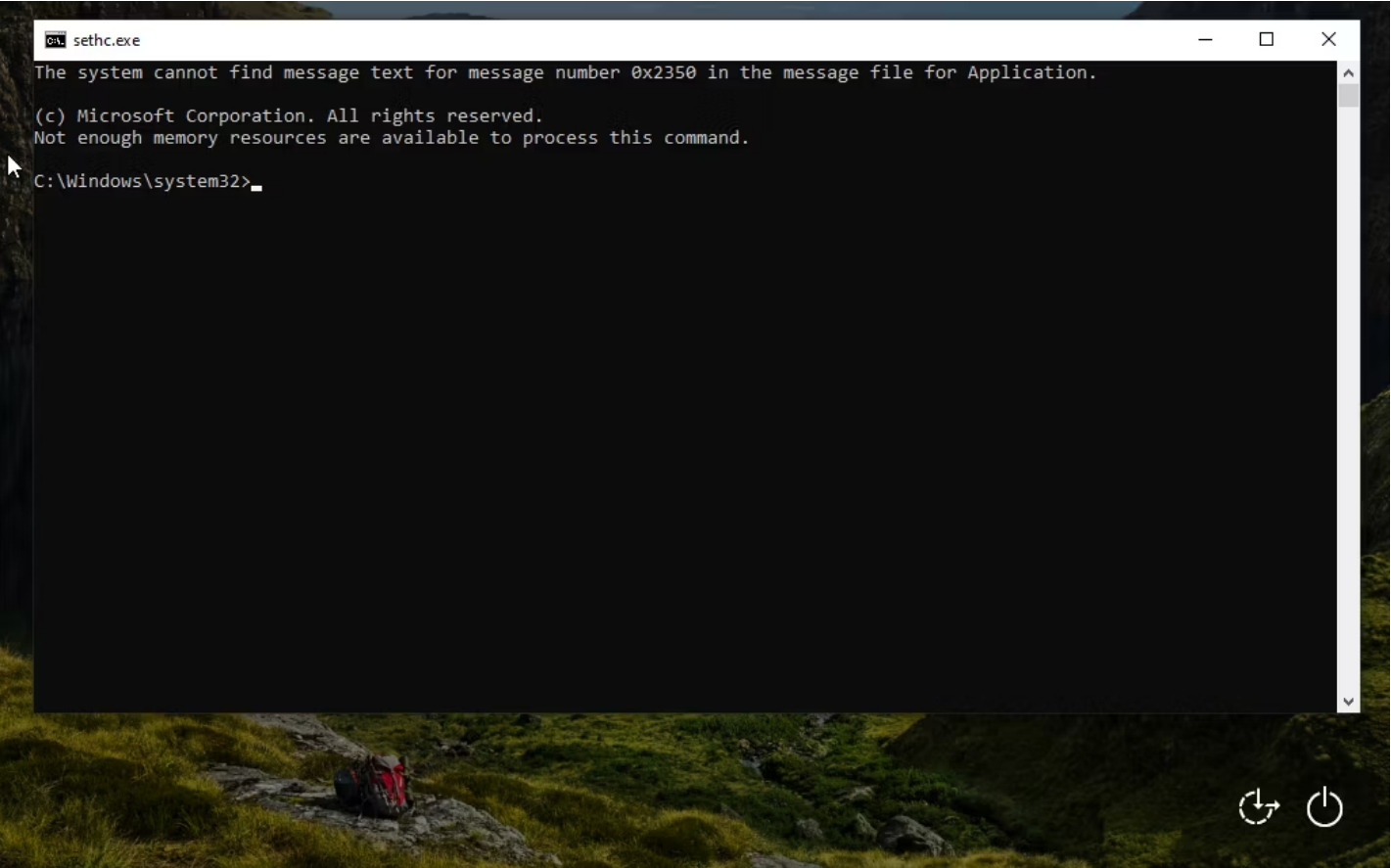
Now you can reset your account password, create a new account, or perform similar actions. To reset your account password, first type **net user** to see all accounts on your machine.

Then, you can change the password for an account using the following command. Replace **username** and **password** with the actual username of your account and the new password you want to set, per the example after the template:

```
net user username password
net user John newpass123
```

If you want to create a new user, whether as a backup or because your main account isn't working properly, enter the following. Again, swap **username** and **password** for the new user's name and new password, like in the example:

```
net user username password /add
net user Rick greatpass123 /add
```

Then, run this command to make the new user an admin:

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```
net localgroup Administrators username /add
net localgroup Administrators Rick /add
```

Now, you've changed your account password and can log back in using it. Since you don't want to work in Safe Mode, reboot your computer and sign back in again as normal.
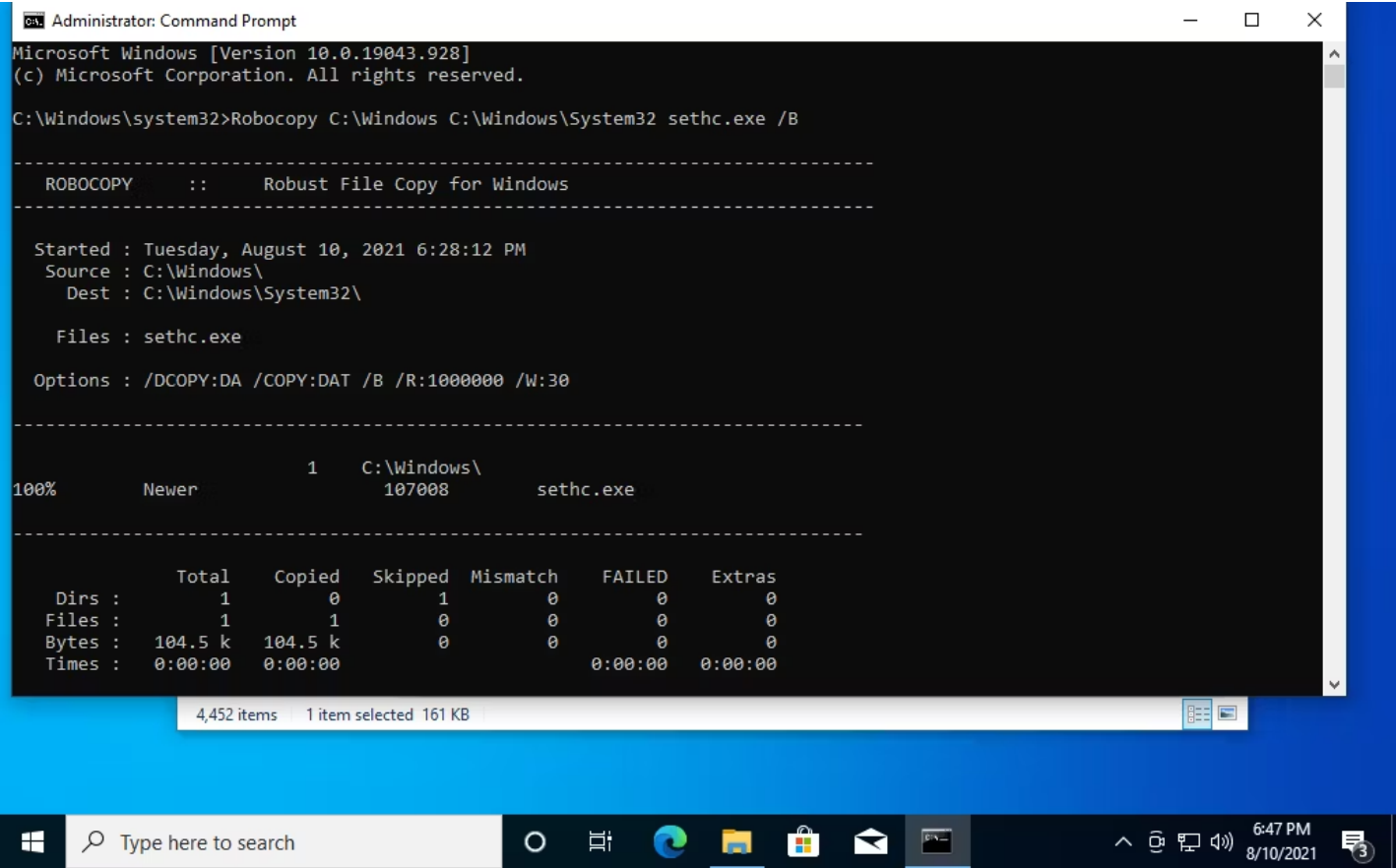
Putting Sticky Keys Back to Normal

Once you've successfully logged into your own admin account or created a new one, you're almost done. The only step left now is to put the shortcut that you changed back.

Load into your computer with the account you've regained access to. Then, search the Start menu for **cmd** and click **Run as administrator** when it appears in the results. Provide admin permission to open an elevated Command Prompt.

Then use this command to put the Sticky Keys shortcut back. If you used the **utilman.exe** method, run the same command with that instead of **sethc.exe**:

```
Robocopy C:\Windows C:\Windows\System32 sethc.exe /B
```


Robocopy is a more robust copying operation that's necessary to use since you're changing a system file here. After you run the command, pressing **Shift** five times should bring up the Sticky Keys window again, which means you're back to normal.

So you know, the backup **sethc** file is still located under **C:\Windows**, but this isn't hurting

anything. Feel free to delete it if you like; just don't delete the actual file located in the **System32** folder.

If you created a new account, you can recover your files by browsing to your old user directory in File Explorer. Go to **C:\Users\[Old Username]** and copy everything you need to your new account under **C:\Users[New Username]**.

3. Reset the Password by Booting Into a Linux USB

If the above method doesn't work, another way to reset your Windows local admin password is using a Linux bootable USB drive. Using a tool inside the Linux environment, you can set a new Windows password.

Create a Drive and Boot Into Linux

First, you'll have to make a bootable Linux USB drive on another computer. It doesn't matter which flavor of Linux you use; if you're not sure, Ubuntu and Mint are two beginner-friendly options.

Once you've made the USB drive, start up the locked PC and look for the prompt to press **F12**, **ESC**, **Delete**, or similar to choose your boot device. See the linked guide above if you need to change the boot order on your PC.

Image credit: Wikimedia Commons

After choosing to boot from USB, give Linux a moment to start up. Depending on which distro you've chosen, you may boot right into a Linux environment, or have to complete some setup

tasks like setting the time zone. If asked to install Linux on your computer, don't do so; click

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the live environment on your USB drive.

You'll need to open the OS's file explorer app. On Ubuntu, this is the folder icon on the left sidebar. If you're using Mint, there's a folder icon in the bottom-left corner, like Windows.

Mount Your Windows Drive

With a file explorer window open, press **Ctrl + L** to edit the **Location** path and type this to see all your drives:

```
computer:///
```

Find the drive that you have Windows installed on. If you only have one hard drive in your computer, it will be the only one present. In the below example, **File System** is the Linux environment, so **VBox Harddisk** is the correct Windows drive.

Right-click on your Windows drive and choose **Mount** so Linux can access it.
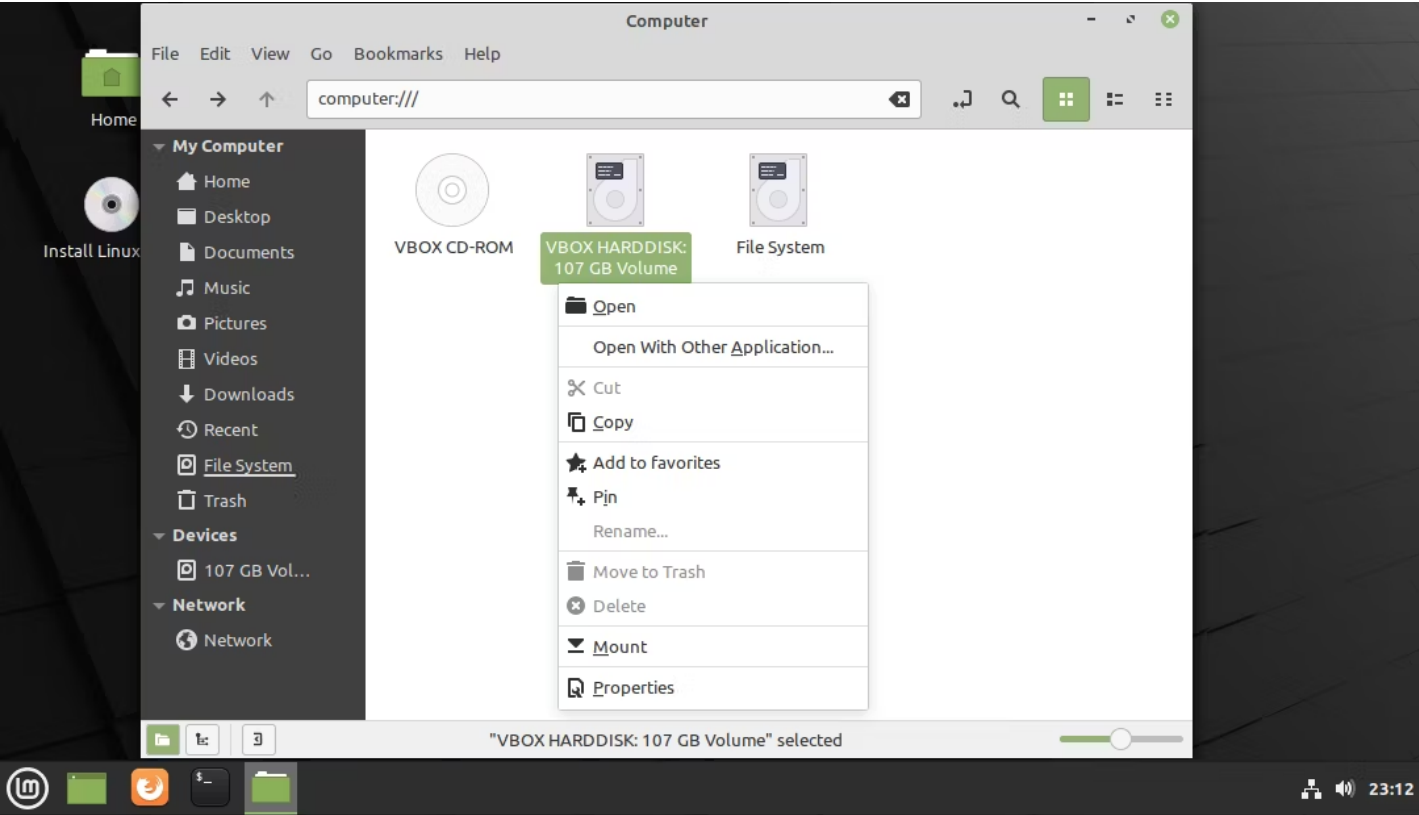
**Reset Your Windows Password From Linux**

From here, you're going to work in the Linux Terminal. Don't worry—it's not scary, even if you're new. The shortcut to open the Terminal in Mint and Ubuntu is **Ctrl + Alt + T**.

First, you need to install a password reset utility called **chntpw**. Type this command to install it:

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```
chntpw
```

Next, you need to change the working directory (the **cd** command stands for **change directory**) to your Windows folder. To get the right location, go back into the file browser and open your Windows drive. Drill down into the **Windows > System32** folder. Now, click inside the address bar at the top of the file browser window and use **Ctrl + C** to copy the address.
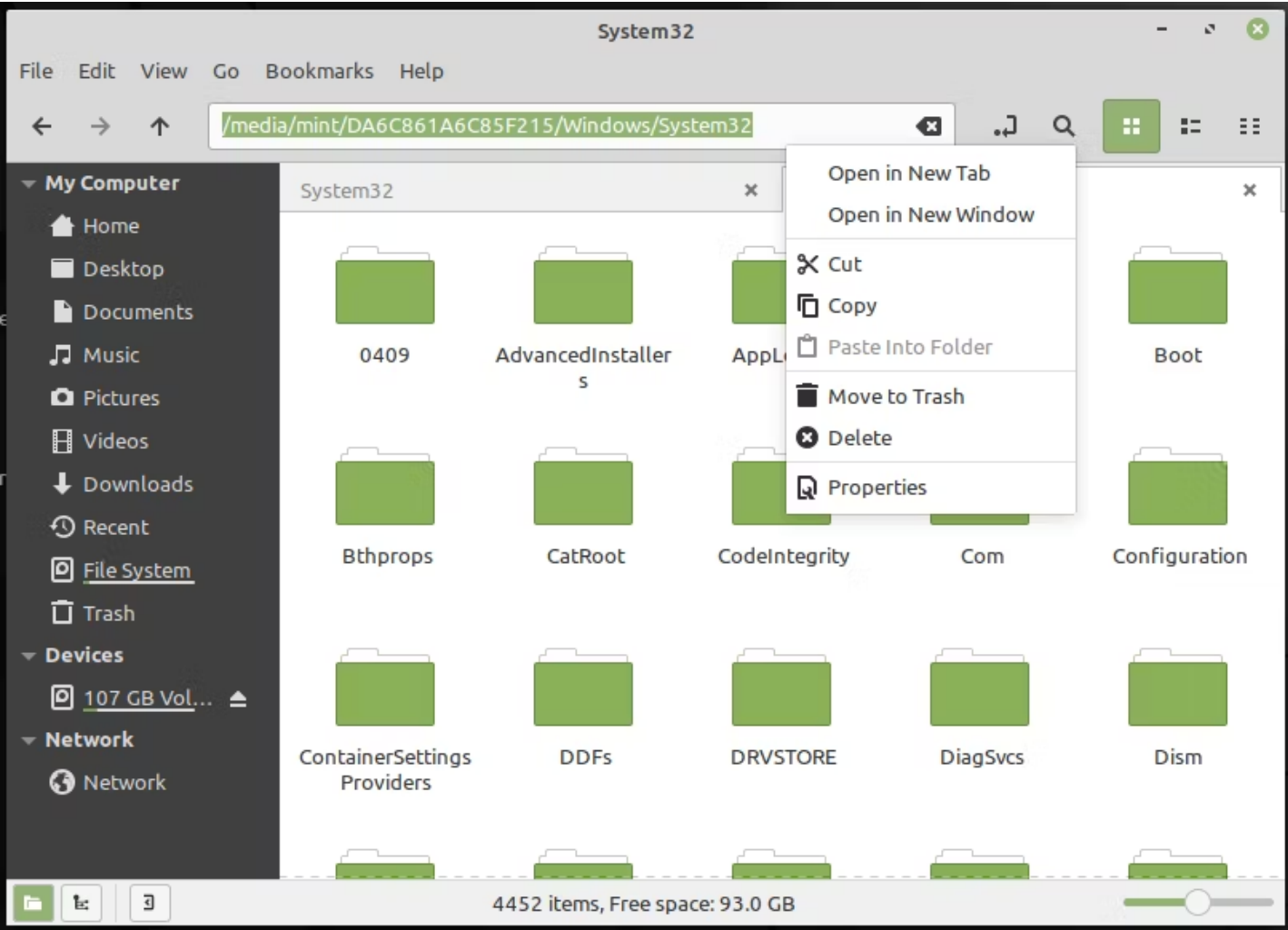

Back in the Terminal, right-click and **Paste** the address you copied, placing it after the **cd** command. You'll also need to add **/config** at the end of the address; this folder doesn't always show in the visual file browser, but adding it manually will work.

All told, the command you run should look like this:

```
cd /media/mint/DA6C861A6C85F215/Windows/System32/config
```

Next, get a list of Windows users by entering this (the character before SAM is a lowercase l as in "lima"):

```
sudo chntpw -l SAM
```
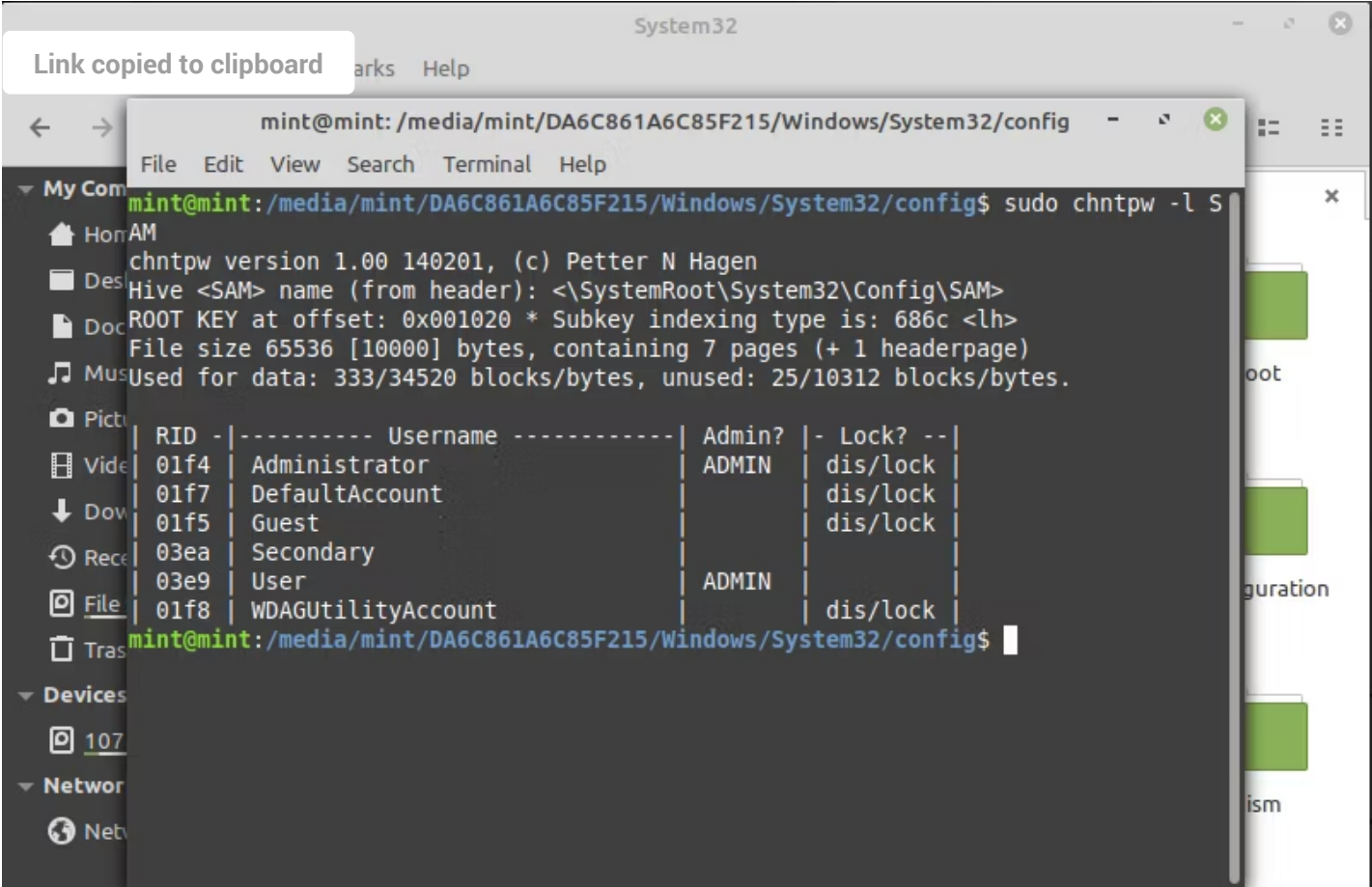
You should see the user whose password you want to reset in this list. To ensure that you make edits to this user only, type the following command, replacing **USER NAME** with the one you need to edit. If it's a one-word username like "Mike", you don't need any quotation marks. For multi-word usernames like "Mike Jones," place quotes around the words or it won't work:

```
sudo chntpw -u "USER NAME" SAM
```
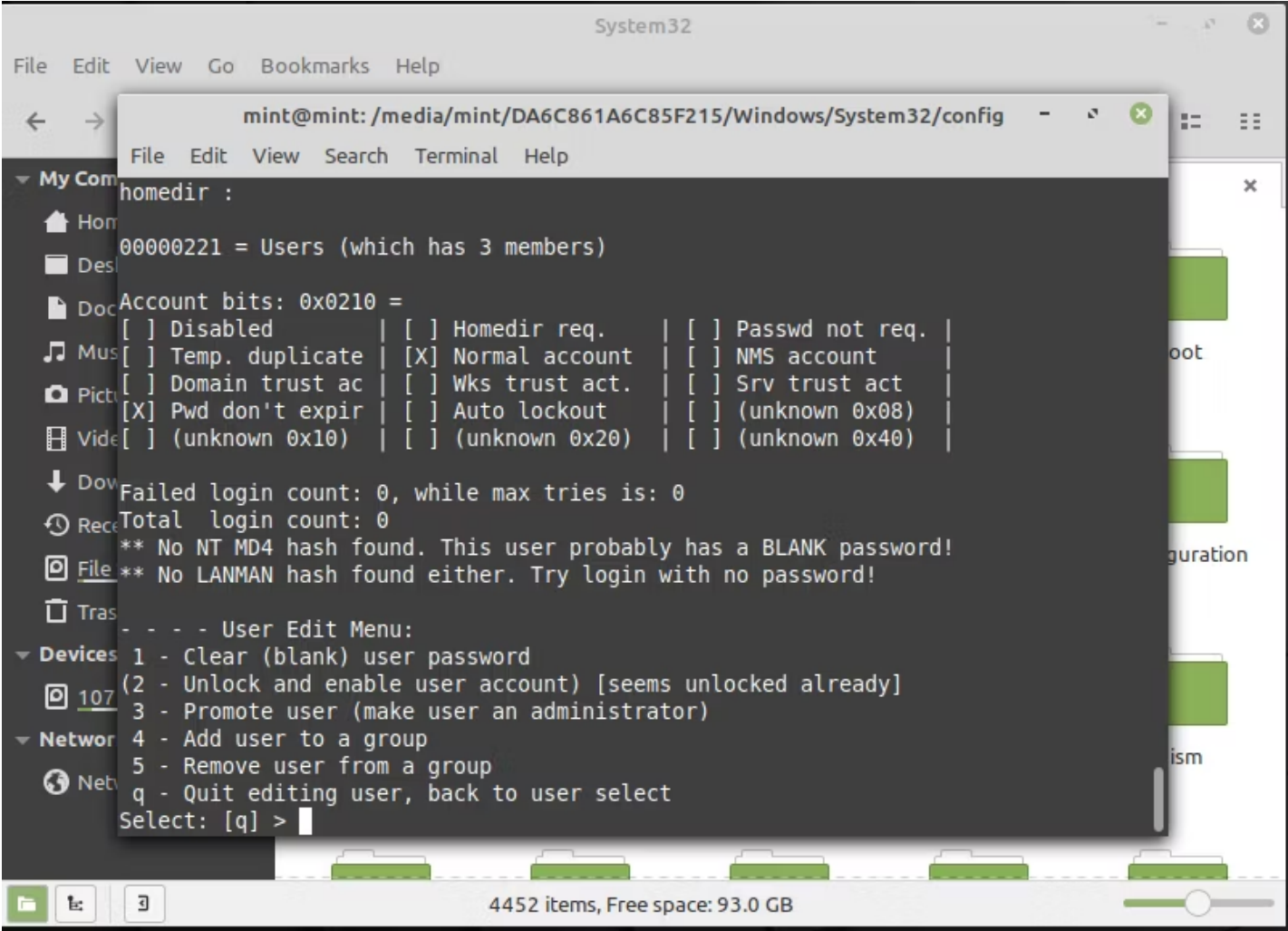
At the next prompt, type **1** and hit **Enter**. This will clear the user's password, allowing you to

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log in without one. Hitting **2** will unlock the user's account, but this is only applicable if the account is disabled. And if needed, you can use **3** to make the user an admin.

Enter **q** to exit the chntpw prompt, then **y** to save your changes. Now you're done in the Linux environment. In Mint, click the **Menu** button in the bottom-right to find the power options and shut down; in Ubuntu, the power icon is at the top-right.

Reboot into Windows and you can sign into your account using the blank password. Once inside, you should head to **Settings > Accounts > Sign-in options** and choose **Password** to set a new password, as leaving your account with no security isn't smart.

How to Avoid Losing Your Windows Password in the Future

While none of these password recovery methods are terribly difficult, they are inconvenient. You don't want to lose your password again in the future and have to rely on them. There are several ways to prevent yourself from having to reset your Windows password down the road.

First, if you don't already use a Microsoft account to sign into Windows 10 or 11, we recommend doing so. This way, you can easily reset your password via the web interface if you ever forget it.

Even if you don't use a Microsoft account, setting a PIN on your Windows account gives you another option for signing in that's easier to remember.
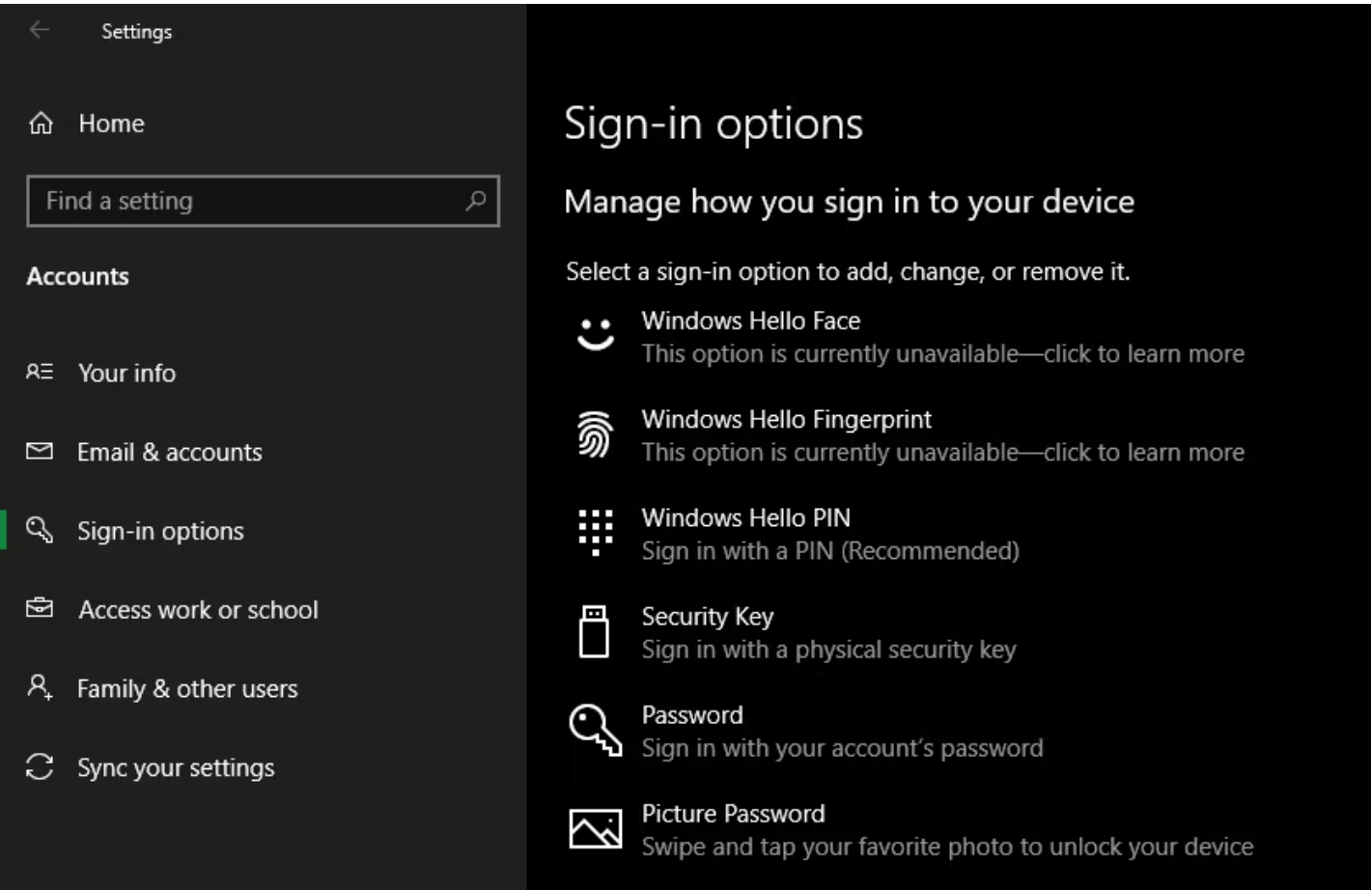
We also strongly recommend using a password manager to store all your passwords safely.

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manager, you only have to remember a few passwords instead of dozens or hundreds.

Finally, Windows also lets you create a password reset disk to avoid these lengthy workaround methods in the future. Connect a flash drive, then search for **password reset disk** in the Start menu to launch the **Create a password reset disk** tool.
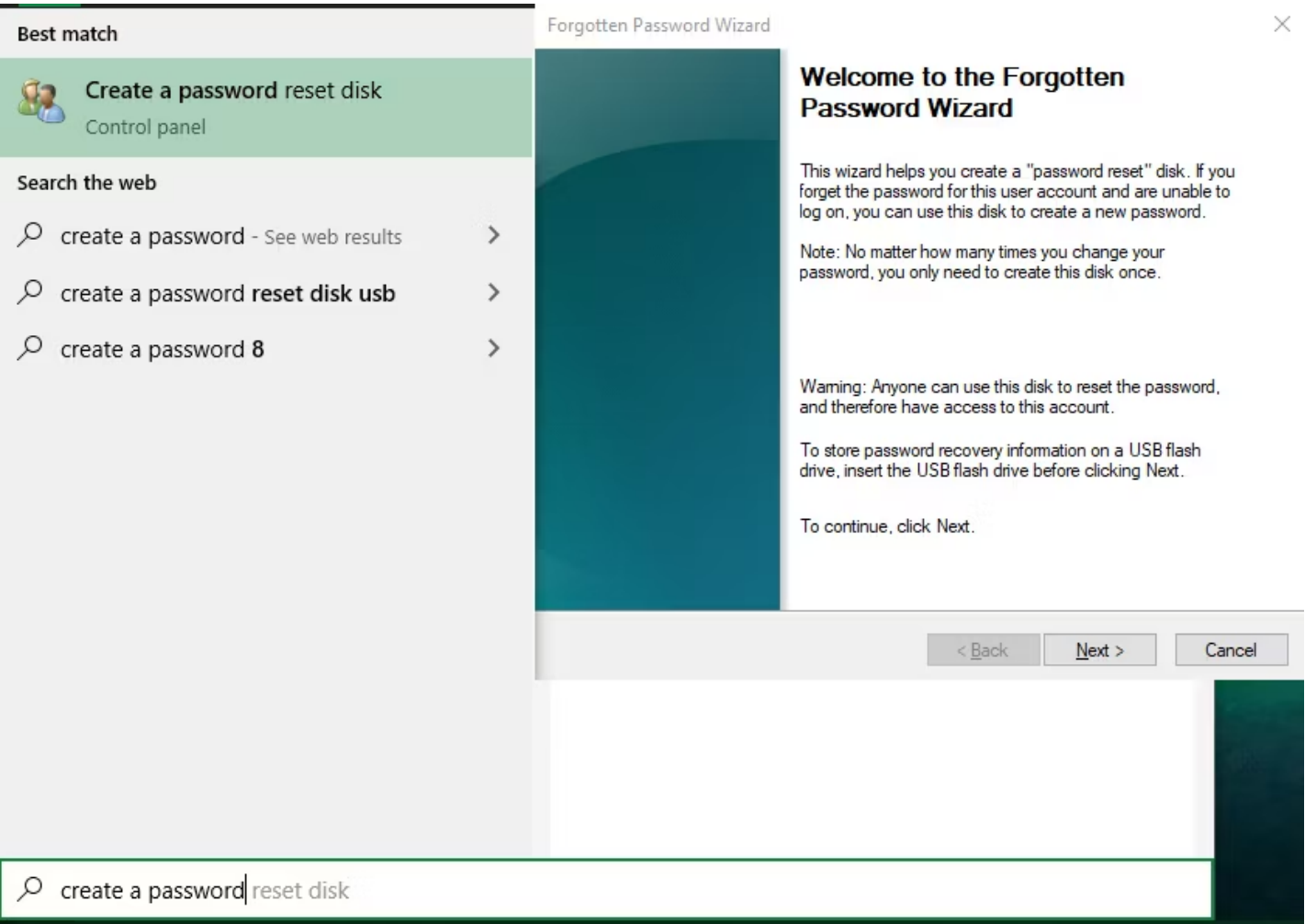
Walk through the steps to create a reset disk using your flash drive. If you get locked out of your account in the future, you can plug in that drive to regain access. This works no matter how many times you change your password, but keep in mind that anyone who has the drive can use it to access your account. Keep it safe!

Forgotten Administrator Password in Windows? No Problem

Forgetting your password isn't fun, and it's a pain to reset a Windows admin password. But at least it's possible.

Anyone can use these methods with a bit of time, and they're a lot better than completely reinstalling Windows because you're locked out. And with a little preparation, you can prevent this from happening again in the future.

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