Lumoset

FREE ONLINE-SAFETY EDUCATION

Money Scams: Gift Cards, Wire Transfers & Crypto Kiosks

Why scammers always ask you to pay this way, and how to say no.

A Lumoset Foundation guide · Part of the free Stay-Safe-Online series

Who it's for: anyone who wants to recognize a scam by how it asks you to pay. **Plain language, no jargon.** A short read you can act on today, and share.

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Who we are

Lumoset Foundation is a nonprofit that helps everyday people stay safe and confident online. We make clear, plain-language lessons about spotting scams and using technology, and we keep everything 100% free, with no account and no catch. We are a registered 501(c)(3) charity based in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Why we made this guide

Almost every scam ends the same way: a request to pay in a way that can't be undone. Learn to spot the payment method, and you can stop nearly any scam, no matter how convincing the story is.

> **Remember: No real business, government agency, or bank ever asks to be paid in gift cards, a wire to a stranger, or cryptocurrency.**

Jump to what you need:

Gift Cards: Why Scammers Love Them

What it is. A scammer instructs you to buy gift cards and read them the numbers on the back.

Why it matters. Once that code is read aloud, the money is gone and untraceable, it works like cash with no fraud protection. Gift cards now show up in roughly one in four fraud reports to the FTC, and remain one of the most common ways scammers ask to be paid.

Red flags

• Any caller or text asking you to buy gift cards “to fix a problem,” pay a fee, or “protect” your money.

• Being asked to read the card numbers over the phone or photograph them.

Do this now

1. Hang up. Gift cards are for gifts, never for paying a bill, a fine, or “protecting” an account.

2. Report it at reportfraud.ftc.gov.

Learn it free: Spot the Scam · Level 1: Protecting Yourself Online covers every common opening line scammers use. Always free.

Wire Transfers: The One-Way Door

What it is. A wire transfer moves money bank-to-bank almost instantly, with no way to reverse it once it lands.

How it works. Scammers posing as a business, a landlord, a romantic interest, or a government office pressure victims to wire money urgently, betting the victim won't verify first.

Do this now

1. Never wire money to anyone you have not met in person and fully verified, especially under time pressure.

2. Call a number you look up yourself, never one given in the message.

Crypto Kiosks: The Newest, Fastest-Growing Trap

What it is. A physical ATM-like machine that turns cash into cryptocurrency, then sends it straight to the scammer's wallet.

How it works. A scammer walks the victim through withdrawing cash, finding a nearby kiosk, and depositing it, often while staying on the phone the whole time. This is one of the fastest-growing scam methods: the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center logged over 13,400 crypto-kiosk complaints in 2025 with losses topping $388 million, and more than half of those complaints involved people over 50, accounting for over $302 million of the losses. A 2024 FTC data spotlight found that more than two of every three dollars lost to crypto-kiosk scams was lost by an older adult, roughly twice as much as every other age group combined.

Red flags

- Anyone giving you step-by-step instructions to a crypto kiosk over the phone.
- Being told a kiosk deposit will “protect,” “verify,” or “unlock” your money.

Do this now

1. Hang up before you ever reach the kiosk.

2. No legitimate refund, prize, fine, or account protection is ever handled this way.

The One Thing All Three Have in Common

Every one of these payment methods shares one trait: once sent, it cannot be undone and cannot be traced back to the scammer. That is exactly why scammers ask for them, and it is the single fastest way to recognize a scam regardless of the story wrapped around it.

If You're Being Asked to Pay This Way Right Now

Do this now

1. Stop. Hang up, close the chat, or step away from the kiosk.

2. Never let anyone stay on the phone with you while you pay, that is a control tactic, not help.

3. Verify independently: call the real organization using a number you find yourself.

4. If you already paid, see our free guide, Scammed? Your First 48 Hours.

5. Report it at reportfraud.ftc.gov or ic3.gov.

Putting It Together

Learn the three payment methods on this list, and you can spot almost any scam in seconds, no matter how convincing the story around it is.

Keep learning, free.

This guide is a start. Our free course **Spot the Scam · Level 1: Protecting Yourself Online** walks you through spotting any scam, step by step. If you've already paid this way, our free guide **Scammed? Your First 48 Hours** is the next step.

- **No account. No cost. No catch.** Ever.
- Start anytime at lumoset.org.
- Know someone who would find this helpful? Please share it.

Key Terms in This Guide

Wire Transfer: A direct bank-to-bank money transfer that lands almost instantly and generally cannot be reversed once sent, which is why scammers frequently request it.

Sources

FTC, Gift Card Scams (consumer.ftc.gov/gift-card-scams) and “A Way to Spot Scams: How Someone Asks You to Pay” (July 2026) · FTC Data Spotlight, Bitcoin ATMs: A Payment Portal for Scammers (Sept. 2024) · FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center, Cryptocurrency Kiosk Complaint Data by State (2025 data, ic3.gov).

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