

THE PARENT'S GUIDEBOOK TO MINECRAFT®

DOWN-TO-EARTH ADVICE FOR PARENTS
OF CHILDREN PLAYING MINECRAFT®

CORI DUSMANN



THE MINECRAFT GUIDE FOR PARENTS

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO THE WONDRIOUS, creative, challenging, and occasionally maddening world of Minecraft. If you are an adult who has found yourself drawn or perhaps dragged in to the world of a Minecraft-playing child or youth, you may be feeling as though you've entered a slightly askew parallel universe. Your children seem to be speaking another language, one where *biomes*, *skins*, *mods*, and *screenies* have become everyday vocabulary. Everything is now formed of pixelated cubes, from trees and livestock to the very landscape itself. And your children may alternate from being absolutely proficient at everything they do to becoming incredibly stuck, calling on you for assistance for the most confusing of activities, such as taming a cat or crafting a potion stand.

You'd like to help your child, you really would, and you know a thing or two about computers. "Check the tutorial," you might say. Or perhaps you look at the directions yourself—only to discover that this amazing game, one with literally endless possibilities and variations, does not come with a user's manual. Nor is there a tutorial, a walk-through, or any other form of guideline. It is a learn-as-you-go game, and without any idea of the purpose, the goal, or the steps to be taken, you may flounder.



In Minecraft, cats (along with dogs and many other animals) have distinct characteristics and uses—but taming cats is not the easiest of endeavors.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

This guide to Minecraft is designed to help parents, guardians, teachers, leaders, and any other adults who are being called upon to help young people in their mining and building adventures. I'll cover everything from the very basics of purchasing and installing the game to technical challenges such as updating, installing mods, and finding custom skins and texture packs. And I'll be sure that you actually understand what all of those things are and why they are important to the game and to your children. We'll explore the various modes of game play—Creative, Survival, and Hardcore—as well as the difficulty

settings, from Peaceful to Hard (in other words, from monster free to monster intense). I'll teach you how to play the game, so you'll be able to help your child when they become stuck and you'll have the skills to log on and play alongside them should you choose to. In addition, we'll explore the less tangible side of online games like Minecraft—the questions of balance, fitting gaming into your family, navigating the world of servers and online communities, sharing work through such sites as YouTube, and much more. I'll touch on Minecraft's educational uses and explore the social side as well.

DO YOU DO WINDOWS?

When Minecraft was introduced, it was a PC game, though it was quickly expanded to run on the Mac and Linux operating systems. More recently, Minecraft Pocket Edition, for tablets and phones, was released, as was an Xbox edition. This book focuses on the original Minecraft game as designed for PC and Mac. The other versions share many components of the full game but are more limited. Directions for playing the game will be primarily Windows focused, with instructions for installation and accessing files on Macs as well.

WHO AM I?

I wear many hats—in a large nutshell, I'm a childcare provider, a child and youth counselor, a writer, a gamer, and a homeschooling mom. Whenever I can combine any of those passions, I'm as happy as can be, and I'm fortunate enough to be able to do so much of the time.

Under the username Whimseysgirl, I play Minecraft both on my own and with my son, Xander (who goes by Wrednax). We are part of an amazing community on Rawcritics, a family-friendly server (primarily

for players age 11 and older), though we also play single-player games and venture onto other servers. Minecraft has been something we've shared from the beginning, and it has become a source of common ground with the kids I work with as well.

■ HOW I BECAME INVOLVED IN MINECRAFT

When Xander was 11 (as I write this he's 14), he was already pretty computer savvy. I've been a haphazard but avid gamer since childhood (though less seriously in recent years), so he's grown up in a house where gaming is just part of the culture. Since I teach him at home, the computer is an important learning tool as well as a toy, and he was well able to navigate it from early on, often faster than I could.

Xander was and is very interested in gaming, vlogs, blogs, and popular-culture websites and seems to always have a finger on the pulse of the gaming community. He knows how to do his research, and he knows the value of checking reviews or opinion pieces and of seeking more than one answer to a question.

When Xander started showing me pictures and videos of this new game he was interested in, Minecraft, I was less than impressed. It was still in its earliest version. The company was hoping to raise money to expand the game and release a beta version. Their marketing seemed basic, and when I watched video clips or saw pictures, those pixelated cubes seemed positively simplistic and outdated. But Xander continued to explore it, and soon enough the story of this new game, with its small independent game designer taking a chance, had me in its thrall too. We ordered a copy.

Suddenly we found ourselves well into the unknown—not only were there no directions, but even fan-made YouTube tutorials were scarce at that point. The learning curve was steep. But Xander soon learned the ropes and began playing in earnest, creating cool structures and farming, mining, and exploring. I started my own game, slowly learning as I went and often calling on his expertise.



In Minecraft, large cubes are the basis of everything. Decorating a tree means giving up the notion of rounded ornaments.

It wasn't until Xander discovered online servers, though, that I became truly involved in his gaming. Until then he'd played only on his own. The idea that he was playing with strangers and conversing with them in game chats was worrying to me. Although I'm far from being a controlling parent, I do like to know who he's playing with and what he's doing. He settled on the Rawcritics.com server, a family-friendly community that offers a PVP (player versus player) world as well as a more peaceful build world. And I was right there watching over his shoulder to see what he'd gotten himself into.

What he found astounded me. It was a community, a true community, with players of all ages. There were staff keeping an eye on things and providing support and activities. There were groups, factions, and teams gathering and pooling resources, creating amazing builds, and banding together in battles and raids to protect their creations and materials. Yes, there was drama and some negative attitudes between players, but there was also caring, friendship, and mutual support. Players knew that I was watching and commenting over Xander's shoulder, and they began to ask if they could show me their work and their skins (the appearance of their characters in the game), drawing me in to their community alongside Xander. I watched him slowly gain confidence and ambition until he

started his own town—a town that grew and gained members under his leadership.

It was then that I realized the potential of Minecraft to be far more than a simple building game. It could be an educational tool, a creative outlet, a social platform, and so much more. There was space to work independently as well as with others. By that point there were countless communities and servers, and people were making YouTube tutorials and game walk-throughs, and even writing songs and making music videos. Inspiration, passion, and creativity were abounding, and it really had me thinking about the ever-changing role of technology and gaming in our lives. It also had me thinking about Internet safety, about communication between Xander and me, and about my role as an educator and the parent of a pre-teen in this new age of digitally connected peers.

MY MOTIVATION IN WRITING THIS BOOK

In addition to homeschooling Xander, I've worked with kids and teens for over 20 years in a variety of settings, from daycares to classrooms to a psychiatric hospital. My roles have ranged from care worker to educational assistant to school-age daycare manager. I've watched children and families get swept into gaming and the online world, and I've seen it become both a source of battles and a place of learning and connection. I've seen parents and children become hooked on online activities, and I am aware of the need for balance, but I've also seen people gain confidence through their experiences in online communities. Navigating the positives and negatives, finding balance, creating dialogue and communication—those are of vital importance too.

Xander eventually convinced me to get my own Minecraft account. I joined his server, and immediately we were playing, working, and creating together. I soon formed friendships with players on the server—some were Xander's friends and others were strictly my own. It was exciting to be able to work and play with him, but at the same time it was exceedingly frustrating.

Watching over his shoulder had given me much of the knowledge I needed, but I soon discovered I didn't have the skills. I was slow and clumsy. I died—a lot. I got lost in caves and on land. I struggled with updates and maps. I was constantly referring to video tutorials, wiki pages, and fellow players, many of whom are much closer to Xander's age and far more computer savvy than I can ever hope to be. I once again saw the need for a guide, something that I could refer to when I got stuck.



Whimseysgirl and Wrednax

Since then, I've become more competent but certainly not proficient. My lack of skills is a bit of a running joke on our server, but I manage to stay alive, create bigger and better builds, and support new players who need help. Xander and I play together and apart, but we constantly share what we're working on. A wonderful and unexpected bonus is being able to connect in a completely different way with the children in the afterschool program where I work. Our discussions about Minecraft give us a positive common ground—once they finish grilling me to ensure that I am genuine and not a gaming poser. In addition, I've been able to help their parents navigate this confusing new world, assuaging their concerns and helping them support their children.

I'm looking forward to doing the same for you. I hope to help you find ways to connect with your child through this amazing game, even if you never mine or place a single block yourself—though I certainly encourage you to give it a try; you might be pleasantly surprised!

GETTING STARTED

MINECRAFT IS VERY EASY to purchase. You can buy it online from the Mojang website, or you can go directly to Minecraft.net and buy it there (both end up in the same place, but the Minecraft.net route eliminates several steps). Alternatively, you can buy a gift card, available at many retailers, and then use it to purchase your game. You can also buy a Minecraft account for another person and have it emailed to them, or it can be sent to you so you can gift it directly (**Figure 4.1**). We'll walk through the entire process.

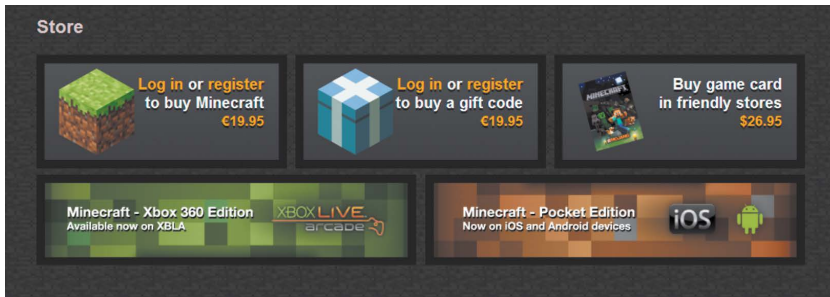


FIGURE 4.1 There are many ways to purchase Minecraft.

THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU BUY

Before you purchase your account, there are some things you need to take into consideration, such as for whom you are purchasing the account, what access they will have, and how many individual accounts you'd like to get. The number of accounts is important, because once a single user has begun to invest in their Minecraft experience, they are unlikely to want anyone else to manipulate their account and, by extension, their Minecraft worlds. You also need to decide on a username, something that requires some forethought.

■ SEPARATE ACCOUNTS

If multiple players are going to be playing, either they can share an account (and therefore won't be able to play at the same time) or they each need their own account. Although you can create endless saved maps, you can play as only one character. If at all possible, buy a separate account for each player in your family. That way, everyone has their own identity.

Remember that single-player maps are saved to the computer they are played on, and therefore anyone logging on to that computer can access them. This means that individual accounts won't necessarily

stop your children from interfering with each other's work. It's a good idea to establish clear house rules and consequences (see Chapter 3, "Fitting Minecraft Fit into Family").

Having separate accounts becomes more important when playing on a server, because it is confusing to others on the server if the person behind the username is constantly shifting. For instance, if Wrednax and I were to share an account, it would cause many challenges beyond not being able to play at the same time. We have very different interests when we play—he is much more interested in PVP than I am, and I tend to be the server "mom," sharing resources and helping new players get settled. If we had one account, other players wouldn't know which of us was logged on unless we clarified each time someone new joined, which could be confusing (and tedious). And if we were playing on a server that uses the Towny plugin (a special modification), we'd really have challenges. Towny lets players create and join towns, and it blocks other players from building or breaking blocks in those towns, which is valuable in terms of protecting your materials. Were we to share a username on the Rawcritics PVP map, however, only one of us could join the town of our choosing, because players can be members of only one town. And since Wrednax is mayor of a PVP town and I'm a member of the only neutral town on the server, that could cause challenges. On other servers, there would be the potential for similar challenges, perhaps with different plugins.

If you are uncertain whether your children will play Minecraft, or you'd just like to try it first, then a shared account will work, particularly if they are just playing on single-player maps. If you take this route, make sure you create a username that will fit your child or yourself, because usernames cannot be changed.

■ SELECTING A USERNAME

Although Mojang has said on its site that you might be able to change your username in the future, it is not possible at this time. So put

thought and care into selecting one. With over 10 million games sold, picking a good, unique username can be a challenge.

You won't know if a name has been used before you try it during the registration process, so you should have a few names prepared. Otherwise, you might find yourself hastily selecting something you or your child will regret.

PRIVACY

When you're playing a single-player game at home or on a private server where you know all the players, your username doesn't really matter much. You could use your real name, and it would be fine. But as soon as you start playing with other people on public servers, privacy becomes much more important. For example, a personal name like Cori_Dusmann, or even CDusmann, would be too revealing, particularly for a child. Even using your child's first name might make you uncomfortable, and it is fairly uncommon to see proper names as usernames.

There are many nicknames and choices available, but you may need to be creative. Wrednax is Xander's name spelled backward—the W is the first letter of his last name. People occasionally figure it out, but there is nothing else revealing about it, so I was fine with his choice. It's been a good one, because it is short, simple, and easy to remember.

If you're concerned about your child being identified by gender, be sure to pick a gender-neutral name. Although it's beginning to change, girl gamers have traditionally had a harder time gaining respect. I've had few problems on Rawcritics, and the Minecraft realm is actually very open and unbiased (relatively speaking). On less family-friendly servers, though, I've occasionally had to ward off unwanted attention and have at times wished I'd chosen a less obviously feminine name.

KEEP IT SHORT

Keep usernames short, especially for younger children. Choose something that your child will remember and be able to spell easily. Short usernames are also helpful in that other players can talk to you without doing a lot of writing. For example, when you send someone a private message on a server, you need to enter their full username. Make it easy for others to communicate with you or your children, and select a shorter name. Also, many commands and actions require the entry of your name and sometimes multiple names. For example, the teleport command usually requires the entry of two names. And even with short names, players will probably shorten them further: Wrednax is usually called Wred, I'm known as Whimsey or Whims, and I'm lazy enough to shorten a friend's four-letter username to the first letter, J.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Usernames can be clever and descriptive, and they can express something about the individual. Keep it simple and easy to remember. Long strings of letters or words can be hard to remember, and even if they have meaning to the user, other players may not bother with messaging.

Be sure that the name when shortened is acceptable to you and your child, because chances are high that your name will be with you for a very long time.

BE CREATIVE

Have fun creating a username. Putting two semi-random words together can result in a fun, easy, and unique name. An adjective and a noun, or a noun and a verb, can work well together. For example, PowerPop, AquaBlue, or GiddyFrog, which might be nicknamed (or *nicked*, in game language) either Giddy or Frog. Names can be playful or serious, witty or goofy.

Using an underscore (`_`) or spare letters can help make the name unique but still easy to remember, for example, Fruity_Galore. Some players use X or Xx to bracket their names; for instance, XxWhimseysgirlxX.

One way to generate some name ideas is to write down a list of adjectives and a list of nouns with your kids. Cut them out and put them in separate bags. Take turns drawing to create names, and make a list of the top ones. Remember that it's always good to have a few names when you start to make an account, in case your preferred name is taken.

CHOOSE A NAME THAT WILL LAST

Although Mojang has said they're working on a way to allow players to change usernames, it may not happen for a long time. Help your children, especially younger ones, select a name that they can be happy with longterm. If they make friendships outside the game, they may still be identified as that username, so it's important to select one that actually represents them. I often call Xander Wred, and he calls me Whims—our usernames have just become nicknames.

CREATING A PASSWORD

To sign in to Minecraft, you will be using a username or the email address linked to the account, as well as a password. It is important to create a password that combines letters and numbers and that is not simple to guess or too short. Create a password solely for your Mojang account, especially if children are going to be logging in on their own, because you cannot know how secure they might keep that password. Pick something that is not obvious or easily figured out—if you need it to be easy to remember, make it personal to you, but don't use birthdays, your address, your phone number, or anything that can be easily guessed.

PURCHASING MINECRAFT

If you are in the United States or Australia, using a gift card may be the easiest way to buy Minecraft. There is also the option of purchasing Minecraft directly online. For either option you need to create a Mojang account first. This is not your Minecraft game account, but an account with Mojang itself.

■ CREATING A MOJANG ACCOUNT

Creating a Mojang account is easy.

1. In a browser, go to www.minecraft.net (**Figure 4.2**).

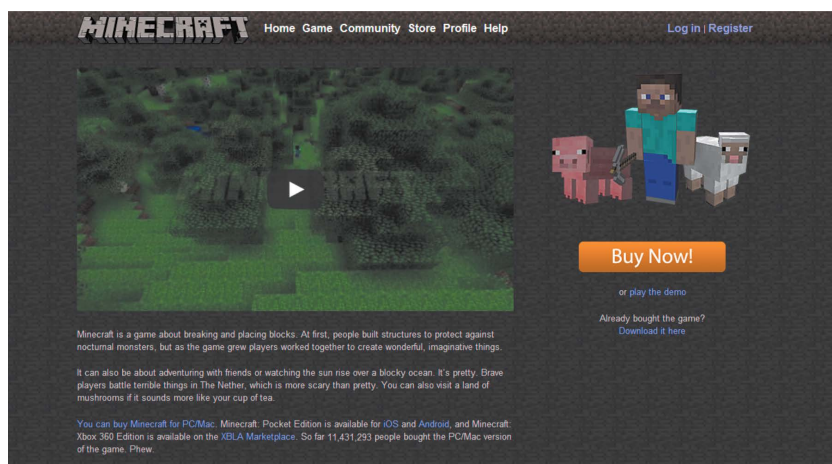


FIGURE 4.2 The Minecraft home page

2. Click Register in the upper-right corner.

You are taken to the page where you'll set up your Mojang account before you purchase the game (**Figure 4.3**).

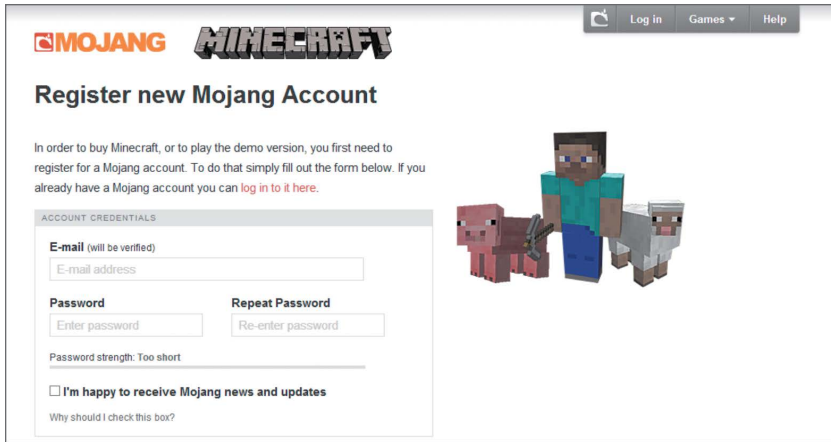
The screenshot shows the Mojang Minecraft website's account registration page. At the top, the Mojang and Minecraft logos are on the left, and navigation links for 'Log in', 'Games', and 'Help' are on the right. The main heading is 'Register new Mojang Account'. Below this, a paragraph explains that a Mojang account is required to buy or play the demo version of Minecraft, and provides a link to log in if the user already has an account. The registration form is titled 'ACCOUNT CREDENTIALS' and includes fields for 'E-mail (will be verified)', 'Password', and 'Repeat Password'. A password strength indicator shows 'Too short'. At the bottom of the form is a checkbox for 'I'm happy to receive Mojang news and updates' with a link to 'Why should I check this box?'. To the right of the form is a pixelated illustration of a Minecraft character (Steve) holding a pickaxe, standing next to a pig and a sheep.

FIGURE 4.3 The Mojang account registration page

3. Enter your email address and password. Enter your password again in the Repeat Password field to verify they are identical. You will also be asked your name and birth date, as well as three security questions to verify your identity should you forget your password.

Note that children under the age of 13 must have a parent or guardian create an account for them (though this is something many kids get around simply by changing their age on the form).

You or your children will be using this email address to log on to Minecraft, so if you are planning to have more than one Minecraft account, you need to register for individual Mojang accounts as well.

Select the check box at the bottom of the page to accept Mojang's terms and conditions and privacy policy (links are available for both), and then click the Register button.

Once you enter your information, you are directed to a page stating that you have received a verification email.

4. Open the email verification. If you don't see the email in your inbox, look in your spam folder.
5. Click the link in the Mojang email, and a new page will open (**Figure 4.4**).

This page has a clearly marked button for redeeming a prepaid gift card or gift code, but no immediately obvious place to actually purchase the game.

6. If you have a gift card or code, click the Redeem Gift Code or Prepaid Card button to go to the redemption page, and skip to the section "Creating Your Minecraft Game Profile." Otherwise, follow the directions in the next section, "Buying Minecraft Online."

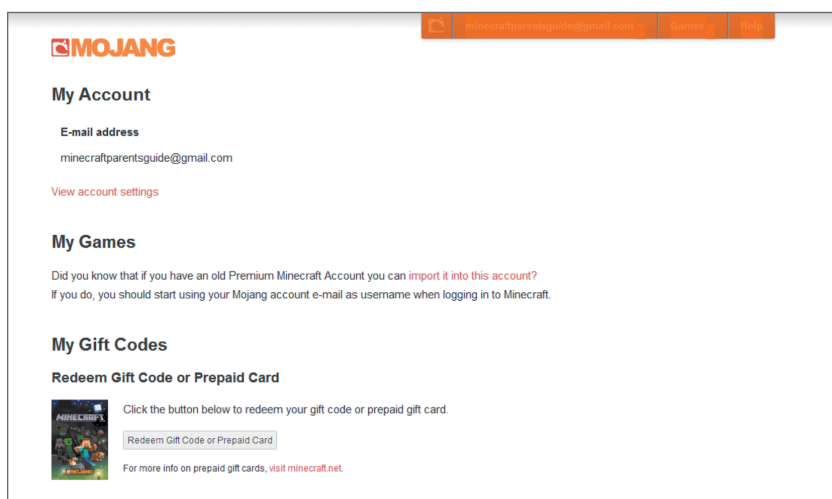


FIGURE 4.4 Your Mojang account page

BUYING MINECRAFT ONLINE

Buying the game is pretty straightforward. You will need a credit card or PayPal account, as well as your Mojang account information.

1. To get to Minecraft.net directly from the Mojang page where you created your account, click the drop-down menu in the upper right, hover your mouse pointer over Games, and then click Minecraft.

or

Go to www.minecraft.net in your browser.

Now that you are registered, you will need to log in.

2. Click Log In in the upper-right corner, and you will be taken to a log-in page.
3. In the Username field, enter the email address you used to register, and enter your password in the field below that. New accounts with Mojang (since mid-2012) use an email address to log in.

4. Click the Buy Now button (**Figure 4.5**).

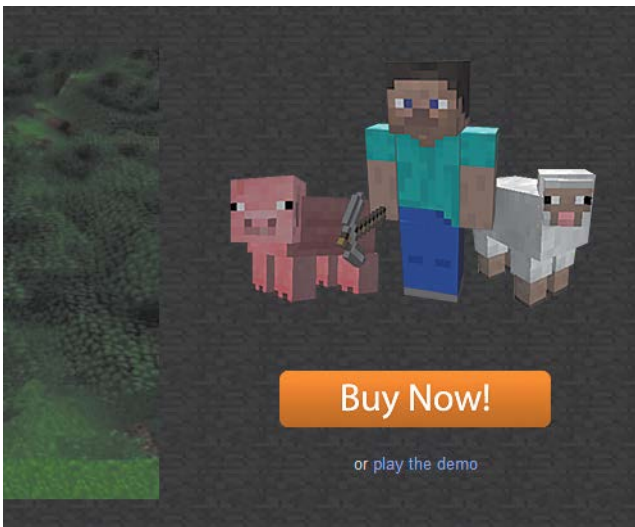


FIGURE 4.5 Buy it

You are redirected back to the Minecraft Store page (**Figure 4.6**). You'll see that the price is listed in Euros, but if you are in the United States, it will be converted to US dollars once you move through to the purchase page.

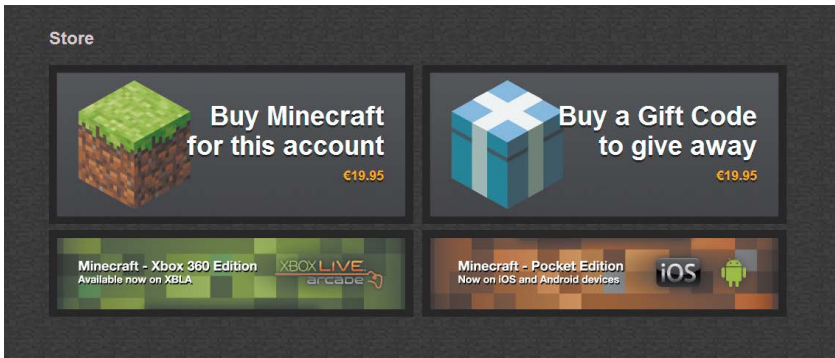


FIGURE 4.6 The Minecraft Store

5. Click “Buy Minecraft for this account.”

On the purchase page, you will see the retail price, as well as a link to system recommendations (**Figure 4.7**). You'll also choose whether to buy the game for yourself or as a gift.

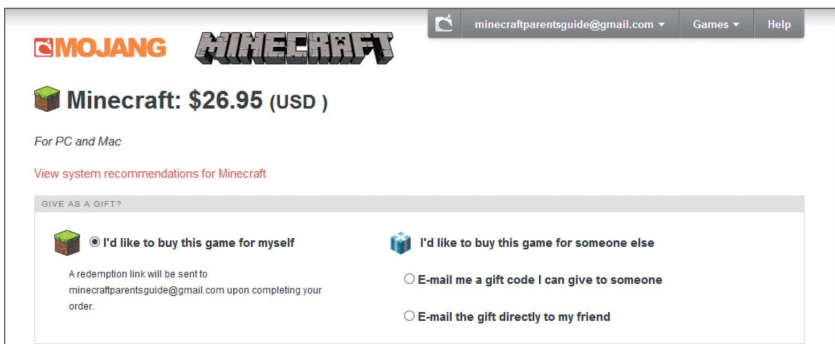


FIGURE 4.7 Purchase options

Your payment options list only Visa, MasterCard, and PayPal, but there is a more extensive list of options provided via the link below these choices.

6. Complete your billing address and make your payment type choice.
7. Click Proceed to Payment Details.

You are taken to a basic payment page.

8. Enter your billing information, and click Pay. You may be asked for a verification of your card. Follow the directions on your screen to complete your purchase.

When your purchase is complete, you are automatically directed to a page that gives you your receipt information and tells you that you must still choose a player name.

9. Click Check Your Inbox to be directed to an email that contains a link to the Create a Game Profile page and three links to download your new game for Windows, Mac, or Linux.

USING A GIFT CODE OR GIFT CARD

Redeeming a gift code or gift card is a matter of a few quick steps. Instructions are on the back of the gift card. In the US and Australia, cards can be purchased at many stores where gift cards are available. Mojang has announced that cards will soon be available in Canada and Europe but hasn't given a date for this.

1. Log in to your account at www.mojang.com. You will be taken to your account page (Figure 4.4).

2. Click the Redeem Gift Code or Prepaid Card button.
3. Enter your code, click the Redeem button, and you are ready to create your Minecraft profile.

■ CREATING YOUR MINECRAFT GAME PROFILE

Your game profile is where you select your username. It is also the place you need to go if you'd like to change your character's appearance (known as a *skin*) by uploading an image file (more on this later).

You can find the Create a Profile page at www.account.mojang.com. When you purchased the game, you were sent an email with a link to this page.



NOTE You will not be using your username to log in to Minecraft. Rather, you will use the email address associated with your Mojang account.

1. Enter your username in the Profile Name field.

Remember that at this point, names cannot be changed, so be sure you are happy with your username.
2. Click Check Availability to see if your chosen name is available. If it is, click Choose Name. If your chosen name is not available, try another until you find a free name.

Once you've selected your name, you'll be asked if you are certain this is the choice you want.
3. Double-check the spelling, and be very sure before you proceed, because you will not be able to change it. Click the Choose Name button (**Figure 4.8**).

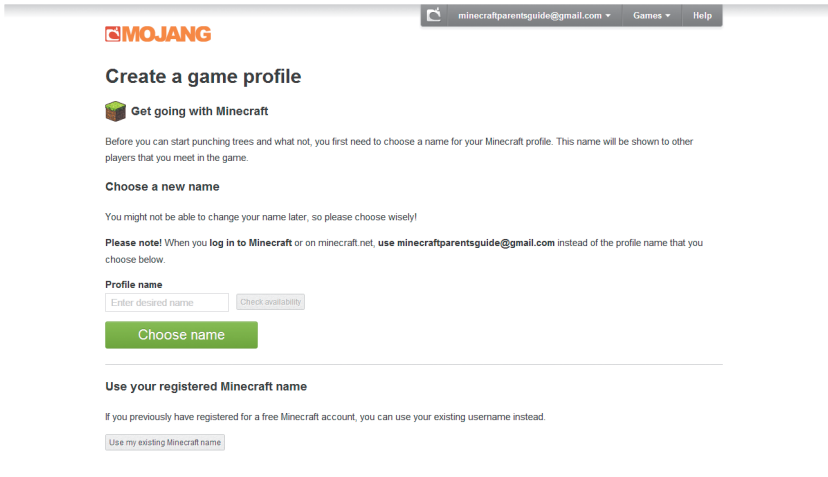


FIGURE 4.8 Creating a game profile

Your page updates, with your new account, its start date, and your username listed under the My Games section. Now you are ready to download Minecraft.

DOWNLOADING AND INSTALLING MINECRAFT

Once you have registered your game and set up an account, you can download and install Minecraft.

If you are not already logged in, log in to your Mojang account. You will find that Minecraft has been added under the My Games section, along with your start date, your profile name, and the download buttons for Windows, Mac, and Linux (**Figure 4.9**).



NOTE I've included the download directions for Windows and Mac. Linux users should search online if needing help.

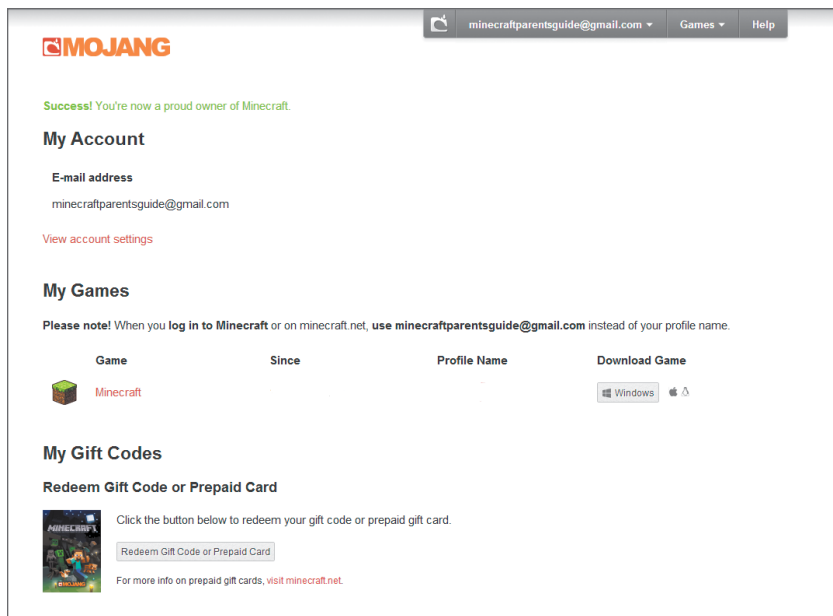


FIGURE 4.9 An updated accounts page with Minecraft included

■ WINDOWS

1. Click the Windows button under “Download Game.”
Your computer downloads the Minecraft.exe file.
2. Save it where you wish; on your desktop or in a games folder, for example.
3. Double-click Minecraft.exe to run it.
Minecraft opens its launcher.
4. Enter your Mojang account email address (not your Minecraft username) and password.

5. Ignore the coding and tabs at the top, and click Play at the bottom of the page.

You'll find yourself at the Minecraft main menu, ready to play (Figure 4.10).



FIGURE 4.10 The Minecraft launch page

■ OS X

1. Click the Apple logo button under “Download Games.” Minecraft downloads to your Downloads folder.
2. Drag Minecraft from the Downloads folder to your Applications folder.
3. Double-click the Minecraft icon.
4. Ignore the coding and tabs at the top, and press Play at the bottom of the page.

You'll find yourself at the Minecraft main menu, ready to play.