



# Core

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## The Elevator Talk: Explaining Seamless Access, Federated Authentication, and Related Privacy Issues to Your Boss, in 60 Seconds, in Very Simple Language

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### The Quick Explanation

- Seamless Access can improve and simplify how an off-campus user accesses our electronic resources, by changing how they authenticate.
- User IDs and passwords are only shared with the local institution; the publisher site receives only confirmation that the user is authorized, and in some cases a pseudonymous identifier for the user.
- Authenticating does not send any user data to the publisher.

### Main Points

#### Don't Panic

There is no ticking clock: The combination of IP access + EZProxy isn't going to suddenly

stop working, but it has always had shortcomings and those will likely get more serious. IP + EZProxy and Seamless Access will work together for at least the foreseeable future.

Federated authentication, including Seamless Access (SA), is an alternative that lets our users access remote sites by logging in to our campus sign-on service, which then confirms to the remote site that this is a valid user. No user data gets sent to the publisher site.

[Of course, for some users, the clock may already have stopped ticking. IP access fails for on-campus users who prefer their phone carrier's 5G network, or who use a third-party VPN for privacy, or who use privacy services like Apple's Private Relay.]

## This Is Already Happening

Seamless Access is one implementation of a broader technology called federated authentication. SA is supported today by a growing number of publishers, database vendors, and other library service providers.

[Our institution already uses federated authentication for services [\_\_\_\_], [\_\_\_\_], and [\_\_\_\_]. That means our campus IT department already knows how to support this and can work with us to set up Seamless Access.]

OR

[Federated authentication is supported by a growing number of external services used by libraries and other academic departments. If the campus doesn't support it now, we should start, and the library should be one of campus leaders on this.]

OR

[Even though our campus IT department won't support federated authentication, we can work with OpenAthens to provide this to our users through vendors we already know and trust.]

Our users already encounter Seamless Access logins as an option at many publisher sites. It is reasonable for them to expect that we support this service.

## Privacy Protections

Some uses of federated authentication have the potential to send the user's private data to the remote site, but *Seamless Access explicitly disallows this*. Remote sites get either anonymous information or a pseudonymous identifier.

For sites that use it, the pseudonymous identifier is a random string that lets a publisher track a user across multiple sessions, without knowing anything about the user's identity. We can refresh user identifiers periodically to cut down on user tracking.

There are valid concerns about library vendors aggressively tracking our users, about user data leaking out to vendors, and about vendors selling that data to third parties. Seamless Access does not significantly contribute to these problems or weaken our users' privacy protections.

## The User Experience

For an off-campus researcher trying to follow a link to an article, the current click path is:

1. Whatever you do, *do not click the link that you have right in front of you* [unless you have previously installed and configured a browser extension that will rewrite the publisher's URL to a proxied version]
2. Navigate to the library home page
3. Find the journal in the library catalog or find-a-journal service; *or* search for the article in a discovery tool
4. Follow the link to EZProxy
5. Login
6. Find the issue by year or volume
7. Find the article in the table of contents
8. Read the article

With Seamless Access, the click path is:

1. Click on the link
2. Click "Login Through My Institution"
  - a. If this is your first time logging in through SA, choose your school from a list. After that, your school will be pre-selected on any SA publisher site.
3. Login
4. Read the article.

## Use Cases

For off-campus users, IP authentication usually fails, and Seamless Access can succeed, in any or all of these settings:

- A user follows a link to an article from Google Scholar, a cited reference in Wikipedia, an open access journal, or other online source that does not require authentication.
- The user bookmarks an article on campus, and then tries to access it off campus.
- The user uses EZProxy to access an article at one publisher's site, but then follows an unproxied link to another publisher's site.
- The user follows links in email sent by a publisher's alerts service, or by colleagues at another institution.
- The user follows a DOI link; DOIs are part of every major citation format.

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