

**The Beginners Guide to Buying on eBay**

# The Beginners Guide to Buying on eBay

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Basic Strategies to Improve  
Your eBay Experience

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# **The Beginners Guide to Buying on eBay**

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# **The Beginners Guide to Buying on eBay**

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## **The Beginners Guide to Buying on eBay**

### **An Introduction to Bidding and Buying on eBay**

Have you noticed that whenever you open a newspaper, watch the TV or have a conversation, people seem to be talking about eBay? If you've never used eBay and you've no idea what it's all about, then the chances are that you're starting to feel a little left out. Don't worry! This report contains everything you need to know about the basics of bidding and buying on eBay.

#### **So What is eBay?**

eBay is an online auction website – and not just any auction site, but the biggest one in the world. If you know how an auction works, then you already know roughly how eBay works. Someone adds something they want to sell to the site, and then buyers come along and place bids on it. The highest bid wins the item! It's that simple.

eBay being an online auction makes a big difference though. Buying and selling are not reserved for the elite or rich. eBay accepts almost any item, no matter how small, and will then advertise it on their sites all over the world. It's a powerful combination of an auction and a slightly chaotic marketplace.

#### **What is Bidding?**

Bidding is when you say how much you will pay for an item in an auction. Bidding on eBay, however, doesn't work in exactly the same way as a normal auction, at least in theory. On eBay, you tell the site what the maximum you are willing to pay for each item is, and then eBay places the bids on

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your behalf. You could say you were willing to pay up to \$100 for something and only have to pay \$50, if that was the highest maximum bid anyone else placed.

It's not as complicated as it sounds – the best way to get used to it is to give it a try. First, go to the eBay website designed for your country. If you don't know the address for it, just go to [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com) and it will tell you there. Now, on the front page you should see a big box marked 'search': just type in anything that you'd like to buy, and you're done.

Wasn't that easy? Now you should have a list of items for sale in front of you, along with how much people are currently bidding for them and the time when bidding ends for each item. If you click one of these items, you can read the description, and then – if you want the item and are ready to bid more than the current highest bidder, place your bid!

### **How Do I Bid?**

Go ahead and scroll down to the bottom of an item's description page, and type the maximum you are willing to pay (your maximum bid) into the box. Then simply press the 'place bid' button – you will need to sign in once you press the button, or go through a quick registration process if you don't have an eBay username).

If someone else's maximum bid on that item is higher than yours, then eBay will tell you and give you the opportunity to bid again. Otherwise, you're now the new highest bidder! All you need to do now is wait until the end of the auction to

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see if you are the winner. If someone else outbids you during the auction, eBay will email you and you can place a higher bid if you desire.

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### **Your Rights as an eBay Buyer**

When you buy things on eBay, you pay the seller before they send you anything. This means that you, as a buyer, are vulnerable to all sorts of problems. You might not get the items you have paid for, or they might be damaged or faulty. Luckily, you have two very important rights when you buy on eBay.

#### **The Right to Receive Your Item.**

Maybe the seller never sent the item, or maybe it got lost in the mail. Whatever happened, you paid for the item. If it doesn't arrive in the mail as described, you have the right to a replacement or a refund, whether it's the seller's fault or not.

The fact that you bought something on eBay doesn't mean that you don't have the exact same rights that you would have if you bought it in a retail store (these rights are pretty much the same all over the world). Plus, under eBay's rules, the seller isn't allowed to change their mind about selling you the item: once the auction ends, it becomes a contract – you must buy and they must sell, or face eBay's penalties.

#### **The Right for Your Item to Be as Described in the Auction.**

Sometimes sellers don't wrap items properly and they get broken. Occasionally they write descriptions that are misleading or just plain wrong to begin with, leaving out vital details that would have caused you to change your mind about buying. If this happens to you, you again have

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the right to a replacement or a refund.

### **So How Do I Use My Rights?**

First, you should take it up with the seller – most will be responsive, as they do not want to have their reputation damaged when an upset buyer leaves negative feedback for all their future buyers to see. If that doesn't work, report them to eBay.

While eBay doesn't have many people handling complaints, they do have a relatively effective set of automatic processes to handle common problems buyers and sellers have with one another.

Finally, if that doesn't work, then you should seek advice from consumer groups in your country, and as a last resort from the police. You should never have to get this far, though: problems on eBay that can't be resolved easily are extremely rare.

### **Don't Be Too Quick.**

Remember not to get too annoyed and be unfair to the seller: nice sellers have agreed to give me refunds for undelivered items, only for me to find out weeks later that they were being held for me at the post office! Always try your best to communicate and think of everything that might have gone wrong: eBay works best when buyers and sellers sort out their problems together, instead of reporting each other to the authorities right away.

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### 10 Ways to Avoid Being Ripped Off on eBay

It is important to remember that eBay is a lot like a flea market. There will always be a slimy guy in the corner, selling things that most people wouldn't touch. The trouble is that on the Internet, these people can be a little harder to spot. Here are ten tips to help you keep an eye out for the rip-off merchants.

**1. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is:** This holds for everything in life, but especially for eBay. Things that seem too cheap are usually too cheap for a reason – it might be a complete scam, or the items might just be of extremely poor quality. Investigate before you go further.

**2. Know the value of what you want to buy:** There are people on eBay who regularly bid such high prices for used cameras that they might as well have gone out and bought them brand new. Check around for prices first.

**3. Only bid on real things:** eBay has plenty of people who are trying to sell all sorts of schemes and scams. It is never worth bidding for these, no matter how cheap they might be.

**4. Don't do anything outside eBay:** Occasionally people will ask you to send them money outside eBay, to avoid the fees eBay charges sellers. Any money you send this way is entirely unsecured – don't do it.

**5. Be careful where you send payment:** People may hack into others' accounts, and ask you to send payment to addresses that eBay has not confirmed as belonging to that

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account – you might send your money and receive nothing in return.

**6. Look out for sellers who suddenly change what they sell:** Sellers can look like they've made lots of transactions, when really they've never sold anything of value. If they suddenly start selling \$1,000 televisions, steer clear – they may be planning to run off with the money.

**7. Beware the shill bidder:** If someone who doesn't seem to have bought anything before is constantly outbidding you on a certain item, be suspicious. It might be a seller 'shill bidding' to force up his item's price.

**8. Don't use the seller's escrow service:** If an escrow service is recommended to you by a seller, it could well be owned and run by them – and they're quite likely to keep your money and send you nothing.

**9. Pay electronically:** You are more likely to be able to recover any losses if you pay using a credit card instead of sending out checks and money orders – these low-tech payment methods can't be tracked as easily.

**10. Buy from reputable sellers:** Each seller has a number next to their name, which is their feedback rating. In most cases, the higher this rating, the more you can trust them.

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### How Important is Your Buyer's Reputation

Your reputation as a buyer (or 'feedback rating') is **THE** most important thing people see when they deal with you on eBay. It is on the basis of this little number that they will decide whether they can trust you or not.

Each time you buy or sell something on eBay, people can leave feedback for you, and you can leave feedback for them. As a buyer, seller's can now only offer you positive feedback, along with a comment. Your feedback rating, then, is worked out using a very simple sum: the number of positive feedback comments people have left for you. The higher your feedback number, the more experienced a buyer you are.

If you are a considerate buyer, then you should find that positive feedback will just appear next to your username, without you needing to do anything. If you want to help it along, though, there are a few things you can do.

**Always leave feedback for others:** People will feel an obligation to leave feedback for you if you leave it for them (eBay will send you an email after each transaction to offer you the opportunity). Take the time to write a positive comment about sellers who do what they should and the chances are they'll do the same for you.

**Pay promptly:** Sellers love nothing more than to be paid promptly – paying as soon as the auction ends saves the seller all sorts of worry, especially if you pay by credit card or another electronic method. You will often find that your positive feedback appears within a few minutes of you

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paying if you pay as soon as the auction ends.

**Don't be a difficult customer:** Understand that your seller might take a day or so to respond to you, and perhaps a few days to send your item – harassing them is nasty and unnecessary, and won't get you good feedback.

**Build relationships:** If a seller sells a lot of a certain kind of thing you like, buy from them a few more times. They will be very happy to find a regular customer, and will go out of their way to leave positive feedback like 'a joy to deal with as ever'. Also, they might offer you a few special deals!

Sellers won't generally be reluctant to sell to buyers without much of a reputation, simply because it is the buyer who takes most of the risk in a transaction. It is worth remembering, however, that transactions where you are the seller and where you are the buyer are counted towards the same feedback total – so if you ever want to start selling, being a good buyer is especially worthwhile.

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### **How to Check an eBay Seller's Reputation**

When you buy something from an eBay seller, you are giving them your money and hoping that you will get something in return. However many guarantees of safety eBay might make to you, nothing is certain: if you just give your money to scam artists all the time without doing any research, then the chances are you won't get all of that money back.

That's why you should always check the seller's reputation, or 'feedback rating'. This is a quick and easy-to-read summary of their history as an eBay seller, which gives you some idea of whether or not you should trust them with your money. Buying anything is a calculated risk: you want to minimize that risk.

#### **How to Check Feedback Ratings.**

On each item's description page, there is a box in the top-right hand corner about the seller, with the title 'Seller information'. This contains the seller's eBay name, their feedback score, and their positive feedback percentage, as well as any stars they have earned.

Different colored stars are given to eBay sellers depending on their rating, in this sequence: yellow, blue, turquoise, purple, red, green, shooting yellow, shooting turquoise, shooting purple, shooting red. Anyone with a 'shooting' star is an experienced eBay member who you should be able to trust.

If you click on the seller's name, you can get to a more detailed view of their reputation – their 'member profile'

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page. This page shows the total number of people who gave them a positive or negative rating, as well as a breakdown by time, and the sellers "DSR" or detailed seller rating. You can also see a complete history of all the comments that have ever been left about them, with the most recent first.

### **What to Look For.**

You might assume that anyone with a very high number can be trusted, but that isn't always true. It is more important to look at their positive feedback percentage – and you should really consider anything below 97% to be a red flag and investigate further.

Take a look through the first visible page with the most recent transactions: are there any negative comments? What do they say? Take others' experiences into account, as they could happen to you if you deal with this person. Be careful not to punish sellers unfairly, however, if they did bad things in their past on eBay but have improved since. You should look at the breakdown by time and give less weight to any negative feedback that was left a long time ago. Equally, though, you should sit up and pay attention if a seller seems to have been left an out-of-character amount of bad feedback in the last month or so.

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### **Understanding the Different eBay Auction Types**

Over the years, eBay has introduced all sorts of different auction types, in an effort to give people more options when they buy and sell their things on eBay. There are many people who don't like the idea that their item might sell for a far lower price than they intend. Equally, there are people who have hundreds of the same item and don't want to sell them individually. This chapter gives you an overview of the different kinds of auctions and how to spot them.

#### **Normal Auctions.**

These are the bread-and-butter of eBay, the auctions everyone knows: you bid, others outbid you, you outbid them, and the winner gets the item. Simple.

#### **Reserve Auctions.**

Reserve auctions are for sellers who don't want their items to sell for less than a certain price – a concept you'll know about if you're familiar with real auctions. They work just like normal auctions on eBay, except that you will be told if your bid has not met the reserve price set by the seller. If no-one is willing to meet this price, then the auction is cancelled, and the seller keeps the item.

You can spot these auctions by looking out for 'Reserve not met' or 'Reserve met' written next to the current bid on an item's description page.

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### **Fixed Price ('Buy it Now') Auctions.**

'Buy it Now' auctions can work in one of two ways. A seller might add a Buy it Now button to a normal auction, meaning that you can choose either to bid normally or to simply pay the asking price and avoid the whole bidding process. Some sellers, though, now cut out the auction process altogether and simply list all their items at fixed price. Recently, eBay added a twist to fixed price auctions: the 'best offer'. This means that you can negotiate a price to someone who offers their items using 'Buy it Now', which could be a great way to get a bargain on things that don't seem to be selling.

Fixed price auctions are easy to spot, as they have a little 'Buy it Now' logo either next to or instead of the current number of bids on the search listings page.

### **Multiple Item ('Dutch') Auctions.**

These are auctions where a seller is selling more than one of a certain item. Buyers bid a price and say how many items they want, and then everyone pays the lowest price that was bid by one of the winning bidders. If you have trouble getting your head around that, don't worry – everyone else does too! These auctions are very rare.

What is more common is when a seller has a lot of one item, and lists it using a combination of two auction types: a multiple-item fixed price auction. This just means that they say how many they have, and offer them at a fixed price. You can enter how many you want and then just click 'Buy it Now' to get them.

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### When to "Buy Now" and When to Bid

You will often find yourself facing the choice of whether to pay a fixed price or keep on bidding. This choice might be presented to you in a single auction, or you might be choosing between different auctions of the different types. So should you use that 'Buy it Now' button or keep on trying to outbid everyone else? It's all a question of weighing up the advantages and disadvantages.

#### **Buy it Now.**

- The Advantages.

When you use 'Buy it Now', you know the asking price and you can take some time to decide whether to pay it or not – you can even negotiate. You don't need to keep your eye on the auction, or get caught up in the last-minute bidding frenzy that is now inevitable on any popular item. Not only that, but the seller will be happy to get a fixed price for their item, and they're likely to be nicer to you than usual. Some sellers can be a little resentful when they feel that you got a little too much of a bargain on their item.

- The Disadvantages.

You will almost certainly pay more for the item, especially with more expensive items. Also, it takes some of the fun out of eBay. Aren't you there for an auction, after all? If you want to pay a fixed price then there are thousands of online stores you could be visiting. It's like pressing 'collect' instead of 'gamble' on a slot machine: it's the boring option. But then, maybe that's what you want.

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These rules are relatively constant: there are few times when using 'Buy it Now' would allow you to get something cheaper, or when bidding would be an easier way to do it. In the end, as with so many things in life, it's a simple question of price vs. convenience, and it's up to you.

There are those times, though, when the strategic use of the 'Buy it Now' button can be a useful tool to help you outwit your competition. If the current bid is almost as high as the 'Buy it Now' price, then why bid higher and keep the contest going? Clicking that button is a no-brainer. The same goes for times when a seller has, for some reason, set the 'Buy it Now' price only slightly higher than their starting price for bids. Why bother to go through all the hassle of bidding?

You might also find that there are times when you should leave the 'Buy it Now' button as a last resort: it can be a useful way of ending last-minute contests with a decisive 'this is mine' gesture.

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### **eBay Auction Buyer's Tips and Tricks**

eBay isn't just an auction and a marketplace: often it can feel quite a lot like a game. Like any game, you can get ahead if you think strategically, using your head to outwit the other buyers and get the best price. Here are a few things you can try.

#### **Shop in the Summer.**

This is simple, but effective. Summer is the quiet season on eBay – almost everything sells for less. While everyone else is out enjoying the sun, invest a little time to find some real bargains.

#### **Beat Them by a Few Cents.**

Outbid people by a few cents instead of a few dollars – if they don't check back before the auction ends, then you will be the winner. To avoid people using this tactic on you, though, always bid strange, hard-to-guess amounts instead of round numbers.

#### **Play Dirty.**

If you know when the auction ends, you can get in there at the very last second and outbid your rivals. The chances are that they won't have the time to sit in front of the auction waiting for it to end – as a rule, he who stays wins. If someone else does retaliate at the end of the auction, though, try not to get carried away in those last few seconds and end up paying too much!

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### **Take Risks.**

This is a strategy for the braver eBay buyer. All of the advice you will see for eBay beginners tells you to buy items that have good pictures, clear descriptions, trustworthy sellers and all the rest. If you're brave, why not take a risk and do the exact opposite?

Many buyers won't want that item from the seller with a feedback rating of 5, no picture and a one-line description. If you take a calculated risk and bid anyway, you might be able to make a tiny bid and win by default. There are people on eBay who make their living from winning auctions like these, taking good pictures of the item, writing a good description and then reselling it at a huge profit. Be careful, though: do this for long enough, and you will inevitably lose your money at some point. It's especially unwise to try it with very high-value items.

### **Avoid Bidding Wars.**

There are few things on eBay that are so rare that you'll only see them once and never again. There are usually quite a few sellers who have an item. What's more, they will generally have more than one to sell, even if they haven't listed them all at once. Always check your seller's history to see whether they sell your item all the time – and if they do, then wait for the next one instead of bidding too much.

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### **Taking Advantage of "Slow" eBay Auctions**

Some auctions get hundreds of bids, but some go much more slowly, getting only a few bids or even none at all for days. Auctions are generally much slower during the summer months than they are in the winter – and sales on eBay are slowing each year, as more sellers than buyers sign up, hoping to get rich quick. There are a number of ways that you can take advantage of slower auctions to get the best price.

#### **Wait to Bid.**

If you bid, then everyone can see you're interested – and that might make them interested too. Leaving the item alone for as long as you can bear will make it look less popular, and keep the price down so you can come in at the last minute and get a bargain.

#### **Make an Offer.**

If the seller is selling an item using 'Buy it Now' and it still hasn't sold when the auction is about to end, use eBay's 'Best Offer' service to make them an offer on it. They may have listed the item two or three times before, and they'll be so annoyed at the prospect of re-listing it yet again that they'll accept your offer just to get rid of the thing.

#### **Conspire with Other Buyers.**

You might not have thought of this, but if there are two auctions for the same item and only you and one other buyer are bidding, why not get together and work out a 'you

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take this one and I'll take that one' deal? This avoids you raising the price on both auctions just to get one each. If you make a few friends, you can even work together on auctions long-term, taking turns to bid.

### **Be Snobbish.**

Send the seller emails asking questions about the condition of the item, and make it very clear that you are a discerning buyer and will only accept things of the highest quality. This will make them feel better about selling you their item for less.

### **Don't Feel Guilty.**

There really are too many sellers on eBay now, to the point where you can get common items at very low prices. Long-term, this will probably force those sellers out of business, but that's the way a market works; supply and demand.

### **Buy in Bulk.**

When auctions are slow, many sellers will have had the same stock for a long time. If you offer to take ten things off their hands all at once then you can almost name your price – the chances are that they'll fall over themselves to give you a good deal. If you come back again and buy another ten items then they'll love you even more.

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### When and How to Withdraw Your eBay Bid

eBay is a little strict about letting you withdraw your bid. They call it a 'bid retraction', and have a stringent set of conditions that you must meet before you are allowed to do it. Here are eBay's three acceptable reasons for withdrawing a bid.

You made a typographical error: This means that you accidentally typed the wrong amount into the bid box, bidding a far higher price than you meant to. This can be scary: imagine bidding \$100 and accidentally adding an extra '0'! You are allowed to withdraw your bid in this situation, and bid again if you want to.

The item's description changed: If you bid on something and then the seller updates the description, you have the right to withdraw your bid. It wouldn't be fair, after all, to force you to take something that you now realize you don't want.

The seller is unreachable: If emails to the seller bounce and they don't answer their telephone, then the auction obviously can't continue, and you can cancel it.

#### **So How Do I Retract My Bid?**

eBay hides away the bid retraction form a bit, because they don't like people using it. You can find it by going here: <http://offer.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?RetractBidShow> Now all you need is the item number from your auction: this can be found on the item description page's top right corner. If you can't see it on the page, look in your browser's title bar, and in any emails eBay has sent you about your bid on

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the item. Choose one of the three allowed reasons, click 'retract bid', and you're done.

### **Are There Any Consequences?**

Well yes, there are. The more unethical among you might have considered that you could just cancel bids anytime you feel like it by saying that you accidentally entered the wrong amount. eBay is one step ahead of you. Each time you retract a bid, it is counted on your feedback page for all to see – and anyone with a lot of retracted bids looks more than a little questionable. eBay also says that abusing the bid retraction feature could get you banned.

So is there a way to retract your bid without facing a penalty? There is if your seller is nice, and most are. Sellers can cancel bids on their auctions at any time, and if you email them with a half-decent excuse then most will be more than happy to do this for you. After all, it's not in their interest for their item to go to someone who won't like it, as you might leave negative feedback.

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### **You Won That eBay Auction! Now What Do You Do**

It's a heady feeling when you win your first eBay auction: a mixture of happiness and perhaps just a little fear. After all, there seems to be so much to do before you can actually get your item. What do you do next?

The simple answer is: you send payment to the seller, as quickly as possible. The quicker you pay, the more your seller will like you, and the sooner your item will arrive. But how you go about it? That all depends on how you plan to pay...

#### **PayPal.**

PayPal is one of the most popular options for paying on eBay, to the point where eBay decided to buy the company. It allows instant electronic payment across the Internet. Money goes instantly from your credit or debit card to the seller's PayPal account, where they can either use it for Internet purchases or transfer it out to their bank.

eBay offers incentives for using PayPal, and almost all sellers now accept it. Its instant nature makes sellers very happy, and means that they can have your item packed and sent and leave you some positive feedback within a few hours of the auction ending. When paying by PayPal, you will be covered by PayPal's own insurance and guarantees, as well as any that your card might have.

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### **Checks and Money Orders.**

This is payment the old-fashioned way, and may lead to a longer wait for your item. You need to mail the check or money order, then the seller has to take it to the bank and get it cleared, and only then do they send the item. The only reason to use this method is if either you or the seller distrust electronic payment methods. If you're willing to go to the trouble with these sellers, though, you might get an item very cheaply, as many buyers just won't be bothered.

When you pay by check or money order, make sure to print the eBay order confirmation page (it will be emailed to you) and put it in the envelope with your payment. Underline or circle key information like your mailing address and the item number. Finally, remember to be patient: keep in contact with the seller, as it really can take a week or two before everything falls into place and your item turns up.

### **Money Transfers and Bank Deposits.**

Some sellers may ask you to pay them using a wire service like Western Union, or simply give you a bank account number and ask you to pay money into it. Unless you really trust the seller, this is generally a bad idea – these methods are hard to trace and you're unlikely to get any money back if anything goes wrong. Paying in cash, it hardly needs to be said, is an even worse idea.

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### Using PayPal on eBay

PayPal and eBay were made for each other – and now that eBay owns PayPal, using them together is getting even easier.

#### **What is PayPal?**

People with PayPal accounts can send money to each other securely online. You can deposit money in a PayPal account from a bank account or a credit card, and withdraw money to your bank account. It is the most common way of paying on eBay, as well as being in widespread use on the rest of the Internet.

#### **Opening a PayPal Account.**

It's very easy to get a PayPal account. Just go to [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com) and click the 'Sign Up' link. As a buyer, you should get a Personal account – you can always upgrade later if you decide to start selling. Then all you need to do is enter your address, phone number and email address, and create a password, and two secret questions. You'll be emailed a confirmation, and then you're done!

If you want to deposit money into the account now, then you need to register a credit or debit card or your bank details, and if you want to withdraw money then you need to register your bank details. There's no need to do anything like that just yet, though.

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### **Paying with PayPal.**

Paying with PayPal is very simple. When you win an auction and click 'Pay Now', you'll be given a list of payment methods the seller accepts. You should always check what the seller accepts before you bid, as there are still some sellers who won't take PayPal. If the seller does accept PayPal, it will already be chosen for you on the payment page.

Now you just need to press 'Next', type in your PayPal username and password and confirm the amount you want to pay. The first time you pay with PayPal you will need to enter the details of your card or bank account, but after that it will remember for you.

### **Becoming Verified.**

You might have noticed that there is a limit to how much money you can send or withdraw using PayPal before you need to be verified. Verification has two steps. First, PayPal deposits some very small amounts of money in your bank account and you need to tell them how much they deposited. Second, they need you to confirm your address and phone number. Once you've done that, all the limits on your account will be lifted. Log in at [paypal.com](http://paypal.com) and click on 'Get Verified' for more information.

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### How to Get eBay Coupons

You have to be very lucky to be one of the chosen few who receive an eBay coupon by email. These coupons are just like cash that you can use towards anything you buy on eBay – the only conditions being that you pay using PayPal, and that you are using eBay in the USA, Canada or the UK.

There are two ways to get eBay coupons.

#### **Wait for that email.**

Of course, if you just wait, you'll be waiting for a long time. You have to do something to make yourself look like the kind of person eBay would want to tempt back with a coupon. If you open an account, buy a few medium-value things and then suddenly stop, the chances are you'll find yourself with some kind of special offer – but still, not always.

#### **Go Searching.**

The better way, of course, is to go and find the coupons that are out there on the web. This is quite hit-and-miss, as eBay doesn't always have an offer on, but when there's a valid code you can guarantee that it'll be everywhere within a few hours. Just type 'eBay coupon codes' into your favorite search engine, but be prepared to pick through some rubbish. You might find you have better luck if you use a more obscure search engine, where people haven't taken the trouble to influence the results. If going through search engines is too much for you, just keep an eye out at any community forums you frequent, where someone might just

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post one. You probably have the best chances if you make a few friends on eBay's own forums at <http://hub.ebay.com/community>. It can be fun and educational to chat to the regulars there too, so you really have nothing to lose.

### **How do You Redeem Coupons?**

A coupon is basically a code, with some being quite long. All you need to do is pay with PayPal as usual for the item you want to use the coupon towards. After you choose PayPal as your payment method, you will notice a heading that says 'Coupons, Gift Certificates and eBay Anything Points'. Type the coupon code in here: they can be long, so you should use copy-and-paste to make sure you get it right. Just click 'Redeem', and it's good to go.

Don't worry about causing problems for sellers by doing this, by the way – they have no way of even telling that you used a coupon, as eBay just pays them for the item as usual. Coupons are good for sellers as they attract more buyers to eBay, meaning that they get more bids on their auctions. After all, why would they object to getting more money without you actually having to pay it?

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### Tips and Tricks for Using eBay Search

If you know what you're doing, you can quickly find what you're looking for on eBay. Here are a few golden rules.

**Be specific:** If you're searching for the first edition of the original Harry Potter book, you'll get further searching for 'harry potter rowling philosopher's stone first edition' than you will searching for 'harry potter'. You'll get fewer results, but the ones you do get will be far more relevant.

**Spell wrongly:** It's a sad fact that many of the sellers on eBay just can't spell. Whatever you're looking for, try thinking of a few common misspellings – the chances are that fewer people will find these items, and so they will be cheaper.

**Get a thesaurus:** You should try to search for all the different words that someone might use to describe your item, for example searching for both 'TV' and 'television', or for 'phone', 'mobile' and 'cellphone'. Where you can, though, leave off the type of item altogether and search by things like brand and model.

**Use the categories:** Whenever you search, you'll notice a list of categories at the side of your search results. If you just searched for the name of a CD because you want to buy that CD, you should click the 'CDs' category to just look at results in that category. Why bother looking through a load of results that you don't care about?

**Don't be afraid to browse:** Once you've found the category that items you like seem to be in, why not click

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'Browse' and take a look through the whole category? You might be surprised by what you find.

Few people realize just how powerful eBay's search engine is – a few symbols here and there and it'll work wonders for you.

**Wildcard searches:** You can put an asterisk (\*) into a search phrase when you want to say 'anything can go here'. For example, if you wanted to search for a 1950s car, you could search for 'car 195\*'. 195\* will show results from any year in the 1950s.

**In this order:** If you put words in quotes (" ") then the only results shown will be ones that have all of the words between the quote marks. For example, searching for "Lord of the Rings" won't give you any results that say, for example "Lord Robert Rings".

**Exclude words:** Put a minus, and then put any words in brackets that you don't want to appear in your search results. For example: "Pulp Fiction" – (poster, photo) will find items related to Pulp Fiction but not posters or photos.

**Either/or:** If you want to search for lots of words at once, just put them in brackets: the TV example from earlier could become '(TV, television)', which would find items with either word.

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### How to Resolve eBay Disputes

eBay has quite an intricate and long-winded dispute resolution procedure. In this chapter, I'll try to break each step down for you, so you can see what's involved and how long it takes.

As an example, let's go through what you would do if you paid for an item but didn't receive it from the seller.

**Before you open a dispute:** Give the seller a chance to send the item before you get ahead of yourself and open a dispute. If you're concerned about how long the item is taking to arrive, the first thing you should do is send a polite email to the seller saying that you haven't received it and asking whether they have shipped it. You should also check your own email address in eBay's options, to make sure that the seller can reply to you. As a last resort before opening a dispute, you should try to call the seller at the telephone number eBay has for them. You might have to pay long-distance charges for the call, but that's better than dragging the auction through delays and mediation.

**Step 1** - You open an Item Not Received dispute: You can do this here:

<http://feedback.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?InrCreateDispute>

All you need to do is enter the item number and say that you did not receive the item.

**Step 2** - eBay contacts the seller: eBay sends the seller an email that tells them that you've said you didn't receive the item. Then can then choose to tell you one of three things: that your payment hasn't cleared yet, that the item is in the

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mail, or that they'll give you your money back. The seller can also tell eBay that they would like to send you a message.

**Step 3** - You talk to the seller: You try to work out what's happened directly with the seller, sending messages back and forth. Hopefully they'll agree to give you a refund for the sake of their feedback, or your item will turn up in the mail during this time.

**Step 4** - Closing the dispute: You have two options to close the dispute: either you were satisfied or you weren't. If you weren't satisfied, then you can file a claim with eBay's Trust and Safety Team.

### **Independent Dispute Mediation.**

If you don't want to go through eBay's own process, and especially if the auction was for a high-value item, then you can use a third-party mediator. eBay recommends SquareTrade, at <http://www.squaretrade.com>, who provide mediation to many websites where there are buyers and sellers. They will contact the seller on your behalf and then mediate as you negotiate what to do from there.

Sellers who are committed to going through SquareTrade's mediation for any disputes can sign up to display the 'SquareTrade seal' on their auctions. This gives their buyers \$250 fraud protection, and shows that their identity has been independently verified so they are who they say they are.

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### **SafeHarbor - eBay's Own Scotland Yard**

SafeHarbor is the eBay police department. If you break the rules, commit fraud or try to buy something you're not supposed to, they'll be after you.

#### **When You Don't Pay.**

This is the most common rule buyer's break – it's all too easy to just change your mind and try to get out of the auction. eBay regards every auction as a contract, and will punish you if you don't go through with your end of the deal. If you decide not to pay then expect to get a few nasty warning emails from eBay threatening you with banning if you do it again.

#### **So There Are Things You Can't Buy on eBay?**

Yes, there are: more things than you'd expect. It makes sense that you can't buy firearms, for example, but you also can't buy fireworks – eBay are worried about the risks of sending them in the mail. Laws in many countries mean that you can't buy alcohol or tobacco. You can't buy illegal or prescription drugs, stocks and shares, or lottery tickets. No underwear, either. You can't buy any little pet puppies or kittens, as animals are banned. If items infringe on copyright, like pirated CDs or software, then they're not allowed either.

eBay's policy is controversial, not least because it is somewhat random in its enforcement – and there have been accusations that they're more responsive to the copyright concerns of big businesses than to auctions for items that

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might actually be dangerous. If they do decide to go after you or the seller, though, they will cancel the auction and may also suspend your accounts.

### **Fraud.**

eBay runs remarkably well considering how unregulated it is, but there is still fraud. If you paid by PayPal, then they can usually reverse the transaction relatively easily and get you most (if not all) of your money back. This is another reason why many buyers prefer to use PayPal. Some sellers are a little scared of the effectiveness of PayPal's refund system, as they can send out items in good faith only to find that their buyer was fraudulent and the transaction has been reversed. If you're worried about fraud, as a buyer, you should always use PayPal.

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### The eBay Buyer's FAQ

So you have a question? Has something gone very wrong and you don't know what to do? Well, fair enough. Here are the questions that I hear all the time from buyers.

#### **Does eBay have a Customer Service Department I Can Phone?**

eBay is notoriously hard to contact should you ever need to – it sometimes seems like they expect the site to run itself. You can email them, as long as you don't have your heart set on a coherent response: go to <http://contact.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ShowCUPortal>. You might have better luck in a 'live help' webchat here: <http://pages.ebay.com/help/basics/n-livehelp.html>.

Only eBay Power Sellers (volume sellers with a high feedback rating) get to phone customer service. If you really want to try your luck, type 'eBay [your country] phone number' into a search engine and you'll probably find something. Unfortunately, the chances are you'll have gone to all that trouble for the privilege of leaving a voicemail message.

Not having a toll free customer service telephone number might seem unfair, but imagine the number of people who would call eBay every day with the silliest questions if they gave out their phone number everywhere. Its Wild West nature is, in a way, part of its charm.

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### **eBay Sent Me an Email Saying They're Going to Close My Account. What Should I Do?**

This email asks for your password, right? It's probably a scam, an attempt to frighten you, make you give up your details and then steal your account. eBay will never ask for your password or any other account details by email. They even offer a special 'Account Guard' as part of their eBay toolbar, which lets you check that you're not giving your password to a fake site. You can read more here:

[http://pages.ebay.com/toolbar/accountguard\\_1.html](http://pages.ebay.com/toolbar/accountguard_1.html).

### **It Seems Too Good to be True. How Does eBay Make Money?**

For you, the buyer, eBay is free. Sellers, though, pay all sorts of fees: a listing fee for each item they list, and a final value fee (a percentage of what the item sold for). They can then pay optional fees for extra services, including 'Buy it Now', extra pictures, reserve prices, highlighting the auction, putting it in bold, listing it first in search results or even putting it on the front page. You can see a full list of fees at <http://pages.ebay.com/help/sell/fees.html>.

It's obviously worth it to the sellers, though, or they wouldn't continue using eBay. The system is quite efficient, and basically forces both eBay and the sellers to keep their profit margins as low as possible – otherwise prices will simply go too high and the buyers will stop buying.

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### Appendix I

Well, that's the end of this report. I hope that the strategies discussed have given you a basic overall understanding of the buying process on eBay. If you would like to continue your eBay education and learn more about topics such as:

- Where to find eBay and PayPal discount coupons...
- Your rights as an eBay Buyer...
- How to avoid getting ripped off...
- How to research your seller's reputation...
- When to "Buy-it-Now" and when to Bid...
- How to avoid "Phishing" schemes...
- Getting your money back...
- All about PayPal...
- How to buy collectibles...
- How to become an eBay "Sniper"...
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