

# Using the Facebook API

## Capturing content from Facebook

If you want to export content from Facebook, a simple way to do this is to use the Facebook API, called the Facebook Graph Explorer. You can access it through your usual browser. If you query or call the API, you get formatted results that you can copy and paste into documents that you can then save into your internal recordkeeping system.

## Using the API

To access the Facebook API, you first have to log in to Facebook. After you've logged in, go to this page:

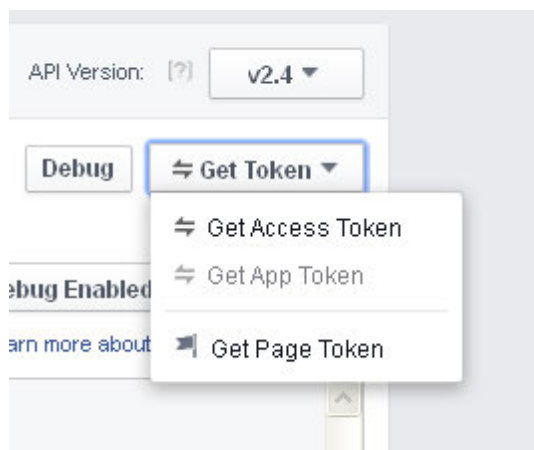
<https://developers.facebook.com/>

Next, click on the 'Tools' tab in the top menu and select 'Graph API Explorer'. You'll be taken to the API interface, which looks like this:

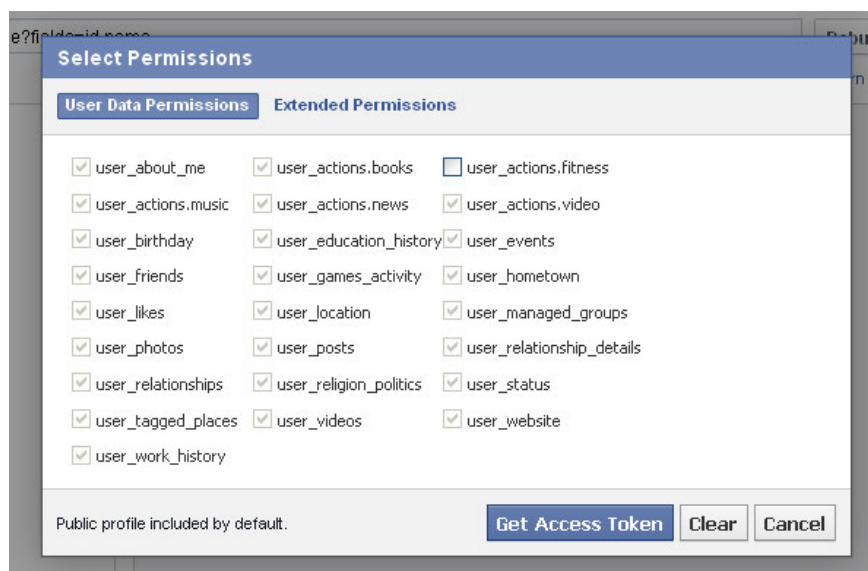
## Access tokens

Before you can query the API, you first have to check it has permission, in the form of an access token, to access your account. Look in the 'Access Token' box near the top of the page to see whether the API already has a token for your account. If it has, there should be a string of numbers and letters in the 'Access Token' box, which will look something like this:

If the 'Access Token' box is empty, click on the 'Get Token' button on the right hand side of the screen to request an access token. A bubble like this will pop up:



Click on the 'Get Access Token' option. Another bubble will pop up:



This bubble tells you what account information the API can currently access—everything with a tick next to it. You can leave any default settings as they are or you can tick further information, for example, **user\_posts**. You can change these settings in the future if you need to by again clicking on the 'Get Access Token' button.

When you're happy with the settings, click the blue 'Get Access Token' button to request an access token. You'll be returned to the API page and the 'Access Token' box will be populated with a string of numbers and letters.

## Finding your user ID

Before you can make any detailed calls, you'll need to query the API to find your user ID. Conveniently, this call is already set up for you when you first navigate to the API page. It has the format **me?fields=id,name** and will look like the example solid-circled in the picture below.

To complete the call to find your user ID, simply click the blue 'Submit' button on the right hand side of the screen. Your user ID will appear in the results field. An example ID is dash-circled in the picture below.

The screenshot shows the Facebook Graph API Explorer interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs for Developers, Apps, Products, Docs, Tools, and Support. Below this, the application is set to 'Graph API Explorer', the locale is 'English (US)', and the API version is 'v2.1'. An access token is provided, and there are buttons for 'Debug', 'Get Access Token', and 'Get App Token'. The main section is titled 'Graph API Explorer' and 'SQL Query'. A 'GET' button is visible next to a query box containing the URL '/v2.1/me?fields=id,name'. Below the query box, there is a section for 'Node: me' with checkboxes for 'id' and 'name', and a search field. The response area shows a JSON object: 

```
{
  "id": "1444358",
  "name": ""
}
```

## Making further calls

To make further API calls, all you have to do is make a note of your user ID and enter that and the appropriate query into the query box, which is next to the 'GET' button in the picture above. You can enter the queries manually or copy and paste them from the sections below.

The 'GET' button at the front of the query box shows that you are getting information from Facebook. If you know the right calls and have the appropriate permissions, you can also use the API to POST information to Facebook and DELETE information from it.

## Useful API calls

### Posts

One useful call you can make is for all posts made by a Facebook user. The format for this call is (replace [user id] with your own user ID):

#### **[user id]?fields=posts**

Calls that return a lot of information are automatically paginated. By default, the API limits the number of results returned in the first page to 50. If you have more than 50 posts and you want to reduce the number of pages you have to navigate through, you can increase the limit up to a maximum of 250.

#### **[user id]?fields=posts.limit(250)**

A lot of information and metadata is returned for each post. Much of it isn't important to capture. You can limit the information and metadata returned for each API call by adding conditions to the query. For example, this call returns only the actual text of the post and any comments made (created time is added by default):

#### **[user id]?fields=posts.limit(250).fields(message,comments)**

This call returns 'likes' as well:

#### **[user id]?fields=posts.limit(250).fields(message,comments,likes)**

If you want to limit the call by date (for example, to return all posts made after a certain date), use this call:

#### **[user id]?fields=posts.limit(250).since(YYYY-MM-DD).fields(message,comments,likes)**

This call returns all posts made before a certain date:

**[user id]?fields=posts.limit(250).until(YYYY-MM-DD).fields(message,comments,likes)**

Note that the 'since' and 'until' calls don't include posts made on the day of the limit date itself.

If the 'since' call returns more than one page of results, the second page will display posts made before the date as well. This just seems to be a quirk of the API pagination. You can either manually scroll through the results to the date you want, or enter another query with altered limit dates:

**[user id]?fields=posts.limit(250).since(YYYY-MM-DD).until(YYYY-MM-DD[date of last post in first page of results + 1 day]).fields(message,comments,likes)**

These calls are useful for incremental exports. But note that comments made on or 'likes' added to posts or photos uploaded before the 'since' date will not be returned.

## Photos

Another set of useful API calls returns information about the photos you have posted to Facebook. Note that it does not return the actual photos themselves. The format for this set of queries is:

**[user id]?fields=albums.limit(250).fields(photos)**

This returns the names of all the photos in your photo albums, sorted by album.

Again, you can limit photo calls by date and also by the kind of information you want for each photo. This query returns only the name of the photo (created time is added by default):

**[user id]?fields=albums.limit(250).fields(photos{name})**

This query returns photo names, any comments made and any likes:

**[user id]?fields=albums.limit(250).fields(photos{name,comments,likes})**

## Saving calls

If you want to save the content you have called through the Facebook API, you have to manually copy and paste the results into a separate document, like .txt. Note that you can only copy and paste one page of results at a time.

## Further information

More information on the Facebook API can be found on the Facebook developers' website:

<https://developers.facebook.com/docs/graph-api/using-graph-api>