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Thread: [What exactly is a pentest and how is it different from hacking?](#)

mokrawide - May 18, 2025, 10:04 am

What exactly is a pentest and how is it different from hacking?

Charlie Sheen - May 18, 2025, 10:05 am

It's all about intentions. A pentest would be to assist a website operator in finding vulnerabilities. Hacking would be for personal gain.

StinkButt420 - May 18, 2025, 10:54 am

From my understanding, it really depends on how many hairs you want to split. Someone could say "when conducting a penetration test, one of the goals outlined by the employer is to test network security strength, social engineering success rate, and application security".

So you would need to hack to trick the network, social engineer ("people hack") the receptionists/whoever answers the phone into giving up information (for example), and test their proprietary applications to see if they leak sensitive consumer information, or give away other types of sensitive information.

The entire point of penetration testing is to see how well your security controls/policies/education hold up against real world threat actors. These are outlined for you in the scope. If a part of the scope is that you're not allowed to DDoS company servers, it's off limits. And a lot of this is tested by "hacking". There's not a real difference in the methodology, only what's been defined as in-scope, and what's been defined as out-of-scope. So there's not a difference in the way it's said, just in the way it's performed.

Edit: And like @CharlieSheen said, intentions are the biggest difference. I forgot to include this.

Anyone feel free to correct me if I'm wrong.

linkinpork - May 18, 2025, 7:23 pm

(May 18, 2025 10:04 AM)mokrawide Wrote: [CITE](#) What exactly is a pentest and how is it different from hacking?

Hi!

A pentest follows [The Penetration Testing Life Cycle](#) and is done by a VAPT consultant or a VAPT company. [What is VAPT?](#)

"Hacking" is more of a general term for using loopholes in rules and tradition to make something better, faster, or work in a different way. Hence the terms "lifehacks" or "food hacks". Think "Trust me, I'm an engineer" but for computer science.

Cheers!

DrunkScottie - *May 22, 2025, 8:38 am*

The term is a "Misnomer", hacking something, and pentesting something are one in the same, but the intent behind the act is different. Hacking something typically is associated with illicit unauthorized access, while pentesting is typically used in a 'whitehat' context to describe authorized acts in an attempt to gauge something security.