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Reading an e-mail header: did SPF, DKIM and DMARC pass?

Delivery & Spam

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Reading an e-mail header: did SPF, DKIM and DMARC pass?

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Every e-mail carries, hidden, a **header**: a technical report of where it passed through and how it was judged. It is the most direct proof for answering “why did it land in spam?” and “is this message really from who it says?”. You need no networking knowledge: just know where it is and which three lines to read.

How to open the header

Where you read the e-mail	What to do
Gmail	Open the message, the three-dots menu, **Show original**. The top already summarises SPF, DKIM and DMARC with PASS or FAIL.
Webmail (Roundcube)	Open the message and look for **Headers** or, in the **More** menu, **View source**.
Classic Outlook	Open the message, **File**, **Properties**, the **Internet headers** box.
Apple Mail	**View** menu, **Message**, **All Headers** (or **Raw Source**).
Thunderbird	**View** menu, **Message Source**.

The lines that matter

Line	What it says
`Authentication-Results`	The result of the three checks, written by the server that received the message. It is the main line.

Line	What it says
`Return-Path` and `From`	The "technical" return address and the one shown as sender. If they belong to different domains, note which domain DMARC judges: the From one.
`Received`	Each server it passed through adds one. They are read from the bottom up: the bottom one is the first.
`Message-ID`	A unique identifier. It is what support asks for to find the message in the logs.

An example of what you look for, in the `Authentication-Results` line:

```
spf=pass smtp.mailfrom=asuaempresa.ao
dkim=pass header.d=asuaempresa.ao
dmarc=pass header.from=asuaempresa.ao
```

If the line is missing, the message did not pass through a server that writes them (rare at the big services). Always compare the domain shown in each check with the domain of the sender's address.

What each result means

Result	Meaning and what to do
pass	The check succeeded. Nothing to do.
fail or softfail (SPF)	The message came from a server the domain did not authorise. See **creating your SPF record**.
dkim=none	The message did not leave signed. Check the key in Email Deliverability: **the panel that audits your domain**.
dkim=fail	The signature does not match: the message was altered on the way, or the published key is another one.
dmarc=fail	For DMARC to pass, SPF or DKIM must pass **and** match the From domain. See **creating your DMARC record**.

The header contains IP addresses and e-mail addresses.
Do not post it on forums or social networks; send it only to whoever will read it, such as support. If you paste an excerpt, remove what is private.

The quickest test:

Send a message from your address to a Gmail of yours and open **Show original**. In two minutes you see whether SPF, DKIM and DMARC pass, with no third-party tools. The overview is in **SPF, DKIM and DMARC**.

NEED A HAND?

Want us to look at the header with you? Send us the complete header, without the body of the message.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **SPF, DKIM and DMARC: why your e-mail lands in spam** →
- **Email Deliverability: the panel that audits your domain** →
- **Creating your SPF record, step by step** →
- **Creating your DMARC record, and reading what it sends back** →

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