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Confirming a phone number at sign-up with an SMS code, step by step

WhatsApp & APIs

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Confirming a phone number at sign-up with an SMS code, step by step

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The short answer: at sign-up, ask for the number, send a code with `POST /v1/sms/otp` and only mark the number as confirmed when `POST /v1/sms/otp/{id}/verify` answers `valid: true`. That way you know the phone really belongs to the person signing up, not to a neighbour, a competitor or a bot. The number can be written with or without the country code, because the system can tell the country from the first digit: **841234567** goes to Mozambique and **923456789** to Angola. So **+258 84 123 4567** and **258841234567** are the same number as **841234567**.

The flow, step by step

1. **The form asks for the number** along with the other details. Before sending a code, check in your own system that the form is not being driven by a bot (see **fraud through your code form**).

2. **Your server sends the code** with `POST /v1/sms/otp` and the `Idempotency-Key` header (one value per sign-up attempt). A double click on “Create account” returns the same response and does not send two SMS.

3. **Keep the `id` in the sign-up session**, never in the browser. It is what ties the code to that sign-up.

4. **Show the code screen** with the masked number the response gives in `to` and a “Not your number? Fix it” link.

5. **Check what the customer typed** with `/verify`. With `valid: true`, save the number as confirmed and the time, which comes in `verified_at`.

6. **With `valid: false`**, say how many attempts are left (`attempts_left`) and, if the status is no longer `pending`, offer a new code.

The fields that matter at sign-up

Field	Suggested for sign-up	Limits
`number`	The number the customer typed, as it is	Mobile numbers in Mozambique and Angola
`length`	6, the default: easy to type, hard to guess	4 to 8 digits
`expires_in`	5 to 10 minutes: the customer is right there, waiting	1 to 60 minutes
`max_attempts`	3 to 5	1 to 10
`text`	Your service name, `{code}` and “Do not share it”	Up to 300 characters
`sender`	Your **Sender ID**, if you have one	Approved for the number's country

Create the account before or after the code?

Both work. If you create the account straight away, keep it in a “number not confirmed” state and hold back anything that depends on the phone. If you create it only after the code, keep the form data in the session until `valid: true`. What you should never do is treat the number as confirmed just because the SMS went out.

Answer the same way whether or not an account exists for that number.
A message such as “This number is already registered” tells anyone who your customers are. Prefer “If the number is valid, you will get a code” and deal with existing accounts after the code is confirmed.

Test the whole flow in the Sandbox
before opening sign-up to the public: the send response includes the code, so you can try the right code, a wrong one and an expired one without using credits.

RECOMMENDED

Want to confirm the number of everyone who signs up on your site or app? See Verification SMS.

See Verification SMS →

SEE ALSO

- **SMS verification API: we generate, send and check the code, and your system keeps only the id**
- **The code entry screen: the field, a countdown, attempts left and clear messages**
- **SMS fraud through your code form: how credits get burnt and how to stop it**
- **Changing a customer's phone number safely: confirm the new number before saving it**
- **Testing SMS verification in the Sandbox: the code comes back in the response**
- **What a Sender ID is: SMS that arrive with your company name instead of a number**

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