GENERAL

how to rekey a lock

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Introduction

When you move into a new home, lose a key, or simply want to improve security, rekeying a lock is often the most efficient and cost effective solution. Instead of replacing an entire lock, rekeying allows you to change the internal pin configuration so that a new key will operate the lock while the old key no longer works. This guide walks you through the process of rekeying a lock, from understanding the basics to mastering the step by step technique. Whether you're a homeowner, a tenant, or a DIY enthusiast, you'll find clear, actionable instructions that keep your property safe and your budget intact.

What Is Rekeying a Lock?

Rekeying, also known as lock rekeying, is the process of altering the internal pins or tumblers within a lock cylinder. By changing these pins, you effectively change the lock's "code," which means a different key will open the lock. The original key is rendered useless, providing an instant security upgrade. Rekeying is common for:

- Apartment buildings where multiple residents share a lock.
- New homeowners who want to replace old keys.
- Businesses that need to control access after staff changes.
- Individuals who have lost keys and want to avoid expensive lock replacement.

Why Choose Rekeying Over Replacement?

Replacing a lock can cost anywhere from $50 to $200, not including labor. Rekeying typically costs between $20 and $80, plus the cost of a new key. Here are the main advantages of rekeying:

1. Cost Savings – No need to buy new lock hardware.
2. Speed – Most locksmiths can rekey a lock in under 30 minutes.
3. Convenience – You can keep the same lock, saving on installation labor.
4. Environmental Benefit – Reduces waste by reusing existing lock components.

Before You Start: Gather Your Tools

Rekeying a lock is a mechanical task that requires a few specialized tools. Having the right tools on hand will make the process smoother and help you avoid damage to the lock or the door. Below is a list of the essential items:

- Rekeying Kit – Includes a set of pins (tumbler, driver, and spring pins) and a rekeying tool.
- Replacement Key Blank – A blank key that you will cut to match the new pin configuration.
- Key Cutting Machine – A manual or electric cutter to shape the new key.
- Pinning Tool – A small lever or screwdriver used to set pins inside the cylinder.
- Lubricant – A silicone-based lubricant to keep the lock running smoothly.
- Lock Pick Set (optional) – Useful if you need to open a lock without a key.
- Measuring Tape or Ruler – For measuring key cuts accurately.

If you're working with a commercial or high security lock, you may need additional specialized tools or a professional locksmith's equipment.

Understanding Lock Types and Pin Configurations

Locks come in various shapes and sizes, but most common residential locks are **pin tumbler locks**. These locks use a series of pins that must align at the shear line to allow the bolt to move. The pins are grouped into:

- Tumbler Pins – The larger pins that sit at the top of the cylinder.
- Driver Pins – The smaller pins that sit below the tumblers.
- Spring Pins – The pins that sit at the bottom, held in place by springs.

Rekeying involves changing the lengths of the driver pins to match the new key cuts. The tumbler pins and springs remain the same.

Step by Step Guide to Rekeying a Pin Tumbler Lock

Follow these steps carefully. The instructions are designed for standard residential locks, such as those found on bedroom doors, cabinets, and entryways.

Step 1: Remove the Lock from the Door

1. Use a screwdriver to remove the screws that hold the lock's faceplate to the door. 2. Gently pull the lock out of the door frame. 3. Take note of any screws or retaining clips that may be hidden behind the faceplate.

Step 2: Identify the Lock Cylinder

The cylinder is the cylindrical part of the lock that houses the pins. It can be a single cylinder (common in simple locks) or a double cylinder (where both sides have keys). For double cylinders, you'll need to rekey both sides.

Step 3: Remove the Cylinder from the Lock Body

1. Unscrew the cylinder's retaining screws. 2. Slide the cylinder out of the lock body. 3. If the lock has a keyway cover, remove it to expose the pins.

Step 4: Remove the Existing Pins

Use a pinning tool or a small flathead screwdriver to gently lift each pin out of the cylinder. Keep track of the pin order, as it will help you install the new pins correctly. Some rekeying kits come with a pin removal tool that makes this easier.

Step 5: Insert the New Driver Pins

Using the pinning tool, slide each new driver pin into the cylinder in the same order as the old pins. Make sure the pins are seated firmly but not over tightened. The new pins will be the ones that correspond to the cuts on your new key blank.

Step 6: Reinstall the Cylinder

Slide the cylinder back into the lock body. Align it carefully so that the pins line up correctly with the lock's internal mechanism. Tighten the retaining screws securely.

Step 7: Reinstall the Lock on the Door

Place the lock back onto the door frame, aligning it with the pre existing screw holes. Reattach the faceplate and secure all screws.

Step 8: Test the New Key

Insert the new key into the lock. Turn it to ensure the bolt moves smoothly. If the lock does not operate,

double check the pin order and the key cuts. Repeat the process if necessary.

Step 9: Lubricate the Lock

Apply a light coat of silicone lubricant to the keyway and internal components. This will reduce wear and ensure smooth operation for years to come.

Step 10: Secure and Label

Label the new key with the date and any relevant notes. Store the old key in a safe place or discard it if it is no longer needed. Consider adding a key tag for easy identification.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Rekeying is a precise task. Here are some pitfalls that can cause frustration or damage:

- Incorrect Pin Order – Mixing up the pin sequence will result in a lock that won't open.
- Over tightening the Cylinder – This can crack the lock body or damage the pins.
- Using a Wrong Pin Set – Each lock model requires a specific pin set; using the wrong set may not fit.
- Skipping Lubrication – A dry lock can seize over time.
- Forgetting to Test Both Sides on a double cylinder lock.

When to Call a Professional Locksmith

While many homeowners can rekey a lock themselves, certain situations warrant professional help:

- High security locks – Commercial or specialized locks often require specialized tools and expertise.
- Locked out of your property – If you don't have a key and can't access the lock, a locksmith can open it without damage.
- Complex lock mechanisms – Some locks have additional anti drill or anti pick features that need specialized knowledge.
- Time constrained situations – A professional can rekey multiple locks quickly, saving you time.

Rekeying Tips for Better Results

- Take Your Time – Rushing can lead to mistakes.
- Use a Key Chart – Many rekeying kits include a chart that matches pin lengths to key cuts.
- Keep a Clean Workspace – A tidy area helps you avoid losing small parts.
- Practice on a Spare Lock – If you're new, try rekeying a spare lock before working on the main one.
- Store Old Keys Safely – Keep them in a lockbox or shred them if they're no longer needed.

After Rekeying: Maintenance and Security Practices

Rekeying a lock is just one part of maintaining a secure home. Here are additional practices to keep your locks in top shape:

- Check for Loose Screws and tighten them regularly.
- Inspect the lock for Wear or Damage and replace if necessary.
- Use a Smart Lock or Keyless Entry for added convenience.
- Periodically Rekey if you suspect a key has been lost or compromised.
- Keep a Master Key System for multi lock buildings to reduce the number of keys you need to manage.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Can I rekey a deadbolt?

Most standard deadbolts are not rekeyable. However, many modern deadbolts include a rekeying feature that allows you to change the key. Check the manufacturer's instructions before attempting.

Will rekeying a lock affect its warranty?

Rekeying can void the lock's warranty if the lock is still under warranty. Always review the terms before proceeding.

How many keys can a rekeyed lock accept?

Typically, a rekeyed lock accepts only one key that matches the new pin configuration. However, you can create duplicate keys if you need multiple copies.

Is it possible to rekey a lock without removing the cylinder?

Some locks have a **"push in"** rekeying method that allows you to change pins without fully removing the cylinder. This is less common and requires a special rekeying tool.

What is the difference between rekeying and reassembling a lock?

Rekeying changes the internal pin configuration to match a new key. Reassembling simply puts the lock back together after disassembly, without changing the pins.

Conclusion

Rekeying a lock is a practical, cost effective way to enhance security, replace lost keys, and maintain control over your property

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