

How to Choose a Good Password

Most of the time, people find it difficult to choose a good password. Here are some tips for you to choose a good password.

- Choose a password that is at least six characters long. This should be long enough to discourage a brute-force attack. Currently, the maximum password length on many Unix systems is eight characters, but if you want to add a few more characters to make it easier to remember, go ahead. Just bear in mind that anything after the eighth character will be ignored (so ``abnormalbrain" is the same as ``abnormal").
- In general, a good password will have a mix of lower- and upper-case characters, numbers, and punctuation marks, and should be at least 6 characters long. Unfortunately, passwords like this are often hard to remember and result in people writing them down. Do not write your passwords down!
- *The license plate rule:* take a phrase and try to squeeze it into eight characters, as if you wanted to put it on a vanity license plate. For example: you can use something like: "Now I use short sentences" and make "NiuS3s" out of it.
- Put a punctuation mark in the middle of a word, e.g., ``vege%tarian".
- Think of an uncommon phrase, and take the first, second or last letter of each word. ``You can't always get what you want" would yield ``ycagwyw". Throw in a capital letter and a punctuation mark or a number or two, and you can end up with ``yCag5wyw".
- Deliberately misspelling one or more words can make your password harder to crack. (For example; "Protect" --> "Portcet").

Using several of the techniques given above, you can create a secure password. And a good password would also be something which no-one would ever think of, except you.

What NOT to Choose as Password

Passwords which crackers would easily handle:

- Words in *any* dictionary.
- Your user name.
- Your real name.
- Your spouse's name.
- Anyone's name (crackers don't necessarily know that your aunt's middle name is Agnes, but it's easy enough to get a list of 100,000 names and try each one).
- Any word in any "cracking dictionary." There are lists of words that crackers use to try to crack passwords: passwords that a lot of people use. Some of these lists include: Abbreviations, Asteroids, Biology, Cartoons, Character Patterns, Machine names, famous names, female names, Bible, male names, Movies, Myths-legends, Number Patterns, Short Phrases, Places, Science Fiction, Shakespeare, Songs, Sports, Surnames
- Any of the above, with a single character before or after it ("dinner", "happy1").
- Any of the above, capitalized ("cat" --> "Cat").
- We used to tell people that taking a word and substituting some characters (a 0 (zero) for an o, or a 1 for an l) made a good password. This is no longer the case. New crackers have the capability to crack things like this, in certain situations.
- Words like "foobar", "xyzy" and "qwerty" are still just plain words. They are also popular passwords, and the crack programs look for them. So you should avoid them.