

Secure passwords

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With the rapid burgeoning of national and international networks, the question of system security has become one of growing importance. High speed inter-machine communication and even higher speed computational processors have made the threats of system "crackers," data theft, data corruption very real.

—Daniel V. Klein, *Foiling the Cracker: A Survey of, and Improvements to, Password Security*, an article sponsored in part by the U.S. Department of Defense

All computer accounts are potential points of entry into computer systems. Unauthorized persons who obtain access to an account can use the account and system resources to gain access to other computer accounts or they can use the stolen account to launch password attacks on remote systems through the UBC campus network. Regardless of whether private files exist on an account, all users are responsible for ensuring the security of their IDs.

Secure passwords minimize the potential for abuse of our systems. A password is considered weak if it has any of the following characteristics:

- less than six characters
- a person's name (i.e. your name, a relative's or an associate's name)

- any string of characters that might be associated with you (e.g. your car's license plate number, your telephone number, your postal code, your pet's name)
- a word that can be found in any dictionary (e.g. English, French, Spanish, etc.)
- the reverse spelling of any of the above

If a password falls into any of these categories, it should be changed immediately.

It is acceptable to make up a password based on multiple items from this section, provided these items are intermixed with special characters, or misspellings which cannot be easily derived.

The primary defense against unauthorized use of an account is a password. Protect yourself and others by choosing a defensive password that is neither a name nor a dictionary word.

For more information on password security, see the January 1993 issue of *Campus Computing and Communications* or contact Satnam Purewal at 822-4820 (e-mail to satnam.purewal@ubc.ca). □