

Effective Passwords



Whether you have a computer account at work, access your bank account(s) online, or have a personal email account – you have at least one password that you have to remember. And most of us have numerous personal accounts that require passwords – email accounts, social networking sites, online shopping sites, and so on.

Computer security people have been advising us for decades to create a separate password for each account that we have. It used to be tough enough to remember what was set as a password where, when we only had a couple of accounts. Now-a-days, I know that *my* account password total is well over a hundred. (I'll blame it on all those recipes sites that allow me to create an account and store recipes. ~grin~)

If we create just one password, then once someone is able to learn the password they have access to all of your accounts. If we *do* create individual passwords but write all those passwords down or store them in a list on the computer, that completely defeats the purpose of having individual passwords (or passwords at all). But if we don't have all the passwords written down, it becomes extremely frustrating trying to get into some accounts especially if they aren't used very often.

So how do we keep all those passwords straight and *still* have effective passwords that keep out unauthorized people?

After a few years of pondering the problem and trying different concepts, I finally came up with an idea that appears to cover all the security and memory aspects. Create a password "base" and add on characters to represent each particular site.

The Password Base

First – understand that "strong" passwords are considered to contain a combination of upper case letters, lower case letters, numbers, and special characters (such as an exclamation mark, an open paren, or a close paren). Some systems on which we have personal accounts will not allow special characters, so the base we are creating in these steps will not contain any special characters.

Second – a number of systems now-a-days require a minimum of 8 characters for the password. A very few systems allow only 8 characters maximum, but those are mostly gone these days as computer systems have had to improve their ability to allow stronger passwords.

To create your password base, think of a word with 5 or 6 characters and add one or more numbers at the beginning and/or the end to total 6 or 7 characters total. For now,

keep all letters in lower case. For example – if you like horses, your password base might be horses1.

Or for an even stronger password, think of a phrase of 5 to 7 words and use the first letters of the words to create your base. If any of the words can be replaced by a number, replace the letter representing the word with the number – such as replacing the words “for” or “four” with the number 4; or replacing the words “to”, “too”, or “two” with the number 2. You can also consider replacing an “i” or an “l” with the number 1 or replacing an “e” with the number 3. Add numbers on to the beginning and/or end for a total of 6 or 7 characters. For example – if you like horses, your phrase might be “I like to ride competition horses”. The password base might then be il2rch.

Not only are phrase passwords harder for “the bad guys” to crack than passwords built on an actual word, but they are typically easier to remember. (Think back to school when we were given a word or a phrase as a memory device for certain things – like HOMES to remember the names of the Great Lakes; or “Every Good Boy Does Fine” for the lines of the treble musical staff.)

You can also use the phrase creation method to create an affirmation password. For more on how to do that, read our Affirmation Passwords article.

This password base NEVER gets written down and does not get stored in any file on your computer.

Individual Site Portion

After you have your password base created, next you need to determine one or more letters to represent each site. This is the portion that you will actually write down. Why does this portion get written down? Because it is only a couple characters out of the entire password. And this is the portion that you might have problems remembering. The list you make will be no good unless someone knows your password base.

To store your individual account “codes”, open a blank file. I recommend using Notepad for this, but you could use Word, Excel, or any comparable program.

Type in the characters you will use to designate this individual site. Enter enough characters to make your entire password 8 characters or more. For now, keep all letters in lower case. If the site’s computer system allows special characters, you can include special characters in the code for this site. Hit the space bar a few times, and specify the name of the site.

For example – if you have a bank account with the Imagination International Bank, you might enter the following:

iib Imagination International

Or if you have a Facebook account and a MySpace account, the entries might be as follows:

fb Facebook
ms MySpace

Save the file with a name like “Codes”, “Extensions”, “Designations”, or “Sites”. Name it something that will help you find the file when you need to use a code that you don’t remember. Do not use your password base as the file’s name. Do not use the names “password” or “pwd” or “passwd” to name this file. And do not place the file in a folder with any of those names. This will help keep your code list even more secure and safe.

The code for each site is then added on to either the beginning or the end of the password base, whichever is easier for you to do when you are typing in passwords. Adding these codes to the example password bases above would give us the following passwords:

horses1iib
horses1fb
horses1ms

OR

iibhorses1
fbhorses1
mshorses1

OR

il2rchiib
il2rchfb
il2rchms

OR

iibil2rch
fbil2rch
msil2rch

The Final Touch

One last final touch needs to be added before you begin using your new password. Near the beginning it was mentioned that strong passwords include a combination of upper case letters and lower case letters. So far, the creation steps have all been done in lower case letters to help decrease confusion.

Decide at least one letter to change to an upper case letter. You can decide to make the first letter upper case. Or make the entire individual account code upper case. Or make all the letters in the base password upper case.

Final password examples using the horses1iib password from above:

Horses1iib

OR

horses1IIB

OR

HORSES1iib

Work Passwords

Remember to NEVER use the same password or password base for your work accounts that you use for any of your personal accounts.

Work passwords benefit greatly from being set up as affirmation passwords. After all, you're entering the password at least once a day, 5 days or more a week. That's a lot of mental time that could be used to improve whatever aspect you are interested in.

May your passwords be easier to remember and provide additional joy to your life.

About The Author

Marie Rice is the founder and editor of PartOfTheWhole.com - wellness for body, mind, and spirit. She enjoys helping others reach their goals. When she's not online, Marie's spending time with her family, gardening, doing crafts, or **most likely** – reading a book!

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