

Creating Complex Passwords That Are Easy To Remember

By

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We all know that we need to create complex passwords and many MSU systems require them, but it is easy for the passwords to be so complex that it is almost impossible to remember them. This leads to creative solutions like sticky notes, using the same password repeatedly and putting the password on a piece of paper under your keyboard.

So how can you create a password that is complicated enough to deter hackers while being able to remember it? I have shared the following trick for creating complex passwords with a number a folks over the years and most find it helps meet complexity requirements while still being usable.

Step 1: Come up with a base word

Pick any common thing that's easy to remember such as a city you used to live in, your elementary school name or childhood pet's name. You will use this to establish the base of your password and satisfy the required criteria for a strong password. You want to choose a base word that will not be easy for someone to guess. This means do not use the name of your spouse, children, current pet or favorite sports team as that will likely be very easy for someone who knows or checks out your Facebook page you to guess. Use something easy for you to remember, but is not commonly shared like a childhood pet, elementary school or favorite high school teacher.

Many MSU passwords require at least one special character and one number. It is also a good idea to use at least one capital letter. For example, you can use the childhood pet name *petunia* as your base word. Now substitute a few characters to meet the capital, special character and number needs. In this example I will capitalize the first letter, replace *a* with an @ and *i* with a 1 giving us *Petun1@*.

Step 2: Add more characters to the base word

Pick some additional random characters to add to the base word. You can choose as many as you want and can use special characters, capitalization and numbers if you want. Adding at least four characters makes sense but more increases the complexity. In our example I will choose the six characters *dpwsjv* to make the entire password: *Petun1@dpwsjv*.

Step 3: Store your password without worry

Write down the additional characters - *dpwsjv* in my example - and place the paper where you can easily find it. Though it is tough to guess the password from this info, do not leave it in plain sight. By never telling anyone your base word or how you add special characters, it will be tough for anyone to figure out your password from the note. If you fear forgetting the base word you could write a hint such as *petdpwsjv* or *Pet1@dpwsjv* though it is most secure to only write the additional characters.

Using this process your complex password is pretty secure even if someone sees your reminder note. The best part is that each time you need to choose a new password, just change the additional characters. The example I gave is 13 characters but you could easily make the password longer by adding more characters to the base word or choosing a longer base word (i.e., city and state where you went to kindergarten).