

Password Guidelines:

Why Should I Care about Password Security?

Your login name and password give you access to Ferris State University's computing services. Every time you connect, you must prove you're who you say you are. Should someone else guess or steal your password, he or she can masquerade as you, which means the intruder would then have access to your files, your e-mail, and more. This intruder will have the power to modify or destroy your files, to send electronic mail threats in your name, or to subscribe to unwanted services for which you'd have to pay. In short, an insecure password can easily wreak havoc in your life.

How Are Passwords Stolen?

Security experts at Carnegie Mellon University estimate that more than a million passwords have already been stolen on the Internet. One has to ask why this happens so frequently. Part of the answer is that hackers have many tools, such as dictionary programs and sniffers, to assist them. A hacker will launch a dictionary attack by passing every word in a dictionary (which can contain foreign languages as well as the entire English language) to a login program in the hope that it will eventually match the correct password.

Passwords are about identity. We tend to reveal ourselves in our passwords. We often choose the name or birth date of a loved one; we use our address, telephone number, or Social Security number; we use the name of a favorite artist, actor, or author. Or we are wise enough to avoid any personal references but choose a word that is a dictionary word, a name or word spelled backward, or an alphabet or keyboard sequence. Just because we think a foreign word is obscure doesn't mean that it isn't in a dictionary somewhere. The point is that all of these types of words are easily guessed, which makes the job of password cracking straightforward.

What do I need to know about our Novell Network passwords?

All passwords for the CASNW1 server are to be at least 5 characters long. Passwords expire every 120 days. When you get notification by the system that your password has expired, you will need to change it within three notifications or your account will be locked. If you forget your password, you will need to call the help desk, x2075.

What Are Some Strategies for Choosing a Good Password?

1. Use lines from a childhood verse:
Verse Line: Yankee Doodle went to town
Password: YDwto#town
2. City Expression: Chicago is my kind of town
Password: CimYKot
3. Foods disliked during childhood:
Food: rice and raisin pudding
Password: ricNraiPudng
4. Transformation techniques:
Technique: Transliteration

Illustrative Expression: photographic
Password: foTOgrafik

5. Technique: Interweaving of characters in successive words
Illustrative Expression: iron horse
Password: ihrOrnSe
6. Technique: Substitution of antonyms
Illustrative Expression: stoplight
Password: starTdark

Note: Obviously, you shouldn't use any of the passwords used as examples in this guide. Treat these examples as guidelines only.

How Can I Avoid a Bad Password?

Avoid passwords that would be easy for anyone to guess.

Don't use:

- Dictionary words (mackerel, dandelion, millionaire).
- Foreign words (octobre, gesundheit, sayonara).
- Simple transformations of words (tiny8, 7eleven, dude!).
- Names, doubled names, first name and last initial (mabell, kittykitty, marissab).
- An alphabet sequence (lmnop) or a keyboard sequence (ghjkl;).
- Words that have the vowels removed (sbtrctn, cntrIntllgnc).
- Phone numbers.
- Numbers substituted for letters, like a zero instead of the letter O or a number 1 in place of the letter l.

How Often Should I Change My Password?

It is time to change your password if:

- Your password doesn't meet the criteria set out in the rules and strategies listed above.
- You have told your password to anyone else.
- You have written your password down anywhere.
- You have visited another city or campus and logged on to a system there.