BASS BERRY + SIMS

Secure Password Creation Suggestions

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The Secret Combo: In his book The Secret to Cybersecurity, former FBI Supervisory Special Agent Scott Augenbaum recommends selecting a "top secret combo" of your favorite number and character combination known only to you (for instance, **2@**) that will appear at the beginning and end of each password. Choosing a number and a special symbol is preferable so you will have satisfied those requirements of certain sites. Depending on personal preference, you can keep the order of the two characters at the beginning and end, reverse the characters at the end, or be daring and insert them within the password characters. Conversely, you might streamline this method by including your secret combo characters only once (not necessarily at the beginning).

The Mnemonic Middle: Agent Augenbaum echoes the often suggested method of having the middle password characters correspond with the first letter of each word in a phrase you make up, can easily recall, and is specific to the site. For example, associating "I enjoy contributing to the American Heart Association" with your AHA login password is converted to **iecttaha**. When coupled with the secret combo, the password becomes **2@iecttaha2@**.

Sly Substitutions: In line with other security professionals, Agent Augenbaum likewise suggests that additional complexity can be introduced to your password by substituting a "1" for an "I". You can fashion your own sly substitutions, such as "4" in place of "for", "c" in place of "see", the numeral "2" for the word "to", etc.

Capping It Off: One required password creation option is to include both small and capital letters. Do so, but not necessarily for the first word in your password phrase. Demonstrate your foresight by capitalizing the letter corresponding to final word in your phrase (**2@iecttahA2@**). Exhibit your ingenuity by capitalizing both the first and last letters (**2@IecttahA2@**). Or show off your eclectic nature by capitalizing some random word in your phrase (**2@iecttaHa2@**).

Stunning Reversal: Another option to increase the complexity of your password without compromising its simplicity is to reverse the phrase portion of your password (**2@ahattcei2@**). Reversing only the secret combo at the end of the password (**2@iecttaha@2**) is another variation of this password creation option.

Pass On the Phrase: All the above notwithstanding, the simplicity of using a substitute password phrase can break down if you do not use a single password for a password manager, or if you access multiple sites not compatible with a password manager. The more passwords you need to remember, the more password phrases you need to recall. Keeping with the goals of site-specificity, complexity and easy recollection, one alternative option is to pair your top secret combo with a variation of the name of the site sponsor rather than your own made up phrase. For example, your Uber Eats password could be **2@ubereats2@**. Again, additional complexity may be introduced by using any one or more of the substitution, capitalization, and character reversal options above. Your Amazon password might be **2@noZama@2**. If faced with a site with eight-character password limitations, you need use only the first (or last) four characters (forward or backward) of the site sponsor (**2@Zama@2**).

The Times They Are a-Changin': Required interval password changes are customary, and may add a level of security to your site logins. However, they can be challenging to password recall. How long entities will continue to require periodic password changes is unknown, but until the practice changes a fairly simple way to comply without scrapping your existing passwords is to incorporate an update identifier in your password convention. For example, the Amazon password above of **2@Zama@2** could become **2@Zamav1@2** (Amazon version 1) and later changed to **2@Zamav2@2** (Amazon version 2).

This content was prepared as part of our five-part series Privacy Perils: Refresher Course in Good Password Hygiene, Part 4.