

## Effective Passwords

*This is the first in a three-part series on modern sign-in security. This month: how to create better passwords. Next issue: passkeys. September issue: where to store them.*

### Creating Your Own Passwords

When I help folks set up a new online account – for example, a furniture store named Lou’sStools.com<sup>1</sup> – their brain sometime freezes as they try to craft a new password.<sup>2</sup> The conversation might go like this:

“Let’s see... I usually use my dog’s name plus a sprinkle of #’s or &’s and a couple of %’s, and the year we were married.”

The result is **Curly!\$\*\*!1979**. Other than being difficult to remember and type, it also means their golden doodle, Curly, can never change his/her/its name. More importantly, personal details like pet names, birthdays, or anniversaries can be guessed or found online.

Some folks don’t own a password dog and, instead, craft clever passwords. For example, **DewUL0V3Me?** for an online dating service.

I find these kinds of passwords hard to think up. They require finger gymnastics to enter and are prone to mistyping. Is that an uppercase “o” or a zero? Enter it wrong five times and you could be locked out of the website and never get to order your stools – or your date. Pity.

A good password doesn’t have to be complicated – it has to be long, unique, and hard to guess. A simple trick is to combine two unrelated words, separate them with a symbol, and add a number. For example: **Flannel-puck72**. It’s fourteen characters are easy to type but difficult for attackers to guess.

The words “flannel” and “puck” are unlikely word mates. The special character, a hyphen, is on the second row of your keyboard (no need to press SHIFT). Tack on a two-digit number that has no significance. Done.

The combinations are endless, which is why these are secure passwords. **Plaid-piano12**, or **crusty=Harmonica65** (the = sign is next to the hyphen). **Hasty-petunia8**. You get the idea?

### Computer-Suggested Passwords

Mac computers and third-party password managers, like 1Password or Google Password Manager, may offer to create a strong password for you. These computer-generated passwords are extremely strong (and long), but because they’re harder to type or remember, they work best when stored in a password manager.

We’ll discuss password managers in September.

If you need help with your computer, just click “Tech Help” at the bottom of our website’s home page or request help from our tech team at:

<https://engage.cmaprinceton.org/tech-help>.



*In a dramatic move, a website reacts after Steve mistypes his password five times.*

<sup>1</sup> I don't think this website exists, but it's a clever name.

<sup>2</sup> The most important rule: never use the same password for more than one account.