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USDA eAuthentication

Tips on Creating a Strong Password

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USDA

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Overview

The key to making your USDA eAuthentication account as secure as possible is creating the strongest possible password while making it easy to remember. The following training provides guidelines that will help you do this.

Overview: Password Rules

To help protect your eAuthentication account, we have created the following rules that enforce password security. The password rules are:

- Contains 12-24 characters, including at least one of each of the following:
  - uppercase letter
  - lowercase letter
  - a number
  - one or more of the following special characters

! # $ % = + : ; , ? ~ * -

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Overview: Password Restrictions

Password Restrictions include:

- Do not use any spaces or special characters not listed above
- Dictionary words may not be used in passwords
- The previous 24 passwords may not be reused
- Profile Information: Mother's Maiden Name, Date of Birth, PIN, Your Name, Address, Phone Number, Email, etc.

Note: Your password will expire after every 60 days.

Password Tips

The following tips will help you in developing strong passwords for the eAuthentication system:

- Make your password lengthy
  - Your password must be a minimum of 12 characters; however, the longer you make the password, the harder it will be for someone to guess. Therefore, try to make your password more than 12 characters long.
- Avoid repeated characters or common character sequences
  - Do not use more than 1-2 letters or numbers together (for example “111111” or “aaaaaaa.”
  - Avoid common sequences, such as “qwerty” and “12345.” These sequences are too easily guessed.

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Password Tips (cont.)

- Avoid use of dictionary words of any language
  - Many hackers use dictionary words of many mainstream languages, including slang, to guess passwords. If you use these in your password, it makes it easier to guess by a hacker.
- Make your password difficult to guess or research
  - One technique is to pick a favorite quote, song lyric or phrase and use the first character from each word to build a password. This will help you select a nonsense password that can't be compared to any known dictionary word and should be unrelated to any identity details known or researchable by you.
  - Please review our sample passwords section for examples.

Password Tips (cont.)

- Avoid obvious character substitutions
  - Replacing the letter “i” with 1 or the letter “o” with 0 does little to prevent a password guessing attack.
- Do not use the same password in all systems
  - If one of the online systems or computers you use is compromised, then the attacker could potentially have access to all of your systems. Make sure you use a distinctly different password for all of your systems.

Sample Passwords

By using the method of creating a password from a long sentence or phrase, you can develop passwords that are difficult for attackers to crack.

Steps	Password
Choose a sentence	The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog's back.
Select the first letter of each word	tqbfjotldb
Add at least 1 number and special character	tqbf*1jotldb7
Change some of the letters to upper case	TqbF*1jotlDb7
Verify that your password meets our requirements	TqbF*1jotlDb7 <-- Yes, it does!

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Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
Pick a password you will remember	Write your password down
Change your password on a regular basis (every 60 days for eAuthentication)	Use any personal attributes found in your eAuthentication profile
Use a mix of upper and lowercase characters, as well as numbers and special characters	Use a word contained in English or a foreign language dictionary
Use a password that you can type quickly without having to look at your keyboard	Share your password with anyone, including spouses and family members
Verify that your password meets our requirements	Use sample passwords given on various websites, including ours

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Other References

For more information about creating stronger passwords and protecting your identity, type the following keywords into your favorite internet search engine:

- Creating a strong password
- Password security
- Protecting personally identifiable information

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