2.4 READING

All about passwords • antonyms • nouns and verbs • the temperature

1 Read the text quickly and choose the best title.

1 How to create a secure and easy-to-remember password
2 How to remember all your passwords
3 How to guess someone's password

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We all know the basic rules for choosing good passwords and keeping them secret. Rule number one: use numbers, symbols and a good mix of letters – upper case (A, B, C) and lower case (a, b, c). Rule number two: use a different password for each of the devices you use or for each website you visit. Rule number three: change your passwords regularly. Rule number four: never write your passwords down. These rules sound easy to follow, right?

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Well, not really. The rules say that a secure password should look something like this: 'N0r@5%_fpO&47d1nk'. Do you think you can remember that? Don't forget you should have several different ones, you shouldn't write them down AND you have to change them every few weeks. Does this sound like an impossible task? Well, for most people, it is. So what do most of us do?

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Recently, researchers had a chance to analyse secret information about passwords. They found that many of us totally ignore the experts' advice and choose simple, easy to remember and extremely insecure passwords. Data shows that one out of every ten people uses '1234' as the pin number for their bank cards, and that the passwords 'welcome', '123456', 'ninja' and of course 'password', are some of the most popular choices.

Even governments choose terrible passwords. It seems hard to believe, but in the 1980s, the American government actually used the 'secret code' '00000000' to unlock its nuclear missiles.

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So how can we make our passwords secure and memorable*? Well, first, the length of your password is important. For a hacker with a computer that can make 1000 guesses per second, a lower case, 5-letter password like 'ftmps' takes only around 3hrs and 45 minutes to crack*. A similar password with 20 letters takes a little longer – around 6.5 thousand trillion centuries*!

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Hackers are very good at guessing when we choose symbols and numbers instead of letters. For example, the password 'M@nch3st3r' seems like a good one, but the code is actually very simple – first letter = upper case, @ = a, 3 = E. It is easy for hackers to program their computers to look out for these kinds of codes. Because the length of the password is so important, a group of words written in lower case, e.g. 'help cheese monkey swimming' is much more secure than something like 'M@nch3st3r', and probably a bit easier to remember (think of a monkey – it is shouting for help and swimming towards some cheese!).

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One day, we probably won't have to worry about all this because we won't need passwords. Some laptop computers already have fingerprint* readers. Recently, scientists in the US have designed a prototype ring for your finger that sends electricity through your skin to a touch screen to tell computers and phones who you are. For now though, we still need passwords, and if you want one that is secure and memorable, the best advice is to make it looooooooo ooooooooooooooooooooooooong.

GLOSSARY

memorable *(adj)* – easy to remember
crack a code or a password *(v)* – work it out or solve it
century *(n)* – 100 years
fingerprint *(n)* – a mark made by the pattern of the skin on the end of your fingers