

# Information systems security

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# Chapter 1

## Authentication techniques protocols, and architectures

Authentication refers to the process of verifying the identity of an entity (whether it's a human, software component, or hardware element) before granting access to resources in a system. Authentication can be applied to various type of "actors", such as:

- **Human being**
- **software component**
- **Hardware element**

### Authentication vs Authorization

- **Authentication (authC/authN)**: established the identity of an entity.
- **Authorization (authZ)**: determines where a authenticated entity has permission to access.

### 1.1 Authentication factors

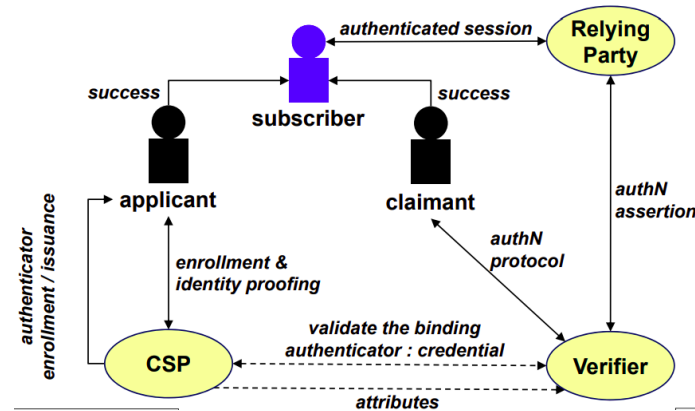
Authentication can be based on 3 primary factors:

- **Knowledge**: Information that only the user knows and can provides as proof of their identity.
- **Ownership**: Physical object or device that only the user has access to.
- **Inherence**: This factor relies on unique biological traits of the user (e.g fingerprint).

**N.B.** Authentication can be applied not just to human user, but also to processes and devices.

#### 1.1.1 Risks

- **Knowledge:**
  - Storage → if passwords are stored improperly, they are vulnerable to theft.
  - Demonstration → user might inadvertently reveal their password through social engineering.
  - Transmission → if passwords are sent over unsecured channel, they can be intercepted by attackers.
- **Ownership:**
  - Authentication theft
  - Cloning
  - Unauthorized usage
- **Inherence:**
  - Counterfeiting → biometric data can be spoofed or replicated by attackers using sophisticated techniques.
  - Privacy → the use of biometric data raises the risk of biometric information being exposed.
  - Irreversibility → biometric traits cannot be replaced if compromised.



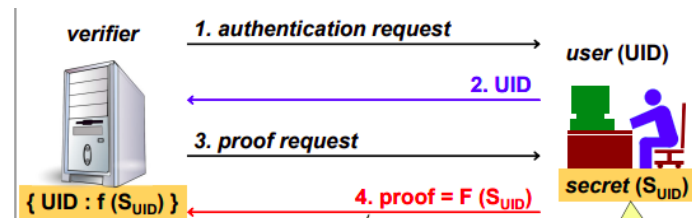
## 1.2 Digital Authentication model (NIST SP800.63B)

### Entities:

- **Subscriber:** applicant who has successfully completed identity proofing.
- **Applicant:** an individual applying to establish a digital identity.
- **Claimant:** the user trying to prove their identity to access a system or service.
- **Relying Party:** will request/receive an authN assertion from the verifier to assess user identity (and attributes).
- **Verifier:** validates the user's credential during each authentication event.
- **CSP:**
  - Verifies the applicant's identity during the initial enrollment process.
  - Issue a credential and binds it to an authenticator for the user.

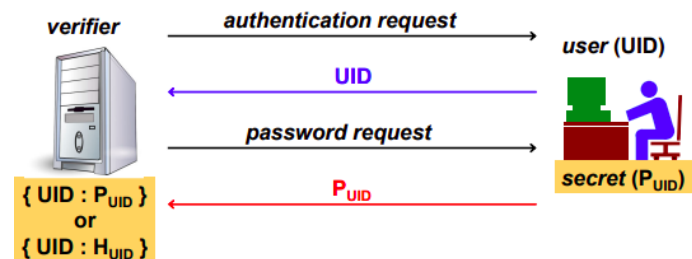
## 1.3 Generic authentication protocol

1. The user initiates an authentication request by sending their UID.
2. The user generates a proof based on their secret, using a secure function  $F(S_{UID})$ , and send this proof to the verifier.
3. The verifier checks if the received proof matches the stored representation of the secret.
4. If it matches, the user is successfully authenticated.



## 1.4 Password base authentication

1. The user sends their UID and  $P_{UID}$  (= Password) to the verifier.
2. The server verifies the proof:
  - If password are stored in cleartext, it directly compares the proof with the stored password.
  - If password are stored in hashes, it hashes the proof and compares it to the store hash  $H_{UID}$ .



**Problems of reusable Passwords**

- **PWD Sniffing** (attackers intercept password during transmission)
- **PWD Database attack** (if DB contains plaintext or obfuscated PWD)
- **PWD Guessing** (very dangerous if it can be done offline, e.g against a list of PWD hashes)
- **PWD Enumeration** (PWD brute force attack)
  - If PWD is limited in length and/or character type.
  - If authN protocol does not block repeated failures.
- **PWD Duplications** (using the same PWD for one service against another one, due to user PWD reuse)
- **Cryptographic Aging** (as computing power grows, older cryptographic methods become vulnerable to new attacks)
- **PWD capture via server spoofing and phishing** (attackers deceive user into giving away their PWD by pretending to be legitimate service)

**Password best practices**

Suggestion to reduce password risks:

- Use alphabetical characters (upper case + lower case), digits and special characters
- Make passwords long (at least 8 character)
- Never use dictionary words
- Change password regularly, but not too frequently
- Do not reuse passwords across different services

**Password storage**

- **Server Side:**
  - Passwords should never be stored in cleartext.
  - Encrypted passwords aren't ideal since the server would need to know the encryption key.
  - Better to store a password digest (hashed password), though vulnerable to dictionary attacks.
  - Rainbow tables can speed up these attacks, so it's important to add a "salt" (random variation) to each password.
- **Client-side:**
  - Ideally, passwords are memorized by the user, but having many passwords makes this difficult.
  - People may resort to writing them down or using simple passwords, which is risky.
  - Using a password manager or encrypted file is a safer alternative.

**1.5 The "dictionary" attack**

- **Hypothesis:** The attacker knows the hash algorithm and the hashed password values.
- **Pre-computation:** For each word in a dictionary, compute and store its hash  $store(DB, Word, hash(Word))$
- **Attack process:**
  - Let  $HP$  (=hash password) to be the hash of an unknown password.
  - Lookup  $HP$  in the precomputed dictionary ( $DB$ ) to find a matching password.
  - If found, output the password; if not, indicate it's "not in dictionary".

**1.6 Rainbow Table attack**

Rainbow Table is a **space-time trade-off technique** that reduces storage needs for exhaustive hash tables, making certain brute-force attacks feasible within limited space. It uses a reduction function  $r : h \rightarrow p$  (which is NOT  $h^{-1}$ ) to generate chains of hashes.

**Example:**

- For a 12-digit password, an exhaustive hash table would require  $10^{12} \text{rows}(P_i : HP_i)$
- rainbow =  $10^9$  rows, each representing 1000 possible passwords.

#### Attack

```
for (k=HP, n=0; n<1000; n++)
  ■ p = r(k)
  ■ if lookup( DB, x, p ) then exit ( "chain found, rooted at x" )
  ■ k = h(p)
exit ( "HP is not in any chain of mine" )
```

## 1.7 Salting Passwords: A Defense Against Dictionary and Rainbow Table Attacks

**Salting passwords** is a security technique used to protect stored passwords from dictionary attacks and rainbow table attacks. A salt is a unique, random string added to each password before hashing. This ensures that even if two users have the same password, their hashes will be different due to the unique salt.

#### Steps for each user (UID):

- Generate or ask for the user's password.
- Create a unique, random salt for each user.
- Compute the salted hash:  $SHP = \text{hash}(\text{password} \parallel \text{salt})$
- Store the triplet  $\{UID, SHP, \text{salt}\}$

#### Password Verification with Salt

- **Claimant:** Provides their user ID (UID) and password (PWD).
- **verifier:**
  - Uses the UID to find the stored salted hash (SHP) and salt.
  - Computes  $SHP' = \text{hash}(PWD \parallel \text{salt})$ .

#### The LinkedIn attack

In 2012, LinkedIn was breached, exposing 6.5 million unsalted SHA-1 password hashes. The lack of salting allowed attackers to crack at least 236,578 passwords through crowdsourced efforts before restrictions halted the exposure.

## 1.8 Strong authentication definitions

The concept of strong authentication (authN) is crucial in ensuring secure identity verification, but it has never been formally defined with a universal definition. Various definitions exist depending on the context, such as the European Central Bank (ECB) and PCI-DSS.

#### ECB definition

The ECB defines strong authentication as a process that involves at least two independent elements from **knowledge** (e.g. password), **ownership** (e.g. smartcard), and **inherence** (e.g. biometrics). The key requirement is that these elements must be mutually independent, so compromising one should not affect the others. Furthermore, at least one element should be **non-reusable** or **non-replicable** (except for inherence), with the entire process safeguarding the confidentiality of the authentication data.

#### PCI-DSS Definition

PCI-DSS mandates **multi-factor authentication (MFA)** for access to cardholder data, particularly for administrators and remote access from untrusted networks. Since version 3.2, MFA has become compulsory for remote access, and the use of the same factor twice (e.g., two passwords) does not qualify as MFA.

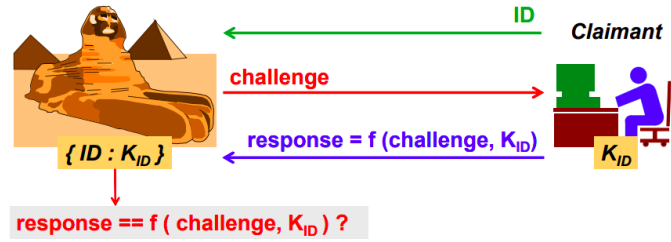
## 1.9 Challenge-Response Authentication (CRA)

Challenge-response authentication (CRA) is a widely used technique where a challenge is issued, and the claimant responds by solving it with a secret (shared or private). The challenge must be **non-repeatable** (usually a random nonce) to avoid replay attacks. The function used to compute the response must be **non-invertible**, otherwise, a listener can record the traffic and easily find the shared secret:

$$\text{if } (\exists f^{-1}) \text{ then } K_c = f^{-1}(\text{response}, \text{challenge})$$

### 1.9.1 Symmetric CRA

Symmetric CRA involves a shared secret (like a password or key) between the claimant and verifier. This method is fast, often utilizing hash functions (e.g., SHA1, SHA2, SHA3).



### 1.9.2 Mutual symmetric CRA

Mutual symmetric CRA requires both parties to authenticate each other. However, it's an old protocol so it has many vulnerabilities.