Chapter 3

User Authentication

Course Instructor: Dr. Nausheen Shoaib

Risk Assessment for User Authentication

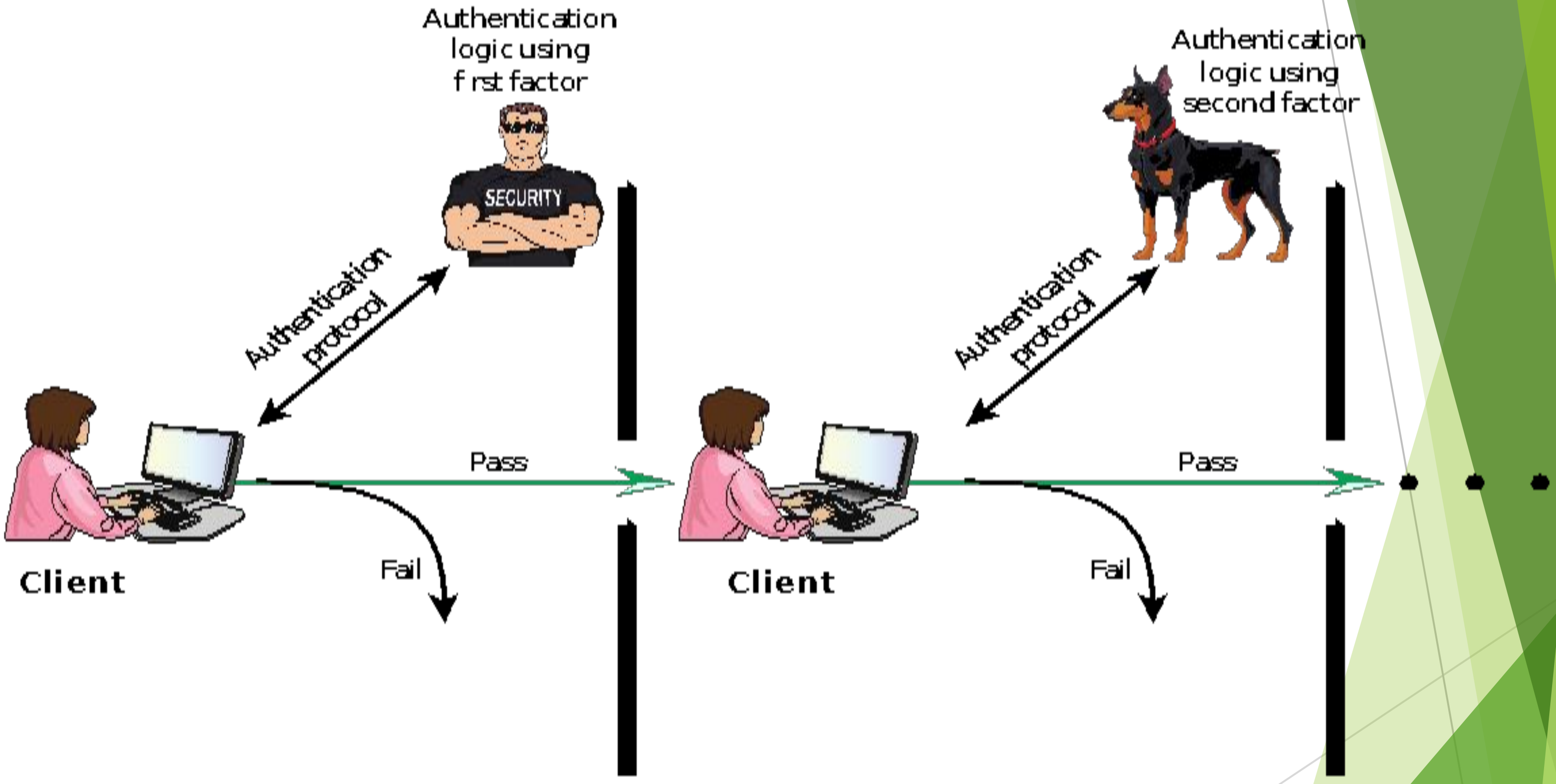
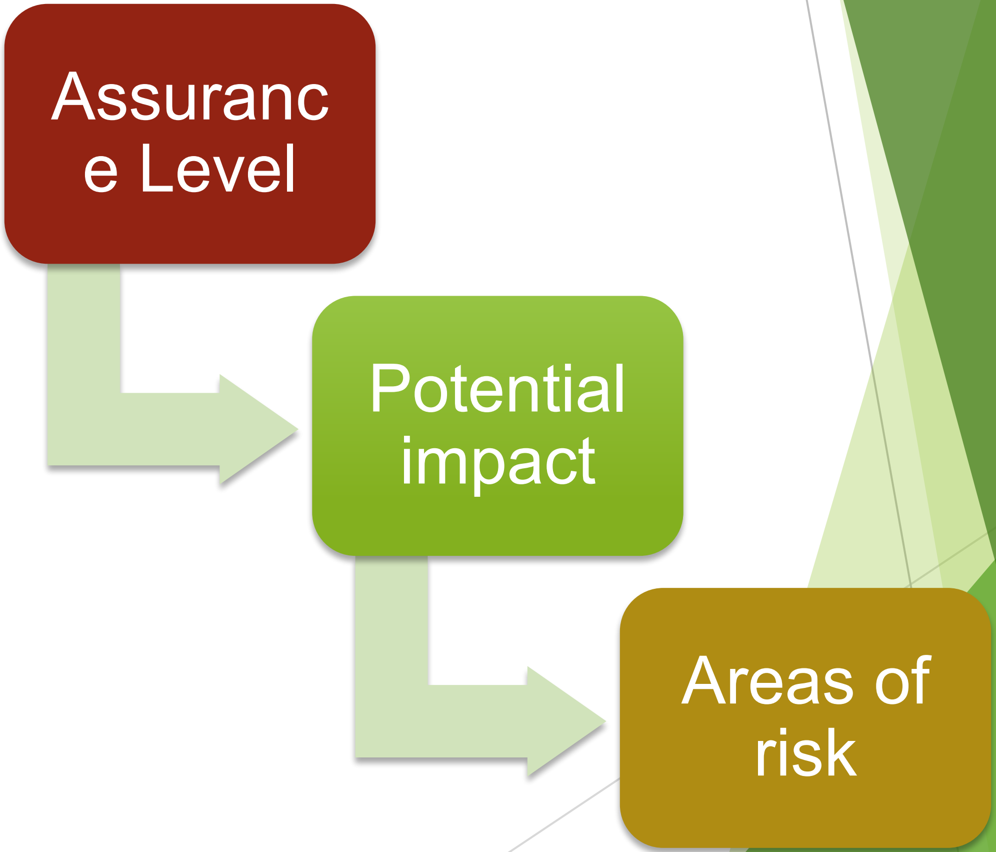


Figure 3.2 Multifactor Authentication

Risk Assessment for User Authentication

- There are three separate concepts:



Assurance Level

Describes an organization's degree of certainty that a user has presented a credential that refers to his or her identity

More specifically is defined as:

The degree of confidence in the vetting process used to establish the identity of the individual to whom the credential was issued

The degree of confidence that the individual who uses the credential is the individual to whom the credential was issued

Four levels of assurance

Level 1

- Little or no confidence in the asserted identity's validity

Level 2

- Some confidence in the asserted identity's validity

Level 3

- High confidence in the asserted identity's validity

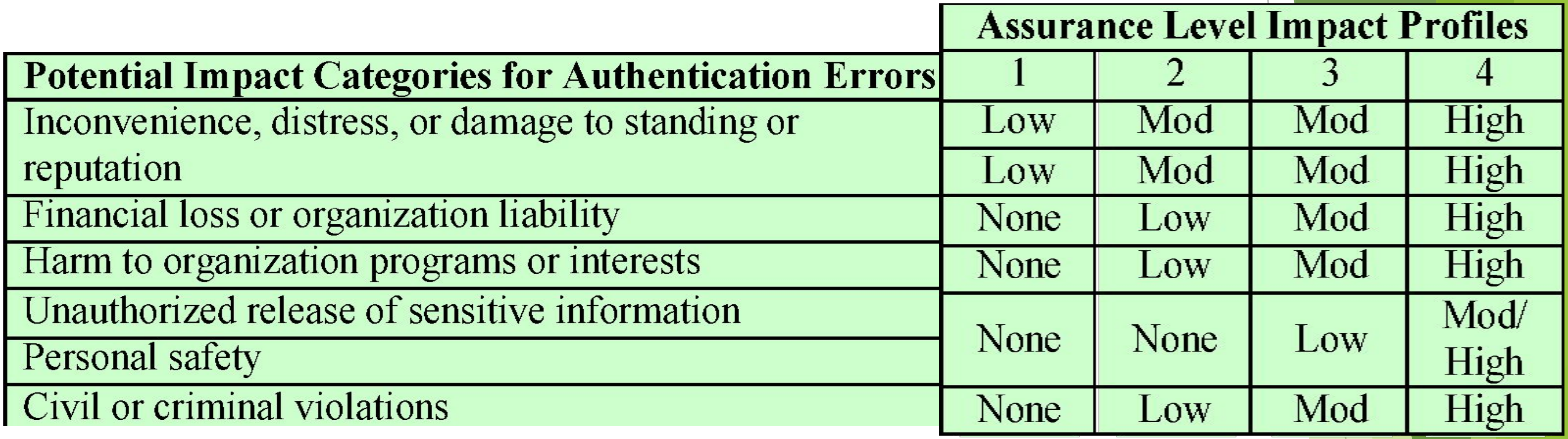
Level 4

- Very high confidence in the asserted identity's validity

Potential Impact

- FIPS 199 defines three levels of potential impact on organizations or individuals should there be a breach of security:
  - Low
    - An authentication error could be expected to have a limited adverse effect on organizational operations, organizational assets, or individuals
  - Moderate
    - An authentication error could be expected to have a serious adverse effect
  - High
    - An authentication error could be expected to have a severe or catastrophic adverse effect

Table 3.2



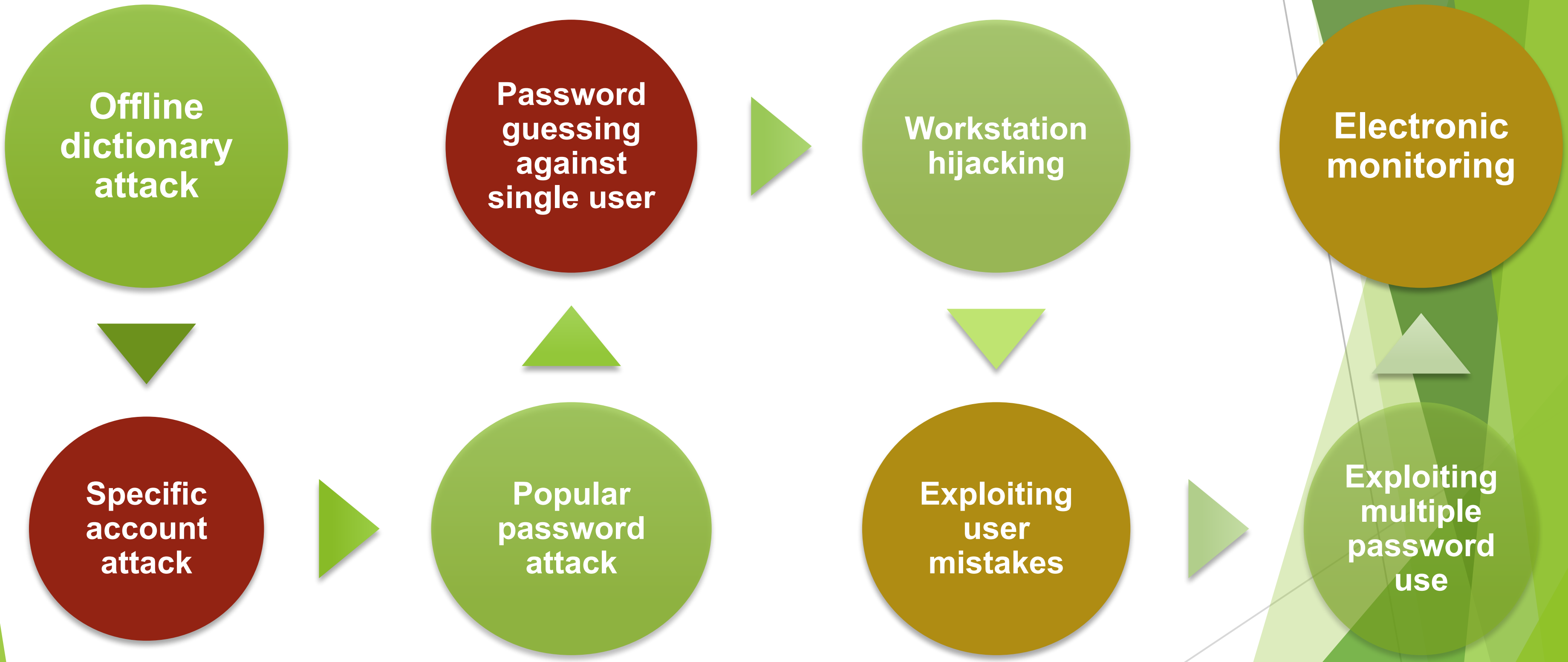
	Assurance Level Impact Profiles			
Potential Impact Categories for Authentication Errors	1	2	3	4
Inconvenience, distress, or damage to standing or reputation	Low	Mod	Mod	High
Financial loss or organization liability	Low	Mod	Mod	High
Harm to organization programs or interests	None	Low	Mod	High
Unauthorized release of sensitive information	None	Low	Mod	High
Personal safety	None	None	Low	Mod/ High
Civil or criminal violations	None	Low	Mod	High

Maximum Potential Impacts for Each Assurance Level

Password-Based Authentication

- Widely used line of defense against intruders
  - User provides name/login and password
  - System compares password with the one stored for that specified login
- The user ID:
  - Determines that the user is authorized to access the system
  - Determines the user’s privileges
  - Is used in discretionary access control

Password Vulnerabilities



Offline dictionary attack

Specific account attack

Popular password attack

Password guessing against single user

Workstation hijacking

Exploiting user mistakes

Exploiting multiple password use

Electronic monitoring

Password Vulnerabilities

- **Offline dictionary attack:** experience shows that determined hackers can frequently bypass such controls and gain access to the file. The attacker obtains the system password file and compares the password hashes against hashes of commonly used passwords. If a match is found, the attacker can gain access by that ID/password combination.
- **Specific account attack:** The attacker targets a specific account and submits password guesses until the correct password is discovered. The standard countermeasure is an account lockout mechanism, which locks out access to the account after a number of failed login attempts.
- **Popular password attack:** A user’s tendency is to choose a password that is easily remembered; this unfortunately makes the password easy to guess. Countermeasures include policies to inhibit the selection by users of common passwords.
- **Password guessing against single user:** system password policies and uses that knowledge to guess the password. Countermeasures include training in and enforcement of password policies that make passwords difficult to guess. Such policies address the secrecy, minimum length of the password, character set etc.

Password Vulnerabilities

- **Workstation hijacking:** The attacker waits until a logged-in workstation is unattended. The standard countermeasure is automatically logging the workstation out after a period of inactivity.
- **Exploiting user mistakes: If** the system assigns a password, then the user is more likely to write it down because it is difficult to remember. This situation creates the potential for an adversary to read the written password. A user may intentionally share a password, to enable a colleague to share files, for example. Also, attackers are frequently successful in obtaining passwords.
- **Exploiting multiple password use:**Attacks can also become much more effective or damaging if different network devices share the same or a similar password for a given user. Countermeasures include a policy that forbids the same or similar password on particular network devices.
- **Electronic monitoring:** If a password is communicated across a network to log on to a remote system, it is vulnerable to eavesdropping. Simple encryption will not fix this problem, because the encrypted password is, in effect, the password and can be observed and reused by an adversary.

Use of Hash Passwords

- A widely used password security technique is the use of hashed passwords and a salt value. This scheme is found on virtually all UNIX variants as well as on a number of other operating systems..
- To load a new password into the system, the user selects or is assigned a password. This password is combined with a fixed-length **salt** value.

Use of Hash Passwords

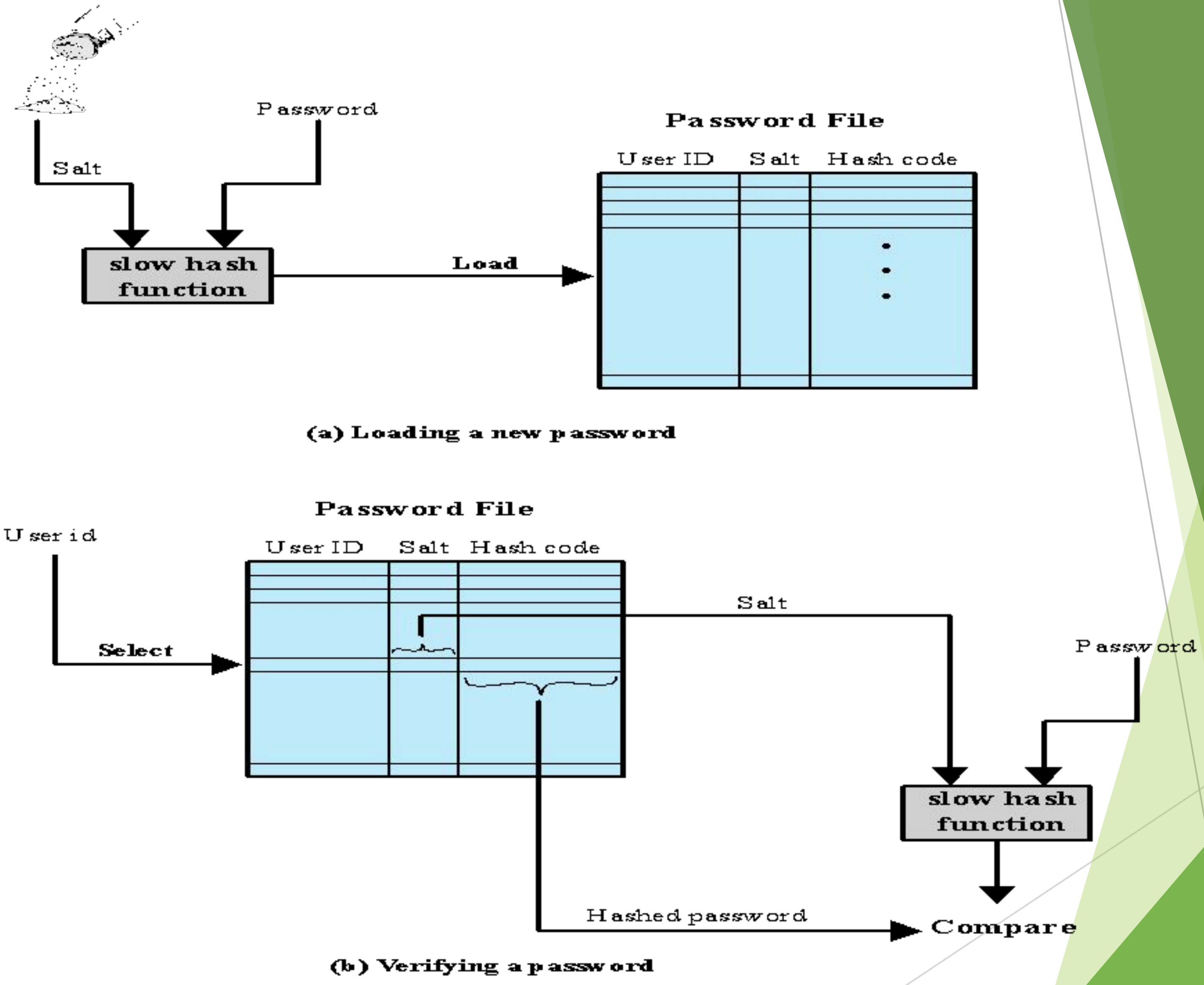
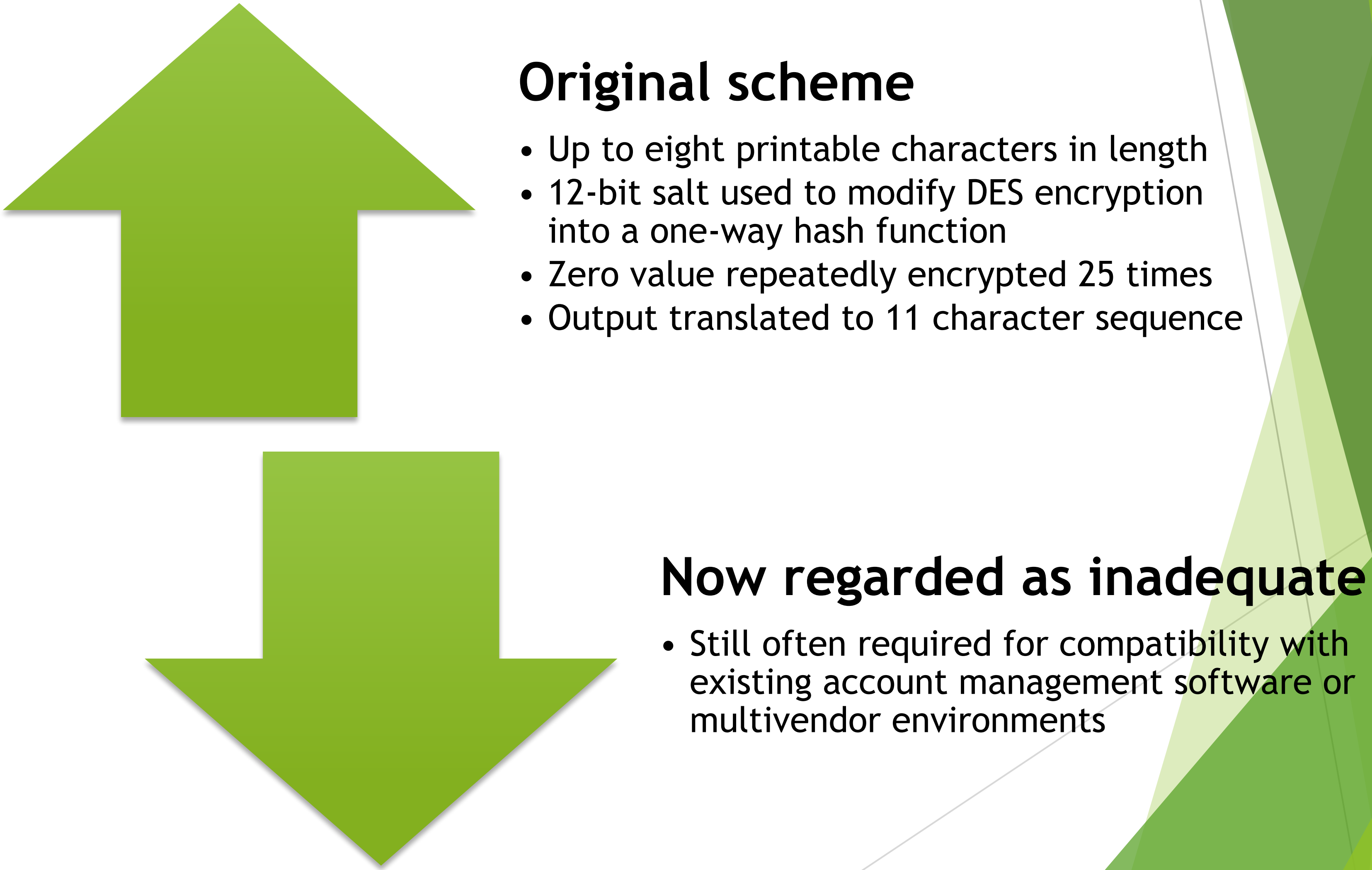


Figure 3.3 UNIX Password Scheme

UNIX Implementation



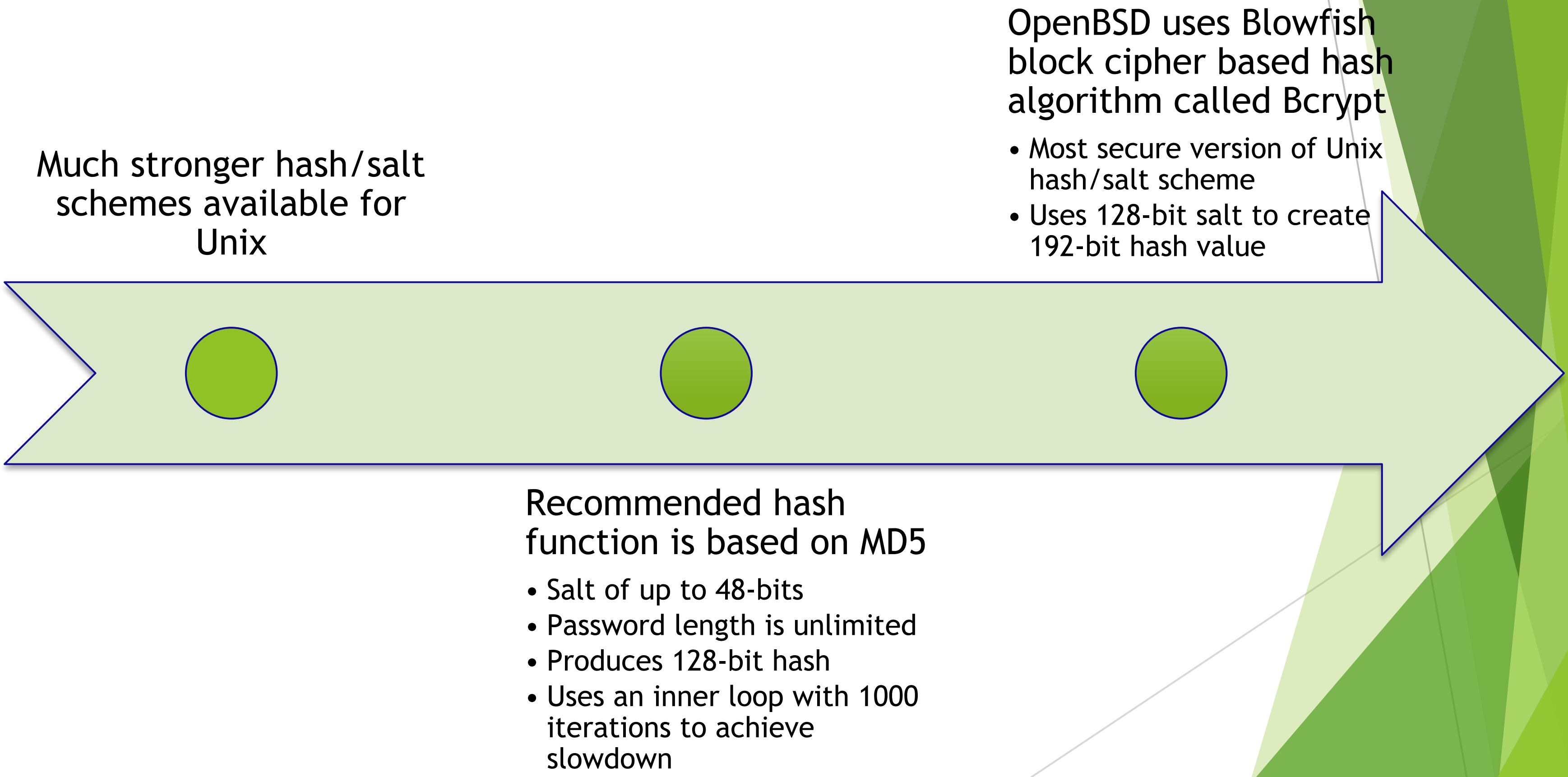
Original scheme

- Up to eight printable characters in length
- 12-bit salt used to modify DES encryption into a one-way hash function
- Zero value repeatedly encrypted 25 times
- Output translated to 11 character sequence

Now regarded as inadequate

- Still often required for compatibility with existing account management software or multivendor environments

Improved Implementations



Much stronger hash/salt schemes available for Unix

Recommended hash function is based on MD5

- Salt of up to 48-bits
- Password length is unlimited
- Produces 128-bit hash
- Uses an inner loop with 1000 iterations to achieve slowdown

OpenBSD uses Blowfish block cipher based hash algorithm called Bcrypt

- Most secure version of Unix hash/salt scheme
- Uses 128-bit salt to create 192-bit hash value

Blowfish Block Cipher

- The hash function, called Bcrypt, is quite slow to execute. Bcrypt allows passwords of up to 55 characters in length and requires a random salt value of 128 bits, to produce a 192-bit hash value Bcrypt also includes a cost variable; an increase in the cost variable causes a corresponding increase in the time required to perform a Bcyrpt hash.
- The cost assigned to a new password is configurable, so administrators can assign a higher cost to privileged users.

Password Cracking

Dictionary attacks

- Develop a large dictionary of possible passwords and try each against the password file
- Each password must be hashed using each salt value and then compared to stored hash values

Rainbow table attacks

- Pre-compute tables of hash values for all salts
- A mammoth table of hash values
- Can be countered by using a sufficiently large salt value and a sufficiently large hash length

Password crackers exploit the fact that people choose easily guessable passwords

- Shorter password lengths are also easier to crack

John the Ripper

- Open-source password cracker first developed in in 1996
- Uses a combination of brute-force and dictionary techniques

Modern Approaches

- Complex password policy
  - Forcing users to pick stronger passwords
- However password-cracking techniques have also improved
  - The processing capacity available for password cracking has increased dramatically
  - The use of sophisticated algorithms to generate potential passwords
  - Studying examples and structures of actual passwords in use

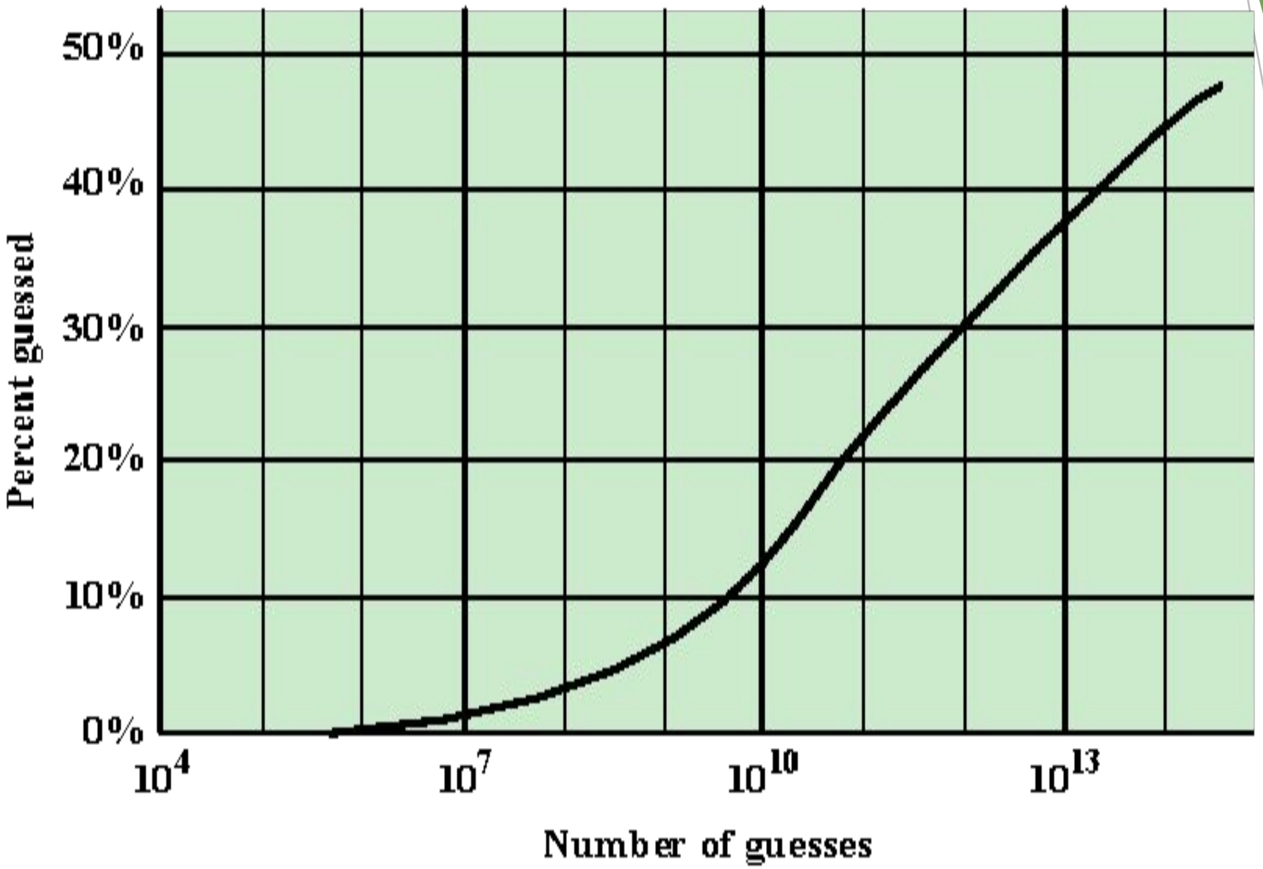
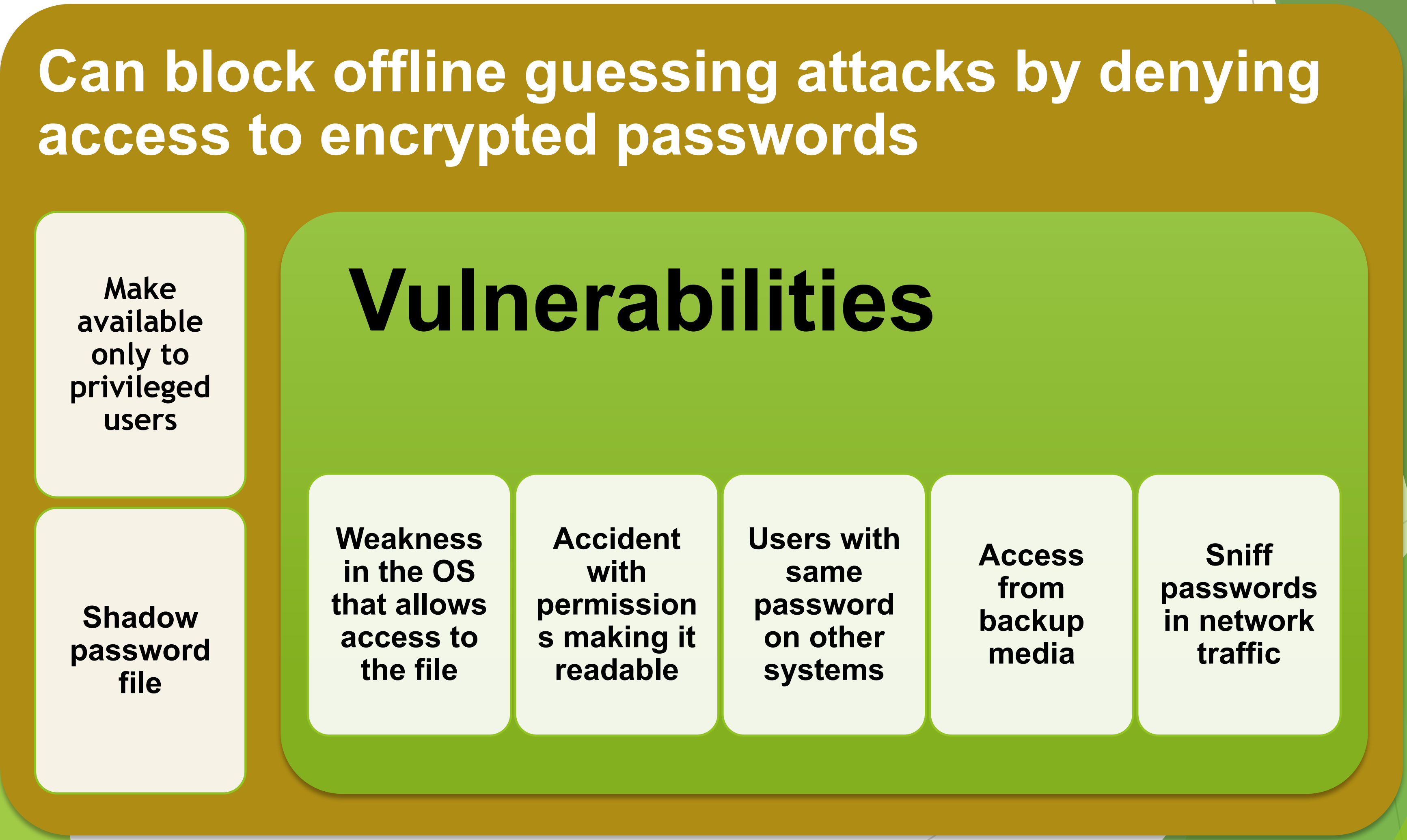


Figure 3.4 The Percentage of Passwords Guessed After a Given Number of Guesses

Password File Access Control



Can block offline guessing attacks by denying access to encrypted passwords

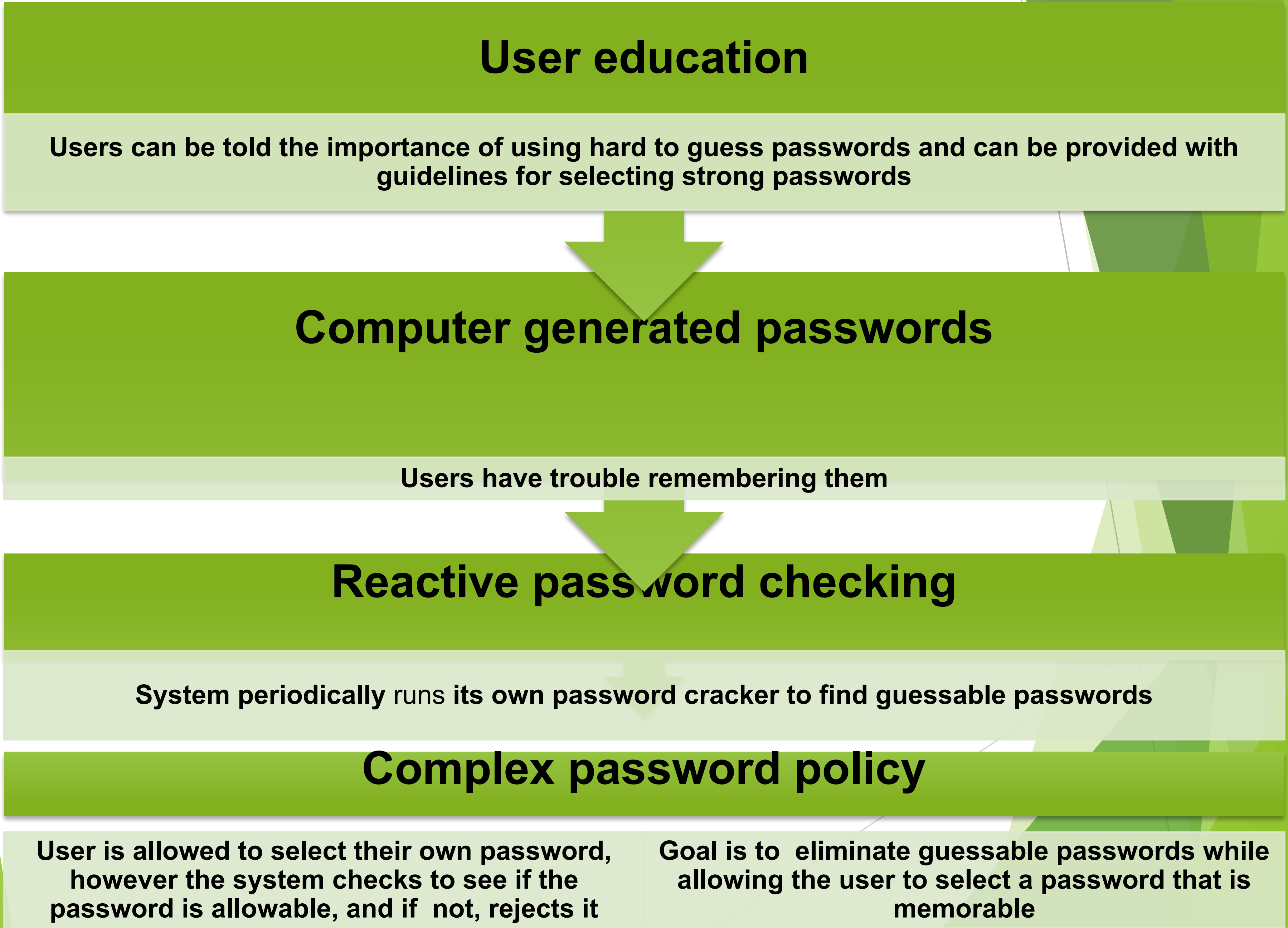
Make available only to privileged users

Shadow password file

Vulnerabilities

- Weakness in the OS that allows access to the file
- Accident with permissions making it readable
- Users with same password on other systems
- Access from backup media
- Sniff passwords in network traffic

Password Selection Strategies



User education

Users can be told the importance of using hard to guess passwords and can be provided with guidelines for selecting strong passwords

Computer generated passwords

Users have trouble remembering them

Reactive password checking

System periodically runs its own password cracker to find guessable passwords

Complex password policy

User is allowed to select their own password, however the system checks to see if the password is allowable, and if not, rejects it

Goal is to eliminate guessable passwords while allowing the user to select a password that is memorable

Proactive Password Checking

- Rule enforcement
  - Specific rules that passwords must adhere to
- Password checker
  - Compile a large dictionary of passwords not to use
- Bloom filter
  - Used to build a table based on hash values
  - Check desired password against this table

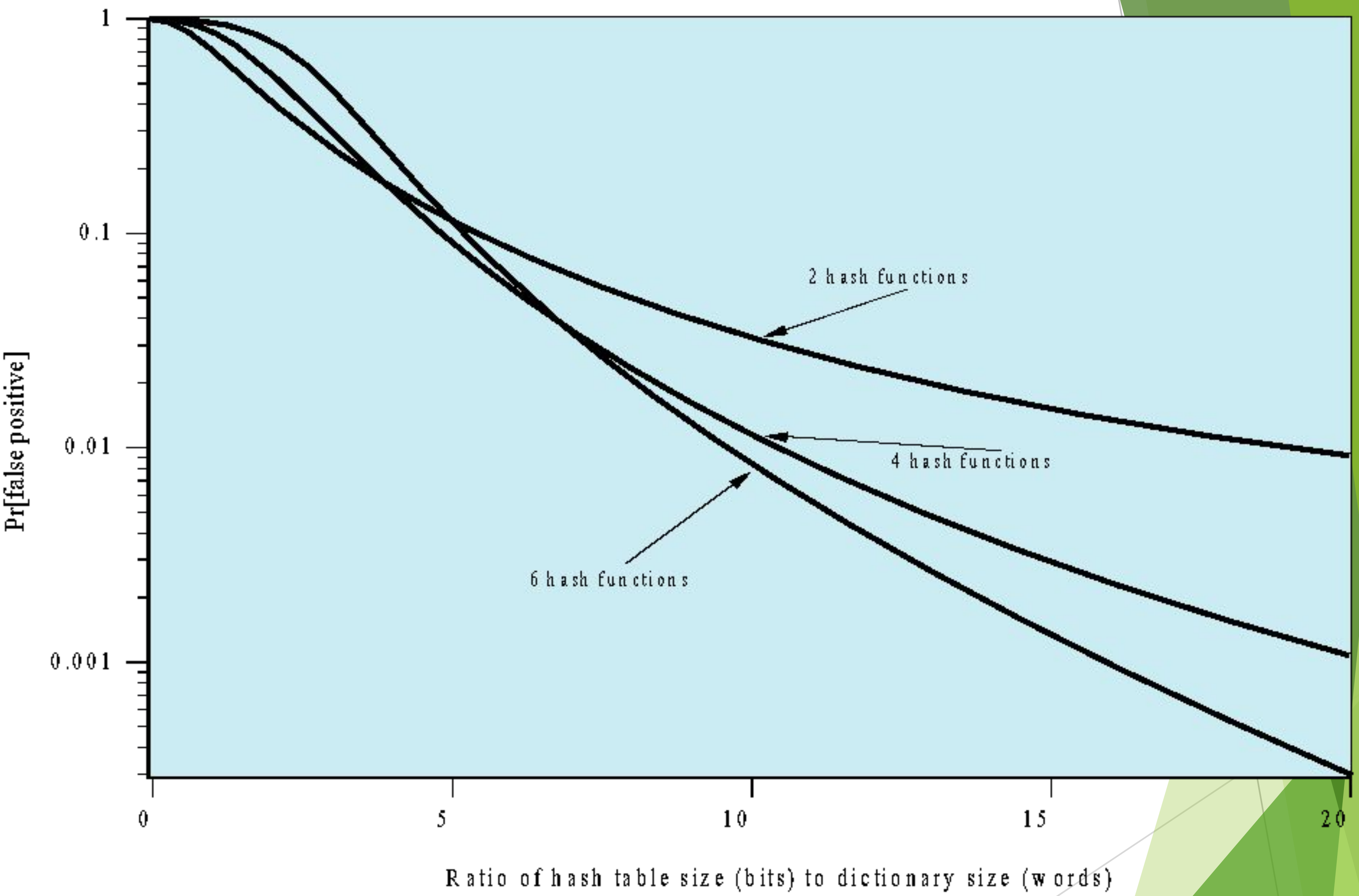
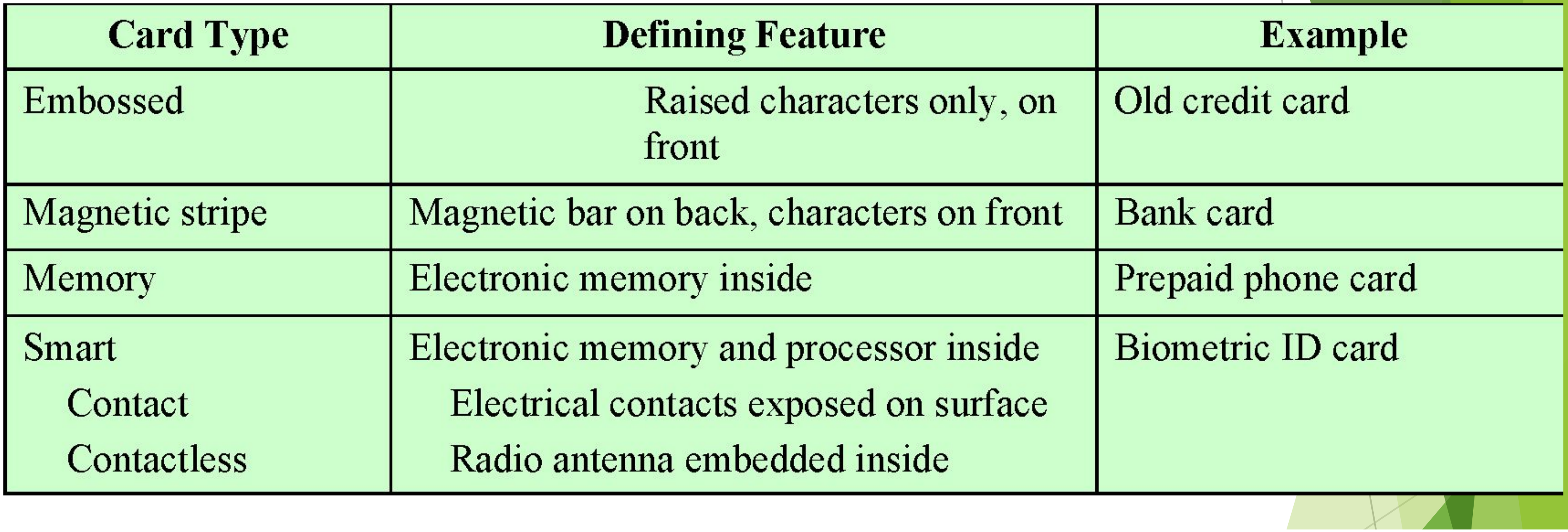


Figure 3.5 Performance of Bloom Filter

Table 3.3



Card Type	Defining Feature	Example
Embossed	Raised characters only, on front	Old credit card
Magnetic stripe	Magnetic bar on back, characters on front	Bank card
Memory	Electronic memory inside	Prepaid phone card
Smart Contact Contactless	Electronic memory and processor inside Electrical contacts exposed on surface Radio antenna embedded inside	Biometric ID card

Types of Cards Used as Tokens

Memory Cards

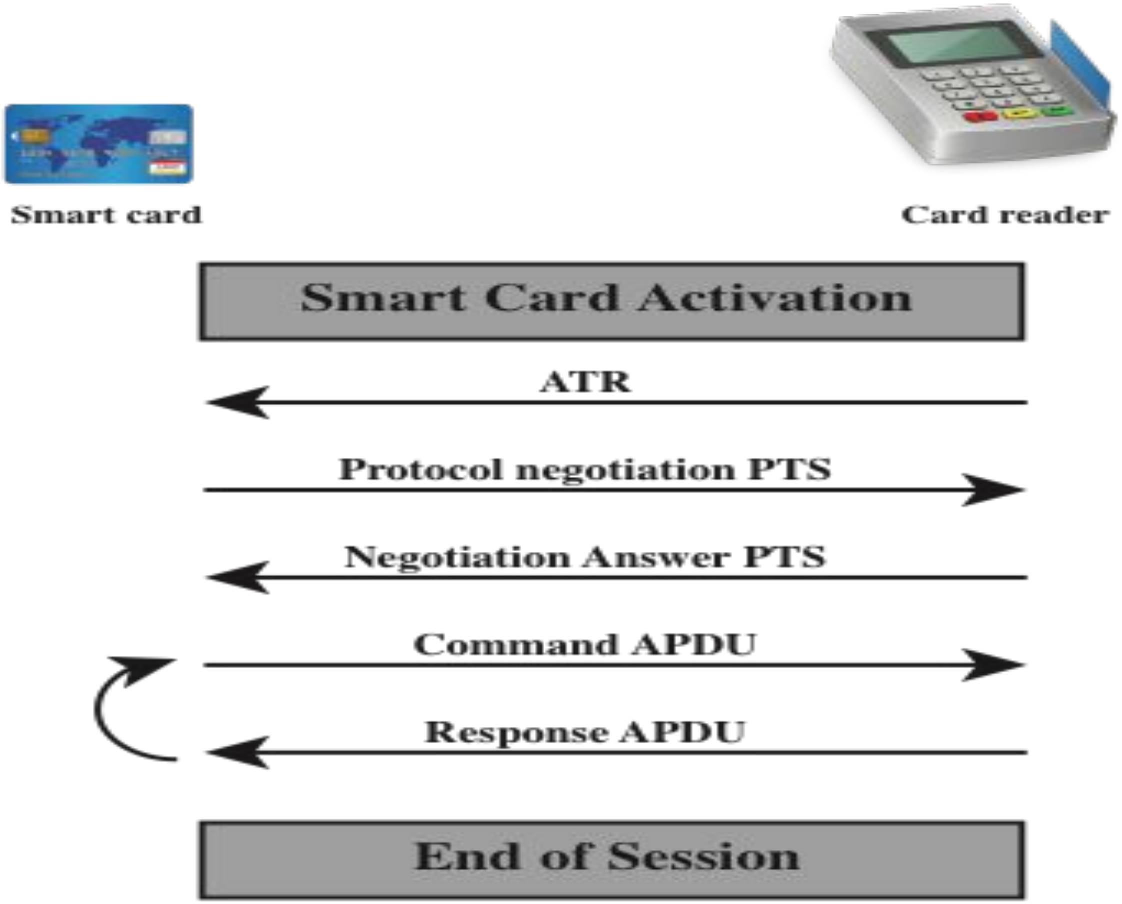
- Can store but do not process data
- The most common is the magnetic stripe card
- Can include an internal electronic memory
- Can be used alone for physical access
  - Hotel room
  - ATM
- Provides significantly greater security when combined with a password or PIN
- Drawbacks of memory cards include:
  - Requires a special reader
  - Loss of token

Smart Tokens

- Physical characteristics:
    - Include an embedded microprocessor
    - A smart token that looks like a bank card
    - Can look like calculators, keys, small portable objects
- User interface:
    - Manual interfaces include a keypad and display for human/token interaction
- Electronic interface
    - A smart card or other token requires an electronic interface to communicate with a compatible reader/writer
    - Contact and contactless interfaces
- Authentication protocol:
    - Classified into three categories:
        - Static

Smart Cards

- Most important category of smart token
  - Has the appearance of a credit card
  - Has an electronic interface
  - May use any of the smart token protocols
- Contain:
  - An entire microprocessor
    - Processor
    - Memory
    - I/O ports
- Typically include three types of memory:
  - Read-only memory (ROM)
    - Stores data that does not change during the card’s life
  - Electrically erasable programmable ROM (EEPROM)
    - Holds application data and programs
  - Random access memory (RAM)



Smart card

Card reader

Smart Card Activation

ATR

Protocol negotiation PTS

Negotiation Answer PTS

Command APDU

Response APDU

End of Session

APDU = application protocol data unit
ATR = Answer to reset
PTS = Protocol type selection

Figure 3.6 Smart Card/Reader Exchange