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
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How to display password policy information for a user (Ubuntu)?


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Asked 14 years, 4 months ago Modified 10 years, 2 months ago Viewed 75k times





[Ubuntu Documentation > Ubuntu 9.04 > Ubuntu Server Guide > Security > User Management](#) states that there is a default minimum password length for Ubuntu:

6



By default, Ubuntu requires a minimum password length of 4 characters

Say the password is to be modified by the user using `passwd`. Is there a command for displaying the current password policies for a user (such as the `chage` command displays the password expiration information for a specific user)?

```
> sudo chage -l SomeUserName
Last password change           : May 13, 2010
Password expires                : never
Password inactive              : never
Account expires                : never
Minimum number of days between password change : 0
Maximum number of days between password change  : 99999
Number of days of warning before password expires : 7
```

This is rather than examining various places that control the policy and interpreting them since the process could contain errors. A command that reports the composed policy would be used to check the policy setting steps.

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I would post the question in the Ubuntu site rather than on SU if I had known it existed. So, should I repost this question on the Ubuntu site rather than having it migrated to the most focused site? – [CW Holeman II](#) Feb 28, 2011 at 23:23

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2 Answers

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6



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The OP confuses two different questions: *policy* and *password length*.

As already stated by @BillThor, password length is dealt with by the PAM module, under the not truly auspicious keyword `obscure`, in the file `/etc/pam.d/common-password`, which contains the following line:

```
password [success=1 default=ignore] pam_unix.so obscure
```

The `obscure` keyword stands for (according to *man pam_unix*):

obscure

Enable some extra checks on password strength. These checks original shadow package. The behavior is similar to the `pam_non-dictionary-based` checks. The following checks are implemented:

Palindrome

Verifies that the new password is not a palindrome of (i

Case Change Only

Verifies that the new password isn't the same as the old

Similar

Verifies that the new password isn't too much like the p

Simple

Is the new password too simple? This is based on the `len` different types of characters (alpha, numeric, etc.) use

The prescription by `obscure` can be overridden as follows: in `/etc/pam.d/common-password`, re-write the line above as

```
password [success=1 default=ignore] pam_unix.so obscure
```

or whatever you like.

Finding exactly where the minimum length password is defined requires diving into the depths of pam:

```
# apt-cache search pam_unix.so
libpam-modules - Pluggable Authentication Modules for PAM
# apt-get source libpam-modules
```

... and then to find where the minimum password length is defined:

```
# grep -rI UNIX_MIN_PASS_LEN
modules/pam_unix/support.h
modules/pam_unix/support.c
debian/patches-applied/007_modules_pam_unix
debian/patches-applied/055_pam_unix_nullok_secure
```

Perusing the debian patches you will see that the parameter `UNIX_MIN_PASS_LEN` (the 27th possible parameter) corresponds to a variable called **`minlen`**, which is set in `/modules/pam_unix/support.c`. However, one of the debian patches fixes `pass_min_len`: the file `debian/patches-applied/007_modules_pam_unix` contains the lines:

```
- int pass_min_len = 0;
+ int pass_min_len = 6;
```

and the file `debian/Changelog` specifies:

- Further cleanups of `007_modules_pam_unix` -- don't use a global variable for `pass_min_len`, don't gratuitously move the length

I always disliked PAM, and for this reason: to locate a trivial parameter like the minimum password length, it obliges you to look into the source code.

The information displayed by `chage -l username` is instead completely contained in the `/etc/shadow` file: The [Man page](#) states:

shadow is a file which contains the password information for the system's accounts and optional aging information.

The fields of each entry are:

Login name, encrypted password, date of last password change, minimum password age, maximum password age, password warning period, password inactivity period, account expiration date, plus a reserved field for future use.

Just to double check, an `strace` of the `chage` command shows which files are opened,

```
# strace -e trace=open -f chage -l myusername
open("/etc/ld.so.cache", O_RDONLY|O_CLOEXEC) = 3
open("/lib/x86_64-linux-gnu/libselinux.so.1", O_RDONLY|O_CLOEXEC) = 3
open("/lib/x86_64-linux-gnu/libc.so.6", O_RDONLY|O_CLOEXEC) = 3
open("/lib/x86_64-linux-gnu/libpcre.so.3", O_RDONLY|O_CLOEXEC) = 3
open("/lib/x86_64-linux-gnu/libdl.so.2", O_RDONLY|O_CLOEXEC) = 3
open("/proc/filesystems", O_RDONLY) = 3
open("/usr/lib/locale/locale-archive", O_RDONLY|O_CLOEXEC) = 3
open("/etc/passwd", O_RDONLY|O_NOCTTY|O_NONBLOCK|O_NOFOLLOW) = 3
open("/etc/shadow", O_RDONLY|O_NOCTTY|O_NONBLOCK|O_NOFOLLOW) = 4
open("/usr/share/locale/locale.alias", O_RDONLY|O_CLOEXEC) = 5
open("/usr/share/locale/en_US/LC_MESSAGES/shadow.mo", O_RDONLY) = 5
open("/usr/share/locale/en/LC_MESSAGES/shadow.mo", O_RDONLY) = 5
open("/usr/share/locale-langpack/en_US/LC_MESSAGES/shadow.mo", O_RDONLY) = 5
open("/usr/share/locale-langpack/en/LC_MESSAGES/shadow.mo", O_RDONLY) = 5
open("/etc/localtime", O_RDONLY|O_CLOEXEC) = 5
Last password change : mag 05
Password expires : never
Password inactive : never
Account expires : never
Minimum number of days between password change : 0
Maximum number of days between password change : 99999
```

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edited Aug 6, 2014 at 19:00

answered Aug 6, 2014 at 12:29

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MariusMatutiae

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2



The policy is found in `/etc/pam.d/common-password`. Default policy is obscure which is documented in the `pam_unix` man page. You may want to install `pam_cracklib` and add some addition policies. Password changes by root generally avoid policies.

If you are not using `pam` to verify the new password, then the policy will belong to the tool used to change the password. This can happen if you are using `LDAP` or another external password database and changing the password directly in the database.

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answered Jun 9, 2010 at 15:51



BillThor

11.2k ● 2 ● 27 ● 25

Added to the question that `passwd` is the tool to be used. – CW Holeman II Jun 9, 2010 at 18:22

2 If that is the case, `/etc/pam.d/common-passwd` is where the policy gets inserted. `pam_unix` provides the default policy. I don't think a policy display tool exists. It would need to know all the possible `pam` modules that apply. Considering that these are possibly user-written, only some policies would be possible. – BillThor Jun 12, 2010 at 1:57

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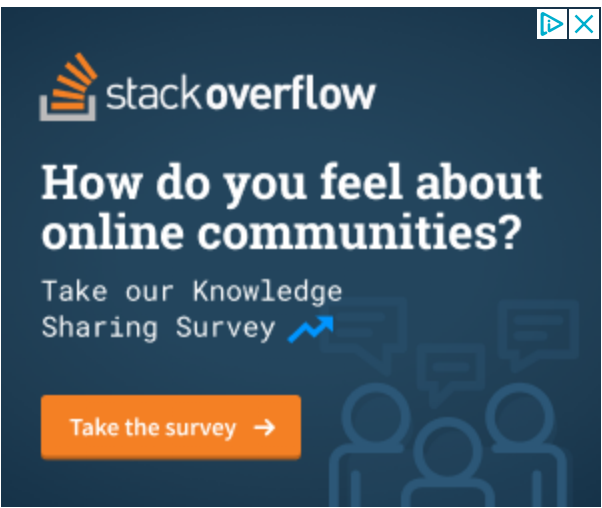


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