

# Access Control and Authentication

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# Linux Systems Security

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# Access Control

- Authenticating users is the act of trying to verify that a user is who they claim to be
- We generally rely on the concept that if a user has the access information, then they are very likely to be authentic
- More sophisticated systems including biometrics and multifactor authentication are based on the same reliance that if a user has the access items or abilities, they are authentic
- Limiting or controlling access can happen in stages, first at login, then at application launch, then application access, etc.
- This unit focuses on user access to the system via login and authentication of hosts and individuals using certificates

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# Login Access Control

- Logins typically happen on physical connections such as terminals, and on network connections using one of several possible remote access protocols
- [/etc/security/access.conf](#) specifies rules about where users can login from - see [access.conf\(5\)](#) or review the comments in the file
- [/etc/securetty](#) provides a simple mechanism to limit where root can log in, default file allows root to log in pretty much anywhere - see file for documentation

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# Passwords

- Passwords are usually required for a user to log in and run whatever shell they normally run
- Typing them can be avoided over the network using ssh keys (i.e. a long unguessable saved password (the private key) which is validated using a public key instead of comparison with a pre-stored hash)
- Access to services/running applications does not necessarily require a UNIX login, each service may have its own password mechanism and policy enforcement options, e.g. mail, web applications, database access, etc.
- The UNIX shell and applications can use pluggable authentication modules (PAM) to provide rules and mechanisms for user authentication
- [http://www.linux-pam.org/Linux-PAM-html/Linux-PAM\\_SAG.html](http://www.linux-pam.org/Linux-PAM-html/Linux-PAM_SAG.html) is an extensive guide to using Pluggable Authentication Modules (PAM) to provide, enhance, and enforce access-related security features of Linux

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# Password Management Tools

- [/etc/shadow](#) file holds encrypted passwords for local unix accounts and has several fields which can be used to enforce a password policy for ordinary users - see [shadow\(5\)](#) and [passwd\(1\)](#) man pages
- Interesting password options for [/etc/pam.d/login](#) could include [minlen](#), [remember](#), [obscure](#) - see [pam\\_unix\(8\)](#) and [pam.conf\(5\)](#) man pages
- [/etc/login.defs](#) provides some additional control options to customize login access restrictions (retries, timeouts, logging, etc.) - see [login.defs\(5\)](#)
- [libpam-pwquality](#) provides a PAM module which significantly enhances the minimum allowed password quality
- Consider using a robust password cracking program to identify when users are using poor passwords, and set their password to expire when a poor one is found (e.g. [passwd -w 3 -x 1 username](#)), this is a good task for a script

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# Legacy Remote Access

- telnet is a very old protocol which allows creation of connections to ports on remote hosts using tcp
- telnet uses no compression, no encryption, no awareness of connection types, it simply connects your terminal and keyboard to a remote socket
- telnet is still a useful tool for testing and diagnostic purposes, but the telnetd daemon is extremely uncommon now and strongly discouraged

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# Legacy Remote Access

- rsh/rcp are tools using a login-specific protocol to establish user access to their unix accounts on remote hosts
- rsh/rcp connect to a rlogind daemon on a remote site and check for environment files which might allow a user to connect to their login shell without entering a password for purposes of interactive access or file transfer
- rsh/rcp do not support compression or encryption and are not useful for other purposes, enabling the rlogind service is strongly discouraged

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# SSH Remote Access

- ssh/scp/sftp is the current preferred remote access toolset and supports much more than unix account access
- ssh tools support encryption and compression
- OpenSSH has both client and server side tools and configurations
- `/etc/ssh` holds the configuration files and is world accessible because client configuration files (`ssh_config` mainly) are kept there
- With your public key installed under your home directory on a server, any user who has your private key can log into the server without manual password entry - Protect your private key with a passphrase! - can also configure MFA
- See <https://linux-audit.com/using-ssh-keys-instead-of-passwords/>



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# SSH Server

- `/etc/ssh/sshd_config` is for the server daemon process
- options to consider include `port` number, host key files, logging config, `loggingracetime`, `permitrootlogin`, `pubkey authentication`, `allowusers`, `denyusers`, `maxauthtries`, `maxstartups`, `passwordauthentication`
- `/etc/ssh` has host key files provided to clients during session establishment for host identity confirmation

<https://help.ubuntu.com/lts/serverguide/openssh-server.html>

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# Authentication with Certificates

- SSL/TLS certificates identify an entity (typically a host or individual) and are signed, usually by a trusted authority
- Your trusted authority list is included with your OS and you can modify it (i.e. [ca-certificates](#) package)
- Certificates are used with public/private key pairs (the public key is in the certificate) to enable encryption
- SSH does not use certificates and keeps keys in different formats from SSL/TLS
- Certificates can be used to identify clients by applications that establish two-way authenticated TLS/SSL connections

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# Public/Private Key Pairs

- Private key decrypts things encrypted with public key
- Public key decrypts things encrypted with private key
- Key generation tools are part of ssh and openssl packages ([ssh-keygen](#) and [openssl genpkey](#))
- [easy-rsa](#) package is a software package which is more user friendly for CA administration, typically installed in [/etc/openvpn/easy-rsa](#)

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# Certificates

- Root certificates are self-signed and are part of the public key infrastructure (PKI)
- Certificates must be signed by a trusted authority, or cannot be trusted for authentication
- Untrusted certificates can still be used for encryption, even if they cannot be trusted for authentication, most commonly used for things like SMTPS, IMAP4S, POP3S, intranet servers
- Creating a certificate involves creating a signing request and having it signed to produce the actual certificate

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# Requesting a Certificate

- Begin by generating a private key if you do not already have one  
`openssl genpkey -algorithm RSA -out /etc/ssl/private/mykey.pem -pkeyopt rsa_keygen_bits:2048`
- Generate a request with embedded public key using your private key  
`openssl req -new -key /etc/ssl/private/mykey.pem -out mycsr.csr`
- Send the request to the Certificate Authority along with your authentication documentation and payment, and they will send back your certificate file
- Install your certificate file in `/etc/ssl/certs` and you can use it in your configuration files for services wanting to use SSL/TLS, identifying as the server named in the certificate

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# Certificate Authority

- A certificate authority (CA) is an organization that validates signing requests and then signs them with the CA's private key, adding the CA info to the certificate
- Validation normally requires documentation of identity and authority from requester
- CAs charge for this service, and certificates expire so this is an ongoing business
- CAs can revoke certificates
- You can create your own CA trivially although no-one will trust your signed certificates unless they install your CA certificate as a trusted root certificate on their system - useful for intranet certificates
- This is the certificate creation method most commonly used when using certificates for client authentication

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# Private CA Example with CA.pl

- You can create a demo CA in `/etc/ssl` (e.g. `cd /etc/ssl;/usr/lib/ssl/misc/CA.pl -newca`)
- For each site you want certificates for, generate a key and csr (e.g. `cd /etc/ssl;/usr/lib/ssl/misc/CA.pl -newreq`)
- Sign the csr with your CA certificate and key to produce their certificate (e.g. `cd /etc/ssl;/usr/lib/ssl/misc/CA.pl -sign`)
- Send `newcert.pem`, `newkey.pem` to the requesting host to be installed and configured into whatever service will use the certificate (e.g. apache2)
- Make sure to install your CA certificate on clients that will be accessing the sites which use certificates you have signed

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# Deploying a Private-CA Signed Certificate

- Most browsers have their own trusted certificates list but users get warned about certificates which are not signed by a trusted root, this would defeat the purpose of using a better certificate than self-signed
- Various operating systems have distinct methods of installing trusted root certificates
- Installing a new CA certificate on Ubuntu starts with saving the CA certificate file to `/usr/share/ca-certificates/somefilename.crt` and then `dpkg-reconfigure ca-certificates`
- Installing a new CA certificate on a Mac looks like this  
`security add-trusted-cert -d -r trustRoot -k "/Library/Keychains/System.keychain" "/private/tmp/certs/certname.cer"`
- Installing a new CA certificate on a Windows host takes different forms for the different OS versions as well as for different browsers, IIS-generated CSRs would also have a different command to sign them with the demoCA (e.g. `cd /etc/ssl;ca -policy policy_anything -notext -in clients.server.com.req -days 365 -out clients.server.com.crt`)
- For a service provider, trusting client's certificates requires trusting the certificate signer, so the client certificate CA must be trusted by the server