

Name: _____

The perfect password

Until recently, most people's contact with secret passwords was limited to reading books or watching films about spies. But not any more. Now anyone who uses the Internet regularly needs a password to do

5▶ masses of things: for example, get into their email, buy a book on Amazon or sell something on eBay. Security experts have analysed databases of the passwords that we use, and their findings are not exactly reassuring. Many of the passwords are very unoriginal and very

10▶ guessable: 'password', 'abc123', etc. This means that they are extremely easy for a hacker to crack. And once we've had our password hacked, the consequences can be dire: identity theft, money mysteriously leaving our bank account and so on. Of course, the problem is

15▶ that, if we decide to use a password that is not obvious and is difficult to crack, we often end up forgetting it ourselves! Hence we tend to use easy-to-remember, and easy-to-crack, passwords.

There are other devices that are more secure than

20▶ passwords, such as fingerprint scanners. However, they are expensive and require sophisticated hardware. Passwords, on the other hand, require only software and are much cheaper. So we will all be using them for the foreseeable future. The challenge,

25▶ therefore, is to come up with passwords that are memorable and secure.

One approach is to use passphrases rather than passwords. These contain two or more words that are completely unconnected, such as 'sofa lion

30▶ phone'. In order to remember the passphrase, we create a mental image that combines the elements. The problem is that, when people try to create a passphrase, they tend to use words that are often connected, such as 'Olympic gold medal'. Cracking

35▶ this type of passphrase is relatively easy for an experienced hacker.

Another interesting idea is to turn a sentence into a password by taking the first letter of each word and using numbers and punctuation marks where

40▶ possible. So 'Too much food and wine is bad for you' is written as '2mf&wib4U'. But even with this system you need to be careful. Don't use a well-known line from a book or film, as this is also crackable. Ideally, you need to think of a phrase or sentence that doesn't

45▶ come up in a Google search.

Some websites help their users to create passwords that are robust by rejecting weak passwords and giving hints on how to create strong ones. This is a

50▶ step in the right direction. Even so, in the end it's up to you to come up with a password that can't be cracked. A lot depends on you getting it right.

1 Answer the questions *in your own words*.

- 1 What type of password do a lot of people use? Why is this a problem?
- 2 Why will the use of passwords not disappear soon?
- 3 What two methods of creating a good password are suggested?

2 Say whether the statements are true or false.

Quote from the text to justify your answers.

- 1 Most people read books about spies.
- 2 Fingerprint scanners are a good security system.
- 3 For a good passphrase, you need to use words that are often connected.
- 4 You shouldn't base a password on a famous phrase.
- 5 All websites help their users to write secure passwords.

3 Find words or phrases in the text that mean:

- 1 very bad (paragraph 1)
- 2 things, instruments (paragraph 2)
- 3 idea, method (paragraph 3)
- 4 appear (paragraph 4)

4 Complete the sentences *in your own words*.

- 1 Databases of passwords
- 2 Compared to fingerprint scanners,
- 3 Passphrases
- 4 'Olympic gold medal'

5 Write four words from the second paragraph that include the same sound as *aw* in *saw* /ɔ:/.