Encryption and Password Protection in MS Office 2010

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Microsoft Office 2010 allows users to encrypt and password protect documents (MS Word), spreadsheets (MS Excel) and presentations (MS PowerPoint). This option was available in previous editions of MS Office, but in MS Office 2010 the steps to use encryption and password protection have been simplified.

There are four simple steps to encrypting your documents, spreadsheets, and presentations in MS Office 2010. The method is the same in MS Word, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint. Here it is demonstrated using a MS Word document.

To use the encryption and password protection function in MS Office 2010, click on the “File” tab in the upper left-hand corner of your document, spreadsheet, or presentation. This opens a menu where you click on the “Info” tab and then on the “Protect Document” button. This button opens a new menu, where you click on the “Encrypt with Password” option. This option opens a dialog box where you enter a password. After entering your password, click “OK” and the dialog box will appear a second time where you must re-enter / confirm your password. Click “OK” after re-entering your password and your document, spreadsheet, or presentation is encrypted and password protected.

1. Click on the “File” Tab
2. Click on “Info” & “Protect Document”
3. Click on “Encrypt with Password”

4. Enter A Strong Password

Encrypted

Once a document, spreadsheet, or presentation has been encrypted in MS Office 2010 whenever you attempt to open it you are presented with a dialog box where you must enter the correct password.

If the correct password is entered your document, spreadsheet, or presentation will open normally. If an incorrect password is entered you will be unable to access your information until the correct password is entered. There is no limit on the number of times a password may be tried – so choose a strong password to keep it from being guessed.

How Strong Is MS Office 2010 Encryption and Password Protection?

By default MS Office 2010 uses - AES (Advanced Encryption Standard), 128-bit key length, SHA1, and CBC (cipher block chaining) - for encryption. This is industry standard and provides very strong encryption. It is important to be sure that you are saving using the MS
Office 2010 format (i.e. .docx, .xlsx, .pptx) and not in the MS Office 97-2003 compatible format (i.e. .doc, .xls, .ppt) in order to take advantage of strong encryption. It must be remembered however that the key to unlocking that encryption is the password used to protect the document, spreadsheet, or presentation. A weak password results in overall weak protection, regardless of how strong the encryption algorithm may be.

To have the best security it is essential that you choose a strong password. In most cases a password of 10 or more characters, containing upper and lower case letters, numbers, and symbols will provide good security. Longer and more complex passwords may provide stronger security, but they will be more difficult to remember. If you forget your password you will lose access to the information contained in your document, spreadsheet, or presentation.

The Microsoft Safety & Security Center has an on-line password checker at: https://www.microsoft.com/security/pc-security/password-checker.aspx that lets you test the strength of your passwords.

You can use MS Office 2010 encryption and password protection to safely store documents, spreadsheets, and presentations on your computer. This is especially important on laptop computers where the risk of theft or loss is increased during travel. Encryption and password protection also secures information you share as attachments in e-mail. Just be sure to share the password with authorized recipients in advance, or in a channel separate from the e-mail containing the encrypted attachments (i.e. by telephone call or SMS / text message).

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End Notes: