windows privilege escalation cheat sheet

windows privilege escalation cheat sheet is an essential resource for cybersecurity professionals, penetration testers, and system administrators looking to understand and mitigate privilege escalation vulnerabilities in Windows environments. This comprehensive guide covers various techniques, tools, and methods used to gain higher privileges on Windows systems, which is critical for both offensive security testing and defensive hardening. By exploring common misconfigurations, vulnerable services, and exploitable binaries, this cheat sheet equips users with the knowledge to identify privilege escalation paths effectively. The content is structured to provide clear explanations and actionable insights, ensuring practical application during security assessments. From enumeration strategies to exploitation techniques, this article delves into the core aspects of Windows privilege escalation, making it a vital reference for anyone involved in Windows security. Below is a detailed table of contents outlining the main topics covered in this windows privilege escalation cheat sheet.

Enumeration Techniques

Effective privilege escalation begins with thorough enumeration of the target Windows system. Identifying system configurations, user privileges, installed software, and running services is critical to uncover potential weaknesses. Enumeration provides the foundational knowledge required for selecting appropriate escalation methods.

User and Group Information

Gathering details about local users, groups, and their privileges helps determine accounts with elevated permissions or those that can be leveraged for privilege escalation. Commands such as *net user* and *net localgroup* provide this information.

System Configuration and Patch Level

Understanding the Windows version, build number, and installed patches assists in identifying known vulnerabilities applicable to the system. Tools like *systeminfo* and the registry can reveal detailed configuration data.

Service and Process Enumeration

Listing running services and processes can expose misconfigured or vulnerable services that run with high privileges. Commands like *sc query* and PowerShell cmdlets such as *Get-Service* are useful for this purpose.

Network and Firewall Settings

Analyzing network interfaces, firewall rules, and open ports can reveal communication channels that might be exploited. Utilities like *netstat* and *Get-NetFirewallRule* assist in this assessment.

- net user / net localgroup
- systeminfo
- sc query / Get-Service
- netstat / Get-NetFirewallRule

Common Privilege Escalation Vulnerabilities

Windows systems often suffer from misconfigurations and vulnerabilities that can be exploited to escalate privileges. Recognizing these common issues is fundamental to successful exploitation and remediation.

Unquoted Service Paths

Services with unquoted executable paths that include spaces can be exploited by placing malicious executables in specific directories. This vulnerability allows attackers to execute code with service-level privileges.

Weak Service Permissions

Improperly set permissions on services may permit standard users to modify service binaries or configurations, enabling privilege escalation through service manipulation.

AlwaysInstallElevated Policy

If the Windows Installer policy "AlwaysInstallElevated" is enabled, users can install MSI packages with elevated privileges, potentially allowing execution of arbitrary code with SYSTEM rights.

Auto-Logon Configuration

Systems configured for automatic logon may store credentials in the registry or in memory, which can be extracted to gain higher privileges.

- Unquoted service paths
- Weak permissions on services
- AlwaysInstallElevated enabled
- Auto-logon credential exposure

Exploiting Misconfigured Services

Misconfigured Windows services are a prevalent vector for privilege escalation. Exploiting these services involves identifying weaknesses in their configuration, permissions, or execution environments.

Modifying Service Binaries

If a user has write permissions to a service executable or its directory, replacing the binary with a malicious payload can result in code execution with the service's privileges.

Changing Service Configuration

Altering the service's executable path or parameters, when permissions allow, can redirect execution to attacker-controlled binaries.

Starting or Stopping Services

Users with rights to start or stop services can leverage this ability to trigger malicious payloads or manipulate service behavior to elevate privileges.

- Check service permissions with tools like AccessChk

- Modify service binaries if write access exists
- Alter service executable paths
- Control service start/stop actions

Abusing Scheduled Tasks and Jobs

Scheduled tasks and background jobs running with elevated privileges can be abused to execute arbitrary code. Identifying and manipulating these tasks is a key privilege escalation tactic.

Enumerating Scheduled Tasks

Using commands like *schtasks /query /fo LIST /v* or PowerShell cmdlets such as *Get-ScheduledTask*, one can list scheduled tasks and analyze their triggers, actions, and privileges.

Modifying or Creating Tasks

With appropriate permissions, users can modify existing tasks or create new ones configured to run with elevated privileges, enabling privilege escalation.

Exploiting Weak Permissions

Tasks with weak ACLs allow modification by non-privileged users, which can be leveraged to execute malicious payloads at scheduled times.

- Use schtasks and Get-ScheduledTask for enumeration
- Check permissions on tasks
- Modify or create tasks with elevated privileges
- Deploy payloads via scheduled jobs

Leveraging DLL Hijacking

DLL hijacking is a technique where an attacker places a malicious DLL in a location where a privileged process loads it instead of the legitimate one. This leads to code execution with

elevated rights.

Understanding DLL Search Order

Windows searches for DLLs in a specific order, including the application directory and system directories. If a DLL with the same name as a required one exists earlier in the search path and is attacker-controlled, it will be loaded.

Identifying Vulnerable Applications

Applications lacking full path specification for DLLs or loading DLLs dynamically may be susceptible. Tools like Process Monitor can help identify DLL loading behavior.

Deploying Malicious DLLs

Placing a malicious DLL in the targeted directory or manipulating environment variables can trick the system into loading the attacker's DLL, resulting in privilege escalation.

- Analyze DLL search order
- Identify vulnerable applications
- Place malicious DLLs strategically
- Use tools like Process Monitor for analysis

Token Manipulation and Impersonation

Windows access tokens represent security contexts for users and processes. Manipulating or impersonating tokens can grant an attacker elevated privileges within the system.

Token Stealing

Attackers can duplicate tokens from high-privilege processes to impersonate those users. This requires appropriate permissions and is often done using specialized tools or scripts.

Token Impersonation

Processes can impersonate tokens to execute actions under different security contexts. Exploiting this allows elevated command execution or access to restricted resources.

Using Tools for Token Manipulation

Utilities like Mimikatz and PowerSploit provide capabilities to manipulate tokens, extract credentials, and perform impersonation, aiding in privilege escalation.

- Duplicate tokens from SYSTEM or Administrator processes
- Impersonate tokens to elevate privileges
- Leverage tools like Mimikatz for token operations
- Ensure appropriate permissions exist for token manipulation

Useful Tools and Commands

Several built-in Windows commands and third-party tools facilitate enumeration, exploitation, and verification during privilege escalation activities. Mastery of these utilities enhances assessment efficiency.

Built-in Windows Commands

Commands such as *whoami*, *icacls*, *sc*, and *schtasks* provide crucial information about user privileges, permissions, service configuration, and scheduled tasks.

Third-Party Tools

Tools like AccessChk, PowerUp, WinPEAS, and Mimikatz automate privilege escalation checks, uncover misconfigurations, and facilitate exploitation steps, making them indispensable for security professionals.

PowerShell Cmdlets

PowerShell offers extensive cmdlets for system interrogation and manipulation, such as *Get-Process*, *Get-Service*, and *Get-ScheduledTask*, supporting detailed analysis and exploitation workflows.

- whoami, icacls, sc, schtasks
- AccessChk for permission auditing
- PowerUp and WinPEAS for automated checks

- Mimikatz for credential and token manipulation
- PowerShell cmdlets for in-depth enumeration

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Windows privilege escalation cheat sheet?

A Windows privilege escalation cheat sheet is a concise reference guide that lists common techniques, commands, and tools used to identify and exploit privilege escalation vulnerabilities on Windows systems.

Why is privilege escalation important in Windows security testing?

Privilege escalation allows an attacker or tester to gain higher-level permissions, such as administrative rights, which can lead to full system control. It is crucial in security testing to identify and mitigate these vulnerabilities before they are exploited maliciously.

What are some common methods listed in a Windows privilege escalation cheat sheet?

Common methods include exploiting misconfigured services, weak file or folder permissions, vulnerable scheduled tasks, unquoted service paths, insecure registry permissions, and leveraging token impersonation or bypassing User Account Control (UAC).

Which built-in Windows commands are useful for privilege escalation enumeration?

Commands such as "whoami /priv", "net user", "systeminfo", "tasklist /v", "sc qc <service>", "icacls", and PowerShell cmdlets like "Get-Process" and "Get-Service" are often used for enumeration during privilege escalation analysis.

How can a cheat sheet help during a penetration test on a Windows machine?

A cheat sheet provides a quick and organized reference to common privilege escalation vectors and commands, saving time and ensuring thoroughness during penetration tests by guiding testers through systematic enumeration and exploitation steps.

Are there any tools recommended in Windows privilege

escalation cheat sheets?

Yes, commonly recommended tools include PowerUp, Sherlock, WinPEAS, SharpUp, and BloodHound, which automate the discovery of privilege escalation opportunities on Windows systems.

Additional Resources

1. *Windows Privilege Escalation Essentials*
This book provides a comprehensive guide to understanding and exploiting privilege escalation vulnerabilities in Windows environments. It covers various techniques attackers use to gain higher privileges and offers defensive strategies for system administrators. Readers will find practical examples and step-by-step instructions to master privilege escalation methods.

2. *Mastering Windows Security and Privilege Escalation*
Focusing on Windows security mechanisms, this book delves into how privilege escalation occurs and how to prevent it. It includes detailed explanations of Windows internals, common misconfigurations, and exploitation techniques. Security professionals will benefit from the real-world case studies and mitigation tactics presented.

3. *The Windows Hacker's Handbook: Privilege Escalation Techniques*
This handbook is designed for ethical hackers and penetration testers seeking to understand Windows privilege escalation. It explores a variety of escalation paths, including token manipulation, service misconfigurations, and kernel exploits. The book emphasizes hands-on labs and cheat sheets to enhance learning and application.

4. *Windows Privilege Escalation Cheat Sheet: Techniques and Tools*
A practical, concise reference guide, this cheat sheet compiles the most effective Windows privilege escalation techniques and tools. It is ideal for quick consultations during penetration tests or security assessments. The book also highlights common pitfalls and how to avoid detection.

5. *Advanced Windows Exploitation and Privilege Escalation*
Targeted at advanced users, this book explores sophisticated exploitation methods to escalate privileges on Windows systems. It includes coverage of kernel vulnerabilities, exploit development, and bypassing security controls like UAC and Windows Defender. Readers gain insight into cutting-edge attack vectors and protection mechanisms.

6. *Practical Windows Privilege Escalation for Penetration Testers*
This guide offers practical techniques tailored for penetration testers who need to escalate privileges in Windows environments. It breaks down complex concepts into actionable steps and includes numerous scripts and tools to automate tasks. The book also discusses post-exploitation tactics and cleanup procedures.

7. *Windows Security: From Fundamentals to Privilege Escalation*
Starting with fundamental Windows security concepts, this book gradually moves into the realm of privilege escalation. It explains how Windows handles permissions, user roles, and security policies, setting the stage for understanding escalation. The book is suited for beginners and intermediate readers aiming to build a solid foundation.

8. *Hacking Windows: Privilege Escalation and Persistence*
This book explores not only privilege escalation but also persistence techniques on Windows machines. It guides readers through various attack stages, from initial access to maintaining control with elevated privileges. The content is enriched with examples of common flaws and how attackers exploit them.

9. *The Blue Team's Guide to Windows Privilege Escalation*
Written from a defender's perspective, this book helps blue team members recognize and mitigate privilege escalation threats. It details detection strategies, logging configurations, and incident response tips specific to Windows environments. The guide empowers security teams to strengthen their defenses against attackers seeking elevated access.

Windows Privilege Escalation Cheat Sheet

windows privilege escalation cheat sheet: The Hacker's Notes Hamcodes K.H, Kayemba Hamiidu, Ever feel like you know the theory — but not what to actually do during a live hack? The Hacker's Notes: How to Hack All-Tech – No Fluff. No Theory. Just Execution You're not alone. In today's ever-evolving digital battlefield, most cybersecurity content overwhelms with theory, jargon, or outdated tools. You're not looking for fluff — you want execution, not explanations. You want to be the operator in control, the one who knows what to do when the moment hits. But theory-heavy textbooks don't teach that. Before: You're jumping between YouTube videos, outdated PDFs, or scattered blog tutorials, trying to piece together a solid offensive or defensive strategy. The Hacker's Notes: How to Hack All-Tech – No Fluff. No Theory. Just Execution. Master the art of hacking and enhance your cybersecurity skills. This streamlined field guide is built for: Red Team / Blue Team Operators Penetration Testers SOC Analysts Cybersecurity Students Ethical Hackers and InfoSec Hobbyists This no-nonsense guide is tailored for professionals who prefer practical over theoretical. With a focus on real-world applications, it's the ultimate resource for anyone eager to learn cutting-edge security tactics. Key Features and Benefits: Direct Execution: Skip the theory. Jump straight into tactics with hands-on, actionable steps. Comprehensive Toolkits: Includes scripts, commands, and playbooks for red and blue teams. Modern Tech Coverage: Extensive operations on AI/ML, blockchain, cloud, mobile, and IoT. Live Examples: Every chapter includes command-line syntax and real-world tool usage. Content Highlights: High-Impact OSINT Techniques – Learn to uncover hidden data and digital footprints. Advanced Exploitation Strategies – Explore paths for privilege escalation, evasion, and persistence. Incident Response Tactics – Master defensive strategies and threat hunting like a pro. Why Choose This Book? Updated for 2025 with modern systems and toolchains. Field-tested techniques used by real operators. Easy-to-navigate format for quick referencing during live engagements. Available in Paperback and Kindle formats. Whether you're executing missions or just starting out, The Hacker's Notes gives you the edge you need to operate with confidence. Intended for training, simulation, and authorized environments only. If you're tired of flipping through 800 pages of theory while your job needs results now… Grab The Hacker's Notes — and become the operator others call when things go wrong. Get your copy today and gain the tactical edge that sets you apart on the cyber battlefield.

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password cracking and persistence mechanisms Defend networks by developing operational awareness using auditd and Sysmon to analyze logs, and deploying defensive tools such as the Snort intrusion detection system, IPFire firewalls, and ModSecurity web application firewalls Who This Book Is For This study guide is intended for everyone involved in or interested in cybersecurity operations (e.g., cybersecurity professionals, IT professionals, business professionals, and students)

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will learn how to use automated scanners to find security flaws in web applications and understand how to bypass basic security controls. In the concluding chapters, you will look at what you have learned in the context of the Open Web Application Security Project (OWASP) and the top 10 web application vulnerabilities you are most likely to encounter, equipping you with the ability to combat them effectively. By the end of this book, you will have acquired the skills you need to identify, exploit, and prevent web application vulnerabilities. What you will learn Set up a secure penetration testing laboratory Use proxies, crawlers, and spiders to investigate an entire website Identify cross-site scripting and client-side vulnerabilities Exploit vulnerabilities that allow the insertion of code into web applications Exploit vulnerabilities that require complex setups Improve testing efficiency using automated vulnerability scanners Learn how to circumvent security controls put in place to prevent attacks Who this book is for Kali Linux Web Penetration Testing Cookbook is for IT professionals, web developers, security enthusiasts, and security professionals who want an accessible reference on how to find, exploit, and prevent security vulnerabilities in web applications. The basics of operating a Linux environment and prior exposure to security technologies and tools are necessary.

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credential saved in the memory, registry settings that always elevate privileges before executing a binary, hard-coded credential contained in the application configuration files, and many more. Table of Contents Introduction Section One: Windows Configuration Chapter 1: AlwaysInstallElevated Section Two: Domain Controller Chapter 2: Zerologon Section Three: Windows Service Chapter 3: Service - Insecure File Permission Chapter 4: Service - Unquoted Path Chapter 5: Service - Bin Path Chapter 6: Service - Registry Chapter 7: Service - DLL Hijacking Section Four: Scheduled Tasks Chapter 8: Scheduled Tasks Section Five: Windows Registry Chapter 9: Autorun Chapter 10: Startup Applications Section Six: Windows Kernel Chapter 11: Kernel - EternalBlue Chapter 12: Kernel - MS15-051 Chapter 13: Kernel - MS14-058 Section Seven: Potato Exploits Chapter 14: Juicy Potato Chapter 15: Rogue Potato Section Eight: Password Mining Chapter 16: Password Mining - Memory Chapter 17: Password Mining - Registry Chapter 18: Password Mining - SiteList Chapter 19: Password Mining - Unattended Chapter 20: Password Mining - Web.config Section Nine: UAC Bypass Chapter 21: User Account Control Bypass For more information, please visit http://www.howtopassoscp.com/.

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