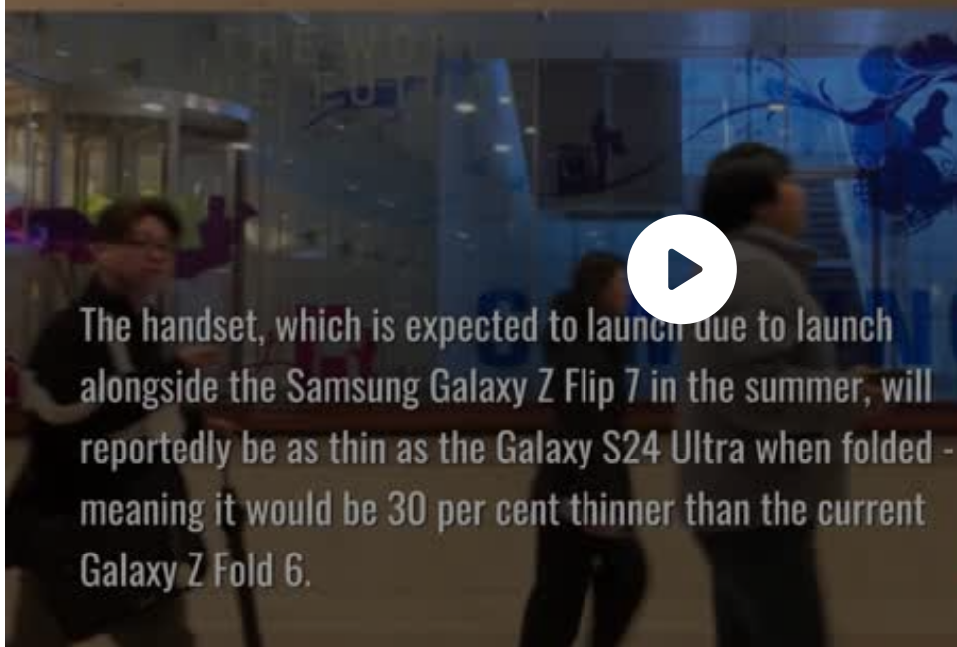


# Linux Directory Structure and Important Files Paths Explained

Ravi Saive | Last Updated: November 15, 2023 | Read Time: 8 mins | [Open Source](#) | [60 Comments](#)

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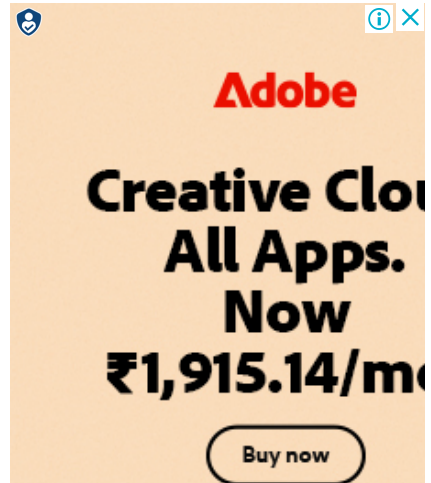


**Brief:** This article gives a breakdown of the Linux File System/directory structure, some of the critical files, their usability, and their location.

You must have probably heard that [everything is considered a file](#) in UNIX and UNIX derivatives such as Linux. If not a file, then it must be a running process.

There are three broad categories of files in Linux.

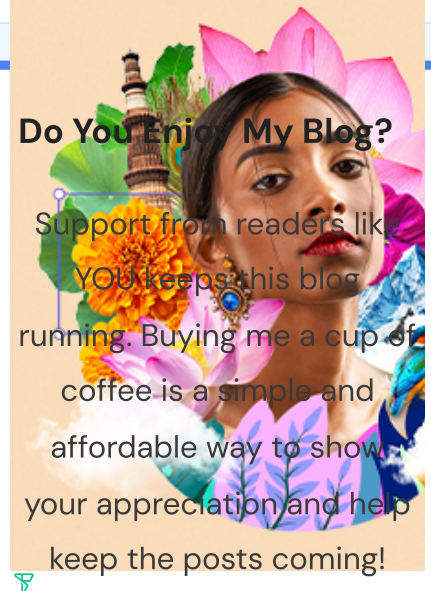
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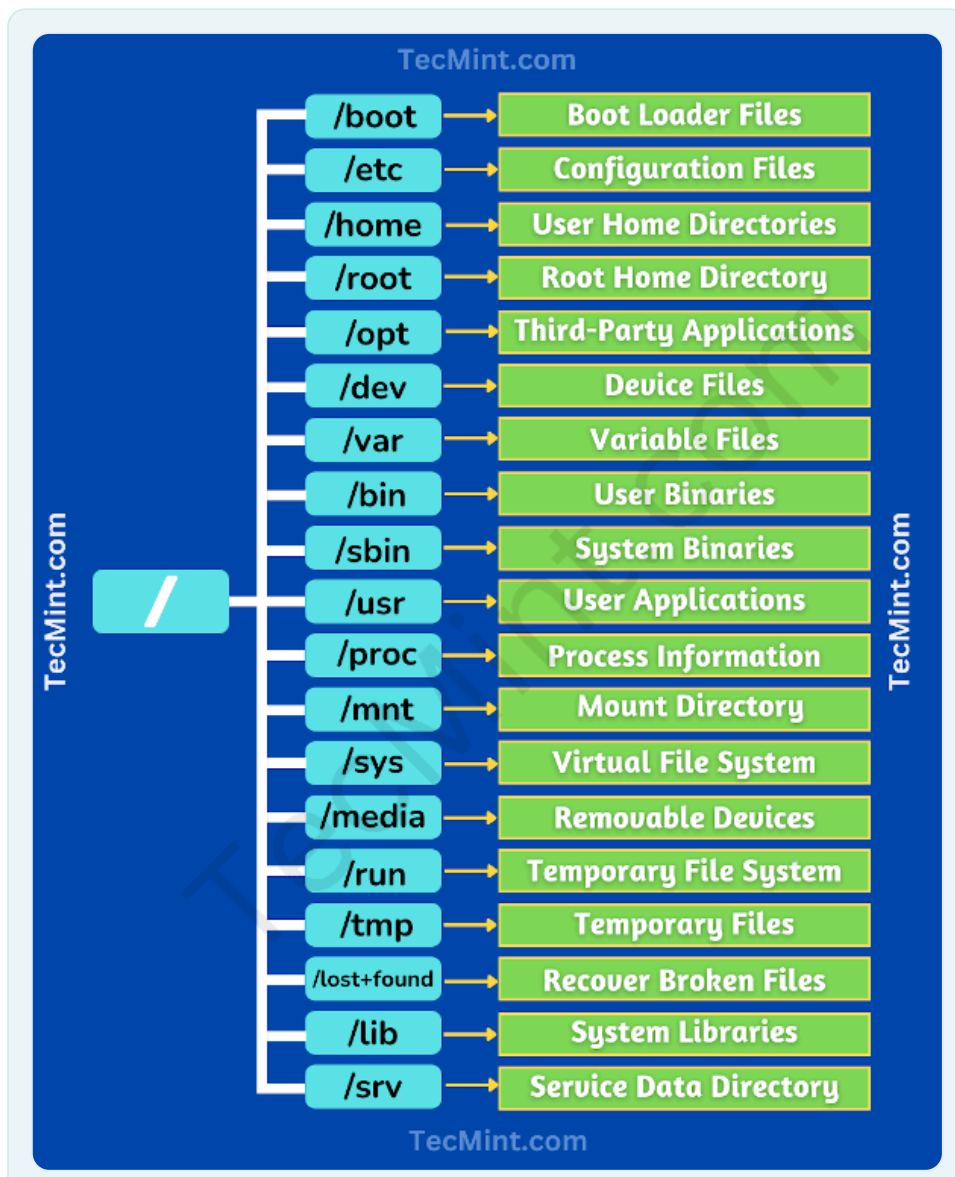
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- **Directory Files** – In Linux, directories are also categorized as files since they also serve as storage space for other files and folders.
- **Device Files** – These are special files that provide an interface to device drivers which enable the usability of hardware devices on the system such as mice, keyboards, USB devices, hard drives, etc. These are found in the **/dev** directory.

## Linux Directory Structure Diagram

A standard **Linux** distribution follows the directory structure as provided below with Diagram and explanation.



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[An Easy Way to Hide Files and Directories in Linux](#)

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Each of the above directories (which is a file, in the first place) contains important information, required for booting to device drivers, configuration files, etc. Describing briefly the purpose of each directory, we are starting hierarchically.

## / Directory

The [root directory](#), denoted by a single forward slash (`/`), is the uppermost directory in the Linux directory structure. It contains all directories, sub-directories, and files on your Linux system. It's from the root directory where the Linux directory hierarchy starts.

**NOTE:** The root directory (`/`) should not be confused with the root home directory (`/root`).

```
(root@tecmin:~)# cd /
(root@tecmin:/)# ls -l
total 28
lrwxrwxrwx    1 root root    7 Oct 11  2021 bin -> usr/bin
dr-xr-xr-x    5 root root 4096 Mar  3  2022 boot
drwxr-xr-x   20 root root 3040 Sep 29 16:27 dev
drwxr-xr-x  111 root root 8192 Sep 29 14:27 etc
drwxr-xr-x    4 root root   39 Oct 11  2021 home
lrwxrwxrwx    1 root root    7 Oct 11  2021 lib -> usr/lib
lrwxrwxrwx    1 root root    9 Oct 11  2021 lib64 -> usr/lib64
drwxr-xr-x    2 root root    6 Oct 11  2021 media
drwxr-xr-x    2 root root    6 Oct 11  2021 mnt
drwxr-xr-x    3 root root   18 Aug 23 12:23 opt
dr-xr-xr-x   159 root root    0 Jan  3  2022 proc
dr-xr-xr-x    8 root root 4096 Sep 29 14:31 root
drwxr-xr-x   35 root root 1000 Aug 23 14:44 run
lrwxrwxrwx    1 root root    8 Oct 11  2021 sbin -> usr/sbin
drwxr-xr-x    2 root root    6 Oct 11  2021 srv
dr-xr-xr-x   13 root root    0 Mar  3  2022 sys
drwxrwxrwt   10 root root 4096 Sep 29 15:08 tmp
drwxr-xr-x   14 root root   167 Mar  3  2022 usr
drwxr-xr-x   21 root root 4096 Aug 23 13:54 var
```

## /boot Directory

This is one of the most vital directories in a Linux system. As the name infers, the boot directory contains [Linux boot files](#) such as the bootloader, the kernel, and its associated files. Files such as ‘**vmlinuz**’ represent the compressed image of the Linux kernel.

```
root@tecmint:~# cd /boot/
root@tecmint:/boot# ls -l
total 261764
-rw-r--r-- 1 root root 192174 Sep 16 2021 config-4.18.0-305.19.1.el8_4.x86_64
-rw-r--r-- 1 root root 192174 Nov 2 2021 config-4.18.0-305.25.1.el8_4.x86_64
-rw-r--r-- 1 root root 193935 Jan 19 2022 config-4.18.0-348.12.2.el8_5.x86_64
drwxr-xr-x 3 root root 17 Jun 25 2021 efi
drwx----- 4 root root 83 Nov 14 2021 grub2
-rw----- 1 root root 84065612 Jun 25 2021 initramfs-0-rescue-53039f99a1524508b06024ec90ac5a
-rw----- 1 root root 31555789 Oct 27 2021 initramfs-4.18.0-305.19.1.el8_4.x86_64.img
-rw----- 1 root root 17985017 Oct 28 2021 initramfs-4.18.0-305.19.1.el8_4.x86_64kdump.img
-rw----- 1 root root 22319352 Mar 3 2022 initramfs-4.18.0-305.25.1.el8_4.x86_64.img
-rw----- 1 root root 18305005 Nov 5 2021 initramfs-4.18.0-305.25.1.el8_4.x86_64kdump.img
-rw----- 1 root root 17980058 Oct 27 2021 initramfs-4.18.0-305.3.1.el8_4.x86_64kdump.img
-rw----- 1 root root 22327867 Mar 3 2022 initramfs-4.18.0-348.12.2.el8_5.x86_64.img
drwxr-xr-x 3 root root 21 Jun 25 2021 loader
lrwxrwxrwx 1 root root 52 Mar 3 2022 symvers-4.18.0-348.12.2.el8_5.x86_64.gz -> /lib
-rw----- 1 root root 4166164 Sep 16 2021 System.map-4.18.0-305.19.1.el8_4.x86_64
-rw----- 1 root root 4166558 Nov 2 2021 System.map-4.18.0-305.25.1.el8_4.x86_64
-rw----- 1 root root 4260137 Jan 19 2022 System.map-4.18.0-348.12.2.el8_5.x86_64
-rwxr-xr-x 1 root root 10019200 Jun 25 2021 vmlinuz-0-rescue-53039f99a1524508b06024ec90ac5a
-rwxr-xr-x 1 root root 10027392 Sep 16 2021 vmlinuz-4.18.0-305.19.1.el8_4.x86_64
-rwxr-xr-x 1 root root 10031392 Nov 2 2021 vmlinuz-4.18.0-305.25.1.el8_4.x86_64
-rwxr-xr-x 1 root root 10215728 Jan 19 2022 vmlinuz-4.18.0-348.12.2.el8_5.x86_64
root@tecmint:/boot#
```

Boot Directory in Linux

## /etc Directory

The **/etc** directory contains system configuration files for all the services, scripts, and third-party applications that are installed. This directory is considered the nerve center of the Linux system.

```
root@tecmint:/etc# ls /etc/
adjtime          cron.daily       environment      host.conf
aliases          cron.deny        ethertypes      hostname
alternatives     cron.hourly      exports          hosts
anacrontab       cron.monthly     exports.d        httpd
asciidoctor      crontab          filesystems     idmapd.conf
asound.conf      cron.weekly      firewallld      init.d
audit            crypto-policies  fonts           inittab
authselect       crypttab         fstab           inputrc
bash_completion.d csh.cshrc       fuse.conf       iproute2
bashrc           csh.login        gcrypt          iscsi
bindresvport.blacklist dbus-1           gdbinit         issue
binfmt.d         dconf            gdbinit.d       issue.net
centos-release   default          gnupg           java
```

/etc Directory in Linux

## /home Directory

The **/home** directory is a directory that contains a user’s personal folders and files. On a graphical Linux system, the home directory,



In addition, the **/home** directory contains personal configuration files which are prefixed with a dot **(.)**. These are hidden files that contain user-specific settings for the login shell session.

```
root@tecmint:/home# ls -l /home/
total 0
drwx----- 2 rockylinux rockylinux 83 Jun 25 2021 rockylinux
drwx----- 2 tecmint      tecmint   83 Aug 23 19:48 tecmint
root@tecmint:/home#
```

#### Home Directory in Linux

## /root Directory

The **/root** directory is the home directory for the root user, which is also referred to as the root user's home directory (and not as the root **(/)** directory).

The root account also referred to as the superuser, administrative user, system administrator or just the root user has all the access to commands and system files in Linux.

```
root@tecmint:/home# ls -l /root/
total 1237224
-rw----- 1 root root 1283 Jun 25 2021 anaconda-ks.cfg
-rw-r--r-- 1 root root 240 Dec 10 2021 download-linux.txt
-rw-r--r-- 1 root root 149503597 Dec 10 2021 linux-5.1.1.tar.gz
drwxr-xr-x 5 root root 196 Sep 29 14:22 linux_commands
drwxr-xr-x 3 root root 47 Aug 23 17:38 lua_build
-rw-r--r-- 1 root root 874618880 Dec 27 2021 ubuntu-20.04.3-desktop-amd64.iso
-rw-r--r-- 1 root root 81920 Dec 10 2021 ubuntu-20.04.3-desktop-amd64.iso.1
-rw-r--r-- 1 root root 1303524 Dec 27 2021 wget-log
root@tecmint:/home#
```

#### Root User Directory in Linux



The **/opt** directory is a directory that is reserved for add-on packages and third-party software applications that are not included by default in the system's official repositories.

For example, when you install applications such as [Skype](#), **Discord**, **Spotify**, and [Java](#), to mention a few, they get stored in the **/opt** directory.

```
(root@tecmin:/home)# ls -l /opt/  
total 0  
drwxr-xr-x 2 root root 6 May 23 20:26 remi  
(root@tecmin:/home)#
```

/opt Directory in Linux

## /dev Directory

The **/dev** directory contains device files or special files for devices that are attached to the system such as the hard drive, keyboard, and mouse. As mentioned, these are not regular that a user can read and write to.

These are abstractions of standard devices that applications on your system interact with through input and output system calls.

```
(root@tecmin:/home)# ls /dev/  
autofs      cpu          fd            input          net            raw            sg1  
block       cpu_dma_latency full           kmsg           null           r1             shm  
bsg          disk         fuse          log            nvram          rtc            snapshot  
bus          dm-0         hidraw0       loop-control   port           rtc0           snd  
cdrom        dm-1         hpet          mapper          ppp            sda            sr0  
char         dm-2         hugepages    mcelog         ptmx           sda1           stderr  
console      dri          hwrng         mem            pts            sda2           stdin  
core         fb0          initctl       mqqueue        random          sg0            stdout
```

/dev Directory in Linux

## /var Directory

The **/var** directory stores system-generated variable files, which include log files, caches, and spool files just to mention a few.





```

[root@tecmin:/home]# ls -l /var
total 12
drwxr-xr-x. 2 root root 19 Apr 12 2021 account
drwxr-xr-x. 2 root root 6 Oct 11 2021 adm
drwxr-xr-x. 12 root root 141 Aug 23 12:37 cache
drwxr-xr-x. 3 root root 18 Oct 11 2021 db
drwxr-xr-x. 3 root root 18 Oct 11 2021 empty
drwxr-xr-x. 2 root root 6 Oct 11 2021 ftp
drwxr-xr-x. 2 root root 6 Oct 11 2021 games
drwxr-xr-x. 2 root root 6 Oct 11 2021 gopher
drwxr-xr-x. 3 root root 18 Nov 9 2021 kerberos
drwxr-xr-x. 41 root root 4096 Aug 23 14:44 lib
drwxr-xr-x. 2 root root 6 Oct 11 2021 local
lrwxrwxrwx. 1 root root 11 Jun 25 2021 lock -> ../run/lock
drwxr-xr-x. 17 root root 4096 Sep 29 14:28 log
lrwxrwxrwx. 1 root root 10 Oct 11 2021 mail -> spool/mail
drwxr-xr-x. 2 root root 6 Oct 11 2021 nis
drwxr-xr-x. 2 root root 6 Oct 11 2021 opt
drwxr-xr-x. 2 root root 6 Oct 11 2021 preserve
lrwxrwxrwx. 1 root root 6 Jun 25 2021 run -> ../run
drwxr-xr-x. 7 root root 72 Oct 11 2021 spool
drwxrwxrwt. 6 root root 4096 Sep 29 14:27 tmp
drwxr-xr-x. 4 root root 33 Aug 23 12:52 www
drwxr-xr-x. 2 root root 6 Oct 11 2021 yp

```

## /var Directory in Linux

## /bin Directory

The **/bin** directory contains user binaries, executable programs, and common system commands that are used by all users in the system. These include [ls](#), [pwd](#), [cat](#), [mkdir](#), [cd](#), [mv](#), [cp](#), [du](#), [df](#), [tar](#), [rpm](#), [wc](#), [history](#), etc.

```

root@tecmin:/home# ls /bin/
a2x          edgepaint    ifnames
a2x.py       editdiff     iio_event_monitor
ab           efikeygen    iio_generic_buffer
ac           efiisiglist  info
aclocal      egrep        infocmp
aclocal-1.16 eject        infotocap
acyclic      elfedit      innochecksum
addr2line    enc2xs       install
alias        encguess     install-catalog
apropos      env          instmodsh
ar           envsubst     intel-speed-select
arch         eqn          interdiff
             espdiff     intltool-extract

```



The **/sbin** directory contains executable files, utilities, and system commands that are reserved for the root user or a user with root privileges. Such commands include halt, reboot, mkfs, [fsck](#), [fdisk](#), halt, [iptables](#), [ifconfig](#), [ip](#), [swapon](#), etc.

```
root@tecmint:/home# ls /sbin/
accessdb          debugfs           gluster           iptables-save
accton            delpart           groupadd          iptables-translate
addgnupghome      depmod            groupdel          iptunnel
addpart           devlink           groupmems         irqbalance
adduser           dmccventd         groupmod          iscsiadm
agetty            dmfilemapd        grpck             iscsid
alternatives      dmidecode         grpconv           iscsi-iname
anacron           dmsetup           grpconv           iscsistart
apachectl         dmstats           grub2-bios-setup  iscsiui
applygnupgdefaults dnsmasq           grub2-get-kernel-settings key.dns_resolver
arp              dump-acct         grub2-install     kpartx
arpd             dumpe2fs          grub2-macbless    lchage
```

/sbin Directory in Linux

## /usr Directory

The **/usr** directory ranks as one of the most important directories due to the enormous amount of data it holds. The directory contains system-wide read-only files. These include libraries, user binaries and their documentation, programs, and system utilities.

```
root@tecmint:/home# ls -l /usr/
total 184
dr-xr-xr-x.  2 root root 36864 Aug 23 20:35 bin
drwxr-xr-x.  2 root root   6 Nov  3 2021 etc
drwxr-xr-x.  2 root root   6 Oct 11 2021 games
drwxr-xr-x. 42 root root 8192 Aug 23 17:35 include
drwxr-xr-x.  3 root root   53 Oct 28 2021 java
dr-xr-xr-x. 38 root root 4096 Aug 23 17:33 lib
dr-xr-xr-x. 68 root root 49152 Aug 23 17:35 lib64
drwxr-xr-x. 35 root root 4096 Aug 23 17:32 libexec
drwxr-xr-x. 13 root root   142 Aug 23 17:37 local
dr-xr-xr-x.  2 root root 16384 Aug 23 17:32 sbin
drwxr-xr-x. 131 root root 4096 Aug 23 18:41 share
drwxr-xr-x.  4 root root   34 Oct 11 2021 src
lrwxrwxrwx.  1 root root   10 Oct 11 2021 tmp -> ../var/tmp
root@tecmint:/home#
```

/usr Directory in Linux

## /proc Directory

The [/proc directory](#) is somewhat of a strange directory. It is a virtual or pseudo filesystem that contains vital information about running processes. It is considered the control and information center for the Linux kernel.





```
[root@tecmint:/home]# ls /proc/
1          110691 110944 152 24234 32      35984 439 453
10         110712 12      154 25      33      35994 442 454
100857     110740 13       155 26      34       36      443 455
109486     110743 14       16 267     34518 36144 444 456
109918     110744 1471     17 27      34519 37      446 457
109919     110780 1472     18 28      34520 38      447 460
109920     110782 149      2 29      34521 39      449 461
109921     110819 15       20 3       34522 4       450 48033
11         110906 150      23 30      34523 40537 451 48034
110617     110930 151      24 31      35      41      452 48035
[root@tecmint:/home]#
```

/proc Directory in Linux

## /mnt Directory

The **/mnt** directory along with its subdirectories is a directory intended to be used as a temporary mount point for [mounting storage devices](#) such as Hard disk drives, USB drives, and CDROMs.

```
[root@tecmint:~]# ls -l /mnt/
total 101
dr-xr-xr-x 1 root root 2048 Aug 19 2021 boot
dr-xr-xr-x 1 root root 2048 Aug 19 2021 casper
dr-xr-xr-x 1 root root 2048 Aug 19 2021 dists
dr-xr-xr-x 1 root root 2048 Aug 19 2021 EFI
dr-xr-xr-x 1 root root 2048 Aug 19 2021 install
dr-xr-xr-x 1 root root 34816 Aug 19 2021 isolinux
-r--r--r-- 1 root root 53487 Aug 19 2021 md5sum.txt
dr-xr-xr-x 1 root root 2048 Aug 19 2021 pool
dr-xr-xr-x 1 root root 2048 Aug 19 2021 preseed
lr-xr-xr-x 1 root root 1 Aug 19 2021 ubuntu -> .
[root@tecmint:~]#
```

mnt Directory in Linux

## /sys Directory



```
(root@tecmin:~)# ls -l /sys
total 0
drwxr-xr-x  2 root root 0 Jan  3  2022 block
drwxr-xr-x 35 root root 0 Jan  3  2022 bus
drwxr-xr-x 58 root root 0 Jan  3  2022 class
drwxr-xr-x  4 root root 0 Jan  3  2022 dev
drwxr-xr-x 15 root root 0 Jan  3  2022 devices
drwxr-xr-x  6 root root 0 Jan  3  2022 firmware
drwxr-xr-x  7 root root 0 Jan  3  2022 fs
drwxr-xr-x  2 root root 0 Jan  3  2022 hypervisor
drwxr-xr-x 15 root root 0 Jan  3  2022 kernel
drwxr-xr-x 149 root root 0 Jan  3  2022 module
drwxr-xr-x  2 root root 0 Jan  3  2022 power
```

/sys Directory in Linux

## /media Directory

The **/media** directory is a directory where the system mounts removable media such as USB drives.

```
tecmin@tecmin:~$ ls -l /media/tecmin/
total 14
dr-xr-xr-x  6 tecmin tecmin 492 Apr  9  2021 CCCOMA_X64FRE_EN-GB_DV9
drwx----- 20 tecmin tecmin 4096 Oct 10 11:38 Linux_Data
drwx----- 15 tecmin tecmin 4096 Jun 29 13:33 Personal_Data
drwx-----  8 tecmin tecmin 4096 Jun  6 12:50 Personal_Sites
tecmin@tecmin:~$
```

/media Directory in Linux

## /run Directory

The **/run** directory is a temporary filesystem that contains volatile runtime data that shows the system has since it was booted. Files under the **/run** directory must be deleted (removed or truncated as convenient) at the start of the boot process.

```
(root@tecmin:~)# ls /run/
agetty.reload  console      dbus         firewallld   gssproxy.sock
auditd.pid     criu         dmeventd-client  fsck         httpd
blkid          cron.reboot  dmeventd-server  gluster      initctl
chrony         cryptsetup   faillock       gssproxy.pid  initramfs
```

/run Directory in Linux

## /tmp Directory

TL



Do not delete files under the /tmp directory unless you know exactly what you are doing! Many of these files are critical for presently running programs and removing them may affect a system crash.

```
root@tecmin:~# ls /tmp/
hsperfdata_root  systemd-private-f61af026a088492a87bb73074cd0fdf7-chrond.service-7VRJ6e
latest.tar.gz    systemd-private-f61af026a088492a87bb73074cd0fdf7-httpd.service-azhcRh
lua_cAmErV       systemd-private-f61af026a088492a87bb73074cd0fdf7-mariadb.service-GNrCwg
root@tecmin:~#
```

### /tmp Directory in Linux

## /lib Directory

The **/lib** directory stores all the essential standard libraries required by user binaries in the **/bin** directory.

```
(root@tecmin:~)# ls /lib
binfmt.d  dracut      firewallld  games  java      jvm-private
cpp        eclipse     firmware   gcc    jvm       kbd
debug      environment.d  fontconfig  grub   jvm-common  kernel
(root@tecmin:~)#
```

### /lib Directory in Linux

## /lost+found Directory

The **lost+found** directory is installed during the installation of Linux, useful for recovering files that may be broken due to unexpected shut-down.



The **/srv** directory is the service directory and is abbreviated as **'srv'**. This directory contains server-specific and service-related files.

## Exploring Important file, their location, and their Usability

**Linux** is a complex system that requires a more complex and efficient way to **start, stop, maintain** and **reboot** a system, unlike **Windows**. There is a well-defined configuration **file, binaries, man pages, info files**, etc. for every **process** in **Linux**.

In addition to the major directories, here is a list of some of the prominent files and directories and their uses.

- **/boot/vmlinuz** : The **Linux Kernel** file.
- **/dev/hda** : Device file for the first **IDE HDD (Hard Disk Drive)**.
- **/dev/hdc** : Device file for the **IDE Cdrom**, commonly.
- **/dev/sda**: Device file for the first SATA Drive (Hard Disk Drive).
- **/dev/null** : A pseudo-device, that doesn't exist. Sometimes garbage output is redirected to **/dev/null**, so that it gets lost, forever.
- **/etc/bashrc** : This file contains system-wide defaults, functions, and aliases among other files that are used by all the system users.
- **/etc/crontab** : This is a system-wide file that is uniquely formatted to schedule or [automate system tasks on a Linux](#) system.
- **/etc/exports** : A file that determines which file systems are exported to remote hosts and specifies options.
- **/etc/fstab** : This is a special file that contains information



- **/etc/hosts** : This is a configuration file that maps system hostnames to their corresponding IP addresses.
- **/etc/hosts.allow** : The file specifies which hosts are permitted to connect to the local system.
- **/etc/host.deny** : The file specifies which hosts are denied access and services on the local machine.
- **/etc/issue** : Contains a pre-login message.
- **/etc/modules** : This file contains the names of kernel modules that should be loaded at boot time, one per line.
- **/etc/motd** : [motd](#) stands for a **message of the day**, the message users get upon login.
- **/etc/mtab** : A read-only file that contains a list of currently mounted filesystems.
- **/etc/passwd** : A file that contains the [system user's information](#) such as the username, UID, GID, and login shell among others
- **/etc/printcap** : Contains printer information that is generated by the `/etc/cups/printers.conf` file.
- **/etc/profile** : Contains Linux system-wide environment and other startup scripts.
- **/etc/profile.d** : Application script, executed after **login**.
- **/etc/rc.d** : Information about **run level** specific script.
- **/etc/rc.d/init.d** : Run Level **Initialisation** Script.
- **/etc/resolv.conf** : This is a DNS resolver file. It specifies how the system leverages DNS to resolve hostnames.
- **/etc/security** : Contains configuration files for various PAM modules.
- **/etc/skel** : This is a directory that contains a set of user configuration files that are copied to the user's home directory when a user is created.



- **/usr/bin/X11** : This directory contains infinitely nested directories and binaries for the X Windows System.
- **/usr/include** : The directory contains header files for C compilers. This includes stdio.h, stdlib.h, and string.h among others.
- **/usr/share** : Shared directories of **man files, info files**, etc.
- **/usr/lib** : This directory consists of object files and directories
- **/usr/sbin** : The directory contains binaries with superuser privileges or for System Administration.
- **/proc/cpuinfo** : The file contains system info including CPU model, model name, number of cores, and clock speed to mention a few files.
- **/proc/interrupts** : Information about the current **interrupts** being utilized currently.
- **/proc/ioports** : The file contains all the Input/Output addresses used by devices on the server.
- **/proc/meminfo** : A file that stores memory usage information including swap information.
- **/proc/modules** : A file that lists all the modules being used by the kernel
- **/proc/mount** : The file contains detailed mounted file-system information.
- **/proc/stat** : The file contains detailed information about the system and kernel activity.
- **/proc/swaps** : The file contains information about the swap file.
- **/proc/version** : The file contains Linux version information.
- **/var/log/lastlog** : A binary file that contains information about the last successful user logins.





- **/var/log/syslog** : A file that contains non-critical system logs.
- **/var/log/wtmp** : A file listing the login **time** and **duration** of each user on the system currently.

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