

TRAINING

Editing Text Files on the Command Line

Overview

Many configurations for Linux applications and services are stored in text files. There are occasions when changing the configuration for a service, like httpd (the Apache web server, as it is called in CentOS and openSUSE) for example,, will require you to edit a configuration file and restart the service. CentOS, openSUSE, and Ubuntu all ship with at least one command line editor preinstalled.

Text editors are the subject of a long running, almost religious debate in the Linux community. Vim and EMACS in particular are favourites among long-time Linux users. Both are highly configurable and can be extended to support many usecases and workflows. Nano is another popular, though less customizable, text editor which may be easier to use for newer Linux users.

Key Ideas

Vim: A text editor first released in 1991 as an improvement on vi, a text editor found in Unix-like environments for many years before that. Uses modal editing where the actions that can be performed vary depending on the editing mode currently employed. The key modes are normal mode (the default, used for navigation, selection, and entering commands and insert mode (press “i” and enter text, press the Esc key to return to normal mode).

Nano: A simple text editor that will be more familiar than Vim to people with experience using Notepad and Gedit. Opens in edit mode, use the “Ctrl” key in combination with letter keys to perform actions on the file you are editing. there, press Ctrl+G to view the complete list of key combinations. Type nano and hit the Enter key to enter nano. Once there, press Ctrl+G to view the complete list of key combinations.

Text file: Any file that contains text. In Linux, file extensions are a convention that allow users to identify files rather than a requirement from the operating system. You can use a text editor to edit plain text files (.txt), html files (.html), bash scripts (.sh), perl scripts (.pl) and many more.

Example Scenario

Use Nano to create a text file to hold a list of things you have to do. Add some things to do, and save the file. Remember one more thing you have to do, open your todo list, add the additional task, and save the file.

Now do it

1. Create a text file to hold your todo list called todo.txt using a text editor, add tasks to it, save it, and exit.
2. Open todo.txt using a text editor, add a task, save it, and exit.

If you remember nothing else...

Nano and Vim are command line text editors that ship by default with many distributions. Vim does not open in edit mode. Text editors can be used to open any text containing file.

Answer Key

1. Create a todo list, add tasks:

1. Enter the nano command

```
$ nano
```

2. Enter some tasks to complete.

3. Save the file by typing “ctrl + o” which means “write out the file”.

4. Type the filename you want to give your todo list (e.g. todo.txt) .

5. Exit nano by pressing “ctrl + x”

2. Edit todo list, add additional task:

1. Enter the nano command, adding the filename as a parameter

```
$ nano todo.txt
```

2. Add the the additional task you remembered

3. Save the file by typing “ctrl + o” which means “write out the file”.

4. Press enter to accept the current filename and update your text file.

5. Press “ctrl + x” to exit Nano.



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