

VPS Feb 01, 2023 Artūras B. 16min Read

40 Essential Linux Commands That Every User Should Know









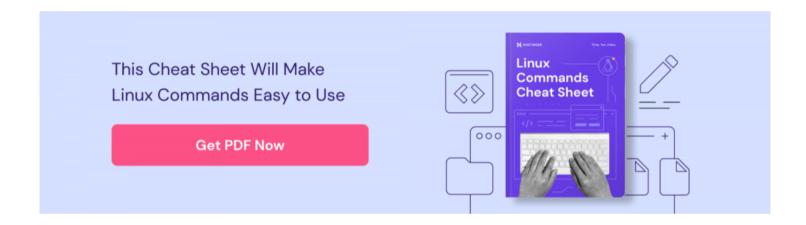


Linux is a family of open-source Unix operating systems based on the Linux Kernel. They include Ubuntu, Fedora, Debian, openSUSE, and Red Hat. Using Linux to manage a <u>Virtual Private Server</u> (VPS) is common practice.

When operating Linux, you need to use a **shell** – a program that gives you access to the operating system's services. Most Linux distributions use a graphical user interface (GUI), making them beginner-friendly.

However, we recommend utilizing the command-line interface (CLI) because it's quicker and offers more control. Tasks that require multiple steps on the GUI can be done in a matter of seconds by entering commands into the CLI.

So if you want to use Linux, learning the common utilities or commands will go a long way. This article will discuss the 40 basic commands to help you use your Linux distro effectively.



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What Is a Linux Command?

A Linux command is a program or utility that runs on the CLI – a console that interacts with the system via texts and processes. It's similar to the Command Prompt application in Windows.

Linux commands are executed on Terminal by pressing **Enter** at the end of the line. You can run commands



CommandName [option(s)] [parameter(s)]

A command may contain an option or a parameter. In some cases, it can still run without them. These are the three most common parts of a command:

- CommandName is the rule that you want to perform.
- Option or flag modifies a command's operation. To invoke it, use hyphens (–) or double hyphens (—).
- Parameter or argument specifies any necessary information for the command.

Keep in mind that all Linux commands are case-sensitive.

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The 40 Most Commonly Used Linux Commands

Before proceeding to the list of basic commands, you need to open Terminal first. If you are still unsure, check out our <u>CLI tutorial</u>.

Although the steps may differ depending on your Linux distribution, the Terminal application is usually found in the **Utilities** section.

Here is the list of basic Linux commands:

1. sudo command

Short for superuser do, **sudo** is one of the most popular basic Linux commands that lets you perform tasks that require administrative or root permissions.

When using sudo, the system will prompt users to authenticate themselves with a password. Then, the Linux system will log a timestamp as a tracker. By default, every root user can run sudo commands for **15** minutes/session.

If you try to run sudo in the command line without authenticating yourself, the system will log the activity as a security event.

Here's the general syntax:

sudo (command)

You can also add an option, such as:

- **-k** or **-reset-timestamp** invalidates the timestamp file.
- -g or -group=group runs commands as a specified group name or ID.
- -h or -host=host runs commands on the host.

2. pwd command

Use the **pwd** command to find the path of your current working directory. Simply entering **pwd** will return the full current path – a path of all the directories that starts with a forward slash (/). For example, /home/username.

The **pwd** command uses the following syntax:





- -L or -logical prints environment variable content, including symbolic links.
- -P or -physical prints the actual path of the current directory.

3. cd command

To navigate through the Linux files and directories, use the **cd** command. Depending on your current working directory, it requires either the full path or the directory name.

Running this command without an option will take you to the home folder. Keep in mind that only users with **sudo** privileges can execute it.

Let's say you're in **/home/username/Documents** and want to go to **Photos**, a subdirectory of **Documents**. To do so, enter the following command:

cd Photos.

If you want to switch to a completely new directory, for example, /home/username/Movies, you have to enter cd followed by the directory's absolute path:

cd /home/username/Movies

Here are some shortcuts to help you navigate:

- cd ~[username] goes to another user's home directory.
- cd .. moves one directory up.
- cd- moves to your previous directory.

4. Is command

The **Is** command lists files and directories within a system. Running it without a flag or parameter will show the current working directory's content.

To see other directories' content, type **Is** followed by the desired path. For example, to view files in the **Documents** folder, enter:

Is /home/username/Documents

Here are some options you can use with the **Is** command:

- Is -R lists all the files in the subdirectories.
- Is -a shows hidden files in addition to the visible ones.
- Is -Ih shows the file sizes in easily readable formats, such as MB, GB, and TB.

5. cat command

Concatenate, or **cat**, is one of the most frequently used Linux commands. It lists, combines, and writes file content to the standard output. To run the cat command, type **cat** followed by the file name and its extension. For instance:

cat filename.txt.

Here are other ways to use the **cat command**:

- cat > filename.txt creates a new file.
- cat filename1.txt filename2.txt > filename3.txt merges filename1.txt and filename2.txt and stores the output in filename3.txt.
- tac filename.txt displays content in reverse order.

6. cp command

Use the **cp** command to copy files or directories and their content. Take a look at the following use cases.

To copy one file from the current directory to another, enter **cp** followed by the file name and the destination directory. For example:





cp filename1.txt filename2.txt filename3.txt /home/username/Documents

To copy the content of a file to a new file in the same directory, enter **cp** followed by the source file and the destination file:

cp filename1.txt filename2.txt

To copy an entire directory, pass the **-R** flag before typing the source directory, followed by the destination directory:

cp -R /home/username/Documents /home/username/Documents_backup

7. my command

The primary use of the <u>mv command</u> is to move and rename files and directories. Additionally, it doesn't produce an output upon execution.

Simply type **mv** followed by the filename and the destination directory. For example, you want to move **filename.txt** to the **/home/username/Documents** directory:

mv filename.txt /home/username/Documents.

You can also use the **mv** command to rename a file:

mv old_filename.txt new_filename.txt

8. mkdir command

Use the **mkdir** command to create one or multiple directories at once and set permissions for each of them. The user executing this command must have the privilege to make a new folder in the parent directory, or they may receive a permission denied error.

Here's the basic syntax:

mkdir [option] directory_name

For example, you want to create a directory called Music:

mkdir Music

To make a new directory called **Songs** inside **Music**, use this command:

mkdir Music/Songs

The **mkdir** command accepts many options, such as:

- -p or -parents create a directory between two existing folders. For example, mkdir -p Music/2020/Songs will make the new "2020" directory.
- -m sets the file permissions. For instance, to create a directory with full read, write, and execute permissions for all users, enter mkdir -m777 directory_name.
- -v prints a message for each created directory.

9. rmdir command

To permanently delete an empty directory, use the <u>rmdir command</u>. Remember that the user running this command should have **sudo** privileges in the parent directory.

For example, you want to remove an empty subdirectory named **personal1** and its main folder **mydir**:

rmdir -p mydir/personal1

10. rm command

The **rm** command is used to delete files within a directory. Make sure that the user performing this command





Here's the general syntax:

rm filename

To remove multiple files, enter the following command:

rm filename1 filename2 filename3

Here are some acceptable options you can add:

- -i prompts system confirmation before deleting a file.
- -f allows the system to remove without a confirmation.
- -r deletes files and directories recursively.

11. touch command

The <u>touch command</u> allows you to create an empty file or generate and modify a timestamp in the Linux command line.

For example, enter the following command to create an HTML file named **Web** in the **Documents** directory:

touch /home/username/Documents/Web.html

12. locate command

The locate command can find a file in the database system.

Moreover, adding the -i argument will turn off case sensitivity, so you can search for a file even if you don't remember its exact name.

To look for content that contains two or more words, use an asterisk (*). For example:

locate -i school*not

The command will search for files that contain the words **school** and **note**, whether they use uppercase or lowercase letters.

13. find command

Use the **find** command to search for files within a specific directory and perform subsequent operations. Here's the general syntax:

find [option] [path] [expression]

For example, you want to look for a file called **notes.txt** within the **home** directory and its subfolders:

find /home -name notes.txt

Here are other variations when using **find**:

- find -name filename.txt to find files in the current directory.
- find ./ -type d -name directoryname to look for directories.

14. grep command

Another basic Linux command on the list is **grep** or global regular expression print. It lets you find a word by searching through all the texts in a specific file.

Once the <u>grep command</u> finds a match, it prints all lines that contain the specific pattern. This command helps filter through large log files.

For example, you want to search for the word **blue** in the **notepad.txt** file:

grep blue notepad.txt

5/22



15. df command

Use the <u>df command</u> to report the system's disk space usage, shown in percentage and kilobyte (KB). Here's the general syntax:

df [options] [file]

For example, enter the following command if you want to see the current directory's system disk space usage in a human-readable format:

df -h

These are some acceptable options to use:

- df -m displays information on the file system usage in MBs.
- df -k displays file system usage in KBs.
- **df -T** shows the file system **type** in a new column.

16. du command

If you want to check how much space a file or a directory takes up, use the **du** command. You can run this command to identify which part of the system uses the storage excessively.

Remember, you must specify the directory path when using the **du** command. For example, to check **/home/user/Documents** enter:

du /home/user/Documents

Adding a flag to the **du** command will modify the operation, such as:

- -s offers the total size of a specified folder.
- -m provides folder and file information in MB
- k displays information in KB.
- -h informs the last modification date of the displayed folders and files.

17. head command

The **head** command allows you to view the first ten lines of a text. Adding an option lets you change the number of lines shown. The **head** command is also used to output piped data to the CLI.

Here's the general syntax:

head [option] [file]

For instance, you want to view the first ten lines of **note.txt**, located in the current directory:

head note.txt

Below are some options you can add:

- -n or -lines prints the first customized number of lines. For example, enter head -n 5 filename.txt to show the first five lines of filename.txt.
- -c or -bytes prints the first customized number of bytes of each file.
- -q or -quiet will not print headers specifying the file name.

18. tail command

The <u>tail command</u> displays the last ten lines of a file. It allows users to check whether a file has new data or to read error messages.

Here's the general format:

tail [option] [file]

For example, you want to show the last ten lines of the **colors.txt** file:





19. diff command

Short for difference, the **diff** command compares two contents of a file line by line. After analyzing them, it will display the parts that do not match.

Programmers often use the diff command to alter a program instead of rewriting the entire source code.

Here's the general format:

diff [option] file1 file2

For example, you want to compare two text files – note.txt and note_update.txt:

diff note.txt note_update.txt

Here are some acceptable options to add:

- -c displays the difference between two files in a context form.
- -u displays the output without redundant information.
- -i makes the diff command case insensitive.

20. tar command

The <u>tar command</u> archives multiple files into a **TAR** file – a common Linux format similar to **ZIP**, with optional compression.

Here's the basic syntax:

tar [options] [archive_file] [file or directory to be archived]

For instance, you want to create a new **TAR** archive named **newarchive.tar** in the **/home/user/Documents** directory:

tar -cvf newarchive.tar /home/user/Documents

The **tar** command accepts many options, such as:

- -x extracts a file.
- -t lists the content of a file.
- -u archives and adds to an existing archive file.

Check out the more <u>practical examples</u> to know more about the other functions.

21. chmod command

<u>chmod</u> is a common command that modifies a file or directory's read, write, and execute permissions. In Linux, each file is associated with three user classes – **owner**, **group member**, and **others**.

Here's the basic syntax:

chmod [option] [permission] [file_name]

For example, the owner is currently the only one with full permissions to change **note.txt**. To allow group members and others to read, write, and execute the file, change it to the **-rwxrwxrwx** permission type, whose numeric value is **777**:

chmod 777 note.txt

This command supports many options, including:

- -c or -changes displays information when a change is made.
- -f or -silent suppresses the error messages.
- -v or -verbose displays a diagnostic for each processed file.





username.

Here's the basic format:

chown [option] owner[:group] file(s)

For example, you want to make linuxuser2 the owner of filename.txt:

chown linuxuser2 filename.txt

23. jobs command

A job is a process that the shell starts. The **jobs** command will display all the running processes along with their statuses. Remember that this command is only available in **csh**, **bash**, **tcsh**, and **ksh** shells.

This is the basic syntax:

jobs [options] jobID

To check the status of jobs in the current shell, simply enter **jobs** to the CLI.

Here are some options you can use:

- -I lists process IDs along with their information.
- -n lists jobs whose statuses have changed since the last notification.
- -p lists process IDs only.

24. kill command

Use the <u>kill command</u> to terminate an unresponsive program manually. It will signal misbehaving applications and instruct them to close their processes.

To kill a program, you must know its process identification number (PID). If you don't know the PID, run the following command:

ps ux

After knowing what signal to use and the program's PID, enter the following syntax:

kill [signal_option] pid

There are <u>64 signals</u> that you can use, but these two are among the most commonly used:

- **SIGTERM** requests a program to stop running and gives it some time to save all of its progress. The system will use this by default if you don't specify the signal when entering the kill command.
- SIGKILL forces programs to stop, and you will lose unsaved progress.

For example, the program's PID is **63773**, and you want to force it to stop:

kill SIGKILL 63773

25. ping command

The <u>ping command</u> is one of the most used basic Linux commands for checking whether a network or a server is reachable. In addition, it is used to troubleshoot various connectivity issues.

Here's the general format:

ping [option] [hostname_or_IP_address]

For example, you want to know whether you can connect to **Google** and measure its response time:

ping google.com



background without hindering other running processes.

The **wget** command retrieves files using HTTP, HTTPS, and FTP protocols. It can perform recursive downloads, which transfer website parts by following directory structures and links, creating local versions of the web pages.

To use it, enter the following command:

wget [option] [url]

For example, enter the following command to download the latest version of WordPress:

wget https://wordpress.org/latest.zip

27. uname command

The **uname** or unix name command will print detailed information about your Linux system and hardware. This includes the machine name, operating system, and kernel. To run this command, simply enter **uname** into your CLI.

Here's the basic syntax:

uname [option]

These are the acceptable options to use:

- -a prints all the system information.
- -s prints the kernel name.
- -n prints the system's node hostname.

28. top command

The <u>top command</u> in Linux Terminal will display all the running processes and a dynamic real-time view of the current system. It sums up the resource utilization, from CPU to memory usage.

The **top** command can also help you identify and terminate a process that may use too many system resources.

To run the command, simply enter **top** into the CLI.

29. history command

With **history**, the system will list up to 500 previously executed commands, allowing you to reuse them without re-entering. Keep in mind that only users with **sudo** privileges can execute this command. How this utility runs also depends on which Linux shell you use.

To run it, enter the command below:

history [option]

This command supports many options, such as:

- -c clears the complete history list.
- -d offset deletes the history entry at the OFFSET position.
- -a appends history lines.

30. man command

The **man** command provides a user manual of any commands or utilities you can run in Terminal, including the name, description, and options.

It consists of nine sections:

- Executable programs or shell commands
- System calls
- Library calls





THE TOTHIALS AND CONVENTIONS

- System administration commands
- Kernel routines
- Miscellaneous

To display the complete manual, enter:

man [command_name]

For example, you want to access the manual for the **Is** command:

man Is

Enter this command if you want to specify the displayed section:

man [option] [section_number] [command_name]

For instance, you want to see section 2 of the **Is** command manual:

man 2 ls

31. echo command

The **echo** command is a built-in utility that displays a line of text or string using the standard output. Here's the basic syntax:

echo [option] [string]

For example, you can display the text Hostinger Tutorials by entering:

echo "Hostinger Tutorials"

This command supports many options, such as:

- -n displays the output without the trailing newline.
- -e enables the interpretation of the following backslash escapes:
- \a plays sound alert.
- **\b** removes spaces in between a text.
- \c produces no further output.
- -E displays the default option and disables the interpretation of backslash escapes.

32. zip, unzip commands

Use the **zip** command to compress your files into a **ZIP** file, a universal format commonly used on Linux. It can automatically choose the best compression ratio.

The **zip** command is also useful for archiving files and directories and reducing disk usage.

To use it, enter the following syntax:

zip [options] zipfile file1 file2....

For example, you have a file named **note.txt** that you want to compress into **archive.zip** in the current directory:

zip archive.zip note.txt

On the other hand, the <u>unzip command</u> extracts the zipped files from an archive. Here's the general format:

unzip [option] file_name.zip

So, to unzip a file called **archive.zip** in the current directory, enter:

unzip archive.zip





Here's the general syntax:

hostname [option]

There are many optional flags to use, including:

- -a or -alias displays the hostname's alias.
- -A or -all-fqdns displays the machine's Fully Qualified Domain Name (FQDN).
- -i or -ip-address displays the machine's IP address.

For example, enter the following command to know your computer's IP address:

hostname -i

34. useradd, userdel commands

Linux is a multi-user system, meaning more than one person can use it simultaneously. **useradd** is used to create a new account, while the **passwd** command allows you to add a password. Only those with root privileges or **sudo** can run the **useradd** command.

When you use the **useradd** command, it performs some major changes:

- Edits the /etc/passwd, /etc/shadow, /etc/group, and /etc/gshadow files for the newly created accounts.
- Creates and populates a home directory for the user.
- Sets file permissions and ownerships to the home directory.

Here's the basic syntax:

useradd [option] username

To set the password:

passwd the_password_combination

For example, to add a new person named John, enter the following command simultaneously:

useradd John

passwd 123456789

To delete a user account, use the userdel command:

userdel username

35. apt-get command

apt-get is a command line tool for handling Advanced Package Tool (APT) libraries in Linux. It lets you retrieve information and bundles from authenticated sources to manage, update, remove, and install software and its dependencies.

Running the apt-get command requires you to use sudo or root privileges.

Here's the main syntax:

apt-get [options] (command)

These are the most common commands you can add to apt-get:

- **update** synchronizes the package files from their sources.
- **upgrade** installs the latest version of all installed packages.
- **check** updates the package cache and checks broken dependencies.





the operating system, while **jed** has to be installed.

The <u>nano command</u> denotes keywords and can work with most languages. To use it, enter the following command:

nano [filename]

vi uses two operating modes to work – **insert** and **command**. **insert** is used to edit and create a text file. On the other hand, the **command** performs operations, such as saving, opening, copying, and pasting a file.

To use **vi** on a file, enter:

vi [filename]

jed has a drop-down menu interface that allows users to perform actions without entering keyboard combinations or commands. Like **vi**, it has modes to load modules or plugins to write specific texts.

To open the program, simply enter **jed** to the command line.

37. alias, unalias commands

alias allows you to create a shortcut with the same functionality as a command, file name, or text. When executed, it instructs the shell to replace one string with another.

To use the **alias** command, enter this syntax:

alias Name=String

For example, you want to make k the alias for the kill command:

alias k='kill'

On the other hand, the **unalias** command deletes an existing alias.

Here's what the general syntax looks like:

unalias [alias_name]

38. su command

The switch user or **su** command allows you to run a program as a different user. It changes the administrative account in the current log-in session. This command is especially beneficial for accessing the system through <u>SSH</u> or using the GUI display manager when the root user is unavailable.

Here's the general syntax of the command:

su [options] [username [argument]]

When executed without any option or argument, the **su** command runs through root privileges. It will prompt you to authenticate and use the **sudo** privileges temporarily.

Here are some acceptable options to use:

- -p or -preserve-environment keeps the same shell environment, consisting HOME, SHELL, USER, and LOGNAME.
- -s or -shell lets you specify a different shell environment to run.
- -I or -login runs a login script to switch to a different username. Executing it requires you to enter the user's password.

39. htop command

The **htop** command is an interactive program that monitors system resources and server processes in real time. It is available on most Linux distributions, and you can install it using the default package manager.

Compared to the **top** command, **htop** has many improvements and additional features, such as mouse operation and visual indicators.





You can also add options, such as:

- -d or -delay shows the delay between updates in tenths of seconds.
- **-C** or **-no-color** enables the monochrome mode.
- -h or -help displays the help message and exit.

40. ps command

The process status or **ps** command produces a snapshot of all running processes in your system. The static results are taken from the virtual files in the **/proc** file system.

Executing the **ps** command without an option or argument will list the running processes in the shell along with:

- The unique process ID (PID)
- The type of the terminal (TTY)
- The running time (TIME)
- The command that launches the process (CMD)

Here are some acceptable options you can use:

- -T displays all processes associated with the current shell session.
- -u username lists processes associated with a specific user.
- -A or -e shows all the running processes.

Bonus Tips and Tricks

Here are some tips and tricks you can use to manage the Linux system:

- Enter the clear command to clean the Terminal screen.
- Press the **Tab** button to autofill after entering a command with an argument.
- Use Ctrl + C to terminate a running command.
- Press Ctrl + Z to pause a working command.
- Use Ctrl + S to freeze your Terminal temporarily.
- Press **Ctrl** + **Q** to undo the Terminal freeze.
- Use Ctrl + A to move to the beginning of the line.
- Press Ctrl + E to bring you to the end of the line.
- When executing multiple commands in a single line, use (;) to separate them. Alternatively, use && to only allow the next command to run if the previous one is successful.

Expert Tip

Did you know that you can edit a text file with Linux commands using SSH? Instead of editing a file locally and uploading it via FTP, you can edit the file instantly on your account using the vim or nano command.

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Download a Free Linux Commands Cheat Sheet

Click the link below to download a free **PDF** of the most commonly used Linux commands. For any Terminal beginner, this cheat sheet is a must-have.







Conclusion

Linux commands let you perform basic and administrative tasks quickly and effectively from the Terminal. With it, you'll have more flexibility over your system and the ability to access features that are not always available through a graphical user interface.

Learning basic Linux commands is essential to interact with your machine, primarily if you use a Virtual Private Server (<u>VPS</u>). In most cases, each utility consists of three parts – a **command name**, a **flag** or **option**, and a **parameter** or **argument**.

This article has discussed 40 common commands, such as **apt-get** to install a package, **nano** to manipulate a file, **htop** to monitor current processes, and **Is** to view a directory.

We hope this article has helped you learn the basic Linux commands. If you have any questions or suggestions, please leave them in the comments section below.

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How to Use Sed Command to Read FilesHow to Use Curl Command for

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How to List Services in Linux

How to Use Rsync for File Transfer and Synchronization

How to Change a User Password in Linux

How to Create a Symbolic Link With In Command

Linux Commands FAQ

What Is the Basic Command of Linux?

One of the most commonly used Linux command is the cat command (short for concatenate). This command helps you create, view and combine files, as well as redirect the output (the contents of the whole file).

How Many Commands Does Linux Have?

There are 100+ commands that are shared by Linux and other similar operating systems.





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Artūras is a Technical Content Writer with years of experience in the field. He has a vast amount of knowledge about WordPress and web hosting, and he uses this expertise to write pristine content about any IT-related subject. In his spare time, Artūras loves spending time with his dogs.

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Very helpful article, Good job Art

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Very good explanations! Thanks a lot!

Dr. Koushik Majhi

July 07 2020

<u>REPLY</u>

Thank you very much. Good article

xmax

July 08 2020

REPLY

Very helpful info, indeed





July 23 2020

Man, you're a lifesaver! REALLY helpful to see all useful commands with their switches all in one place.

Tomislav T.

September 06 2020

Always happy to help, Syed! :)

Sina

August 17 2020 REPLY

Thanks art That was Very Very Helpful!

Hasan Murtaza

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Thanks

boe

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thanks

happy

August 31 2020

Love from China.

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Very helpful

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Happy to help, Mehmood.

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kamyogi

December 23 2020

REPLY

Thank you very much Art. Very useful. It has changed a bit my attitude towards Linux.

Nizor

January 11 2021

REPLY

This was very helpful. Thanks

ajay

January 27 2021

REPLY





Benji

February 27 2021

Lots of lives saved by this command lines. Thanks!

Ulita Dso'za

May 08 2021 REPLY

Thank you....!!! It is very helpful for beginners........

Bethwel Ombewa

July 07 2021 REPLY

Very helpful information

sharfat hussain

July 07 2021 REPLY

very informative Linux command

Grammy R. Codeislow

July 11 2021 REPLY

Your documentation is incredibly useful. Thanks for taking the time to make this.

r

August 27 2021 REPLY

for a guy starting to learn linux this is very very helpful.

Vakarė

September 20 2021

Happy to hear that:)

G. Williams

August 27 2021 REPLY

Awesome tips, been too long with MS...school was a while ago now Linux PC my gift to me, using a new OS after 40 yrs isn't easy. I know I can swing it.



september zo zozi

Best of luck, I'm sure you'll do great!

gayle williams

September 15 2021

Your info was epic...thanx

Akash Jaiwal

December 11 2021

Great, all commands are useful. Thanks a lot to given description of all commands

the kid

December 20 2021 REPLY

Thank you for this guild it was very useful!

Mark

January 06 2022

Great information and well laid out.

Tamanna yadav

February 06 2022

Good job bro

Hassan Raza

March 17 2022

Great work found many commads in one place

rotke

April 06 2022

Thanks, there were few commands I didn't know: locate and jobs, I used find and ps. I will tray them out, thanks.

Bill Zaffos

May 20 2022

 \equiv

REPLY





when deeding information from a USB drive, but then, you would need the blkid, or maybe not.

Vakarė

May 24 2022

Hi there! This is a good point - apt-get update and apt-get upgrade are commonly used before installing any application. If you're simply editing some files or navigating your server, it's not that important, but surely won't hurt

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