

Shellscripting: Absolute Basics

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Whats all this about?

I've written a lot of code over the years:

Assembly, C and Java as an engineer

Commonlisp for my own projects

Haskell to build compilers

PostScript to draw really efficient diagrams

L^AT_EX to publish books

...several a dozen other things too

Which language have I written the most code in?

Which language do I use to solve most tasks?

Which language do I like the least?

Shellscripting!

Normally we type commands for the terminal on a commandline...

- ▶ But we can automate them and stick them into scripts

Anything you have to do more than once...

Write a script for it!

- ▶ Saves a tonne of time
- ▶ Often easier than writing a full program

For example...

```
#!/bin/sh
GREP=grep
if [ $(uname) = "OpenBSD" ]; then
    # Use GNU Grep on OpenBSD
    GREP=ggrep
fi

${GREP} -Pi "^${1}$" /usr/share/dict/words
```

Sometimes I cheat at Wordle:

- ▶ I want to know a word that matches a regex exactly
 - ▶ I can search the system dictionary file at /usr/share/dict/words
 - ▶ grep can do the search, but I need to explicitly specify GNU Grep on systems where it isn't the default
- ```
knotwords 'st[^aeo]pid'
- stupid
```

Or for example...

```
#!/usr/bin/env bash
if [$1 = "should" -a $2 = "also" -a $3 = "run"]; then
 shift 3
 gum confirm "Run 'doas $*'" && doas $*
elif [$1 = "should" -a $2 = "also" -a $3 = "remove"]; then
 gum confirm "Delete '$4'" && doas rm -fr "${4}"
else
 2>&1 printf "WARNING You should read the commands you"
 2>&1 printf "paste more carefully\n"
fi
```

Sometimes when I upgrade my computer it tells me to delete some files or run some commands:

You should also run rcctl restart pf

Copying and pasting the precise text is a pain...

- Can I just copy the whole line and run that?

(Of course I can... should I though?)

## Or for a further example...

```
#!/usr/bin/env bash
Fix kitty
/usr/local/opt/bin/fix-kitty

Update sources
cd /usr/src && cvs -q up -Pd -A
cd /usr/ports && cvs -q up -Pd -A
cd /usr/xenocara && cvs -q up -Pd -A
```

After I upgrade my computer I need to run a couple of standard commands.

- ▶ I can never remember them
- ▶ Batch them up!

# So whats this really about?

Shellscripting is about automating all those tedious little jobs

- ▶ Byzantine syntax (based on shell commands)
- ▶ Awful for debugging
- ▶ Requires magical knowledge
- ▶ Probably the most useful thing you'll ever learn

## Luckily we have help

Shell scripting is somewhat magical, and there are *lots* of gotchas...

<https://www.shellcheck.net>

Wonderful tool to spot unportable/dangerous things in shell scripts

- ▶ Commandline tool available
- ▶ Run it on *everything* you ever write
- ▶ shellcheck is great

```
shellcheck `command -v knotwords`
```

```
In /home/joseph/.local/bin/knotwords line 2:
```

```
GREP=grep
```

```
^__^ SC2209 (warning): Use var=${command} to assign output (or quote to assign string).
```

```
In /home/joseph/.local/bin/knotwords line 3:
```

```
if [$(uname) = "OpenBSD"]; then
```

```
^-----^ SC2046 (warning): Quote this to prevent word splitting.
```

For more information:

```
https://www.shellcheck.net/wiki/SC2046 -- Quote this to prevent word splitt...
```

```
https://www.shellcheck.net/wiki/SC2209 -- Use var=${command} to assign outp...
```



## So how do you write one?

Start the file with the `shebang` `#!` then the path to the interpreter of the script plus any arguments:

For portable POSIX shellscripts `#! /bin/sh/`

For less portable BASH scripts `#! /usr/bin/env bash`

Then

- ▶ `chmod +x my-script.sh`
- ▶ `./my-script.sh`

The rest of the file will be run by the interpreter you specified

- ▶ or `sh my-script.sh` if you don't want to/can't mark it executable.

(Hey this is also why Python scripts start `#! /usr/bin/env python3`)

## Why env?

Hang on, you might be saying, I know that bash is always in `/bin/bash`... can I just put that as my interpreter path?

### Yes, but...

In the beginning `/bin` was reserved for just system programs

- ▶ and `/usr/bin` for admin installed programs
- ▶ and `/usr/local/bin` for locally installed programs
- ▶ and `/opt/bin` for optional installed programs
- ▶ and `/opt/local/bin` for optional locally installed programs
- ▶ and `~/.local/bin` for a users programs
- ▶ ...oh and sometimes they're even mounted on different disks!

This is *kinda* madness.

- ▶ So *must* Linux systems said look we'll just stick everything in `/bin` and stop using multiple partitions
- ▶ But some said no it should be `/usr/bin`, one said `/Applications/`, and others stuck them in `/usr/bin` but symlinked them to `/bin`
- ▶ And on some systems users grew fed up of the outdated system bash and compiled their own and installed it in `~/.local/bin` ...
- ▶ ...and ever tried using Python venv?

ENV(1)

General Commands Manual

ENV(1)

## NAME

env - set and print environment

## SYNOPSIS

```
env [-i] [name=value ...] [utility [argument ...]]
```

## DESCRIPTION

env executes utility after modifying the environment as specified on the command line. The option name=value specifies an environment variable, name, with a value of value.

What env does is look through the PATH and tries to find the program specified and runs it.

## ...Path?

There is an **environment variable** called PATH that tells the system where all the programs are:

- ▶ Colon separated list of paths

**If you want to alter it** you can add a line like to your shell's config

```
export PATH="${PATH}:/extra/directory/to/search"
```

Your shells config is possibly in `~/.profile` but it often varies... check the `man` page for your `${SHELL}`

Also some shells have different syntax (e.g. fish)...

```
$ tr ':' $'\n' <<< $PATH
/home/joseph/.local/share/python/bin
/bin
/usr/bin
/sbin
/usr/sbin
/usr/X11R6/bin
/usr/local/bin
/usr/local/sbin
/home/joseph/.local/bin
/usr/local/opt/bin
/usr/games
/usr/local/games
/usr/local/jdk-17/bin
/home/joseph/.local/share/go/bin
```

## Basic Syntax

Shell scripts are written by chaining commands together

`A; B` run A then run B

`A | B` run A and feed its output as the input to B

`A && B` run A and if successful run B

`A || B` run A and if not successful run B

## How does it know if its successful?

Programs return a 1 byte exit value (e.g. C main ends with `return 0;`)

- ▶ This gets stored into the variable `${?}` after every command runs.
- ▶ `0` indicates success (usually)
- ▶ `>0` indicates failure (usually)

This can then be used with commands like `test`:

```
do_long_running_command
test $? -eq 0 && printf "Command succeeded\n"
```

Or the slightly shorter:

```
do_long_running_command
[$? -eq 0] && printf "Command succeeded\n"
```

## Wrap up

That's the basics of shell scripting,

- ▶ Include a `#!`
- ▶ Always use `env`
- ▶ `$?` contains the exit code

## Next time

Control flow and more advanced shell scripting for shellscripts.

## Bonus puzzle

Why is this the case?



`[ $? -eq 0 ] # works` ✓

`[$? -eq 0] # doesn't work` ✗

## Different shells

(Just use bash unless you care about *extreme* portability in which case use POSIX sh)

### Typical Shells

**sh** POSIX shell

**bash** Bourne Again shell (default on Linux)

**zsh** Z Shell (default on Macs), like bash but with more features

**ksh** Korn shell (default on BSD)

### Other shells

**dash** simplified faster bash, used for booting on Linux

**Busybox sh** simplified bash you find on embedded systems

### Weird shells

**fish** More usable shell (but different incompatible syntax)

**elvish** Nicer syntax for scripting (but incompatible with POSIX)

**nushell** Nicer output (but incompatible, and weird)