Table Of Contents

nixCraft: Linux Tips, Hacks, Tutorials, And Ideas In Blog Format
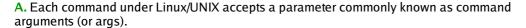http://www.cyberciti.biz/

Home > Faq > BASH Shell

Linux / UNIX : Argument list too long error in shell and solution

Posted by Vivek Gite <vivek@nixcraft.com>

Q. I'm new to Linux. We have a backup server and most our developer sftp or ftp and upload files to our server. I just need backup of last 4 weeks. So if I try to list or remove directory I get an error cannot remove directory.

So my question is why am I getting an "Argument list too long" error message when executing some commands in the shell?

A. Each command under Linux/UNIX accepts a parameter commonly known as command arguments (or args).

[1]

For example, the command cd /etc is considered as 1 command line arguments, namely, /etc. Some command can accept more than 2 argument and act on supplied args. For example cp command:

```
$ cp /etc/file1 /etc/file2 /etc/file3 /mnt/pen
```

cp command has total 4 command line arguments. The shell can hold a maximum of 131072 bytes for command line arguments. If you try to pass more than that number you will greeted with an error that read as follows:

Argument list too long

Remember each character requires one byte of storage.

How do I get rid of this problem while using rm / ls or any other shell command?

The best way to deal with this problem is to use wild cards. For example, just list a directory starting with a character:

```
$ ls a*
```

or

```
$ rm a*
```

You can also use for loop to deal with group of files:

```
for fileset in a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t v w x z
do
    /bin/rm $fileset*
done
```

4000+ howtos and counting! Want to read more Linux / UNIX howtos, tips and tricks? Subscribe to our daily email newsletter or weekly newsletter to make sure you don't miss a single tip/tricks. Alternatively, subscribe via RSS/XML feed.

Article printed from Frequently Asked Questions About Linux / UNIX: **http://www.cyberciti.biz/faq/**

URL to article: **http://www.cyberciti.biz/faq/rm-ls-command-argument-list-too-long-error/**

URLs in this post:

[1] Image: **http://www.cyberciti.biz/faq/faq/category/troubleshooting/**