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How To Find Files by Content Under UNIX

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[1]

Q. I had written lots of code in C for my school work and saved it as source code under /home/user/c/*.c and *.h. How do I find files by content such as string or words (function name such as main()) under UNIX shell prompt?

A. You need to use following tools:

[a] **grep command** : print lines matching a pattern.

[b] **find command**: search for files in a directory hierarchy.

[grep command to find files by \[2\] content](#)

Type the command as follows:

```
grep 'string' *.txt
grep 'main(' *.c
grep '#include<example.h>' *.c
grep 'getChar*' *.c
grep -i 'ultra' *.conf
grep -iR 'ultra' *.conf
```

Where

- **-i** : Ignore case distinctions in both the PATTERN (match valid, VALID, Valid string) and the input files (math file.c FILE.c FILE.C filename).
- **-R** : Read all files under each directory, recursively

Highlighting searched patterns

You can highlight patterns easily while searching large number of files:

```
$ grep --color=auto -iR 'getChar();' *.c
```

Displaying file names and line number for searched patterns

You may also need to display filenames and numbers:

```
$ grep --color=auto -iRnH 'getChar();' *.c
```

Where,

- **-n** : Prefix each line of output with the 1-based line number within its input file.
- **-H** Print the file name for each match. This is the default when there is more than one file to search.

```
$grep --color=auto -nH 'DIR' *
```

Sample output:

```
77.sh:16:# use find command to get all subdirs name in DIRS
77.sh:17:DIRS=$(find "$START" -type d)
77.sh:20:for d in $DIRS
83.sh:19:         output="[DIR] $f/"
83.sh:41:[DIR] old/
83.sh:42:[DIR] test/
83.sh:47:[DIR] x/
83.sh:48:[DIR] y/
```

[3]

Fig.01: grep command displaying searched pattern

You can also use find command:

```
$ find . -name "*.c" -print | xargs grep "main("
```

Further readings:

- [find command](#) [4]
- [grep command](#) [5]
- [man pages find and grep](#)

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[2] grep command to find files by: <http://www.cyberciti.biz/faq/howto-search-find-file-for-text-string/>

[3] Image: <http://www.cyberciti.biz/faq/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/grep-command.png>

[4] find command: <http://www.cyberciti.biz/faq/tag/find-command/>

[5] grep command: <http://www.cyberciti.biz/faq/tag/grep-command/>