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Linux / UNIX: Getting help with man page

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Q. I've CentOS 5 server located in a remote data center. How do I get more help about command and its syntax?

A. Linux and UNIX comes with man (manual) pages. man command displays pages from reference manual. You can learn about command and its syntax. Each man page has following information:

=> Command name along with a short description

=> A SYNOPSIS of command usages

=> A Description

=> A listing of all its options (switches)

=> A list of config files or associated files

man Page sections

Each man page comes in sections. The table below shows the section numbers of the manual followed by the types of pages they contain:

- **Section # 1** : User command (executable programs or shell commands)
- **Section # 2** : System calls (functions provided by the kernel)
- **Section # 3** : Library calls (functions within program libraries)
- **Section # 4** : Special files (usually found in /dev)
- **Section # 5** : File formats and conventions eg /etc/passwd
- **Section # 6** : Games
- **Section # 7** : Miscellaneous (including macro packages and conventions),
- **Section # 8** : System administration commands (usually only for root)
- **Section # 9** : Kernel routines [Non standard]

So you see commands or files are referred by a name followed by manual section number in parentheses. For example, useradd(8) refers to the user add command from sys admin section # 8.

man command examples

Just use man command as follows:

man {**command-name**}

man {**section**}{**command-name**}

For example, display clear command man page, enter:

```
$ man clear
```

Display passwd file format man page (from section # 5):

```
$ man 5 passwd
```

Display more information about passwd command itself (from section # 1):

```
$ man 1 passwd
```

Search man page referenced by printf

Lookup the manual pages referenced by smail and print out the short descriptions of any found. For example:

```
$ man -f printf
```

Output:

```
printf (1)          - format and print data
printf (3)          - formatted output conversion
```

This command is equivalent to `whatis printf`:

```
$ whatis -r printf
```

Search man page by keywords

Search the short descriptions and manual page names for the keyword `printf` as regular expression. Print out any matches.

```
$ man -k passwd
$ man -k printf
```

This command is equivalent to `apropos printf`:

```
$ apropos printf
$ apropos passwd
```

Display all matching man pages

You can display, in succession, all of the available `passwd` manual pages contained within the manual. It is possible to quit between successive displays or skip any of them.

```
$ man -a passwd
```

To view next man page just hit [Enter] key, to skip press [CTRL+D] and to quit type [Ctrl+C].

info documentation

You can read documentation in Info format. This is another system that organizes its information into sections. `info`, a command used to view such documentation produced by Texinfo, a computer program documentation system developed for and by the GNU Project.

info syntax

`info {command-name}`

For example display `ls` command info page:

```
$ info ls
```

In some cases, `info` command can offer more detailed help as compare to `man` page. For example try following two commands:

```
$ man date
$ info date
```

Info page navigation commands

- `q` - Quit info page
- `n` - Goto next section
- `p` - Goto previous section
- `u` - Goto one level up

You can start at `buffers` node within `emacs` manual

```
$ info emacs buffers
```

/usr/share/doc

You may also find `/usr/share/doc` a good place for more documentation. Both Gnome and KDE provides graphical help system under help menu. You can get help by pressing F1 key.

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