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Head and Tail Commands

The Linux command line offers powerful tools for manipulating text files. Among these, the `head` and `tail` commands play a vital role in quickly viewing the contents of a file, specifically focusing on the beginning and end portions.

Unveiling the First Glimpse: The `head` Command

The `head` command serves the purpose of displaying the initial lines of a text file. By default, it presents the first ten lines. However, you can customize the output to view a different number of lines using the `-n` option followed by the desired number.

Here's the syntax for using `head`:

```
head [-n number] file
```

- `-n number`: This option specifies the number of lines to display from the beginning of the file. If `-n` is omitted, `head` defaults to showing the first ten lines.
- `file`: This represents the name of the text file you want to examine.

For instance, the following command displays the first five lines of a file named "myfile.txt":

```
head -n 5 myfile.txt
```

Scrolling to the End: The `tail` Command

The `tail` command acts as the counterpart to `head`, focusing on the end of a text file. By default, it displays the last ten lines. Similar to `head`, you can control the output using the `-n` option.

Here's the syntax for using `tail`:

```
tail [-n number] file
```

- `-n number`: This option specifies the number of lines to display from the end of the file. If `-n` is omitted, `tail` defaults to showing the last ten lines.
- `file`: This represents the name of the text file you want to examine.

For example, the following command displays the last three lines of "myfile.txt":

```
tail -n 3 myfile.txt
```

Beyond the Beginning and End:

While `head` and `tail` primarily deal with the start and finish of files, there's an interesting way to combine them to extract a specific section from the middle. Suppose you want to display lines 6 to 10 from a file. You can achieve this by piping the output of `head` with a specified number of lines (`-n`) to `tail` with another specific number (`-n`). Here's how it works:

```
head -n 10 file | tail -n 5
```

In this example, `head` first retrieves the initial ten lines. Then, the pipe (`|`) redirects this output to `tail`, which displays only the last five lines out of the ten received, effectively giving you lines 6 to 10.