Chapter 5. Man pages

This chapter will explain the use of **man** pages (also called **manual pages**) on your Unix or Linux computer.

You will learn the **man** command together with related commands like **whereis**, **whatis** and **mandb**.

Most Unix files and commands have pretty good man pages to explain their use. Man pages also come in handy when you are using multiple flavours of Unix or several Linux distributions since options and parameters sometimes vary.

5.1. man $command

Type **man** followed by a command (for which you want help) and start reading. Press **q** to quit the manpage. Some man pages contain examples (near the end).

```
paul@laika:~$ man whois
Reformatting whois(1), please wait...
```

5.2. man $configfile

Most **configuration files** have their own manual.

```
paul@laika:~$ man syslog.conf
Reformatting syslog.conf(5), please wait...
```

5.3. man $daemon

This is also true for most **daemons** (background programs) on your system..

```
paul@laika:~$ man syslogd
Reformatting syslogd(8), please wait...
```

5.4. man -k (apropos)

man -k (or **apropos**) shows a list of man pages containing a string.

```
paul@laika:~$ man -k syslog
lm-syslog-setup (8)  - configure laptop mode to switch syslog.conf ...
logger (1)           - a shell command interface to the syslog(3) ...
syslog-facility (8)  - Setup and remove LOCALx facility for sysklogd
syslog.conf (5)      - syslogd(8) configuration file
syslogd (8)          - Linux system logging utilities.
syslogd-listfiles (8) - list system logfiles
```

5.5. whatis

To see just the description of a manual page, use **whatis** followed by a string.

```
paul@u810:~$ whatis route
route (8)            - show / manipulate the IP routing table
```

5.6. whereis

The location of a manpage can be revealed with **whereis**.

```
paul@laika:~$ whereis -m whois
whois: /usr/share/man/man1/whois.1.gz
```

This file is directly readable by **man**.

```
paul@laika:~$ man /usr/share/man/man1/whois.1.gz
```

5.7. man sections

By now you will have noticed the numbers between the round brackets. **man man** will explain to you that these are section numbers. Executable programs and shell commands reside in section one.

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

5.8. man $section $file

Therefore, when referring to the man page of the passwd command, you will see it written as **passwd(1)**; when referring to the **passwd file**, you will see it written as **passwd(5)**. The screenshot explains how to open the man page in the correct section.

```
[paul@RHEL52 ~]$ man passwd      # opens the first manual found
[paul@RHEL52 ~]$ man 5 passwd    # opens a page from section 5
```

5.9. man man

If you want to know more about **man**, then Read The Fantastic Manual (RTFM).

Unfortunately, manual pages do not have the answer to everything...

```
paul@laika:~$ man woman
No manual entry for woman
```

5.10. mandb

Should you be convinced that a man page exists, but you can't access it, then try running **mandb** on Debian/Mint.

```
root@laika:~# mandb
0 man subdirectories contained newer manual pages.
0 manual pages were added.
0 stray cats were added.
0 old database entries were purged.
```

Or run **makewhatis** on CentOS/Redhat.

```
[root@centos65 ~]# apropos scsi
scsi: nothing appropriat
[root@server2 ~]# makewhatis
[root@server2 ~]# apropos scs
hpsa                 (4)  - HP Smart Array SCSI driver
lsscsi               (8)  - list SCSI devices (or hosts) and their attributes
sd                   (4)  - Driver for SCSI Disk Drives
                     (4)  - SCSI tape device
```