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Filtering Input, Regular Expressions And Basic Patterns

Filtering Input

The `grep` command is a text filter that will search input and return lines which contain a match to a given pattern.

```
grep [OPTIONS] PATTERN [FILE]
```

Follow Along

Use the following command to switch to the `Documents` directory:

```
sysadmin@localhost:~$ cd ~/Documents
```

If the example below fails, repeat the example from *Section 11: Copying Files*:

```
sysadmin@localhost:~/Documents$ cp /etc/passwd .
```

>_ Ubuntu PC ▾

[Toggle onscreen keyboard](#)

For example, the `passwd` file we previously copied into the `Documents` directory contains the details of special system accounts and user accounts on the system. This file can be very large, however the `grep` command can be used filter out information about a specific user, such as the `sysadmin` user. Use `sysadmin` as the pattern argument and `passwd` as the file argument:

```
sysadmin@localhost:~/Documents$ grep sysadmin passwd
sysadmin:x:1001:1001:System Administrator,,,:/home/sysadmin:/bin/ba
```

The command above returned the line from the `passwd` which contains the pattern `sysadmin`.

Note

This line is the `/etc/passwd` entry pertaining to the user `sysadmin` and provides information that is beyond the scope of this course. To learn more about this file, check out [NDG Linux Essentials](#).

The example above uses a simple search term as the pattern, however `grep` is able to interpret much more complex search patterns.

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