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# Linux and Unix `fmt` command tutorial with examples

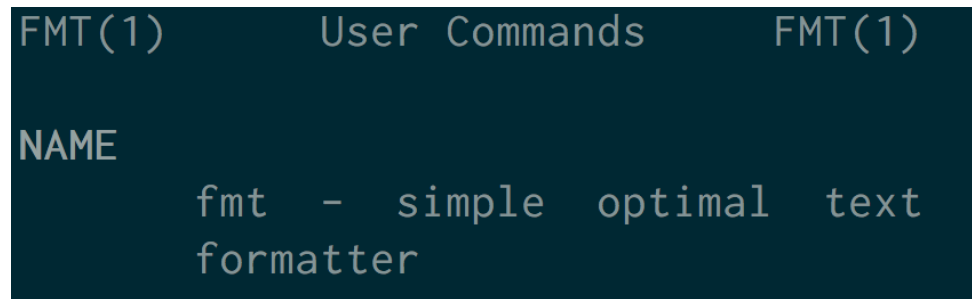
Tutorial on using `fmt`, a UNIX and Linux command for formatting text. Examples of formatting a file, setting the column with and formatting uniform spaces.

*Estimated reading time: 3 minutes*

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## What is the `fmt` command in UNIX?

The `fmt` is a simple text formatter that can set the column width for a file, files or standard input and write it to standard output. It supports setting the width of columns for the formatting, preserving first line indentation, and setting uniform spacing. Originally designed as a tool to format mail messages it can be useful for reading files in the terminal and ad-hoc formatting requirements.

## How to format the contents of a file

To format the contents of a file using the `fmt` command pass a file, files or standard input to the command. The result will be printed to standard output. In the following example there is a file of latin text named `text.txt`. Using the [cat \(/unix-cat/\)](#) tool it is possible to see that this file is unformatted.

```
cat text.txt
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Suspendisse
```

To file contents can be sorted using the `fmt` command.

```
fmt text.txt
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Suspendisse
diam enim, faucibus ut cursus vel, dictum et risus. Donec elementum,
lacus in pulvinar pretium, ex risus porttitor tortor, ac faucibus
```

```
leo ante sed mauris. Proin volutpat urna ut faucibus placerat. Ut dictum tristique nibh quis ornare.
```

The default width is 75 columns.

## How to change the width of formatting

By default `fmt` sets the column width at 75. This can be changed with the `--width` option.

```
fmt --width 10 text.txt
Aenean sodales, dolor at
dictum venenatis, nisl nibh
eleifend nunc, sed viverra
```

## How to preserve first line indentation

To preserve first line indentation using the `fmt` command the `-t` option may be used. This ensures that indentation of the first lines of a paragraph is preseved. In the following example the first line is indented.

```
cat lorum.txt
  Aenean sodales, dolor at dictum venenatis, nisl nibh eleifend nunc,
  Suspendisse potenti. Praesent sit amet vehicula tortor, nec pharetr
```

By default `fmt` removes this indentation.

```
fmt lorum.txt
Aenean sodales, dolor at dictum venenatis, nisl nibh eleifend
nunc, sed viverra turpis sapien ut urna. Fusce ornare tristique
tortor sit amet sodales. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante
ipsum primis in faucibus. Etiam rhoncus hendrerit sem a vulputate.

Suspendisse potenti. Praesent sit amet vehicula tortor, nec
pharetra arcu. Curabitur at sollicitudin sapien. Fusce eget
pulvinar velit. Morbi a elit nec odio ornare ullamcorper.
Etiam vulputate ex ac metus vehicula sollicitudin.
```

To preserve indentation the `-t` option may be used.

```
fmt -t lorum.txt
  Aenean sodales, dolor at dictum venenatis, nisl nibh eleifend nunc,
  sed viverra turpis sapien ut urna. Fusce ornare tristique tortor sit
  amet sodales. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis in
  faucibus. Etiam rhoncus hendrerit sem a vulputate.

  Suspendisse potenti. Praesent sit amet vehicula tortor, nec pharetr
  arcu. Curabitur at sollicitudin sapien. Fusce eget pulvinar velit. Mo
  a elit nec odio ornare ullamcorper.    Etiam vulputate ex ac metus
  vehicula sollicitudin.
```

## How to enforce uniform spacing

To enforce uniform spacing using the `fmt` command the `-u` option may be used. This enforces one space between words and two after sentences.