How to disable user login with Linux nologin

8 October 2021 by Luke Reynolds

At some point, the time will come when a system administrator needs to disable user accounts on a Linux system. This can be achieved by Linux nologin technique. Some common reasons for disabling user accounts are due to some suspicious user activity, or perhaps due to a user's work contract termination.

As far as the overall system security is concerned, it is always a good idea to have only those user logins enabled which are necessary for the system or company to function. This tutorial explores some ways on how to disable user accounts on any Linux distro.

In this tutorial you will learn:

- How to disable user accounts with `nologin`
- How to disable user account with `false` and other shells

- How to disable user accounts with `usermod` and `/etc/shadow`

How to disable user login with Linux nologin

Software Requirements and Linux Command Line Conventions

Category	Requirements, Conventions or Software Version Used
System	Any Linux distro
Software	N/A
Other	Privileged access to your Linux system as root or via the `sudo` command.
Conventions	**#** – requires given linux commands to be executed with root privileges either directly as a root user or by use of `sudo` command **$** – requires given linux commands to be executed as a regular non-privileged user

Disable user accounts via nologin

The **nologin** shell is located at **/sbin/nologin**. On some systems, this shell may also be located at `/usr/sbin/nologin`. Either way, it's the same file and will provide the same function.

To set a user's shell to `nologin`, you can use the `usermod` command, along with the `-s` or `--shell` option, as seen in the syntax below. In this example, we are setting the shell for user `linuxconfig`.

```
# usermod linuxconfig -s /sbin/nologin
```

From then on, when the user tries to login, they will see the following message:

```
This account is currently not available.
```

Disable user account with false and other shells

There are more shells available that function similarly to `/sbin/nologin`. The most well known one is probably `/bin/false`. This isn't really a "shell," but just a file that will return false and exit instantly.

This works perfectly fine for disabling a user account, but doesn't have the advantage of issuing a message when the user tries to login. For this reason, the `/sbin/nologin` file will normally be the ideal way to disable a user account (that is, if you wish to do so by changing the user shell).

To set a user's shell to `false`, you can use the `usermod` command in the same syntax as we saw above.

```
# usermod linuxconfig -s /bin/false
```

You could also use `/bin/true` instead, which will do the same thing. To see more shells that your system has available, execute the following command.

```
$ cat /etc/shells
```

Disable user accounts by editing /etc/shadow

You can lock a user's account with the `usermod` command and `-L` option.

```
# usermod -L testuser
```

The only thing this does is add an `!` exclamation point to the beginning of the user's encrypted password in the `/etc/shadow` file. You can observe this yourself by viewing the `/etc/shadow` file after disabling a user account.

```
# cat /etc/shadow | grep testuser
```

Disabling a user with usermod command on Linux

To unlock the user account, which simply removes the exclamation point from the beginning of the user's password in `/etc/shadow`, use the `-U` option with the `usermod` command.

```
# usermod -U testuser
```

Closing Thoughts

In this linux nologin guide, we saw several methods that can be used to disable a user account on a Linux system. This included editing the user's shell to `nologin` or `false`, which are popular choices, or just changing the user's encrypted password in `/etc/shadow` so they would never be able to login. Use whichever method you find most appropriate for your system administration situation.

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