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My top 10 terminal shortcuts for Linux

There are many advantages to using terminal shortcuts. Here are 10 great ones, plus a bonus tip.

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Linux is so flexible that you often can achieve the same results in several different ways. What sets sysadmins apart is how we use this flexibility to achieve the desired outcome. One of the joys we all share is our daily interaction with Linux terminals and the command line. Evidently, terminals and command lines play a significant role in almost every Linux admin's life.

Commands can get tricky at times and really frustrating when you have the right skills, but your brain starts thinking faster than what your keyboard and mouse can do for you.

What can you do to simplify your interaction with Linux so that you can accomplish much more every day? The most straightforward, yet practical solution is utilizing *shortcuts*. Shortcuts can significantly improve your skills and save you several days every year, according to recent studies. So now you may be asking yourself, "What are the most popular and frequently-used Linux shortcuts out there?"

Well, ask no more! In this article, I share my top 10 terminal shortcuts that I believe are useful to the broadest range of the sysadmin community. They are a vital part of my life and allow me to save time and focus better on what I enjoy doing: Building systems. I also provide a quick tip at the end to help you master any Linux shortcuts.

But wait, what are shortcuts?

Shortcuts are a key or combination of keys that provide quick access to a specific task or command. Almost everyone uses computer shortcuts in some form or fashion, but they are particularly critical for Linux sysadmins.

Just a note, most of these tricks assume you're using a Bash shell. They may be similar in other shells, but be aware there could be subtle differences.

1. Tab

Tab is my ultimate friend - it never lets me down. It is the handiest shortcut and time saver ever developed. It autocompletes commands, file names, or directory names for you. Simply start typing a command, file name, or directory name, and then press the Tab key. The system will either complete the string or display all available options to you.

2. Ctrl+C

Ctrl+C is a well-known shortcut that I use all the time. It cleanly aborts most programs by sending the SIGINT signal to the program that I want to interrupt and abort. Most programs correctly catch it and exit cleanly. If the program does not specify how to handle SIGINT, the underlying processes are then self-terminated. Yes, it's safe to use.

3. Ctrl+R/O/G

I find this combination (reverse-i-search) very useful when searching through my command history. I can bring up commands that I used previously, navigate through them, and repeat the command I need. This is very helpful with long and chained commands.

- Ctrl+R: Recall the last command matching the characters you provide.
- Ctrl+R (again): Navigate through the matching commands.
- Ctrl+O: Send the command back to your terminal or select Enter to execute the command from the search mode.
- Ctrl+G: Leave the history search mode without running a command.

4. Ctrl+L

This shortcut is equivalent to the `clear` command. It clears your terminal screen.

5. Ctrl+D

This shortcut will effectively log you out of any terminal and close it, or get you back to the original user when used after `su` or `sudo` commands. It sends an EOF (End-of-file) marker to bash. Bash exits when it receives this marker. This shortcut is similar to running the `exit` command.

[Free download: [Advanced Linux commands cheat sheet](https://www.redhat.com/sysadmin/top-10-shortcuts).]

6. Ctrl+Alt+D

This shortcut will minimize all terminals/windows and show your desktop. Repeat it to revert your windows back in the same order.

7. Ctrl+U

This shortcut erases everything from the current cursor position to the beginning of the line. I find this useful when I mistype a command or see a syntax error and prefer to start over. It's a very handy shortcut.

8. Ctrl+Z

This shortcut is useful if you need to get the terminal back while working on something. It sends the SIGTSTP signal to the foreground process. For example, you are working in a text editor and need to break out to find some data. You can use this shortcut to suspend and send the editor to the background, do your other task, and then run `fg` to get back into your application.

9. Ctrl+A

Move the cursor to the beginning of the line. Very handy when you need that little flag added to the beginning of your 200 characters chained-command. I use this instead of the arrow keys to save time.

10. Ctrl+E

This shortcut does the opposite of Ctrl+A. It moves the cursor to the end of the line. I always use the Ctrl+A and Ctrl+E shortcuts to quickly move my cursor around the current line while typing long or chained commands.

Bonus tip

You now have my top 10 list and a good idea of how shortcuts can improve your sysadmin skills and overall productivity. Now, how are you going to memorize them?

One of the best ways I found to learn Linux shortcuts is to choose a couple of shortcuts, write them on a Post-it note, and stick it to my screen. I keep the Post-it there until I have learned the shortcuts by heart. I then change to another note that contains new shortcuts.

Wrap up

It takes time to develop quality Linux skills. I know I didn't have them all when I started with Linux two decades ago. Learning this handful of shortcuts will help shine as a Linux pro and earn you serious bragging rights in the Linux community.

[Download now: [A sysadmin's guide to Bash scripting](#).]

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