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# How to Copy Files in Linux | cp Command

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In the world of Linux computers, a common and important job is copying files. The key tool for this task is the “cp” command. In this simple guide, we’ll explore how to copy a file in Linux, looking at the basic steps, different choices you can make, and giving clear examples. We’ll also take a peek behind the scenes to understand how the “cp” command works. Let’s get started on this easy journey to become familiar with the ins and outs of copying files in Linux!

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## Syntax of cp Command

The basic syntax for copying a file using the cp command is as follows:

```
cp source_file destination
```

This command creates a copy of the `source\_file` at the specified `destination`. If the destination is a [directory](#), the file is copied into that directory.

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## How to Copy files in Linux with the `cp` Command

The `cp` command is a versatile tool used in Unix-like operating systems for copying files and directories. It offers three principal modes of operation, each serving different purposes.

### 1. Copying Between Two Files in Linux

If the `cp` command contains two file names, it copies the contents of the first file to the second file. If the second file doesn't exist, it is created, and the content is copied into it. However, if the second file already exists, it is overwritten without warning.

```
cp Src_file Dest_file
```

- If `Dest\_file` does not exist, it is created.
- If `Dest\_file` already exists, it is overwritten without any warning.

#### Example 1:

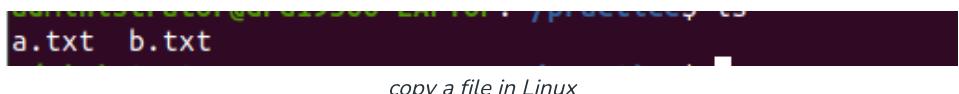
- Initially, there is only one file (`a.txt`) in the directory.
- The `cp` command is used to copy the contents of `a.txt` to `b.txt`.
- After the command execution, both `a.txt` and the newly created `b.txt` coexist in the directory.

```
cp a.txt b.txt
```



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**Got It !**



a.txt b.txt

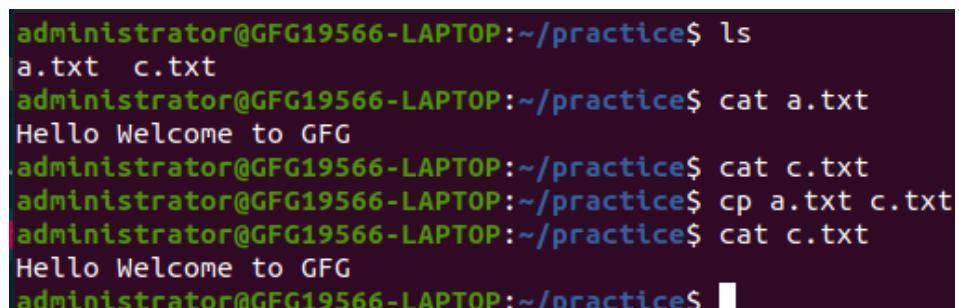
*copy a file in Linux*

We used `ls` command to display all the file in the current directory.

### Example 2:

- Initially, there are two files (`a.txt` and `c.txt`) in the directory.
- The `cp` command is used to copy the contents of `a.txt` to `c.txt`.
- After the command execution, the content of `c.txt` is overwritten with the content of `a.txt` .

```
cp a.txt c.txt
```



```
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ ls
a.txt c.txt
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cat a.txt
Hello Welcome to GFG
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cat c.txt
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cp a.txt c.txt
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cat c.txt
Hello Welcome to GFG
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$
```

*Copy a file in Linux*

We used `ls` command to display all the file in the current directory and used `cat` command to display the content in the text file.

## 2. Copy files to a Directory in Linux

When the cp command has one or more source file arguments and is followed by a destination directory argument, it copies each source file to the destination directory with the same name. If the destination directory does not exist, it is created. If it already exists, the files are overwritten without warning.

```
cp Src_file1 Src_file2 Src_file3 Dest_directory
```



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directory name “new”

```
cp a.txt b.txt c.txt new/
```

```
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ ls
a.txt b.txt c.txt new
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ ls new/
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cp a.txt b.txt c.txt new/
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ ls new/
a.txt b.txt c.txt
```

*Copy multiple files to another directory*

We used ‘ls’ command to display all the file in the “new” directory to confirm the successful copy of file in that directory.

### 3. Copying Files Between Two Directories in Linux

In this mode, if the cp command contains two directory names, it copies all files from the source directory to the destination directory. The ‘-R’ option is typically used to indicate recursive copying for directories.

```
cp -R Src_directory Dest_directory
```

```
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ ls
a.txt b.txt c.txt new1
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cp -R /home/administrator/practice/ /home/administrat
or/Downloads/new3
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ ls /home/administrator/Downloads/new3
a.txt b.txt c.txt new1
```

*copying files between two directories*

The behavior depends on whether ‘Dest\_directory’ exists or not. If it doesn’t exist, ‘cp’ creates it and copies the content of ‘Src\_directory’ recursively. If ‘Dest\_directory’ exists, the copy of ‘Src\_directory’ becomes a sub-directory under ‘Dest\_directory’

### Options Available in ‘cp’ Command in Linux

There are many options of cp command, here we will discuss some of them

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Option	Detail
<b>-i</b>	Interactive copying with a warning before overwriting the destination file.
<b>-b</b>	Creates a backup of the destination file in the same folder with a different name and format.
<b>-f</b>	Forces copying, even if the user lacks writing permission; deletes destination file if necessary.
<b>-r or -R</b>	Copies directory structure recursively.
<b>-p</b>	Preserves file characteristics (modification time, access time, ownership, permission-bits).
'*'	Uses the * wildcard to represent all files and directories matching a pattern.

## How to Copy Files Using Options Available in 'cp' Command in Linux

### 1. Copy a File in Linux Using '-i' Option

**-i(interactive):** i stands for Interactive copying. With this option the system first warns the user before overwriting the destination file. **cp** prompts for a response, if you press **y** then it overwrites the file and with any other option leaves it uncopied.

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### Example:

```
cp -i a.txt b.txt
```

```
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ ls
a.txt b.txt
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cat a.txt
hello welcome to gfg
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cat b.txt
Hello this is b.txt file
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cp -i a.txt b.txt
cp: overwrite 'b.txt'? y
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cat b.txt
hello welcome to gfg
```

*Copy a File in Linux Using '-i'*

Here,

- `ls` command shows existing files: `a.txt` and `b.txt`.
- `cat a.txt` displays the content of `a.txt`.
- `cat b.txt` displays the content of `b.txt`.
- `cp -i a.txt b.txt` initiates an interactive copy.
- System prompts to confirm overwrite of `b.txt`.
- User responds with 'y' to confirm.
- `cat b.txt` shows the updated content, which now matches `a.txt`.

## 2. Copy a File in Linux Using '-f' Option

**-f(force):** If the system is unable to open destination file for writing operation because the user doesn't have writing permission for this file then by using **-f** option with **cp** command, destination file is deleted first and then copying of content is done from source to destination file.

### Basic Syntax:

```
cp -f [Source_file] [Destination_file]
```



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**Got It !**

**Example:**

```
cp -f a.txt b.txt
```

```
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ ls
a.txt b.txt
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cat a.txt
hello welcome to gfg
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cat b.txt
hello
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cp -f a.txt b.txt
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cat b.txt
hello welcome to gfg
```

*Copy a File in Linux Using '-f'*

Here,

- `ls` command shows existing files: `a.txt` and `b.txt`.
- `cat a.txt` displays the content of `a.txt`.
- `cat b.txt` displays the content of `b.txt`.
- `cp -f a.txt b.txt` initiates a forceful copy.
- Destination file (b.txt) is overwritten without prompting.
- `cat b.txt` shows the updated content, which now matches `a.txt`.

### 3. Copy a File in Linux Using `'-r` or `'-R` Option

Copying directory structure recursively. With this option **cp** command shows its recursive behavior by copying the entire directory structure recursively.

**Basic Syntax:**

```
cp -r [Directory_name1] [Directory_name2]
```

**Example:**

```
cp -r geeksforgeeks gfg
```



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## 4. Copy a File in Linux Using `‐p` Option

**-p(preserve):** With **-p** option **cp** preserves the following characteristics of each source file in the corresponding destination file: the time of the last data modification and the time of the last access, the ownership (only if it has permissions to do this), and the file permission-bits.

**Note:** For the preservation of characteristics, you must be the **root user** of the system, otherwise characteristics change.

### Basic Syntax:

```
cp -p [Source_file] [Destination_file]
```

### Example:

```
cp -p a.txt c.txt
```

## 5. Copy a File in Linux Using `\*` Option

**Copying using \* wildcard:** The star wildcard represents anything i.e., all files and directories. Suppose we have many texts documents in a directory and want to copy it to another directory, it takes lots of time if we copy files 1 by 1 or command becomes too long if specify all these file names as the argument, but by using \* wildcard it becomes simple.

### Basic Syntax:

```
cp *.txt [Destination Directory or file]
```

### Example:

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```
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ ls
a.txt b.txt c.txt new
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ cp *.txt new/
administrator@GFG19566-LAPTOP:~/practice$ ls new/
a.txt b.txt c.txt
```

*Copy a File in Linux Using '\*'*

## Conclusion

The `cp` command is an essential tool which is used for copying files or groups of files and directories in Unix-Like operating systems. If we talk about its syntax it takes at least two filenames in as an argument (source and destination). As mentioned, the command has three principles: copying two file names, copying one or more arguments, and copying two directory names. Then we also mention the multiple options available while using `cp` command: `-i` , `-b` , `-f` , `-r` , `-p` . To work with easy in Unix shell for file management one should know the proper working of `cp` command.

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