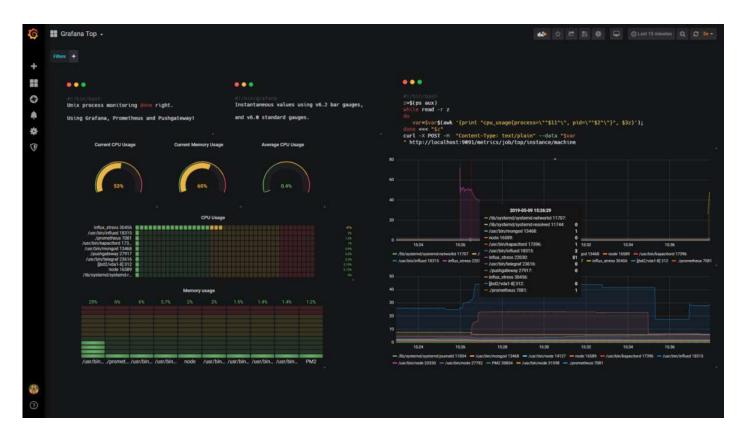
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# Monitoring Linux Processes using Prometheus and Grafana | Prometheus & Grafana Linux Monitoring

July 26, 2021



By referring to this tutorial, all Linux OS developers, system administrators, DevOps engineers, and many other technical developers can easily learn and perform **Monitoring Linux Processes using Prometheus and Grafana.** Follow this guide until you get familiar with the process.



One of the most difficult tasks for a **Linux system administrator** or a **DevOps engineer** would be tracking performance metrics on the servers. Sometimes, you may also get real issues like running very slow, unresponsive examples may be blocking you from running remote commands like top or htop on them. Moreover, you can also get a bottleneck on your server, but you cannot recognize it easily and fastly.

Do you need the entire **monitoring technique** to track all these general performances issues and resolve them from time to time by using various individual processes? Then this can be possible by following the tutorial carefully. Let's see it live here for now:



The main objective of this tutorial is to design a **complete monitoring dashboard for Linux sysadmins**.

#### Do Check Other Monitoring Guides:

- MongoDB Monitoring with Grafana & Prometheus
- Complete MySQL dashboard with Grafana & Prometheus
- 4 Best Open Source Dashboard Monitoring Tools In 2021

As a result, it will showcase several panels that are entirely customizable and scalable to multiple instances for distributed architectures.

- What You Will Learn
- Unix Process Monitoring Basics
- Detailing Our Monitoring Architecture
- Installing The Different Tools
- a Installing Pushgateway
- b Installing Prometheus
- c Installing Grafana
- Building a bash script to retrieve metrics
- Building An Awesome Dashboard With Grafana
- 1. Building Rounded Gauges
- a Retrieving the current overall CPU usage
- b Retrieving the average CPU usage
- 2. Building Horizontal Gauges
- 3. Building Vertical Gauges
- 4. Building Line Graphs
- Bonus: explore data using ad hoc filters
- A quick word to conclude

## What You Will Learn

Before jumping right into this technical journey, let's have a quick look at everything that you are going to learn by reading this article:

- Understanding current state-of-the-art ways to monitor process performance on Unix systems;
- Learn how to install the latest versions of Prometheus v2.9.2, Pushgateway v0.8.0, and Grafana v6.2;

- Build a simple bash script that exports metrics to Pushgateway;
- Build a complete Grafana dashboard including the latest panels available such as the 'Gauge' and the 'Bar Gauge';
- Bonus: implementing **ad-hoc filters** to track individual processes or instances.

Now that we have an overview of everything that we are going to learn, and without further due, let's have an introduction to what's currently existing for Unix systems.

## **Unix Process Monitoring Basics**

When it comes to process monitoring for Unix systems, you have multiple options.

The most popular one is probably 'top'.

Top provides a full overview of performance metrics on your system such as the current **CPU usage**, the current **memory usage** as well as metrics for individual processes.

This command is widely used among sysadmins and is probably the first command run when a performance bottleneck is detected on a system (if you can access it of course!)

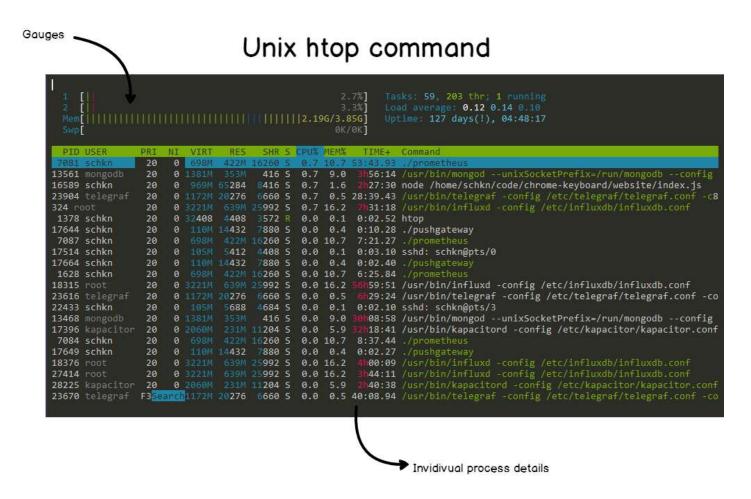
# Unix top command

```
top - 16:17:31 up 127 days, 4:38,
                                     5 users,
                                                load average: 0.21, 0.19, 0.13
                   1 running, 81 sleeping,
                                                0 stopped,
Tasks: 123 total,
                                                              0 zombie
%Cpu(s): 4.7 us, 2.2 sy, 0.0 ni, 93.2 id, 0.0 wa, 0.0 hi, 0.0 si, 0.0 KiB Mem : 4039588 total, 137876 free, 2264716 used, 1636996 buff/cache
KiB Swap:
                 0 total,
                                  0 free,
                                                  0 used. 2006124 avail Mem
                                                                TIME+ COMMAND
               PR NI VIRT
                                          SHR S %CPU %MEM
PID USER
                                  RES
                     0 1414808
                                          416 S
                                                   3.7
                                                       9.0
                                                              1808:54 mongod
13468 mongodb
                                362516
                20
                    0 3299048 622164
                                        26004 S
                                                   1.0 15.4
                                                              3419:47 influxd
18315 root
7081 schkn
                    0 715428 432856
                                        16260 S
                                                   0.7 10.7
                                                             53:38.80 prometheus
22433 schkn
                20
                        107984
                                         4684 S
                                                   0.7
                                                              0:01.25 sshd
                    0 1200720
23616 telegraf
                                 20436
                                         6660 S
                                                       0.5 389:22.88 telegraf
                    0 113132
0 44544
                                         7880 S
17644 schkn
                                 14432
                                                   0.3 0.4
                                                              0:06.95 pushgateway
27819 schkn
                20
                                 3908
                                         3292 R
                                                   0.3 0.1
                                                              0:00.61 top
                                         4188 S
                                                   0.0 0.2
                                                              3:33.77 systemd
                                            0 5
                                                   0.0
                                                       0.0
                                                              0:00.28 kthreadd
    2 root
                 0 -20
                                                              0:00.00 kworker/0:0H
                                            О Т
                                                   0.0
                                                       0.0
    4 root
    6 root
                                            0 I
                                                   0.0 0.0
                                                              0:00.00 mm_percpu_wq
    7 root
                                            0 5
                                                   0.0
                                                       0.0
                                                              2:20.14 ksoftirqd/0
    8 root
                                            0 I
                                                   0.0
                                                       0.0 71:32.57 rcu sched
                20 0
                                            0 T
    9 root
                                                   0.0 0.0
                                                              0:00.00 rcu_bh
   10 root
                                            0 5
                                                   0.0
                                                        0.0
                                                              0:00.74 migration/0
                                            0 5
                                                   0.0 0.0
                                                              0:23.83 watchdog/0
   11 root
                                            0 5
                                                   0.0
                                                       0.0
                                                              0:00.01 cpuhp/0
   12 root
   13 root
                20
                                     а
                                            0 5
                                                   0.0
                                                       0.0
                                                              0:00.01 cpuhp/1
                                     0
                                            0 5
                                                   0.0 0.0
                                                              0:25.11 watchdog/1
   15 root
                rt
                                            0 5
                                                   0.0
                                                        0.0
                                                              0:00.73 migration/1
                                                              1:47.74 ksoftirgd/1
                20
                                            0 5
   16 root
                                     0
                                                   0.0
                                                       0.0
   18 root
                 0 -20
                                     0
                                            0 I
                                                   0.0
                                                       0.0
                                                              0:00.00 kworker/1:0H
                                            0 5
                                                        0.0
                                                              0:00.00 kdevtmpfs
```

The top command is already pretty readable, but there is a command that makes everything even more readable than that: **htop**.

Htop provides the same set of functionalities (CPU, memory, uptime..) as a top but in a colorful and pleasant way.

Htop also provides **gauges** that reflect current system usage.



Knowing that those two commands exist, why would we want to build yet another way to monitor processes?

The main reason would be **system availability**: in case of a system overload, you may have no physical or remote access to your instance.

By externalizing process monitoring, you can analyze what's causing the outage without accessing the machine.

Another reason is that **processes get created and killed all the time**, often by the kernel itself.

In this case, running the top command would give you zero information as it would be too late for you to catch who's causing performance issues on your system.

You would have to dig into kernel logs to see what has been killed.

With a monitoring dashboard, you can simply go back in time and see which process was causing the issue.

Now that you know why we want to build this dashboard, let's have a look at the **architecture** put in place in order to build it.

## **Detailing Our Monitoring Architecture**

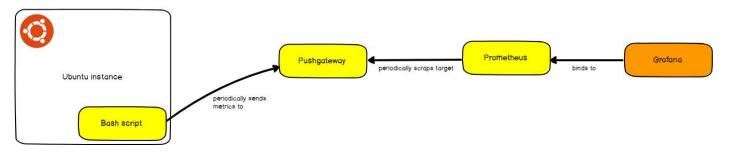
Before having a look at the architecture that we are going to use, we want to use a solution that is:

- Resource cheap: i.e not consuming many resources on our host;
- Simple to put in place: a solution that doesn't require a lot of time to instantiate;
- **Scalable**: if we were to monitor another host, we can do it quickly and efficiently.

Those are the points we will keep in mind throughout this tutorial.

The detailed architecture we are going to use today is this one:

## Process Monitoring Architecture



Our architecture makes use of four different components:

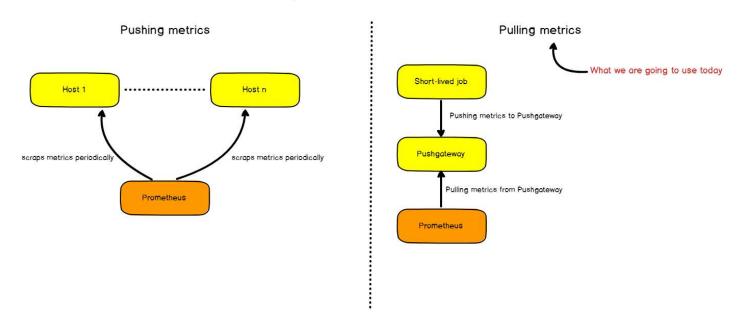
- A bash script used to send periodically metrics to the Pushgateway;
- Pushgateway: a metrics cache used by individual scripts as a target;
- **Prometheus:** that instantiates a time series database used to store metrics. Prometheus will scrape Pushgateway as a target in order to retrieve and store metrics;
- **Grafana**: a dashboard monitoring tool that retrieves data from Prometheus via PromQL queries and plots them.

For those who are quite familiar with Prometheus, you already know that Prometheus scraps metrics exposed by HTTP instances and stores them.

In our case, the bash script has a very tiny lifespan and it doesn't expose any HTTP instance for Prometheus.

This is why we have to use the Pushgateway; designed for **short-lived jobs**, Pushgateway will cache metrics received from the script and expose them to Prometheus.

## Gathering metrics with Prometheus



## **Installing The Different Tools**

Now that you have a better idea of what's going on in our application, let's install the different tools needed.

## a – Installing Pushgateway

In order to install **Pushgateway**, run a simple wget command to get the latest binaries available.

wget https://github.com/prometheus/pushgateway/releases/download/v0.8.0/j

**→** 

Now that you have the archive, extract it, and run the executable available in the pushgateway folder.

- > tar xvzf pushgateway-0.8.0.linux-amd64.tar.gz
- > cd pushgateway-0.8.0.linux-amd64/
- > ./pushgateway &

As a result, your **Pushgateway should start as a background process**.

me@schkn-ubuntu:~/softs/pushgateway/pushgateway-0.8.0.linux-amd64\$ ./pusl

[1] 22806

me@schkn-ubuntu:~/softs/pushgateway/pushgateway-0.8.0.linux-amd64\$
INFO[0000] Starting pushgateway (version=0.8.0, branch=HEAD, revision=d90)

Nice!

From there, Pushgateway is listening to incoming metrics on port 9091.

## **b** – Installing Prometheus

As described in the 'Getting Started' section of Prometheus's website, head over to https://prometheus.io/download/ and run a simple wget command in order to get the Prometheus archive for your OS.

wget https://github.com/prometheus/prometheus/releases/download/v2.9.2/p

Now that you have the archive, extract it, and navigate into the main folder:

- > tar xvzf prometheus-2.9.2.linux-amd64.tar.gz
- > cd prometheus-2.9.2.linux-amd64/

As stated before, **Prometheus scraps 'targets' periodically** to gather metrics from them.

Targets (Pushgateway in our case) need to be configured via Prometheus's configuration file.

> vi prometheus.yml

In the 'global' section, modify the 'scrape\_interval' property down to one second.

#### global:

scrape\_interval: 1s # Set the scrape interval to every 1 second.

In the 'scrape\_configs' section, add an entry to the targets property under the static\_configs section.

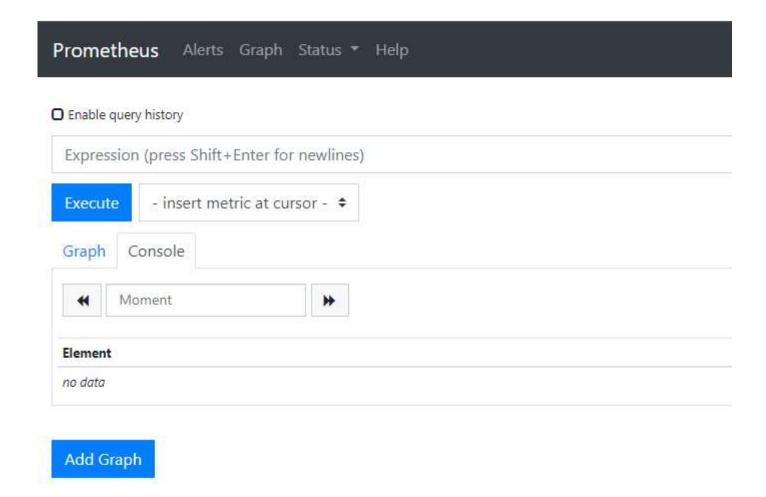
Exit vi, and finally run the Prometheus executable in the folder.

Prometheus should start when launching the final Prometheus command. To assure that everything went correctly, you can head over to http://localhost:9090/graph.

If you have access to Prometheus's web console, it means that everything went just fine.

You can also verify that Pushgateway is correctly configured as a target in 'Status' > 'Targets' in the Web UI.

# Prometheus Web Console



## c – Installing Grafana

If you are looking for a tutorial to **install Grafana on Linux**, just follow the link!

**Also Check:** How To Create a Grafana Dashboard? (UI + API methods)

Last not but least, we are going to install **Grafana v6.2**. Head over to https://grafana.com/grafana/download/beta.

As done before, run a simple wget command to get it.

> wget https://dl.grafana.com/oss/release/grafana 6.2.0-beta1 amd64.deb>

**←** 

Now that you have extracted the deb file, grafana should run as a service on your instance.

You can verify it by running the following command:

- > sudo systemctl status grafana-server
- grafana-server.service Grafana instance

Loaded: loaded (/usr/lib/systemd/system/grafana-server.service; disable)

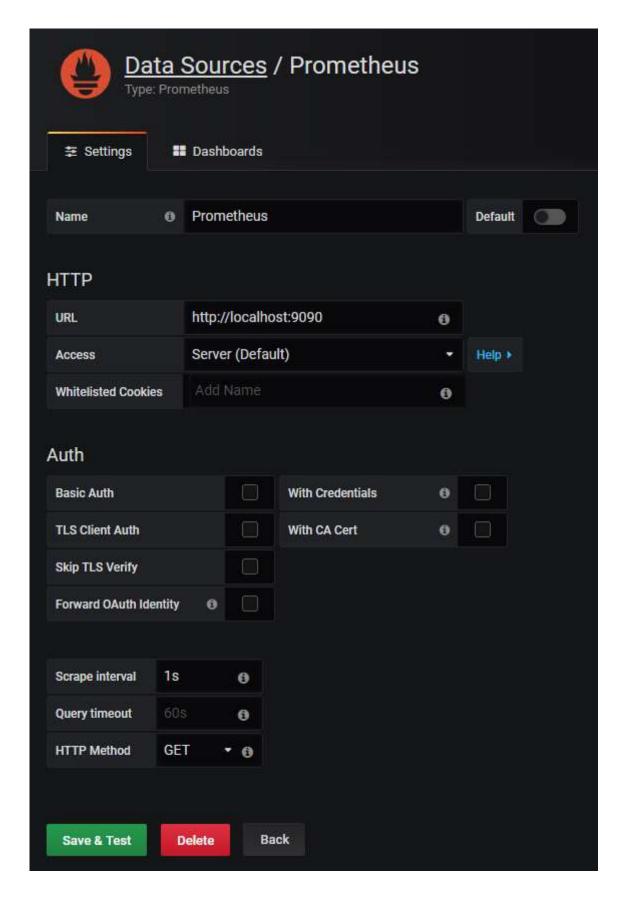
Active: active (running) since Thu 2019-05-09 10:44:49 UTC; 5 days ago

Docs: http://docs.grafana.org

You can also check http://localhost:3000 which is the default address for Grafana Web UI.

Now that you have Grafana on your instance, we have to configure **Prometheus as a datasource**.

You can configure your datasource this way:



That's it!

Click on 'Save and Test' and make sure that your datasource is working properly.

## Building a bash script to retrieve metrics

Your next task is to build a simple bash script that retrieves metrics such as the CPU usage and the memory usage for individual processes.

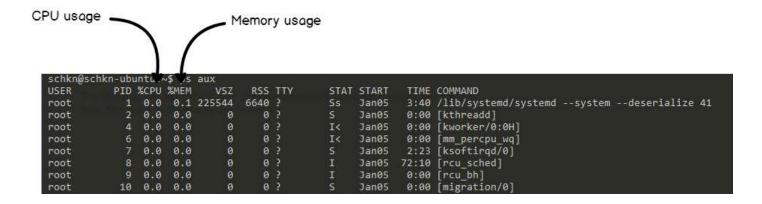
Your script can be defined as a cron task that will run every second later on.

To perform this task, you have multiple candidates.

You could run top commands every second, parse it using sed and send the metrics to Pushgateway.

The hard part with top is that it runs on multiple iterations, providing a metrics average over time. This is not really what we are looking for.

Instead, we are going to use the **ps** command and more precisely the **ps aux** command.



This command exposes individual **CPU and memory usages** as well as the exact command behind it.

This is exactly what we are looking for.

But before going any further, let's have a look at what **Pushgateway is expecting as input.** 

Pushgateway, pretty much like Prometheus, works with **key-value pairs**: the key describes the **metric monitored** and the value is self-explanatory.

Here are some examples:





# metric with labels



As you can tell, the first form simply describes the CPU usage, but the second one describes the CPU usage for the java process.

Adding labels is a way of specifying what your metric describes more precisely.

Now that we have this information, we can build our final script.

As a reminder, our script will perform a ps aux command, parse the result, transform it and send it to the Pushgateway via the syntax we described before.

Create a script file, give it some rights and navigate to it.

```
> touch better-top
> chmod u+x better-top
> vi better-top
```

Here's the script:

```
#!/bin/bash
z=$(ps aux)
while read -r z
do
    var=$var$(awk '{print "cpu_usage{process=\""$11"\", pid=\""$2"\"}", $2"
done <<< "$z"
curl -X POST -H "Content-Type: text/plain" --data "$var
" http://localhost:9091/metrics/job/top/instance/machine</pre>
```

If you want the same script for memory usage, simply change the 'cpu\_usage' label to 'memory\_usage' and the \$3z to \$4z

So what does this script do?

First, it performs the **ps aux** command we described before.

Then, **it iterates on the different lines** and **formats it** accordingly to the key-labeled value pair format we described before.

Finally, **everything is concatenated** and **sent to the Pushgateway** via a simple curl command.

```
Simple, isn't it?
```

As you can tell, this script gathers all metrics for our processes but it only runs one iteration.

For now, we are simply going to execute it every one second using a sleep command.

Later on, you are free to create a service to execute it every second with a timer (at least with systemd).

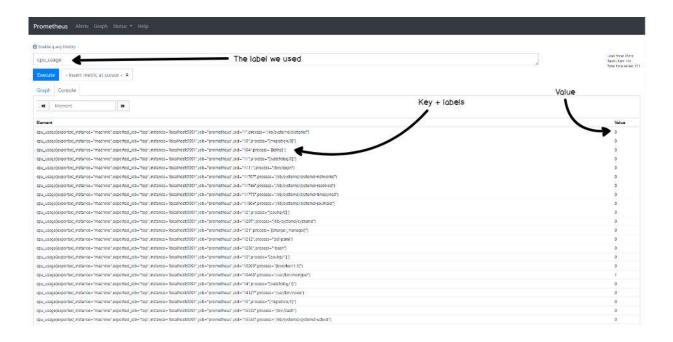
Interested in systemd? I made a complete tutorial about monitoring them with Chronograf

> while sleep 1; do ./better-top; done;

Now that our metrics are sent to the Pushgateway, let's see if we can explore them in **Prometheus Web Console**.

Head over to http://localhost:9090. In the 'Expression' field, simply type '**cpu\_usage**'. You should now see all metrics in your browser.

Congratulations! Your CPU metrics are now stored in Prometheus TSDB.



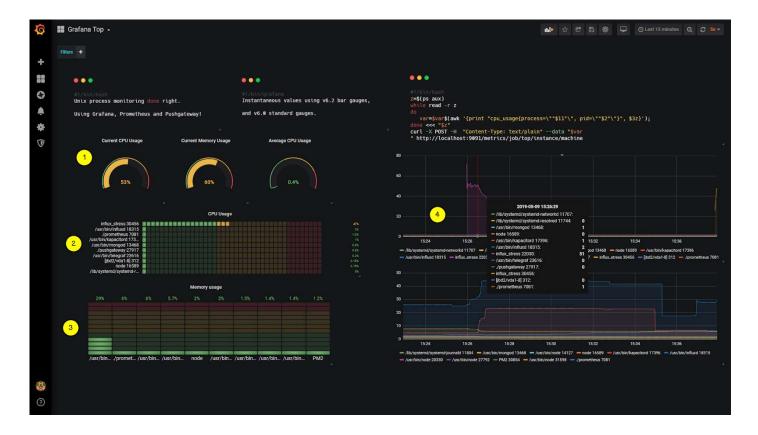
# Building An Awesome Dashboard With Grafana

Now that our metrics are stored in Prometheus, we simply have to build a **Grafana** dashboard in order to visualize them.

We will use the latest panels available in Grafana v6.2: **the vertical and horizontal bar** gauges, the rounded gauges, and the classic line charts.

For your comfort, I have annotated the final dashboard with numbers from 1 to 4.

They will match the different subsections of this chapter. If you're only interested in a certain panel, head over directly to the corresponding subsection.



## 1. Building Rounded Gauges

Here's a closer view of what rounded gauges in our panel.

For now, we are going to focus on the CPU usage of our processes as it can be easily mirrored for memory usage.

With those panels, we are going to track two metrics: **the current CPU usage of all our processes and the average CPU usage.** 

In order to retrieve those metrics, we are going to perform PromQL queries on our Prometheus instance?

So.. what's PromQL?

#### PromQL is the query language designed for Prometheus.

Similarly, what you found to find on InfluxDB instances with InfluxQL (or IFQL), PromQL queries can aggregate data using functions such as the sum, the average, and the standard deviation.

The syntax is very easy to use as we are going to demonstrate it with our panels.

#### a – Retrieving the current overall CPU usage

In order to retrieve the current overall CPU usage, we are going to use the **PromQL sum** function.

At a given moment in time, our overall CPU usage is simply the sum of individual usages.

Here's the cheat sheet:

Tanel needed



PromQL query sum(cpu\_usage)

Tafana Query Configuration



🧖 Grafana Visualization Configuration



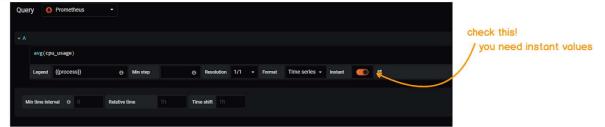
## b - Retrieving the average CPU usage

Not much work to do for average CPU usage, you are simply going to use the **avg function of PromQL**. You can find the cheat sheet below.

Tanel needed



- PromQL query
  - avg(cpu\_usage)
- 🌣 Grafana Query Configuration



🧖 Grafana Visualization Configuration



## 2. Building Horizontal Gauges

Horizontal gauges are one of the latest additions of Grafana v6.2.

Our goal with this panel is to expose the top 10 most consuming processes of our system.

To do so, we are going to use the **topk function** that retrieves the top k elements for a metric.

Similar to what we did before, we are going to define thresholds in order to be informed when a process is consuming too many resources.

🌣 Panel needed



PromQL query topk(10, cpu\_usage)

Srafana Query Configuration



Tarafana Visualization Configuration



## 3. Building Vertical Gauges

Vertical gauges are very similar to horizontal gauges, we only need to tweak the **orientation parameter** in the visualization panel of Grafana.

Also, we are going to monitor our memory usage with this panel so the query is slightly different.

Here's the cheat sheet:

🌣 Panel needed



PromQL query

topk(10, memory\_usage)

🌣 Grafana Query Configuration



🌣 Grafana Visualization Configuration



Awesome! We have made great progress so far, with one panel to go.

## 4. Building Line Graphs

Line graphs have been in Grafana for a long time and this is the panel that we are going to use to have a historical view of how our processes have evolved over time.

This graph can be particularly handy when:

- You had some outages in the past and would like to investigate which processes were active at the time.
- A certain process died but you want to have a view of its behavior right before it happened

When it comes to troubleshooting exploration, it would honestly need a whole article (especially with the recent Grafana Loki addition).

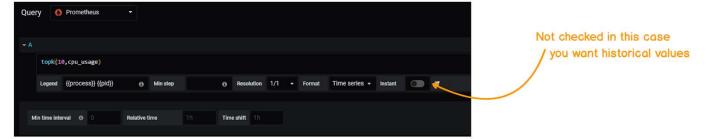
Okay, here's the final cheat sheet!

🧖 Panel needed



PromQL query topk(10, cpu\_usage)

🧖 Grafana Query Configuration



🌣 Grafana Visualization Configuration



From there, we have all the panels that we need for our final dashboard.

You can arrange them the way you want or simply take some inspiration from the one we built.

## Bonus: explore data using ad hoc filters

Real-time data is interesting to see – but the real value comes when you are able **to explore your data.** 

In this bonus section, we are not going to use the 'Explore' function (maybe in another article?), we are going to use ad hoc filters.

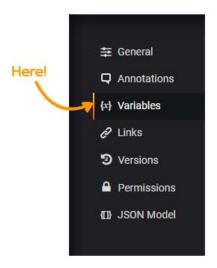
With Grafana, you can define **variables associated with a graph**. You have many different options for variables: you can for example define a variable for your data source that would allow you to dynamically switch the datasource in a query.

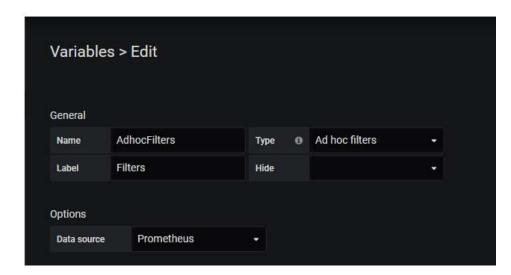
In our case, we are going to use simple **ad hoc filters** to explore our data.



From there, simply click on 'Variables' in the left menu, then click on 'New'.

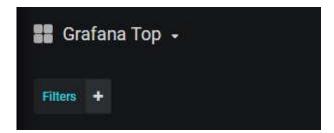
# Variable Configuration





As stated, ad hoc filters are automatically applied to dashboards that target the Prometheus datasource. Back to our dashboard.

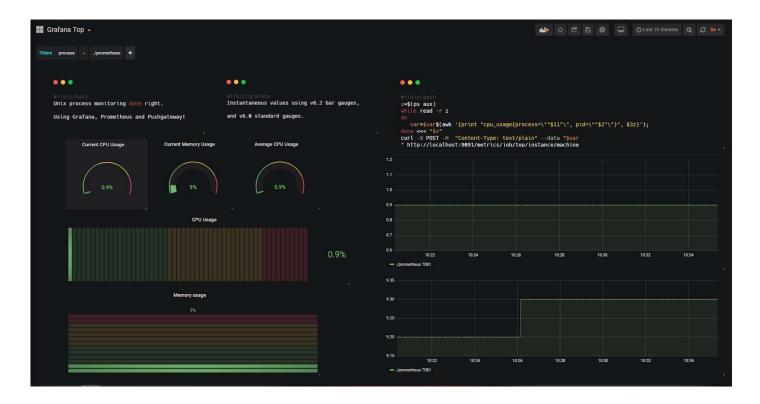
Take a look at the top left corner of the dashboard.



#### Filters!

Now let's say that you want the performance of a certain process in your system: let's take Prometheus itself for example.

Simply navigate into the filters and see the dashboard updating accordingly.



Now you have a direct look at how Prometheus is behaving on your instance.

You could even go back in time and see how the process behaved, independently from its pid!

## A quick word to conclude

From this tutorial, you now have a better understanding of what **Prometheus and**Grafana have to offer.

You know have a **complete monitoring dashboard** for one instance, but there is really a small step to make it scale and monitor an entire cluster of Unix instances.

**DevOps monitoring** is definitely an interesting subject – but it can turn into a nightmare if you do it wrong.

This is exactly why we write those articles and build those dashboards: to help you reach the maximum efficiency of what those tools have to offer.

We believe that great tech can be enhanced with useful showcases.

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I made similar articles, so if you enjoyed this one, make sure to read the others:

- Monitoring Windows services using Grafana, Telegraf and InfluxDB.
- Prometheus Monitoring: The Definitive Guide

Until then, have fun, as always.

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