

NAME

whatis – display one-line manual page descriptions

SYNOPSIS

whatis [**-dlv?V**] [**-r** | **-w**] [**-s list**] [**-m system** [**,...**]] [**-M path**] [**-L locale**] [**-C file**] *name* ...

DESCRIPTION

Each manual page has a short description available within it. **whatis** searches the manual page names and displays the manual page descriptions of any *name* matched.

name may contain wildcards (**-w**) or be a regular expression (**-r**). Using these options, it may be necessary to quote the *name* or escape (\) the special characters to stop the shell from interpreting them.

index databases are used during the search, and are updated by the **mandb** program. Depending on your installation, this may be run by a periodic cron job, or may need to be run manually after new manual pages have been installed. To produce an old style text **whatis** database from the relative **index** database, issue the command:

```
whatis -M manpath -w '*' | sort > manpath/whatis
```

where *manpath* is a manual page hierarchy such as */usr/man*.

OPTIONS

-d, --debug

Print debugging information.

-v, --verbose

Print verbose warning messages.

-r, --regex

Interpret each *name* as a regular expression. If *aname* matches any part of a page name, a match will be made. This option causes **whatis** to be somewhat slower due to the nature of database searches.

-w, --wildcard

Interpret each *name* as a pattern containing shell style wildcards. For a match to be made, an expanded *name* must match the entire page name. This option causes **whatis** to be somewhat slower due to the nature of database searches.

-l, --long

Do not trim output to the terminal width. Normally, output will be truncated to the terminal width to avoid ugly results from poorly-written **NAME** sections.

-s list, --sections=list, --section=list

Search only the given manual sections. *list* is a colon- or comma-separated list of sections. If an entry in *list* is a simple section, for example "3", then the displayed list of descriptions will include pages in sections "3", "3perl", "3x", and so on; while if an entry in *list* has an extension, for example "3perl", then the list will only include pages in that exact part of the manual section.

-m system [,...], --systems=system [,...]

If this system has access to other operating systems' manual page names, they can be accessed using this option. To search NewOS's manual page names, use the option **-m NewOS**.

The *system* specified can be a combination of comma delimited operating system names. To include a search of the native operating system's manual page names, include the system name **man** in the argument string. This option will override the **\$SYSTEM** environment variable.

-M path, --manpath=path

Specify an alternate set of colon-delimited manual page hierarchies to search. By default, **whatis** uses the **\$MANPATH** environment variable, unless it is empty or unset, in which case it will

determine an appropriate manpath based on your **\$PATH** environment variable. This option overrides the contents of **\$MANPATH**.

-L locale, --locale=locale

whatis will normally determine your current locale by a call to the C function **setlocale(3)** which interrogates various environment variables, possibly including **\$LC_MESSAGES** and **\$LANG**. To temporarily override the determined value, use this option to supply a *locale* string directly to **whatis**. Note that it will not take effect until the search for pages actually begins. Output such as the help message will always be displayed in the initially determined locale.

-C file, --config-file=file

Use this user configuration file rather than the default of *~/manpath*.

-, --help

Print a help message and exit.

--usage

Print a short usage message and exit.

-V, --version

Display version information.

EXIT STATUS

- 0** Successful program execution.
- 1** Usage, syntax or configuration file error.
- 2** Operational error.
- 16** Nothing was found that matched the criteria specified.

ENVIRONMENT

SYSTEM

If **\$SYSTEM** is set, it will have the same effect as if it had been specified as the argument to the **-m** option.

MANPATH

If **\$MANPATH** is set, its value is interpreted as the colon-delimited manual page hierarchy search path to use.

See the **SEARCH PATH** section of **manpath(5)** for the default behaviour and details of how this environment variable is handled.

MANWIDTH

If **\$MANWIDTH** is set, its value is used as the terminal width (see the **--long** option). If it is not set, the terminal width will be calculated using the value of **\$COLUMNS**, and **ioctl(2)** if available, or falling back to 80 characters if all else fails.

FILES

/usr/share/man/index.(bt|db|dir|pag)

A traditional global *index* database cache.

/var/cache/man/index.(bt|db|dir|pag)

An FHS compliant global *index* database cache.

/usr/share/man/.../whatis

A traditional **whatis** text database.

SEE ALSO

apropos(1), **man(1)**, **mandb(8)**

AUTHOR

Wilf. (G.Wilford@ee.surrey.ac.uk).

Fabrizio Polacco (fpolacco@debian.org).

Colin Watson (cjwtson@debian.org).

BUGS

<https://gitlab.com/cjwatson/man-db/-/issues>

<https://savannah.nongnu.org/bugs/?group=man-db>