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Linux Terminal Tips - Tab completion, command history

Learning Objectives

After completing this reading, you will be able to:

- Use tab completion to autocomplete commands
- Use command history to quickly navigate previous commands

Tab Completion

Many shells support a feature called tab completion.

Tab completion allows you to autocomplete a command you're typing on the command line.

Suppose you're in your home directory , which contains the directories:

- Pictures
- Videos
- Documents
- Downloads

And suppose your **Documents** folder *only* contains the folder:

python-examples

Tab completion:

In this exercise, you will use tab completion to quickly enter a command to navigate to the Pictures directory.

If you type

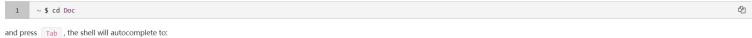


Tab completion for long paths:

You can also use tab completion to autocomplete longer paths.

If you type:





If you press Tab again, the shell will further autocomplete to:

1 ~ \$ cd Documents/python-examples/

Command History

/ \$

Command history allows you to navigate previous commands you've entered using the Up Arrow and Down Arrow keys.

Let's say you've created a Python script called helloworld.py in your python-examples directory that simply prints Hello, World! when you run it. Consider you have just entered the following sequence of commands, and the shell is awaiting your next input:

1 ~ \$ cd ~/Documents/python-examples
2 ~/Documents/python-examples \$ python3 myprogram.py
3 Hello, World!
4 ~/Documents/python-examples \$ cd /

because the folder python-examples is the only existing file within the //Documents directory. With just a few clicks, you can quickly autocomplete longer paths in your command line.

In the following exercises, you will learn how to rerun a previous command withut having to retype it by pressing the Up Arrow key.

Running the last command:

If you press the Up Arrow key once, the shell will automatically insert the last command you entered:

```
1 ~ $ cd ~/Documents/python-examples
2 ~/Documents/python-examples $ python3 myprogram.py
3 Hello, World!
4 ~/Documents/python-examples $ cd /
5 / $ cd /
```

Notice that the last command you entered was cd / , which has been automatically inserted onto the command line for you.

Running previous command from session:

If you press the Up Arrow key two additional times (so, three times total), the shell will automatically insert the command you ran three commands ago:

Tip: If you click the Up Arrow key too many times, you can use the Down Arrow key to cycle through your command history in the opposite direction.

Press Enter to return to your ~/Documents/python-examples directory. You should see something like the following:

1 ~ \$ cd ~/Documents/python-examples
2 ~/Documents/python-examples \$ python3 myprogram.py
3 Hello, World!
4 ~/Documents/python-examples \$ cd /
5 / \$ cd ~/Documents/python-examples
6 ~/Documents/python-examples \$

Summary

Congratulations! You now know how to use a few convenient shortcuts to speed up your command line interactions!

In this reading, you learned how to:

- Use tab completion to autocomplete commands
- Use the command history to quickly navigate to previous commands

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