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# Bash Scripting Tutorial – Linux Shell Script and Command Line for Beginners



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In Linux, process automation relies heavily on shell scripting. This involves creating a file containing a series of commands that can be executed together.

In this article, we'll start with the basics of bash scripting which includes variables, commands, inputs/ outputs, and debugging. We'll also see examples of each along the way.

Let's get started. 

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# Pre-requisites

To follow along with this tutorial, you should have the following accesses:

- A running version of Linux with access to the command line.

If you do not have Linux installed or you are just starting out, you can easily access the Linux command line through [Replit](#). Replit is a browser-based IDE where you can access the bash shell in a few minutes.

You can also install Linux on top of your Windows system using WSL (Windows Subsystem for Linux). [Here](#) is a tutorial for that.

# Introduction

## Definition of Bash scripting

A bash script is a file containing a sequence of commands that are executed by the bash program line by line. It allows you to perform a series of actions, such as navigating to a specific directory, creating a folder, and launching a process using the command line.

By saving these commands in a script, you can repeat the same sequence of steps multiple times and execute them by running the script.

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system administration tasks, managing system resources, and performing other routine tasks in Unix/Linux systems. Some advantages of shell scripting are:

- **Automation:** Shell scripts allow you to automate repetitive tasks and processes, saving time and reducing the risk of errors that can occur with manual execution.
- **Portability:** Shell scripts can be run on various platforms and operating systems, including Unix, Linux, macOS, and even Windows through the use of emulators or virtual machines.
- **Flexibility:** Shell scripts are highly customizable and can be easily modified to suit specific requirements. They can also be combined with other programming languages or utilities to create more powerful scripts.
- **Accessibility:** Shell scripts are easy to write and don't require any special tools or software. They can be edited using any text editor, and most operating systems have a built-in shell interpreter.
- **Integration:** Shell scripts can be integrated with other tools and applications, such as databases, web servers, and cloud services, allowing for more complex automation and system management tasks.
- **Debugging:** Shell scripts are easy to debug, and most shells have built-in debugging and error-reporting tools that can help identify and fix issues quickly.

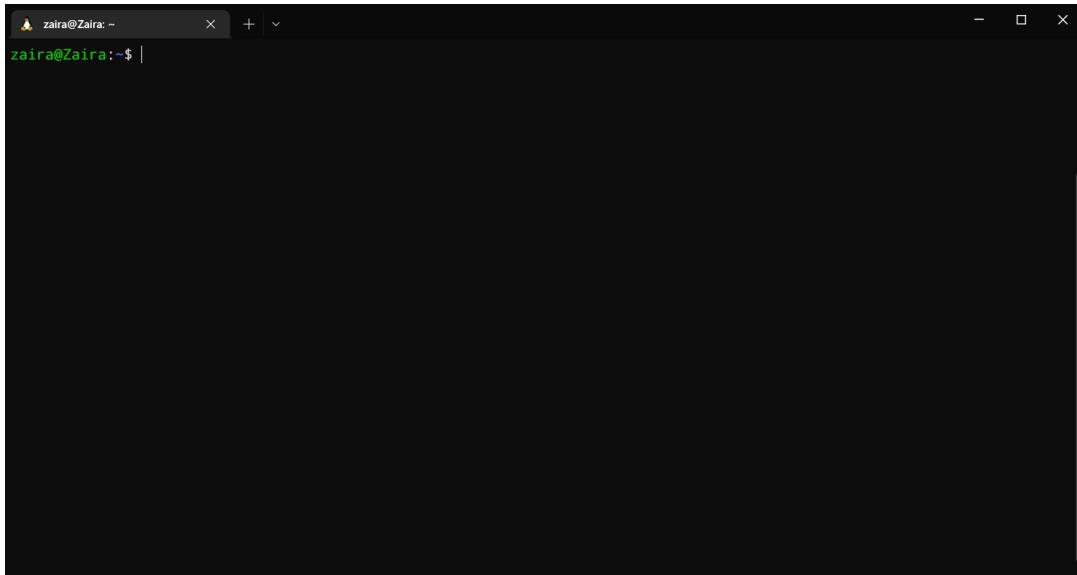
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## line interface

The terms "shell" and "bash" are used interchangeably. But there is a subtle difference between the two.

The term "shell" refers to a program that provides a command-line interface for interacting with an operating system. Bash (Bourne-Again SHell) is one of the most commonly used Unix/Linux shells and is the default shell in many Linux distributions.

A shell or command-line interface looks like this:



The shell accepts commands from the user and displays the output

In the above output, `zaira@Zaira` is the shell prompt. When a shell is used interactively, it displays a `$` when it is waiting for a command from the user.

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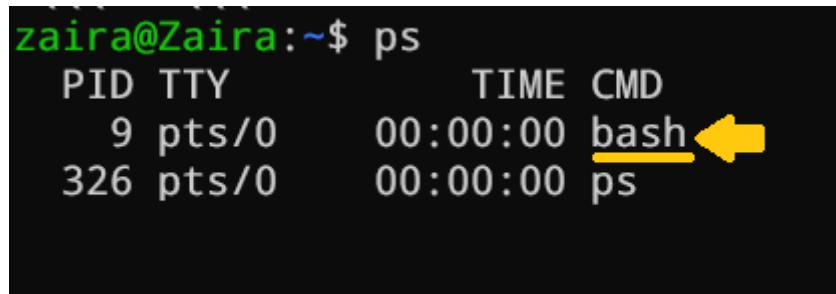
```
[root@host ~]#
```

Although Bash is a type of shell, there are other shells available as well, such as Korn shell (ksh), C shell (csh), and Z shell (zsh). Each shell has its own syntax and set of features, but they all share the common purpose of providing a command-line interface for interacting with the operating system.

You can determine your shell type using the `ps` command:

```
ps
```

Here is the output for me:



```
zaira@Zaira:~$ ps
 PID TTY          TIME CMD
   9 pts/0        00:00:00 bash ←
 326 pts/0        00:00:00 ps
```

Checking the shell type. I'm using bash shell

In summary, while "shell" is a broad term that refers to any program that provides a command-line interface, "Bash" is a

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# How to Get Started with Bash Scripting

## Running Bash commands from the command line

As mentioned earlier, the shell prompt looks something like this:

```
[username@host ~]$
```

You can enter any command after the `$` sign and see the output on the terminal.

Generally, commands follow this syntax:

```
command [OPTIONS] arguments
```

Let's discuss a few basic bash commands and see their outputs.  
Make sure to follow along :)

- `date` : Displays the current date

```
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$ date
Tue Mar 14 13:08:57 PKT 2023
```

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```
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$ pwd  
/home/zaira/shell-tutorial
```

- `ls` : Lists the contents of the current directory.

```
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$ ls  
check_plaindrome.sh  count_odd.sh  env  log  temp
```

- `echo` : Prints a string of text, or value of a variable to the terminal.

```
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$ echo "Hello bash"  
Hello bash
```

You can always refer to a commands manual with the `man` command.

For example, the manual for `ls` looks something like this:

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```
-a, --all
    do not ignore entries starting with .

-A, --almost-all
    do not list implied . and ..

--author
    with -l, print the author of each file

-b, --escape
    print C-style escapes for nongraphic characters

--block-size=SIZE
    with -l, scale sizes by SIZE when printing them; e.g., '--block-size=M'; see SIZE format below

-B, --ignore-backups
    do not list implied entries ending with -

-c
    with -lt: sort by, and show, ctime (time of last modification of file status information); with -l: show ctime and sort by name; otherwise: sort by ctime, newest first

-C
    list entries by columns

--color[=WHEN]
    colorize the output; WHEN can be 'always' (default if omitted), 'auto', or 'never'; more info below

Manual page ls(1) line 1 (press h for help or q to quit)
```

You can see options for a command in detail using `man`

# How to Create and Execute Bash scripts

## Script naming conventions

By naming convention, bash scripts end with `.sh`. However, bash scripts can run perfectly fine without the `sh` extension.

## Adding the Shebang

Bash scripts start with a `shebang`. Shebang is a combination of `bash #` and `bang !` followed by the bash shell path. This is the first line of the script. Shebang tells the shell to execute it via bash shell. Shebang is simply an absolute path to the bash interpreter.

Below is an example of the shebang statement.

`#!/bin/bash`

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```
which bash
```

## Creating our first bash script

Our first script prompts the user to enter a path. In return, its contents will be listed.

Create a file named `run_all.sh` using the `vi` command. You can use any editor of your choice.

```
vi run_all.sh
```

Add the following commands in your file and save it:

```
#!/bin/bash
echo "Today is " `date`

echo -e "\nEnter the path to directory"
read the_path

echo -e "\n your path has the following files and folders: "
ls $the_path
```

Script to print contents of a user supplied directory

Let's take a deeper look at the script line by line. I am displaying

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```
1 #!/bin/bash
2 echo "Today is " `date`
3
4 echo -e "\nEnter the path to directory"
5 read the_path
6
7 echo -e "\n your path has the following files and folders: "
8 ls $the_path
```

- Line #1: The shebang ( `#!/bin/bash` ) points toward the bash shell path.
- Line #2: The `echo` command is displaying the current date and time on the terminal. Note that the `date` is in backticks.
- Line #4: We want the user to enter a valid path.
- Line #5: The `read` command reads the input and stores it in the variable `the_path`.
- Line #8: The `ls` command takes the variable with the stored path and displays the current files and folders.

## Executing the bash script

To make the script executable, assign execution rights to your user using this command:

```
chmod u+x run_all.sh
```

Here,

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user: u .

- `+x` adds the execution rights to the current user. This means that the user who is the owner can now run the script.
- `run_all.sh` is the file we wish to run.

You can run the script using any of the mentioned methods:

- `sh run_all.sh`
- `bash run_all.sh`
- `./run_all.sh`

Let's see it running in action 

```
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$  
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$  
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$ |
```

# Bash Scripting Basics

## Comments in bash scripting

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the interpreter.

Comments are very helpful in documenting the code, and it is a good practice to add them to help others understand the code.

These are examples of comments:

```
# This is an example comment  
# Both of these lines will be ignored by the interpreter
```

## Variables and data types in Bash

Variables let you store data. You can use variables to read, access, and manipulate data throughout your script.

There are no data types in Bash. In Bash, a variable is capable of storing numeric values, individual characters, or strings of characters.

In Bash, you can use and set the variable values in the following ways:

1. Assign the value directly:

```
country=Pakistan
```

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```
same_country=$country
```

This assigns the value of `country` to the new variable `same_country`

To access the variable value, append `$` to the variable name.

```
zaira@Zaira:~$ country=Pakistan
zaira@Zaira:~$ echo $country
Pakistan
zaira@Zaira:~$ new_country=$country
zaira@Zaira:~$ echo $new_country
Pakistan
```

Assigning and printing variable values

## Variable naming conventions

In Bash scripting, the following are the variable naming conventions:

1. Variable names should start with a letter or an underscore (`_`).
2. Variable names can contain letters, numbers, and underscores (`_`).
3. Variable names are case-sensitive.

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5. Use descriptive names that reflect the purpose of the variable.
6. Avoid using reserved keywords, such as `if`, `then`, `else`, `fi`, and so on as variable names.

Here are some examples of valid variable names in Bash:

```
name  
count  
_var  
myVar  
MY_VAR
```

And here are some examples of invalid variable names:

```
2ndvar (variable name starts with a number)  
my var (variable name contains a space)  
my-var (variable name contains a hyphen)
```

Following these naming conventions helps make Bash scripts more readable and easier to maintain.

## Input and output in Bash scripts

### Gathering input

In this section, we'll discuss some methods to provide input to our scripts.

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We can read the user input using the `read` command.

```
#!/bin/bash
echo "Today is " `date`

echo -e "\nEnter the path to directory"
read the_path

echo -e "\nyour path has the following files and folders: "
ls $the_path
```

```
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$
```

## 2. Reading from a file

This code reads each line from a file named `input.txt` and prints it to the terminal. We'll study while loops later in this article.

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```
echo $line
```

### 3. Command line arguments

In a bash script or function, `$1` denotes the initial argument passed, `$2` denotes the second argument passed, and so forth.

This script takes a name as a command-line argument and prints a personalized greeting.

```
echo "Hello, $1!"
```

We have supplied `Zaira` as our argument to the script.

```
#!/bin/bash
echo "Hello, $1!"
```

The code for the script: `greeting.sh`

**Output:**

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```
zaira@zaira:~/shell-tutorial$  
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$  
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$
```

## Displaying output

Here we'll discuss some methods to receive output from the scripts.

### 1. Printing to the terminal.

```
echo "Hello, World!"
```

This prints the text "Hello, World!" to the terminal.

### 2. Writing to a file:

```
echo "This is some text." > output.txt
```

This writes the text "This is some text." to a file named `output.txt`. Note that the `>` operator overwrites a file if it already has some content.

### 3. Appending to a file:

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This appends the text "More text." to the end of the file `output.txt`.

#### 4. Redirecting output:

```
ls > files.txt
```

This lists the files in the current directory and writes the output to a file named `files.txt`. You can redirect output of any command to a file this way.

## Basic Bash commands (echo, read, etc.)

Here is a list of some of the most commonly used bash commands:

1. `cd` : Change the directory to a different location.
2. `ls` : List the contents of the current directory.
3. `mkdir` : Create a new directory.
4. `touch` : Create a new file.
5. `rm` : Remove a file or directory.
6. `cp` : Copy a file or directory.
7. `mv` : Move or rename a file or directory.
8. `echo` : Print text to the terminal.
9. `cat` : Concatenate and print the contents of a file.

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12. sudo : Run a command with administrative privileges.
13. df : Display the amount of disk space available.
14. history : Show a list of previously executed commands.
15. ps : Display information about running processes.

## Conditional statements (if/else)

Expressions that produce a boolean result, either true or false, are called conditions. There are several ways to evaluate conditions, including `if` , `if-else` , `if-elif-else` , and nested conditionals.

### Syntax:

```
if [[ condition ]];  
then  
    statement  
elif [[ condition ]]; then  
    statement  
else  
    do this by default  
fi
```

Syntax of bash conditional statements

We can use logical operators such as AND `-a` and OR `-o` to make comparisons that have more significance.

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This statement checks if both conditions are true : a is greater than 60 AND b is less than 100.

Let's see an example of a Bash script that uses `if`, `if-else`, and `if-elif-else` statements to determine if a user-inputted number is positive, negative, or zero:

```
#!/bin/bash

echo "Please enter a number: "
read num

if [ $num -gt 0 ]; then
    echo "$num is positive"
elif [ $num -lt 0 ]; then
    echo "$num is negative"
else
    echo "$num is zero"
fi
```

Script to determine if a number is positive, negative, or zero

The script first prompts the user to enter a number. Then, it uses an `if` statement to check if the number is greater than 0. If it is, the script outputs that the number is positive. If the number is not greater than 0, the script moves on to the next statement, which is an `if-elif` statement. Here, the script checks if the number is less than 0. If it is, the script outputs that the number is negative. Finally, if the number is neither greater than 0 nor less than 0, the script uses an `else` statement to output that the number is zero.

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```
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$  
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$  
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$ |
```

# Looping and Branching in Bash

## While loop

While loops check for a condition and loop until the condition remains `true`. We need to provide a counter statement that increments the counter to control loop execution.

In the example below, `(( i += 1 ))` is the counter statement that increments the value of `i`. The loop will run exactly 10 times.

```
#!/bin/bash  
i=1  
while [[ $i -le 10 ]] ; do  
    echo "$i"  
    (( i += 1 ))  
done
```

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```
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$ ./while-loop.sh
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
```

## For loop

The `for` loop, just like the `while` loop, allows you to execute statements a specific number of times. Each loop differs in its syntax and usage.

In the example below, the loop will iterate 5 times.

```
#!/bin/bash

for i in {1..5}
do
    echo $i
done
```

For loop that iterates 5 times.

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```
zaira@Zaira:~/shell-tutorial$ ./for-loop.sh
```

```
1
```

```
2
```

```
3
```

```
4
```

## Case statements

In Bash, case statements are used to compare a given value against a list of patterns and execute a block of code based on the first pattern that matches. The syntax for a case statement in Bash is as follows:

```
case expression in
    pattern1)
        # code to execute if expression matches pattern1
        ;;
    pattern2)
        # code to execute if expression matches pattern2
        ;;
    pattern3)
        # code to execute if expression matches pattern3
        ;;
    *)
        # code to execute if none of the above patterns match expression
        ;;
esac
```

Case statements syntax

Here, "expression" is the value that we want to compare, and "pattern1", "pattern2", "pattern3", and so on are the patterns that we want to compare it against.

The double semicolon ";;" separates each block of code to

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case, which executes if none of the specified patterns match the expression.  
Let's see an example.

```
fruit="apple"

case $fruit in
    "apple")
        echo "This is a red fruit."
        ;;
    "banana")
        echo "This is a yellow fruit."
        ;;
    "orange")
        echo "This is an orange fruit."
        ;;
    *)
        echo "Unknown fruit."
        ;;
esac
```

Example of case statement

In this example, since the value of "fruit" is "apple", the first pattern matches, and the block of code that echoes "This is a red fruit." is executed. If the value of "fruit" were instead "banana", the second pattern would match and the block of code that echoes "This is a yellow fruit." would execute, and so on. If the value of "fruit" does not match any of the specified patterns, the default case is executed, which echoes "Unknown fruit."

## How to Schedule Scripts using

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Unix-like operating systems. By configuring cron, you can set up automated jobs to run on a daily, weekly, monthly, or specific time basis. The automation capabilities provided by cron play a crucial role in Linux system administration.

Below is the syntax to schedule crons:

```
# Cron job example
* * * * * sh /path/to/script.sh
```

Here, the \*s represent minute(s) hour(s) day(s) month(s) weekday(s), respectively.

Below are some examples of scheduling cron jobs.

SCHEDULE	DESCRIPTION
0 0 * * *	Run a script at midnight every day
*/5 * * * *	Run a script every 5 minutes
0 6 * * 1-5	Run a script at 6 am from Monday to Friday
0 0 1-7 * *	Run a script on the first 7 days of every month
0 12 1 * *	Run a script on the first day of every month at noon

## Using crontab

The crontab utility is used to add and edit the cron jobs.

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You can add and edit the cron through `crontab -e`.

You can read more about corn jobs in my [other article here](#).

## How to Debug and Troubleshoot Bash Scripts

Debugging and troubleshooting are essential skills for any Bash scripter. While Bash scripts can be incredibly powerful, they can also be prone to errors and unexpected behavior. In this section, we will discuss some tips and techniques for debugging and troubleshooting Bash scripts.

### Set the `set -x` option

One of the most useful techniques for debugging Bash scripts is to set the `set -x` option at the beginning of the script. This option enables debugging mode, which causes Bash to print each command that it executes to the terminal, preceded by a `+` sign. This can be incredibly helpful in identifying where errors are occurring in your script.

```
#!/bin/bash
```

```
set -x
```

```
# Your script goes here
```

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indicates the nature of the error. You can check the exit code of the most recent command using the `$?` variable. A value of `0` indicates success, while any other value indicates an error.

```
#!/bin/bash

# Your script goes here

if [ $? -ne 0 ]; then
    echo "Error occurred."
fi
```

## Use echo statements

Another useful technique for debugging Bash scripts is to insert `echo` statements throughout your code. This can help you identify where errors are occurring and what values are being passed to variables.

```
#!/bin/bash

# Your script goes here

echo "Value of variable x is: $x"

# More code goes here
```

## Use the `set -e` option

If you want your script to exit immediately when any command

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will cause Bash to exit with an error if any command in the script fails. making it easier to identify and fix errors in your script.

```
#!/bin/bash

set -e

# Your script goes here
```

## Troubleshooting crons by verifying logs

We can troubleshoot crons using the log files. Logs are maintained for all the scheduled jobs. You can check and verify in logs if a specific job ran as intended or not.

For Ubuntu/Debian, you can find cron logs at:

/var/log/syslog

The location varies for other distributions.

A cron job log file can look like this:

```
2022-03-11 00:00:01 Task started
2022-03-11 00:00:02 Running script /path/to/script.sh
2022-03-11 00:00:03 Script completed successfully
2022-03-11 00:05:01 Task started
2022-03-11 00:05:02 Running script /path/to/script.sh
2022-03-11 00:05:03 Error: unable to connect to database
```

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2022-03-11 00:10:02 Running script /path/to/script.sh

2022-03-11 00:10:03 Script completed successfully

[Cron log](#)

## Conclusion

In this article, we started with how to access the terminal and then ran some basic bash commands. We also studied what a bash shell is. We briefly looked at branching the code using loops and conditionals. Finally, we discussed automating the scripts using cron followed by some troubleshooting techniques.

## Resources for learning more about Bash scripting

If you want to dig deeper into the world of bash scripting, I would suggest you have a look at this 6-hour course on Linux at freeCodeCamp.

Introduction to Linux – Full Course for ...



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See you in the next tutorial, happy coding 😊

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I am a DevOps Consultant and writer at FreeCodeCamp. I aim to provide easy and to-the-point content for Techies!

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