

Video - Context-Sensitive Help and Command Syntax Check (4 min)

The Cisco IOS help command is accessed by using the question mark. The help command is context-sensitive, so it matters how and where you use the question mark. For instance, let's say I want a list of all the commands that are available to me in user exec mode. I simply type a question mark, and I'm returned the commands that are available in user exec mode. If I type "enable" and enter privileged exec mode and put in a question mark, I'm given the commands that are available to me in privileged exec mode. I'll press the space bar to get the next page of output. An even different set of commands is available to the user in global configuration mode.

Notice I'll go to global config mode, put in a question mark, and I'm given a completely different set of commands that are available in this particular command mode. There are other uses for the help command as well. Let's say that I don't want a listing of all of the commands that are available, and I just want help finishing one particular command. For instance, let's say I'm putting in the command interface, but I've forgotten what the complete command name is. I've typed "in" and I need help finishing the command. I can put in part of a command and then put in a question mark, and it'll help me finish the command.

Notice that I put in "in" and then a question mark, and the help command has returned that the command that I'm looking for is interface. I can use the help command in another context as well. So now that I know that the command is interface, let's say I'm not sure what the next command parameter or argument is that goes with the interface command.

In this case, I'll put a space and then a question mark, and it'll tell me the next parameter or argument that is required by the interface command. Now I know that the next part of the command is either the name of the interface, like Ethernet, FastEthernet, GigabitEthernet, or maybe it's vlan or range. Related to the help command is the command syntax checker. The command syntax checker will let me know when I have a problem with the command that I've put in.

For instance, we can see here that the next part of this command would be one of these arguments here. Let's say I make a mistake and I type in the number 33 instead of vlan or range, and hit "enter." Notice that the command syntax checker has informed me that beginning at the number 3, I've made an invalid input. This is extremely useful, because it helps me to isolate where the problem is with the particular command that I've entered. This can work in different contexts as well.

For instance, let's say that I've put in just the letter "i" instead of "interface," and I hit "enter." The command syntax checker informs me that the letter "i" is an ambiguous command, the reason being is that if I type in "i" and a question mark, there is actually two commands that begin with the letter "i" in global configuration mode: the command "interface" and the command "ip." The third example of the command syntax checker is when I type in "interface" and hit "enter" and the command syntax checker has informed me that the command is incomplete. To solve this, I put in "interface" again, a space and a question mark, and I'm given the next set of options that I need to finish this command. You can see how the help command is very useful in learning the different commands that are available to you as well as the correct context and use of the different commands.