

Practical applications of 'ls' command in Linux

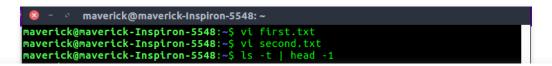
Difficulty Level: Medium • Last Updated: 18 Feb, 2021

ls is a Linux shell command that lists directory contents of files and directories. Some practical examples of ls command are shown below.

1. Open Last Edited File Using ls -t



ls -t: It sorts the file by modification time, showing the last edited file first. head -1 picks up this first file. To open the last edited file in the current directory use the combination of ls and head commands as shown below.



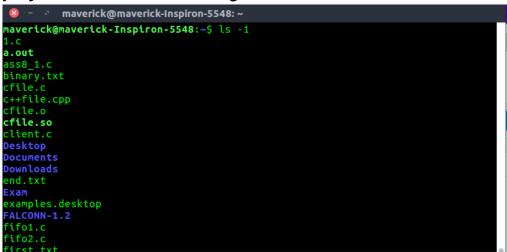
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[Note: This will open the last file you edited (i.e second.txt)]

2. Display One File Per Line Using ls -1



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\$ ls -l: To show long listing information about the file/directory.

```
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548: ~
averick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$ ls -l
            1 maverick maverick
                                       1176 Feb 16 00:19 1.c
                                       9008 May 10 22:54 a.out
           1 maverick maverick
                                        484 Mar 29 22:18 ass8_1.c
            1 maverick maverick
                                      19920 Feb 16 00:20 binary.txt
                                        67 May 31 13:16 cfile.c
187 May 31 13:21 c++file.cpp
            1 maverick maverick
              maverick maverick
            1 maverick maverick
                                       1552 May 31 13:37 cfile.o
                                       8120 May 31 13:37 cfile.so
1017 Feb 17 04:43 client.c
            1 maverick maverick
            2 maverick maverick
                                       4096 May 27 22:28 Desktop
                                       4096 Apr 2 04:11 Documents
4096 May 31 13:12 Downloads
            2 maverick maverick
            1 maverick maverick
                                        54 Mar 29 22:23 end.txt
                                       4096 Nov 18 2016 Exam
8980 Nov 6 2016 examples.desktop
    wxr-x 11 maverick maverick
            1 maverick maverick
                                       4096 Nov 18 2016 FALCONN-1.2
            6 maverick maverick
            1 maverick maverick
                                        513 May 10 22:47 fifo1.c
              maverick maverick
                                        496 May 10 22:47 fifo2.c
              maverick maverick
                                        152 Jun 3 16:43 first.txt
            1 maverick maverick
                                      10856 Nov 18 2016 glove.cc
              maverick maverick 45750028 Nov
                                                      2016 google-chrome-stable_curre
```

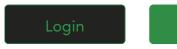
-rw-rw-r- 1 maverick maverick 1176 Feb 16 00:19 1.c

1st Character – File Type: First character specifies the type of the file. In the example above the hyphen (-) in the 1st character indicates that this is a normal file. Following are the possible file type options in the 1st character of the ls –l output.

Field Explanation

- normal file
- d: directory
- s:socket file
- l: link file
- **Field 1 File Permissions**: Next 9 character specifies the files permission. The every 3 characters specifies read, write, execute permissions for user(root), group and others respectively in order. Taking above example, -rw-rw-r- indicates read-write permission for user(root), read permission for group, and no permission for

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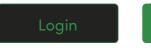
- Field 3 Owner: Initialized by username 'maverick'.
- **Field 4 Group**: Fourth field specifies the group of the file. In this example, this file belongs to "maverick' group.
- **Field 5 Size**: Fifth field specifies the size of file in bytes. In this example, '1176' indicates the file size in bytes.
- Field 6 Last modified date and time: Sixth field specifies the date and time of the last modification of the file. In this example, 'Feb 16 00:19' specifies the last modification time of the file.
- **Field 7 File name**: The last field is the name of the file. In this example, the file name is 1.c.

4. Display File Size in Human Readable Format Using ls -lh

ls -lh (h stands for human readable form): To display file size in easy to read format. i.e i.e M for MB, K for KB, G for GB.

```
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548: ~
averick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$ ls -lh
           1 maverick maverick 1.2K Feb 16 00:19 1.c
           1 maverick maverick 8.8K May 10 22:54 a.out
           1 maverick maverick 484 Mar 29 22:18 ass8_1.c
1 maverick maverick 20K Feb 16 00:20 binary.txt
            1 maverick maverick
             maverick maverick
                                 187 May 31
             maverick maverick 1.6K May 31 13:37 cfile.o
             maverick maverick 8.0K May 31 13:37 cfile.so
             maverick maverick 1017 Feb 17 04:43 client.c
             maverick maverick 4.0K May 27 22:28 Desktop
           2 maverick maverick 4.0K Apr
             maverick maverick 4.0K May 31 13:12 Downloads
           1 maverick maverick 54 Mar 29 22:23 end.txt
       -x 11 maverick maverick 4.0K Nov 18 2016 Exam
             maverick maverick 8.8K Nov 6
                                              2016 examples.desktop
           6 maverick maverick 4.0K Nov 18 2016 FALCONN-1.2
             maverick maverick 513 May 10 22:47 fifo1.c
                                 496 May 10 22:47 fifo2.c
             maverick maverick
             maverick maverick
           1 maverick maverick
                                 11K Nov 18
                                             2016 glove.cc
             maverick maverick
                                              2016 google-chrome-stable_current_
                                 44M Nov
```

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5. Display Directory Information Using ls -ld

When you use "ls -l" you will get the details of directories content. But if you want the details of the directory then you can use -d option as., For example, if you use ls -l /etc will display all the files under the *etc* directory. But, if you want to display the information about the /etc/ directory, use -ld option as shown below.

\$ ls -l /etc

```
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548: ~
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$ ls -l /etc
total 1180
                                4096 Jul 20 2016 acpi
3028 Jul 20 2016 addu
rwxr-xr-x
             3 root root
             1 root root
                                               2016 adduser.conf
CMXC-XC-X
             2 root root
                                4096 May 23 22:31 alternatives
                                401 Dec 29 2014 anacrontab
112 Jan 10 2014 apg.conf
4096 Jul 20 2016 apm
             1 root root
             1 root root
rwxr-xr-x
             6 root root
                                4096 Apr 11 05:31 apparmor
4096 May 28 04:12 apparmor.d
CMXC-XC-X
CMXC-XC-X
             8 root root
             5 root root
                                4096 May 23 22:36 apport
                                389 Apr 18 2016 appstream.conf
4096 Nov 6 2016 apt
             1 root root
             6 root root
                                4096 Jul 20
             3 root root
                                                2016 aptdaemon
                                4096 Jul 20
4096 Jul 20
                                                2016 at-spi2
             2 root root
             3 root root
              1 root root
                                2188 Sep 1
                                                2015 bash.bashrc
                                  45 Aug 13
                                                2015 bash_completion
               root root
                                 4096 May 23 22:38 bash_completion.d
rwxr-xr-x
               root root
                                 367 Jan 27 2016 bindresvport.blacklist
ΓW-Γ--Γ--
             1 root root
                                                2016 binfmt.d 2016 bluetooth
               root root
                                 4096 Apr 12
                                 4096
CMXC-XC-X
               root root
```

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6. Order Files Based on Last Modified Time Using ls -lt

ls -lt: To sort the file names displayed in the order of last modification time. You will be finding it handy to use it in combination with -l option.

```
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548: ~
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$ ls -lt
total 44892
                                        4096 Jun 3 16:49 Pictures
75 Jun 3 16:44 second.t
drwxr-xr-x 2 maverick maverick
                                        75 Jun 3 16:44 second.txt
152 Jun 3 16:43 first.txt
            1 maverick maverick
rw-rw-r-- 1 maverick maverick
                                        8120 May 31 13:37 cfile.so
            1 maverick maverick
                                        1552 May 31 13:37 cfile.o
rw-rw-r-- 1 maverick maverick
                                         187 May 31 13:21 c++file.cpp
                                        8120 May 31 13:17 libCfile.so
                                        67 May 31 13:16 cfile.c
4096 May 31 13:12 Downloads
            1 maverick maverick
rwxr-xr-x 2 maverick maverick
                                        4096 May 27 22:28 Desktop
            3 maverick maverick
                                        4096 May 10 22:57 Videos
rwxrwxr-x 1 maverick maverick
                                        9008 May 10 22:54 a.out
                                        513 May 10 22:47 fifo1.c
4096 Apr 2 04:11 Documents
            1 maverick maverick
rwxr-xr-x 2 maverick maverick
                                         247 Apr 2 03:53 zombie_1.c
            1 maverick maverick
                                                  2 03:49 zombie_4.c
2 03:48 zombie_3.c
             1 maverick maverick
                                         322 Apr
            1 maverick maverick
                                         284 Арг
                                         271 Apr
            1 maverick maverick
                                                   2 03:47 zombie_2.c
            1 maverick maverick
                                         382 Apr
              maverick maverick
                                             Mar
                                                  29 22:23 end.txt
```

7. Order Files Based on Last Modified Time (In Reverse Order) Using ls -ltr

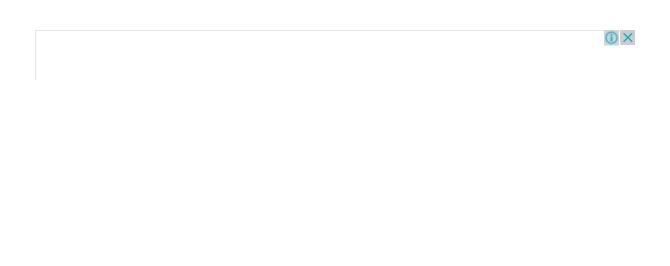
\$ ls -ltr: To sort the file names in the last modification time in reverse order. This will be showing the last edited file in the last line which will be handy when the listing goes beyond a page.

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```
2016 Music
           2 maverick maverick
                                      4096 Nov
                                      4096 Nov 18
rwxrwxr-x 11 maverick maverick
                                                    2016 Exam
                                      4096 Nov 18
                                     10856 Nov 18 2016 glove.cc
1176 Feb 16 00:19 1.c
           1 maverick maverick
            1 maverick maverick
                                     19920 Feb 16 00:20 binary.txt
            1 maverick maverick
                                      4096 Feb 17 03:36 kv
             maverick maverick
                                      1017 Feb 17 04:43 client.c
            1 maverick maverick
                                      1214 Feb 17 04:45 server.c
            1 maverick maverick
                                       259 Mar 29 21:02 time_sharing.c
484 Mar 29 22:18 ass8_1.c
            1 maverick maverick
            1 maverick maverick
                                       586 Mar 29 22:20 start.txt
            1 maverick maverick
              maverick maverick
                                        54 Mar 29 22:23 end.txt
                                       382 Apr 2 03:33 zom5.c
            1 maverick maverick
                                                 2 03:47 zombie_2.c
            1 maverick maverick
```

8. Display Hidden Files Using ls -a (or) ls -A



\$ Ls -a: To show all the hidden files in the directory, use '-a option'. Hidden files in Unix starts with '.' in its file name. It will show all the files including the '.' (current directory) and '..' (parent directory).

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```
Desktop .thunderbird
.dmrc time_sharing.c
Documents Videos
Downloads .viminfo
```

\$ ls -A: To show the hidden files, but not the '.' (current directory) and '..' (parent directory).

```
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548: ~
naverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$ ls -A
                    .gnuplot_history
google-chrome-stable_current_amd64.deb
.ICEauthority
1.c.swo
.1.c.swp
a.out
ass8_1.c
.bash_history
                    libCfile.so
.bash_logout
                    Music
.bashrc
                    .profile
cfile.c
                    Public
file.o
                    Release.key
cfile.so
                    second.txt
:lient.c
                    server.c
.compiz
.config
                    .sudo_as_admin_successful
Desktop
                    Templates
                    .thunderbird
                    time_sharing.c
Documents
Downloads
                    Videos
end.txt
                    .viminfo
```

[Note: . and .. are not displayed here]

9. Display Files Recursively Using ls -R

\$ ls /etc/apt

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```
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548: ~
averick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$ ls -R /etc/apt
etc/apt:
pt.conf
                                                   trusted.gpg
                                                                   trusted.gpg.d
pt.conf.d sources.list
                             sources.list.save
                                                   trusted.gpg~
etc/apt/apt.conf.d:
                        10periodic
                                           50appstream
Otrustcdrom
                        15update-stamp
                                           50unattended-upgrades
1autoremove
                        20archive
                                           70debconf
lautoremove-kernels 20auto-upgrades 99synaptic
                                           99update-notifier
1-vendor-ubuntu
                        20dbus
etc/apt/preferences.d:
/etc/apt/sources.list.d:
arc-theme.list
                                             noobslab-ubuntu-icons-xenial.list
arc-theme.list.save
                                             noobslab-ubuntu-icons-xenial.list.save
oogle-chrome.list
                                             numix-ubuntu-ppa-xenial.list
ilarimogard-ubuntu-webupd8-xenial.list numix-ubuntu-ppa-xenial.list.save
/etc/apt/trusted.gpg.d:
nilarimogard_ubuntu_webupd8.gpg
nilarimogard_ubuntu_webupd8.gpg~
                                     noobslab_ubuntu_icons.gpg~
                                     numix_ubuntu_ppa.gpg
numix_ubuntu_ppa.gpg
```

10. Display File Inode Number Using ls -i

Sometimes you may want to know the inone number of a file for internal maintenance. Use -i option as shown below to display inone number. Using inode number you can remove files that has special characters in it's name.

¢ la -i

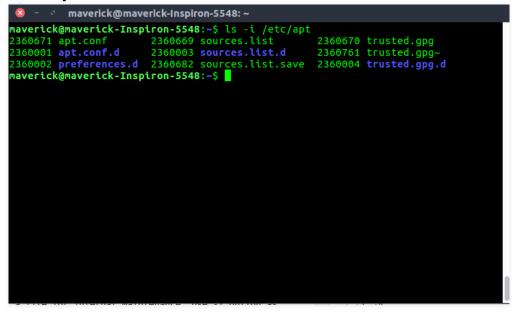
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```
099728 cfile.so
                           2098568 Release.key
                           2100165 second.txt
2097164 Desktop
                           2101171 start.txt
2097168 Documents
                          2097166 Templates
2097165 Downloads
2102815 end.txt
                           2102715 time_sharing.c
2229834 Exam
                           2097171 Videos
2097156 examples.desktop 2100133 zom5.c
                          2100076 zombie_1.c
2100930 zombie_2.c
2104166 FALCONN-1.2
2107423 fifo1.c
2107416 fifo2.c
                          2100936 zombie_3.c
2101004 first.txt
                           2100953 zombie_4.c
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$
```

\$ ls -i /etc/apt



11. Hide Control Characters Using ls -q

ls -q: To print question mark instead of the non graphics control characters.

```
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548: ~
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$ ls -q
                                                          Release.key
              examples.desktop
a.out
                                                          second.txt
ass8_1.c
              FALCONN-1.2
                                                          server.c
              fifo1.c
fifo2.c
binary.txt
                                                          Templates
file.c
:++file.cpp
              first.txt
                                                          time sharing.c
file.o
                                                          Videos
              glove.cc
              google-chrome-stable_current_amd64.deb
cfile.so
                                                          zombie_1.c
zombie_2.c
:lient.c
Desktop
              libCfile.so
Documents
              Music
                                                          zombie_3.c
Downloads
              Pictures
                                                          zombie_4.c
              Public
```

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12. Display File UID and GID Using ls -n

\$ ls -n ~/kv: Lists the output like -l, but shows the uid and gid in numeric format instead of names.

```
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548: ~
naverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$ ls -n ~/kv
otal 84
              1000 1000 8856 Feb 1 21:00 a.out 1000 1000 725 Feb 1 04:55 ass1_1.c
rwxrwxr-x 1
                              790 Jan 31 22:46 ass1_2.c
               1000 1000
                              863 Feb 1 05:31 ass1_3.c
846 Jan 31 22:46 ass1_4.c
               1000 1000
1000 1000
               1000 1000
                              869 Feb 1 20:58 ass1_5.c
                                        1 05:31 ass1.txt
1 20:59 binary.txt
               1000 1000 259 Feb
1000 1000 13900 Feb
                              586 Dec 22 07:56 bubble_sort.c
               1000 1000
                              866 Feb 16 23:10 client1.c
659 Feb 16 23:10 client.c
               1000 1000
               1000 1000
                              411 Dec 22 06:16 insertion_sort.c
               1000 1000
               1000 1000
                              932 Dec 22 05:26 mergesort.c
               1000 1000
                              973 Feb 16 23:10 server1.c
                              868 Feb 16 23:10 server.c
831 Feb 16_23:10 socket.c
rw-rw-r-- 1 1000 1000
rw-rw-r-- 1 1000 1000
naverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$
```

13. Visual Classification of Files With Special Characters Using ls -F

\$ ls -F: Instead of doing the 'ls -l' and then the checking for the first character to determine the type of file. You can use -F which classifies the file with different special character for different kind of files.

- / directory.
- nothing normal file.
- @ link file.
- * Executable file

```
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548: ~
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$ ls -F
                                                        Release.key
a.out*
             examples.desktop
ss8_1.c
             FALCONN-1.2/
                                                        server.c
inary.txt
             fifo1.c
             fifo2.c
                                                        Templates/
                                                        time_sharing.c
 ++file.cpp
                                                        Videos/
             glove.cc
```

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14. Visual Classification of Files With Colors Using ls -F

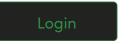
\$ ls -color=auto: Recognizing the file type by the color in which it gets displayed is an another kind in classification of file. In the below output directories get displayed in blue, soft links get displayed in green, and ordinary files gets displayed in default color.

```
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548: ~
maverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$ ls --color=auto
                                                          Release.key
             Exam
             examples.desktop FALCONN-1.2
a.out
                                                          second.txt
                                                          server.c
ass8_1.c
inary.txt
              fifo1.c
                                                          start.txt
              fifo2.c
                                                          Templates
file.c
                                                          time_sharing.c
             google-chrome-stable_current_amd64.deb
                                                          Videos
cfile.so
                                                         zom5.c
                                                          zombie_1.c
              libCfile.so
                                                          zombie_2.c
                                                          zombie_3.c
zombie_4.c
Documents
             Music
             Pictures
Downloads
end.txt
             Public
naverick@maverick-Inspiron-5548:~$
```

Reference:

Linux manual page for ls command

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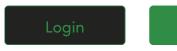
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