15.3.2 Disable Login

Click one of the buttons to take you to that part of the video.

Disable Login 0:00-0:22

In this demonstration we are going to discuss disabling user logins. There may be times when you need to perform some administrative task on the Linux system and that task requires everyone to be logged out and they need to stay out while you perform your work. We are going to talk about how to make that happen in this demonstration.

View Current Logins 0:23-1:09

Let's begin by switching to our root user account. The first thing we need to do is get everybody who is currently logged in to the system to log off. We can see who is currently logged in by entering the 'w' command.

You can see that we have three different login sessions currently running on the system. The first one is the rtracy graphical session; that's the graphical environment that I'm currently working in. I also have the rtracy terminal server session; that's this session right here that I'm working within. I have a second bash session running over here. We're going to pretend--let's move this over here, didn't mean to do that--and we're going to pretend that this session over here is another user that's logged in to the system and we need them to log out.

Log Current Users Off System 1:10-3:09

There are basically two different ways you can do this. One would be to call all the logged in users, that you've identified over here, on the phone or send them a text or an email saying, "Hey, please log out so I can get some work done."

There will be times, however, when that doesn't work. Let's say that the user that opened up this session is in a meeting and they're going to be a in a meeting for three hours and you can't wait for three hours to perform the work that needs to be done on this system. In which case, you're going to have to forcefully log them off.

I will emphasize that you should try the nice way first, because if you forcefully log someone off, there's a good chance that you could end up losing important data. Be very careful before you do what I'm about to show you how to do.

Let's say that we need to get everyone logged off and we can't get a hold of this user. It's a crisis. We've got to get going on these administrative tasks, so we're going to forcefully log off that session. We look over here in the output of w and we see that this is the TTY session that this user is currently using.

You terminate a given user's session by killing its parent process. This is called killing the session leader. In this case, we need to log off this rtracy user over here. The user is logged in on pts/1, so we can find out what the parent process ID is for that session by using the 'ps' command, '-dN' command.

But we're going to pipe the output to the 'grip' command and we're going to look for the lines that contain 'pts/1'. When I do, I see the parent process ID of this session over here. Now that we know what it is, we can simply kill it. Do this using the 'kill' command. I'm going to use a fairly brutal termination signal. We'll use the '-9' signal and then we enter the PP ID number, '1995'. Hit Enter and notice that the user was logged out.

Now that we've got everybody logged off except for me--and we can verify that by entering 'w' again--we see that I'm the only one currently logged in to the system.

Use /etc/nologin 3:10-5:09

We can block everyone else by being able to log in by creating a file in the /etc directory named 'nologin'. That's all you have to do. Notice, I use the touch command to create the etc/nologin file. It doesn't even have any text in it. We do a 'cat' command of 'nologin'; it's completely blank. Just the mere presence of this file in /etc blocks all logins.

You do have the option of adding some text to the file. Let's go ahead and open up the file in my vi editor. Let's put some simple text in that informs the user of what's going on. "The system is down for maintenance. Logins are disabled."

Let's use the 'cat' command again. Now whenever a user logs in to the system, this text is going to be displayed. If they log in to the system using a terminal session, such as with an SSH client, then they will see this text displayed on the screen. If they log in through a graphical

interface, such as the one we're currently using, this message will flash for just a second and then it won't be displayed anymore.

Let's go ahead and see how that works. I'm going to go ahead and switch user accounts, so I'm going to log in to a second user account simultaneously as the rtracy user account. Let's try logging in as the ksanders user; I'll enter in ksanders' password. As I hit sign in, watch for the little text message that I just created in the nologin file.

It'll be displayed down here for just a second. There's our message and then it goes away really fast and it just says "Sorry, that didn't work. Please try again," which I don't think is all that great of a message, because it doesn't accurately indicate what's really going on with the system, but that's the way it is.

Summary 5:10-5:18

That's it for this demonstration. In this demo we talked about disabling logins. We talked about how to find out who is currently logged in to the system. We talked about how to log them off of the system and then we talked about how to disable logins.

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