

Tail

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1 Introduction

Viewing log files in real time is one of the most important tasks for system administrators. Typically, it is the end of the log file where new information is appended. Therefore the command `tail -f LOGFILE` is used. This document describes `tail` as well as other tools.

2 Tail

The Swiss Army knife for system administrators. The `tail` tool can be used for various purposes, the most common ones are

1. View some lines at the end of a huge file: `tail -n NUMBER FILE`
2. View a logfile that is updated in real time (follow): `tail -f FILE`.
3. Use it in scripts like: `cat FILE|sort|uniq|tail -n 1`

In cases where more than one log file needs to be monitored, many approaches have been implemented.

4. Quick and Dirty: `cd /var/log&&tail -f mail.{err,warn,info,log}`
5. Executing one `tail` per terminal
6. Using `screen` and `tail`
7. Using `tmux` and `tail`
8. ...

Or one can use `multitail`

3 Multitail

The advantage of `multitail` over `tail` is that if you open 2 or more log files with one command in one window, `multitail` will group the output, unlike `tail`. Installation is simple.

```
aptitude install multitail
```

Unfortunately, the command line options are different from `tail`, but some are similar.

1. View some lines at the end of a huge file: `multitail -n NUMBER FILE`
2. View a log file updated in real time (follow): `multitail -f FILE`.
3. Use it in scripts like `cat FILE|sort|uniq|multitail -j -n 1` will **not** work.
4. View many files: `cd /var/log&&multitail -f mail.{err,warn,info,log}`

Some differences to `tail` are:

- Leaving the `multitail` session with `q` not `CTL-C`
- Output is colored
- Compared to `tail`, `multitail` is difficult to use in scripts
- Displays the file name by default

4 Grc

If the color feature of `multitail` would be the only reason to switch from `tail` to `multitail`, you should consider using `grc` to colorize `tail`.

For mail logs, `grc` produces better color output, in my opinion, because it highlights some constructs, like the contents of round and square brackets, and the header of a `syslog` line is easily distinguishable from the rest.

```
aptitude install grc
```

- See [grc](#) for advanced usage of `grc`
- Repository: <https://github.com/garabik/grc>

5 History

Version	Date	Notes
0.1.2	2023-04-06	Improve writing, typos
0.1.1	2022-05-28	Link to grc & grc repository, +History, mv ../Tools
0.1.0	2022-05-27	Initial release

6 Disclaimer of Warranty

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