Linux Command Basics: Viewing and Editing Files

This handout provides a series of foundational commands in Linux systems to help view and edit files. This handout does not include a complete list of Linux commands; however, they serve as a foundation for students to provide them with a brief explanation of the use of base commands.

It is important to note that Linux systems have various distributions, or different versions, that use similar terminal commands. A brief explanation of the command format is included below, which is essential to bridge the gap between distributions and the structure of commands.

Linux commands can contain four parts, but commands do not have to contain each segment.

<div align="center">

command [-flag(s)] [value]] [argument(s)]

</div>

- Command: The primary function, which tells the terminal what action to perform
- Flags: Modify the command by providing specific details or settings for the action
- Value: A guideline for the flag
- Arguments: The item the command operates on

The commands listed in the tables below provide examples that explain what certain commands and flags represent, or examples of the execution of these commands.

Processing Text

Command	Function / Description	Example
cat	Displays the contents of a file on the terminal	**cat** example.txt
grep	Searches for text or phrases inside a file	**grep** "text" example.txt
echo	Out puts text to terminal	**echo** "text"

Linux also has various text editors that can be used for altering documents. Examples of these are the vi and nano text editors. These file editors accomplish similar goals but have slightly different steps for writing and editing files. When using the vi or nano editor to create or edit a pre-existing file, the following commands would be used:

Text Editors

Command	Function / Description	Example
vi	Opens the vi-text editor. If a file name is supplied following the command, that file will be opened in the editor.	**vi** *my_file.txt*
nano	Opens the nano text editor. If a file name is supplied following the command, that file will be opened in the editor.	**nano** *my_file.txt*

Below are some key differences between the vi and nano editors.

Functions/ Description	Vi Editor	Nano
Insert text	"i key" or Insert key	N/A
Exit insert mode	Esc key	N/A
Save and exit	:x	CTRL+ X
"Quit" if no changes	:q	N/A
Write and exit file	:wq	CTRL+ X

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