Chapter 8. working with directories

This module is a brief overview of the most common commands to work with directories: **pwd**, **cd**, **ls**, **mkdir** and **rmdir**. These commands are available on any Linux (or Unix) system.

This module also discusses **absolute** and **relative paths** and **path completion** in the **bash** shell.

8.1. pwd

The **you are here** sign can be displayed with the **pwd** command (Print Working Directory). Go ahead, try it: Open a command line interface (also called a terminal, console or xterm) and type **pwd**. The tool displays your **current directory**.

```
paul@debian8:~$ pwd
/home/paul
```

8.2. cd

You can change your current directory with the **cd** command (Change Directory).

```
paul@debian8$ cd /etc
paul@debian8$ pwd
/etc
paul@debian8$ cd /bin
paul@debian8$ pwd
/bin
paul@debian8$ cd /home/paul/
paul@debian8$ pwd
/home/paul
```

8.2.1. cd ~

The **cd** is also a shortcut to get back into your home directory. Just typing **cd** without a target directory, will put you in your home directory. Typing **cd ~** has the same effect.

```
paul@debian8$ cd /etc
paul@debian8$ pwd
/etc
paul@debian8$ cd
paul@debian8$ pwd
/home/paul
paul@debian8$ cd ~
paul@debian8$ pwd
/home/paul
```

8.2.2. cd ..

To go to the **parent directory** (the one just above your current directory in the directory tree), type **cd ..** .

```
paul@debian8$ pwd
/usr/share/games
paul@debian8$ cd ..
paul@debian8$ pwd
/usr/share
```

*To stay in the current directory, type **cd .** ;-)* We will see useful use of the **.** character representing the current directory later.

8.2.3. cd -

Another useful shortcut with **cd** is to just type **cd -** to go to the previous directory.

```
paul@debian8$ pwd
/home/paul
paul@debian8$ cd /etc
paul@debian8$ pwd
/etc
paul@debian8$ cd -
/home/paul
paul@debian8$ cd -
/etc
```

8.3. absolute and relative paths

You should be aware of **absolute and relative paths** in the file tree. When you type a path starting with a **slash (/)**, then the **root** of the file tree is assumed. If you don't start your path with a slash, then the current directory is the assumed starting point.

The screenshot below first shows the current directory **/home/paul**. From within this directory, you have to type **cd /home** instead of **cd home** to go to the **/home** directory.

```
paul@debian8$ pwd
/home/paul
paul@debian8$ cd home
bash: cd: home: No such file or directory
paul@debian8$ cd /home
paul@debian8$ pwd
/home
```

When inside **/home**, you have to type **cd paul** instead of **cd /paul** to enter the subdirectory **paul** of the current directory **/home**.

```
paul@debian8$ pwd
/home
paul@debian8$ cd /paul
bash: cd: /paul: No such file or directory
paul@debian8$ cd paul
paul@debian8$ pwd
/home/paul
```

In case your current directory is the **root directory /**, then both **cd /home** and **cd home** will get you in the **/home** directory.

```
paul@debian8$ pwd
/
paul@debian8$ cd home
paul@debian8$ pwd
/home
paul@debian8$ cd /
paul@debian8$ cd /home
paul@debian8$ pwd
/home
```

This was the last screenshot with **pwd** statements. From now on, the current directory will often be displayed in the prompt. Later in this book we will explain how the shell variable **$PS1** can be configured to show this.

8.4. path completion

The **tab key** can help you in typing a path without errors. Typing **cd /et** followed by the **tab key** will expand the command line to **cd /etc/**. When typing **cd /Et** followed by the **tab key**, nothing will happen because you typed the wrong **path** (upper case E).

You will need fewer key strokes when using the **tab key**, and you will be sure your typed **path** is correct!

8.5. ls

You can list the contents of a directory with **ls**.

```
paul@debian8:~$ ls
allfiles.txt  dmesg.txt  services   stuff  summer.txt
paul@debian8:~$
```

8.5.1. ls -a

A frequently used option with ls is **-a** to show all files. Showing all files means including the **hidden files**. When a file name on a Linux file system starts with a dot, it is considered a **hidden file** and it doesn't show up in regular file listings.

```
paul@debian8:~$ ls
allfiles.txt  dmesg.txt  services  stuff  summer.txt
paul@debian8:~$ ls -a
.   allfiles.txt   .bash_profile  dmesg.txt   .lesshst  stuff
..  .bash_history  .bashrc        services    .ssh      summer.txt
paul@debian8:~$
```

8.5.2. ls -l

Many times you will be using options with **ls** to display the contents of the directory in different formats or to display different parts of the directory. Typing just **ls** gives you a list of files in the directory. Typing **ls -l** (that is a letter L, not the number 1) gives you a long listing.

```
paul@debian8:~$ ls -l
total 17296
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul 17584442 Sep 17 00:03 allfiles.txt
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul    96650 Sep 17 00:03 dmesg.txt
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul    19558 Sep 17 00:04 services
drwxr-xr-x 2 paul paul     4096 Sep 17 00:04 stuff
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul        0 Sep 17 00:04 summer.txt
```

8.5.3. ls -lh

Another frequently used ls option is **-h**. It shows the numbers (file sizes) in a more human readable format. Also shown below is some variation in the way you can give the options to **ls**. We will explain the details of the output later in this book.

Note that we use the letter L as an option in this screenshot, not the number 1.

```
paul@debian8:~$ ls -l -h
total 17M
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  17M Sep 17 00:03 allfiles.txt
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  95K Sep 17 00:03 dmesg.txt
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  20K Sep 17 00:04 services
drwxr-xr-x 2 paul paul 4.0K Sep 17 00:04 stuff
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul    0 Sep 17 00:04 summer.txt
paul@debian8:~$ ls -lh
total 17M
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  17M Sep 17 00:03 allfiles.txt
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  95K Sep 17 00:03 dmesg.txt
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  20K Sep 17 00:04 services
drwxr-xr-x 2 paul paul 4.0K Sep 17 00:04 stuff
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul    0 Sep 17 00:04 summer.txt
paul@debian8:~$ ls -hl
total 17M
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  17M Sep 17 00:03 allfiles.txt
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  95K Sep 17 00:03 dmesg.txt
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  20K Sep 17 00:04 services
drwxr-xr-x 2 paul paul 4.0K Sep 17 00:04 stuff
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul    0 Sep 17 00:04 summer.txt
paul@debian8:~$ ls -h -l
total 17M
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  17M Sep 17 00:03 allfiles.txt
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  95K Sep 17 00:03 dmesg.txt
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul  20K Sep 17 00:04 services
drwxr-xr-x 2 paul paul 4.0K Sep 17 00:04 stuff
-rw-r--r-- 1 paul paul    0 Sep 17 00:04 summer.txt
paul@debian8:~$
```

8.6. mkdir

Walking around the Unix file tree is fun, but it is even more fun to create your own directories with **mkdir**. You have to give at least one parameter to **mkdir**, the name of the new directory to be created. Think before you type a leading / .

```
paul@debian8:~$ mkdir mydir
paul@debian8:~$ cd mydir
paul@debian8:~/mydir$ ls -al
total 8
drwxr-xr-x  2 paul paul 4096 Sep 17 00:07 .
drwxr-xr-x 48 paul paul 4096 Sep 17 00:07 ..
paul@debian8:~/mydir$ mkdir stuff
paul@debian8:~/mydir$ mkdir otherstuff
paul@debian8:~/mydir$ ls -l
total 8
drwxr-xr-x 2 paul paul 4096 Sep 17 00:08 otherstuff
drwxr-xr-x 2 paul paul 4096 Sep 17 00:08 stuff
paul@debian8:~/mydir$
```

8.6.1. mkdir -p

The following command will fail, because the **parent directory** of **threedirsdeep** does not exist.

```
paul@debian8:~$ mkdir mydir2/mysubdir2/threedirsdeep
mkdir: cannot create directory ‘mydir2/mysubdir2/threedirsdeep’: No such fi\
le or directory
```

When given the option **-p**, then **mkdir** will create **parent directories** as needed.

```
paul@debian8:~$ mkdir -p mydir2/mysubdir2/threedirsdeep
paul@debian8:~$ cd mydir2
paul@debian8:~/mydir2$ ls -l
total 4
drwxr-xr-x 3 paul paul 4096 Sep 17 00:11 mysubdir2
paul@debian8:~/mydir2$ cd mysubdir2
paul@debian8:~/mydir2/mysubdir2$ ls -l
total 4
drwxr-xr-x 2 paul paul 4096 Sep 17 00:11 threedirsdeep
paul@debian8:~/mydir2/mysubdir2$ cd threedirsdeep/
paul@debian8:~/mydir2/mysubdir2/threedirsdeep$ pwd
/home/paul/mydir2/mysubdir2/threedirsdeep
```

8.7. rmdir

When a directory is empty, you can use **rmdir** to remove the directory.

```
paul@debian8:~/mydir$ ls -l
total 8
drwxr-xr-x 2 paul paul 4096 Sep 17 00:08 otherstuff
drwxr-xr-x 2 paul paul 4096 Sep 17 00:08 stuff
paul@debian8:~/mydir$ rmdir otherstuff
paul@debian8:~/mydir$ cd ..
paul@debian8:~$ rmdir mydir
rmdir: failed to remove ‘mydir’: Directory not empty
paul@debian8:~$ rmdir mydir/stuff
paul@debian8:~$ rmdir mydir
paul@debian8:~$
```

8.7.1. rmdir -p

And similar to the **mkdir -p** option, you can also use **rmdir** to recursively remove directories.

```
paul@debian8:~$ mkdir -p test42/subdir
paul@debian8:~$ rmdir -p test42/subdir
paul@debian8:~$
```

8.8. practice: working with directories

1. Display your current directory.

2. Change to the /etc directory.

3. Now change to your home directory using only three key presses.

4. Change to the /boot/grub directory using only eleven key presses.

5. Go to the parent directory of the current directory.

6. Go to the root directory.

7. List the contents of the root directory.

8. List a long listing of the root directory.

9. Stay where you are, and list the contents of /etc.

10. Stay where you are, and list the contents of /bin and /sbin.

11. Stay where you are, and list the contents of ~.

12. List all the files (including hidden files) in your home directory.

13. List the files in /boot in a human readable format.

14. Create a directory testdir in your home directory.

15. Change to the /etc directory, stay here and create a directory newdir in your home directory.

16. Create in one command the directories ~/dir1/dir2/dir3 (dir3 is a subdirectory from dir2, and dir2 is a subdirectory from dir1).

17. Remove the directory testdir.

18. If time permits (or if you are waiting for other students to finish this practice), use and understand **pushd** and **popd**. Use the man page of **bash** to find information about these commands.