man Manual page lookup

CONCEPTS

A name can exist in several sections: printf(1) is the command, printf(3) the C function. Write man 3 printf to pick.

Manual sections

Section	Holds
1	User commands
2	System calls
3	Library functions
4	Devices and special files
5	File formats and config
6	Games
7	Overviews and conventions
8	Admin commands

Do not know the name a topic or word

↓ `man -k`

Pick a hit name (section)

↓ `man`

Read the page in the pager

↓ `/ search`

Find the option or example

man shows pages through a pager, normally less, so every less key works inside it.

Shell builtins (cd, export, alias) have no own page: use help <name>, or man bash and search there.

OPENING PAGES

`man <name>`
Show the manual page

`man <section> <name>`
Show the page from one section

`man -a <name>`
Show every matching page in turn

`man -l <file>`
Open a page from a local file

`man -w <name>`
Print the path of the page file

`man -aw <name>`
Print the paths of all matching pages

`man <name> <sub>`
Open subcommand page (git-commit)

`man -P <pager> <name>`
Use another pager for one run

OPENING PAGES (cont.)

`man -P cat <name>`
Dump the page without a pager

`MANWIDTH=80 man <name>`
Format the page to a set width

SEARCHING PAGES

`man -k <word>`
Search names and descriptions

`apropos <word>`
Same as man -k

`man -f <name>`
One-line summary of a page

`whatis <name>`
Same as man -f

`man -k <word> -s <n>`
Limit a search to one section

`man -k '^<prefix>'`
Search with a regex on the names

`man -k --names-only <word>`
Match page names only

`mandb`
Rebuild the index behind -k and -f

INSIDE THE PAGER

`Space / b`
Page forward / back

`j / k`
Line down / up

`g / G`
Top / bottom of the page

`/<text>`
Search forward

`?<text>`
Search backward

`n / N`
Next / previous match

`&<text>`
Show only lines matching

`h`
Pager key help

`q`
Quit

`/^ *-<x>`
Jump to the description of option -x

INSIDE THE PAGER (cont.)

`/^SYNOPSIS`
Jump to a section heading

`MANPAGER='less -R +Gg'`
Choose the pager for man

OTHER HELP SOURCES

`<command> --help`
Built-in usage summary

`help <builtin>`
Help for a shell builtin

`help`
List all shell builtins

`type <name>`
Is it a builtin, alias or file?

`which <name>`
Path of the executable

`info <topic>`
Open the GNU Info manual

`tldr <command>`
Short community examples (extra tool)

READING A PAGE

Conventions in SYNOPSIS

Written	Means
`[x]`	optional
`<x> or x in italics`	replace with a value
`a | b`	pick one
`x ...`	can repeat

Read NAME and SYNOPSIS first, then jump to the option you need; EXAMPLES and SEE ALSO often save the most time.

RECIPES

Find the right command and read it

```
man -k 'copy file'
man -f cp
man 1 cp
# /^ *-r then n
```

Which page, which section?

```
man -aw printf
man -f printf
man 3 printf
```

Save a readable plain-text page

```
man ls | col -bx > ls.txt
# or: MANWIDTH=80 man -P cat ls > ls.txt
```