# man Manual page lookup

**START HERE**

`man <command>`
Read a manual page

`n / N`
Next / previous match

`man -k <word>`
Search page descriptions

`q`
Quit the page

`man <n> <name>`
Pick a section

`<command> --help`
Quick usage summary

`/<text>`
Search inside a page

`help <builtin>`
Help for a shell builtin

**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

## 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 |

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
*Press q to move on to the next section's page.*

`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 git commit finds git-commit(1); --no-subpages turns this off.*

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

## OPENING PAGES (cont.)

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

`man -I <name>`
Match the name case-sensitively

`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

`man -k --wildcard '<glob>'`
Search names with a wildcard

`man -K <text>`
Search the full text of all pages
*Slow: it opens every page. Combine with -s to narrow it.*

`mandb`
Rebuild the index behind -k and -f
*New pages are invisible to -k until the database is updated (usually needs root).*

## INSIDE THE PAGER

`Space / b`
Page forward / back

`j / k`
Line down / up

## INSIDE THE PAGER (cont.)

`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
*The pattern matches an option at the start of a line, e.g. /^ *-r.*

`/^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

`ls /usr/share/doc/<pkg>`
Package docs and examples

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

## OTHER HELP SOURCES (cont.)

`man man`
The manual page for man itself

`man 7 man-pages`
How pages are written and laid out

`compgen -b`
List builtins for completion

## 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.

Not every page has EXAMPLES. If it is thin, try the --help output or a tldr page.

## 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
```

### Look up a flag without leaving the shell

```
man -P cat tar | grep -n -- '--
exclude'
tar --help | grep -- --exclude
```