netcat (nc) TCP/UDP Swiss army knife

START HERE

`nc <host> <port>`
Open a TCP connection

`nc -u <host> <port>`
Talk UDP

`nc -zv <host> <port>`
Is the port open?

`nc -w 3 <host> <port>`
Give up after 3 seconds

`nc -zv <host> 20-80`
Scan a port range

`nc -l <port> > <file>`
Receive a file

`nc -l <port>`
Listen for one connection

`nc <host> <port> < <file>`
Send a file

stdin typed or piped → sent over → **nc** client or -l server → TCP / UDP → **peer** host:port → replies to → **stdout** screen, file, pipe

CONCEPTS

nc copies stdin to the socket and the socket to stdout. Pipes and redirects do the rest.

Two variants exist: OpenBSD nc (-l <port>, -N, -k, -U, proxies) and traditional nc (-l -p <port>, -q, -e). Check with: nc -h.

Debian: nc may point to netcat-traditional; install netcat-openbsd for the OpenBSD flags. Ncat (nmap) is a third variant.

CONNECT

`nc <host> <port>`
Connect and talk interactively

`nc -v <host> <port>`
Verbose: report connection status

`nc -w <secs> <host> <port>`
Timeout for connect and idle

`nc -n <ip> <port>`
No DNS lookups

`nc -4 / nc -6`
Force IPv4 / IPv6 (OpenBSD)

`nc -C <host> <port>`
Send CRLF line endings (traditional)

For SMTP, HTTP and other CRLF protocols. Upstream OpenBSD nc has no CRLF flag (its -C is a TLS cert file); pipe through unix2dos or printf instead.

`nc -N <host> <port>`
Close socket on stdin EOF (OpenBSD)

Without -N, OpenBSD nc keeps waiting after stdin ends. Traditional nc uses -q <secs> instead.

CONNECT (cont.)

`nc -q <secs> <host> <port>`
Quit after stdin EOF (traditional)

`nc -s <addr> <host> <port>`
Choose source address

`nc -p <port> <host> <port>`
Choose source port

`nc -i <secs> <host> <port>`
Pause between lines sent

LISTEN

`nc -l <port>`
Listen once on a TCP port (OpenBSD)

`nc -l -p <port>`
Listen once (traditional syntax)

`nc -lv <port>`
Listen and show who connects

`nc -lk <port>`
Keep listening after a client leaves

OpenBSD nc only. With a loop on traditional nc: while true; do nc -l -p <port>; done.

`nc -l <addr> <port>`
Bind to one address only

nc -l 127.0.0.1 <port> keeps the listener off the network.

`nc -lu <port>`
Listen for UDP datagrams

`nc -lU <path>`
Listen on a Unix socket (OpenBSD)

`nc -W <n> -l <port>`
Exit after n packets (OpenBSD)

SCAN PORTS

`nc -zv <host> <port>`
Test whether one port is open

`nc -zv <host> <from>-<to>`
Scan a range of ports

SCAN PORTS (cont.)

`nc -zv <host> <port1> <port2>`
Scan several ports

`nc -zvw 2 <host> <from>-<to>`
Scan with a short timeout

`nc -zuv <host> <port>`
UDP probe

UDP has no handshake, so success usually only means no ICMP error came back. Treat it as a hint.

`nc -zvr <host> <from>-<to>`
Scan in random order

TRANSFER DATA

`nc -l <port> > <file>`
Receive into a file

`nc <host> <port> < <file>`
Send a file

`nc -u <host> <port>`
Send lines as UDP datagrams

`echo '<text>' | nc -u -w 1 <host> <port>`
Fire a single UDP message

`tar cf - <dir> | nc <host> <port>`
Stream a directory

`nc -l <port> | tar xf -`
Unpack a streamed directory

`nc -U <path>`
Connect to a Unix socket (OpenBSD)

`nc -o <file> <host> <port>`
Hex dump of traffic (traditional)

PROXY AND SHELL

`nc -x <proxy>:<port> <host> <port>`
Connect through a SOCKS5 proxy (OpenBSD)

PROXY AND SHELL (cont.)

`nc -x <proxy>:<port> -X connect <host> <port>`
Use an HTTP CONNECT proxy (OpenBSD)

`nc -X 4 -x <proxy> <host> <port>`
Pick SOCKS version 4, 4A or 5

`nc -e <prog> -l -p <port>`
Run a program per connection (traditional)

Exposes the program to anyone who can reach the port. Absent in OpenBSD nc and most packages.

`nc -g <gw> <host> <port>`
Source-routing hop (traditional)

RECIPES

Check a service is reachable

```
nc -zvw 3 db.example.com 5432
# 'succeeded' / 'open' = port reachable
# timeout = filtered, refused = closed
```

Speak HTTP by hand

```
printf 'GET / HTTP/1.1\r\nHost: example.com\r\nConnection: close\r\n\r\n' \
  | nc -w 5 example.com 80
```

Copy a file between hosts

```
# receiver
nc -l 9000 > backup.tar.gz
# sender
nc -N receiver.example.com 9000 < backup.tar.gz
```

Throwaway chat or echo test

```
# host A
nc -lv 9000
# host B: type, lines appear on A
nc hostA 9000
```