tail, head and watch Peek, follow, repeat

CONCEPTS

head and tail show the start and end of a file; watch reruns any command and redraws the screen.

head start of file
↓ -n N
file or stdin
tail end of file
↓ -f
live stream new lines

tail -f follows the open file; after log rotation it keeps reading the old, renamed file. Use -F to follow the name.

TAIL

`tail <file>`
Last 10 lines

`tail -n <N> <file>`
Last N lines

`tail -n +<N> <file>`
From line N to the end

`tail -c <N> <file>`
Last N bytes

`tail <file1> <file2>`
Last lines of several files, with headers

FOLLOWING

`tail -f <file>`
Follow appended lines

`tail -F <file>`
Follow by name, retry if missing

`tail -f <file1> <file2>`
Follow several files at once

`tail -n 0 -f <file>`
Follow only new lines

`tail -f --pid=<pid> <file>`
Stop when a process exits

FOLLOWING (cont.)

`Ctrl+C`
Stop following

HEAD

`head <file>`
First 10 lines

`head -n <N> <file>`
First N lines

`head -n -<N> <file>`
All but the last N lines

`head -c <N> <file>`
First N bytes

`head <file1> <file2>`
First lines of several files, with headers

`head -n 1`
First line of piped input

WATCH

`watch <cmd>`
Run every 2 seconds

`watch -n <secs> <cmd>`
Set the interval

`watch -d <cmd>`
Highlight changes between runs

`watch -t <cmd>`
Hide the header

`watch -g <cmd>`
Exit when the output changes

PIPES AND TEE

`<cmd> | tail -n <N>`
Keep the last N output lines

`<cmd> | head -n <N>`
Keep the first N output lines

`tail -f <file> | grep --line-buffered <pat>`
Filter a live log

`<cmd> | tee <file>`
Show output and save it