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

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 -e *<cmd>*
Stop when the command fails

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

watch -c *<cmd>*
Keep ANSI colours

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

<cmd> **| tee -a** *<file>*
Append instead of overwrite

<cmd> **| sudo tee** *<file>*
Write to a root-owned file