rm Cheatsheet

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Quick reference for removing files and directories safely with rm in Linux

The `rm` command removes files and directories in Linux. This cheatsheet covers the most common `rm` options, safe deletion patterns, recursive removal, and practical command combinations.

Basic Syntax

Core command forms for file and directory removal.

`rm [OPTIONS] FILE...`	Remove one or more files
`rm -r [OPTIONS] DIRECTORY...`	Remove directories recursively
`rm -- FILE`	Treat argument as filename even if it starts with `-`
`rm -i FILE`	Prompt before each removal

Remove Files

Common file deletion commands.

`rm file.txt`	Remove one file
`rm file1 file2 file3`	Remove multiple files
`rm *.log`	Remove files matching pattern
`rm -- -strange-filename`	Remove file named with leading `-`
`rm -v file.txt`	Remove file with verbose output

Remove Directories

Delete directories and their contents.

`rm -r dir/`	Remove directory recursively
`rm -rf dir/`	Force recursive removal without prompts
`rm -r dir1 dir2`	Remove multiple directories
`rm -r -- */`	Remove all directories in current path

Prompt and Safety Options

Control how aggressively `rm` deletes files.

`rm -i file.txt`	Prompt before each file removal
`rm -I file1 file2`	Prompt once before deleting many files
`rm --interactive=always file.txt`	Always prompt
`rm --interactive=once *.tmp`	Prompt once
`rm -f file.txt`	Ignore nonexistent files, never prompt

Useful Patterns

Frequent real-world combinations.

`find . -type f -name '*.tmp' -delete`	Remove matching temporary files
`find . -type d -empty -delete`	Remove empty directories
`rm -rf -- build/ dist/`	Remove common build directories
`rm -f -- *.bak *.old`	Remove backup files quietly

Troubleshooting

Quick checks for common removal errors.

`Permission denied`	Check ownership and permissions; use `sudo` only when needed
`Is a directory`	Add `-r` to remove directories
`No such file or directory`	Verify path and shell glob expansion
`Cannot remove write-protected file`	Use `-i` for prompts or `-f` to force
`File name starts with -`	Use `rm -- filename`

Related Guides

Use these references for safer file management workflows.

Rm Command in Linux	Full `rm` guide with examples
How to Find Files in Linux Using the Command Line	Find and target files before deleting
Chmod Command in Linux	Fix permission errors before removal
Linux Commands Cheatsheet	General Linux command quick reference