

sort Cheatsheet

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Quick reference for sorting text lines with sort in Linux

The `sort` command orders lines from files or standard input. This cheatsheet covers common sort options for numeric sorting, field-based sorting, unique lines, and practical pipeline usage.

Basic Syntax

Core `sort` command forms.

<code>sort file.txt</code>	Sort lines alphabetically (ascending)
<code>sort -r file.txt</code>	Sort lines in reverse order
<code>sort -n file.txt</code>	Sort numerically
<code>sort -nr file.txt</code>	Sort numerically, largest first
<code>sort file1 file2</code>	Merge and sort multiple files

Sort by Field

Sort lines by one column or key.

<code>sort -k2 file.txt</code>	Sort by second field
<code>sort -k2,2 file.txt</code>	Sort using only field 2 as key
<code>sort -t: -k3,3n /etc/passwd</code>	Sort by UID field in <code>/etc/passwd</code>
<code>sort -t, -k1,1 data.csv</code>	Sort CSV by first column
<code>sort -k3,3 -k1,1 file.txt</code>	Secondary sort: key 3, then key 1

Numeric and Human Sizes

Handle numbers and size suffixes correctly.

<code>sort -n numbers.txt</code>	Numeric sort
<code>sort -g values.txt</code>	General numeric sort (floats/scientific notation)
<code>sort -h sizes.txt</code>	Sort human-readable sizes (K, M, G)
<code>`du -sh /var/*`</code>	<code>sort -h`</code>
<code>sort -V versions.txt</code>	Natural version sort (1.9 before 1.10)

Unique and Check

Detect duplicates and verify sorted input.

<code>sort -u file.txt</code>	Sort and remove duplicate lines
<code>`sort file.txt`</code>	<code>uniq`</code>
<code>`sort file.txt`</code>	<code>uniq -c`</code>
<code>sort -c file.txt</code>	Check if file is sorted
<code>sort -C file.txt</code>	Quiet sorted-check (status code only)

In-Place and Output

Safe ways to write sorted results.

<code>sort file.txt > sorted.txt</code>	Write output to a new file
<code>sort -o file.txt file.txt</code>	Sort in place safely
<code>sort -o out.txt in.txt</code>	Write sorted output with -O
<code>sort -T /tmp bigfile.txt</code>	Use temp directory for large sorts
<code>LC_ALL=C sort file.txt</code>	Byte-order sort for predictable locale behavior

Common Pipelines

Practical combinations with other commands.

<code>`grep -Eo '[[:alnum:]]_+' file.txt`</code>	<code>sort`</code>
<code>`cut -d',' -f2 data.csv`</code>	<code>sort`</code>
<code>`sort access.log`</code>	<code>uniq -c`</code>
<code>`ps -eo user=`</code>	<code>sort`</code>
<code>`find . -type f`</code>	<code>sort`</code>

Troubleshooting

Quick checks for common `sort` issues.

Numbers sorted as text	Add <code>-n</code> (or <code>-g</code> for floats)
Size values ordered incorrectly	Use <code>-h</code> for human-readable sizes
Unexpected uppercase/lowercase order	Use <code>-f</code> or set locale with <code>LC_ALL=C</code>
File was emptied after sorting	Do not use <code>sort file > file</code> ; use <code>sort -o file file</code>
Different results across systems	Verify locale and use explicit key options (<code>-k</code>)

Related Guides

Use these guides for full sorting and text-processing workflows.

sort Command in Linux	Full <code>sort</code> guide with examples
<code>uniq</code>	Remove and count duplicate lines after sorting
head Command in Linux	Show the first lines of output
wc Command in Linux	Count lines, words, and bytes
cut Command in Linux	Extract fields from text
grep Command in Linux	Search and filter matching lines