

watch Cheatsheet

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Quick reference for rerunning commands at intervals and monitoring output changes with watch in Linux

The `watch` command reruns another command at a fixed interval and refreshes the output in the terminal. This cheatsheet covers intervals, highlighting changes, command pipelines, and practical monitoring patterns.

Basic Syntax

Core `watch` command forms.

<code>watch command</code>	Run a command repeatedly every 2 seconds
<code>watch -n 5 command</code>	Refresh every 5 seconds
<code>watch -n 1 date</code>	Update output every second
<code>watch --help</code>	Show available options

Common Monitoring Tasks

Use `watch` to keep an eye on changing system state.

<code>watch free -h</code>	Monitor memory usage
<code>watch df -h</code>	Monitor disk space
<code>watch uptime</code>	Check load averages and uptime
<code>`watch "ps -ef grep nginx"`</code>	
<code>watch "ss -tulpn"</code>	Monitor listening sockets

Timing and Refresh Control

Control how often `watch` reruns the command.

<code>watch -n 0.5 command</code>	Refresh every 0.5 seconds
<code>watch -n 10 command</code>	Refresh every 10 seconds
<code>watch -t command</code>	Hide the header line
<code>watch -p command</code>	Try to run at precise intervals
<code>watch -x command arg1 arg2</code>	Run the command directly without <code>sh -c</code>

Highlighting Changes

Make changing output easier to spot.

<code>watch -d command</code>	Highlight differences between updates
<code>watch -d free -h</code>	Highlight memory changes
<code>watch -d "ip -brief address"</code>	Highlight interface state or address changes
<code>watch -d -n 1 "cat /proc/loadavg"</code>	Highlight load-average changes

Commands with Pipes and Quotes

Wrap pipelines and shell syntax in quotes unless you use `-x`.

<code>`watch "ps -ef grep apache"`</code>	
<code>`watch "ls -lh /var/log tail"`</code>	
<code>watch "grep -c error /var/log/syslog"</code>	Count matching lines repeatedly
<code>watch -x ls -lh /var/log</code>	Run <code>ls</code> directly without shell parsing
<code>`watch "find /tmp -maxdepth 1 -type f wc -l"`</code>	

Exit Conditions and Beeps

Stop or alert when output changes.

<code>watch -g command</code>	Exit when command output changes
<code>watch -b command</code>	Beep if the command exits with non-zero status
<code>watch -b -n 5 "systemctl is-active nginx"</code>	Alert if the service is no longer active
<code>watch -g "cat /tmp/status.txt"</code>	Exit when the file content changes

Troubleshooting

Quick fixes for common `watch` issues.

Pipes or redirects do not work	Quote the whole command or use <code>sh -c</code>
The screen flickers too much	Increase the interval or hide the header with <code>-t</code>
Output changes are hard to spot	Add <code>-d</code> to highlight differences
The command exits immediately	Check the command syntax outside <code>watch</code> first
You need shell expansion and variables	Use quoted shell commands instead of <code>-X</code>

Related Guides

Use these guides for broader monitoring and process tasks.

Linux Watch Command	Full guide to <code>watch</code> options and examples
ps Command in Linux	Inspect running processes
free Command in Linux	Check memory usage
ss Command in Linux	Inspect sockets and ports
top Command in Linux	Monitor processes interactively