

# wc Cheatsheet

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Quick reference for counting lines, words, bytes, characters, and longest line length with `wc` in Linux

The `wc` command counts lines, words, bytes, and characters in files or command output. This cheatsheet covers the most common counting patterns you will use in scripts and daily shell workflows.

## Basic Syntax

Core `wc` command forms.

<code>wc file.txt</code>	Show lines, words, and bytes for a file
<code>wc file1 file2</code>	Show counts per file and a total line
<code>wc *.log</code>	Count all matching files
<code>command   wc</code>	Count output from another command
<code>wc --help</code>	Show available options

## Common Count Flags

Use flags to request specific counters.

<code>wc -l file.txt</code>	Count lines only
<code>wc -w file.txt</code>	Count words only
<code>wc -c file.txt</code>	Count bytes only
<code>wc -m file.txt</code>	Count characters only
<code>wc -L file.txt</code>	Show longest line length

## Useful Pipelines

Practical `wc` combinations for quick shell checks.

<code>ls -l   wc -l</code>	Count directory entries (one per line)
<code>grep -r "ERROR" /var/log   wc -l</code>	Count matching log lines
<code>find . -type f   wc -l</code>	Count files recursively
<code>ps aux   wc -l</code>	Count process list lines
<code>cat file.txt   wc -w</code>	Count words from stdin

## Multi-File Counting

Summarize multiple files and totals.

<code>wc -l *.txt</code>	Line count for each file plus total
<code>wc -w docs/*.md</code>	Word count per Markdown file and total
<code>wc -c part1 part2 part3</code>	Byte count per file and combined total
<code>wc -m *.csv</code>	Character count for each CSV file
<code>wc -L *.log</code>	Max line length per file and max total

## Script-Friendly Patterns

Extract numeric output safely in scripts.

<code>count=\$(wc -l &lt; file.txt)</code>	Capture pure line count without filename
<code>words=\$(wc -w &lt; file.txt)</code>	Capture word count only
<code>bytes=\$(wc -c &lt; file.txt)</code>	Capture byte count only
<code>if [ "\$(wc -l &lt; file.txt)" -gt 1000 ]; then ... fi</code>	Threshold check in scripts
<code>printf '%s\n' "\$text"   wc -m</code>	Count characters in a variable

## Troubleshooting

Quick checks for common `wc` confusion.

Count includes filename	Use input redirection: <code>wc -l &lt; file</code>
Unexpected word count	Confirm whitespace and delimiters in the file
Character and byte counts differ	Use <code>-m</code> for characters and <code>-C</code> for bytes
Total line missing with many files	Ensure shell glob matches at least one file
Pipeline count seems off by one	Some commands add headers; account for that

## Related Guides

Use these guides for complete text-processing workflows.

<a href="#">linux wc Command</a>	Full <b>WC</b> guide with detailed examples
<a href="#">head Command in Linux</a>	Show first lines of files
<a href="#">tail Command in Linux</a>	Show last lines and follow logs
<a href="#">grep Command in Linux</a>	Search and filter matching lines
<a href="#">find Files in Linux</a>	Build file lists for counting