

cat – concatenate files and print to the standard output

`cat` is a simple yet very useful Unix command. It takes a name of one or more text files, and then shows their contents to the standard output as one stream of data.

`cat` is used as the go-to text file viewer for most of small configuration or data files. If you know that the file is about 10-20 lines of code, `cat` would be the perfect tool to show its contents.

For larger files, [more command](#) or its improved version – [less command](#) – are recommended.

cat Unix command example

```
greys@ubuntu:~$ cat /etc/kernel-img.conf
do_symlinks = yes
relative_links = yes
do_bootloader = no
do_bootfloppy = no
do_initrd = yes
link_in_boot = no
postinst_hook = /sbin/update-grub
postrm_hook = /sbin/update-grub
```

for two files, it looks like this:

```
greys@ubuntu:~$ cat /etc/issue
Ubuntu 7.04 \n \l
\
greys@ubuntu:~$ cat /etc/issue /etc/kernel-img.conf
Ubuntu 7.04 \n \l
\
do_symlinks = yes
relative_links = yes
do_bootloader = no
do_bootfloppy = no
```

```
do_initrd = yes
link_in_boot = no
postinst_hook = /sbin/update-grub
postrm_hook = /sbin/update-grub
```

Line number in cat output

If you use the `-n` command line option with `cat`, your output will contain line numbers:

```
greys@ubuntu:~$ cat -n /etc/kernel-img.conf
 1 do_symlinks = yes
 2 relative_links = yes
 3 do_bootloader = no
 4 do_bootfloppy = no
 5 do_initrd = yes
 6 link_in_boot = no
 7 postinst_hook = /sbin/update-grub
 8 postrm_hook = /sbin/update-grub
```

It is important to remember that `-n` numbers out the lines of the output generated by `cat`, not shows the number for each line in the original files. When working with more than one file, it's easy to see what I mean:

```
greys@ubuntu:~$ cat -n /etc/issue /etc/kernel-img.conf
 1 Ubuntu 7.04 \n \l
 2
 3 do_symlinks = yes
 4 relative_links = yes
 5 do_bootloader = no
 6 do_bootfloppy = no
 7 do_initrd = yes
 8 link_in_boot = no
 9 postinst_hook = /sbin/update-grub
10 postrm_hook = /sbin/update-grub
```

While a line is a line, even if it's empty, you could in some rare cases be only interested in numbering the lines which contain some information, and ignore the empty lines altogether. That's when a `-b` option comes handy:

```
greys@ubuntu:~$ cat -bn /etc/issue /etc/kernel-img.conf
```

```
1  Ubuntu 7.04 \n \l  
  
2  do_symlinks = yes  
3  relative_links = yes  
4  do_bootloader = no  
5  do_bootfloppy = no  
6  do_initrd = yes  
7  link_in_boot = no  
8  postinst_hook = /sbin/update-grub  
9  postrm_hook   = /sbin/update-grub
```

See also

- [more command](#)
- [less command](#)
- [Basic Unix commands](#)
- [Advanced Unix commands](#)