Getting the difference between shutting a Unix system down versus halting it is kind of important.

**Graceful shutdown**

It’s important that your Unix/Linux system completes startup or shutdown in a graceful manner. What this means is that every process gets a chance to stop properly, rather than gets killed. It also means that these processes get stopped in an orderly manner – specifically following the order of appropriate startup/shutdown scripts or dependencies.

**shutdown command** does exactly that: it puts your desktop or
server into a state of stopping services and preparing the server to be powered off.

Depending on your Unix/Linux implementation and command line options, a number of things will be requested by shutdown command before powering the system off:

- warning about pending shutdown is broadcast to all the users logged into your system
- a grace period (usually 1 minute) is started before shutdown proceeds
- stop scripts are executed to correctly stop networked services
- login attempts are blocked (new users won’t be able to log in)
- processes are gracefully killed – meaning they can save data before shutting down

Relevant shutdown command options

If you want to immediately begin the shutdown procedure, you need to specify keyword `now`. If you want the server to power off and stay down, specify `-h` (for halt), if you want it to be rebooted, specify `-r` (for reboot).

**IMPORTANT**: If you don’t specify `-h` or `-r`, your Unix multiuser environment will be stopped and most OS services shut down, but the physical/virtual hardware will not be powered off. You’ll probably end up in a **single user mode** – where you can run admin commands as `root`. 
Complete **shutdown command** for immediately bringing server down:

```
$ sudo shutdown -h now
```

**Ungraceful shutdown: halt**

**halt command** is another way to stop your Unix-like environment, but it’s more aggressive: no shutdown scripts or graceful process completion is allowed — it just stops Unix kernel.

**halt** also doesn’t really power your system off — it just stops your Unix/Linux environment from running. You still need to press the power button or activate the power switch.

**See Also**

- [Basic Unix Commands](#)
- [Unix Reference](#)