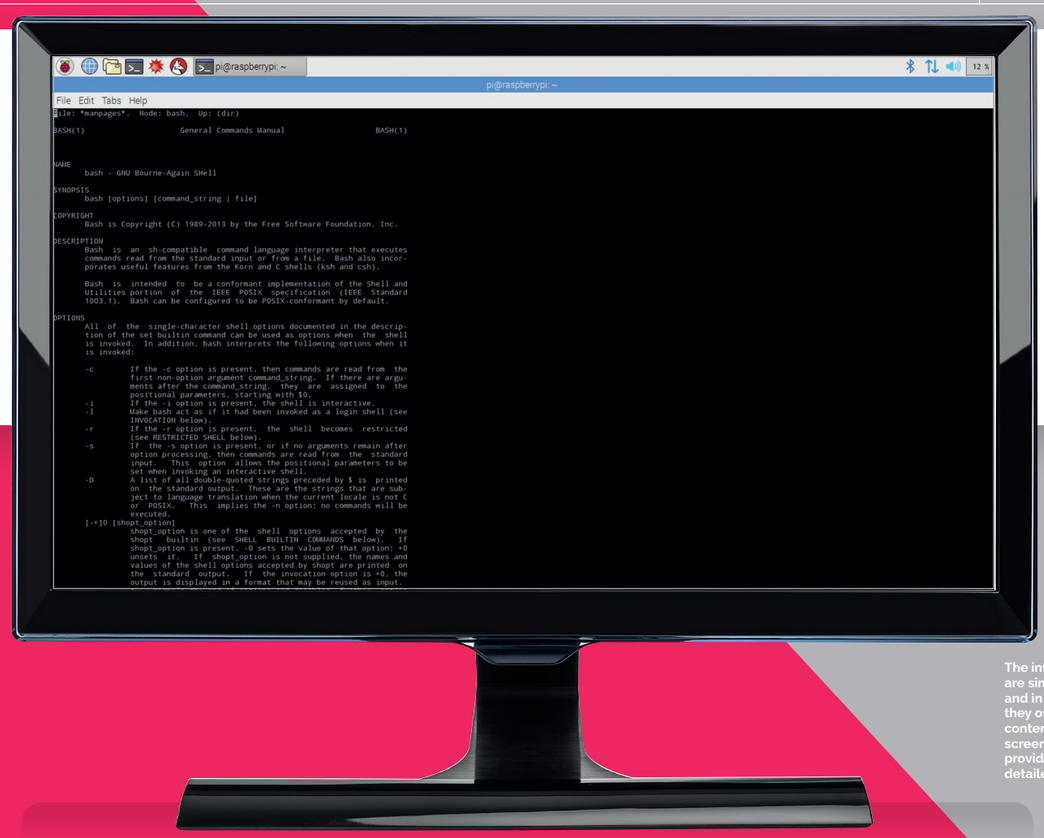
GET HELP FROM THE COMMAND LINE

The basic commands you need to get advice from the Linux command line

On our Switch to the command line tutorial (*Page* 34), we looked briefly at 'man', the manual you can access from the command line.

The man tool is so important that we think it deserves a more thorough explanation. And man isn't alone in offering help on the command line. Other commands like **whatis**, **info**, and **apropos** all offer support and assistance. And let's face it, support and assistance are what you will often need at the command line.

Even seasoned coders don't always know the correct command to type into the Linux terminal. This guide is all about the various ways to get help at the command line, so no matter what command you come across, you'll be able to find out more information on how to use it.



The info screens are similar to man, and in many cases, they offer the same content. But some info screens (like bash) provide much more detailed content

man

Your first point of call for getting help on the command line is man (short for 'manual'). Enter **man** followed by the name of a command to get detailed information about it. For instance, enter:

```
man passwd
```

...and you will see detailed information about the tool used to change your password. Man screens are displayed one page at a time. Press the **SPACE** bar to move to the next page, and press **Q** to exit the page and return to the command prompt.

The synopsis gives a brief outline of how to use the command. In this case, you need to enter the command, an option, and an account name. The parts in brackets are optional

The description gives a detailed outline of the tool. It also offers information on how it works

Many commands have options, typically a hyphen followed by a letter (or double-hyphen followed by a word). You'll find each option outlined in detail in the man page



Man pages can be a bit tricky to read at first, but you'll soon get the hang of it.

At the top are the Name, Synopsis, and Description sections. Read these to get an overview of the command. Below them you'll find options and parameters; read these carefully to discover ways to expand your usage of each command. It's a good idea to use man on any commands you know, and read the manual for any new Linux commands you come across.

You can even read a man page for man:

```
man man
```

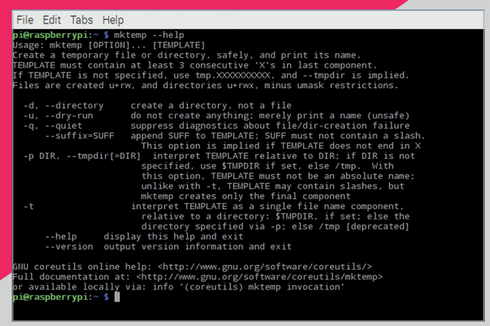
Press **H** in the man screen to view a summary of navigational key presses. These are worth learning so you can do more than press space to move to the next page.

Man's lesser-known partner is 'info', which is used to display information pages associated with commands. Sometimes these are the same as the man pages. In other cases they provide a different description. Try these:

```
man bash
info bash
```

While **man bash** gives you a brief description of the GNU Bourne-Again Shell and the options used with the bash command; **info bash** gives the whole history and hundreds of pages of detailed information.

Press **H** on an info screen to view the controls for navigating such long documents. As well as **SPACE** to move down, you use **DELETE** to go back a screen, **TAB** to highlight links, and **RETURN** to use them. Press **Q** to exit the help screen.



Many commands feature a built-in help option, accessed with **-h** or **--help**. Using it offers a brief outline