Terminal Basics

What is a terminal?

A **terminal** is a command line interface for a computer, meaning that you make the computer do stuff by writing text commands. Terminals may be unfamiliar territory for someone used to Windows or Mac computers, but it's fairly easy to learn the basics. They are typically more powerful (more options) and flexible tools for computer control than GUIs. Linux, macOS and other **Unix-like** operating systems share many basic commands, see the cheat sheet above. The best way to learn terminal usage is to try it out and start using it!

unix_cheat_sheet.p

Autocompletion

Most good **shells** have **autocompletion**, meaning that you can get suggestions based on what you already typed. Press tab once to autocomplete when there is only one compatible option (such as only one possible file name/path). Press tab twice to see possible options when there are multiple.

SSH

Secure **SH**ell is a program for getting remote terminal access to a computer, over the internet.

Terminal Terminology

These are often used interchangeably.

A **Shell** is a program that interprets and processes commands, and returns output. Examples of shells are BASH (Linux standard), CSH, and ZSH.

A **Terminal** is some kind of device that runs the shell. It may be a physical or a virtual device.

Console is usually synonymous with terminal, but may refer to the physical screen and keyboard of a terminal.

tty is often synonymous with terminal, and originally meant "tele-typewriter". In Linux, tty usually refers to a virtual console.