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Editing and searching on a server: nano, grep and find for beginners

Command Line Basics

CODE	VERSION	COUNTRY · LANGUAGE
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RLX Holdings, S.A. · Group RLX Holdings
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Editing and searching on a server: nano, grep and find for beginners

Command Line Basics Created on **October 15, 2026** 2 min read



The short answer: on a VPS there is no mouse and no windows, but three tools solve almost everything a beginner needs: **nano** to **edit** a file, **grep** to **search for text** inside files and **find** to **locate files**. All come with the system.

nano: editing a file

Open with `nano /path/to/file` (if the file belongs to the system, put `sudo` in front). Type as normal. The shortcuts are listed at the bottom of the screen; the `^` symbol means the Ctrl key.

To	Shortcut
Save	`Ctrl+O` and then Enter
Quit	`Ctrl+X` (if there are changes, it asks whether to save)
Search inside the file	`Ctrl+W`
Delete the current line	`Ctrl+K`
Go to a line	`Ctrl+_` and the number

grep: searching for text

To	Command
Lines with a word in a file	`grep -n "error" /var/log/app.log`
Ignoring upper and lower case	`grep -in "error" file`
In every PHP file of a folder	`grep -rn "word" /var/www/site --include="*.php"`

To	Command
The lines that do NOT have the word	`grep -v "word" file`
Follow a log live	`tail -f /var/log/app.log`

The `-n` shows the line number and the `-r` goes into subfolders. To read a big file a little at a time, use `less file` (quit with `q`).

find: locating files

To	Command
A file by name	`find /var/www -name "wp-config.php"`
Changed in the last 24 hours	`find /var/www/site -type f -mtime -1`
Larger than 100 MB	`find / -type f -size +100M 2>/dev/null`

The `2>/dev/null` hides the "Permission denied" messages. The second line is useful if the site was changed without you knowing; the third helps when the disk fills up: see **No space left on device**.

Before editing a configuration file, take a copy:
`Cp -a file file.before`. And do not use `rm` with asterisks on files found by a find without looking at the list first. See also **Linux file permissions**.

Is this your first VPS? Start with **First steps with your VPS**. To know where the logs you will want to search are: **Where are the logs on a Linux VPS**.

NEED A HAND?

Searched and cannot find the cause of an error on the server? Open a ticket with the log file and the error line.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

First steps with your VPS →

Where are the logs on a Linux VPS: journalctl and /var/log

Linux file permissions on a VPS: chmod, chown and Permission denied

No space left on device: finding what fills your VPS disk

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TAX ID (NUIT)	401 191 607
LEGAL ENTITY NO. (NUEL)	105 045 974
ECONOMIC ACTIVITY CODE (CAE)	62022
REGISTERED OFFICE	Bairro 7 de Setembro Vilankulo 1304 · CEP 0411-02, Inhambane, Mozambique
CONTACT	info@interweb.co.mz · +258 84 635 1111 · +258 86 635 1111 · www.interweb.co.mz
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