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Checking DNS from the command line: dig and nslookup, and how to read the answer

Domains & DNS

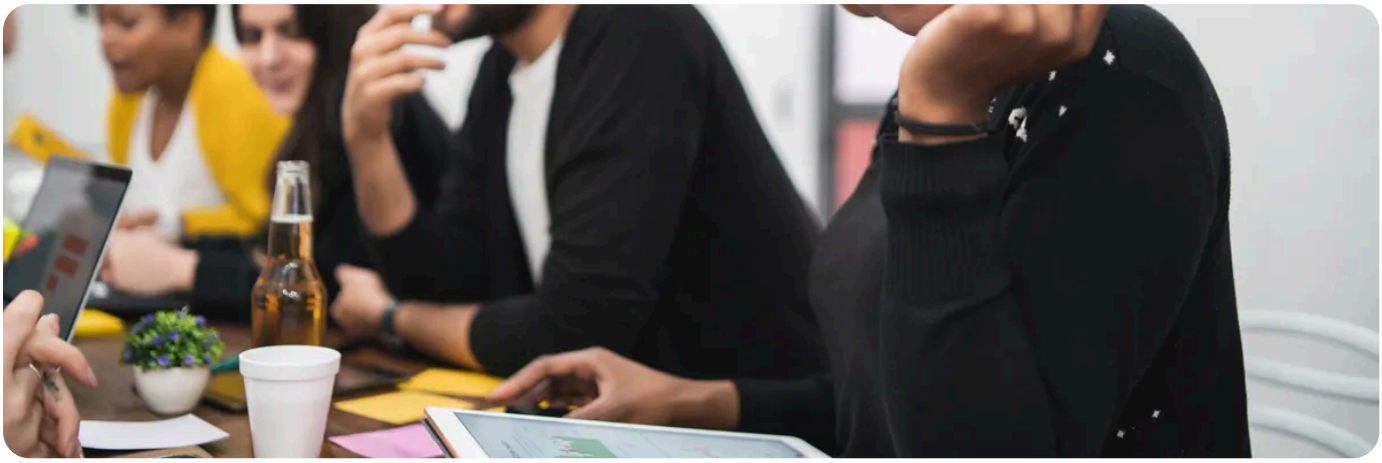
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Checking DNS from the command line: dig and nslookup, and how to read the answer

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The short answer: dig and **nslookup** ask the DNS directly what it answers for a name. They are the quickest way to know whether a change has arrived, where your domain points and why something does not resolve. dig comes with Linux and Mac (on a VPS you may need to install the `dnsutils` or `bind-utils` package); nslookup also exists on Windows.

The commands used most

To see…	dig	nslookup
Where the site points	`dig +short A example.com`	`nslookup example.com`
Where the e-mail goes	`dig +short MX example.com`	`nslookup -type=MX example.com`
The TXT records (SPF, DMARC)	`dig +short TXT example.com`	`nslookup -type=TXT example.com`
The nameservers	`dig +short NS example.com`	`nslookup -type=NS example.com`
Asking one particular server	`dig @1.1.1.1 example.com`	`nslookup example.com 1.1.1.1`

The `+short` gives just the answer, without the rest of the text. Swap `example.com` for your domain. For a subdomain, write it in full: `dig +short A shop.example.com`.

How to read the full answer

Without `+short`, dig shows several sections. In `dig example.com MX` these parts matter:

```
;; ->>HEADER<<- opcode: QUERY, status: NOERROR
;; ANSWER SECTION:
example.com. 14400 IN MX 10 mail.example.com.
```

Part	What it says
`status: NOERROR`	The question was answered. If there is an answer, it appears in "ANSWER SECTION".
`status: NXDOMAIN`	The name **does not exist**. See **DNS_PROBE_FINISHED_NXDOMAIN**.
`status: SERVFAIL`	The server that answered could not get the answer (a broken zone, nameservers that do not respond or a DNSSEC problem).
The number after the name (`14400`)	The **TTL**, in seconds: how long an answer may be kept.
`NOERROR` but no "ANSWER SECTION"	The name exists, but has no record of that type.

Has a change arrived?

Ask your **domain's own server** and a **public server** at the same time, and compare. First find the nameservers with `dig +short NS example.com`; then:

```
dig +short A example.com @ns1.of-your-nameservers.com
dig +short A example.com @1.1.1.1
```

If the first already shows the new value and the second still the old one, the change is right and only time (the TTL) needs to pass. If not even the first shows it, the record was not saved in the right place. See **How long DNS changes take to propagate**.

Mind the cache on your computer and your network.
A browser can show the old site even with the right DNS. dig, unless you say otherwise, asks the DNS server configured on your computer, and that one also keeps answers. Asking with `@1.1.1.1` or the nameserver itself avoids that mistake.

To just see the result without a command line, see **How to check a domain DNS**. And what the records mean: **DNS records explained**.

NEED A HAND?

Does the DNS answer in a way you do not understand? Open a ticket with the domain and the text dig showed you.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- How long DNS changes take to propagate
- DNS_PROBE_FINISHED_NXDOMAIN: what it means and what to check
- How to check a domain DNS
- Nameservers: what they are and which ones to use with us

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