

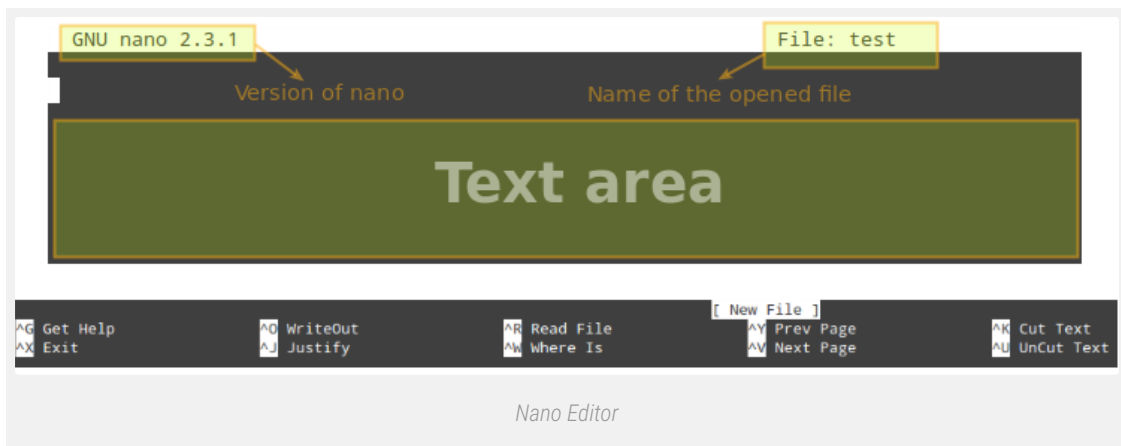
Editing Text Files with Nano

by [Gabriel Cánepa](#) | Published: March 24, 2015 | Last Updated: January 24, 2017

Every system administrator has to deal with text files as part of his daily responsibilities. That includes editing existing files (most likely configuration files), or creating new ones. It has been said that if you want to start a holy war in the Linux world, you can ask sysadmins what their favorite text editor is and why. We are not going to do that in this article, but will present a few tips that will be helpful to use two of the most widely used text editors in RHEL 7: **nano** (due to its simplicity and easiness of use, specially to new users), and **vi/m** (due to its several features that convert it into more than a simple editor). I am sure that you can find many more reasons to use one or the other, or perhaps some other editor such as **emacs** or **pico**. It's entirely up to you.

Editing Files with Nano Editor

To launch **nano**, you can either just type **nano** at the command prompt, optionally followed by a **filename** (in this case, if the file exists, it will be opened in edition mode). If the file does not exist, or if we omit the filename, nano will also be opened in edition mode but will present a blank screen for us to start typing:



As you can see in the previous image, **nano** displays at the bottom of the screen several functions that are available via the indicated shortcuts (^, aka caret, indicates the **Ctrl** key). To name a few of them:

- **Ctrl + G**: brings up the help menu with a complete list of functions and descriptions: **Ctrl + X**: exits the current file. If changes have not been saved, they are discarded.
- **Ctrl + R**: lets you choose a file to insert its contents into the present file by specifying a full path.

```

GNU nano 2.3.1                               New Bu
Main nano help text

The nano editor is designed to emulate the functionality and ease-
the program version, the current filename being edited, and whethe
The status line is the third line from the bottom and shows import

The notation for shortcuts is as follows: Control-key sequences ar
pressing the Escape (Esc) key twice.  Escape-key sequences are not
on your keyboard setup.  Also, pressing Esc twice and then typing
The following keystrokes are available in the main editor window.

^G      (F1)          Display this help text
^X      (F2)          Close the current file buffer / Exit from n
^O      (F3)          Write the current file to disk
^J      (F4)          Justify the current paragraph

^R      (F5)          Insert another file into the current one
^W      (F6)          Search for a string or a regular expression
^Y      (F7)          Go to previous screen
^V      (F8)          Go to next screen

^K      (F9)          Cut the current line and store it in the cu
^U      (F10)         Uncut from the cutbuffer into the current l
^C      (F11)         Display the position of the cursor
^T      (F12)         Invoke the spell checker, if available

M-\     (M-|)         Go to the first line of the file
M-/     (M-?)         Go to the last line of the file

^_      (F13) (M-G)   Go to line and column number
^\      (F14) (M-R)   Replace a string or a regular expression
^^      (F15) (M-A)   Mark text at the cursor position

```

Nano Editor Help Menu

- **Ctrl + O**: saves changes made to a file. It will let you save the file with the same name or a different one. Then press Enter to confirm.

```

File Name to Write: RHCSA-PART4
^G Get Help
^C Cancel

```

Nano Editor Save Changes Mode

- **Ctrl + X**: exits the current file. If changes have not been saved, they are discarded.
- **Ctrl + R**: lets you choose a file to insert its contents into the present file by specifying a full path.

```

File to insert [from ./] : /etc/passwd
^G Get Help
^C Cancel

```

Nano: Insert File Content to Parent File

will insert the contents of `/etc/passwd` into the current file.

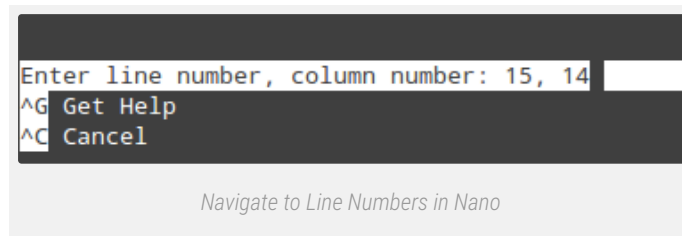
- **Ctrl + K**: cuts the current line.
- **Ctrl + U**: paste.
- **Ctrl + C**: cancels the current operation and places you at the previous screen.

To easily navigate the opened file, nano provides the following features:

- **Ctrl + F** and **Ctrl + B** move the cursor forward or backward, whereas **Ctrl + P** and **Ctrl + N** move it up or down one line at a time, respectively, just like the arrow keys.
- **Ctrl + space** and **Alt + space** move the cursor forward and backward one word at a time.

Finally,

- **Ctrl + _ (underscore)** and then entering X,Y will take you precisely to Line X, column Y, if you want to place the cursor at a specific place in the document.



Navigate to Line Numbers in Nano

The example above will take you to **line 15, column 14** in the current document.

If you can recall your early Linux days, specially if you came from Windows, you will probably agree that starting off with nano is the best way to go for a new user.