Editing Text Files with Nano
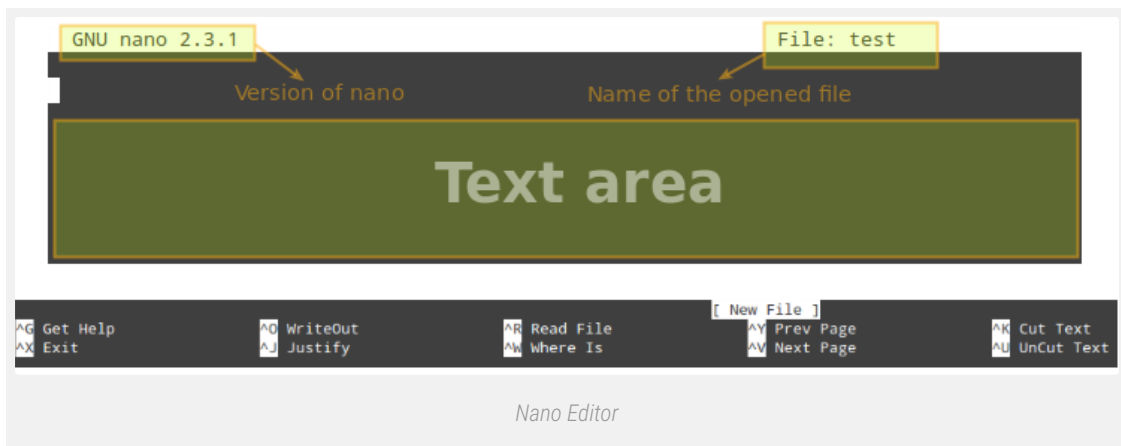
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Every system administrator has to deal with text files as part of his daily responsibilities. That includes editing existing files (most likely configuration files), or creating new ones. It has been said that if you want to start a holy war in the 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:

Nano Editor

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.

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.

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.

Nano: Insert File Content to Parent File

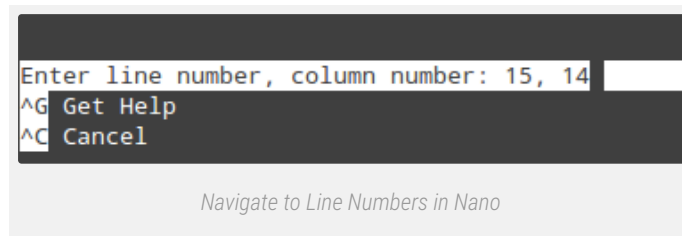will insert the contents of **/etc/passwd** into the current file.

- **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.


```
Enter line number, column number: 15, 14
^G Get Help
^C Cancel
```

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.