

## Introduction

The Unix command line is a text-driven interface. This can present a few problems when speaking Unix aloud — there are quite a few special symbols to consider!

To handle this problem, the Unix community has developed a jargon that attempts to make spoken Unix easy to pronounce and unambiguous in meaning (though often strange-sounding). For example, the ability to speak aloud a command line like the following is needed to clearly communicate verbally about Unix:


```
cat file1 | grep someword > \  
~/file2.`date`
```

If you're interested in learning more about Unix and hacker<sup>1</sup> jargon (and there's lots more to learn!), check out the The Jargon File at <http://www.catb.org/~esr/jargon/html/>

## General notes

- In this brochure I've tried to stick to variants of hacker jargon that are at least somewhat common in Saskatchewan.
- In general, the shorter and clearer the pronunciation the more likely it is to be common use. Ambiguity would defeat the whole purpose of a spoken jargon.
- When alternate pronunciations are given, they are in order of decreasing usage. The first one is given is generally preferred.

## Bucky bits

Bucky bits<sup>2</sup> refer to the special keys on a keyboard which act to modify a second key when pressed, the most common example of which is the  key. They are special not because of their pronunciation but because there is a wide variety of ways to represent them. In the table below, *x* represents a hypothetical character that is being used with the modifier key. Note that the “Meta” modifier does not exist on PC-style keyboards, and it is usually mapped to one of the two keys listed.

<sup>1</sup>See <http://www.catb.org/~esr/jargon/html/H/hacker.html> for the definition of hacker

<sup>2</sup><http://www.catb.org/~esr/jargon/html/B/bucky-bits.html>

### Bucky bit key



### Written as

X, Shift-*x*, S-*x*  
Control-*x*, Ctrl-*x*, C-*x*, ^-*x*  
Alt-*x*, A-*x*, Meta-*x*, M-*x*  
Escape-*x*, Meta-*x*, M-*x*

## Punctuation, as nouns

These refer to punctuation when they are *not* acting as a command or modifier. Generally a complete word is used as the “pronunciation” of a punctuation mark, much like saying “alpha beta charlie” for the alphabet (and for much the same reasons).

### Symbol Pronunciation

#	hash, pound, octothorpe, number sign
!	bang, exclamation, cokebottle
#!	hash-bang, sh-bang
”	double quote
\$	dollar, dollar sign, string
%	percent, percent sign,
&	ampersand, and, and sign
'	quote, single quote, apostrophe
()	left (right) paren, left (right) parenthesis
*	star, asterisk, glob
+	plus, add
,	comma
-	dash, hyphen, minus
.	dot, point, period
/	slash, forward slash
:	colon
;	semi-colon
< >	less (greater) than, left (right) angle, left (right) angle bracket
=	equals
?	question mark
@	at sign, at
[]	left (right) square bracket
\	backslash, escape
^	caret, hat
_	underscore, underline
`	backtick, back quote, left quote
{ }	left (right) brace (bracket), left (right) curly brace (bracket)
	pipe, bar, vertical bar

## Punctuation, as verbs

These refer to punctuation when they *are* acting as a command or modifier. Typically the function of the command in a major piece of Unix software (such as the shell, or vi) is used as the name.

### Symbol Pronunciation

!	history, force
#	comment
\$	variable, string
?	wildcard, any
*	glob
\	continuation ( <i>if at the end of a line</i> )
^	replace, substitute
&&	and-and, if succeeds then
	pipe, into, pipe into
~	home
<	from, redirect from
>	to, redirect to

## Common abbreviations

Some common Unix words and abbreviations are difficult to pronounce verbally and are often filled out (reverse abbreviated?) in order to make them flow more easily.

Word	Pronunciation
sh	shell
csh	c-shell
fsck	filesystem-check
wc	word-count

And many others. If an abbreviation is difficult to pronounce, try expanding it to its full form.

## Examples

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Taking the example given in the introduction, it could be pronounced like so:

“cat file1 into grep someword, redirect to (continuation) tilde slash file2 dot backtick date backtick”

Note that “tilde” was used instead of “home” for the ~ symbol because it was being used as a noun instead of a verb, or command.

