

**NAME**

whatis - display one-line manual page descriptions

**SYNOPSIS**

```
whatis [ -dlv?V ] [ -r | -w ] [ -s list ] [ -m system [ , . . . ] ] [ -M path ] [ -L locale ] [ -C file ] name . . .
```

**DESCRIPTION**

Each manual page has a short description available within it. **whatis** searches the manual page names and displays the manual page descriptions of any *name* matched.

*name* may contain wildcards (**-w**) or be a regular expression (**-r**). Using these options, it may be necessary to quote the *name* or escape (\) the special characters to stop the shell from interpreting them.

**index** databases are used during the search, and are updated by the **mandb** program. Depending on your installation, this may be run by a periodic cron job, or may need to be run manually after new manual pages have been installed. To produce an old style text **whatis** database from the relative **index** database, issue the command:

```
whatis -M manpath -w '*' | sort > manpath/whatis
```

where *manpath* is a manual page hierarchy such as */usr/man*.

**OPTIONS****-d, --debug**

Print debugging information.

**-v, --verbose**

Print verbose warning messages.

**-r, --regex**

Interpret each *name* as a regular expression. If *aname* matches an y part of a page name, a match will be made. This option causes **whatis** to be somewhat slower due to the nature of database searches.

**-w, --wildcard**

Interpret each *name* as a pattern containing shell style wildcards. For a match to be made, an expanded *name* must match the entire page name. This option causes **whatis** to be somewhat slower due to the nature of database searches.

**-l, --long**

Do not trim output to the terminal width. Normally, output will be truncated to the terminal width to avoid ugly results from poorly-written **NAME** sections.

**-s list, --sections list, --section list**

Search only the given manual sections. *list* is a colon- or comma-separated list of sections. If an entry in *list* is a simple section, for example "3", then the displayed list of descriptions will include pages in sections "3", "3perl", "3x", and so on; while if an entry in *list* has an extension, for example "3perl", then the list will only include pages in that exact part of the manual section.

**-m system [ , . . . ], --systems=system [ , . . . ]**

If this system has access to other operating system's manual page names, they can be accessed using this option. To search NewOS's manual page names, use the option **-m NewOS**.

The *system* specified can be a combination of comma delimited operating system names. To include a search of the native operating system's manual page names, include the system name **man** in the argument string. This option will override the **\$SYSTEM** environment variable.

**-M path, --manpath=path**

Specify an alternate set of colon-delimited manual page hierarchies to search. By default, **whatis** uses the **\$MANPATH** environment variable, unless it is empty or unset, in which case it will determine an appropriate manpath based on your **\$PATH** environment variable. This option overrides the contents of **\$MANPATH**.

**-L locale, --locale=locale**

**what**is will normally determine your current locale by a call to the C function [setlocale\(3\)](#) which interrogates various environment variables, possibly including `$LC_MESSAGES` and `$LANG`. To temporarily override the determined value, use this option to supply a *locale* string directly to **what**is. Note that it will not take effect until the search for pages actually begins. Output such as the help message will always be displayed in the initially determined locale.

**-C file, --config-file=file**

Use this user configuration file rather than the default of `~/.manpath`.

**-?, --help**

Print a help message and exit.

**--usage** Print a short usage message and exit.

**-V, --version**

Display version information.

**EXIT STATUS**

- 0** Successful program execution.
- 1** Usage, syntax or configuration file error.
- 2** Operational error.
- 16** Nothing was found that matched the criteria specified.

**ENVIRONMENT****SYSTEM**

If `$SYSTEM` is set, it will have the same effect as if it had been specified as the argument to the **-m** option.

**MANPATH**

If `$MANPATH` is set, its value is interpreted as the colon-delimited manual page hierarchy search path to use.

**MANWIDTH**

If `$MANWIDTH` is set, its value is used as the terminal width (see the **--long** option). If it is not set, the terminal width will be calculated using the value of `$COLUMNS`, an [ioctl\(2\)](#) if available, or falling back to 80 characters if all else fails.

**FILES**

*/usr/share/man/index.(bt/db/dir|pag)*

A traditional global *index* database cache.

*/var/cache/man/index.(bt/db/dir|pag)*

An FHS compliant global *index* database cache.

*/usr/share/man/.../what*is

A traditional **what**is text database.

**SEE ALSO**

[apropos\(1\)](#), [man\(1\)](#), [mandb\(8\)](#)

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