NAME

head — extract file header

SYNOPSIS

head [**-zqv**] [**-n** [**-**]*lines*|**-c** [**-**]*bytes*] [*file*]...

DESCRIPTION

Copies the first *lines* (default **10**) or *bytes* of each *file* (standard input stream if "**-**", the default) to the standard output stream.

With more than one *file*, each one is delineated by an empty line and
    ==> *file* <==
heading.

If *lines* or *bytes* start with a **-**, all *but* the last *lines* or *bytes* of the *file*s are copied.

lines and *bytes* are in the mostly-case-insensitive format:
    [*base*][**b**|**KMGTPEZY**[**B**]] (with at least one of {*base*, **b**, **KMGTPEZY**, **B**})
Where *base* is an optionally-floating-point number of bytes, defaulting to **1**, which is then optionally multiplied by the relevant unit. **B** sets the unit multiplier to **1000** (from **1024**). **b**(lock) is a unit of **512**. *lines*|*bytes* is equal to *base·unit^{mult}*, if any, or *base*.

OPTIONS

-n, **--lines**= *lines*	Copy the first *lines* of each *file*. Default: **10**.
-c, **--bytes**= *bytes*	Copy the first *bytes* of each *file*.
-n, **--lines**=-*lines*	Copy all but the last *lines* of each *file*.
-c, **--bytes**=-*bytes*	Copy all but the last *bytes* of each *file*.
-z, **--zero-terminated**	Line separator is NUL, not newline. File headers are still written with newlines.
-q, **--quiet**, **--silent**	Never write file headers.
-v, **--verbose**	Always write file headers.

EXIT STATUS

1 if a *file* couldn't be opened or read.

EXAMPLES

```
$ find tests/ -type f -executable -exec head -n2 {} +
==> tests/head <==
#!/bin/sh
# SPDX-License-Identifier: 0BSD

==> tests/env/test <==
#!/bin/sh
# SPDX-License-Identifier: 0BSD

==> tests/env/code/env.1-3c <==
#!/usr/bin/env -S PYTHONUNBUFFERED=1 python3 -S
echo "PYTHONUNBUFFERED=$PYTHONUNBUFFERED"


# Strip signature generated by Linux sign-file
$ head -c-754 /lib/modules/$(uname -r)/updates/dkms/zfs.ko
```

SEE ALSO

cat(1), dd(1), truncate(1).

tail(1) — '**−**'-marked *lines* and *bytes* are symmetric, and '**+**'-marked ones are almost symmetric:
    { **head −c −***10* f; **tail −c −***10* f; }
    { **head −n +***10* f; **tail −n +***11* f; }
are equivalent to **cat** f.

STANDARDS

Conforms to IEEE Std 1003.1-2024 ("POSIX.1"); **−zqv**, "negative" and unit-suffixed *lines* and *bytes* are extensions, originating from the GNU system. **−qv** under FreeBSD 3.0.

The GNU system disallows *lines* and *bytes* with **B** but without a multiplier and only supports integer *base*s.

A heretofore-unnoted legacy **−***lines* argument format, equivalent to **−n** *lines*, is also accepted, for compatibility with 1 BSD. Avoid it.

HISTORY

Appeared mostly fully-formed in 1 BSD as head(VI):
        head [**−**count] [file ...]
with *count*s interspersable among *file*s.

4.3 BSD−Reno fixes this, only allowing it as the first argument.

4.4 BSD adds **−n** *lines* and prunes **−***lines* from the manual.

AT&T System V Release 4 UNIX sees 2 BSD **head**.

IEEE Std 1003.2-1992 ("POSIX.2") standardises both *lines* forms, having created **−n** to match **tail**, but notes the **−***lines* one as obsolescent. It's removed in IEEE Std 1003.1-2001 ("POSIX.1").

IEEE Std 1003.1-2024 ("POSIX.1") standardises plain-number **−c** *bytes*.