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Cat Pages — Faster man-db

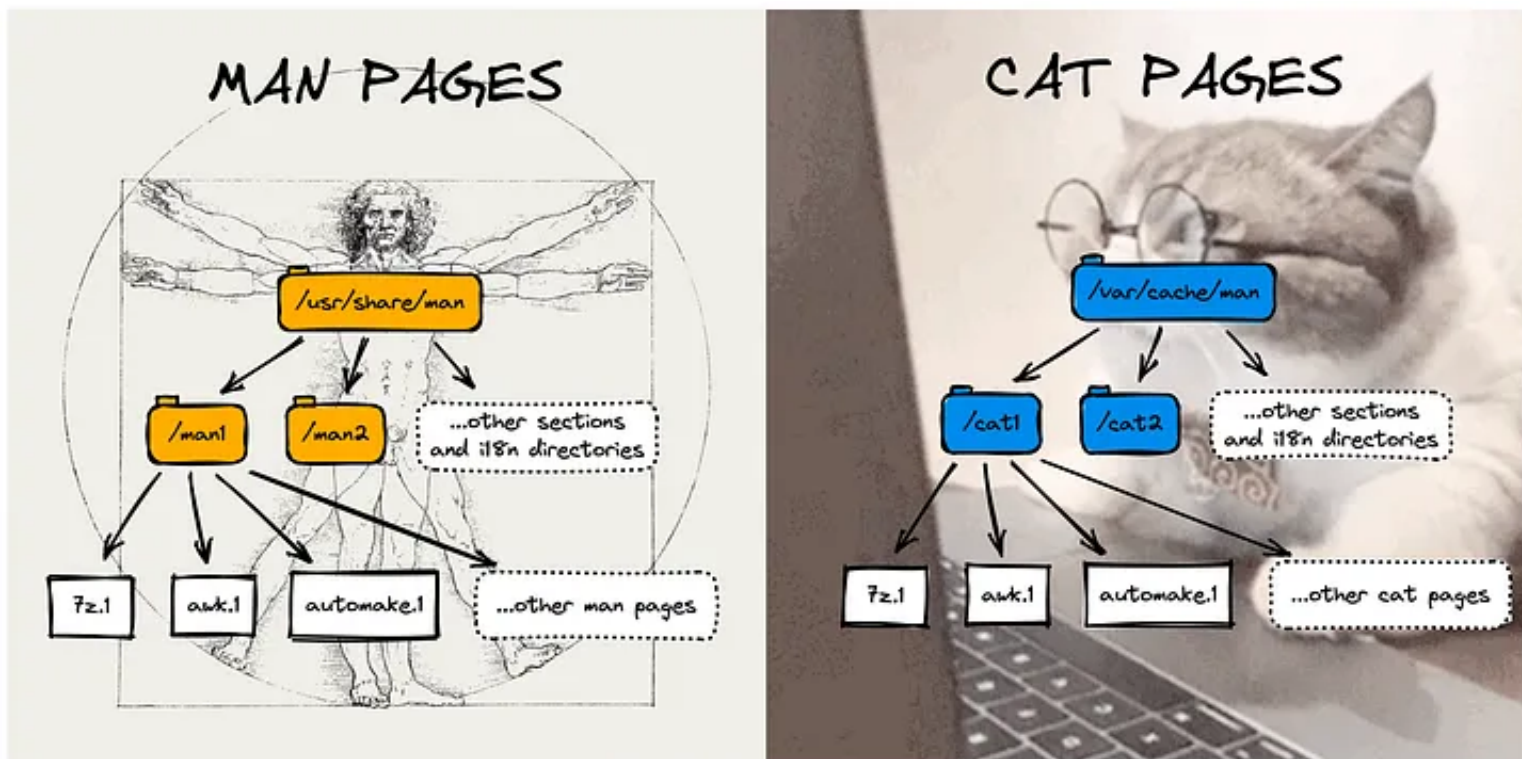
Use catman to Speed Up Your Man Pages



Photo by [Miikka Luotio](#) on [Unsplash](#)

When using modern `man` implementations like `man-db`, storing the formatted manual pages on disk has become standard practice so that subsequent requests for the manual page do not have to be formatted again.

These pre-formatted man pages are known as “cat pages.”



Of cats and men

Although cat pages require some megabytes of disk space, they substantially increase speed, and their use is recommended. Indeed, cat pages might load two or three times faster!

```
~> hyperfine 'MANWIDTH=100 man ls' # custom MANWIDTH bypasses use of cat page
Benchmark 1: MANWIDTH=100 man ls
Time (mean ± σ): 185.8 ms ± 8.4 ms [User: 174.3 ms, System: 63.5 ms]
Range (min ... max): 171.7 ms ... 200.8 ms 15 runs

~> hyperfine 'MANWIDTH=80 man ls' # meow
Benchmark 1: MANWIDTH=80 man ls
Time (mean ± σ): 53.8 ms ± 2.5 ms [User: 22.1 ms, System: 28.9 ms]
Range (min ... max): 46.4 ms ... 57.1 ms 50 runs
```

man pages vs cat pages benchmark

The hierarchy of cat pages is created in a separate folder from the hierarchy of man pages — It mirrors the folders and file names of the man hierarchy. In short, it's a cache.

Whether or not cat pages are created on your system depends on several factors, not least how man-db was installed. So make sure to read your manual (`man-db-manual.{ps/txt}`), your configuration file (`/etc/man_db.conf`), and — naturally — [the man page for man](#).

You will find that in most systems, by default, cat pages are created only if you try to run `man` with a column width set to 80 (easily done with the env variable `MANWIDTH=80`), which after all is a beautiful looking default for any screen size!

You might also need to manually run the commands `mandb` and `catman`, usually as root, to create the cat pages hierarchy for all your man pages.

You can verify if there is a cat page for a given man page by running `man -W ls`. That is, with the flags `-W`, `--where-cat` or `--location-cat`. It should print the location of the cat page for the `ls` command. It's purrtastic!

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