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# GNU sort's -h option

- 6- Webographie -

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# GNU sort's -h option

I only [recently](#) became aware of

GNU sort's `-h` option, which strikes me as a beautiful encapsulation of everything (both good and bad) that people attribute to GNU programs and their profusion of options.

GNU sort's `-h` is like `-n` (sort numerically) except that it sorts numerically for GNU's 'humane' numbers, as produced by (for example) GNU `du`'s `-h` option. This leads naturally to [a variant of a little script that I've already talked about](#) :

```
du -h | sort -hr | less
```

On the one hand, `-h` is clearly useful in both commands. Humane numbers are a lot easier to read and grasp than plain numbers, and now GNU sort will order them correctly for you. On the other hand you can see the need for a `-h` argument to sort as evidence of an intrinsic problem with `du -h` ; in this view, GNU is piling hack on top of hack. The arguable Unix way might be a general `hum` command that humanized all numbers (or specific columns of numbers if you wanted) ; that would make the example into '`du | sort -nr | hum | less`', which creates a general tool at the price of making people add an extra command to their pipelines.

I don't have any particular view on whether GNU sort's `-h` option is Unixy wrong or not. I do think that it's (seductively) convenient, and now that I've become aware of it it's probably going to work its way into various things I do.

(This could spark a great debate on what the true Unix way is, but I'm not going to touch that one right now.)

[\(5 comments.\)](#)

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