

Easily Monitor Log File Output in OSX Terminal (tail -F)

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Here's a quick tip that is a real time saver in some situations. As a developer you often come across programs, tools or servers that produce output in form of a log file. Or maybe - and this includes myself - you use logs for debugging purposes.

In ColdFusion for example I regularly find myself adding cflog tags to my code in order to get a view into what my code is doing. Having to open and close log files constantly can be tedious at best, but luckily there is a really simple way of displaying a live view of the most recent entries using the standard Unix tail -F command.

Whereas tail on its own simply displays the last part of a file, the -F option will not stop when the end of the file is reached but will keep monitoring the file for new lines and displaying them, thereby giving you effectively a live console view into the file.

Taking ColdFusion logs as an example, here's how you'd monitor a particular log file (mine are typically named according to the site or application I am working on):

```
cd /Applications/ColdFusion9/logs/  
tail -F playingornot.log  
"Information", "jrpp-4", "02/21/12", "17:40:30", "PLAYINGORNOT", "/index.cfm"  
"Information", "jrpp-5", "02/21/12", "17:40:33", "PLAYINGORNOT", "/index.cfm"  
"Information", "jrpp-5", "02/21/12", "17:40:35", "PLAYINGORNOT", "/cfc/Auth.cfc"  
"Information", "jrpp-5", "02/21/12", "17:40:35", "PLAYINGORNOT", "/cfc/Players.cfc"  
"Information", "jrpp-5", "02/21/12", "17:40:36", "PLAYINGORNOT", "/cfc/PlayTimes.cfc"  
"Information", "jrpp-1", "02/28/12", "09:37:37", "PLAYINGORNOT", "/index.cfm"  
"Information", "jrpp-1", "02/28/12", "09:37:40", "PLAYINGORNOT", "/cfc/Auth.cfc"  
"Information", "jrpp-1", "02/28/12", "09:37:41", "PLAYINGORNOT", "/cfc/Players.cfc"  
"Information", "jrpp-1", "02/28/12", "09:37:42", "PLAYINGORNOT", "/cfc/PlayTimes.cfc"  
"Information", "jrpp-2", "02/28/12", "09:40:30", "PLAYINGORNOT", "/cfc/PlayTimes.cfc"
```

As my application runs I can see new entries being displayed in real time in my log file - very handy. This particular log is produced by adding

```
<cflog file="#this.name#" type="information" text="#arguments.targetPage#">
```

to my Application.cfc's onRequestStart handler.

This technique works for any kind of text based log file on operating systems that have the tail command or similar available.