cp (copy files and directories)

The *cp* ("copy") command is one of the first that Linux beginners learn:

> *cp SOURCE DEST*

It copies the file SOURCE to DEST. If you want to copy a whole directory, use the *-r* switch ("recursive").

Straightforward, isn't it? However, few people know that by copying files in this way, important file attributes may get lost. For example, you probably don't want your vacation photos to lose their timestamps (indicating when they were taken). If you copy files using *cp* without options, timestamps are discarded and the new files are stamped with the current date and time. If you want to avoid this default behavior of *cp*, try using the option *-p* ("preserve"). As the man page of *cp* tells us, this option is a shorthand for:

> *--preserve=mode,ownership,timestamps*

It should be clear from this that you can preserve other file attributes as well. I find that *-p* is a reasonable choice in most cases. You may want to save the following →*alias* definition in your ~/.bashrc configuration file:

> *alias cp=`cp -p'*

Or even better:

> *alias cp=`cp -ip'*

The *-i* option ("interactive") makes *cp* ask for permission before overwriting files. I keep this alias in my own .bashrc. It has saved me a lot of trouble.