

Viewing the Commit History

After you have created several commits, or if you have cloned a repository with an existing commit history, you'll probably want to look back to see what has happened. The most basic and powerful tool to do this is the `git log` command.

These examples use a very simple project called “simplegit”. To get the project, run

```
git clone https://github.com/schacon/simplegit-progit
```

When you run `git log` in this project, you should get output that looks something like this:

```
git log
commit ca82a6dff817ec66f44342007202690a93763949
Author: Scott Chacon <schacon@gee-mail.com>
Date:   Mon Mar 17 21:52:11 2008 -0700

    changed the version number

commit 085bb3bcb608e1e8451d4b2432f8ecbe6306e7e7
Author: Scott Chacon <schacon@gee-mail.com>
Date:   Sat Mar 15 16:40:33 2008 -0700

    removed unnecessary test

commit a11bef06a3f659402fe7563abf99ad00de2209e6
Author: Scott Chacon <schacon@gee-mail.com>
Date:   Sat Mar 15 10:31:28 2008 -0700

    first commit
```

By default, with no arguments, `git log` lists the commits made in that repository in reverse chronological order; that is, the most recent commits show up first. As you can see, this command lists each commit with its SHA-1 checksum, the author's name and email, the date written, and the commit message.

A huge number and variety of options to the `git log` command are available to show you exactly what you're looking for. Here, we'll show you some of the most popular.

One of the more helpful options is `-p` or `--patch`, which shows the difference (the *patch* output) introduced in each commit. You can also limit the number of log entries displayed, such as using `-2` to show only the last two entries.

```
git log -p -2
commit ca82a6dff817ec66f44342007202690a93763949
Author: Scott Chacon <schacon@gee-mail.com>
Date:   Mon Mar 17 21:52:11 2008 -0700

    changed the version number

diff --git a/Rakefile b/Rakefile
index a874b73..8f94139 100644
--- a/Rakefile
+++ b/Rakefile
@@ -5,7 +5,7 @@ require 'rake/gempackagetask'
spec = Gem::Specification.new do |s|
  s.platform = Gem::Platform::RUBY
  s.name     = "simplegit"
  s.version  = "0.1.0"
  s.version  = "0.1.1"
  s.author   = "Scott Chacon"
  s.email    = "schacon@gee-mail.com"
  s.summary  = "A simple gem for using Git in Ruby code."

commit 085bb3bcb608e1e8451d4b2432f8ecbe6306e7e7
Author: Scott Chacon <schacon@gee-mail.com>
Date:   Sat Mar 15 16:40:33 2008 -0700

    removed unnecessary test

diff --git a/lib/simplegit.rb b/lib/simplegit.rb
index a0a60ae..47c6340 100644
--- a/lib/simplegit.rb
+++ b/lib/simplegit.rb
@@ -18,8 +18,3 @@ class SimpleGit
  end

end
```


As you can see, the `--stat` option prints below each commit entry a list of modified files, how many files were changed, and how many lines in those files were added and removed. It also puts a summary of the information at the end.

Another really useful option is `--pretty`. This option changes the log output to formats other than the default. A few prebuilt options are available for you to use. The `oneline` option prints each commit on a single line, which is useful if you're looking at a lot of commits. In addition, the `short`, `full`, and `fuller` options show the output in roughly the same format but with less or more information, respectively:

```
git log --pretty=oneline
a82a6dff817ec66f44342007202690a93763949 changed the version number
35bb3bcb608e1e8451d4b2432f8ecbe6306e7e7 removed unnecessary test
11bef06a3f659402fe7563abf99ad00de2209e6 first commit
```

The most interesting option is `format`, which allows you to specify your own log output format. This is especially useful when you're generating output for machine parsing — because you specify the format explicitly, you know it won't change with updates to Git:

```
git log --pretty=format:"%h - %an, 6 years ago : %s"
a82a6d - Scott Chacon, 6 years ago : changed the version number
35bb3b - Scott Chacon, 6 years ago : removed unnecessary test
11bef0 - Scott Chacon, 6 years ago : first commit
```

Useful options for `git log --pretty=format` lists some of the more useful options that `format` takes.

Table 1. Useful options for `git log --pretty=format`

Option	Description of Output
<code>%H</code>	Commit hash
<code>%h</code>	Abbreviated commit hash
<code>%T</code>	Tree hash
<code>%t</code>	Abbreviated tree hash
<code>%P</code>	Parent hashes
<code>%p</code>	Abbreviated parent hashes
<code>%an</code>	Author name
<code>%ae</code>	Author email
<code>%ad</code>	Author date (format respects the <code>--date=option</code>)
<code>%ar</code>	Author date, relative
<code>%cn</code>	Committer name

Option	Description of Output
%ce	Committer email
%cd	Committer date
%cr	Committer date, relative
%s	Subject

You may be wondering what the difference is between *author* and *committer*. The author is the person who originally wrote the work, whereas the committer is the person who last applied the work. So, if you send in a patch to a project and one of the core members applies the patch, both of you get credit — you as the author, and the core member as the committer. We'll cover this distinction a bit more in [Distributed Git](#).

The `oneline` and `format` options are particularly useful with another `log` option called `--graph`. This option adds a nice little ASCII graph showing your branch and merge history:

```
git log --pretty=format:"%h %s" --graph
2d3acf9 ignore errors from SIGCHLD on trap
5e3ee11 Merge branch 'master' of git://github.com/dustin/grit
\
* 420eac9 Added a method for getting the current branch.
| 30e367c timeout code and tests
| 5a09431 add timeout protection to grit
| e1193f8 support for heads with slashes in them
/
d6016bc require time for xmlschema
11d191e Merge branch 'defunkt' into local
```

This type of output will become more interesting as we go through branching and merging in the next chapter.

Those are only some simple output-formatting options to `git log` — there are many more. [Common options to git log](#) lists the options we've covered so far, as well as some other common formatting options that may be useful, along with how they change the output of the log command.

Table 2. Common options to `git log`

Option	Description
-p	Show the patch introduced with each commit.
--stat	Show statistics for files modified in each commit.
--shortstat	Display only the changed/insertions/deletions line from the --stat command.

Option	Description
<code>--name-only</code>	Show the list of files modified after the commit information.
<code>--name-status</code>	Show the list of files affected with added/modified/deleted information as well.
<code>--abbrev-commit</code>	Show only the first few characters of the SHA-1 checksum instead of all 40.
<code>--relative-date</code>	Display the date in a relative format (for example, “2 weeks ago”) instead of using the full date format.
<code>--graph</code>	Display an ASCII graph of the branch and merge history beside the log output.
<code>--pretty</code>	Show commits in an alternate format. Options include oneline, short, full, fuller, and format (where you specify your own format).
<code>--oneline</code>	Shorthand for <code>--pretty=oneline --abbrev-commit</code> used together.

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