



Firebird's fbmgr Superserver Manager

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Fbmgr is used to start and stop your Firebird Superserver. This is different from starting and stopping a database—as explained in the `gfix` manual—as the running databases rely on the Firebird service/daemon. This daemon is the Firebird *engine*—without it, nothing will run under Superserver.



If you are using Firebird Classic, this chapter does not apply and it is entirely possible that the executables mentioned in this chapter may not even exist in your installation directory.



If you are using Firebird 2.5 onwards, you will see a message whenever you use `fbmgr`, telling you that `fbmgr` has been deprecated. From Firebird 3.0 onwards, this utility is no longer present in Firebird releases. You are advised to use the `fbguard` utility instead. See the chapter on `fbguard` for details.

On Windows systems, the engine runs as a service and is slightly different. Windows will be discussed separately in this manual for that reason.

In the remainder of this manual, we will discuss the following:

- Differences between Windows and Linux systems.
- Command-line options for `fbmgr`.
- `Fbmgr` commands and their parameters.
- Running `fbmgr` in interactive or batch modes.
- Some caveats, gotchas and foibles of `fbmgr`.

Chapter 2. Fbmgr on Linux Systems

On Linux, the Firebird engine is started whenever you carry out an install — from an RPM or via a script — and at system boot time. This means that Firebird is available whenever your system is running once you have Firebird installed.

At boot time, the script `/etc/init.d/firebird` is executed to start up the Firebird engine on Suse servers, other Linux servers use the script `/etc/rc.d/init.d/firebird` instead. The same script is executed just before the server shuts down to stop the Firebird engine. The engine runs as the `firebird` user and not as root.

The script is installed to the location described above, and a symbolic link is created to `/usr/sbin/rcfirebird` and the script can therefore be called in both ways, whichever you find easiest, but you must be the root user:

```
tux> /etc/init.d/firebird <parameter>
```

or

```
tux> rcfirebird <parameter>
```

This script can take one of the following parameters:

start

Starts the Firebird engine. If already running, does nothing. The engine is started under the watchful eye of the guardian process (`fbguard`) and is set to automatically restart if the engine fails for any reason. The engine runs under the `firebird` user even though you have to be root to run the `rcfirebird` script.

stop

Stops the Firebird engine. If already stopped, does nothing. It kills the process for the running engine by reading the pidfile (by default `/var/run/firebird/firebird.pid`). If the process is not running, no error is reported.

status

Checks the current status of the Firebird engine. This command can return a status code (in `$?`) as follows:

```
tux> rcfirebird status ; echo $?
```

- 0 - the engine is running.
- 1 - the engine was not running but the pidfile was found.
- 2 - the engine was not running but the lock file was found.
- 3 - the engine was not running.

The `status` parameter is not available on every Linux distribution. You can check if it is available on your installation by running the `rcfirebird` command with no parameters:



```
tux> rcfirebird
Usage: /usr/sbin/rcfirebird {start|stop|status|try-restart|restart|
force-reload|reload}
```

The command will list all the options available for your particular installation.

try-restart

Restarts the Firebird engine but only if it is currently running, otherwise, does nothing.

restart

Stops and restarts the Firebird engine, whether it was running or not.

force-reload

This is exactly the same as the `restart` command.

reload

Reload is not implemented.

It might be necessary for you to manually shut down the engine from time to time, and to restart it again afterwards. To do this, and assuming that either none of the options to `rcfirebird` are suitable or you do not have root privileges, `fbmgr` is your tool. `Fbmgr` is, by default, available to all users of the system to execute — however, in order to start and stop the Firebird engine, root or `SYSDBA` rights are required.

It is noted that the default shell for the `firebird` user (at least of Suse systems) defaults to `/bin/false` and so, you cannot log in as the `firebird` user. This means that you must use `rcfirebird` to start and stop the engine because if you use `fbmgr` as root, then all databases created by the engine will be owned by root.



In order to allow the `firebird` user the ability to start and stop the database engine, you need to alter the default shell from `/bin/false` to something like `/bin/bash` and set a password, while logged in as root, as follows:

```
tux> usermod --shell /bin/bash firebird
tux> passwd firebird
```

`Fbmgr` is a very short shell script which currently — as of version 2.1.3 — exports the `FIREBIRD` environment variable and calls `fbmgr.bin` passing all supplied parameters over, so `fbmgr.bin` does all the hard work.

As the two are interchangeable, I shall use the former (and shorter!) `fbmgr` in the remainder of this chapter.

2.1. Fbmgr Commands

Fbmgr can be run interactively or in batch mode. The commands are identical whichever mode you use and the following section describes the commands and shows examples of each, running in both modes.

To enter interactive mode, simply log in as the firebird user and type the command `fbmgr`. If `/opt/firebird/bin` is not on your path, type the command `bin/fbmgr` instead.



When you log in as the firebird user, the home directory (`$HOME`) is set to be `/opt/firebird`. The `bin` subdirectory, where all the firebird binaries live, is immediately beneath `$HOME`.

2.1.1. Getting Help

To see a list of all the commands—except, for some reason, the `start` command—run `fbmgr` and pass the `-help` command (in batch mode) or type `help` at the prompt in interactive mode. The resulting output is the same regardless, including the grammatical error “... also be used as an option switches ...”:

```
tux> fbmgr -help
```

```
Usage:          fbmgr -command [-option [parameter]]
```

```
or
fbmgr<RETURN>
FBMGR> command [-option [parameter]]
```

shut [-now]	shutdown server
show	show host and user
user <user_name>	set user name
password <password>	set DBA password
pidfile <filename>	file to save fbserver's PID
help	prints help text
quit	quit prompt mode

Command switches 'user' and 'password' can also be used as an option switches for commands like `start` or `shut`. For example, to shutdown server you can:

```
fbmgr -shut -password <password>
```

```
or
```

```
fbmgr<RETURN>
FBMGR> shut -password <password>
```

```
or
```

```
fbmgr<RETURN>
```

```
FBMGR> password <password>
FBMGR> shut
```



When using this option under Firebird 2.5, an additional line is printed at the beginning of the output advising you that “fbmgr is deprecated and will be removed soon”.

2.1.2. Starting Up

When the Firebird engine is started, it normally runs under the watchful eyes of the guardian process — fbguard. The guardian will restart the engine any time it determines that the engine has crashed and in doing so, will hopefully reduce the downtime that the users may suffer as a result of a crashed engine.

It is possible, however, to force the engine to be started up and the guardian will allow it to stay down if it detects a crash. Fbmgr allows the DBA or System Administrator to decide which of the two startup methods will be used.

Start And Stay Running

At system boot time, the engine is started in the mode that allows the guardian to restart it in the event of a crash. To perform this task manually using fbmgr you would carry out one of the following:

```
tux> fbmgr -start -forever
server has been successfully started
```

Or, in interactive mode:

```
tux> fbmgr
FBMGR> start -forever
server has been successfully started
```

If you are logged in as a *privileged user* then you don’t need to specify a `-user` as these login accounts default to SYSDBA when fbmgr is run. If you log in as any other user, even supplying a user name will not be enough to allow you to restart a closed database engine.



A privileged user is one that the Firebird engine considers to be privileged enough to automatically be given SYSDBA rights. This means that it can start and stop the engine without being required to authenticate as SYSDBA. At present there are four login names that are assumed to be privileged, these are:

- root
- firebird
- interbase

- interbas (without the 'e')

The start command defaults to `-forever` if nothing is specified.

```
tux> fbmgr -start
server has been successfully started
```

Start And Stop Running

Under normal circumstances you would wish for the database engine to remain running as long as possible. At other times, however, you may wish for any crashes to be investigated prior to restarting the engine. This is possible using `fbmgr` as the following shows:

```
tux> fbmgr -start -once
```

Or, running interactively:

```
tux> fbmgr
FBMGR> start -once
```

2.1.3. Shutting Down

Shutting down the engine stops the guardian process from restarting it. If this was not the case, it would be very difficult to actually stop the Firebird engine!



Any user who has logged on to the database server and who is armed with the SYSDBA password, can close the engine down. This is a slight inconsistency as only the privileged users can start the engine.

If you are logged in as a privileged user, you do not need to supply a user name to shut down the engine, you are only required to supply the SYSDBA password.

```
tux> fbmgr -shut -password secret
server shutdown completed
```

You *are* required to supply a user name if you log in as your own account.

```
tux> fbmgr -shut -password secret
no permissions to perform operation

tux> fbmgr -shut -user sysdba -password secret
server shutdown completed
```


2.1.4. Showing Details

The show command displays the name of the server that you are running on and details of the user you are currently using. If you are running fbmgr as a privileged user, then the user will be SYSDBA unless you specified a different one with the -user parameter.

```
tux> fbmgr -show
```

```
Host:  localhost
User:  SYSDBA
```

You can supply a different user name on the command line if desired:

```
tux> fbmgr -show -username norman
```

```
Host:  localhost
User:  NORMAN
```

In interactive mode, the process is almost identical:

```
tux> fbmgr
FBMGR> show
```

```
Host:  localhost
User:  SYSDBA
```

Or, using a different user name:

```
tux> fbmgr -user norman
FBMGR> show
```

```
Host:  localhost
User:  NORMAN
```

It appears that the show command always displays the host name as localhost while you are logged onto that server. It is unfortunate that the show command doesn't show any details about the running (or otherwise) Firebird engine. You can find this out as follows:

```
tux> ps -ef|grep -i fire[b]ird
firebird 3752    1  0 14:13 ?        00:00:00 /opt/firebird/bin/fbguard -o
firebird 3753  3752  0 14:13 ?        00:00:00 /opt/firebird/bin/fbserver
```

Look closely at the process details for the guardian, you can see a -o parameter. This indicates that the engine is running and is in -once mode. If it crashes at any time, it will not be restarted by the guardian. In -forever mode, the parameter is -f.

If you don't see either the guardian or the server processes, then you can assume that the (Superserver) engine is not running.



When using `grep` to filter out the interesting processes from a call to `ps -ef`, for example, using a character class for one single character prevents the `grep` process itself from being listed. The following two `grep` commands produce identical results but using the character class in the first saves having to call `grep -v grep` to filter out the unwanted `grep` process.

```
ps -ef | grep -i fire[b]ird  
ps -ef | grep -i firebird | grep -v grep
```

2.1.5. Exiting

The `quit` command gets you out of an interactive session. There is no `quit` command for batch mode.

Chapter 3. Fguard on Linux Systems

From Firebird 2.5 onwards the use of `fbmgr` is deprecated and from Firebird 3.0, it will be removed. The `fbguard` utility, which was actually used by `fbmgr`, should be used instead. The system start and stop scripts, as described in the previous chapter, use `fbguard` to start and stop the Firebird engine at system startup and shutdown.

3.1. Fguard Commands



For best results and security, you are advised to *always* start and stop the Firebird engine using the default scripts `/etc/init.d/firebird` or the alias `rcfirebird`. These scripts carry out various checks to ensure that the engine runs as the correct user, makes sure that the guardian process watches over the engine and so on. Running `fbguard` on its own makes no such checks and *can* lead to databases becoming unavailable due to being owned by root, for example—because this command always runs the Firebird engine as the root user.

Fguard cannot be run interactively, you must supply the required commands on the command line when executing `fbguard`. Fguard can be run as the `firebird` user, for example, but will always cause the engine itself to run as root. This may be a cause of serious concern for system administrators. If you create any databases while the engine is running as root then those databases will be owned by root and you will *not* be able to access it at some future point when the engine runs—correctly—as the `firebird` user.

If you always use the `/etc/init.d.firebird` (or `rcfirebird`) command to start and stop the engine, it will *always* run as the `firebird` user, regardless of which user you actually run the command as.



You cannot mix and match the various methods of starting and stopping the engine. If you use `fbguard` to start the engine, you need to kill the `fbserver` process to stop it. If you use `/etc/init.d/firebird` (or `rcfirebird`) to start the engine, you *must* use the corresponding stop script. You cannot shut down the engine with `rcfirebird stop`, for example, if you started it with `fbguard`.

3.1.1. Getting Help

To see a list of all the commands run `fbguard` passing the `-help` command. The resulting output is as follows:

```
tux> cd /opt/firebird/bin
tux> ./fbguard -help
Usage: fbguard [-signore|-onetime|-forever (default)][-daemon][-pidfile filename]
```

The use of the `-daemon` option forces the engine to run as a daemon. If you run the `fbguard` command to start the engine from a terminal session, your terminal will hang.

By default, `fbguard` will use its own default location to store the file that holds the process id of the

running Firebird engine. You may tell it to use a specific pidfile, if you wish, by specifying the `-pidfile` option. The default is `/var/run/firebird/default.pid`.



In Firebird 2.50 and 2.5.1, on the OpenSuse platform, the default pidfile is named `/var/run/firebird/.pid` because of a bug in the `/etc/init.d/firebird` script where the variable `INSTANCE` is not defined. It should be defined with a value of `default`.

3.1.2. Starting Up

When the Firebird engine is started at system boot or by the `/etc/init.d/firebird` script, it runs under the watchful eyes of the guardian process. The guardian will restart the engine any time it determines that the engine has crashed and in doing so, will hopefully reduce the downtime that the users may suffer as a result of a crashed engine. It is possible, however, to force the engine to be started up and the guardian will allow it to stay down if it detects a crash.

As mentioned above, regardless of the user you are logged in as when you execute the `fbguard` command, the engine always runs as the root user.

Regardless of the start mode chosen, the `-signore` option can be used to indicate that startup errors are to be ignored, and `fbguard` is to continue to attempt to startup the engine. Startup errors include problems such as port 3050 already being used, etc. Normally, on a startup error `fbguard` will make no further attempt to start the engine.

Start And Stay Running

At system boot time, the engine is started in the mode that allows the guardian to restart it in the event of a crash. To perform this task manually using `fbguard` you would carry out the following process:

```
tux> fguard -forever -daemon
```

The command defaults to `-forever` if nothing is specified.

```
tux> fguard -daemon
```

Start And Stop Running

Under normal circumstances you would wish for the database engine to remain running as long as possible. At other times, however, you may wish for any crashes to be investigated prior to restarting the engine. This is possible using `fbguard` as the following shows:

```
tux> fguard -onetime -daemon
```

3.1.3. Shutting Down

There is no `fbguard` command line option that shuts down the running Firebird engine. To do so

requires that you kill the running process as root.

```
tux> ps -ef| grep -i fire[b]ird
root    11556 11555  0 12:18 ?          00:00:00 /opt/firebird/bin/fbserver

tux> kill 11556

tux> ps -ef| grep -i fire[b]ird
## No output shown ##
```

The fbserver process is always listed as running from /opt/firebird as per the output from the various grep commands above. The fbguard process, on the other hand, doesn't show the full path unless it was started using the full path, as follows:

```
tux> cd /opt/firebird/bin
tux> ./fbguard -forever -daemon

tux> ps -ef | grep -i fire[b]ird
root    11794 11793  0 12:32 ?          00:00:00
/opt/firebird/bin/fbserver

tux> ps -ef|grep -i fb[g]uard
root    11793     1  0 12:32 ?          00:00:00 ./fbguard -forever
-daemon

tux> kill 11794

tux> /opt/firebird/bin/fbguard -forever -daemon

tux> ps -ef | grep -i fire[b]ird
root    11838     1  0 12:34 ?          00:00:00
/opt/firebird/bin/fbguard -forever -daemon
root    11839 11838  0 12:34 ?          00:00:00
/opt/firebird/bin/fbserver
```



Chapter 4. Windows Systems

On Windows 2000/2003, Vista and NT systems as well as the non-home versions of XP, the Firebird engine runs as a service as does the Firebird Guardian. Both of these run under the local system user account. For best results and stability, you are advised to keep Firebird running as a service rather than as an application.

After installation, these two services are defined to be started and stopped automatically on server boot and shutdown. If you wish to control when the services are started and stopped, use *Control Panel* to change their properties to manual.

On Windows ME, 95, 98 and XP Home, the engine runs as an application as does the guardian. In this case, an icon will be seen in the system tray and you can carry out manual maintenance by right clicking on the icon.



The remainder of this section assumes that you have the Firebird engine and the guardian running as services. All the engine commands are accessed via a right-click on the guardian icon in the system tray when running as an application.

On Windows, the guardian process is the file `fbguard.exe` and the engine itself is the file `fbserver.exe`.

Normally the `instsvc` command is used to install or remove services. It can also be used to start and stop services that already exist. When discussing the `instsvc` command below, it will be used only to start and stop services rather than installing and removing them.

4.1. Starting The Engine

When you start the guardian service on Windows, it will automatically bring up the database engine without you needing to physically start it too.

4.1.1. Using Net Start

Provided you know the exact service name, you can use the `net` commands to start (and stop) the guardian and database engine. Up until Firebird 2.0, the service name was simply "FirebirdServer". From Version 2.1 onwards, there can be many different services running. In this section, only the default services for Firebird 2.x will be discussed and these are "Firebird Guardian - DefaultInstance" and "Firebird Server - DefaultInstance". As there are spaces in the names, double quotes are required to prevent errors.

```
C:\>net start "firebird guardian - defaultinstance"  
The Firebird Guardian - DefaultInstance service is starting.  
The Firebird Guardian - DefaultInstance service was started successfully.
```

4.1.2. Using Instsvc

As you can see from the above, under Firebird 2.x, the service names are a bit unwieldy. It is easier to use `instsvc` to start the services as you do not need to know the default service names.

```
C:\>instsvc start
Service "Firebird Guardian - DefaultInstance" successfully started.
```

4.2. Stopping The Engine

When you stop the guardian service on Windows, it will automatically bring down the database engine without you being required to stop it too.

4.2.1. Using Net Stop

As with starting the services, in order to use `net stop` to bring the guardian and engine down, you need to know the exact service name (for the guardian) and enclose it in quotes if there are spaces in the name.

```
C:\>net stop "firebird guardian - defaultinstance"
The Firebird Guardian - DefaultInstance service is stopping.
The Firebird Guardian - DefaultInstance service was stopped successfully.
```

4.2.2. Using Instsvc

As with starting the default services, stopping them is far easier using `instsvc`.

```
C:\>instsvc stop
Service "Firebird Guardian - DefaultInstance" successfully stopped.
```

4.3. Querying The Engine

It is possible to query the services running on the server to check whether the Firebird services are running or not. Once again, the `instsvc` command is used:

```
C:\>instsvc q

Firebird Guardian - DefaultInstance IS installed.
  Status : stopped
  Path   : C:\Program Files\Firebird\Firebird_2_0\bin\fbguard.exe -s
  Startup : manual
  Run as  : LocalSystem

Firebird Server - DefaultInstance IS installed.
  Status : stopped
```

```
Path      : C:\Program Files\Firebird\Firebird_2_0\bin\fbserver.exe -s
Startup  : manual
Run as   : LocalSystem
```

It can be seen from the above, that there are two services installed on this server, but none of them are currently running. Other details are displayed such as whether or not these services are started automatically on reboot—in the example above, this is not the case—and the user account (LocalSystem) under which the services will be run, when they are started.

This command is very useful as it displays the two service names—once you have that information, you may use the `net stop` or `net start` commands to bring the database down and to restart it.

Chapter 5. Fbmgr Caveats

The following caveats are all specific to the Linux (and by assumption, other Unix systems) and do not apply to Windows versions of Firebird. The reason is simple, Windows doesn't have an fbmgr application as it uses the `instsvc` command instead.

5.1. Fbmgr is Deprecated at Firebird 2.5

The biggest drawback to the fbmgr utility is the fact that it is deprecated from Firebird 2.5 onwards and will be removed altogether from Firebird 3.0. You are advised to use `fbguard` instead.

5.2. The Help Command

The help command, as described above, doesn't mention that fact that there is a `start` command. There is a very brief mention of the `start` command, but no text explains its use, unlike the other commands which are described.

5.3. Who Owns The Databases?

While not an error as such, this is something that you should be aware of. When the server boots, it starts the Firebird engine and runs it as the user `firebird`. By default, the `firebird` has no interactive shell — it defaults to `/bin/false` — and so you cannot log in to, or `su` to, the `firebird` user to manually run a command.

This means that, unless you change the `firebird` user's default shell as described above, you will have to carry out any manual restarts etc of the engine as the root user — although you can shut it down as any user provided you have the `SYSDBA` password.

If you do restart the engine as root, then it will now be running as root. While existing databases — owned by the `firebird` user — will happily be read from and written to by root, any new databases created will be owned by root. Everything will work fine for a while but after the server is next rebooted, these new databases will then fail to be accessible as the engine is now running as the `firebird` user again and that user has no permissions to access the databases owned by root.

You are therefore advised to always start and stop the server either:

- as root, using the `rcfirebird` command; or
- as `firebird`, using `fbmgr`.

but never, ever, as root using `fbmgr`. If you follow the above instructions, all your databases will be owned by the `firebird` user.

5.4. What's That Defunct Guardian Process Doing?

If you run `fbmgr` and shut down the database engine, the `fbserver` process vanishes from the list of processes running under the `firebird` user. However, a `ps -ef|grep -i fir[e]bird` command will

show the following:

```
tux> ps -ef|grep -i fir[e]bird
firebird 29978 29844 0 15:57 pts/0    00:00:00 /opt/firebird/bin/fbmgr.bin
firebird 29979 29978 0 15:57 ?        00:00:00 [fbguard] <defunct>
root      29992 29955 0 15:57 pts/1    00:00:00 grep -i fire
```

The guardian process, fbguard, doesn't vanish until you exit from fbmgr. This again is not a major problem, but knowing that all you have to do is exit from fbmgr to make it vanish is helpful.

5.5. I Can Shut Down But Not Start Up The Engine

If you log in to the server as a privileged user and have the SYSDBA's password, you can shut down and start up the engine with no problems. If, on the other hand, you log in as any other user and try to use fbmgr to stop and start the Firebird engine, you will find that you can stop it with no problems but you will not be allowed to restart it. Only privileged users can start the engine. The following shows the problem.

```
tux> # Shutdown Firebird engine as user 'norman'.
tux> fbmgr -shut -password secret
no permissions to perform operation

tux> fbmgr -shut -user sysdba -password secret
server shutdown completed

tux> # Try to restart the Firebird engine as user 'norman'.
tux> fbmgr -start
no permissions to perform operation

tux> fbmgr -start -password secret
no permissions to perform operation

tux> fbmgr -start -user sysdba -password secret
no permissions to perform operation

tux> # Give up and restart the engine as 'firebird'.
tux> su - firebird
tux> bin/fbmgr -start
server has been successfully started
```

It can be seen from the above that a normal user armed with the SYSDBA user name and password can stop the Firebird engine but is completely unable to restart it afterwards.

The reason why this is the case is quite simple. Until the firebird engine is started, there is no way to check that the password supplied for the SYSDBA user is actually correct. Because of this, logging

in as a privileged user assumes SYSDBA privileges and allows you to start the engine.

5.6. Shut Without Parameters Appears To Be a Bug

Running fbmgr's -shut command with no user or password gives the following cryptic output:

```
tux> fbmgr -shut
Invalid clumplet buffer structure: buffer end before end of clumplet -
no length component
can not attach to server
```

The same result is obtained even with a user name supplied:

```
tux> fbmgr -shut -user sysdba
Invalid clumplet buffer structure: buffer end before end of clumplet -
no length component
can not attach to server
```

Appendix A: Document history

The exact file history is recorded in the firebird-documentation git repository; see <https://github.com/FirebirdSQL/firebird-documentation>

Revision History

1.0	29 Sep 2009	ND	Created as a chapter in the Command Line Utilities manual.
1.1	11 Oct 2009	ND	Some screen output wrapped as it extended out of the page in the generated pdf.
1.2	20 Oct 2009	ND	Replaced all references to "root or firebird" account names with "privileged users" as there are more than just these two accounts. Converted to a stand alone manual.
1.3	21 Oct 2009	ND	A few spelling mistakes corrected.
1.4	26 Oct 2009	ND	The status option to the <code>rcfirebird</code> command is not available on all Linux distros. Text amended to warn the reader of this discrepancy.
1.5	11 Oct 2011	ND	Spelling corrections.
1.6	13 Oct 2011	ND	Updated to mention that <code>fbmgr</code> is deprecated from Firebird 2.5 onwards, and removed altogether from Firebird 3.0. Added a chapter on using <code>fbguard</code> .
1.7	17 Jun 2020	M R	Conversion to AsciiDoc, minor copy-editing

Appendix B: License notice

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The Original Documentation is titled *Firebird Superserver Manager*.

The Initial Writer of the Original Documentation is: Norman Dunbar.

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