The kickstarter for hosts

How a host uses the kickstarter for repeatable Exponential installs from a reviewed kickstart.ini: the ini and run commands, DatabaseAction and why it can destroy data, dry runs, templates with placeholders, logs, and...

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This page is for system administrators who install the same kind of Exponential site again and again: a host's standard templates, staging copies, training sites. It answers: how the kickstarter works, how to keep its configuration as a reviewed template, and how not to destroy a database with it. The reference is Chapter 6.

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What it is

"The kickstarter (`bin/php/kickstarter.php`, console name `exp:kickstarter`) runs the step classes in one PHP process on the command line and reads every answer from `kickstart.ini`" (4.2). It is the method "to use when the same installation has to be made more than once, when the answers should be reviewed as a file before they are applied, or when the site package comes from a local package repository".

The commands

Shell

```
php bin/php/console exp:kickstarter ini --yes          # write kickstart.ini from the built-in de
faults
php bin/php/console exp:kickstarter run --list-steps   # show the steps, change nothing
php bin/php/console exp:kickstarter run --dry-run      # check, stop after SiteDetails
php bin/php/console exp:kickstarter run --apply --force        # install
```

- `ini` writes the file: interactively, with `--yes` (built-in defaults) or `--defaults` (the values of `kickstart.ini-dist`).
- `run` installs from it. `--force` "is required whenever the range of steps includes `CreateSites`".
- A call without a command "shows the help and exits with status 0, so a script that forgot the subcommand does not fail; check that your scripts name `run`" (6.2).

DatabaseAction

> **Warning**
>
> "`DatabaseAction=remove` destroys data. It empties the database named in `[site_details] Database` and installs into it ... Everything in that database is lost, and nothing asks you again: `--force` is the only confirmation." (6.5)

Value	Database	Use it for
`remove`	tables dropped (SQLite: file emptied), then installed	a clean install, a reinstall
`ignore`	added to whatever is there, nothing dropped	a new, empty database
`skip`	nothing inserted	regenerating `settings/siteaccess/` and `settings/override/` against a complete database

"A value that is missing or misspelled behaves like `ignore`": write it explicitly. Back up any database a run might touch into a directory outside the installation root first.

Templates with placeholders

The pattern from 6.11, for a host's standard sites:

1. Keep a template such as `deploy/kickstart.ini.template` under version control, with placeholders for the customer values and secrets.
2. Render it at provisioning time into the installation root with mode `0600`.
3. Dry run, then install, and fail on a non-zero status:

Shell

```
#!/usr/bin/env bash
set -euo pipefail
cd /var/www/vhosts/<domain>/<installation>
umask 077
envsubst < deploy/kickstart.ini.template > kickstart.ini
php bin/php/console exp:kickstarter run --dry-run
php bin/php/console exp:kickstarter run --apply --force
rm -f kickstart.ini
```

`exp:kickstarter ini --from-installed` fills `Database` from an existing installation's settings, which helps when you build a template from a site you already run (6.2.1).

> **Tip**
>
> The browser wizard reads `kickstart.ini` too and pre-fills or skips pages from it (5.6). A host can pre-fill the database page for a customer who then finishes the install in the browser (The setup wizard on shared hosting).

Logs

File	Holds
`var/log/setup.log`	every step of the run
`var/log/kickstart.log` (`.1` to `.9` keep earlier runs)	each kickstarter run, passwords masked; `EXP_KICKSTART_LOG=0` turns it off

"`var/log/kickstart.log` and `var/log/setup.log` are the artefacts to keep from a failed job."

Clean up

- Remove `kickstart.ini` after the install: it "holds passwords in clear text" and the wizard would read it on a later run (4.6).
- Deliver and remove `var/log/initial-admin-password` if a password was generated.

A public demo. With `EXP_DEMO_MODE=1` in the environment of `exp:kickstarter run`, a well-known or short `[site_admin] Password` (`publish`, `publishing`) is installed as given instead of being replaced; an empty one is still replaced. The run's child process inherits the variable. Demo mode for hosts.

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