PHP system(); hide command output - How to hide displayed output with exec();

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I've recently wanted to **use PHP's** embedded system(""); - external command execute function in order to use *ls + wc* to calculate the number of files stored in a directory. I know many would argue, this is not a good practice and from a performance view point it is absolutely bad idea. However as I was lazy to code ti in PHP, I used the below line of code to do the task:

This example worked fine for me to calculate the number of files in my **/dir**, but unfortunately the execution output was also visialized in the browser. It seems this is some kind of default behaviour in both libphp and php cli. I didn't liked the behaviour so I checked online for a solution to prevent the system(); from printing its output.

What I found as a recommendations on many pages is instead of **system();** to prevent command execution output one should use **exec();**.
Therefore I used instead of my above code:

By the way insetad of using exec();, it is also possible to just use ` (backtick) - in same way like in bash scripting's ``.

Hence the above code can be also written for short like this:

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