

## Popular Open Source / Free Applications

Andy Pepperdine

This is a list of the most commonly used applications among the members of the FOSS group in the U3A in Bath, together with some comments on each, like why it is preferred, what features it has, etc.

Emphasis is put on applications for Linux that can substitute for those in use on Windows, since one reason that a switch to Linux is not completed is because of lack of knowledge of an application equivalent to the one on Windows.

### **Web browser (Firefox)**

This is a very common application, and is available on Windows, Apple and Linux.

#### **Where from?**

For Linux, it will almost certainly be in your repositories, either as Firefox delivered by the Mozilla foundation, or a re-badged version to prevent trademark issues (e.g. Iceape).

For all systems and languages (Windows, Mac OS X, Linux): <https://www.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/all.html>

#### **Comments**

Firefox needs no introduction to most people these days; the brand seems to have spread well. One powerful feature is the ability to add extra features to the basic set up via Add-ons. Go to Tools → Add-ons and the Get Add-ons tab. There you can search for all sorts of useful things. Our favourites are:

1. Adblock Plus will prevent several advertisements appearing and make it easier to see some sites, as well as increasing the speed of loading of those and others.
2. NoScript helps you control what each site does on your machine by restricting whether it can run scripts or not. Unfortunately, these days, almost every single site needs scripts to run, so that the process of setting up all the approved sites for scripts is rather tedious. In theory it should speed up loading, but as so many sites need scripts, it makes much less difference that it should. The remaining advantage is that it will suppress scripts run on sites external to the site you are reading, and that can mean less tracking of your activity.
3. Flashblock will prevent those annoying flash banners on sites that stop you concentrating on the content. It will also suppress many advertisements.
4. HTTPS everywhere is an add-on that is not provided by Mozilla. It attempts to make every connection to websites via the secure HTTPS protocol instead of the insecure HTTP. Not all sites will allow https, but for those that do, this add-on will use it even though you have used the http address you copied in from elsewhere. You can get it from: <https://www.eff.org/https-everywhere/>

### **Web browser (Chrome or Chromium)**

An alternative to Firefox is Chrome, from Google. Google's intention was that Chromium was the name for the project that gave rise to Chrome and maybe other software as well. But the name has spread.

Chromium is also the name of a browser built from the same sources, but issued by someone other than Google. There may be minor differences between the two.

#### **Where from?**

On Linux, a version under the name of Chromium is probably found in the repositories of the distribution.

For other systems (Windows, Mac OS X, Linux): <https://support.google.com/chrome/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=95411> from where you get to the download page. Google have gone bananas over trying to guess what you want, and I cannot find a page that gives you the option of getting anything other than the system you are on.

### Comments

Chrome also has add-ons, like Firefox, covering largely the same set of things. If you haven't used Chrome, then the interface appears rather sparse. Just remember that the menu is obtained by clicking on the spanner at the upper right.

## E-Mail client (*Thunderbird*)

For those who use an e-mail client instead of webmail, then Thunderbird is the popular choice. It comes from the same stable as Firefox, and also has some useful add-ons available.

### Where from?

For Linux, it will almost certainly be in the repositories.

For others (Windows, MAC OS X, Linux): <https://www.mozilla.org/en-US/thunderbird/all.html> from where you can select what you want.

### Comments

Thunderbird is an e-mail client that can be configured either to keep all your e-mails on the local machine, or to leave them on the server. It supports both POP and IMAP servers, and the latest versions largely configure themselves when provided with an e-mail address for an account. It can handle multiple accounts so you can mix the messages how you will, and add filters to place regular messages into differing folders.

There are number of useful add-ons available from Tools → Add-ons. My favourites are

1. Lightning is a calendar application to help you keep appointments, etc. But note is only local. If you want access to your calendar wherever you are, then consider a web calendar like Google's.
2. Foreign language dictionaries for spell checking in a number of different languages.
3. Enigmail to sign and encrypt e-mail messages if that is considered important to you.
4. LookOut to read Microsoft's outlook attachments is useful on Linux systems.
5. Signature Switch to select different signatures before sending a message.

## Office suites (*LibreOffice, OpenOffice*)

There is almost unanimous agreement that OpenOffice or LibreOffice are the best for normal domestic use. They are almost equivalent at the time of writing, but are expected to diverge in the future. However, since they are from the same base point, they will remain largely compatible for some time.

### Where from?

Linux distributions supply their own tailored versions of one or other of these. However, their tailoring may remove some features and make it harder to get exactly what you want, especially in the way the data base portions work.

All systems are catered for at their own websites (Windows, MAC OS X, Linux):

LibreOffice: <https://www.libreoffice.org/download/>

OpenOffice: <http://www.openoffice.org/>

### Comments

The original OpenOffice was taken under the wing of Oracle when they took over Sun Microsystems. However, this was not popular with the developers, some of whom set up a rival LibreOffice to do their own developments. Meanwhile, OpenOffice was snared in a legal tangle, eventually resolved by transferring it to the Apache corporation. Currently, LibreOffice is ahead in terms of types of document it can read and write, and some other technical details. But they are highly compatible, indeed virtually the same.

Due to this recent chaos, access to the spelling checkers for different languages may need to be indirect until the supporters decide whether to support both, or just one and the user has to copy it to the other separately.

The functionality is too large to describe here, suffice it to say there are modules for writing text documents (Writer), spreadsheets (Calc), drawings (Draw), preparing mathematical formulae (Math), and data base access

(Base). The writer part is good enough for almost all domestic publishing requirements, like newsletters.

## ***Desk Top Publishing (Scribus)***

If you need publishing package, this is probably the favourite. It's easy to use.

### **Where from?**

It will be in the Linux repositories.

For all systems (Windows, MAC OS X, Linux and other systems): <http://www.scribus.net/canvas/Scribus>

### **Comments**

Not much to say. It appears to have a full set of features for producing professional looking books.

## ***Home finances (GnuCash and KMyMoney)***

For simple domestic accounts, both GnuCash and KMyMoney will work.

### **Where from?**

Both of these are in Linux repositories.

Other wise download them from

GnuCash for Windows, MAC OS X, Linux and others: <http://www.gnucash.org/>

KMyMoney for Windows, MAC OS X, Linux from: <http://kymoney2.sourceforge.net/index2.html>

### **Comments**

Gnucash has a better fit with Gnome and related desktops, whereas KMyMoney has been written for KDE style desktops, but both will work on either desktop.

GnuCash is available for all of Windows, Mac OS-X and Linux and is probably the easier to get started with.

To install KMyMoney on Windows or Mac OS-X, you must first install the KDE libraries, which makes it less easy to use by a beginner.

They can import existing accounts from some other packages, like Intuit's Quickbooks, but do not expect all the features to be available. Conventional wisdom is that if you have a business, then get paid for accounting packages, as the free ones are not really suitable, primarily because of the lack of certainty for updates to follow taxation changes.

## ***PDF viewers***

There is probably one built in to the system you have acquired. If not, then Adobe Acrobat is the official one to use if you want to be guaranteed that it will handle the latest versions. However, there are various others that concentrate on certain types of files (like scientific ones) or speed which have their advantages. Most of them are free, but not all, and a list is available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_PDF\\_software](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_PDF_software)

### **Where from?**

Linux systems will come with one that will be adequate builtin as part of either the web browser, or the file browser, or both.

I believe that MAC OS X may have one as well, but Windows has been known to arrive without one.

Of the independent offerings, Foxit has a good name and is fast. It is free of charge, but not open source. Get it from [http://www.foxitsoftware.com/Secure\\_PDF\\_Reader/](http://www.foxitsoftware.com/Secure_PDF_Reader/)

### **Comments**

A pdf reader is a pdf reader; choose one that suits your particular situation.

## ***Text editors***

For simple text editing, there are numerous possibilities, the most common on Linux being gedit and leafpad.

Leafpad is the simpler and less feature rich, but is more suitable for older smaller systems.

But on any system, there will some form of simple text editor suitable for the few cases it is needed.

## **Web composing (BlueGriffon)**

A popular choice for composing web pages is BlueGriffon.

### **Where from?**

For all systems, there is a version at <http://bluegriffon.org/>

### **Comments**

This is one of the few that attempt to provide a reasonable view of the thing you are editing, instead of just the source code. The free version is open source, and is adequate for simple jobs. However, to get more features, then they sell versions that have far more capability, which you may prefer.

## **Image viewing (gThumb, GNOME Image Viewer)**

Most programs that enable you to look at pictures also provide extra features that complicate what ought to be a simple task. The simplest are Gnome Image viewer, gThumb and Fotoxx. But the web browser could also be used as they normally have default ways of displaying pictures just as they are.

A useful comparison of image viewers is at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison\\_of\\_image\\_viewers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_image_viewers)

### **Where from?**

These are both available in Linux repositories. None are available on other systems, unless you wish to compile the source and find suitable libraries yourself.

### **Comments**

Sometimes you want to make simple edits, like rotating them, or adding tags or extra data into the EXIF comments, and then the options are more limited. The best thing is to try a few and see what suits you.

## **Image organising (Shotwell, Métamorphose)**

There are several ways of maintaining catalogues of pictures, none of which seem to satisfy all the requirements of anyone, but all seem to do most for someone. These two are among the more popular.

A comparison of organisers is at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image\\_organizer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image_organizer)

### **Where from?**

Shotwell is in the Linux repositories. It appears to be Linux only.

Métamorphose (Windows and Linux): <http://file-folder-ren.sourceforge.net>

### **Comments**

Shotwell relies on an external database to preserve information about the images. Consequently when the file is transferred elsewhere it may lose data useful to the recipient.

Métamorphose allows you to change the names of files for photos to reflect where and when they were taken, with comments you have on them, and many other possibilities. This will at least enable you to name a file suitable for transfer.

## **Image editing (Gimp, Hugin)**

Digital editing of images has become more common recently, requiring the ability to perform many different transformational operations on them.

### **Where from?**

GIMP and Hugin are in the Linux repositories.

For other systems (Windows, MAC OS X, Linux and others)

GIMP is at <http://www.gimp.org/>

Hugin is at <http://hugin.sourceforge.net/download/>

### Comments

GIMP is a good replacement for Photoshop and completely free.

Hugin can join photographs in many different ways to create panoramas and other effects. If you are into spectacular effects, this is one to use.

## Document scanning (*SimpleScan, XSane*)

Not so much an application as support in Linux for hardware.

### Where from?

Both SimpleScan and XSane are in the Linux repositories.

### Comments

Scanning used to be a problem on Linux, and you must still be careful what you buy. There are still some that are not supported or use special drivers written by the manufacturers, but the position is much better than it was. The underlying set of utilities go under the name of Sane, and a list of currently supported scanners (including photo scanners) can be found at <http://www.sane-project.org/sane-mfgs.html>

## Burning CDs or DVDs (*Brasero*)

This is the one in common use on Ubuntu systems. It will detect that a single file that is a disk image is to be burnt, then prompt you whether you wish to burn as an image or not. It is built into Nautilus, although I've noticed it often crashes when used directly from the file browser, but never when started directly.

It is in the repositories.

## Monitoring your Linux system (*load indicators*)

On Linux there are a number of different system monitors that can give continuous information on the amount of work your machine is doing. One of the easy ones for Ubuntu is the System Load Indicator, installed from the package indicator-multiloader. It can be configured to display not just the cpu, but also memory usage, network activity, disk activity, etc. as small histograms in the applet bar. The frequency of update can also be changed.

## Time and weather indicators

Ubuntu (12.04 Unity) has an applet installed by default that shows the time at the upper right. Click on the time and look at Time & Date Settings, Clock tab, click Time in other locations and Choose Locations button to set alternative locations which will display by clicking the time.

Also, there is a weather applet that can be installed to give updates of what is going on elsewhere. However, I've found it unreliable, failing to connect and update the details for sites that are listed as available.

## Command line (*xterm, Guake*)

On Linux systems, the command line has to be used sometimes. There are many applications that can provide a window with a command line, and the one normally provided by the installation will be adequate.

However, if you have a small screen, then Guake may be worth looking at, as it allows a semi-transparent window to be used and you can see any web-pages below it to copy text from, etc.

## Creating Linux installation sticks (*UNetbootin*)

This is the usual one to use with Ubuntu systems, and can handle a number of different Linux systems, but not

all. So check the documentation before creating a USB stick for installation purposes. It converts a CD or DVD .iso image file into a form suitable for a USB memory stick, and burn it there so it can be used to boot from.

## ***Backups (Simple Backup, grsync, Mint Backup, Back-in-Time)***

What and how you back up is a personal choice, and there are several different methods and applications. You should try them yourself to see whether they are useful for you.

Simple Backup is described at <http://www.howtogeek.com/howto/29518/how-to-backup-your-linux-pc-with-simple-backup/>

The standard Unix method of old was to use the command rsync. Grsync provides a graphical front end to it, and might be suitable if you know what you are doing.

Linux Mint has its own back up system, which will be worth considering. Some reviews on it are at: <http://community.linuxmint.com/software/view/mintbackup>

Another one for Ubuntu worth a look is Back-in-Time, which can take snapshots of working areas at regular intervals, saving only the changes. A description is at: <http://www.ubuntugeek.com/back-in-time-a-simple-backup-tool-for-ubuntu.html> but it is now in the repositories so the installation instructions there are unnecessary.

## ***System snapshots (Remastersys)***

Remastersys gives a snapshot of your whole Linux system so you can roll it back to a known configuration when there is a danger of the system being corrupted, for example while experimentally deleting packages. It is not part of Ubuntu, but can be obtained from <http://www.remastersys.com>

## ***Efficiency utilities (Bleachbit)***

Bleachbit can be used to remove unused packages to improve the general efficiency, especially at start up of the system. Applies to Linux and Windows and will help you tidy up your use of space by numerous applications which might leave data scattered around the place. The result also improves your privacy should that be necessary for you. A description is at: <http://bleachbit.sourceforge.net/>

## ***File system cleaner (FSLint)***

Linux file systems typically do not need defragmenting, unlike Windows. However, you may have a number of unused folders that the system kindly gave you on the off-chance you want them. FSLint is a program that can help you tidy things up. It is available in the repositories, or from: <http://www.pixelbeat.org/fslint/>

## ***Adding applications to Debian-based Linux systems (Synaptic)***

Ubuntu has stopped including by default the most adaptable front end to software management software, preferring instead the Ubuntu Software Centre. If you want more control and information, then install from the centre the synaptic package manager.