

The Official Ubuntu Book

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The Official Ubuntu Book (OUB) has an expansive scope aiming to make the Ubuntu experience easier and more enjoyable for first time users to system administrators. Written by a group of some of the most experienced Free and Open Source (FOSS) administrators the OUB details meticulous step by step instructions setting up and installing Ubuntu down to learning the command line. This near 400 page tome covers the complete Ubuntu system and philosophy. Though the writing suffers somewhat from the large number of community contributed sections, the warm and welcoming community succeeds in making new users feel at home. With an eye for the technical side of the writing, the chapters follow a fairly linear path starting with the simplest things and the GUI it moves in a sequential fashion towards more difficult topics and more difficult descriptions. No matter its place within the structure of the book the writing always takes the time to explain in full not just what to do but also why and what options you have. Realistically, Linux is such a diverse operation system with so many different distributions that it is refreshing to see such a focused effort on fully explaining just one example system. The book is filled with concise and clear descriptions of various technologies and system software that make the task at hand and the terminology used a true pleasure to learn. The book

additionally has many wonderful small tips that are clearly marked elaborating on terms or just explaining some of Linux's inside jokes. A seasoned system administrator might find some of the descriptions a bit long in the tooth and feel their eyes glazing over at the really quite readable descriptions of technical terms, but they are clearly not the main targeted audience. Besides a lovely telling of Ubuntu's creation and purpose the book tackles topics such as installation, understanding the desktop paradigm, software installation, customization, the command line, and wraps up with an intro to the server edition. Reading this book has made me grow to appreciate Ubuntu even more.

As my own primary operating system I have been an Ubuntu user of years, installing it on all my sundrie boxes and laptops; albeit often with some dumbfounding headaches on laptops. I have been considering switching distributions to Arch but frankly the ease of installation and the convenience of PPA's is hard to ignore in Ubuntu. Choosing this book was a fairly natural selection as I have over the years gleaned all my Linux knowledge in the form of forums and blogs, and except for Ubuntu Made Easy the Official Ubuntu Book has been the only recurring string suggested. In all honesty I did not realize what a proficient Linux user I had become, only the chapter on setting up a web server and some of the command line were things that I was not familiar with.

Still the book captured my interest and I took some surprising interest and giggles from the tips presented; I apparently am a Linux insider as I got all the jokes. I would highly recommend this book to a beginning Linux/Ubuntu user, all the technical task are easy to follow and informative with lots of great screen captures along the way. Being a community written book it is affordable and

follows the same open source philosophy as the operating system it describes.

Applying OUB to the twenty five posed questions was an interesting task, as frankly, I could have completed the list without a book for all three major operating systems as well as both iOS and Android. Still there are a few questions on the list that have some rather convoluted answers on Ubuntu. For example a simple question like how to view a video file is not as simple as double clicking on Windows™ and OSX™. Ubuntu ships with only open source video codecs installed and you must install additional proprietary codecs yourself.

Although developers in the open source community have created free implementations of some of these codecs, the licensing that surrounds them conflicts with the legal and philosophical position that Ubuntu has set. These codecs are excluded not only because they are legally dubious but also because they disagree with Ubuntu's ethic of creating a distribution that consists entirely of free software in the most free sense of the word. Luckily OUB covers this in several ways. It documents the option to install these codex during the installation of the OS by the use of an optional installer, as well as how to install these after the fact and Ubuntu has made this process as easy as offering to install these codex when trying to play a proprietary format. In fact installing software in Linux in general is somewhat different than on OSX™ or Windows™.

The OUB covers this in spades though explaining the philosophy and system of software repositories and offering detailed explanations on how to use multiple means to install software both from Ubuntu's repositories and from outside packages.

Of course all questions pertaining to the use of the desktop GUI are

explained profusely and with ample illustration. When a book is created about non-FOSS software perhaps illustrations are expensive but a community created book about a FOSS operating system has them in profusion. Things like changing file views, desktop backgrounds, opening files, and the use of Ubuntu's own custom shell (Unity) are covered with ample explanation. I myself do not use Unity, preferring the customizable simplicity of XFCE. This brings up another interesting point about Ubuntu and Linux in general; you have a wide array of choice in how you setup your system. So, questions about how to find the certain settings are dependent on those choices. The OUB of course mainly focuses on describing these types of actions in relation to Unity and its upstream Gnome components but also includes information for people who are using official derivative distributions such and Kubuntu, Xubuntu, and Lubuntu.

Questions about installation and partitioning are exceptionally clear and are certainly easier than attempting anything similar on Windows™. The graphical installer handles all these items with simple question and answer steps. It should be noted that though the installer includes the partitioning software Gparted, the finalized installation does not, so creating additional partitions and Raids requires installation of Gparted from the repositories. Again the tips included were a great wealth of short but helpful information on tackling these topics. Finally so far as maintaining the system goes users are prompted with software and security updates by default and the OUB of course includes information about these systems in chapter three dealing with getting started with Ubuntu.

Again though I have already had a fair degree of experience with Linux

the Official Ubuntu Book offered up a few helpful tips. Some items of particular interest concerned the use of the command line and web server setup. One of the challenges of using the terminal is the difficulty of managing multiple screens. If you are in a desktop environment, you can launch another terminal window or use GNOME terminal's tabs, but if you are on a server or another machine that doesn't have a desktop environment installed, that doesn't work.

Thankfully, such a tool to help you does exist: `byobu`. Japanese for screen, `byobu` is a set of default configurations for the GNU `screen` command. Essentially, `byobu` is a window manager for the command line. I have always shied away from working without a graphical desktop but this peaked my interest. Another item of interest was the book's incredibly down to earth explanation of a RAID setup. I have been interested for some time in setting up my own server and it was really interesting to read about some of the advantages of setting up a multiple hard drive system. Feeding on my interest in web design and development it was interesting to learn that one can make a html based hyperlink to a package in the Ubuntu repositories simply by placing `apt:packagename` in the href attribute. I'm not sure when I would use this but it got me a little geeked. Another point of interest that had me wiping my brow was the ability to create a delete command in the command line interface (CLI) that makes use of the trash folder. Usually the "rm" command instantly and completely removes the chosen file. This has always made me uncomfortable as I have gleaned all of my Linux knowledge so far by trial and error, so its nice to have a option to undo whatever damage I have just done. Finally one simple addition to my knowledge. I have often used the properties window available on

right click for items in the GUI file system but I never realize that the emblems tab was for overlaying various icons onto files and folders. I am a very visual person and being able to mark files like this helps me to organize my work.

The Official Ubuntu Book is an excellent resource that is really incredibly up to date considering that Ubuntu releases a new version every six months like clockwork. Also considering the massive graphic changes Ubuntu has gone through with the implementation of Unity in the last year. For myself I probably found the books suggestion of reading the Official Ubuntu Server Book the most enticing element based on how well the OUB was put together.

Honestly I wish that I had just bought this book years ago when I started experimenting with Linux. Thinking back to those early days downloading distro ISO's and pumping them into parallels and cussing at my screen install after install I realize that Linux/Ubuntu is quite a departure from its two main competitors. Having a technical resource that is as clear and friendly as the Official Ubuntu Book could not be more helpful. For new users this book would be a one stop shopping experience that pulls on the knowledge and compassion of the entire Ubuntu community to welcome them into the folds of freedom.