

Chapter 1: Getting Started

In order to start using your system you will usually have to perform what is known as a user login. This procedure is necessary to identify yourself to the system. The system allows multiple users to use it concurrently and so it has to be able to identify a user in order to grant them the necessary privileges and rights to use the system and applications. Each user upon successful login will be assigned to his home directory (folder).

Some systems may have been set up so that upon power-on, a default user is logged in automatically. If this is so, then you will not be presented with a login screen or prompt as described in the section below. You may skip on to the section entitled “Basic Navigation using the Mouse on the Desktop”.

Note:

There is a special user called the **root** or **superuser** (this user is usually created during the system installation) which has unlimited access and rights to all the system files and resources. You only need to login as root if certain system level administrative tasks are to be carried out. Otherwise there is usually no need for a normal user to login as root. This is to prevent accidentally damaging the system by deleting or modifying important system files.

LOGGING IN

Depending on how you have set up your system, you will either have a graphical login screen or a text-based login prompt for you to perform the login process.

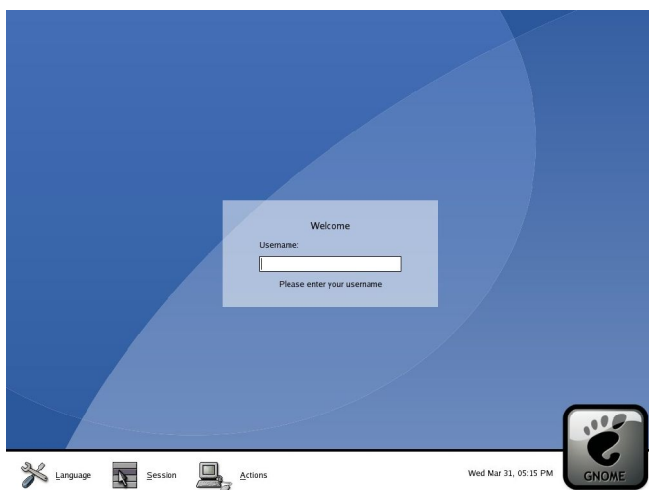


Fig. Graphical Login Screen

```
Fedora Core release 1
Kernel 2.4.22-1 on an i686
localhost login:
```

Fig. Text-based Login Prompt

To login, enter the username followed by the ENTER key and when the password prompt appears, enter the password followed by the ENTER key.

STARTING THE GRAPHICAL DESKTOP

If you have logged in from the graphical login screen, the graphical desktop will be started automatically for you. The graphical desktop presents a Graphical User Interface (GUI) for the user to interact with the system and run

applications. If you have used the text-based screen login, you will have to start the graphical desktop manually by entering the command **startx** followed by the ENTER key.

```
[anita@localhost anita]$ startx
```

Fig. Starting the Graphical Desktop

Note:

The graphical desktop that we will be using throughout most of this guide is called the **GNOME Desktop**. There is another desktop environment in popular use on Linux systems – the **KDE Desktop**. There is some coverage of KDE later, comparing the similarities and differences between GNOME and KDE although we will not be covering the KDE desktop in detail.

For the rest of this user guide, when we refer to the graphical desktop or Desktop we shall be talking about the GNOME Desktop unless stated otherwise.

USING THE MOUSE ON THE DESKTOP

Proper usage of the mouse is essential in order to have a rewarding and productive experience on the graphical desktop. Most Linux graphical desktops are designed for use with a 3-button mouse. If you are using a 2-button mouse, during installation, it should have been configured to emulate the middle-button of a 3-button mouse by pressing both buttons simultaneously.

To click on a mouse the left button is depressed. (A mouse configured for a left-handed user will need to have its right button depressed.) The right (or left button for a left-handed mouse) and middle buttons are usually used to invoke special or specific features of the GUI and instructions to do so will be explicitly given.

The term “clicking on the mouse” means that you click on the mouse once.

The term “double clicking” means that you click twice in succession on the mouse.

To “select” an item means clicking it once with the mouse.

The term “drag and drop” means that you will have to click on an item and while continuing to hold the mouse button down, drag the item to another place and on reaching its destination drop it by releasing the mouse button.

EXERCISES

1. Open the home folder from the Desktop.
2. Close the home folder window by clicking on the close window button at the top right-hand corner.
3. Right-click on the trash icon, view its properties and close it back.
4. Move the trash icon to another location on the desktop by using the mouse to drag it to the new location and releasing the mouse.

MAIN COMPONENTS OF THE DESKTOP

The figure below shows a typical view of the graphical Linux desktop.

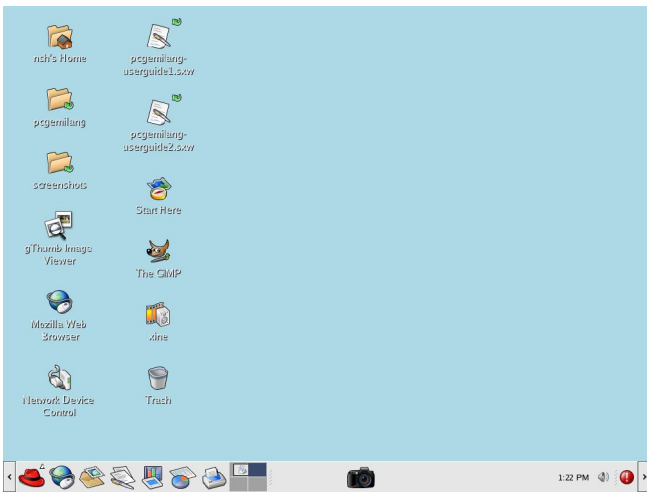


Fig. A Typical Linux Desktop

There are 3 main components on the desktop:

- the Menu System
- the Panel
- the Desktop itself

THE MENU SYSTEM

The main menu can be accessed by clicking on the Main Menu button located at the extreme lower left hand corner of the desktop. This may be portrayed by one of several icons depending on the desktop environment used.



Generic GNOME Main Menu button



Fedora/Red Hat Main Menu button

Clicking on this will bring up the Menu System as shown in the figure below.



Fig. The Menu System

From the Menu System you can start many of the applications installed on your Linux system. Note that the Menu System consists of a Main Menu panel and sub-menu panels. Each entry in the Menu System which has an arrow on its right means that it is an entry point to a sub-menu, and there can be sub-menus within each sub-menu. In this way applications in the Menu System can be organised and categorised for easy reference and access.

To access a the sub-menu associated with a menu entry, move the mouse and rest it on the menu entry in question and a sub-menu panel will appear.



Fig. Main Menu and Sub-menu

Clicking once on a menu entry will cause an application associated with it to be launched, i.e. executed.

THE PANEL

The long bar across the bottom of the desktop screen is called the Panel. The Panel contains the Main Menu icon, the application launcher icons, a notification area and applets.



Fig. The Panel

Installed by default are several application launcher icons on the Panel. Clicking on one of these will run an application. Commonly accessed applications can be added to the Panel and those that are less frequently used can be taken off.

The notification area holds alert icons so that the user can be alerted to critical messages.

Applets are small applications that run on the Panel. These usually perform useful and informative tasks like setting the sound level of the soundcard, monitoring whether the system software needs an update, etc. By default the following applets are run.

The Workspace Switcher

The graphical desktop can be regarded as a workspace drawing an analogy with the working area on a real physical tabletop. Programs are run, documents displayed and files opened on the workspace. To cut down on workspace clutter and to enable the user to organise his workspace more efficiently, the graphical desktop environment allows the usage of multiple workspaces. Each workspace can be considered as a virtual desktop.



Fig. The Workspace Switcher

By default the user has 4 desktop workspace areas to work on. The workspace switcher represents each workspace as a small square and shows the applications running in each of them. To access a workspace click on the square with the mouse.

The Taskbar

The Taskbar applet is located next to the workspace switcher and shows the titles of all the running applications in a virtual desktop (a workspace).

THE DESKTOP SPACE

The Desktop space refers to the rest of the screen. It contains icons which are graphical representations of shortcuts to application launchers, file folders, files and peripheral devices like floppy disks, CD-ROM drives and printers. Double-clicking on an icon representing an application will launch or execute the application. Commonly used applications and/or files/folders are usually placed on the desktop space.

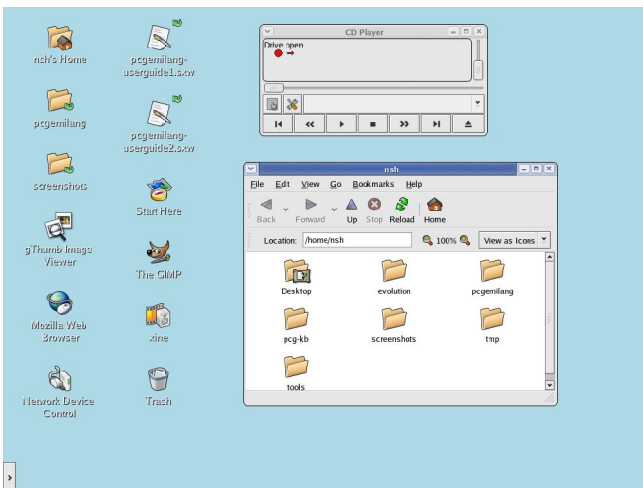


Fig. The Desktop Space

USING THE WINDOW MANAGER

An interactive application that is run on the graphical desktop, is usually displayed inside a window. This window can be accessed and manipulated using the window manager.

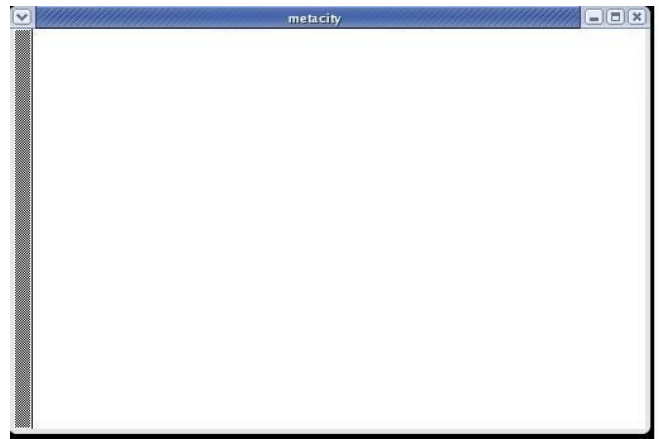


Fig. An Application Window Frame

THE TITLEBAR

When an application is started an application window opens and a frame (see figure above) is placed around the window of the application. The top edge of the frame has a titlebar that contains the title of the application.



Fig. The Window Titlebar

At the left hand corner of the titlebar is the Window Menu button. Clicking on this button will open up the Window Menu.

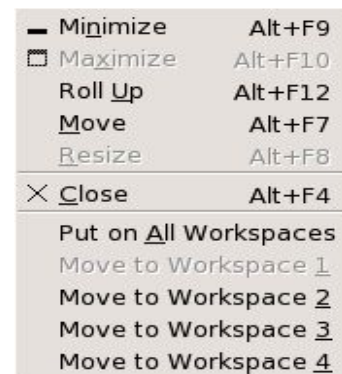


Fig. The Window Menu

You can perform operations such as minimise, (un)maximise, roll up, move and resize the window from this menu. At the right edge of the titlebar there are three buttons which allow you to minimise, (un)maximise and close the window.

To perform an operation in the Window Menu, open the menu by clicking on the Window Menu button and then select the desired operation.

MANIPULATING THE WINDOW

Some basic instructions to manipulate the windowing system are given here. More details can be obtained by running the "Help" application on the Main Menu. After running the Help application choose:

Desktop --> Windows --> Manipulating Windows

Focus

In order for a window to receive input from the mouse and the keyboard it has to be the window "in focus". Only one window can have focus at a time. Windows that are not in focus have their titlebars greyed-out. To focus on a window place the mouse on the titlebar and click on it. (You can actually click anywhere within the window, but it

is safer to click on the titlebar since there is no possibility of accidentally clicking on some item selection or functionality of the application running within the window.) If the window is not visible you can click on the taskbar on the Panel at the bottom of the Desktop to bring into focus the window you want.

Maximise and Minimise

Maximising a window means that the window is expanded to cover the whole desktop while minimising it means that the window is taken off the desktop and it appears as an icon in the taskbar on the Panel.

You can maximise a window which has focused from the Window Menu or by clicking on the maximise button on the titlebar. You can similarly minimise the window. If the window does not have focus bring it into focus first by clicking on the taskbar on the Panel.

Resize

You can resize a window, i.e. change its size, by placing the mouse at an edge of the window and then drag the window to the desired size.

Move

To move a window to another place on the desktop, place the mouse on the titlebar and drag the window to the desired location.

Roll Up and Unroll

To roll up a window allows you to “roll up” the window frame until what can be seen of the window is just the the titlebar. You can perform this operation from the Window Menu.

To restore the window back to its original shape, select the unroll option from the Window Menu.

Close

You can close a window which has focused from the Window Menu or by clicking on the close window button on the titlebar. If the window does not have focus bring it into focus first by clicking on the taskbar on the Panel.

Note: Closing the window will terminate your application.

Move to Workspaces

The Window Menu can be used to move the application currently opened to another workspace or to all the workspaces.

EXERCISES

1. Open your home folder from the Main Menu. Perform the following operations on the opened window:
 - maximise it
 - minimise it
 - resize it
 - roll it up
 - unroll it
 - move it to another position on the Desktop
 - place it on workspace 3
 - close the window

ENDING THE SESSION

To end this chapter, you can exit your session on the desktop by performing what is known as a logout.

If you do not want to use the system anymore, you can turn it off by performing a system shutdown.

LOGOUT

When you have finished working on the system, you will need to logout. Logging out will inform the system that you are no longer using the system's resources. All the files opened and programs run by you will be closed and/or stopped unless you have specifically informed the system to keep them open or running for you.

To logout, at the Main Menu select:

Main Menu --> Logout

and at the dialog window select logout and click OK



Fig. Logout Dialog Window

SHUTTING DOWN THE SYSTEM

When you have finished using the computer and want to power it off, you will have to perform a system shutdown.

Note:

It is very important that a proper system shutdown is performed. You should not just turn off the power switch of the computer to shut it down. Failure to observe this may lead to system software and data corruption and failure.

To shutdown, at the Main Menu, perform a logout. Then at the graphical login screen select the “Shut down” option at the bottom of the screen. Sometimes (depending on the login screen chosen) the Shutdown option is available as a sub-option under the Actions option at the bottom of the screen.

Alternatively on some systems, you may be able to perform a shut down by performing a log out operation as described in the previous section but instead of selecting “Log out”, select the “Shut down” option from the Logout dialog.