

Will I need to use the command Line in Ubuntu Linux? Nope, not unless you want to!

The command line exists in windows too but most people no longer use it. That is true in Linux as well. Virtually everything a common user wants to do with a computer can be done using the provided GUI (Graphical User Interface) tools available in the Desktop Menus.

Why would I want to?

Let's say you are surfing the web one day and read an article that describes a genealogy program for ubuntu called gramps that you would really like to try out. While you may well be able to install gramps using the graphical tools the system provides, it is likely the article will tell you how to do it using the command line rather than by using the graphical tools.

Why? Because it is much easier for the author of the article to tell you to open a terminal and type `sudo apt-get install gramps` than it is to write several paragraphs and maybe include some graphical images to give you instructions on how to use the graphical tools. Both ways work, the command line way is simply easier to describe and only assumes you know how to open a terminal.

Oh, BTW (by the way), whether you use a command prefaced with "sudo" or a GUI tool that requires special privileges you will be asked to enter your password unless you have already done so very recently.

So how do I get to a command line? How do I get out of it?

Easy! Select "terminal" from the Applications/Accessories menu. A terminal window will open on your screen with a command line prompt displayed in it just waiting for you to type some command(s). Getting out of it is just as easy. Either click the big **X** in the upper right corner like any other window or type `exit` and press the Enter key.

What is that "prompt" you mentioned?

Those words and symbols that appeared when you opened the terminal and that show up after virtually every command you run are called the prompt. It can be modified to show many things, but if no one has done so, it shows your userid, a `@` symbol, the name of the computer you are using, a colon, the directory you are in (NOTE: `~` is shorthand for you being in your personal home directory), and usually a `$` symbol. It simply shows you that information while it waits for you to type a command.

OK, so what do I type on this command line?

Well you could type the command shown in that article to install the genealogy program we mentioned, but let's try something less drastic first. How about getting a list of the files in whatever is the current directory (folder). You could use the GUI tool for this but we are talking about the command line, or cli, interface. Back in DOS, or a Windows command line window, we would use the command `dir`. In fact, you can make linux use that as well, but the usual command is `ls` (for list) which results in a display something like:

```
larry@lshooter:~$ ls
Desktop    Downloads  java      Nexuiz    Pictures
Documents Examples   Music     Photos    Public    Templates
```

Just like in DOS, there are many options you can use to display additional information. You might want to try some variations just to get used to being on the command line. Try using:

```
ls -l
ls -l --classify
ls -l --color=auto
ls -a
```

Wow, lots of differing results, but still kind of boring.

True, but I am only trying to tickle you, not convert you or teach you all you can do. But here is one you may find more interesting:

```
sudo lshw -html > ~/Desktop/lshw_out.html
```

After doing this, look on your desktop and you will see an icon with the name "lshw_out.html". If you double click on that, your browser will display a "web" page of all the hardware in your computer. There is a GUI based tool for this but I think the page we built with that command line entry is better.

What next?

We are talking about beginner stuff here so I don't want to get into a tutorial. If you just want a couple more examples, try:

```
df -h
wc ~/Desktop/lshw_out.html
free
man free
```

which tell you about disk free space, word counts in the file you created, how memory is being used, and a description (or manual page) of the "free" command

There are MANY resources, books, and tutorials to learn more. Of course, you are welcome to explore or to look ahead to more advanced topics though the point of this paper is that you do not NEED to do so, you just may WANT to.

BTW, one convenient reference (*not* a tutorial) is provided by Ubuntu. If you click on the big question mark in the top panel and then on Advanced Topics on the page that opens, one of those topics is about using the command line

by lat