

# FAQ and resources

Bastien Gorissen, Pascale Gorissen

**W**e asked Junior to confide us his questions. Junior does not actually have a deep knowledge in open source software, on the contrary...  
If by any chance you end up knowing everything that is asked by Junior, consult instead the end of the chapter which will make you familiar with a list of references enabling you to go further in your knowledge.

## Frequently Asked Questions

***Junior: I hear quite a lot of people talking about open source software these days. But, after all, what is the meaning of open source software?***

“Open source software” is a designation which is often opposed to another: “proprietary software”. To define one, let us clarify the other too.

The proprietary software means the great majority of programs that are sold on the market. Those programs are only commercialized in their final form, that is to say that you are not granted the access to their secret of fabrication (in other words, the source code). That the programmers could adapt the recipe to accommodate their own tastes is in this case out of the question. *Proprietary* also means that you do not have the right to redistribute, copy, not use that kind of software in a context different from the one described in the license.

At the opposite, the open source software exists. Open source implies that the programs guarantee four fundamental rights to its user:

- The right to use the software without any restrictions (yes, even for commercial use, as long as the seller respects the four rights).
- The right to redistribute the software. Making copied for all your friends and relatives is allowed, even encouraged!
- The right to access to the secret of the software’s fabrication (its source code).
- The right to modify the source code.

Notice that more than just a legal distinctness, it is a whole new idea of sharing which is promoted through those four rights.

***J: So, the open source software is quite similar to the freeware?***

Not at all! You must not be mistaken by the “free” prefix which can be misunderstood as linked to the “free software” expression. The freeware is proprietary software distributed gratis. You are not granted the access to the freeware source code and you cannot copy it nor redistribute it.

***J: I believed open source software was always costless.***

As we said earlier, that is not necessarily always the case. You have the right to decide to sell an open source program that you did not create yourself if, and only if, you keep the four fundamental rights.

However, it is a fact that the great majority of those programs remain fully costless. Be sure to find any program you need for a daily use of your computer without having to open your wallet.

***J: If I follow you, I will not have to pay anything to comfortably use my Ubuntu system? How is that miracle possible?***

To shed light on that Ubuntu feature which is not easily understood by the non-users, we must go back to the open source software debut.

All this began thanks to some people, programmers, who decided to write code in order to build a program likely to fill some

personal needs they had. The link with open source software? There it is: those programmers, instead of keeping the results of their work for themselves, decided to make available their programs to anyone wanting to use them. Freely, of course. The phenomenon developed until today where systems like Ubuntu are available for everyone.

This sharing process partly explains the gratuitousness but another factor must be taken into account. In fact, the open source software has its trading weight. Some companies are proposing services surrounding Linux systems : support for corporations, documentation books, or simply t-shirts and other products decorated with the logo of the distribution. Those services allow companies like Canonical (roots of the Ubuntu project) to be totally sustainable economically speaking even when distributing a free system.

**J: But if I do not have to pay anything, is this system really reliable? Can I trust Ubuntu?**

When it comes to reliability, you should not worry. To prove that, let us make a quick comparison... The company X sells to consumers a proprietary software Y. Bad luck, the program Y you just bought has a bug and you are forced to make contact with the company X. The problem is that, with that kind of huge companies, the process of making contact with the helpdesk often turns into a real crusade because of answers' delays. Meanwhile, your neighbor, he, downloaded a free software W. Double bad luck : W has also a bug. The difference between both situations holds in the fact that your neighbor, as opposed to you, can contact not one helpdesk but a whole community of programmers and other users ready to give a hand. In those conditions, how can you not feel secure?

**J: When I talk about Linux, I was often replied that it was a "geek thing". What is a "geek"? Are they right?**

There was in fact a time long ago when advanced computing knowledge was needed to be able to use a Linux system. But that time is clearly revolved. Sources of help and documentation are multiplying, systems go more and more easier to use and become even more instinctive than another famous proprietary operating system... You just have to look at the menus: in Ubuntu, the programs are sorted according to the type of function they offer, a more logical order than programs listed in company name alphabetical order.

## Resources

During your first steps under Ubuntu (and even much later on), maybe you shall encounter some difficulties, concepts that you do not understand, hardware which does not work, mistakes due to some bugs, etc.

Do not worry, everyone has been through this one time or another. The Ubuntu community being huge, it is rare to be confronted to a problem which has not already been encountered or even resolved by someone else.

Or maybe are you simply in want of a broader knowledge, of a better

understanding of the system, or of a contribution to the community...

## The Loco Teams and the LUGs

The first available resource, and not the least, is the LUGs (Linux Users Groups) network. The LUGs are not particularly dedicated to the Ubuntu system but to all Linux distribution. The LUGs movement has earned through these past years a great importance and there is not a town or region which has not its LUG.

The LUGs offer the opportunity of meeting other people with interest for open source software, sharing your experiences, getting help over a precise situation. Most LUGs regularly organize *Install Parties*, meetings during which people come with their computer to install Linux with the assistance of LUG members.

More specific to Ubuntu, remember the presence of the Loco Teams. The Loco Teams rather aim to promote Ubuntu and to centralize the documentation and information specific to a particular country. We find for instance Ubuntu-qc in Quebec or Ubuntu-be in Belgium. The big countries like the United States have one Loco Team for each state or region.

The list of all existing Loco Team can be found at the following address: [wiki.ubuntu.com/LoCoTeamList](http://wiki.ubuntu.com/LoCoTeamList).



**Figure 1.** The Ubuntu wiki

## Online help

The Ubuntu community is, of course, quite everywhere on the web. But there are several particular spots on the Internet where you can find official resources. Do not hesitate to use and abuse of the following addresses.

### The Ubuntu Wiki

The official website for the documentation is the wiki Ubuntu : [wiki.ubuntu.com](http://wiki.ubuntu.com)

As it is a wiki, all users can modify and fill it. It is a huge website and, at the beginning, there is the risk of getting lost more than once. But the Ubuntu is particularly interesting because it is totally internationalized and because it is used for the development of the next Ubuntu versions. For example, you will find there a wide list of hardware with, for each, their current compatibility with Ubuntu, possible problems, considered solutions in the next version, etc.

If you wish to deepen your experience of Ubuntu, the Ubuntu wiki is an indispensable tool. The wiki is the reference for an always updated and complete information. If you do not find what you seek on other websites, think of the wiki Ubuntu as a standard.

### The Ubuntu forums

The international Ubuntu forums can be found here: <http://www.ubuntuforums.org>

Be careful here: we enter a world of disproportion. Nearly 300 000 users are registered on the Ubuntu forums! 5000 members logged in at the same time is not a rarity!

This has nothing to do with a friendly little forum to chat and meet some new people. Here, there is no time to commiserate and get to know each other. Everyone is there to solve problems as quickly as it can be done.

So, if you have a problem which is clearly not addressed in the documentation (or for which the solution proposed does not work), do not



**Figure 2.** Planet Ubuntu, the blogs of the people involved in the Ubuntu project

hesitate to post a message. Do not forget to give all the possible details concerning the issue as well as the “hello” and the “thanks in advance”.

With a complete and well-written message, be sure that someone, or several people, will come to help you. Always keep in mind that all the people on the forums are *voluntarily* helping others! They give you a hand without expecting anything in return, they owe you nothing! Try to repay the favor when you can.

Ubuntu forums is an exceptional tool to find the solution to specific problems. On the Ubuntu forums, you become aware that you have exactly the same problem as an Italian and that is an Ukrainian who will bring the solution thanks to the code created by a Colombian. Ubuntu forums is in fact world-wide.

### The Ubuntu planet

Nowadays, many people own a kind of diary on the web, commonly named a blog or weblog. The temptation of reading many of them is deep but to check 50 blogs every single day may reveal itself as of being practically difficult. Fortunately, blogs can be grouped in one webpage which is called “a planet”.

Ubuntu has also its planet which is regrouping the blogs of the people involved in the Ubuntu project. Not everyone can be aggregated in

this planet, you must be part of the project to be accepted.

The content of the articles is not always focused on Ubuntu. You will find a great deal of personal information. It is a way for the participants to the project to get to know each other better and to share what is important from their point of view.

### Reporting a bug

Let us now consider another case: you find a problem which should not exist, a problem which finds its roots in the Ubuntu system. That kind of problem is called a “bug”.

Rather than criticizing, the only way to see this problem fixed is to inform the developers. That is called “reporting a bug” and, as far as Ubuntu is concerned, the tool used for this is the Launchpad website: [bugs.launchpad.net/ubuntu](http://bugs.launchpad.net/ubuntu)

### Does the bug already exist?

The first thing to do is to check whether the bug has not already been reported. In fact, if you met the problem, you are probably not the only one.

You must therefore do a research within the existing bugs. To be honest, doing that kind of research asks a bit of intuition and a certain knowledge of technical vocabulary. But while trying, you will learn a lot.



**Figure 3.** Reporting a bug with launchpad

If the bug already exists, you can subscribe to it to be informed if any changes occur. You can also post a comment if you think you can add a clarification considering to the original bug. For instance, if the bug deals with scanners model XXX but you met the same problem with a scanner model YYY.

### The bug seems not to exist yet

In this case, file a report!

A good bug report should include the following information:

- Your exact situation (which hardware, which software),
- What you wish to obtain,
- The problem that you meet,

- The exact process to reproduce the bug (indispensable as to make possible for the developers to understand what is going on).

For example, to indicate *My email client has a bug* is not a good bug report. Nothing can be done except giving you the answer *Well, that's too bad for you*.

On the contrary, writing "The email client Extra Mail 2.1 under Ubuntu Gutsy has a bug each time you try to pick the SSL option in the account parameters. The window closes and the program has to be launched again" is already more accurate. The developers can then try to

repeat the same operations on their computer and ask you some additional details.

### Keeping track of a bug

From the moment you reported a bug, it is important to keep track of it. In fact, the developers may ask you more details or particular information which could be needed to reveal the origin of the problem. Sometimes, you could even be asked to type in some obscure command lines in a terminal and to copy / paste the results of the manipulation. Do not worry, there is no need to understand what this means.

The developers will sometimes also propose a solution. You must then test the solution (after all, you had the difficulties) in order to confirm or not if the solution is valid.

### Participate with Launchpad

If you have a little spare time, do not hesitate to explore the Launchpad website. Doing so, you will discover that it is also there that the translations of Ubuntu are made.

So if you speak several languages, why not contribute in the software translations? It is a work on the long run be it has to be done. To contribute, nothing is easier: you just have to visit the address *translations.launchpad.net/ubuntu/*. 