

INTRODUCTION



You may be coming to Linux and KDE from another operating system, and you are probably familiar with browsing the Web, sending email, preparing documents, and doing other job-related tasks with your computer. Whether you're somewhat experienced or completely new to computers, this book was written for you.

In general, this book does not assume any computer experience on your part. We explain what Linux and KDE are (Chapter 1, "Learning about the Pieces"), and we even tell you how to use your mouse (with Linux there are three buttons). Of course the more experience you have, the more quickly you'll learn, because working with the KDE interface is very much like using other popular, windows-based interfaces—but with many important differences.

Although there are many commercial programs available for Linux, they are not the focus of this book. Instead, we focus on programs that are available for free and commonly included in most Linux distributions.

We don't cover every application that comes with KDE, focusing instead on those you are most likely to need in a typical office, or even home, environment. Once you become comfortable with the material, it should be easy for you to learn about any specific commercial or free programs you may wish to use.

Why This Book Is Different

Traditionally, Linux has been a favorite operating system of the more technically literate computer users. So, you'll find many Linux books that tell you Linux is like UNIX (it is), how to load Linux, why Linux is great, and how to do specific things with Linux (such as run a webserver). There are also many books that go into great detail about how to use specific software available for Linux (such as The GIMP graphics program), as well as books that compare Microsoft Windows' features to those of Linux.

This book is different in that we assume you don't want to install Linux, don't want to learn how to be a system administrator, and aren't concerned with doing some of the more complicated tasks. We assume you already have a working Linux system on your desk and need to use it to get your work done. That work probably involves email, the Web, working with documents, and performing general office tasks. Additionally, we assume that, in most cases, you will want to use the KDE graphical user interface (GUI) that comes with Linux to perform these tasks. (Of course, once you become proficient at all these tasks, you may want to learn what the command line is and how to do some tasks more efficiently from it.)

This book is also unique in that it is the product of a number of employees at our company, SSC. Contributors include Phil Hughes, our publisher; Carlie Fairchild, Rebecca Cassity, Clarica Grove, and James Gray from the marketing department; Richard Vernon, Jill Franklin, Don Marti, Heather Mead, and Joel Megal from editorial; our graphic artist, Lydia Kinata; our webmaster, Scott Blanchard; and one of our system administrators, Mike Orr.

SSC, as a publishing company, has been using Linux since 1993. Some of us have been working with UNIX since 1980 and have progressed from the UNIX command-line interface to doing some tasks with the GUI. Others came "off the street" with no UNIX or Linux experience, learned the GUI first, and then expanded their knowledge to include command-line tools.

As a result, we all remember what it's like to learn certain job-related tasks with Linux and to be exposed to the KDE desktop for the first time.

With the exception of magazine layout and some accounting tasks, all of our work is done on Linux. A lot of it is done using the KDE desktop and the utilities included with most Linux distributions. We have written this book to get you up and working on Linux and KDE quickly.

For the writing and testing of this book, we have used the Debian "Woody" and SuSE 7.3 and 8.0 distributions (see Chapter 1, "Learning about the Pieces," for information on distributions). Also, like Linux itself, many open-source programs are under constant development. For this reason, the version of a given program that you are using may be different from the version discussed here. The differences are normally in added features, however, and usually do not affect the core functions of the program. So if you follow the instructions you find in these pages, you shouldn't have any trouble learning to use the applications, even if the version seems a little different.

So welcome to Linux and the KDE desktop! With a little practice, we're confident that you'll soon be working proficiently and will come to appreciate the power, reliability, and even fun of the Linux operating system.