



## Free in Every Way

Most open-source programs are free as in no cost (“free beer!”) to install and use in any way you like. Under the FLOSS (Free/Libre Open-Source Software) model proposed by Richard Stallman, open-source software source code is also free (“free speech”) to study, change and redistribute.

This contrasts with closed-source or (“proprietary”) software, which is almost always controlled by the publisher and cannot be changed or redistributed in the same way, even after you have paid for it.

Increasingly, publishers are also using closed source to gather information on users with little or no disclosure. The recent update to Windows 10 is just such an example.

## Why Choose Open Source?

- **You are in charge.** You decide how to install and use your software on whatever device you want. It usually means that Windows, Apple, or Linux PCs will run it, and you don’t pay for multiple licenses to use it.
- **You can see everything it does.** When source code is freely available to everyone it can be studied, improved, and adapted to your specific needs. Nothing is hidden from you, the user.
- **Security is important.** For many people, using FLOSS products means there is much less likelihood that a program is spying on the user or reporting usage back to the publisher.

Privacy and security are major watchwords in the open-source community, and any issues are taken seriously and dealt with quickly.

- **It’s often faster to use.** Much commonly-used software suffers from “software bloat” and “feature creep”, with newer generations demanding more of both the hardware and the user. Most open-source solutions run faster or use fewer resources than the non-free versions, meaning you don’t need the latest and most expensive hardware to take advantage of free software.
- **There’s community support.** Many authors of open-source software respond quickly to bug reports and major support issues. The fact that people can examine the code used to build a program also means that other people can offer detailed support that is so often not available to users of proprietary software.

## Is There a Catch?

There’s no catch! Free, open-source software really is free, with no strings attached. There is free, open-source software available for almost anything you can think of, and new software is constantly being developed by hobbyists and professionals around the world. Cutting-edge features are also being added to many free software suites all the time.

For most personal, business or academic use, open-source products are equal or superior to their proprietary counterparts, and are the secure, ethical, and privacy-conscious choice.

For certain specialized professional uses it can be hard to find a truly comparable alternative to non-free/proprietary software tools. It’s okay to use the right tool for the right job, but understanding the tradeoffs can influence how you do business.

## What is Linux?

Linux is a free and open-source Unix-like operating system kernel first released by Linus Torvalds in 1991. It became popular with the adoption of the *GNU* (“*Gnu’s Not Unix*”) tools developed by the Free Software Foundation, led by Richard Stallman. Some people refer to the whole operating system package as *GNU/Linux* as a result.

Many complete versions (“distributions”) of GNU/Linux have been developed to take advantage of the powerful features and flexibility of the GNU/Linux core, each of which had a different philosophy on packaging and installing software to meet the diverse needs of a wide range of users in the home, office, and industry, all free of charge.

This incredible flexibility of Linux means that it currently sees use on billions of devices all around the world. The popular Android mobile phone operating system uses the Linux kernel.

Linux can also be found on desktop, laptop, and tablet computers, professional workstations, web servers, e-commerce sites, point-of-sale systems and cash registers, home automation and security systems, and many other everyday digital devices.