A NEW PLACE TO CALL HOME

Getting to Know the Desktop

Now Ubuntu is up and running, and you are ready and raring to go. If you are running Ubuntu from your hard disk, you will first see the login screen that will appear each and every time you boot up (Figure 3-1). There’s no need to keep the login screen waiting, so type your username, and press ENTER. After that, you will be prompted for your user password in the same screen, so type it, and press ENTER again. Within moments, you will be face to face with your desktop in Ubuntu.
Welcome to the GNOME Desktop

Ubuntu’s implementation of the GNOME desktop is shown in Figure 3-2, and as you can see, it isn’t all that different from what you might be used to in a Windows or Mac OS 9 environment, other than the fact that it has taskbars, or panels, at both the top and the bottom of the screen. There are also no desktop icons, except when running a live session from the Desktop CD, in which case you’ll see a launcher to run the installation wizard (labeled Install). All in all, it is a very uncluttered place to be, and despite its superficial similarities to other OS desktop environments, things in the GNOME are different enough to be interesting.

The main elements of the GNOME desktop are the panels at the top and bottom of the screen and the icons that appear upon those panels. The desktop itself, although empty at startup, does see its share of action, but I’ll come to that later. For now, I’ll focus on the two panels.

The Top Panel

Of the two GNOME Panels on your desktop, the top panel is basically where all the action is. As you can see, there are three menus and a few icons at the left end of the panel, and a number of odds and ends at the other end (Figure 3-3). So that you understand what each of the panel items does, I will now briefly describe each of them, moving from left to right, as seems to be the fashion these days.
The Left End

At the far left of the top panel, you will find a set of three menus. These provide access to most of what your system has to offer in terms of applications, locations, and utilities. These include:

- **Applications menu**  The access point to the majority of your applications, a software manager, and some system tools.
- **Places menu**  Your system navigator, from which you can access your home folder, browse your computer’s filesystem and connected networks, and search for files on your hard disk.
- **System menu**  The access point for your system preferences, software installer, and administration tools. This is also the place to go when you want to shut down or log out of your system.
Immediately to the right of the three menus are a set of three launchers. When these icons are clicked, they launch the following applications:

- **Firefox**  Your web browser
- **Evolution Mail**  The very popular Linux email program, scheduler, and task manager
- **Help**  Access to the Ubuntu help files installed on your hard disk

**The Right End**

At the right side of the top panel are a series of icons that perform a variety of functions. Some of these are indicators, while some are applets that allow you to perform certain functions. These consist of:

- **Fast User Switch Applet**  Shows you the name of the current user and allows you to quickly switch to other user accounts you have set up on your machine.
- **Update Notification Tool**  Tells you when there are system or application updates and allows you to download and install the updates. Only appears when updates are available.
- **Bluetooth Manager**  As the name implies. Only appears on machines with Bluetooth capabilities.
- **Network Manager Applet**  Lets you see your network status and configure your network devices. When used with a wireless network connection, indicates the wireless signal’s strength and allows you to switch between wireless networks easily.
- **Volume Control**  A volume controller. Duh.
- **Calendar/Clock**  Date and time, as always, but now with weather information and other cool features.
- **Quit**  Brings you to the logout screen, from which you can log out, shut down, restart, or switch users.

**The Bottom Panel**

The bottom panel, as you can see in Figure 3-4, is a much simpler affair, containing only the four items I will now briefly describe.

- **Show Desktop**  A button that minimizes all open windows and allows you to see your desktop when it is obscured from view.
- **Window List**  A list of windows or applications you have open, which is very similar to what happens in the Windows taskbar.
Workspace Switcher  An application that allows you to switch between virtual desktops. (I’ll talk about this more in “Virtual Desktops” on page 45.)

Trash  There is nothing mysterious about Trash . . . other than its rather Mac OS X–ish location on the panel.

Figure 3-4: The bottom GNOME Panel

Project 3A: Customizing the GNOME Panel

The GNOME Panel is not a static thing. You can add launchers (respectively known as program shortcuts or aliases to Windows and Mac users), utilities, and even amusements to make it do almost anything you want it to—within limits, of course. In the various stages of this project, you will customize your panel to get some hands-on experience working with it and to make things more convenient for you as you make your way through the rest of this book. You are, of course, free to change any of the customizations I ask you to make (though you won’t have a say in the matter if you’re working in a live session from the desktop CD, as you won’t be able to save your settings).

Each of the following subprojects is very simple. Most are only three-step, point-and-click procedures that you should be able to handle without any difficulty.

3A-1: Adding Utility Buttons to the Panel

The GNOME Panel allows you to add a number of utility applications, known as applets. Each of these has some specific function, such as tracking your stocks, telling you the weather, or performing some particular system-related function. To start out, let’s add a clearly useful utility to the top panel: the Force Quit button. The Force Quit button lets you quickly and easily deal with non-responding windows.

Yes, it does happen on occasion: A window suddenly refuses to do anything. Regardless of what you want it to do or what it is supposed to be doing, it just sits there as if it is on strike (maybe it is). With just one click of the Force Quit button, your cursor becomes a powerful surgical instrument that will kill the window you click. You definitely don’t want to be without this button, so here’s how to add it to the panel:

1. Right-click any open space on the top panel.
2. From the popup menu, select Add to Panel, after which the Add to Panel window will appear.
3. In that window, click **Force Quit** once to highlight it, as I’ve done in Figure 3-5. Click the **Add** button, and then click **Close** to finish the job.

![Add to Panel window](image)

**Figure 3-5: Adding launchers and utility applets to the GNOME Panel**

To reinforce what you’ve just learned how to do, let’s add another utility to the panel: the Run Application panel applet. Once you start installing applications in Ubuntu, you will find that some of those applications do not automatically install program launchers in your Applications menu. This means that you have to open a Terminal window and type a command every time you want to run such programs, which can get old rather fast. The Run Application panel applet is one way around this problem.

To add the Run Application applet to the panel, just follow the same steps you used in adding the Force Quit button; but this time in step 3, highlight **Run Application** in the Add Launcher window instead of Force Quit.

**NOTE**

If you later decide not to keep the Run Application panel applet on the panel, or if you just prefer keyboard shortcuts to pointing and clicking, it is worth noting that you can also bring up the applet by pressing **ALT-F2**.

**3A-2: Adding Amusing Applets to the Panel**

The GNOME Panel not only allows you to add very functional utilities, but it allows you to add quite seemingly useless amusements as well. In this part of the project, we will be adding two such amusements: Eyes and a little fish called Wanda.
At first glance, Wanda does little more than bat her tail around and spurt out a bubble or two. However, if you click on her, a window pops up in which Wanda will spew out quotes and offbeat one-liners.

To get a glimpse of Wanda in action, limited though that action may be, the steps are essentially the same as those in Project 3A-1 on page 35, but I’ll run through them one more time:

1. Right-click any open space on the top panel.
2. From the popup menu, select Add to Panel, after which the Add to Panel window will appear.
3. In that window, click Fish once to highlight it, click the Add button, and then click Close.

Wanda will now appear on your panel, so go ahead and give her a click to see what she has to say.

Now you can add Eyes, which is a pair of eyes that follows your mouse cursor around as it moves about your desktop. Follow the same procedure, but click Eyes instead of Fish in step 3.

**3A-3: Adding a Program Launcher to the Panel**

Now let’s move on to something a bit more practical—adding program launchers to the panel. While it is very easy to run an application by navigating through the Applications menu, there are no doubt some applications that you will be using frequently enough to want easy access to them. OpenOffice.org Word Processor (commonly known as Writer) is probably one of those.

**Method 1**

There are a number of different ways to add a launcher to the panel, but let’s start with the most conventional. To add a panel launcher for OpenOffice.org Writer, follow these steps:

1. Right-click any open space within the top panel.
2. Select Add to Panel in the popup menu to bring up the Add to Panel window.
3. In that window, select Application Launcher, and click the Forward button that then appears.
4. A new screen will then appear, showing the contents of the Application menu (Figure 3-6). Click the small arrow next to Office to expand that menu, and then scroll down and click OpenOffice.org Word Processor to highlight it.
5. Click the Add button, and then click Close to complete the process.
Method 2

There is another way to add program launchers to the panel, and it is actually a tad quicker. As an example, we’ll add a launcher for the OpenOffice.org spreadsheet program, Calc. Here are the steps:

1. Go to the Applications menu, and navigate your way to and right-click **Office → OpenOffice.org Spreadsheet**.

2. In the popup menu that then appears, select (that’s the usual ol’ left-click this time) **Add this launcher to panel** (Figure 3-7). The Spreadsheet launcher will then appear in the panel.
Method 3

Now that you’ve learned two ways to add application launchers to the panel, I might as well let you in on a third, even easier method. Just open a menu, select the item you want to add to the panel, and then drag it there. Well, it can’t get much easier than that, eh?

3A-4: Changing Panel Launcher Icons

You may feel that your two new program launchers are somewhat plain, and therefore, it is rather difficult to distinguish one from the other. Fortunately, you can change the icon for any launcher quite easily. To learn how to do it, let’s address our immediate concerns with the two OpenOffice.org launchers. Here’s what we need to do:

1. Right-click the first program launcher you added (the word processor), and select Properties from the popup menu.
2. In the Launcher Properties window, click the OpenOffice.org Writer icon, which will bring up a Browse icons window.
3. In that window, click the Browse button to bring up the Browse window.
4. At the top of that window, click the icons button. In the right pane, double-click the hicolor folder, double-click the 48x48 folder within the hicolor folder, and then select the apps folder within the 48x48 folder by clicking it once.
5. When you’ve finished all that folder clicking, click the Open button.
6. You will be back at the Browse icons window, which now displays a different set of icons than you started with. Scroll down in that window until you find openofficeorg24-writer.png, and then click it once (Figure 3-8).

Figure 3-8: Selecting a new panel launcher icon
7. Click the **OK** button in that window, which will close it.
8. You will then be back at the Launcher Properties window, which should now look like that in Figure 3-9. If so, click **Close**.

![Figure 3-9: A Launcher Properties window](image)

Once you have completed the transformation, follow essentially the same steps for the word processor launcher, but this time around you should select `openofficeorg24-calc.png` as the icon in step 3.

### 3A-5: Adding a Drawer to the Panel

One of the features I quite like about the GNOME Panel is the drawer. The *drawer* is a little applet that saves on panel space by letting you add drop-down panels, in which you can place launchers that you do not have room to place elsewhere. These drawers are also handy locations to place launchers for applications that you must normally run by typing a command in a Terminal window or via the Launch Application window, such as those you compile yourself from source code or that are run via scripts. You’ll learn how to do this in Chapter 9. Of course, you can put anything you want in a drawer, including frequently used files or even whole menus.

Adding a drawer to your panel is very easy, and is basically the same procedure that you used to add the Force Kill button to the panel. Here is all you need to do:

1. Right-click any open space on the top panel.
2. From the popup menu, select **Add to Panel**, after which the Add to Panel window will appear.
3. In that window, click **Drawer** once to highlight it, and then click the **Add** button. Close the window by, quite logically, clicking **Close**.

### 3A-6: Adding Program Launchers to the Drawer

The drawer you’ve just added is, of course, empty at this stage, so let’s put it to good use by adding launchers for three useful, yet less glamorous, system utilities. These are System Monitor, which allows you to view your computer’s running applications and processes, memory and CPU usage, and storage
device usage; Terminal, in which you can type and execute commands (slightly geeky, I admit, but very useful); and Synaptic Package Manager, which you can use to download and install applications.

Here’s what you need to do:

1. Right-click the **drawer** applet in the panel, and select **Add to Drawer** in the popup menu.
2. In the Add to Drawer window that then appears (and looks and behaves exactly the same as the Add to Panel window), select **Application Launcher**, and then click the **Forward** button that appears.
3. In the next screen, click the small arrow next to **Accessories**, scroll down and click **Terminal** to select it, and then click the **Add** button. The Terminal launcher will now be loaded into the drawer.
4. Next, scroll way down and click the small arrow next to **Administration**.
5. Scroll down within that category until you find **Synaptic Package Manager**, click it to select, and then click **Add**.
6. Finally, add a launcher for the System Monitor by scrolling up to the **System Tools** category, clicking **System Monitor**, and then clicking **Add**. You can now close the Add to Drawer window.

The three launchers should now be loaded in the drawer, so click the drawer to sneak a peek. Yours should look the same as mine in Figure 3-10.

![Figure 3-10: Launchers in a GNOME Panel drawer](image)

**3A-7: Adding the Entire Contents of a Menu to the Panel**

If you find that you use the applications in a particular submenu of your Applications, Places, or System menus a lot, you can opt to add the entire menu to the panel as either a menu or as a drawer in a manner similar to the one you used in Project 3A-5’s “Method 2” on page 38. To learn how to do this, let’s add the Games submenu to the panel as a menu, and the Sound & Video submenu as a drawer. Here is what you need to do:

1. Add the Games menu to the panel by going to **Applications ➤ Games** and then right-clicking any of the launchers within that submenu.
2. In the popup menu that appears, select **Entire menu ➤ Add this as menu to panel**.
3. Add the Sound & Video submenu to the panel as a drawer by going to Applications → Sound & Video and then right-clicking any of the launchers you find there.

4. In the popup menu, select Entire menu → Add this as drawer to panel.

You should now have two new launchers on your panel with icons matching those found in the Applications menu next to the relevant items. Click each of these new panel entries to see how they work.

3A-8: Moving Things Around on the Panel

Well, now we’ve added all we are going to be adding to the panel. It may seem a little messy up there right now, so let’s do a bit of housekeeping by moving things around. We will try to group things together somewhat thematically so as to make them easier to deal with.

Fortunately, you can move panel launchers quite easily by right-clicking the launcher in question, selecting Move from the popup menu, and then dragging the launcher to the spot you want to place it. Once the launcher is where you want it to be, click the launcher once, and it will stay there.

To get some practice with this moving business, let’s move the launchers, menus, and drawers you added by placing them in the following order, from left to right: Applications, Places, System, Firefox, Mail, Help, OpenOffice.org Writer, OpenOffice.org Calc, Sound & Video, Games, Drawer. Place the remaining launchers at the right end of the panel, to the left of the Fast User Switch Applet, in the following left-to-right order: Eyes, Wanda, Force Quit. Finally, place the Run Application panel applet by itself, midway between the two clusters of launchers. When you’ve made all your changes, your panel should look pretty much like mine in Figure 3-11.

![Figure 3-11: The GNOME Panel with the new launchers](image)

More Panel Fun

In addition to the basic customization you did in Project 3A on page 35, you can do a lot more to change the look and feel of your panel. Of course, you can remove any of your launchers, drawers, or menus by right-clicking the item in question and then selecting Remove From Panel in the popup menu, but there are still more options. Most of these are available by right-clicking any open space in the panel and then selecting Properties, which will bring up the Panel Properties window.
From this window you can change the position of the panel, alter its size, change its color, or make it transparent—very cool. You can also set the panel so that it will automatically disappear when you are not using it and have it reappear when you bring your mouse cursor into the area where the panel normally resides. Don’t feel afraid to play around and give things a try—that’s half the fun!

**Project 3B: Manipulating Menus**

Now that you have learned about some of the cool and useful things you can do with your panel, let’s now move on to the topic of menus. A very nice feature of GNOME is that it allows you to edit its menus. You can add launchers, remove items, move items, and even change the icons that appear within the menus. All in all, you have a lot of control over things, but for this project, we’ll limit our work to two of these areas: changing icons and moving menu items.

**3B-1: Changing Icons Within Menus**

As you no doubt recall, one of the problems with the OpenOffice.org Writer and Calc launchers we added to the panel was that they shared rather similar icons. If you go to Applications ▶ Office, you will see that the icons for the various OpenOffice.org modules, although not the same, are also a bit similar. To remedy this state of affairs, we will change these icons to the same set we used for the two panel launchers in Project 3A-4. In this case, just follow these steps:

1. Right-click the Applications menu and select Edit Menus, or go to the System menu and select Preferences ▶ Main Menu.
2. In the menu editor window that then appears, click Office in the left pane. The contents of that menu will then appear in the right pane.
3. In the right pane of the window, right-click OpenOffice.org Word Processor, and then select Properties in the popup menu. A Launcher Properties window will then appear.
4. In that window, click the Icon button. Using the method described in Project 3A-4 on page 39, navigate to /usr/share/icons/hicolor/48x48 in the Browse icons window that then appears.
5. Select the apps folder by clicking it once. You can make it easier to add icons for the other OpenOffice.org modules by creating a link to the apps folder; just drag it to the lower portion of the left pane in the same window. Your window should then look like mine in Figure 3-12. Assuming it does, from now on you will be able to navigate directly to this folder by clicking that icon in the left pane.
6. Click the **Open** button, which will return you to the Browse icons window.

7. In that window, scroll down to and click `openofficeorg24-writer.png`, and then click **OK**.

8. The new icon should now appear in the Launcher Properties window, though there is sometimes a slight delay. When it does appear, click **Close**, and you will be able to see the change in the menu editor window.

9. Repeat the process for each of the other OpenOffice.org icons, being sure to select the appropriate icons for each of the OpenOffice.org modules (`openofficeorg24-impress` for the Presentation module, for example). Once you’re done, leave the menu editor window open to continue work on Project 3B-2.

### 3B-2: Changing the Order of Icons Within Menus

While we still have everything open to the Office menu, let’s deal with what I consider to be another problem: the order of the items in the menu. It just doesn’t make sense to me to have what is arguably the most commonly used office application, your word processor, way down there at the bottom of the menu.

Remedying this situation is easy. Just click the **OpenOffice.org Word Processor** icon in the right pane of the menu editor window. Then click the
Move Up button on the right side of the window as many times as necessary until the Word Processor icon is right there at the top of the list.

While we’re being logical and all, why not make things even better by getting the Evolution launcher out of the Office menu, too. After all, there’s already a launcher in the Internet menu, which seems a far more natural place for it to be. If you agree and want to hide this instance of Evolution, just uncheck the box next to its name. The name of that entry should then switch to italic typeface, indicating that the item in question will not be visible in the actual drop-down menu. Once you’re done, your menu editor window should look something like mine in Figure 3-13. If all seems fine to you, click Close and then go to Applications ➔ Office to check out the results.

Virtual Desktops

It is now time to discuss a rather convenient feature of Linux: virtual desktops. While the virtual desktop feature has only recently made its way into Mac OS X and Windows, it has been a Linux feature for years (yes, it started here, folks). But rather than babble on about what this virtual desktop business is and what it can do for you, it is probably best to have you learn about it by giving you some hands-on experience.

In your GNOME Panel, click the Wanda, OpenOffice.org Writer, and Firefox launchers. You will then have three windows open in your present desktop, or workspace. Now look at the Workspace Switcher to the right of...
the bottom panel. There should be two boxes, with the one on the left (your present workspace) in brown. If you click the other, grayed-out box, all your open windows will suddenly disappear.

Actually, nothing has really disappeared—you are just viewing a new desktop. All your other windows are still open and running in the previous desktop. In this second desktop you can open something else: Go to the Applications menu, and select Games ➔ AisleRiot Solitaire. The AisleRiot Solitaire card game will soon appear.

You now have windows open in two different desktops, and you can switch back and forth between them. To do so, just go to the Workspace Switcher in your panel and click the first grayed box, which will take you to your original desktop. Once you’ve done that, the box for the workspace you were just in will gray, and you can then click that one to go back to your game desktop.

As you can imagine, this feature has some potential benefits for you, in addition to helping you avoid clutter. Just imagine that you are at work typing some long document in OpenOffice.org Writer. Eventually, you get tired and decide to goof off a bit by playing a game, such as Mines, for a while. To do this, you switch to another desktop where you open and play the game. A bit later, when you notice your boss making the rounds of the office, you simply switch back to the first desktop so that you look busy when he walks by and asks, “Keeping yourself busy, Boaz?”

Phew!

By the way, you can also switch between virtual desktops by simultaneously pressing and holding CTRL-ALT and then pressing your left and right cursor keys to move to your targeted desktop.

**Moving Running Applications Between Virtual Desktops**

So what happens if, let’s say, you are running OpenOffice.org Writer in one workspace and the GIMP in another, but suddenly think that it would be handy to have them both running in the same workspace? Do you quit the GIMP and start it up again in the other desktop? Fortunately, things are much simpler than that, and there are actually two ways to get the job done.

The first of these ways is to right-click the title bar of the window you want to move, and then select Move to Workspace Left or Move to Workspace Right. If you’ve changed the Workspace Switcher preferences so that you have four or more workspaces (right-click the switcher, and select Preferences), you’ll be able to select Move to Another Workspace and then select the workspace you want to move the window to by number: Workspace 1, Workspace 2, and so on.

If you prefer keeping your hands more on your keyboard than on your mouse, you can also move a window from workspace to workspace by using hotkeys. With the window you want to move active (on top of the pile, so to speak), press and hold SHIFT-CTRL-ALT, and then use the left and right cursor keys to move the window to the desired desktop.
Wanda Revisited—GNOME Easter Eggs

Well, now that we’ve finished with our work in this chapter, it’s time to goof around a bit by revisiting our precocious piscean pal, Wanda. Knowing what you now do about Wanda the Fish, you might find it odd for me to start talking about her again, but Wanda has a few more tricks beneath her fins. In fact, she is a good means by which to introduce two of GNOME’s most famous Easter eggs. Easter eggs, in case you don’t know, are hidden snippets of code that programmers seem to love to sneak into their programs. They are usually pretty useless things, but they can be found in all operating systems, numerous applications, and even on DVDs (to find out more about those, go to www.dvdeasterregs.com).

A good example of an Easter egg is my first encounter with one on my first Mac, an ancient Mac SE with a whopping 2MB of RAM. On that machine, you could bring up an image (or was it a slideshow?) of the Mac SE development team by pressing the seldom used debug key on the side of the machine and then typing G 41D89A. Pretty cool, I guess, but I would never ever have stumbled upon it had I not read about it in some magazine.

As my example shows, accessing these Easter eggs usually requires some unusual maneuvers, ones that you would never perform in the normal course of things. To see a Wanda-related Easter egg in action, click the Run Application button you just added to the panel, type gegls from outer space in the Command box, and then click Run. You will then see an odd little game of the Space Invaders genre, shown in Figure 3-14, in which Wanda defends our beloved planet from . . . well, gegls, I guess.

![Figure 3-14: One of GNOME’s Wanda-related Easter eggs](image)
To try out the other Wanda Easter egg, open the Run Application panel applet again, but this time type **free the fish**, and then click **Run**. Wanda will now appear swimming around your desktop. If you then click directly on her, she will swim away and out of the picture . . . but she’ll be back.

To put an end to Wanda’s comings and goings, you will need to restart the GNOME Panel. There several rather inelegant ways of going about this, but for now we’ll do it by opening the Run Application panel applet again, typing **killall gnome-panel**, and then clicking **Run**. Your panels will disappear for a second or two but will shortly reappear. Wanda, however, will be gone.

**Shutting Down**

Now that you know your desktop environment so well, you may feel like calling it a day and shutting down your machine. To do so, just go to the **System** menu and select **Quit**, or click the **Quit** button at the far-right corner of the top Panel. Your screen will darken, and then a small window (Figure 3-15) will appear with seven choices to choose from: Log Out, Lock Screen, Switch User, Suspend, Hibernate, Restart, and Shut Down (Hibernate is not an option when running a live session from the Desktop CD). Click **Shut Down**, and the shutdown process will begin. If, however, nothing seems to happen within a few seconds of clicking **OK**, press **CTRL-ALT-BACKSPACE** in unison, which will bring you to the login screen you saw at the beginning of the chapter (Figure 3-1). Once there, click **Shut Down** at the bottom of the screen. This will bring up a small window asking you if you are sure you want to shut down. Just click **OK**, and shutdown will commence.

![Figure 3-15: GNOME’s logout window](image)

The actual shutdown will take a few seconds as the system closes its various services. When it is all done, the system should power down your computer as well, in which case you are done. On a few machines, however, the system cannot power down your machine. You will know if this is so in your case because all screen activity will come to an end. If you get to that point and nothing else happens for 15 seconds or so, then just power down the machine manually by pressing the power button. It is completely safe to do so at that point.