

THE LINUX MIGRATION HANDBOOK

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO
SWITCHING FROM
WINDOWS OR macOS TO **LINUX**



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TERMINAL



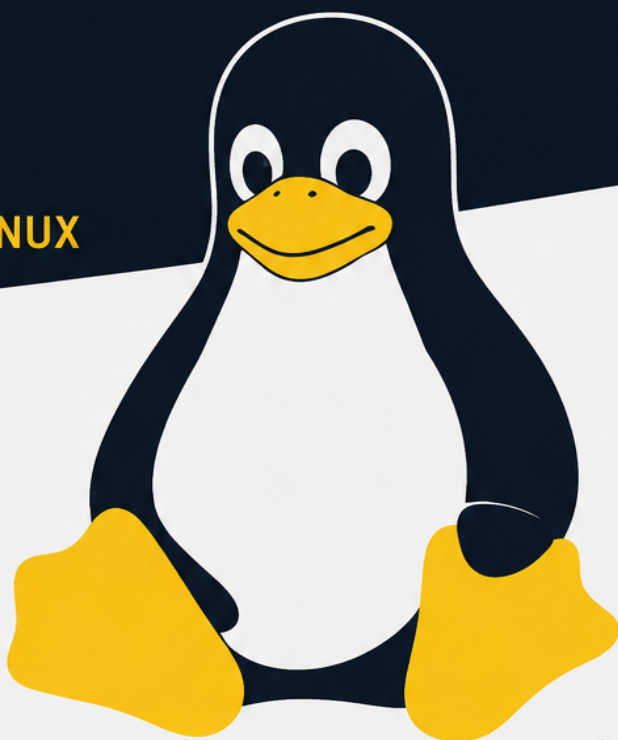
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M I C H A E L J A Y D E N

The Linux Migration Handbook

A Complete Guide to Switching from Windows or macOS to Linux

Steve T. Publications

This book is available at <https://leanpub.com/thelinuxmigrationhandbook>

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A Complete Guide to Switching from Windows or macOS to Linux

About this book: Linux is no longer a niche operating system reserved for developers and hobbyists. In 2025, Linux desktop usage crossed the 5 percent threshold in the United States for the first time, and worldwide adoption has grown by over 70 percent since 2022. Whether you are a student tired of software costs, a professional seeking greater control over your computing environment, a developer wanting the best tools at your fingertips, or simply someone curious about open source, this book will guide you through every aspect of making the switch. From understanding why Linux matters to choosing the right distribution, installing it alongside or instead of your current operating system, finding alternatives to the applications you depend on, and mastering the terminal and system administration skills that make Linux truly powerful, this handbook covers the complete migration journey. By the end, you will not only be a confident Linux user but also understand the philosophy, history, and community that make Linux one of the most important technological achievements of our time.

Introduction: The Computer That Is Actually Yours

Something unusual is happening on computers around the world. Quietly, without a headline launch event or a billion-dollar marketing campaign, millions of people are making a decision that changes their relationship with technology forever: they are switching to Linux.

You might be reading this book because your Windows 10 support ended in October 2025 and you are facing an expensive hardware upgrade just to run Windows 11. You might be a macOS user frustrated by Apple's increasingly restrictive ecosystem, where you cannot install software from outside the App Store, where the Touch Bar disappeared and came back again, and where every new feature seems designed to lock you deeper into Apple services. Or perhaps you are a developer who has heard that Linux is the natural habitat for coding, a student tired of paying for software licenses, a privacy-conscious user worried about telemetry, or simply someone curious about the operating system that powers the Internet, the cloud, and most of the world's supercomputers.

Whatever brought you here, you have come to the right place. This book is designed to take you from wherever you are now, whether that is complete unfamiliarity with Linux or some experience using it on a server, to becoming a confident, capable Linux user who understands not just how to operate the system but why it works the way it does.

What You Will Learn

This book covers the full migration journey, organized into fifteen chapters that build on each other progressively:

Chapters 1 through 3 establish the foundation. You will understand why Linux adoption is accelerating, what you gain and lose by switching, the history and philosophy behind the operating system, and how Linux compares to Windows and macOS across performance, security, privacy, and cost.

Chapters 4 through 6 cover the practical decisions you need to make before installing. You will learn how distributions work, which one is right for your specific needs, how to plan a migration that minimizes disruption, how to back up your data properly, and the different installation methods available, from fresh installs to dual booting and virtual machines.

Chapters 7 through 10 get you comfortable with the day-to-day experience of Linux. You will explore desktop environments, learn package management, master essential terminal commands, understand the file system hierarchy, and gain the system administration knowledge that separates Linux users from Linux operators.

Chapters 11 through 13 address specialized needs: security hardening, privacy tools, performance optimization, office productivity, creative work, gaming with Steam and Proton, development environments, and AI and machine learning workflows.

Chapters 14 and 15 bring everything together with troubleshooting guides, deep customization techniques, automation strategies, and advice for staying the course as a long-term Linux user.

Who This Book Is For

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How to Use This Book

Read this book from beginning to end if you are a complete beginner. Each chapter builds on the previous one, and skipping ahead may leave gaps in your understanding. If you already have some Linux experience, use the chapter structure as a roadmap and jump to the sections most relevant to your needs.

Throughout the book, you will find practical examples, comparison tables, checklists, and troubleshooting guides. Commands are shown in monospace text and can be copied directly into your terminal. Where a concept differs significantly between distributions, the variations are noted explicitly.

A Note on Bias

Linux has passionate advocates who will tell you it is perfect in every way, and equally passionate critics who will tell you it is useless for everyday computing. Both groups are wrong. Linux is a tool, and like any tool, its value depends on how well it fits your specific needs. This book presents Linux honestly, acknowledging both its strengths and its limitations. There are situations where Windows or macOS remains the better choice, and those situations are discussed openly. The goal is not to convert you through rhetoric but to equip you with the knowledge to make your own informed decision.

Let us begin.

Chapter 1: Why Switch to Linux?

The Growing Case for Linux

For decades, “the year of the Linux desktop” was a running joke in technology circles. Every year, someone would predict that Linux would finally break through to mainstream adoption, and every year it did not. But something has changed fundamentally since 2023, and the data tells an unambiguous story.

According to StatCounter’s web traffic analysis, Linux desktop usage in the United States reached 5.03 percent of the operating system market in June 2025, crossing the 5 percent threshold for the first time in history [1]. Worldwide usage sat at approximately 4.1 percent during the same period, representing a growth trajectory that has seen Linux’s desktop share increase from 2.76 percent in July 2022 to over 4.7 percent globally by the end of 2025 [2]. In India, Linux adoption reached an impressive 16.21 percent as of mid-2024 [3].

The Linux operating system market, valued at \$21.97 billion in 2024, is projected to grow to \$99.69 billion by 2032 at a compound annual growth rate of 20.9 percent [4]. Beyond desktops, Linux already dominates other computing spheres: it powers 44.8 percent of all server operating systems, runs 59.2 percent of websites with identifiable operating systems, and controls 100 percent of the world’s top 500 supercomputers [5].

Several converging factors explain this acceleration. The end of Windows 10 support on October 14, 2025, forced millions of users to confront an uncomfortable reality: upgrading to Windows 11 requires relatively new hardware with TPM 2.0 support and specific CPU generations, effectively rendering billions of dollars worth of perfectly functional computers as e-waste [6]. Meanwhile, Apple’s ecosystem has grown increasingly restrictive, with mandatory iCloud integration, App Store requirements on macOS, and a pricing strategy that makes Mac computers among the most expensive personal computers per unit of performance [7].

Perhaps most significantly, Linux itself has matured dramatically. The desktop environments available today bear little resemblance to the clunky in-

terfaces of a decade ago. Gaming support through Valve's Proton compatibility layer has brought thousands of Windows games to Linux [8]. Development tools run natively and often better on Linux than on any other platform. And for everyday tasks, the software ecosystem is richer and more accessible than ever.

What You Gain and What You Lose

Switching operating systems is a significant decision, and it is important to understand both sides of the trade-off honestly.

What you gain:

- **Control over your system.** Linux gives you complete visibility into what your computer is doing. Every process, every network connection, every file access can be monitored and controlled. You decide what software runs, when updates happen, and how your data is handled.
- **Privacy by design.** Linux desktop distributions do not include telemetry by default. Your browsing habits, search queries, and usage patterns are not collected, sold, or used to build advertising profiles. What happens on your computer stays on your computer.
- **Security architecture.** Linux uses a permission model where normal users cannot modify system files without explicit authorization. Malware targeting Linux desktops is extremely rare compared to Windows. In 2024, Windows accounted for 93 percent of all malware infections globally, while Linux represented less than 2 percent [9].
- **Performance on older hardware.** A typical Linux desktop installation uses significantly fewer system resources than Windows 11 or macOS. A computer with 4 GB of RAM and a dual-core processor from 2015 can run modern Linux distributions smoothly, extending the useful life of aging hardware by years.
- **Free software, forever.** The operating system itself costs nothing. Most applications available for Linux are free and open source. There are no subscription fees, no activation keys, and no feature tiers that require payment.
- **Customization without limits.** From the desktop appearance to the kernel parameters, every aspect of Linux can be modified. If you do not like how something works, you can change it or replace it entirely.

- **A vibrant community.** Linux has one of the most active and helpful technology communities in existence. When you encounter a problem, chances are someone has already solved it and documented the solution on a forum, wiki, or mailing list.

What you lose:

- **Microsoft Office native support.** There is no native Microsoft Office for Linux. You can use Microsoft 365 in a web browser, run Office through compatibility layers like Wine or CrossOver, or use alternatives like LibreOffice and ONLYOFFICE. For most users, the alternatives are sufficient. For users who depend on advanced Excel features or PowerPoint animations, this remains a genuine limitation.
- **Adobe Creative Cloud.** Photoshop, Premiere Pro, Illustrator, and other Adobe applications do not run natively on Linux. Alternatives exist: GIMP for photo editing, Krita for digital painting, DaVinci Resolve for video editing, Inkscape for vector graphics. These tools are powerful and free, but they have different interfaces and workflows that require relearning.
- **Some Windows-only professional software.** Certain engineering, CAD, accounting, and industry-specific applications are Windows-only. Compatibility layers can sometimes bridge this gap, but not always.
- **Gaming convenience.** While Proton has made enormous strides in bringing Windows games to Linux, some titles with aggressive anti-cheat systems still do not work. You will occasionally encounter a game that runs perfectly on Windows but not on Linux.
- **Familiarity.** Your muscle memory, your keyboard shortcuts, your mental model of how the file system works, all of it needs to be rebuilt. This is the single biggest hurdle for new users, and it is entirely temporary. Most people adapt within a few weeks.

Who Should Make the Switch (and Who Should Not)

Linux is not universally the right choice, and being honest about who benefits most from switching will save you time and frustration.

You should strongly consider switching if:

- You are a developer, programmer, or IT professional. Linux is the native environment for most development tools, and many technologies (Docker, Kubernetes, cloud infrastructure) are fundamentally Linux-based.
- You value privacy and want minimal telemetry on your personal computer.
- You have older hardware that struggles with Windows 11 or cannot run it at all.
- You are a student or educator looking to eliminate software costs.
- You enjoy understanding how your technology works and want the ability to customize every aspect of your computing environment.
- You are frustrated by forced updates, bloatware, ads in the start menu, or mandatory account requirements in Windows 11.
- You work primarily with web-based tools and do not depend on specific desktop applications.

You should think carefully before switching if:

- Your profession requires Microsoft Office with advanced features (complex macros, VBA scripts, enterprise add-ins).
- You are a professional video editor or graphic designer who depends on Adobe Creative Cloud.
- You play competitive multiplayer games with kernel-level anti-cheat systems that do not support Linux.
- You use specialized industry software (certain CAD programs, medical software, financial trading platforms) that is Windows-only.
- You have very limited time to learn a new system and cannot afford even a brief productivity dip during the transition.

You can probably switch with minimal disruption if:

- Your primary activities are web browsing, email, document editing, video streaming, and communication. Linux handles all of these excellently.
- You use Microsoft Office but only for basic documents, spreadsheets, and presentations. LibreOffice or ONLYOFFICE will cover your needs.
- You game primarily on Steam. Proton compatibility covers the vast majority of the Steam library.
- You are willing to spend a weekend learning the basics and a few weeks getting comfortable.

Real Stories: People Who Made the Leap

Understanding why real people and organizations switched to Linux provides context that statistics alone cannot convey. The following accounts are drawn from documented migrations, published interviews, and community-reported experiences.

The French Gendarmerie: 100,000 workstations migrated. Perhaps the largest government Linux desktop migration in history, France's National Gendarmerie began replacing Windows XP with a custom Ubuntu distribution called "GendBuntu" in 2008. By June 2024, GendBuntu ran on 103,164 workstations, representing 97 percent of the force's computing estate. The migration saved approximately two million euros per year in licensing costs and reduced total cost of ownership significantly. As Pascal Danek, who led the migration team, noted: "The goal was never specifically to migrate away from Windows, or to Linux. The goal was to gain greater independence and flexibility than proprietary software could offer." The project remains operational more than 17 years after its inception, demonstrating that large-scale Linux migrations can be sustainable long-term investments [66, 67].

Munich's LiMux: 15,000 city government PCs. In 2003, Munich's city council voted to migrate 15,000 government desktops from Windows NT 4.0 to an Ubuntu-based system called LiMux. The project was completed in 2013, with all workstations running Linux and LibreOffice. Frank Schreiner, the IT director who oversaw the migration, reported that the city achieved its financial goals: "We have the exact same parameters for staying with Windows as with the migration to the Linux platform, and the Linux option came out ahead." The project faced political challenges, including a 2017 vote to consider returning to Windows, but ultimately Munich reversed course again in 2020, committing to deeper open-source adoption [68, 69].

Individual developers: documented experiences. Opensource.com published a collection of 17 firsthand migration stories in 2021, capturing the diverse motivations of real users. One contributor who switched from Windows to Fedora noted: "I started with Fedora with GNOME. Later I switched to KDE because I liked the look of it. Then when KDE4 broke things I depended on, I tried out Ubuntu." Another user who migrated from Windows to Linux cited malware fatigue as the primary motivator: "I got tired of malware, forced upgrades, limited customizing and Microsoft's hatred of Open Source." These accounts, drawn from the broader community, illustrate recurring themes:

frustration with proprietary restrictions, desire for control, and eventual satisfaction after the initial learning period [70].

The Steam Deck effect: gamers discovering Linux. Valve's Steam Deck, released in February 2022, introduced millions of gamers to Linux without them necessarily realizing it. SteamOS, the handheld's operating system, is based on Arch Linux. By November 2025, Linux reached 3.20 percent of Steam's user base, an all-time high driven largely by Steam Deck owners who then installed SteamOS on their desktop machines. Many users report that after experiencing Linux gaming through the Steam Deck, they found desktop Linux surprisingly capable and chose to migrate their primary workstations [71, 72].

These stories illustrate a common pattern: the initial discomfort of switching is real but temporary, and the long-term benefits often exceed expectations. The key is realistic planning, choosing the right distribution, and giving yourself time to adapt without pressure.

Chapter 1 FAQ

Q: Is Linux really free? A: The operating system itself costs nothing to download and install. Most applications available for Linux are also free and open source. However, some commercial software (like DaVinci Resolve Studio or CrossOver) has paid versions, and you will still need to pay for hardware, internet, and electricity.

Q: Will I lose all my files if I switch to Linux? A: No. If you install Linux alongside Windows (dual boot), your existing files remain untouched. If you replace Windows entirely, you should back up your data first, then restore it after installation. Linux can read and write Windows NTFS partitions, so accessing your old files is straightforward.

Q: Do I need to know how to code to use Linux? A: No. Modern Linux distributions are designed for everyday users and do not require programming knowledge. The terminal is available for advanced tasks, but most users accomplish everything through graphical interfaces.

Q: Can I run Microsoft Office on Linux? A: There is no native desktop version of Microsoft Office for Linux. You can use Microsoft 365 in a web browser, which covers most common needs. LibreOffice and ONLYOFFICE provide free alternatives with strong .docx/.xlsx compatibility. For advanced

Excel features (VBA macros, complex pivot tables), you may need to keep Windows available through dual boot or a virtual machine.

Q: What if something goes wrong during installation? A: Linux installations are generally safe because the installer does not modify your existing data unless you explicitly tell it to. If you encounter problems, you can restart the installation, try a different distribution, or seek help from community forums. Your original operating system remains intact until you confirm the partition changes.

Q: How long does the transition take? A: Most users feel comfortable with basic tasks within one to two weeks. Full adaptation, including learning terminal basics and finding software alternatives, typically takes four to six weeks. The timeline depends on your workflow complexity and how much time you invest in learning.

Key Takeaways from Chapter 1:

- Linux desktop adoption has grown significantly, crossing 5 percent in the United States by mid-2025.
- Switching to Linux offers gains in control, privacy, security, performance on older hardware, cost savings, and customization.
- The main losses are native Microsoft Office support, Adobe Creative Cloud, some Windows-only professional software, and initial gaming convenience.
- Linux is an excellent choice for developers, privacy-conscious users, students, and anyone whose workflow is primarily web-based.
- Users who depend on specific proprietary applications should research alternatives before committing to a full migration.

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