

Guide to X11/Starting Sessions

Starting Sessions

This chapter describes **how to start an X11 session**.

This chapter will answer the following questions:

- What are the different methods for starting X11?
- How does one start X11 and a window manager?
- How does one control which window manager and programs will start?
- Is there a way to make fonts appear nicer?

Methods to start X11

Recall that X11 consists of an *X server* and several clients. If you only start the X server, you obtain a blank screen. What one needs is a way to start the X server plus some default clients such as a window manager

First, some Unix consoles give a text-only login prompt. In this case, first login as normal to obtain your Unix shell, then use a **xinit** or **startx** command to start the X server and default clients at your shell.

Second, some Unix consoles have a graphical login prompt! In this case, the system boot scripts have started an X server already; a program called the *display manager* has drawn a graphical user interface that lets you type a username and password. In this case, when you login, you start using X11 immediately.

Third, some systems are using a graphical environment that is not X11. For example, Mac OS X has its native *Quartz* system. In Mac OS X, you start the `X11.app` program, which is an X server that lets X clients appear on the same desktop as your other Mac programs. Similar programs exist for Microsoft Windows (which is not a Unix platform).

xinit and startx

There is a program **startx**, which launches X11. It is simple to use:

```
$ startx
```

This gives you some default environment. However, if you want to customise your default environment, using **xinit** might be easier. The **startx** script looks for several files (`~/Xresources`, `~/Xmodmap`, ...) and loads them; the files it uses are different on each system, so you might have to read the **startx** script on your system to understand what it does.

In contrast, the **xinit** program only starts an X server and runs a `~/xinitrc` script. There is no need to remember whether your system calls it `"Xresources"` or `".xresources"` or `".xrdb"`; you can simply specify the exact behavior that you want in your `"~/xinitrc"`

Using xinit without an .xinitrc

If you broke your `"xinitrc"`, or do not have one yet, then you can start one. For example:

```
these will work
$ xinit /usr/X11R6/bin/xterm
$ xinit $(which xterm)
this will NOT work
$ xinit xterm
```