

How to create desktop shortcut or launcher on Linux

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If you have a program you use regularly on Linux desktop, you may want to create a "desktop shortcut", so you can launch the program by simply clicking on the shortcut. While most GUI programs automatically create their desktop shortcut during installation, GUI programs built from their source or terminal applications may require you to set up associated shortcuts manually.

In this tutorial, I will describe **how to create a desktop shortcut or launcher on various Linux desktops**.

A desktop shortcut is represented by a corresponding `.desktop` file which contains meta information of a given app (e.g., name of the app, launch command, location of icon file, etc.). Desktop shortcut files are placed in `/usr/share/applications` or `~/.local/share/applications`. The former directory stores desktop shortcuts that are available for every user, while the latter folder contains shortcuts created for a particular user only.

Create a Desktop Shortcut From the Command Line

To manually create a desktop shortcut for a particular program or command, you can create a `.desktop` file using any text editor, and place it in either `/usr/share/applications` or `~/.local/share/applications`. A typical `.desktop` file looks like the following.

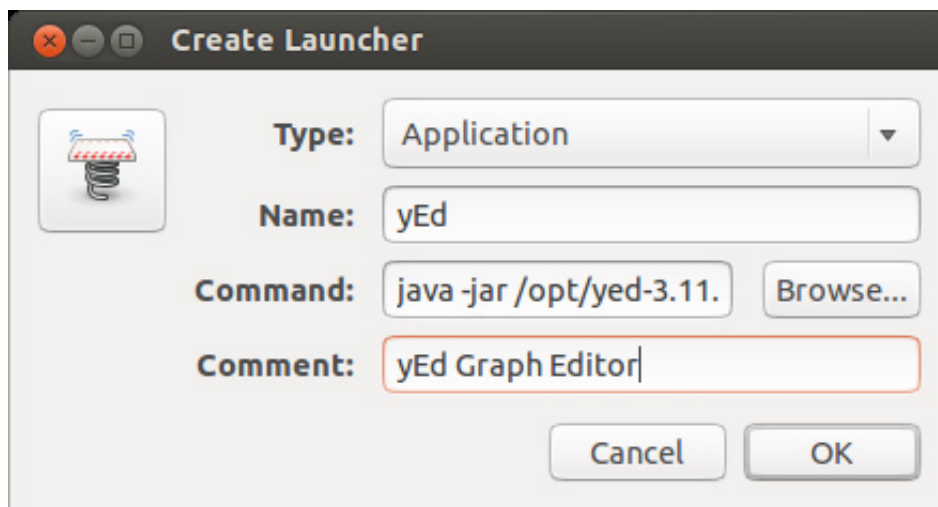
```
[Desktop Entry]
Encoding=UTF-8
Version=1.0                                # version of an app.
Name[en_US]=yEd                            # name of an app.
GenericName=GUI Port Scanner               # longer name of an app.
Exec=java -jar /opt/yed-3.11.1/yed.jar      # command used to launch
Terminal=false                             # whether an app requires
Icon[en_US]=/opt/yed-3.11.1/icons/yicon32.png # location of icon file
Type=Application                           # type.
Categories=Application;Network;Security;   # categories in which the app belongs
Comment[en_US]=yEd Graph Editor            # comment which appears
```

Besides manually create `.desktop` file, there are various desktop-specific ways to create an application shortcut, which I am going to cover in the rest of the tutorial.

Create a Desktop Shortcut on GNOME Desktop

In GNOME desktop, you can use `gnome-desktop-item-edit` to configure a desktop shortcut easily.

```
$ gnome-desktop-item-edit ~/.local/share/applications --create-new
```



In this example, `gnome-desktop-item-edit` will automatically create a desktop launcher file in `~/.local/share/applications`. To customize icon location and other info, you may have to edit the `.desktop` file manually afterward.

If `gnome-desktop-item-edit` is not available (e.g., on Ubuntu), you can install it as follows.

```
$ sudo apt-get install --no-install-recommends gnome-panel
```