Linux

Linux, computer operating system created in the early 1990s by Finnish software engineer Linus Torvalds and the Free Software Foundation (FSF).

While still a student at the University of Helsinki, Torvalds started developing Linux to create a system similar to MINIX, a UNIX operating system. In 1991 he released version 0.02; Version 1.0 of the Linux kernel, the core of the operating system, was released in 1994. About the same time, American software developer Richard Stallman and the FSF made efforts to create an open-source UNIX-like operating system called GNU. In contrast to Torvalds, Stallman and the FSF started by creating utilities for the operating system first. These utilities were then added to the Linux kernel to create a complete system called GNU/Linux, or, less precisely, just Linux.

Linux grew throughout the 1990s because of the efforts of hobbyist developers. Although Linux is not as user-friendly as the popular Microsoft Windows and Mac OS operating systems, it is an efficient and reliable system that rarely crashes. Combined with Apache, an open-source Web server, Linux accounts for most of the servers used on the Internet. Because it is open-source, and thus modifiable for different uses, Linux is popular for systems as diverse as cellular telephones and supercomputers. Android, Google’s operating system for mobile devices, has at its core a modified Linux kernel, and Chrome OS, Google’s operating system that uses the Chrome browser, is also Linux-based. The addition of user-friendly desktop environments, office suites, Web browsers, and even games helped to increase Linux’s popularity and make it more suitable for home and office desktops. New distributions (packages of Linux software) have been created since the 1990s. Some of the more well-known distributions include MX Linux, Manjaro, Linux Mint, and Ubuntu.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia BritannicaThis article was most recently revised and updated by Erik Gregersen.

Citation Information
Article Title: Linux
Website Name: Encyclopaedia Britannica
Publisher: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.
Date Published: 15 May 2023
URL: https://www.britannica.comhttps://www.britannica.com/technology/Linux
Access Date: January 03, 2025