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**Linus Torvalds** (born December 28, 1969, [Helsinki](#), Finland) is a Finnish [computer scientist](#) who was the principal force behind the development of the [Linux](#) operating system.

At age 10 Torvalds began to [dabble](#) in [computer programming](#) on his grandfather's Commodore VIC-20. In 1991 while a computer science student at the University of Helsinki (M.S., 1996), he purchased his first [personal computer](#) (PC). He was not satisfied, however, with the computer's [operating system](#) (OS). His PC used MS-DOS (the [disk operating system](#) from [Microsoft](#)), but Torvalds preferred the [UNIX](#) operating system he had used on the university's computers. Consequently, he decided to create his own PC-based version of UNIX.

Months of determined programming work yielded the beginnings of an operating system known as Linux. In 1991 Torvalds posted a message on the [Internet](#) to alert other PC users to his new system, made the [software](#) available as a free download, and, as was a common practice among software developers at the time, released the



**Linus Torvalds, 2012** The “benevolent dictator” of Linux stepped down from his position at the Linux Foundation in 2018.

### Quick Facts

**Born:** December 28, 1969, [Helsinki, Finland](#) (age 55)

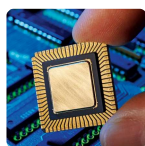
**Inventions:** [Linux](#)

**Subjects Of Study:** [operating system](#)

**On the Web:** [Internet Hall of Fame - Linus Torvalds](#) (Feb. 26, 2025)

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source code, which meant that anyone with knowledge of computer programming could modify Linux to suit their own purposes. Because of their access to the source code, many programmers helped Torvalds retool and refine the software, and by 1994 Linux kernel (original code) version 1.0 had been released.



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### Computers and Technology Quiz

#### Teaching Insults

The computer science professor Megan Squire used Torvalds's emails as an example in order to train a program to recognize insults.

Although Torvalds purposely made Linux [open source](#), he would send abusive emails to those who made changes he disagreed with. Megan Squire, a computer science professor at Elon University, stated in [a 2018 interview](#) [in The New Yorker](#) that the emails may have contributed to the male-dominated Linux development [community](#), as women may have found receiving the insulting messages to be more isolating than men may have found them. In 2018 Torvalds announced in a post to a Linux mailing list that he would step down as lead developer at Linux “to get help on how to behave differently.” He admitted that he had never been a “people person.”

Operating Linux required a certain amount of technical acumen; it was not as easy to use as more popular operating systems, such as [Windows](#), [Apple's Mac OS](#), or [IBM OS/2](#). However, Linux evolved into a remarkably reliable, efficient system that rarely crashed. Linux became popular in the late 1990s when competitors of Microsoft began taking the upstart OS seriously. [Netscape Communications](#), Corel, Oracle, [Intel](#), and other companies announced plans to support Linux as an inexpensive [alternative](#) to Windows. In addition to Linux being free, its source code can be viewed and freely modified by anyone, unlike in a [proprietary](#) OS. This means that different language versions can be developed and [deployed](#) in markets that would be too small for the traditional companies. Also, many organizations and governments have expressed security reservations about using any kind of computer software containing code that cannot be viewed.

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 cell phones 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, which uses the Chrome browser, is also Linux-based. The addition of user-friendly desktop environments, office suites, browsers, and even games helped to increase Linux's popularity and make it more suitable for home and office desktops.

In 1997 Torvalds took a position with Transmeta, a [microprocessor](#) manufacturer, and relocated to [California](#). Six years later he left the company to work as a project coordinator under the [auspices](#) of the Open Source Development Labs (OSDL), a [consortium](#) created by such high-tech companies as IBM, Intel, and Siemens to promote Linux development. In 2007 OSDL merged with the Free Standards Group to form the Linux Foundation. In 2012 Torvalds was awarded the Millennium Technology Prize by the foundation Technology Academy Finland.



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Technology > Computers

## Linux

operating system

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Also known as: GNU/Linux

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

**Key People:** [Linus Torvalds](#) • [Richard Stallman](#)

**Related Topics:** [open source](#) • [operating system](#) • [Android](#)

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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.



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