**FreeCAD Connector for NVIDIA Omniverse**

Documentation & How-to Guide

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## Introduction

For the field of computer-aided design (CAD), NVIDIA Omniverse presents an opportunity to improve on the workflows currently in place for both the initial design and continuous improvement of engineering components. Mainly, Omniverse serves as a shared 3D model exchange where contributors can create, view, and analyse the same model all while simultaneously conducting simulations in a true-to-life virtual environment [1].

The creation and analysis of engineering components in the context of Omniverse can be done using third-party connectors. Connectors offer real-time synchronisation between Omniverse and design and simulation tools currently in use. Due to Omniverse’s open platform, several Omniverse connectors have been developed such as for Unreal Engine, ParaView, and Autodesk Maya, with the potential of developing further connectors through the Connect library [2].

FreeCAD is a general-purpose 3D computer-aided design tool. While not necessarily the main industry standard for CAD, its’ open-source nature and modular architecture has allowed for introduction of numerous third-party ‘workbench’ tools expanding to a wider range of uses around engineering. For example, FreeCAD has previously been used to parse the nested structures and complicated surfaces associated with Monte-Carlo neutronics calculations for magnetic fusion devices [3].

Currently, NVIDIA does not offer a connector between Omniverse and FreeCAD. Fortunately, the development of such a connector is made straightforward due to the availability of both open Omniverse Connect and FreeCAD Workbench platforms.

## Installation

### Installation of the Omniverse Launcher

The Omniverse Launcher is a piece of software that is required as a first step for setting up a local Omniverse Nucleus server. The provision of the software is free (at the time of writing of this document in May 2024) and allows access to NVIDIA’s suite of Omniverse connected applications.

1. Navigate to the Omniverse main page at [nvidia.com/omniverse]. Under Software Development Kit (SDK), click Download now.

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1. A prompt to register for the download will appear. Enter the user’s details and select Submit to begin the download.

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1. A file (omniverse-launcher-win.exe) will begin to download. Execute the file and complete all the necessary steps in the installer.
2. The launcher will display after the installation is done. The user may need to log in to the launcher – this is done through an NVIDIA account that the user has to setup.

### Setting up a local Omniverse Nucleus server

The developed software relies on a connection with an Omniverse Nucleus server. Network clients requiring access to a given Nucleus server will require the server’s IP address and hostname to be accessible to it. Using Nucleus behind a firewall and port forwarding network traffic inbound is not supported.

The FreeCAD connector can run on any Omniverse Nucleus setup. The most basic one can be downloaded using the Omniverse Individual license, which is free to use. The Omniverse Enterprise license requires a paid license subscription. There are some differences between Omniverse Individual and Omniverse Enterprise, however Omniverse Individual allows up to two users to work on the same project per entity.

Setting up a local Nucleus service using the Omniverse Individual license can be done through the steps in the following [link](https://docs.omniverse.nvidia.com/nucleus/latest/workstation/installation.html):

[https://docs.omniverse.nvidia.com/nucleus/latest/workstation/installation.html]

To set up an enterprise Omniverse Nucleus server, an extended user license is required, information regarding this and installation steps of the Omniverse IT-managed launcher can be found [here](https://docs.omniverse.nvidia.com/launcher/latest/it-managed-launcher.html) [https://docs.omniverse.nvidia.com/launcher/latest/it-managed-launcher.html]. Further information regarding the differences between Omniverse Individual and Enterprise is available [here](https://docs.omniverse.nvidia.com/enterprise/latest/benefits.html) [https://docs.omniverse.nvidia.com/enterprise/latest/benefits.html].

### Basic installation (automated script)

The basic installation is the recommended method of installation and should work with most systems.

1. Git clone the FreeCAD Connector repository to your FreeCAD \Mod directory. Typically, this is `C:\Users\USER\_NAME\AppData\Roaming\FreeCAD\Mod`.

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| **Command:**  git clone <https://github.com/raska-s/FreeCAD-Omniverse.git> |

1. Navigate to the cloned repository’s directory and launch the installation by running `install.bat`. This will fetch the dependencies required to run the software.

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| **Command:**  cd .\FreeCAD-Omniverse  .\install.bat |

1. Installation complete.

**Note**: if the `AppData\Roaming\FreeCAD\Mod` file directory does not exist, you must first initialise this folder. This happens if no FreeCAD addons have been previously installed. To do this, launch FreeCAD, and on the toolbar click `Tools` > `Addon Manager`. If you are using the Addon Manager for the first time, a dialog box will open, warning you that the addons in the Addon manager are not officially part of FreeCAD. It also presents several options related to the Addon Manager's data usage. Adjust those options to your liking and press the `OK` button to continue. The `\Mod` directory should now exist.

### Manual installation

This subsection outlines the steps required to install the software manually, without using the automated script.

1. Git clone the FreeCAD Connector repository to your FreeCAD \Mod directory. Typically, this is `C:\Users\USER\_NAME\AppData\Roaming\FreeCAD\Mod`.

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| **Command:**  git clone <https://github.com/raska-s/FreeCAD-Omniverse.git> |

## System

In this software, geometry is pushed to the Nucleus in a neutral .STP format, which preserves the information initially attached by FreeCAD and does not require importing of tessellated geometry into the FreeCAD workspace. This is shown in **Fig. 2**. Along with the STP file, the connector uploads a USD file, which is updated whenever a new version of its corresponding STP file is made. However, the connector imports only the stored STP file when pulling from Nucleus. The tessellation process is done only once for each version of the geometry.

Here, USD and STP files are stored in a project folder, which contains single-component assets and assemblies. By default, projects are stored in omniverse://$HOST\_NAME/Users/$USER\_NAME/FreeCAD/$PROJECT\_NAME. Assets are then stored in $PROJECT\_FOLDER/asset\_$ASSETNAME/ and assemblies stored as $PROJECT\_FOLDER/assembly/$ASSEMBLY\_NAME.usda. This is shown in Fig 3.

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| ***Fig.2****. Simplified upload and download workflow of FreeCAD connector version 2.* |

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| *Fig. 3. Representation of the default file storage tree in FreeCAD connector version 2.* |

## User interface

Establishing a connection with a component stored on the Nucleus is done through a project-based process: the user can either open an existing project or create a new project, and then select an existing asset or create a new one. When opening an existing project, clicking the ‘Open existing project’ button will prompt the user to input the Nucleus link of their project. Similarly, clicking the ‘Create new project’ button will prompt the user to input the Nucleus hostname and the new project name. Once done, clicking the ‘Create/browse project assets’ button opens a pop-up menu prompting the user to select an existing asset or create a new one. Once the STP and USD asset URLs are available to view on the panel, the user can push and pull geometry to and from the Nucleus in one click. Pictorial representation of the UI is shown in Fig. 4.

## How-to: Basic usage

## How-to: Assembly panel

The push-pull assembly workflow provides a way for the FreeCAD user to use the various assembly functionalities of FreeCAD such as that found on the standard Part workbench, [A2plus](https://wiki.freecad.org/A2plus_Workbench), [Assembly3](https://wiki.freecad.org/Assembly3_Workbench), or [Assembly4](https://wiki.freecad.org/Assembly4_Workbench), and propagate the component placement to a USD file on the Omniverse Nucleus.

The main user interface for the assembly feature in the FreeCAD connector is the Assembly Tools panel. A screenshot of this is given inFig. 1. There are two main UI areas in this panel, which in total contains 5 different buttons. The Create New Assembly button allows the user to create a USDA file on the Nucleus server which references the USD objects in the current FreeCAD workspace. Clicking this button opens a pop-up menu that prompts the user to input an assembly name and to select items in the workspace to include in the assembly. The Import Existing Assembly button will open a pop-up menu that prompts the user to select an existing assembly from the current project folder. Upon selection, the entire assembly and its components will be imported into the FreeCAD workspace. These two features were introduced in version 2 of the FreeCAD connector, and detailed in the previous report.

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| *Fig. 1. FreeCAD Connector Assembly Tools panel with a project and assembly loaded.* |

Under these two buttons, status indicators are given, detailing the current project and assembly in use in the given session. If both current project and assembly elements are valid, the status will show the ‘Ready’ indicator, which allows users to access the Upload assembly changes, Fetch assembly changes, and Live assembly mode features.

The remaining three buttons allow the user to transfer positional information (translation and rotation) to and from the Nucleus server. The first two are part of the batch push-and-pull assembly workflow. The Upload assembly changes button sends the cartesian coordinates and rotation of each component in the current FreeCAD assembly to the assembly USDA file stored on the Nucleus and alters the position of each referenced single component within the assembly USDA file. Meanwhile, the Fetch new assembly changes button requests the coordinates and rotation of each element in the assembly USDA file stored in the Nucleus server, and adjusts each component’s rotation and translation in the FreeCAD workspace. These two buttons allow for simple manipulation of position and angle of the components, integrated with the Omniverse environment.

# Live assembly mode

An exciting addition to the Omniverse Connector for FreeCAD is the Live assembly mode. This button allows for live real-time communication between the FreeCAD workspace and Omniverse environment. Upon clicking this button, a pop-up menu will prompt the user to select an available Omniverse Live session attached to the assembly USDA file. These available sessions are also possible to view on the Omniverse USD Composer app. This is shown in Figs. 2 (a) and (b).

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| *Fig. 2. Available Live Sessions pop-up dialog on (a) FreeCAD and (b) Omniverse USD Composer.* | |

On FreeCAD, the Live Assembly Mode button will show that it is active and toggled in blue, as shown in Fig 3(a). If the assembly USDA file is opened on Omniverse USD Composer and a user is logged into the same Live Session as the FreeCAD user, a small user icon will appear near the Live button of the USD Composer app. Also, a message will appear on the USD Composer notifying the user that another user has joined the session. These are shown in Figs. 3(b) and ©. Any changes done on the Omniverse side will now propagate in real-time on FreeCAD. Clicking the Live assembly button again on FreeCAD deactivates the Live mode, triggering the Omniverse Client to quit the Live Session and thus turning the button white in the process.

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| A screenshot of a computer screen  Description automatically generated  *(a)* | A screen shot of a computer  Description automatically generated  *(b)* |
| A blue rectangle with black text  Description automatically generated  *(c)* | |
| *Fig.3. Indications that Live Session is active: (a) Toggled Live assembly button active on FreeCAD, (b) User icon next to Live button on USD Composer, and (c) User joining message on USD Composer.* | |