How to… Fix HP printer “filter failed” error in (Ubuntu) Linux

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Error: “filter failed”

***Update, 2015-02-06**: As of a recent upgrade[‘] to Xubuntu 14.10, jumping straight to the third solution still fixes this error. It can also fix the “cups filter failed”, “print service unavailable”, and “bad file descriptor” errors, according to an anonymous commenter.*[1]

My printer suffered a paper jam. After releasing the paper, I found that the printer was unwilling to print anything. The specific error was “filter failed”.

[1] http://thenumberzero.blogspot.com/2014/02/how-to-fix-hp-printer-filter-failed.html?showComment=1424962297455#c7199534845988630867

Diagnosing

The first step is to open CUPS. In your browser's urlbar, type "localhost:631". If at any point, CUPS asks for your password, enter it as you would in the terminal. To confirm this error, click on the *Jobs* tab (Figure 1).

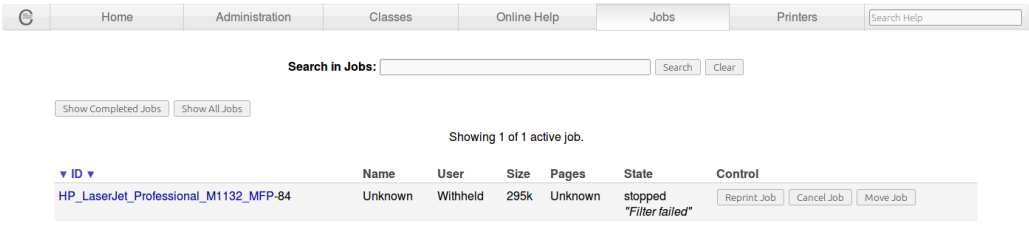

Figure 1: Confirming the "filter failed" error in CUPS.

As you can see under *State*, I'm getting the "filter failed" error.

Solution 1: re-install printer

Now click on the *Printers* tab, and then click on your printer (Figure 2).

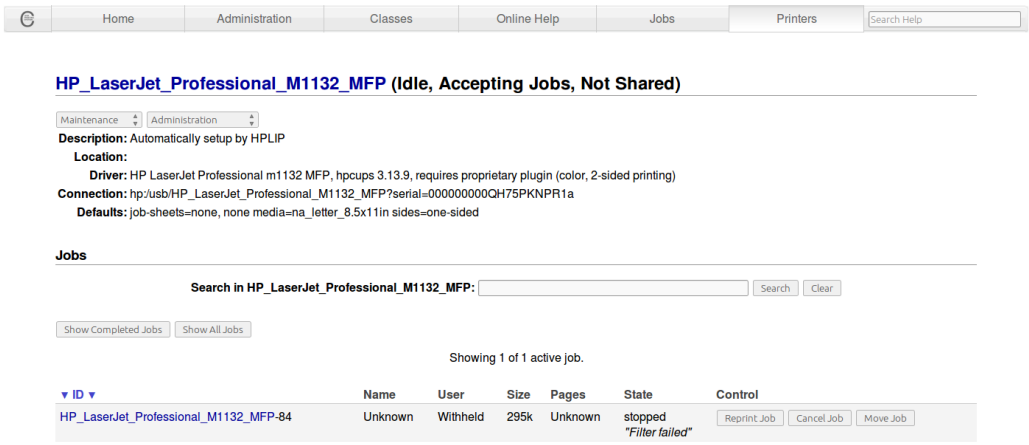

Figure 2: HP_LaserJet_Professional_M1132_MFP page in CUPS.

Under the *Administration* menu, you will see an option to delete the printer (Figure 3).

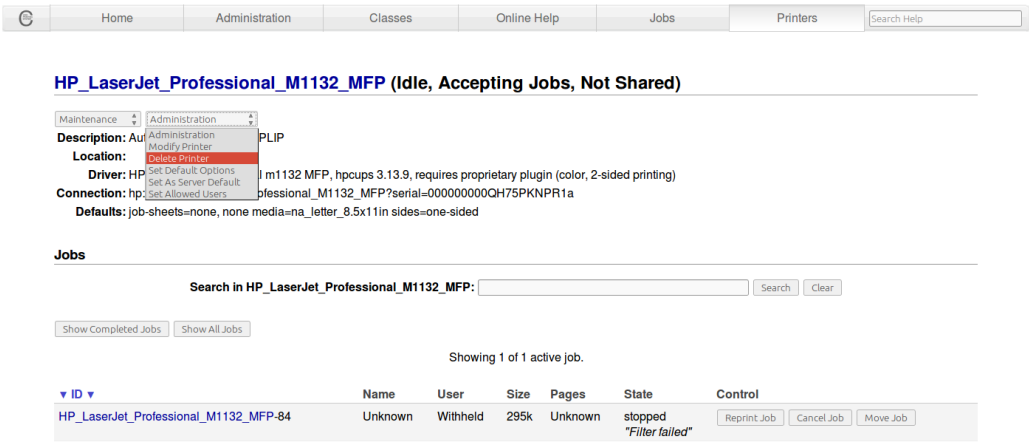

Figure 3: Deleting the printer using the administration menu in the CUPS *Printers* page.

When asked to confirm, click *Delete Printer*. In the *Administration* tab, add the printer (Figure 4).

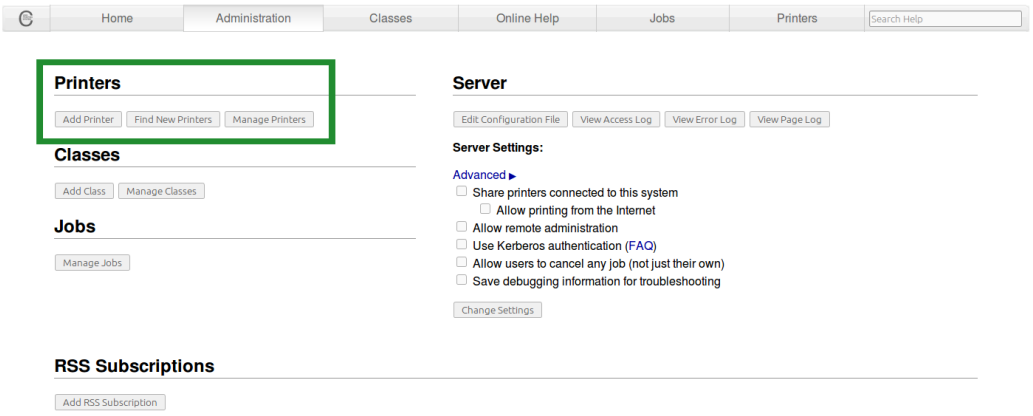

Figure 4: Adding the printer on the *Administration* page.

Once that is complete, try printing your document. (You can also print a test page in the *Maintenance* menu of your printer's page (Figure 5).)

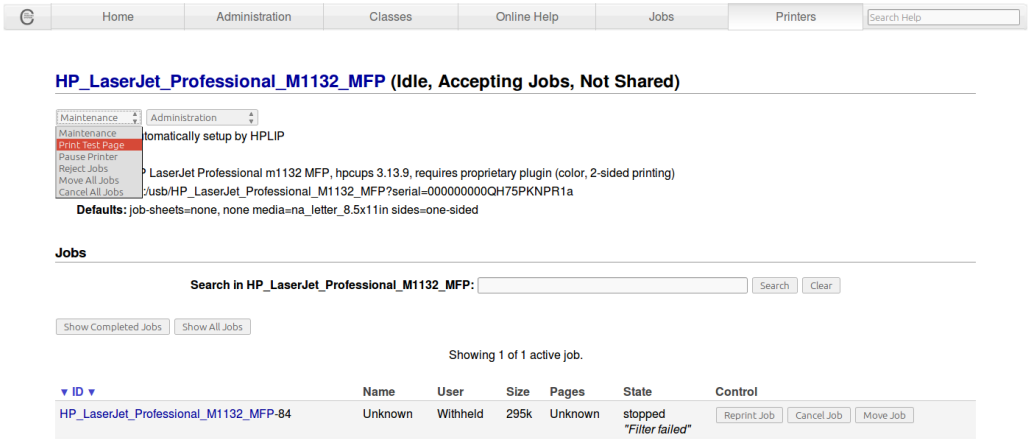

Figure 5: Printing a test page using the *Maintenance* menu.

Alternate solution if this fails: rename your printer with a slightly different name.

Solution 2: re-install CUPS

Some found that this error was caused by a problem with CUPS, either after an update or failed installation.

Although you can do this in the terminal, we're going to use a GUI method. Open Synaptic, and in the *Quick filter* text field, type "cups" (Figure 6).

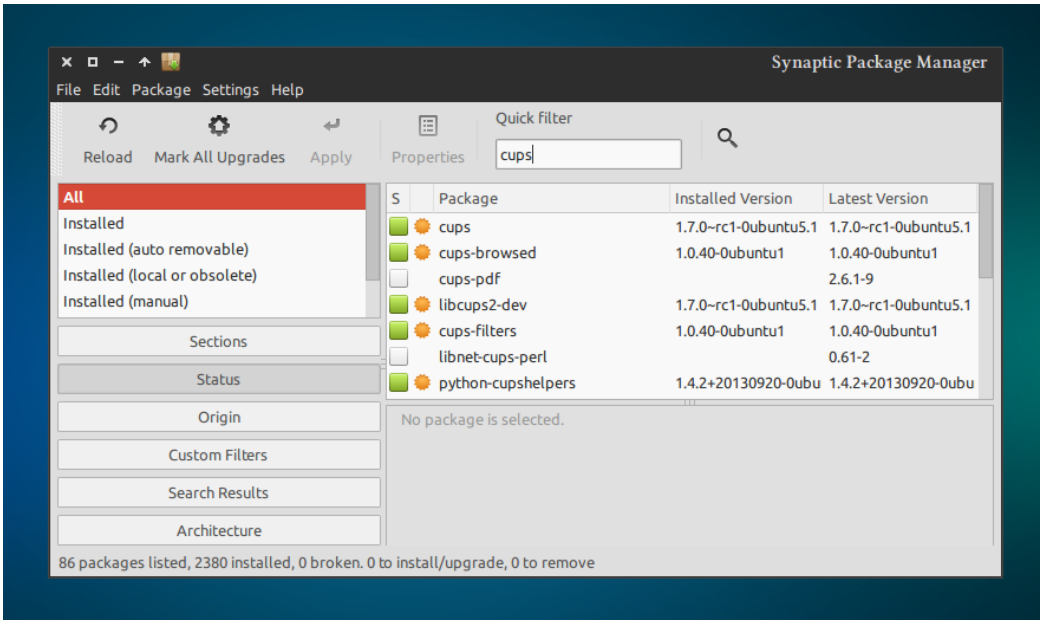

Figure 6: Finding CUPS in Synaptic.

Click on the *Installed* tab, so it will be easier to select all (Figure 7). Although you don't have to re-install everything, this is what I (or we) will be doing.

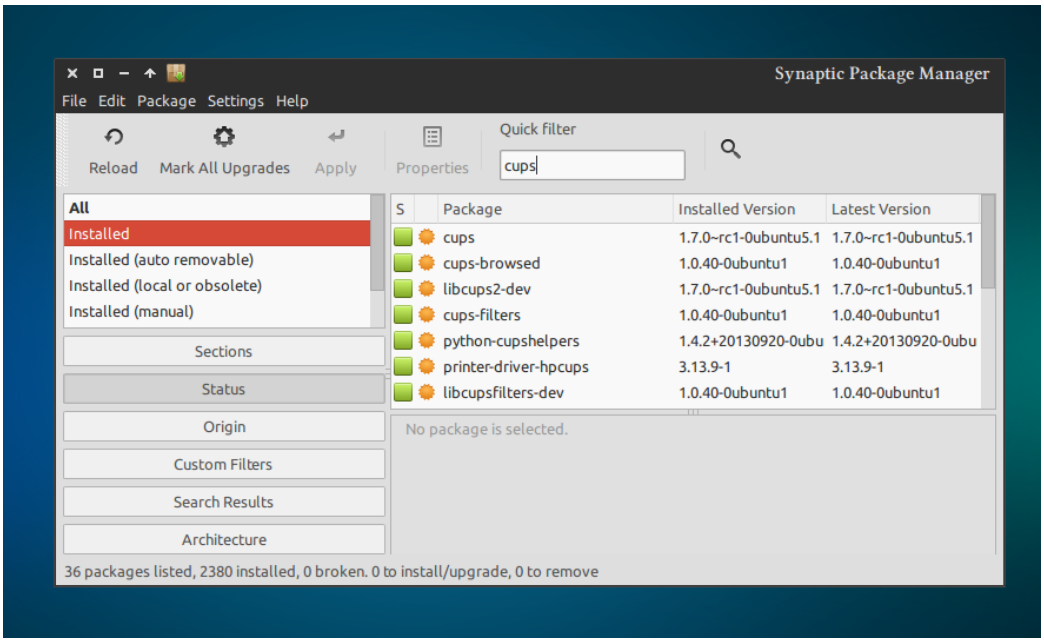

Figure 7: Viewing all CUPS-related installations.

Select all the packages (CTRL + A). Now mark the packages for re-installation

(Figure 8). You can do this either by right-clicking and clicking *Mark for Reinstallation* or opening the *Package* menu and clicking *Mark for Reinstallation* there.

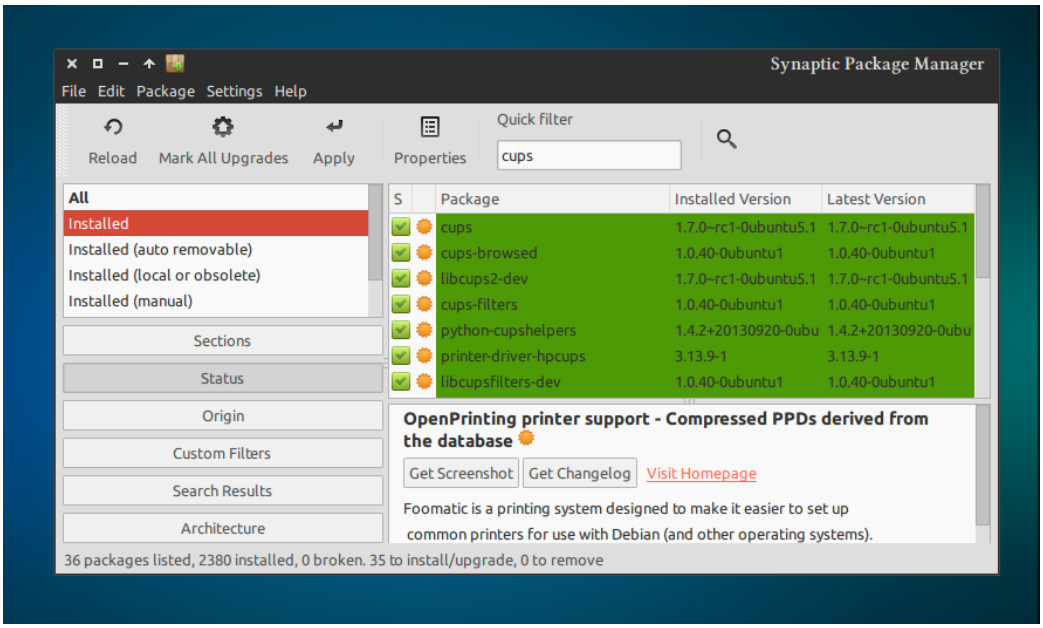

Figure 8: Marking CUPS for re-installation.

Now click *Apply* and let Synaptic re-install CUPS. After re-installation, print your document.

Solution 3: fix HPLIP

If you perused the list of packages you marked for re-installation, you may have noticed one called hplip. Formally known as HP Linux Imaging and Printing, HPLIP integrates HP printers with Linux. It is provided by HP[2].

Generally, HPLIP will come pre-installed with your distribution; you can confirm that by typing "hplip" in *Quick filter* again. If it's installed, Synaptic will show it as such.

Let's close Synaptic now and open the terminal. In the terminal, type "hp-check -t". This will check whether HPLIP is working correctly. Figure 9 shows what I found.

I was missing two required packages. If you have the same problem, type "hp-doctor" as suggested. You will get a number of prompts throughout, the first of which may be a distribution error:

[2] http://hplipopensource.com/hplip-web/index.html

error: This distro (i.e ubuntu 13.10) is either deprecated or not yet supported.
The diagnosis is limited on unsupported platforms. Do you want to continue?(y=yes, n=no*):

Type “y” and continue. If you get after it checks for updates:

Newer version of HPLIP-3.13.11 is available.
Press ‘y’ to continue to upgrade HPLIP-3.13.11 (y=yes*, n=no):

Type “y” and continue. You may be told to install HPLIP manually, but it will continue anyway, and check for dependencies.

Under *General Dependencies*, hp-doctor found this (Figure 10):

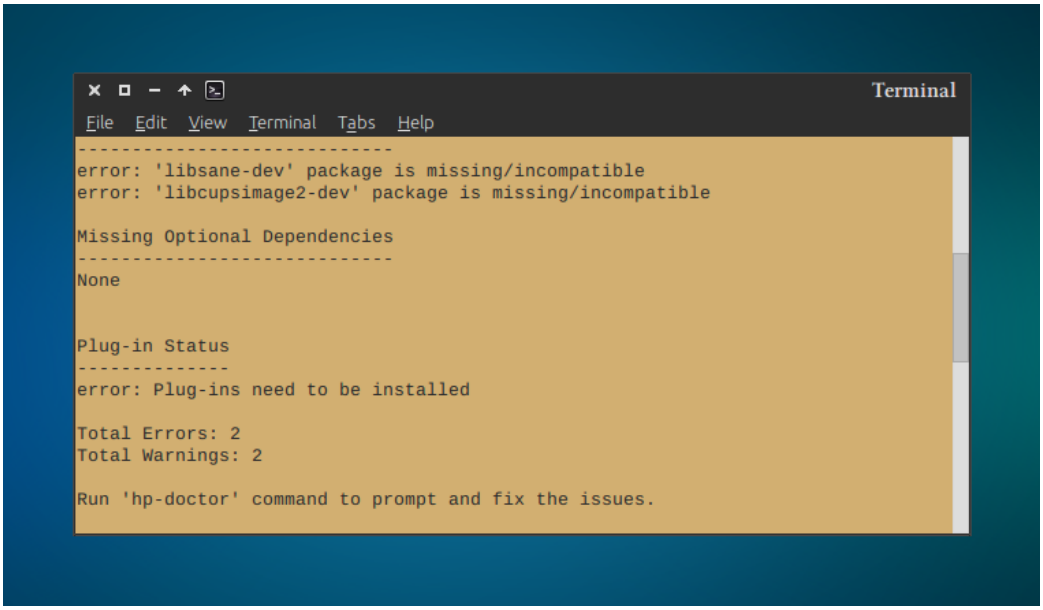

Figure 9: The results of the “hp-check -t” command.

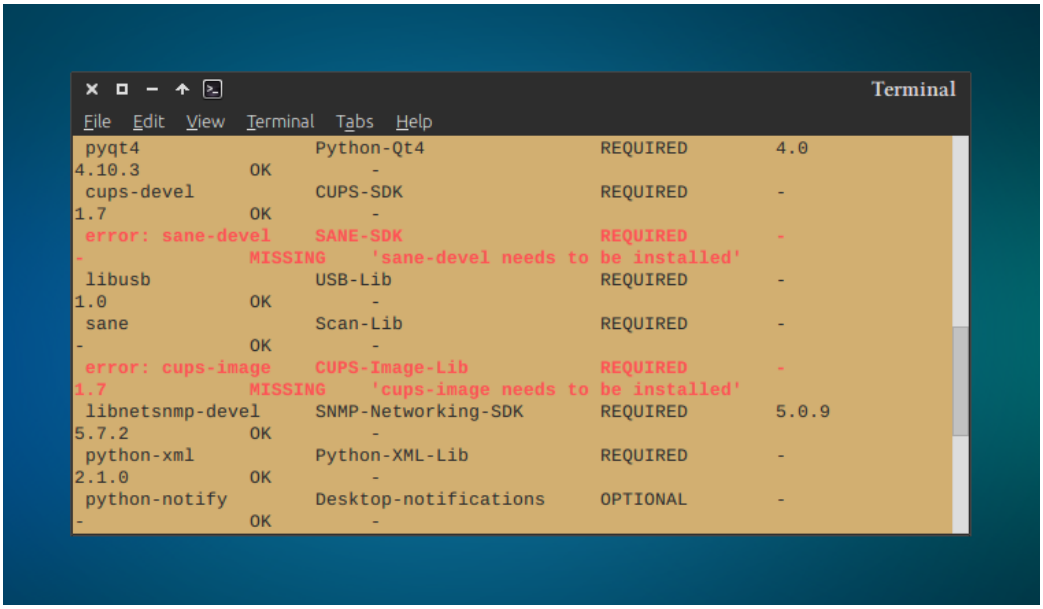

Figure 10: Running "hp-doctor" highlights the errors shown by *hp-check -t*. It then attempts to fix them.

The next prompt will be:

> Do you want to update repository and Install missing/incompatible packages. (a=install all*, c=custom_install, s=skip):

Type "a" and continue. Because my problem was a plug-in version mismatch, I next got this:

> Found Plugin version mismatch. Press 'y' to re-install the plugin(y=yes*, n=no):

Type "y" and continue. When you're asked whether to download, specify a path, or quit, choose the download option by typing "d".

HP will then ask you to accept the license terms:

> Do you accept the license terms for the plug-in (y=yes*, n=no, q=quit) ?

Type "y" if you accept. hp-doctor will then complete without further prompts. Now try to print your document.

Other solutions

In my case, running *hp-check -t* was the solution to fix the "filter failed" error. However, that may not be the case with you.

One solution that was a temporary fix was to change my PDF viewer. So, switching from the default Evince to KDE's Okular[3] appeared to solve the problem. (By my own admission, I'm no Linux expert, so don't ask me how.)

Here are some useful resources with other potential solutions:

- In Arch Linux, one solution is to clean the pacman cache; or install foo2zjs from the AUR while making sure HPLIP is *not* installed: https://bbs.archlinux.org/viewtopic.php?id=148850.
- Further advice on using hp-check, et al.: http://unix.stackexchange.com/questions/77139/filter-failed-from-hplip.
- If you aren't a member of the lpadmin group, add yourself manually: http://ubuntuforums.org/showthread.php?t=2145030.
- Try switching the printer and/or computer off and on again, or trying again later. This solution might seem like a joke, but it's worth a shot if you don't want to re-install packages or play around with the command-line: http://askubuntu.com/questions/304152/after-update-my-printer-will-not-work.

[3] http://okular.kde.org/

Error: “unable to connect to server”

Another error I’ve discovered is “unable to connect to server”, which has the more serious effect of preventing you from interacting with the printer at all. This means you are unable to load the CUPS interface. When I encountered this error, none of the solutions proposed above worked.

Diagnosing

Try to open CUPS in your browser, by going to “localhost:631”. An error page will come up, stating that the browser is unable to connect to the server at localhost:631 (Figure 11). Trying to access CUPS using a native printing tool (in my case, system-config-printer[4]) initially reports that the “printing service is not available” and gives you the option to connect manually. Doing so, however, brings up the “failed to connect to server” error.

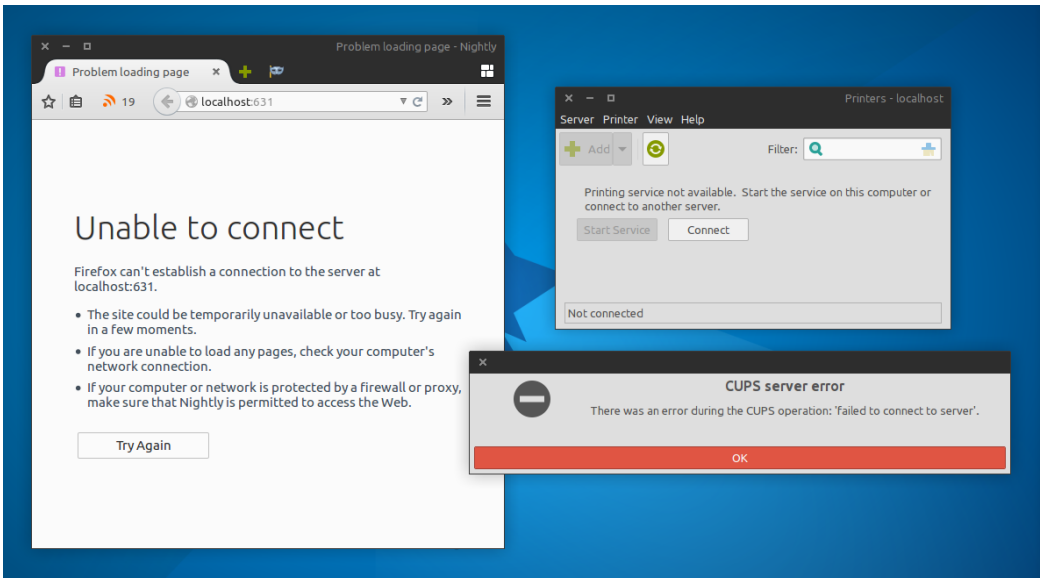

Figure 11: The “unable to connect to server” error prevents you from connecting to your printer.

Solution 1: edit cupsd.conf

Warning: please be aware that this solution requires editing a config file in your root directory. If you’re worried that this will make the problem worse, either don’t

[4] http://cyberelk.net/tim/software/system-config-printer/

try it or do what I do: screenshot every step so you know how to go back and leave the file open so you can always undo the changes after testing.

Read the warning? Based on a solution on LinuxQuestions.org[5], what we're going to do is edit cupsd.conf to make CUPS listen on port 631. The process is pretty simple—just add the line "Port 631" or "Listen 127.0.0.1:631" to cupsd.conf—but many people find editing their root directory daunting. This tutorial is for them.

The first step is to open your terminal, then type in the command to open cupsd.conf with a text editor: "sudo [text editor] /etc/cups/cupsd.conf" (Figure 12). Since I use Mousepad, the default text editor in Xubuntu, I entered "sudo mousepad /etc/cups/cupsd.conf".

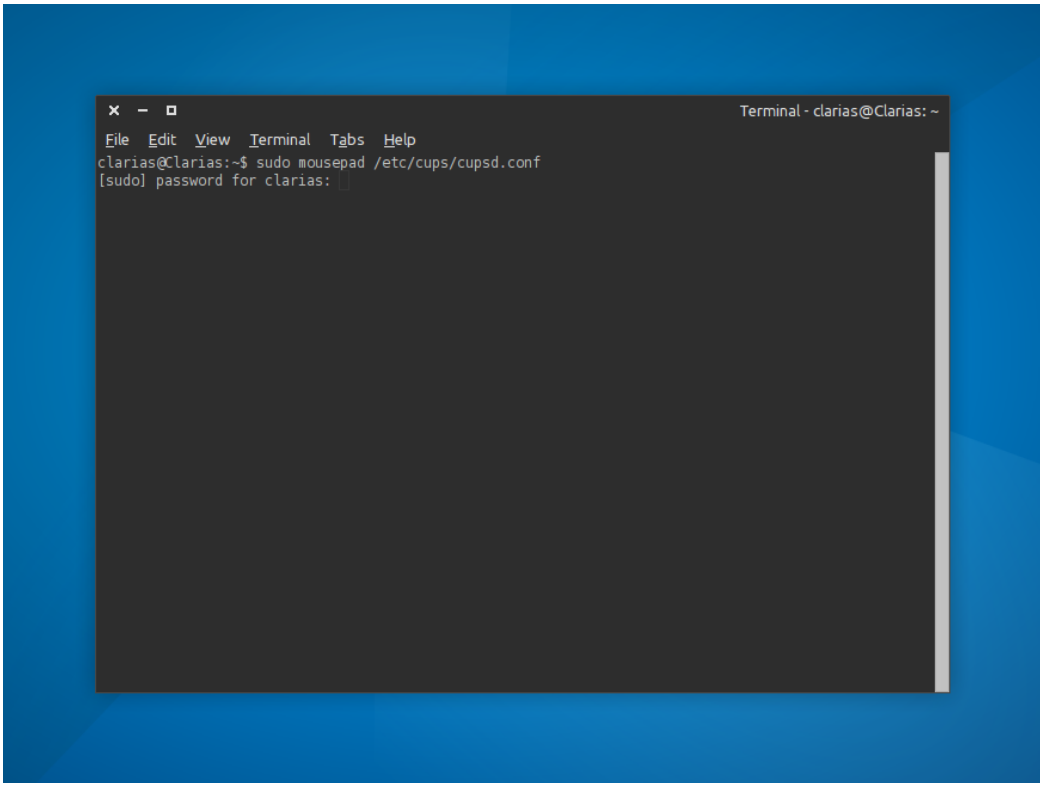

Figure 12: "sudo [your text editor] /etc/cups/cupsd.conf" is the easiest way to open cupsd.conf with a text editor.

Because you're using the *sudo* command, you'll be prompted for your password.

[5] https://www.linuxquestions.org/questions/linux-general-1/cups-unable-to-connect-to-server-184088/

Once cupsd.conf is opened, look for the line “Listen /var/run/cups/cups.sock” (Figure 13). Add “Port 631” or “Listen 127.0.0.1:631” in a new line above that one, and save the file (Figure 14).

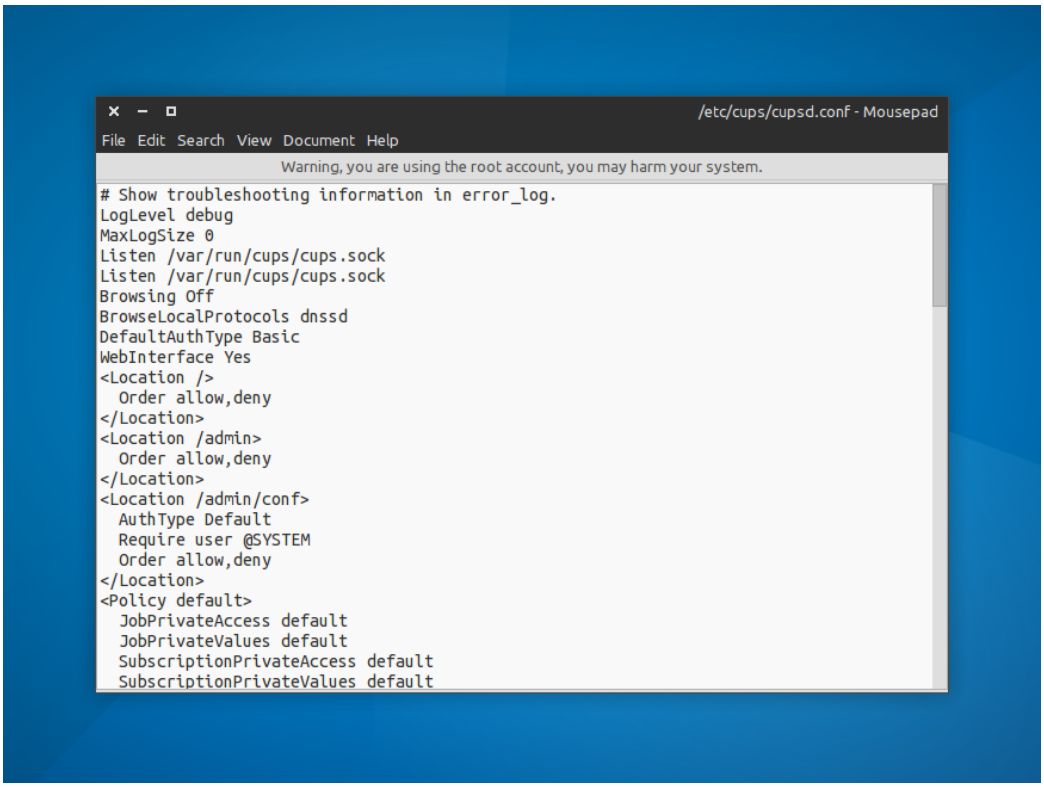

Figure 13: In my version of cupsd.conf, the line “Listen /var/run/cups/cups.sock” is fifth from top.

Since, as I’ve said before, I’m no technical wizard, I can only report that “Port 631” worked for me, so I didn’t try “Listen 127.0.0.1:631”. Replacing “Listen /var/run/cups/cups.sock” with “Port 631” also had no negative effect.[6] (You may also have noticed that “Listen /var/run/cups/cups.sock” was repeated in my cupsd.conf, so I just replaced one of them.)

[6]However, if you are able to explain the reasons for these results, I would be happy to hear from you.

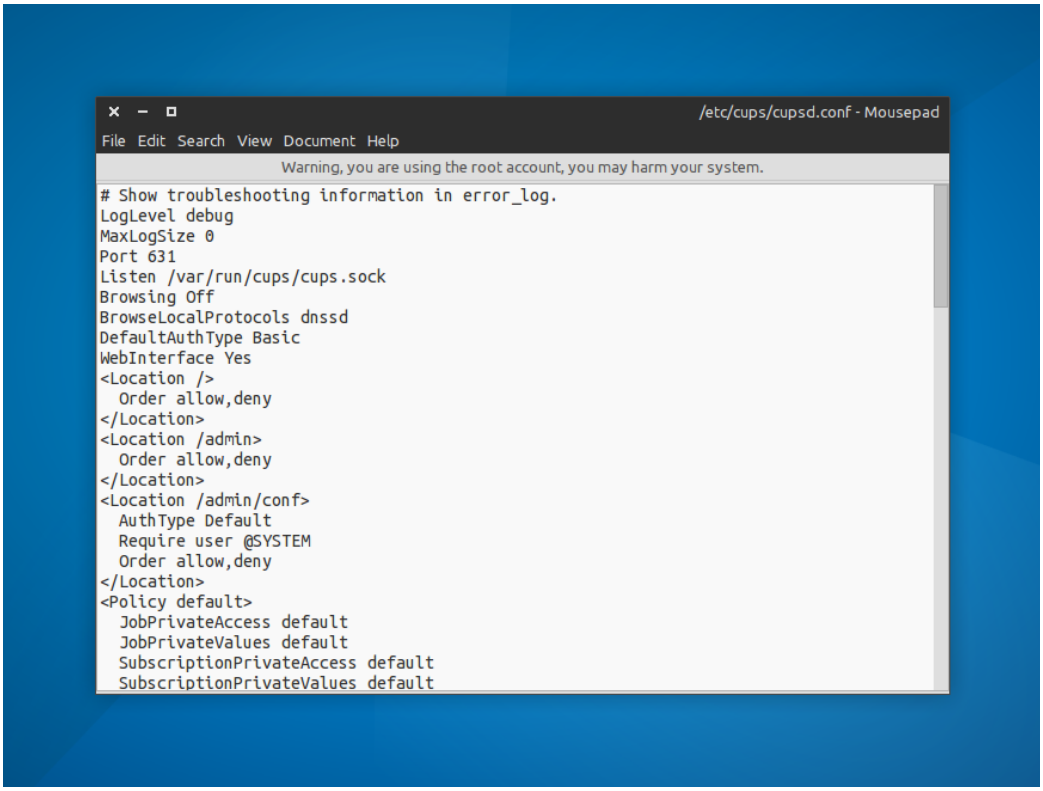

Figure 14: Add either “Port 631” or “Listen 127.0.0.1:631” to cupsd.conf.

That’s pretty much it. Now you just have to restart CUPS with “sudo /etc/init.d/cups restart” (Figure 15), and then try printing a page.

If you still have a problem at this point, try running “hp-doctor” again. In my case, the error shifted from “unable to connect to server” to “filter failed”, so that proved to be the final step in fixing this.

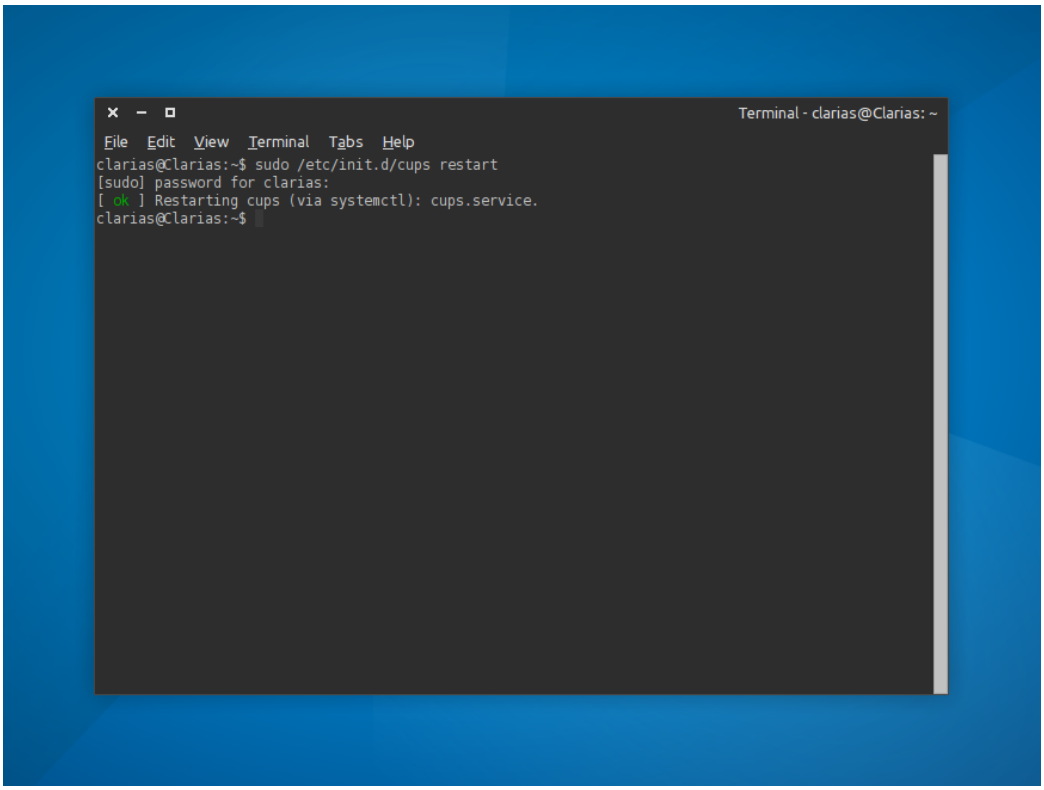

Figure 15: Restart CUPS.

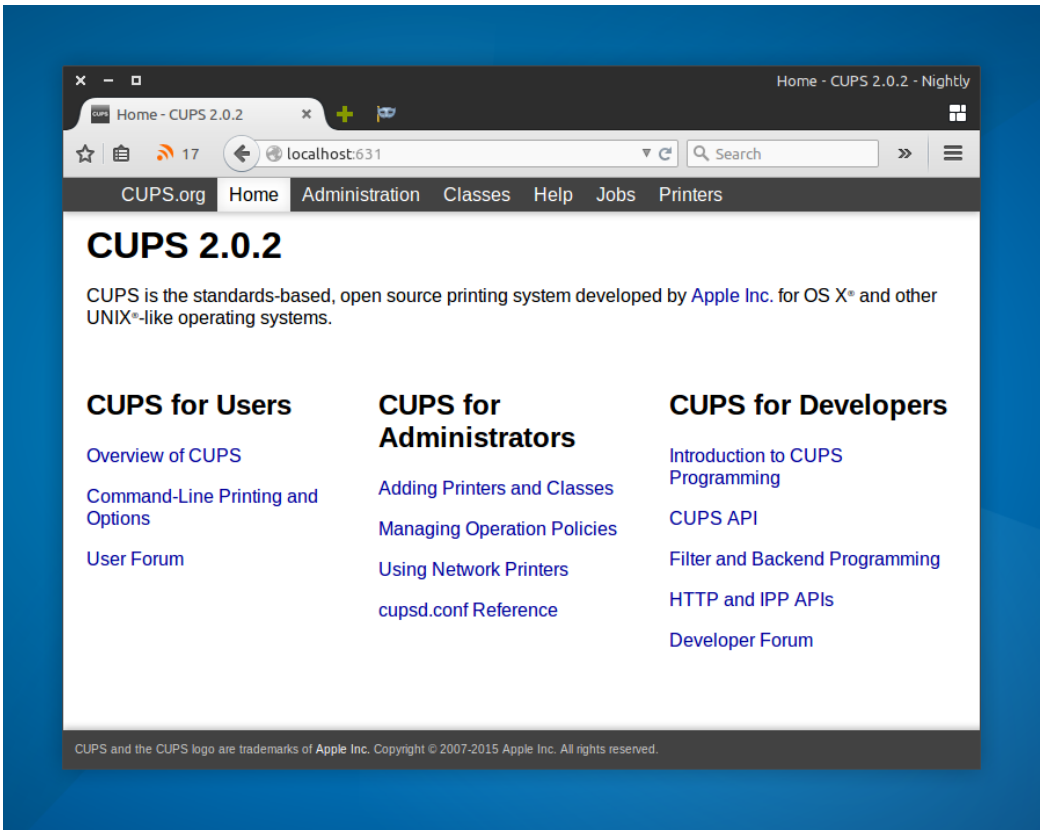

Figure 16: Success!

Read online at: http://thenumberzero.blogspot.com/2014/02/how-to-fix-hp-printer-filter-failed.html

***Version** 1.2; **last edited** 2015-03-02*

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***Printer**: HP LaserJet M1132 MFP*

***Operating systems tested**: Xubuntu 13.10, 14.04, 14.10; **theme**: Numix*