How do I start TextEditor from the command line?

I work a lot at the command line in a Terminal and would like to start a text editor on a certain file. I'm from Linux Land and normally use kwrite or gedit from a bash shell. Trying to find the Mac equivalent, as a guess, tried

```
user> textedit somefile.txt
```

and

```
user> texteditor somefile.txt
```

and

```
user> TextEditor somefile.txt
```

and other variations. I can't seem to find the proper name of the text editor app. (No, vi isn't to my liking.) Oddly, the guy at an Apple store didn't know this.

terminal   command-line   text-editor

edited Jul 19 '11 at 18:12

Joel Spolsky ♦
1,498 ● 11 ● 27 ● 46

asked Jun 27 '11 at 18:15

DarenW
1,060 ● 4 ● 16 ● 21

Both Nathan and mipadi provide answers, but I think they're only partial answers, so I added one. I'm not sure if it would have been better to combine their responses somehow, and if so, how to have done that. – Viktor Haag Jun 27 '11 at 19:07

@Viktor it generally isn't good to re-post things that people have already said, and exact duplicates are removed. Since you had something to add, good ways to go would be an answer saying "In addition to Nathan and mipadi's techniques...", or comments on those answers with your addendums. What you've done here is okay, but not exactly a 'best practice'. Thanks for asking; now you know for the future :-). – Nathan Greenstein Jun 27 '11 at 21:27

6 Answers

Here are some possible answers, all using the 'open' command-line utility.

The **-a** option means "open the file argument with the named application":

```
open -a TextEdit file.txt
```

The **-e** option means "open the file argument with the TextEdit application":

```
open -e file.txt
```

The **-t** option means "open the file with the default application for editing text files, as determined via LaunchServices". By default, this will be /Applications/TextEdit.app; however, it's possible for this setting to get overridden:

```
open -t file.txt
```

Finally, any file that's of the "text" type will get opened by the application bound to the text type if you just say `open file.txt` . You can use the "file" command to reveal what the operating system thinks the file type is: `file file.txt` . So, for example, if you renamed "file.txt" to just "textfile" then `open textfile` would still open it in the default text-file editing application, as long as `file textfile` still thought that "textfile" was actually a text file.

A short 'help' file on `open` can be found by running

```
open --help
```

Or you can read the whole manual with

```
man open
```

edited Oct 9 '14 at 11:16

CousinCocaine
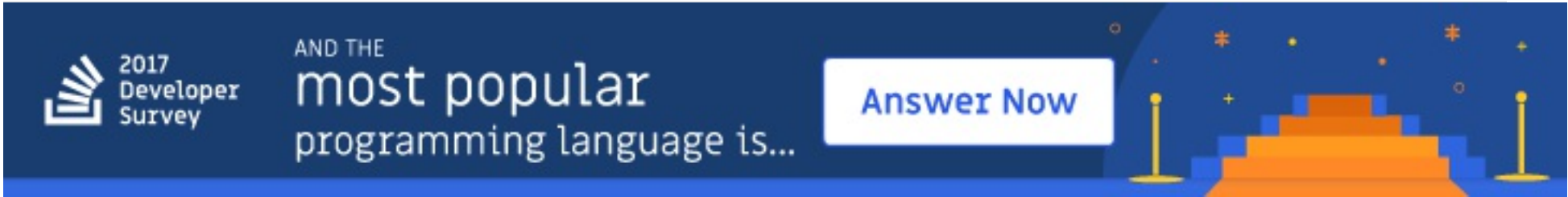**4,553** ● 7 ● 24 ● 57

answered Jun 27 '11 at 18:57

Viktor Haag
960 ● 7 ● 10

I put this into my .bash_profile: "alias o='open -a Sublime\ Text\ 2'" and then I can simply type at the command prompt: "o text.txt". It's very easy on the fingers ;) – cmroanirgo Jul 15 '14 at 2:57

`open` is the only 'right' way to do this. – CousinCocaine Oct 9 '14 at 9:40

The default text editor is TextEdit. You can open a text file in there by using open - a:

```
$ open -a TextEdit hi.txt
```

If you want to use another app, just put it's name in, like this:

```
$ open -a Coda index.html
```

edited Dec 22 '11 at 15:42

answered Jun 27 '11 at 18:25

Nathan Greenstein
18.7k ● 20 ● 78 ● 122

There are two ways:

If your default text editor is TextEdit, you can simply use

```
open -t file.txt
```

to open it in TextEditor.

If your default text editor is not TextEdit, and you want to open it in TextEdit specifically, you can use

```
/Applications/TextEdit.app/Contents/MacOS/TextEdit file.txt
```

Either of those can be made an alias in your shell config file, of course.

answered Jun 27 '11 at 18:20

mipadi
1,887 ● 2 ● 17 ● 26

> Notice that I'm not sure that the convention of passing the file name argument directly to the application's name on the command line may not work for all applications. Only applications that are built to accept filenames on the command line as valid arguments for opening will work this way. I *think* that the more general `open` command uses a more thorough method to get an application to "open" the file argument passed to the open command (i.e. it depends on the same functionality by which the Finder's "double click to open" action works). – Viktor Haag Jun 27 '11 at 19:10 ✏

> @Viktor Haag: Both of those will work with TextEdit. – mipadi Jun 27 '11 at 19:18

If you search for a comfortable way with more "linux feel" add something like the following to your `~/.profile` :

```
alias textmate='open -a TextMate'
```

or

```
alias textedit='open -a TextEdit'
```

depending on your editors.

edited Oct 11 '14 at 21:01   answered Jan 11 '14 at 11:55

1   Although `.profile` works, `.bash_profile` is more common on OS X. – CousinCocaine Oct 9 '14 at 9:41

If you already started to write in terminal and you want to continue on your favorite editor you can press `ctrl` + `X` , `ctrl` + `E` and continue working in emacs or your default bash editor.

If you want to change the default editor, change the environment variable EDITOR to your favorite one:

```
EDITOR=vim;export EDITOR
```

answered Jan 11 '14 at 13:16

EDSancha
31 ● 2

See if you have the vim editor, I didn't even realize my terminal could use it.

Try:

```
user> vimtutor
```

to figure out its controls.

You can edit files pretty well with it. The syntax looks something like:

```
user> vim foo.txt
```

answered Feb 17 '14 at 6:17

user70580
1