

Git for Beginners

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Who is this book for?

What is Git

The Structure of Git

When working with git in your day to day it's useful to know about the way git is structured. There are four main working areas that you'll be using when working with git. These four areas are

- The Working Directory
- The Staging Area (Also know as the index)
- The Local Repository
- The Remote Repository

The further down the above list you go the less control you have over changes to individual files and the more control git has.

Lets look at each of these areas together now.

The Working Directory

The working directory is where you make all your changes. It is the directory which is under version control using git. You have the most control over this area and can make changes using editors without ever typing a single git command. While there are git commands that can make changes in this area, git commands are not the only way unlike the next area.

The Staging Area (Also know as the index)

The Staging Area or Index is where you stage your changes to your working directory ready to be put under git's full control. This is the area between you and your local repository. The main purpose of this area is to help you organise how you label the changes you wish to put under git's full control. You will also see this area come into play a lot when you have conflicts between changes. You can only make changes here using git commands, but you have still have control over what goes under git's full control.

The Local Repository

The Local Repository is what allows git to be distributed. You have your own local copy of the repository that you can control with git commands. Once you have put changes into the local repository you cannot edit them easily. It is possible, but you can only really edit blocks of changes that were made in the staging area previously.

Also the Local Repository can be seen a little bit like a staging area for the remote repository.

The Remote Repository

The remote repository is the area that everyone on your team and the outside world can see your changes. You can think of the remote repository as the perfect copy of your code (The good enough to ship version). As such you tend to have less control over this area. It is possible to have more than one remote repository in your project, but most likely you'll only ever work with one.

Working locally

It is possible to work with git without having a remote repository at all. For this first section that is exactly what we will do.

The reason for this is so we can just think about the interaction between the first three areas, and since this is what you will most likely be doing mostly, it's a good place to start and for you to get some practice.

Intilising your Local Repository

The first thing you will want to do is identify the directory you want to put under version control. This directory is your working directory as mentioned before as one of the working areas in git. This directory can be empty or can already contain files. In your terminal either create or navigate to the directory you wish to put under version control. You can do this by using the cd and mkdir commands if using a bash shell.

Once your terminal is in your directory, you can use the following command to create your local repository.

```
git init
```

That is it. You now have a local repository you can work with. This repository is currently empty and knows nothing about the files you might already have in your working directory. Additionally your staging area is also empty.

Before we start looking at adding changes to the staging area, let's have a look at what things look like currently to git. It is often useful to be able to see what git knows about your working directory and what state things are in generally. The command that can tell you about the status of git is simply

```
git status
```

As an example here is what git status tells me after initialising an empty working directory

```
working % git status
On branch main

No commits yet

nothing to commit (create/copy files and use "git add" to track)
```

Just to dissect this a little bit. The first line tells you which branch you are on. Don't worry about branches for now, we will cover those in a later section. The next line tells you about commits, this we will cover those shortly. The last line tells you that there's no changes in your working directory.

The usage of git status can go a little bit further too. You can provide a file or a directory after the command if you only want to know about the status of that one file or directory, the command looks like this

```
git status <file or directory>
```

where you replace <file or directory> with whichever file or directory you wish.

Adding files to the staging area

Since we don't have any changes yet^[1], we should make some. With an editor make a new file, let's call it "my_new_file.txt" and inside it we will add the text

```
This is my first file
```

Once you have made this change and saved it. You will now have a change in your working directory. Let's see what git thinks of it by running git status once again.

```
working % git status
On branch main

No commits yet

Untracked files:
  (use "git add <file>..." to include in what will be committed)
  my_new_file.txt

nothing added to commit but untracked files present (use "git add" to track)
```

You now see the new file under the untrack files list. This means that there are changes in the working directory that have not yet in the staging area in git. So our next step is to add this file. The command for this is

```
git add
```

This command takes a filename or a directory or a list of files/directories after it. This tells git to add the listed files or directories to the staging area.

Let's do that now. To add the single file we have so far type git add my_new_file.txt into the command line and press enter.

Now when we do git status we see the following.

```
working % git status
On branch main

No commits yet

Changes to be committed:
  (use "git rm --cached <file>..." to unstage)
    new file:   my_new_file.txt
```

As you can see the file has moved from *Untracked files* to *Changes to be committed*. This means your changes are now in the staging area.

You can choose to make more changes if you like, but these changes won't end up in the staging area until you add them again. This is because your file is now partly under git's control. You've added it to the staging area and so git remembers the changes made when it was added.

Removing files from the staging area

It's quite possible that you've added files to the staging area you did not mean to. For example you might have added an entire directory but you only meant to add some of the changes inside that directory.

Summary

In this section we have seen

- How to create a local repository using the git init command.
- How to add changes to the staging area using the git add command.

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1. Maybe you do already if you didn't start with an empty directory, don't worry we'll get onto adding these soon. [↩](#)