Vim: a highly stable terminal-based text editor

Every Linux user needs a text editor. It is the place where every development is made. There are hundreds of options, from the most simple to the highly elaborated. This article is the first of a column to Ubuntu Mint, dedicated to Vim: a highly customizable and highly stable text editor, which is terminal-based and has been developed since 60s.

* VIM IMAGE HERE

## Origins

In the early history of operating systems, we find Unix, developed by Bell Labs in the 1960s, which was accompanied by a text editor called Ed, an abbreviation for editor. In the early 1970s, Ed was replaced by a more modern version called Ex (short for extended). At that time, everything had a CLI (command line interface) and, therefore, everything operated directly through command lines. It was not different with Ex.

With the advancement of technology, TUI (terminal-based user interface) applications started to be developed. Although they are not CLI, TUI applications are also carried out within a terminal. By the late 1970s, Unix replaced Ex and started using a TUI text editor called Vi: an abbreviation for “visual”, referencing the shift from command lines to a visual interface.

Unix operating systems were not open-source. However, they were highly sought after due to their portability, which motivated many people to focus on the problem of building open-source versions of Unix applications. For example, the Linux kernel emerged from the attempt to replicate the kernel of Minix, one of the Unix versions, in an open-source format. The same happened with the text editor Vi.

Indeed, in 1991, Bram Moolenaar developed a software that aimed to be an open-source version of Vi. He named it Vim, which originally stood for “Vi IMitation”. However, Vim ended up being developed as a much more sophisticated fork of Vi and packed with many tools, leading to a change in the meaning of the acronym Vim to “Vi IMproved”. Over the years, Vim has evolved with a focus on simplicity, modularity, and customization.

## Characteristics

Vim was developed in the C programming language, making it independent of the shell used in Unix. This allowed for the release of Vim versions for different operating systems. A scripting language called Vim Sript was developed to standardize and facilitate the creation of modules, referred as “plugins”.

One of the remarkable features of Vi is the use of keybinds: it involves mapping keyboard patterns to actions, making command execution simpler, faster, and more customizable. This characteristic has been preserved and remains predominant in Vim.

## gVim

In the 1980s, the first GUI applications started to emerge on Macintosh and Windows 1.0 computers. While maintaining its minimalist style, a GUI version of Vim was released in 1998, called gVim.

## Installing

Installing Vim and gVim in Ubuntu is very simple from the apt package manager:

sudo apt-get install vim  
 sudo apt-get install vim-gtk3

## Conclusion

Thus, Vim:

* is a text editor created in 1991 as a fork of a text editor that has existed since the 1970s, making it extremely stable and extensively tested;
* is an open-source software and cross-platform, with versions available for Linux, Windows, macOS, and more;
* was initially developed in a terminal-based user interface (TUI) format, but also has a minimalist graphical user interface (GUI) version called gVim;
* is highly extensible, allowing for the use of plugins that add additional functionalities and features;
* is fully customizable, allowing users to configure and personalize various aspects of the editor to suit their preferences and workflow;
* is very easy to install in Ubuntu.