

Linux and Emacs

1 The Greek Island Machines

This semester, we will be using the CS department's Linux workstations in the mini-mini-focus for all programming in CS251. There are ten such workstations, all named after Greek islands: corfu, crete, cyprus, ithaca, kithera, lefkas, paxi, santorini, rhodes, and zante.

If you took CS230 in Fall 2000 with Allen Downey, you are already familiar with working in the Linux environment and with using tools such as shells, X Windows, and Emacs. If not, you need some pointers to information on how to log in to these machines and use these tools. That's the purpose of this handout.

2 Logging In to an Island Console

In order to use a Linux workstation, you must have an account on Nike, the CS department file server. If you do not already have an account, one will be made for you based on information you provide in the on-line course questionnaire (<http://cs.wellesley.edu/~cs251/questionnaire.html>).

The easiest way to use one of the Linux workstations is to directly log in to one of the consoles in the mini-mini. A console not in use should display a Linux login screen, picturing a penguin with a login prompt. Enter your Nike username and password at the prompt. If your configuration files are correctly set, then after a little while an X-window manager known as KDE should appear on the screen. If not, contact me for assistance.

A few things can go wrong when you are logging in. If the screen is blank, type any key and the login screen should appear. If the screen displays a screensaver of some form, it has been "locked" by another student (see notes on locking etiquette, below) and you cannot use it. If the screen display looks like KDE, then another student is logged into the machine and may still be using it. If the screen display looks like Windows NT, then the machine has been booted in the wrong mode and needs to be booted into Linux mode.

3 Telneting into an Island Machine

You do not have to be physically seated in front of one of the Linux workstations in order to use it. You can access any of the island machines remotely via a telnet client, such as BetterTelnet on a Mac or QVTerminal on a PC. You can use one of these clients to connect to an island machine with your Nike username and password.

There are two key advantages of telneting to a Linux machine. First, you can access the island machines from any other machine on the Internet – a fact which is important when the Science Center is closed or you don't wish to walk there. Second, via telnet you can still use the machines even when all consoles are actively being used (several people can be logged into the same Linux machine at once). This is important to know when the mini-mini is crowded with people near a problem set deadline.

A disadvantage of using telnet is that telnet clients provide only a text-based interface, so you will not be using the graphical user interface familiar from the console. However, since nothing in the course depends on graphics (Emacs/Scheme/ML/Haskell all work wonderfully well in a purely text-based environment), you can work on any assignment in the course via telnet. (It helps to be familiar with Emacs control- and meta- key commands!)

Note: there are programs for both Macs and PCs that can display X windows from a remote Linux machine, but these are not standard on the public cluster machines at Wellesley.

4 Accessing Nike Files

The Nike file system is automatically mounted onto the Linux machine when you log in. This means that you can transparently refer to any of your files on Nike from the Linux machine using the normal Nike file names. For instance, if you are user `gdome`, and you create a file named `~gdome/test.txt`, this file is actually stored on Nike and not on the Linux machine. You can later view, edit, or delete any such file from any Linux machine or from Nike itself.

5 Using a Shell

You can accomplish many tasks in KDE by pointing and clicking, just as on a Mac or in Windows. However, some tasks can only be accomplished (or can be accomplished more conveniently) by typing textual commands in an interactive program called a *shell*. For instance, in a shell, you can easily copy all files whose name match a certain pattern from one directory to another – something that can be more tedious using point-and-click interfaces.

If you are unfamiliar with shells, you should read Chapter 4 (*The Unix Shell*) of Larry Greenfield's *The LINUX User's Guide*. This guide is available on-line from the CS251 home page. There are also a few hardcopies of the guide sprinkled amongst the island machines.

There are two standard ways to create a new shell window:

- Click on the shell icon on the KDE menu bar.
- You can create a shell within Emacs via `M-x shell` (see the section on Emacs, below). It is very convenient to have a shell within Emacs, because then any shell command can be easily executed without leaving Emacs. This is especially important if you are telneting into a Linux machine.

One minor drawback of running a shell under Emacs is that Emacs sometimes interprets or prints character sequences in a different way than a separate shell window would. For instance, an Emacs shell will echo passwords that a normal shell would not. Also, the `ls` command in an Emacs shell prints a lot of annoying formatting characters; these can be removed by first executing `unalias ls` in the Emacs shell.

6 Emacs

Emacs is an extensible, customizable, self-documenting text editor created by Richard Stallman. Many consider it to be one of the greatest programs of all time. It also happens to be free; in fact, it is the flagship programs of Stallman's Free Software Foundation and GNU project.

You will be doing most of your work this semester – writing, executing, and debugging programs in Scheme, ML, and Haskell – using Emacs. In fact, it is possible to do all your work in the course entirely within Emacs. It is very important to become a proficient Emacs user because this will save you a lot of time during the semester.

There are two standard ways to launch Emacs:

- Select the menu sequence `K:Applications:Emacs`.
- Execute `emacs &` from within a shell. The `&` will create a separate Emacs window. If you are working via telnet and do not wish a window to be created, instead execute `emacs -nw` (the `-nw` means “no window”).

All Emacs documentation, including a tutorial and reference information, are on-line. If you are unfamiliar with Emacs (or have used it before but are rusty), you should take the on-line Emacs tutorial. You can do this by typing the `Control` and `h` keys at the same time, followed by the `t` key. This will load an interactive tutorial, whose directions you should follow. When you complete the tutorial, you will know how to do basic editing in Emacs.

The tutorial teaches you keystroke commands for basic Emacs functionality. If you prefer, most of this functionality can instead be accessed by using a combination of the mouse, menu items, and arrow keys. However, I strongly recommend that you learn the keystroke commands, as they will save you lots of time and make it easier for you to work via telnet.

Another useful introduction to Emacs is Chapter 8 (*Editing Files with Emacs*) of Larry Greenfield’s *The LINUX User’s Guide*. You will find links to this and several sites containing more detailed Emacs documentation on the CS251 web page.

It turns out that Emacs even has its own hypertext information system. This system contains detailed documentation on Emacs itself, and is worth exploring to find out more about Emacs. In order to access this information system, type the `Escape` key, followed by the `x` key, followed by the character sequence `info`. This will load up an editor buffer that contains a top-level menu of the system documentation. You can browse this system via mouse clicks, much as you browse web pages in a web browser.

7 Printing

There are two standard ways to print your files from an island machine:

- Within Emacs, select either the `Tools:Print:Print Buffer` or `Tools:Print:Postscript Print Buffer` menu sequences. (The latter gives nicer looking output.)
- Within a shell, execute `lpr filename`.

Either of these options will print your document on printer `psci11`, which is the smaller printer near the mini-focus consultant’s desk. If you use `lpr`, you can print to a different printer using the `-P` option.

The connections from some of the island machines to `psci11` have been flaky (e.g., nothing prints out when you try the above). We are investigating the problem.

8 Logging Out of an Island Machine

After you are done using a Linux workstation, you should log out by selecting the menu sequence K:Logout. This should bring back the Linux login screen. If not, something is wrong with one of your configuration files; contact me for assistance.

If you have connected to an island machine via telnet, you can type `logout` or `exit` in the login shell to log out.

It is important not to accidentally leave yourself logged in to a Linux machine when you are done. If you do so, someone may accidentally or purposely read, modify, or delete your files. Also, you will be tying up an important resource.

If you want to leave the mini-mini for a short break, you can “lock” your console by clicking on the lock icon on the menu bar. This will lock the screen in such a way that your password is required to unlock it. You should only lock machines for *short* breaks (as a rule of thumb, no more than 15 minutes). Otherwise, you will be tying up an important resource that someone else may need to use.