

# Free and Open Source Software (FOSS)

*A practical guide to free and open source software for Windows, Mac and Linux*



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**Information Management Systems Association**

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## What exactly is free, open source software?

Free software is software that anyone is free to use, copy, improve, examine or distribute, either free of cost or for a price. More precisely, it refers to four fundamental freedoms, which users of the software should have:

1. Users should be able to run the software for any purpose.
2. Users should be able to closely examine and study the software and should be able to freely modify and improve it to suit their needs better.
3. Users should be able to give copies of the software to other people for whom the software will be useful.
4. Users should be able to improve the software and freely distribute their improvements to the broader public so that they, as a whole, benefit.

Ultimately, the concept is that you retain your rights to do what you will as a user. There are lots of different types of free software licences which cover and specify different levels of freedom, however they all have the commonality that the underlying code which runs the program is available for free, which in almost all cases

guarantees you a number of rights that you waive when you agree to a standard EULA (End User Licence Agreement) when not using free software.

## I'm confused? Free means what?

The word "free" has two meanings in the English language.

1. The "free" in "free beer", which refers to zero cost.
2. The "free" in "free speech", which refers to freedom.

The "free" in free software refers to the freedoms mentioned earlier. There's nothing in the definition of free software that says that you cannot sell it to someone for a price. Indeed, there are companies whose entire business model is centred around collecting, compiling and selling free software with valued added services. Many companies use free software to run their businesses - Google and Yahoo! are two prime examples.

Free software exists because those who write it choose to give it away for others to use at no cost. Its their copyright; they make the choice to give it away. Its that simple. Don't believe it? Keep reading.

## Why should I care?

Okay, so maybe you have a friend who rants about how cool their Linux computer is. Maybe you have another that gripes about the fact they have had to pay \$\$\$ to get Office suites for their new laptop. Maybe you want to be able to do the neat things that the software at your school does. Maybe you have recently suffered a virus attack, in which you lost your thesis, and all your digital photos and music.

Or it could just be **that someone gave you this brochure**, and you are only now pondering why the heck you took it!

Free software can't solve every problem but, it can at least help alleviate many computer-related ones. In almost all cases it will save you megabucks in the process, and probably stop you from "borrowing" a copy of Microsoft Windows or Microsoft Office from your friends!!! Remember, "borrowing" such software is illegal!

## Ok, so what is it?

There are a lot of high quality Free and Open Source Software packages, many of which contain features you don't get with commercial or proprietary packages. The following are some that every student should know about. They are available for Mac, Windows and Linux, so no matter what you are running you can use them.

### LibreOffice | <http://libreoffice.org>

An Office suite, which is compatible with Microsoft Office. It contains extra functionality such as the ability to create PDF's and supports a much wider range of document formats. Also includes spreadsheets, presentation and database software.

### GIMP | <http://gimp.org>

Strange name, great software! GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program), is a Graphics editing program, similar to Photoshop. It supports a much wider range of formats and the windows version (with a plugin) can support Photoshop filters too!

### Firefox | <http://getfirefox.com>

Firefox, is a Web browser. It is much more secure and renders web pages faster and more correctly than the competition. It also supports many features that others don't include. Reduce the risk of having your computer exploited with spyware and malware. Use Firefox!

### Thunderbird | <http://mozilla.org>

Mozilla Thunderbird is an e-mail program is similar to Outlook Express or Eudora. Outlook Express comes pre-installed in Windows, but is one of most frequent ways in which a computer becomes infected with viruses through e-mail. By installing and using Thunderbird you keep yourself secure

from e-mail viruses. Thunderbird of course includes many features Outlook express does not, including spam and scam detection.

### iLearn | <http://ilearn.sfsu.edu>

Did you know that iLearn, SF State's Learning Management System (LMS) is based on free and open source software called Moodle? Through Moodle we get the combined intellect of thousands of programmers worldwide, and the feedback of many thousands more. iLearn brings us a stable, usable and fully customized LMS!

## Want Linux?

Linux is a Complete operating system, if you are curious it can be installed on the same computer along side existing Operating Systems.

Please ask if you are interested in getting it installed. IMSA members are more than happy to assist you.

- [imsa@sfsu.edu](mailto:imsa@sfsu.edu)
- [opensource@sfsu.edu](mailto:opensource@sfsu.edu)

Better yet, find your local Linux User Group (LUG) and get started. You'll find LUGs everywhere - from Albania to Zimbabwe! <http://www.linux.org/groups/>