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Chapter 2

Exploring the Ubuntu Desktop

OBJECTIVES

- The highlights of Ubuntu desktop
- How to change the default language
- How to create a new user account and take advantage of user switching
- To add and remove applications
- How to enable 3D Desktop effects

This section serves as a quick tour of the Ubuntu desktop. The course will go into more detail in later lessons, but this will give you a taste of what's ahead.

2.1 Ubuntu Desktop Components

Note: Note:

GNOME is the default desktop environment for Ubuntu. GNOME (GNU Network Object Model Environment) is an international effort to build a complete desktop environment—the graphical user interface, which sits on top of a computer operating system—entirely from free software. This goal includes creating software development frameworks, selecting application software for the desktop and working on the programmes which manage application launching, file handling and window and task management. Community members worldwide contribute to the translation and accessibility of the desktop in multiple languages. (Reference: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNOME>)

Key Desktop Components on Ubuntu When you start your computer, the first screen displayed on Ubuntu is the logon screen, where you type your user name and password. The next screen displayed is the Ubuntu desktop. Ubuntu comes with a completely clean desktop background, free of icons by default.

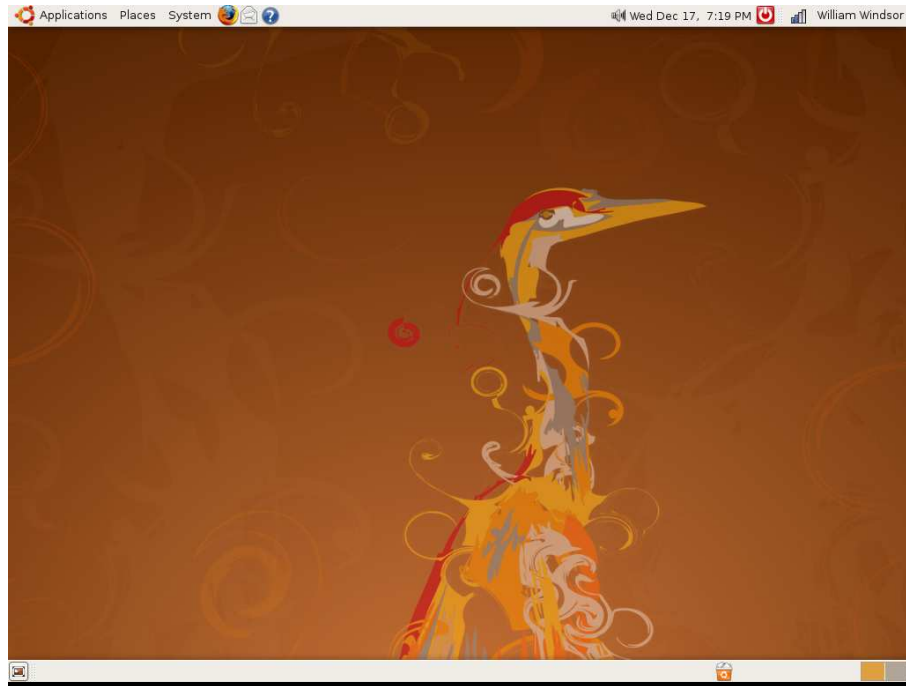


Figure 2.1: Default Ubuntu Desktop

You can arrange icons and files on the desktop to access them quickly. If a CD, hard disk or any other external device is connected to your computer, Ubuntu automatically displays its icon on the desktop to allow easy access to the device.



Figure 2.2: Desktop Icons

At the top and bottom of the desktop are two bars, called panels.

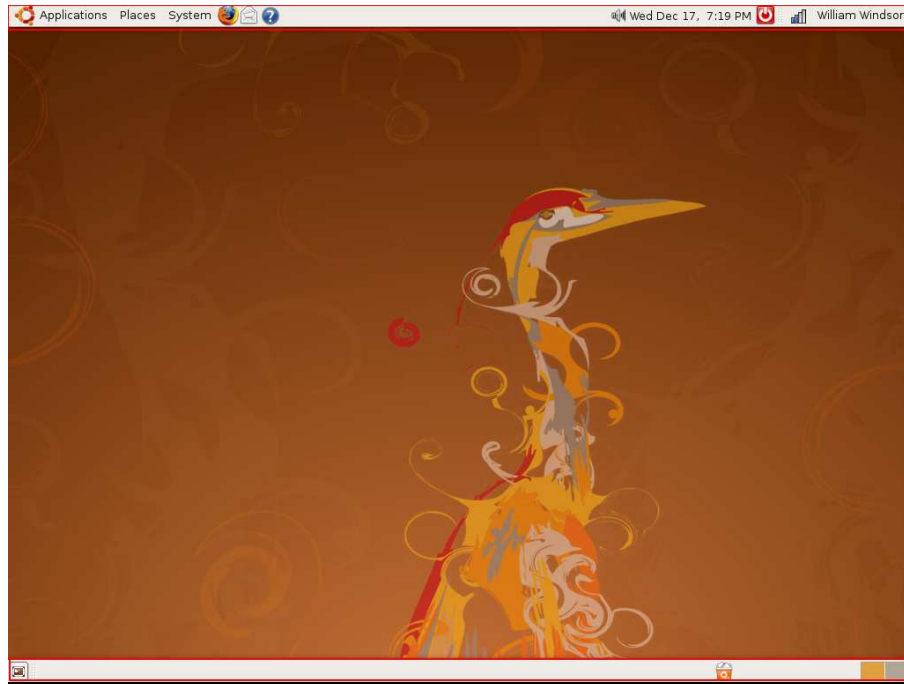


Figure 2.3: Desktop Panels

There are three main menus in the left pane of the top panel: Applications, Places and System.

- **Applications:** This menu contains all the applications installed on your computer such as games, music players, Web browsers and e-mail clients.

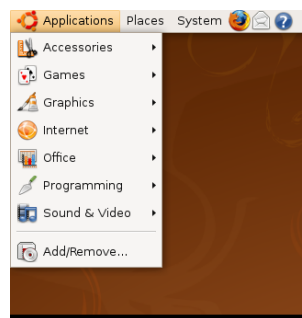


Figure 2.4: The Application Menu

- **Places:** This menu provides access to your home directory, external devices and network on your computer.



Figure 2.5: The Places Menu

Note: The Home directory is created by default for every user and automatically takes the username. It contains all user-specific files. In a multi-user system, every user stores personal data in a sub-directory of this directory.

- **System:** This menu enables you to change the computer settings. You can also access the Ubuntu help system and turn off your computer here.



Figure 2.6: The System Menu

By default, there are three shortcut icons next to the menus on the top panel: Mozilla Firefox, Evolution and Help. You can create additional shortcuts to any applications and place them here for quick access.



Figure 2.7: The Shortcut Icons

1. Right-click the blank area of the top panel and click **Add to Panel**. The **Add to Panel** dialogue box appears.

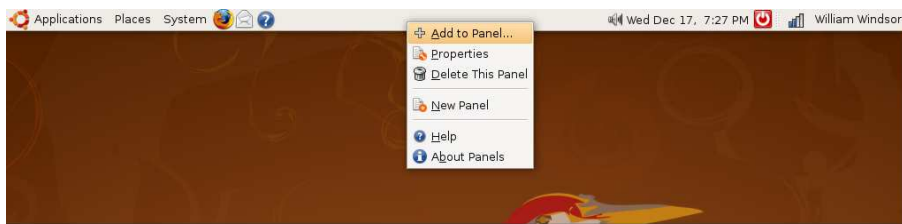


Figure 2.8: Adding a Shortcut Icon

- The **Add to Panel** dialogue box displays a list of applications available on your computer. Select an application and click **Add** to add it to the blank area of the desktop. If you want to launch the programmes available on the **Applications** menu, click **Application Launcher**. NOTE:

Alternatively, you can drag an application icon from the Add to Panel dialogue box and drop the icon on the panel to create a short cut to the application.



Figure 2.9: Adding Application Launchers

- The applications grouped in a category similar to the **Applications** menu appears. Select an application from the available list, and click **Add**.



Figure 2.10: Selecting Applications

The icon of the selected application will be displayed on the blank area of the top panel.

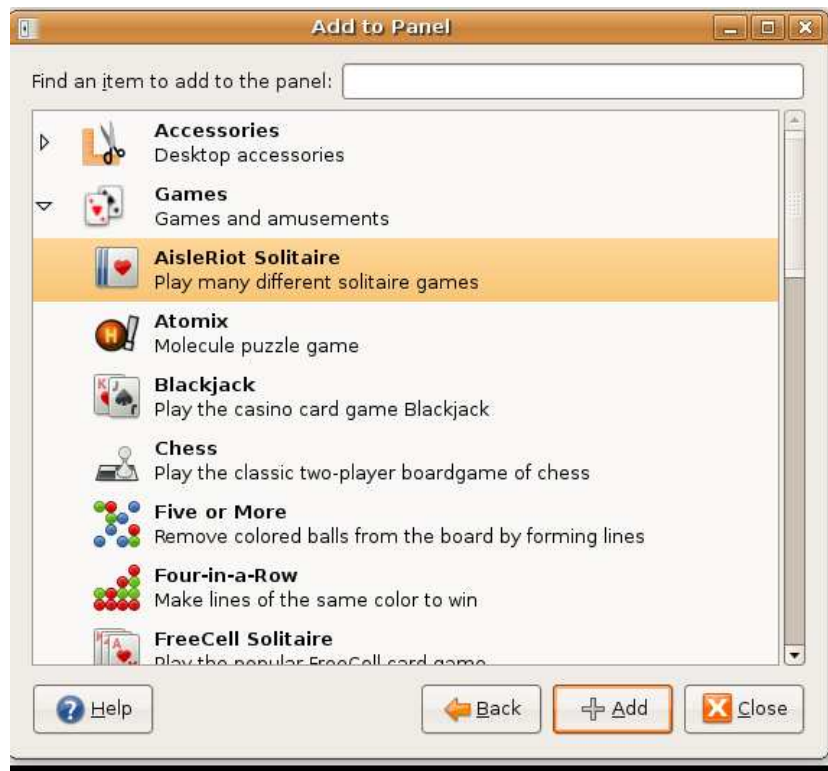


Figure 2.11: Adding Application Launchers

You can change the location of the newly created shortcut icon by right-clicking it and selecting **Move**. Move the icon anywhere on the top panel and left-click the icon to freeze its location.

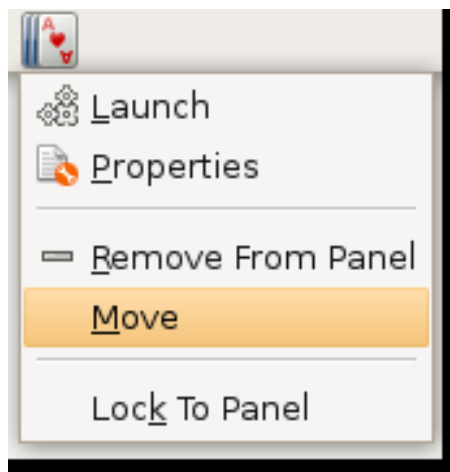


Figure 2.12: Moving Shortcut Icons

Next to the blank area on the top panel (where you can create short cuts of the application) is the fast user switch icon. This icon shows the current user of your computer. You can click the icon to view other users on the computer and switch to another user.

You will learn more about fast user switching in the **Fast User Switching** topic of this lesson.



Figure 2.13: The Fast User Switch Icon

The System tray contains the network and sound icons for quick access to network and sound settings. You can check the network configuration of the computer and adjust the volume of your computer's speaker.

The current date and time is displayed next to the System tray. If you click the date and time, a calendar is displayed.

The last icon on the top panel shuts down, restarts, hibernates, locks your computer and places it on standby.

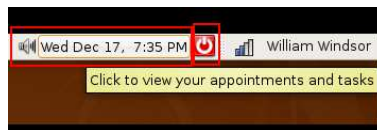


Figure 2.14: Top Panel Icons

The first icon on the bottom panel provides quick access to the desktop. If multiple windows are open on your desktop and you would like to minimise all of them together, click this icon. Clicking again will display your windows in their original state, before you minimised them.



Figure 2.15: Show the Desktop

Next to the icon used to minimise the windows is a blank area in which the list of open application windows appears, similar to the taskbar in Windows. When you open an application, it's listed on this area for easy access, as shown in the bottom panel of the following screen:



Figure 2.16: Open Applications

The next icon, workspace, enables you to split the windows that are open on your desktop into multiple workspaces. You can then navigate among the workspaces by pressing and holding down the CTRL+ALT keys, and then pressing either the left or the right arrow key. This reduces the clutter on your desktop and eases navigation between windows.

For example, you might have the Firefox window, an OpenOffice application, a search window and a calculator window open on the desktop.

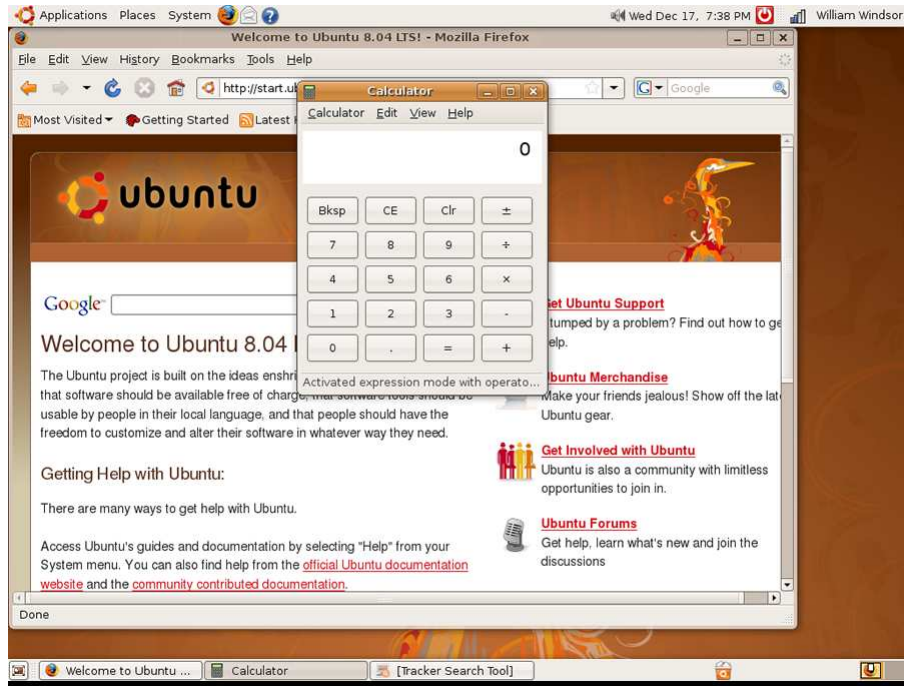


Figure 2.17: The Workspace Icon

You can move the Firefox window to a separate workspace by pressing and holding down the CTRL+ALT+SHIFT keys and then pressing the left or the right arrow key. Two workspaces will be displayed in the bottom-right corner of the desktop - one workspace with the Firefox window and the original workspace with the other windows.



Figure 2.18: Switching Workspaces

Now, you have two separate workspaces. Notice that the Firefox window has shifted to the original workspace. So, depending

on the task you perform, you can split the windows into different workspaces.

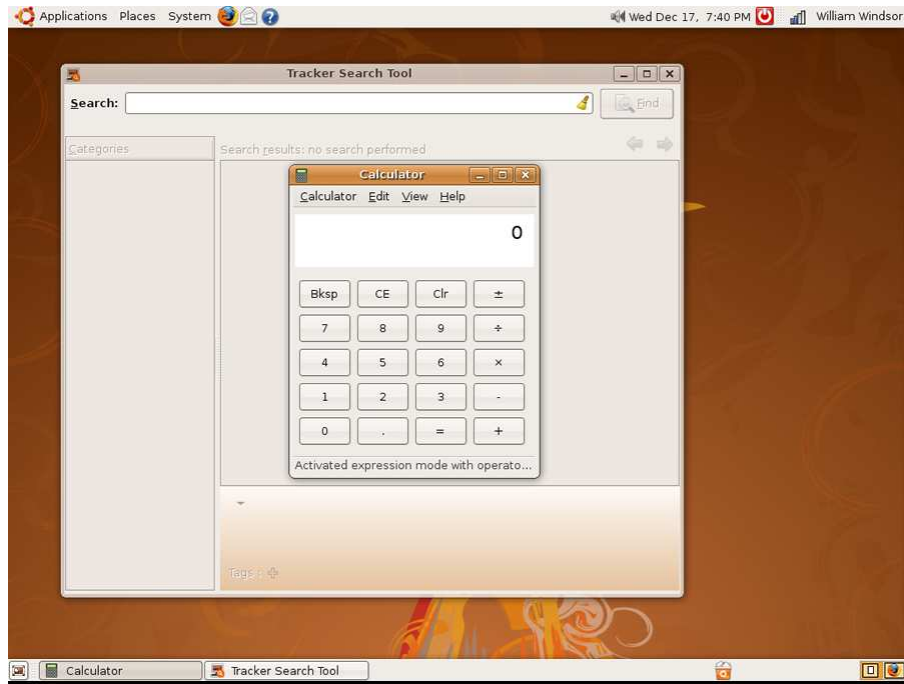


Figure 2.19: Splitting Windows into Workspaces

By default, Ubuntu provides two workspaces. If you want to split the windows into more workspaces, you have to add the workspace to the desktop by right-clicking the workspace icon and then clicking **Preferences**. The **Workspace Switcher Preferences** dialogue box appears.



Figure 2.20: Creating New Workspaces

In the **Workspace Switcher Preferences** dialogue box, type or select the number of workspaces from the **Number of workspaces** list and click **Close**.

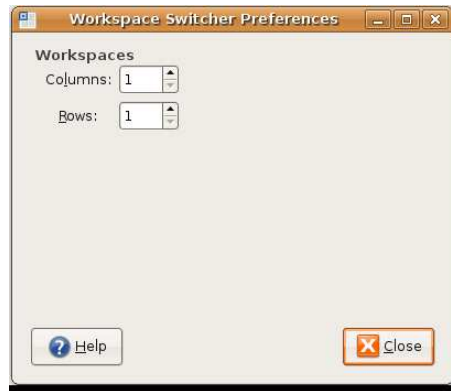


Figure 2.21: Workspace Switcher Preferences

The specified number of workspaces will be displayed in the bottom-right corner of the desktop.

The last icon in the bottom panel is the **Waste basket**. It contains the files you deleted from your computer. Right-click the icon and click **Open** to open the **Trash** window.

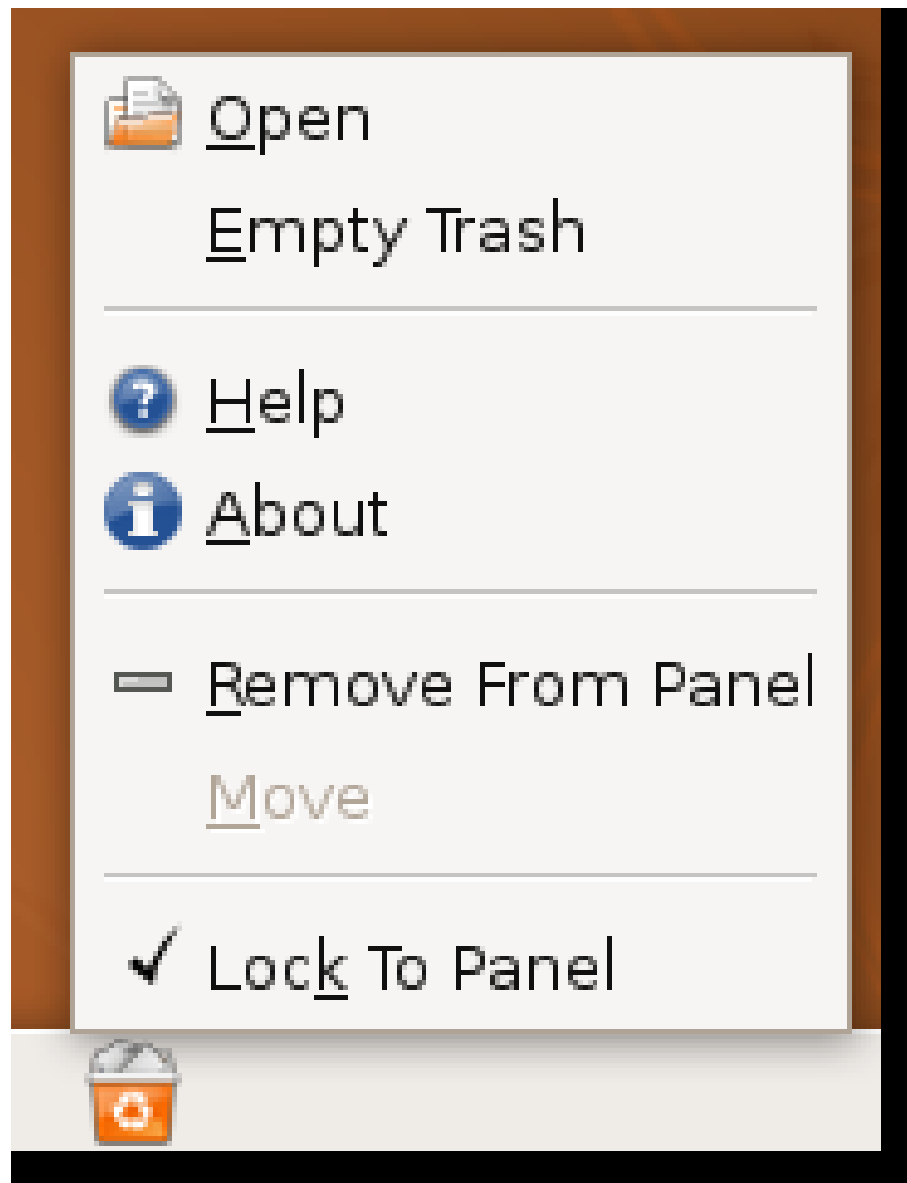


Figure 2.22: The Waste Basket Icon and Menu

You can delete an item permanently from the computer by pressing the **DELETE** key.

Alternatively, you can right-click the item and click **Delete from Trash** to permanently delete it from the computer.

If you want to restore the deleted item to the desktop, drag that item to the desktop from the **Trash** window.

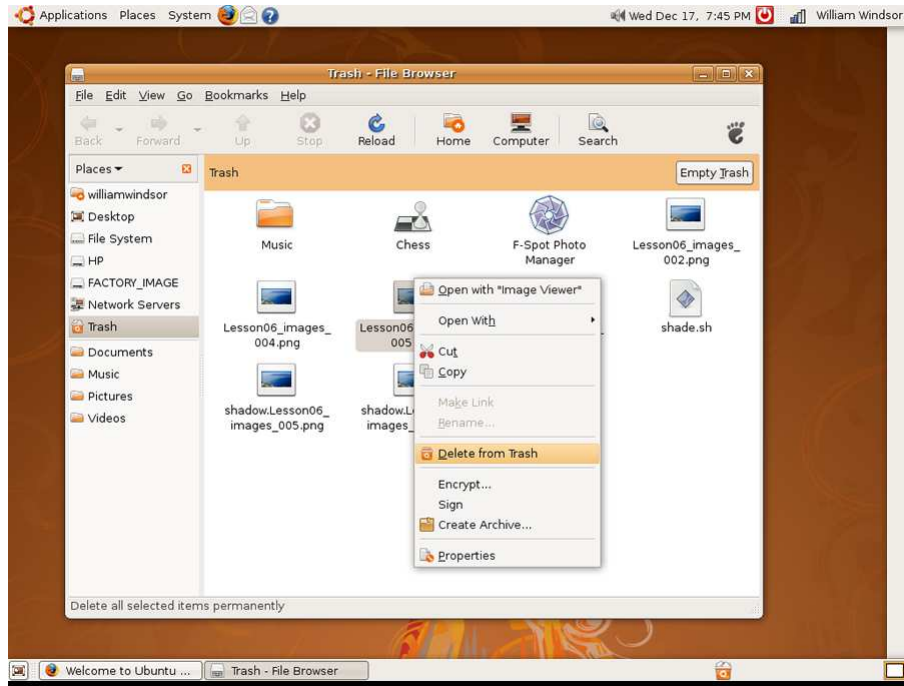


Figure 2.23: Deleting Items from Trash

2.2 Changing the Default Language

Nice to Know:

Ubuntu supports more than 100 languages. You can set the default language of your computer either during the installation of Ubuntu or at a later stage.

To change the default language during the installation, select the required language when prompted.

1. On the **System** menu, point to **Administration** and click **Language Support**. The system prompts you to install language support if updates are available for your selected language.

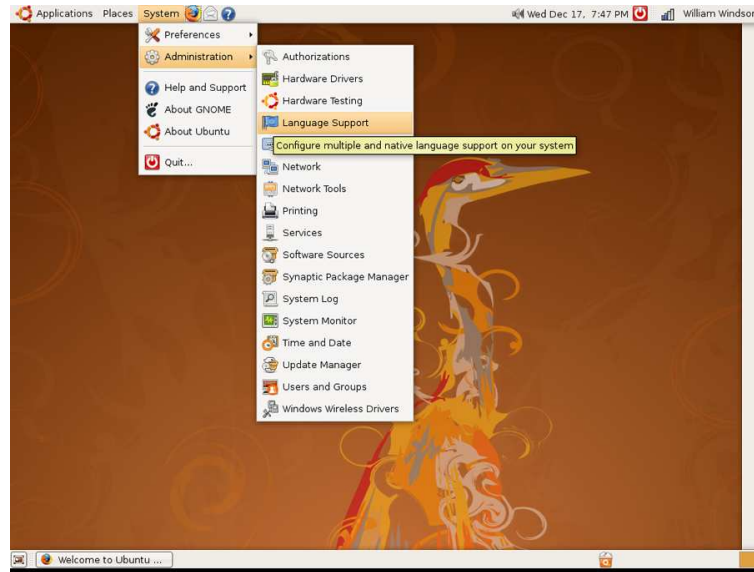


Figure 2.24: Configuring Language Support

2. Click **Install** to continue. On completing the updates, the **Language Support** dialogue box opens.



Figure 2.25: Installing Language Support Updates

3. In the **Language Support** dialogue box, from the **Supported Languages** section, select the check box for the language you want to use for support functions in Ubuntu.



Figure 2.26: Installing Default Language Support

4. Click **Apply** and then click **OK**. Ubuntu downloads and installs the necessary packages on your computer. The language you selected will now appear in the **Default Language** box.
5. Select the language that you want set as default, and click **OK**.
6. For the changes to take effect, log off and then log on again.

You can change the language as many times as you would like and this can depend on your location. For example, changing the language to Russian may be a nice touch when presenting in Russia during a business trip.

2.3 Creating a User Account and Fast User Switching

You may have multiple users who want to access your system. In this case, there is a risk of data being manipulated or corrupted by other users. To prevent this from happening, you can create user accounts for each individual who wants to use your computer, giving each user an individual account with personalised user settings. For example, it is useful to give children their own accounts on the computer to prevent them from changing your settings or accessing unsuitable files and applications..

1. On the **System** menu, point to **Administration** and click **Users and Groups**. The **User settings** dialogue box appears.

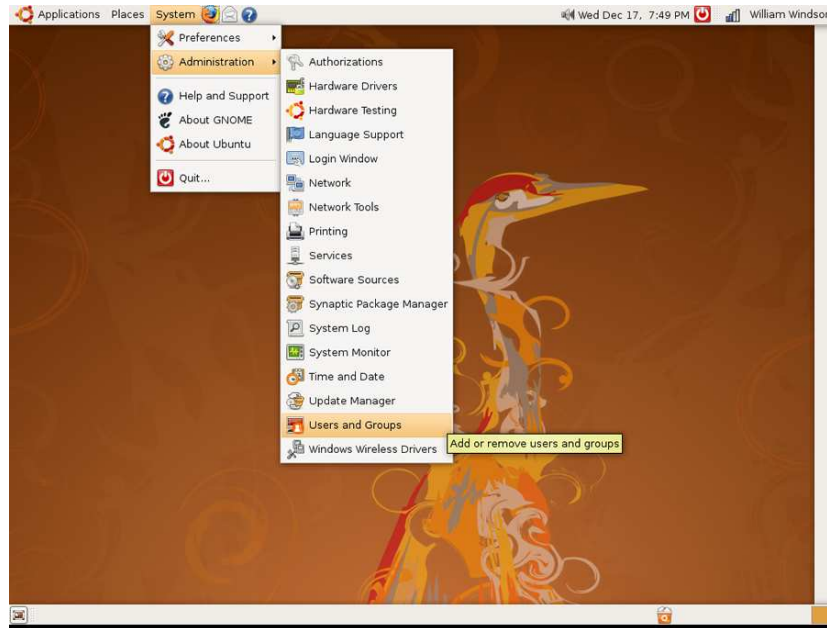


Figure 2.27: Adding/Removing Users

2. In the **User settings** dialogue box, click **Add User** to add a new user account on your computer. The **New user account** dialogue box opens.



Figure 2.28: Adding a User

3. Specify the user accounts' basic settings, contact information and password information in the **New user account** dialogue box.
 - (a) Type the name with which you want to log on to your computer in the **Username** box.
 - (b) Type your full name in the **Real name** box.
 - (c) Select your user type from the **Profile** box.
 - (d) Type your office location in the **Office location** box.
 - (e) Type your work phone number in the **Work phone** box.
 - (f) Type your home phone number in the **Home phone** box.
 - (g) Type the password for your user account in the **User password** box.

NOTE:

This information is for record keeping only, and other users cannot view it.

Click **Close** to save the settings.

New user account

Account | User Privileges | Advanced

Basic Settings

Username: charleswindsor

Real name: Charles Windsor

Profile: Desktop user

Contact Information

Office location:

Work phone:

Home phone:

Password

Set password by hand

User password: ●●●●●●●●

Confirmation: ●●●●●●●●

Generate random password

Password set to:

Figure 2.29: Configuring New User Account

4. A new user account will be displayed in the User settings dialogue box. This dialogue box displays the new user's full name and login name. It also tells you the location of the new user account created.



Figure 2.30: The New User Account

Now, if you click the fast user switch icon, there will be two users displayed and the current user logged on to the computer will be marked.

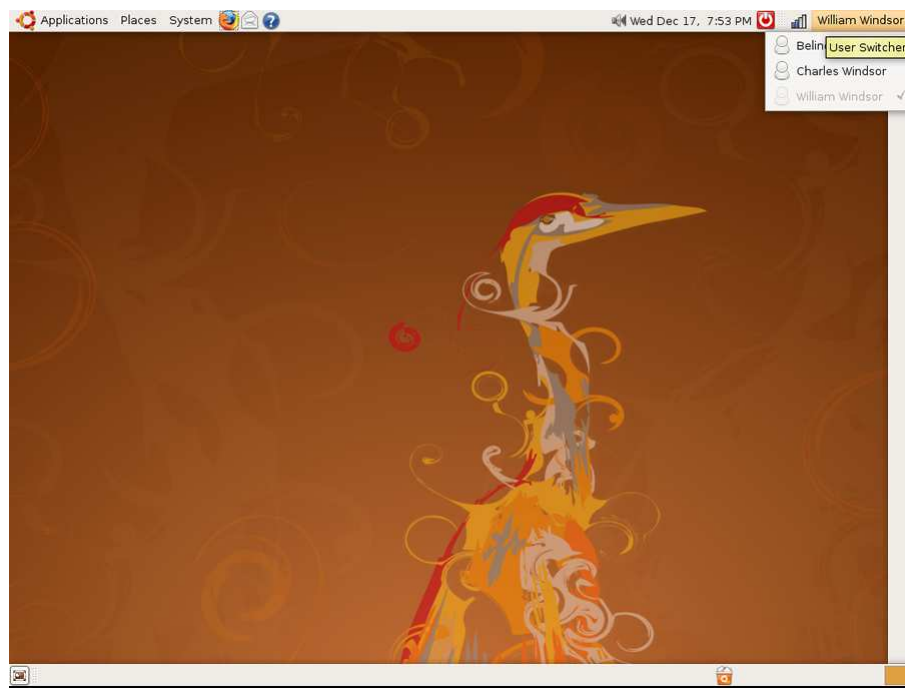


Figure 2.31: Switching Users

This feature prevents you from logging off and logging on all the time to switch users. It allows multiple users to switch quickly while staying logged on. By simply clicking the fast user switching icon, a list of the user names appears. Select the user name and you will be directed to the logon screen. Type the user name and password, and you will be on a desktop of the new user.

When you switch to another user, the previous user screen is locked by default, so the other person cannot make any profile changes.

2.4 Adding/Removing Applications

USE THE ADD/REMOVE APPLICATIONS WHEN YOU NEED TO:

- Use software not provided as a default application on Ubuntu.
- Try an alternative application to the one already installed

Ubuntu contains pre-loaded software that you can easily install on your computer when required. You can install this software by using the Add/Remove application or the Synaptic Package Manager utility of Ubuntu. To access the Add/Remove application, on the **Applications** menu, click **Add/Remove**.

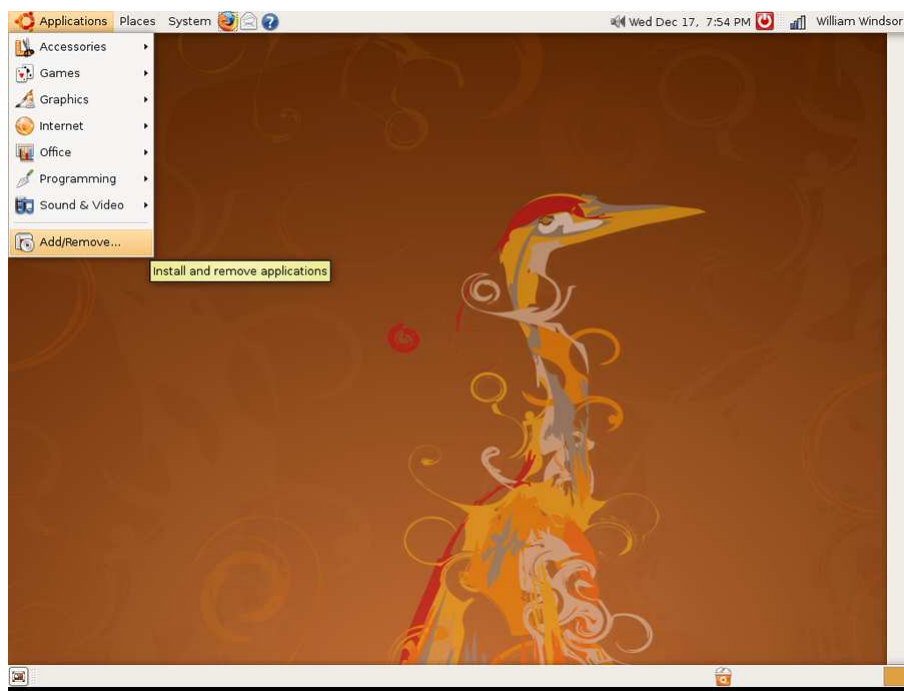


Figure 2.32: Launching Add/Remove Applications

To access Synaptic Package Manager, on the **System** menu, point to **Administration** and click **Synaptic Package Manager**.

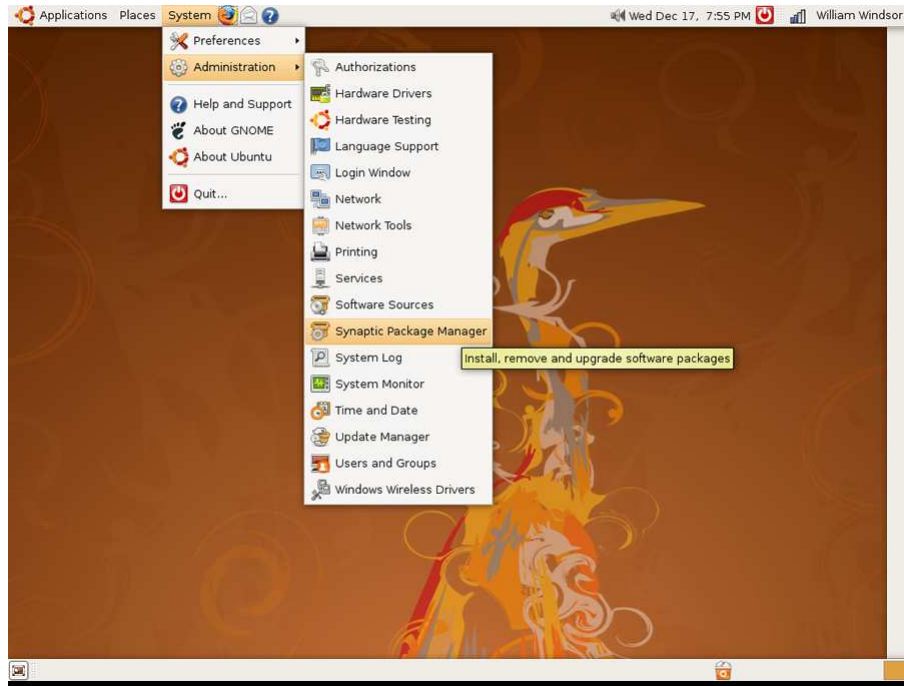


Figure 2.33: Launching Synaptic Package Manager

Synaptic offers an advanced way of installing packages. If you do not find a software programme in the Add/Remove tool, you can search for it in Synaptic. It searches all software in the available repositories on Ubuntu.

2.5 Desktop Effects - Compiz Fusion

Compiz Fusion is a 3D window manager that makes use of 3D accelerated graphics cards found today on many desktops and laptops. It provides a number of visual effects that makes the Linux desktop more powerful and intuitive, as well as easier and more fun to use. For example, you can place workspaces on a cube, which enables you to move from one workspace to another easily.

Compiz Fusion is enabled by default on Ubuntu 8.04 LTS with appropriate graphics cards. It enables the 3D desktop visual effects that improve the usability and visual appeal of the system. You really have to see and play with this application to appreciate the benefits.

1. On the **System** menu, point to **Preferences** and click **Appearance**. The **Appearance Preferences** dialogue box appears.

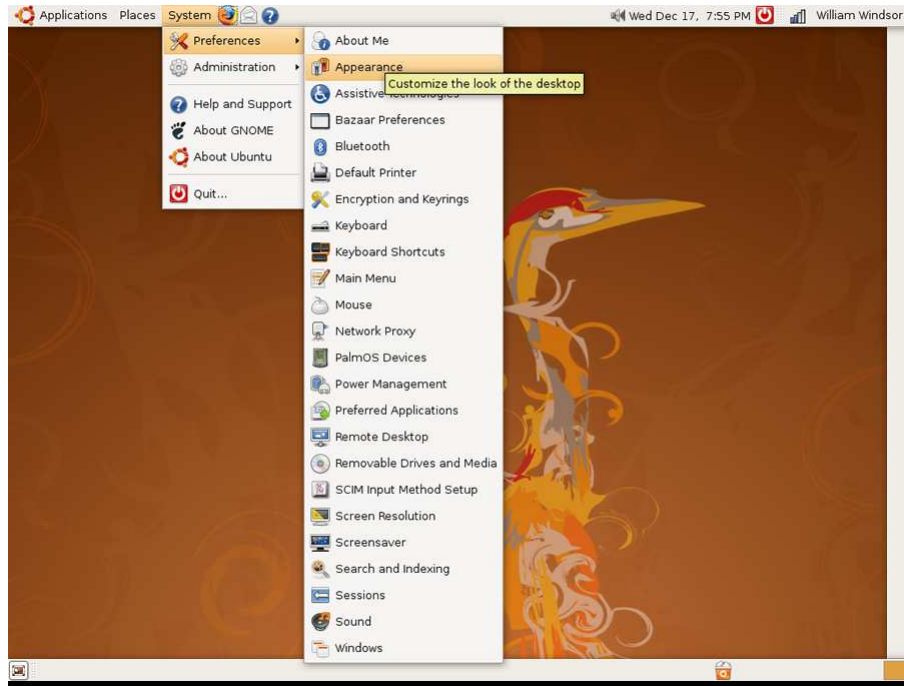


Figure 2.34: Opening the Appearance Preferences Dialogue Box

2. In the **Appearance Preferences** dialogue box, there are three pre-configured levels of special effects settings: No effects, Normal effects and Extra effects. You can select any one of them:

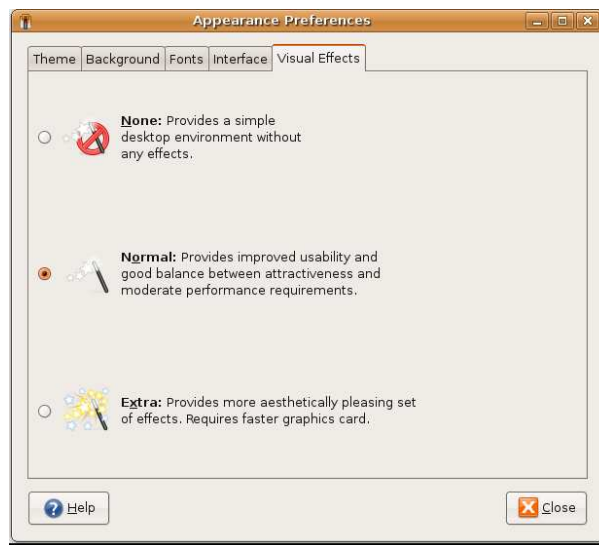


Figure 2.35: Configuring Visual Effects

If you want a simple desktop without any special effects, select **None**. If you want a desktop with a balance of attractiveness and average performance, select **Normal**. If you want various desktop effects, such as wobbly windows, desktop cube and many more, select **Extra**. For example, while you are waiting for an update to complete or an e-mail client to import e-mail messages, you can turn on the Wobbly effect. The windows will start dancing and displaying the 3D effects. Play with it a little, it's fun!

2.6 Lesson Summary

In this lesson, you learned that:

- Ubuntu utilises the GNOME desktop by default
- You can set the default language of your computer either during the installation of Ubuntu or at a later stage
- Fast user switching enables you to share your computer with other users without sharing your files
- You can install software by using the Add/Remove application or the Synaptic Package Manager utility of Ubuntu
- Compiz Fusion is enabled by default on Ubuntu 8.04 LTS and provides fun, 3D desktop visual effects

2.7 Review Exercise

Question: At the top and bottom of the desktop, you have two bars, called _____.

Answer:

Question: Which are the three shortcut icons already present on the top panel?

Answer:

Question: What is fast user switching?

Answer:

2.8 Lab Exercise

Exercise: You have bank-related information on your computer and want to block others' access to it. Your friend wants to use your computer for some time. To handle this situation, create a new user account for your friend and use the fast user switch feature.

1. On the **System** menu, point to **Administration** and click **Users and Groups**. The **User settings** dialogue box opens.
2. In the **User settings** dialogue box, click **Add User**. The **New user account** dialogue box appears.
3. In the dialogue box, specify the following information:
 - (a) Type charles in the **Username** box.
 - (b) Select Desktop user from the **Profile** box.
 - i. Type charles windsor in the **Real name** box.
 - ii. Type England in the **Office location** box.
 - iii. Type 111111 in the **Work phone** box.
 - iv. Type 99999 in the **Home phone** box.
 - v. Type password@1 in the **User password** box.
 - vi. Click **Close** to save the settings.
4. Click the fast user switch icon on the top panel. Click charles. The logon screen appears.
5. Type charles in the **Username** box and password@1 in the **Password** box.
6. Your friend can now work on this desktop.

Your friend cannot access your user account because the computer will ask for your password to log on to the account. So, your personal data is safe.
