

How To: Ask a Good Support Question

Today, we're going to try to teach you how to ask a good support question. After all, if you want good support (and of course you do) then you really need to start with a good question.

Let's be frank about this. Asking a good support question is actually a difficult thing for some people to do. The people needing support are often the least-knowledgeable, which already places them at a disadvantage.

Seriously, it's hard to ask good questions. In fact, the possible scope of things that would need to be covered in an article of this nature is so large that I'm really only going to be able to give you some general guidelines. I'll do what I can, and various sites may have different conventions, so you'll have to take from this what you can.

Let's do this thing!

Skip to the support question form by clicking [here](#).

Asking Good Support Questions:

Start with a good headline! Seriously, your headline should actually be a short description. Generic headlines don't help and won't attract people to your question.

Bad: "My computer won't boot."

Good: "My computer stops booting after the GRUB screen with a blinking cursor and a black screen."

Seriously, put some effort into it. Don't make it click-bait, make it an accurate summary of the problem. Make it a simple, well-thought-out description of your problem.

But, before you even begin...

Use the search feature! Before you post your question, search! Search, search, search! It's your computer and your problem, you should be the one doing the most research. On top of that, many questions already have an answer. Every support site out there has a search function. Use it!

Don't just use the forum's search – use your favorite search engine. Don't just do a quick search, keep searching. Make it past the first five or ten results, and don't expect your answer to be on the first link you clicked. You might have to do multiple searches, digging deeper into the problem.

I get it, searching can be hard – especially if you don't know the jargon. So, find as much information as you can about your problem and use any error logs you can find. Even if your searching doesn't give you the answer – it might give you enough information to help us help you.

Hint: If you start an application from the terminal, you might learn something from the text it outputs to the terminal.

Hint: If you want a nice GUI way to read your logs, I highly recommend using `kssystemlog`. It pulls in just a few dependencies and a very handy tool.

Seriously, search and then search some more. If nothing else, you'll have more information with which you can help us to help you. You'll also learn things along the way. What's not to love?

While you're searching, make sure you also search the site to make sure you put your question in the right section. The "General" category is not a catch-all, it's where you put your question when there's no better category. If your question is about the terminal, put it in the command line section. If your question is specific to Ubuntu, make sure you put it in the "Debian and derivatives" section. Use commonsense and put

your question in the most appropriate section.

Make your post legible! If you want help, once again, help us help you. Because this is written for more than one site, I need to be generic when I say this. The forum has formatting features – USE THEM!

Unless otherwise specified, the language is English. It's not that we're dicks, it's that we don't speak your language. Use a translator and post your question in English when you're on English-speaking sites.

Use code tags. Every single Linux support forum that I know of has the ability to wrap things in code tags. It will look a little like this:

```
[code]sudo apt update && sudo apt upgrade -y[/code]
```

Doing so will properly format the code and make it legible. It makes it easier for us to actually see what's going on. It gives clear line breaks, makes the text distinct, and helps us spot problems.

Use paragraphs. Giant walls of text aren't easy to read, nor are they fun to decipher when they're interspersed with multiple problems and poorly formatted code snippets. Without paragraphs, you might as well be writing gibberish.

For the love of all that's holy, stop taking screenshots of text! It's text. Post it as text! We can highlight the important bits and search for them. We can edit it and post it back to you. So, if it is at all possible, do not post text as images. It's a pain in the butt to get the text during a boot error, so there are obvious exceptions when it's approached by a reasonable person. But, seriously, try to avoid it.

Be complete and informative! There's almost no such thing as too much information. I mean, sure, you could possibly give us more information than we need, but that's much better than not

enough information.

We need to not just know what distro you're using, but we also need to know what version. We need to know what desktop environment you're using. We need to know what major changes you've made to your system.

We need to know what software version it is you're talking about. Believe it or not, we don't know every piece of software, so you should provide a link to the software's home page so that we can learn about it and help you. We'll also need to know how you installed it, if it is indeed a software question.

If it's a hardware connection, telling us the model number of your computer isn't actually enough information. Different models have entirely different configurations and we'll need to know what CPU you have, what your GPU is, what you have for sound, what type of connection to the internet you have, how much RAM you have, and possibly more.

NOTE: Sometimes your 'problem' isn't actually a problem, it's the expected behavior. Yes, your computer will slow down when you have a bunch of browser tabs open and leave them open for days. Yes, your computer will still boot slowly if it's old and you're using an OS with a heavy desktop environment and you have everything opening at boot. No, it's not supposed to show asterisks (some distros do) when you type your password into the terminal.

Be patient and helpful! We're all volunteers. We owe you nothing. Don't treat us like paid support and don't expect us to do the work for you. You're expected to participate in us helping you. When we ask for follow-up information, provide it in a timely manner.

TIP: Limit your questions to one at a time, unless you're absolutely certain that they're related. We volunteers tend to specialize in a few areas, so mixing a bunch of questions into

one post is just confusing.

Don't cross-post. Pick a forum and ask there. Chances are good that we're members of the other forums, so you're going to get a lot of the same people helping you. Don't ask the same question at multiple sites, ask at one site – which also makes it easier for the person who's searching for the same question in the future.

Finally! This is just a general guide. As I told you at the start, asking a good support question isn't easy. On top of it all, different forums will have different conventions. So, you should probably lurk at a forum before just jumping in. It's probably a good idea to pick a forum at the same time you pick a distro. That way, they know who you are and you're a member of the community before you're asking for help.

Anyhow, I have a (temporary, I hope) survey that you can answer. It's just a good start for asking a good support question. It's located here:

Ask a Good Support Question Easy Form

Again, that's just a form to ensure you include the basic information needed to help you. Be reasonable and amend it as necessary. In the future, I'll try to get something better designed, but it's a start. This is definitely a draft and will be amended in the future.

What is the Best Linux

Distro?

Finally, an answer to the age old question: Which Linux distro is the best?

This question gets asked time and time again. This has been debated from the moment more than one distro existed – pretty much since day one. It's also often seen on a larger scale, is Windows better than MacOS or Linux? It has been so hotly debated that it has caused true animosity and rage-quitting entire sites.

I've been using Linux exclusively for more than a decade. In a prior position, I used Unix extensively. I have dozens of virtual machines of myriad distros. My Linux ISO folder is 250 GB in size. If you can name it, I've probably installed it and used it. I think that makes me qualified to finally put this question to bed.

So, what is the best Linux distro?

There isn't one.

The best Linux distro is the best one for you. It's the one that suits your individual needs best. It's the one where you're most able to get your work done. It's the one that's suited to your personal workflow. It's the one that makes you the most happy. It's the one that best lets you use the applications you need to use. It's the one that works for *you*.

You can look up Linux distro benchmarks.

You can check their popularity.

You can test them out virtually online.

But, at the end of the day, nothing beats experience. You can download the images and use VirtualBox to test them for longer periods (and more fully, with internet access) than you'll get online. You can download the various .iso images and test them

on bare metal – without harming your currently installed operating system.

The reality is, it may take you some time to find the right distro for you. Maybe you'll start with something easy to install and maintain, and maybe your final destination ends with Linux From Scratch. Maybe you'll start off with LFS, learn as much as you can, and end up using a more mainstream distro. Who knows? Only you. Only you know.

When someone attempts to tell you the best Linux distro, what they really mean is what is best for them. That may not be the best for you – or it could be the best for you. You won't know until you try. You still won't know, until you've tried many.

There are many things to consider. Do you want a stable release? Do you want a rolling release with the most up-to-date software? Do you want to use Aptitude or Zypper, or maybe none at all? Which desktop environment do you want? What default software do you want? Which window manager is right for you? Do you want a fancy desktop or just the bare minimum? How about something in between?

TIP: You can do some *really* refined searches at DistroWatch.

Do you want a distro that comes with just the basics so that you can add your own software? Do you want a distro that comes with the software you're most likely to use? Do you want a specialist distro that comes with the tools you need, like Springdale Linux? Do you want to work with multimedia as a creator with Ubuntu Studio?

Then, what computer architecture are you using? Are you trying to keep your old 32 bit computer running? You can do that. Do you want to use your SBC (Single-Board Computer) as your HTPC (Home Theater PC)? You can do that. Do you want to set up your own router and firewall? You can do that. Do you want to set up your own NAS (Network-Attached Storage)? You can do that! In fact, there are unique Linux distros to do all of those

things!

There are many, many choices. Odds are great that there's a distro that's right for you. And, if you can't find one that's just right, you can make your own. On top of that, you can make pretty much any distro do the same thing that another distro does. So, you can start with one distro and turn it into whatever you want.

The choices are so many and so broad that you have practically limitless choices. That's one of the things that makes Linux so great. You have a say in what your operating system does (and what it doesn't) do. It's your computer, you get to decide.

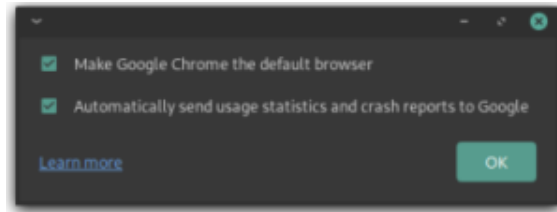
And, that's the answer to this age-old question. There is no right distro, there's only the right distro for you. Me? I'm old. I want stability and an environment that gets out of my way to let me get my work done with the smoothest possible workflow. The distro that does that is the distro that's right for me.

Enjoy the wondrous journey of discovery, as you find the right Linux distro for you.

NOTE: This article was updated on 01/15/2021.

A Short Rant...

I am not sure who I am ranting about. I am not sure who made this decision. Allow me to show you:



Look carefully. You'll see it.

I was playing with Manjaro (their Cinnamon edition is delightful) and was playing around with AUR software. After all, I wanted to install Google Chrome. Say what you will, but I actually like their browser. It suits my needs best and, trust me, I've tried all the other browsers.

It's not the packager's fault. It's probably not Manjaro's fault. It's almost certainly Google's fault.

Don't see it yet? Well, look at the choices. See, I'd like Google Chrome to be a good browser. By that, I mean that I'm willing to send them crash reports. I don't want to send them my usage statistics, even though I'm sure they're truly anonymized and I really don't have anything to hide. I just don't need them knowing that much information.

I get it Google, you're an information company. But, for the love of all that's holy, let us pick. Because I didn't want to send usage stats, I am not able to send you crash reports by the proper channels. Manjaro will get crash reports when something crashes. That's not going to make it upstream to Google. Google isn't going to be trawling through Manjaro's crash reports looking for data. They're going to expect it on their channels.

Why can't I pick one or the other, Google? You're not making more people send you usage statistics, you're making fewer people send you crash statistics! There's a bit more fidelity and more choices at `chrome://settings/syncSetup` but not that much. In there, you can at least choose to send less data to them.

I know, bitching about data collection with a data collection company is kinda silly – but there is data that I’d happily give them. There is data I’d let them have in exchange for making a decent browser. I’m willing to make that trade, but they need to let me pick a more granular selection than they currently allow.

Linux History: A Reminder!

I’ve nearly finished Wiley’s 10th Edition of the Linux Bible and it’s a wonderful book. In it, way back near the start, there’s this gem – and it really tells us how far Linux has come.

Some histories of Linux begin with the following message entitled “What would you like to see most in minix?” posted by Linus Torvalds to the comp.os.minix newsgroup on August 25, 1991, at <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!msg/comp.os.minix/dlNtH7RRrGA/SwRavCzVE7gJ>

Linus Benedict Torvalds

Hello everybody out there using minix – I’m doing a (free) operating system (just a hobby, won’t be big and professional like gnu) for 386(486) AT clones. This has been brewing since april, and is starting to get ready. I’d like any feedback on things people like/dislike in minix, as my OS resembles it somewhat (same physical layout of the file-system (due to practical reasons, among other things)). . .Any suggestions are welcome,

*but I won't promise
I'll implement them ☐*

Linus (torvalds@[redacted].fi)

PS. Yes – it's free of any minix code, and it has a multi-threaded fs. It is NOT protable[sic] (uses 386 task switching etc), and it probably never will support anything other than AT-harddisks, as that's all I have :-).

Anyone reading this site will not need elaboration. Man, how far has Linux come? How far will it go? Will there someday be a small project that takes off and supplants Linucus Rex?

Microsoft Edge for Linux?

I wanted to test it out to see how well it works. With just one tab open, there are 13 instances of 'msedge' tasks running. It's consuming quite a bit of CPU for being so idle. It also lags a bit visually. It's almost imperceptible, but it's there. Opening menus has a small lag, for example. As does typing this text – though it's not using an insane amount of CPU cycles.

It's definitely a dev build, and I'd expect the final product to be more polished. I am unable to login to the browser, so I can't share settings and a profile across multiple instances. That doesn't yet work, but it does give you a helpful message that lets you know that it's not yet supported.

I do not see me using this as my daily driver, nor even one of my many browser instances that I have configured for different tasks, but here we are. It has a nice dark mode available by

default. I haven't tried to install any extensions or anything. It's an intuitive browser to use, as would be expected as a Microsoft product.

It was trivial to install. They provide a .deb or an .rpm. So, you shouldn't need to work hard to install it on quite a variety of distros. You can find it packaged here. This is, interesting, the first MS product I've used in a very long time. I don't even use VS Code, though I probably should give that a try.

I suppose that I'd keep running it, if I actually cared. After all, my running it would report my uses back to the mothership and they'd theoretically improve the browser because of it. Alas, I really don't care. It's great to see MS releasing opensource software. It's great to have another browser alternative. I just don't care enough to do anything about it.