

# 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 `ksystemlog`. 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.