

An Introduction to KDE

The KDE Team



An Introduction to KDE

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Abstract

An introduction to the K Desktop Environment
Quick Start Guide to KDE

Chapter 1

Introduction

This document is a brief introduction to the K Desktop Environment. It will familiarize you with some of the basic features of KDE.

This guide is far from covering all aspects of the K Desktop or even most of them. It will only describe some of the most basic ways to accomplish a few of the most common tasks.

We assume that you are already familiar with at least one graphical user interface, for example CDETM, GeosTM, GEMTM, NeXTSTEPTM, Mac[®], OS/2TM or Microsoft[®] Windows[®]. So we will not explain the usage of the mouse or the keyboard but concentrate on hopefully more interesting things.

Chapter 2

An Overview of KDE

This section is for users who prefer to learn by exploring and want only a brief orientation to get started. Later sections provide a more thorough introduction to the environment, with helpful hints and shortcuts. If you are impatient to get started, skim this section, go play for a bit, then come back and peruse the other sections of this guide as needed.

NOTE

KDE provides a highly configurable desktop environment. This overview assumes that you are using the default environment.

2.1 The KDE Desktop

A typical KDE desktop consists of several parts:

- A panel at the bottom of the screen, used to start applications and switch between desktops. Among other things, it contains the K menu, a large K icon which displays a menu of applications to start when clicked.
- A taskbar, by default embedded in the panel, used to switch between and manage currently running applications. Click on an application on the taskbar to switch to the application.
- The desktop itself, on which frequently used files and folders may be placed. KDE provides multiple desktops, each of which has its own windows. Click on the numbered buttons on the panel to switch between desktops.

2.2 Ready, Set, Go!

Here are a few quick tips to get you up and running.

- To start an application, click on the K icon button on the panel (called the [K menu](#)) and choose an item from the menu.
- Click the icon that looks like a picture of a house on the panel to access the files in your home folder using Konqueror, KDE's File Manager utility.
- Choose K menu → System → Konsole to get a UNIX® command prompt, or press Alt+F2 to get a mini command prompt window to execute a single command.
- Choose the Control Center item on the K menu to configure KDE.
- Press Alt+Tab to switch between applications and Ctrl+Tab to switch between desktops using the keyboard.
- Use the right mouse button mouse button to access context menus for the panel, desktop, and most KDE applications.

Chapter 3

Launching Applications

3.1 Using the K menu and the Panel

At the bottom of the screen you will find the desktop panel, which is called Kicker. You use the panel to launch applications. Have a look at the button on the left with a large K icon.

This button is called the K menu. It has a small arrow on the top to indicate that it will pop up a menu if you click on it. Just do it! The pop-up offers you easy access to all KDE applications installed on your computer system.

3.1.1 Customizing Kicker

If you use one application or tool very often, then you may want to have even faster access to it, of course. In this case, you can add a single application, or an entire sub-menu of the K menu, as a special quick-launch button, on to the panel. If you want to reach the KFind application directly via a launch button, simply choose K menu → Panel Menu → Add → Button → Find Files (By this we mean that you should first click the K menu, then select Panel Menu, where the small arrow to the right indicates that another menu will pop up. In this menu, choose Add, then Button, and in the next sub-menu, Find Files).

You can add an entire menu this way, or one of the K icon button sub-menus. For example, if you have KOffice installed and want quick access to all the KOffice applications, without having to navigate through the K menu, then instead of choosing an application, click on the Add this menu menu entry. Now you will have instant access to all the KOffice applications, without having to put an icon for each on the panel.

NOTE

You can move all items of the panel around with the Move command of the context menu. Just click with the third mouse button (the third mouse button is normally the right button, but if you have configured your mouse differently, for example for left-handers, it might also be the left one). A menu will pop up where you can choose Move. Now move the mouse and see how the icon follows while still staying on the panel. When you are done, simply hit the first mouse button (by default the left one). As you may have noticed, there is also a menu entry Remove in case you are tired of a certain launch button on your desktop.

3.1.2 Using Context menus

This leads us to another interesting topic: in many places, you can click the right mouse button to display a context menu with choices that are applicable to the item you clicked. It is therefore always a good idea to try out the third mouse button on something, if you do not know what to do with it. Even the background of the desktops has such a menu!

3.1.3 Other Panel features

There are other interesting things possible with the panel. One may be important if you have a low resolution on your monitor: it is the 'hide-and-show' function, activated by clicking on the small arrowed button, which is at one or both ends of the panel.

Perhaps you just don't like the panel extending the full width of the screen. That's easily changed! right mouse button on an empty space in the panel, and choose Configure Panel.... In the KControl dialog that pops up, you can choose Length on the Appearance tab, and use the slider there to set the panel to less than 100% width.

If you're following along, and have that dialog open anyway, then feel free to play with all the options, and use the Apply to see the effect they have. You can easily reset everything to the default configuration, by simply pressing the Use Defaults button.

By the way, if you are not sure what a certain button does in KDE, just move the mouse pointer over it and wait for a short while: KDE has a built-in mini context help, called 'tool tips', which explains the functionality of such controls in a few words.

3.2 But I want my command line back!

Just calm down, there is nothing to fear. KDE does not want to take your beloved (and sometimes very effective) command line away from you. You

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can move your files with the desktop, but you can also use the UNIX® commands you are accustomed to. In fact, KDE puts command line power at your fingertips, in perhaps some surprising places.

KDE provides a very sophisticated command line window called Konsole. Choose K menu → System → Konsole to start it. This may be something you want on your panel: luckily it's already there in the default configuration!

Sometimes, you only want to enter one command on the command line. In these cases, you do not need a full-blown terminal. Just hit Alt-F2 and you get a small command line where you can enter one command. The command line window will disappear afterwards, but it remembers your command.

When you pop up this window (which we call *minicli* by the way) and hit the **Up arrow**, you can browse through all the commands you have previously entered. Also, you can enter URLs in *minicli* to open a Konqueror window with the specified URL.

Konqueror and the editor Kate can both display terminal windows, which behave just like Konsole. In Konqueror, you can turn this on with the menu choice Window → Show Terminal Emulator. The embedded terminal will display at the bottom of your Konqueror window, and the really clever thing is that it will follow your clicks in the file manager view, changing folder as you do. In Kate you can display a terminal with the menu choice Settings → Show Console.

TIP

To display a UNIX® man page, enter **man** : *command* in *minicli*, where *command* is the name of a UNIX® command.

TIP

To search for a word or words on the Google search engine, you can try entering **gg** : *word or words*. There are a whole lot more of these shortcut commands, and you can even add your own! Take a look in KControl, in the tab Web Browsing+Enhanced Browsing.

Finally, there's a way to have your command line always available, no matter what you're doing - add one to your Kicker panel!

Simply right mouse button click on an empty space in the panel, and choose Panel → Add → Applet → Application Launcher. This will embed a mini-cli directly into your panel, complete with command history.

So, in conclusion, the command line is never far from view when you're using KDE.

Chapter 4

Working with windows

If you have not already done so, start an application using the [K menu](#); say, Find Files.

4.1 A window! What now?

Well, usually people work *inside* windows, but sometimes you may want to manipulate windows. Here's a quick overview of some of the most common window related functions:

Move a window Drag the window's title bar, or hold the **Alt** key down and drag anywhere in the window.

Resize a window: Drag the window's border, or hold the **Alt** key down and drag with the right mouse button anywhere in the window.

Maximize a window Click the maximize button in the titlebar (in the default decoration it is the square, next to the X) to make the window fill the screen, or if the window is already maximized, to shrink it back to its original size. Clicking with the middle mouse button maximizes the window vertically, and with the right mouse button, horizontally.

Iconify a window Click the iconify button in the titlebar (next to Maximize) to hide the window. Restore it by clicking on the window's icon in the taskbar.

Switch between windows Aside from the usual mouse click to switch to another window, you can use Alt+Tab to switch windows. See below for more techniques.

4.1.1 Title bar buttons

KDE windows have some pretty standard buttons on their title bars which give you fast access to some common operations. The default button layout looks like this:

ON THE LEFT SIDE:

- A menu button. This usually shows a mini icon for the application. Click on it to get a window operations menu. Shortcut: Alt+F3 opens the window menu.
- Optionally a sticky button. What the heck is this? Stay tuned!

ON THE RIGHT SIDE:

- An iconify button.
- A maximize button.
- A close button. This closes the window. Shortcut: Alt+F4.

4.1.2 Switching between windows

Now that we know how to deal with windows, we encourage you to open some other windows using the panel, since we will now discuss how to switch between different windows. Since this is such a common activity, KDE offers several ways to do it; pick your favorite!

Many window systems require you to click the mouse in another window to begin using it. This is KDE's default behavior, termed 'Click To Focus' focus policy. But you can also configure your desktop in a way that moving the mouse pointer on to a window will activate it. This is called 'Focus Follows Mouse'. If you select this policy using the [KDE Control Center](#), the window under the mouse pointer is always the active one. It doesn't necessarily come to the front automatically, but you can still click on to the titlebar or the border of a window or, a KDE special, you can use the **Alt** key and click the middle mouse button anywhere on the window to raise it.

Here are some other methods to switch windows:

- Pick a window from the *window list* menu. To open the menu, click the middle mouse button on an empty area of the desktop, or click the icon with several windows on the panel, or finally click the up arrow at the left hand end of the taskbar in the panel.
- Hold down the **Alt** key and press **Tab** to cycle through the windows.
- Use the taskbar (see below).

4.2 Using the Taskbar

The taskbar displays a list of small icons, one for each window on the desktop. In the default KDE setup the taskbar is located inside the panel, but it can also be located at the top or the bottom of the screen.

The taskbar is very powerful. In the default configuration, if you have more than one window from the same application open, they will be 'grouped', so that you see one icon per application in the taskbar.

A simple left mouse click on the taskbar button will pop up a list of the open windows for that application and you can choose the window you want to use. Choosing one of these entries with the left will bring you to the selected window immediately. Click on a taskbar entry with the right and you will see a menu allowing you to operate on all the windows grouped under that icon, or each window individually.

You can choose to see all the windows on all the desktops in your taskbar, no matter which desktop you are currently viewing, or to only see the icons for the desktop you are looking at. You can also choose to ungroup the icons, so that each open window will have its own icon in the taskbar. These and many more options are available simply by right clicking on the taskbar handle (the small textured bar at the left hand side) and choosing Configure Taskbar....

The icons on the taskbar resize themselves to make room for applications, so you can fit many more applications than you might think. Making the panel wider will let the taskbar icons take on a row and column layout, but they will still resize to fit more icons.

4.3 Using Virtual Desktops

Now, what was that 'sticky' thing?

It may happen that you have more windows open than space on your desktop. In this case you have three possibilities:

1. Leave all windows open (cluttered desktop)
2. Iconify those windows which you do not need at present and use the taskbar or Alt+Tab to switch between them (still a bit confusing and much work!)
3. Recommended: Do what a real operating system does if there is not enough physical memory: Use virtual memory, in this case virtual desktops.

The third option is the way to go! KDE can handle several different desktops, each with its own windows. The default configuration provides four desktops. You can switch between the virtual desktops easily with a click on one of the

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desktop buttons on the panel. Also Ctrl+F1...F4 will send you to the corresponding desktop immediately, or Ctrl+Tab will cycle through the desktops.

Virtual desktops are very nice. But sometimes you want a window to be present on *every* desktop. This could be, for example, a small chat window, an alarm clock or whatever. In this case you can use the above mentioned 'sticky' button which will pin the window on the background so that it will appear on every virtual desktop.

The sticky button can also be used to move a window from one virtual desktop to another one: push the sticky pin on the window, switch to a different desktop, and release the pin by pushing it again. You can achieve the same result by using the context popup menu of the window's entry in the taskbar (menu item To Current Desktop) or the To Desktop option on the window operations menu.

Chapter 5

Managing your files

A common metaphor of graphical desktops is the use of folders to represent folders on your hard disk. Folders contain files and other folders. A KDE application called Konqueror, the K File Manager, uses this metaphor to help you manage your files.

5.1 Using Konqueror

The first time you start KDE, a window with lots of icons in it appears. This is a Konqueror window displaying the files in your home folder (the area where your personal files are stored). The pathname of the folder is displayed under the window's tool bar. If you don't see such a window now, click the icon on the panel that looks like a folder with a picture of a house.

To open a file or folder, simply click it once with the left mouse button. You can also choose Window → Show Navigation Panel from the menu to display the folder hierarchy for more direct navigation. Or you can edit the path displayed under the toolbar to get to a specific folder quickly.

5.1.1 Opening Files

KDE comes with a set of applications to view and edit files of many common types, and when you click a file containing, say, a document or image, Konqueror will start the appropriate application to display the file. If it doesn't know what application to start to open a file you clicked, Konqueror will prompt you for the name of the application to run, and when you have chosen, Konqueror will offer to remember your choice for the next time you open a file of that type.

NOTE

Konqueror uses MIME types to associate files with applications.

5.1.2 Dragging and Dropping Icons

To copy or move a file, simply drag its icon to the desktop, to another Konqueror window, or to a folder icon. When you release the button, Konqueror displays a menu to allow you to choose to copy, move, or create a link to the file.

NOTE

Note that if you choose to create a link, KDE creates a UNIX® symbolic link (not a hard link), so if you move or delete the original file, the link will be broken.

Most KDE applications also support drag and drop operations: you can drag an icon on to a window of a running application, or on to an icon of an application that is not started, to have the application open the file. Try it!

5.1.3 Setting File Properties

To change file properties, such as its name and permissions, right mouse button click the icon and choose Properties from the menu.

5.2 Working with Archives and Networks

In the recent past, you needed special software to access files on the Internet. Not any more!

KDE supports a technology called 'Network Transparent Access' (NTA) which allows you to work with files on the other side of the world as easily as those on your local hard disk.

For example, to access files on an FTP server, just choose Location → Open Location from a Konqueror menu, and enter the URL of an FTP server. You can drag and drop files to and from the folders on the server just as if they were on your local disk. You'll even be able to open files on the FTP server without having to manually copy them to your local disk (KDE does it for you when necessary).

NOTE

Note that Konqueror uses anonymous FTP access, which may restrict your access to files on the FTP server. If you have an account on the server, you can supply your user ID as part of the URL, like this: `ftp://userid@server/folder`. Konqueror will prompt you for your password, and if the login succeeds, you will have full access to your files on the server.

If you are used to the WinZip™ utility on Microsoft® Windows®, then you will be happy to hear that KDE can look into tar archives, too. It treats such archives just like a normal folder, and you can browse into the archive, open files, etc. In general, accessing files on the Internet and in archives should look and feel just like accessing files on your local disk, except for delays imposed by the network and extracting the archive.

5.3 Using Templates to access Applications and Devices

In KDE it's easy to put icons on the panel or the desktop to access your applications. It's just as easy to add icons to access other items of interest. KDE has templates for shortcuts to:

- Applications
- Printers
- Mountable Devices (e.g. floppy drives)
- Internet resources (e.g. WWW documents, FTP folders)
- Documents for some of KDE's KOffice applications.

You can add any of these items to the desktop by right mouse button clicking where you want the icon, and choosing Create New and selecting the item you want to link to.

Nearly every item in the K menu, on the desktop, and on the panel refers to a `.desktop` file on disk. The `.desktop` file specifies what icon to display, as well as specific information about what the icon represents (an application, device, or URL). You can drag any `.desktop` file to the panel to create a quick-launch button.

5.3.1 Mounting devices

UNIX® provides access to storage devices other than the primary hard disk through a process called *mounting*. KDE uses `.desktop` files to allow you to

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easily mount, unmount, and access files on secondary storage devices such as floppy drives and CD-ROM drive drives.

As an example, here are the steps needed to create an icon to access files on a floppy disk:

NOTE

Many systems require you to be logged in as `root` to mount and unmount devices.

1. Right click on the desktop and choose Create New → Device → Floppy Device...
2. On the General tab of the resulting dialog, change the name to whatever you like, in the text box at the top.
3. On the Device tab, enter `/dev/fd0` (or the path to the floppy device as it is named on your system) as the Device.
4. You can add a Mount Point here too. This should be an existing folder, but empty. Common mount points are `/mnt/floppy` or `/floppy`, but you can just as easily have floppy disks mounted on `/mydisk` if you want.
5. Click the Unmounted Icon and select the picture of a floppy disk without the green light.
6. Once you're happy with your choices, choose OK and you are finished!

Now, place a properly formatted floppy in the drive and click the Floppy icon to have KDE mount the floppy drive and display the files on the disk. Before removing the disk from the drive, right mouse button click the Floppy icon and choose Unmount from the menu.

Chapter 6

Configuring your desktop

If you do not like something about the way the desktop looks or operates, you can probably change it. KDE is very configurable and you can change almost every aspect of the appearance and the behavior of your desktop. Unlike many other UNIX® desktop environments, you do not have to edit cryptic configuration files either (but you can if you really want to!) You use the KControl, a special program for configuring your desktop.

6.1 Using the KDE Control Center

Launch the KDE Control Center from the [K menu](#). A window with two panes appears, displaying a list of modules in the left pane.

Open a module by clicking its name; a list of submodules will appear. Then, click one of the submodule category names to edit its configuration in the right pane.

Changing the configuration is fairly straightforward. A help button is available on each configuration panel to explain settings that are not obvious. Each panel has buttons labeled Help, Use Defaults, Apply, and Reset, which work as follows:

Help Displays a short help text in the left hand pane, including a link to a longer manual for the module in question.

Use Defaults Sets all the options in the current module back to the default at the time KDE was installed.

Apply Applies the current settings in the currently open module.

Reset Resets the options to the state they were in when you opened the module. If you have already used the Apply button, then this button will reset the options to the state they were in when you pressed Apply.

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NOTE

If you make changes on one configuration panel and move to a different module without clicking OK or Apply first, KDE Control Center will prompt you to ask whether your changes should be applied first.

Chapter 7

Logging out

We sincerely hope that using KDE gives you so much fun and pleasure that you never want to log out. But if you do, simply choose K menu → Logout.

There is also a logout button directly on the panel, which looks like a small power button. Or you can press Ctrl+Alt+Delete to log out.

7.1 Session Management

When you log out, KDE can remember which applications you had open, as well as where all the windows were located, so that it can open them for you the next time you log in. This feature is termed *Session Management*. KDE-aware applications will restore themselves to the state they were in when you logged out. For example, Kate remembers which files you were editing.

Non-KDE applications do not memorize their state on logout, and KDE will warn you to make sure that you have saved any important data in them when you start to log out.

To illustrate session management, choose K menu → Editors → Kate to start Kate. Open a text document to edit. Now log out and back in. You will observe that Kate will be restored to the exact same position on the screen, including the right virtual desktop, and the document we left open in Kate before we logged out is opened again automatically. Kate will even remember whether you had unsaved changes to your document before you logged out and will save them to the file you were working on if you choose Save from the File menu.

Chapter 8

KDE, an exciting Journey

We hope you enjoyed this brief tour of the K Desktop environment and that this unique desktop environment will help you get your work done faster and more comfortably than ever.

Please remember that the KDE project is not a commercial venture, but rather a project run by volunteers from all over the world. We would like to invite you to join the KDE project and become part of this unique network of people. If you are a programmer you might consider helping us write KDE applications. If you are an artist or have experience with graphic design, consider creating icons sets, color schemes, sound schemes and logos for KDE. If you enjoy writing we would love for you to join our documentation project.

As you can see there are many ways in which you can help. You are cordially invited to join this world-wide network of people dedicated to making KDE the best desktop environment for any computer. Please visit www.kde.org for more information.

Welcome aboard on this exciting journey,

Your KDE Team

Chapter 9

Credits

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