

Letters to the editor

Write Access

■ Lilo woe

Q I seem to have broken my Linux system, I can only boot into Windows with a boot floppy. When I start the system it boots up, but stops part way through the LILO prompt, I only get 'LIL' and not full LILO. I am now worried that I have corrupted the hard disk with Linux?

Mrs. Trellis, South Wales

LM Not very helpful is it, having an application just die without giving any information on why. In fact, LILO is being helpful, it is telling us exactly how far it has got and we can make a fair guess as to what might be stopping it.

Each letter printed indicates another stage in the booting process. The initial 'L' tells us that *lilo* has found the first stage, single sector boot loader. This is a good sign as it must mean that the connection to the hard disk and the MBR – where that single sector lives – must still be in working order.

The first 'I' is printed when it makes a further call to the hard disk, this time loading the second stage loader. This loader is bigger and so has more functionality, which, in turn, means it can report some error codes. Some of these codes are listed in the manpage, take a look at *man lilo*. Should this second stage be completed then the second 'L' is printed.

This brings us to where you have been stuck, trying to verify the 'Descriptor Table' that lists which images reside where and how they can be loaded, the details held in the */etc/lilo.conf* file. If *lilo* is getting stuck then there must be something wrong with this file.

Perhaps you may have recompiled your kernel, or tried adding a new boot image to be loaded at boot time, but you have forgotten to run the command to get *lilo* to re-read the configuration file with:

```
# /sbin/lilo
```

■ Words apart

Q I am new to Linux and miss some of my Windows applications. Can you recommend a good text editor/word processor?

John Doyle, by email

LM Yes. Unfortunately, it may not be suitable for you. The choice of a text editor is a very personal one and there is no way out but to try some of them for yourself until you start to build up some idea of what you actually like and dislike in editors. You have set yourself a very difficult challenge by lumping text editors and word processors together, they are two very different beasts that, sometimes, can be persuaded to do similar things.

It is most likely that you have some sort of version of *vi* on your system, probably *vim*. You may have *emacs* as well.

There are some very good reasons why you should, at the very least, make some sort of acquaintance with *vi*, should you ever have to edit a file on someone else's machine, it is the editor that is most likely to be there. You may have been immediately put off the first time you ran it, because of its somewhat austere appearance. I would suggest a little bit of perseverance, but this time, run *vimtutor* and give it the 30 minutes.

Regardless of how well you get on you should then go and try *emacs*. Again,

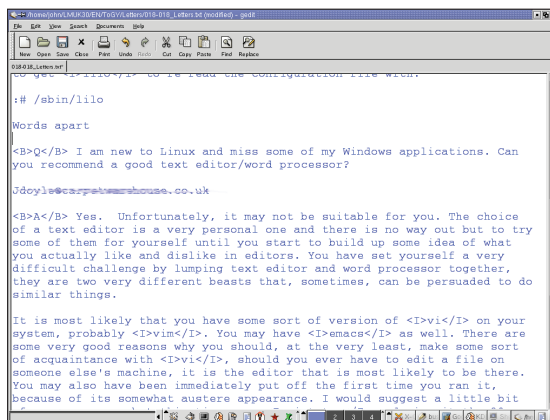


Figure 1: GEdit for GUI text manipulation



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some find it too 'unfriendly' initially, so you should give over some time to running the *emacs* tutorial. This time, with *emacs* running, type CTRL-h and then the 't' key to start an interactive session and you will find yourself in an interactive *emacs* lesson.

With some practical knowledge under your belt you could then start to look at some of the text editors that have GUI interfaces to them, like *gedit* or *kate*. Then you can settle on one that has key binding similar to those of *vi* or *emacs*, whichever one you preferred.

Word processing is a different matter. Here you need to decide how much of your system resources you want to give over to the task, and what tasks and document formats you will need to work with. Then there are many to choose from.

Top of the Open Source tree must be OpenOffice, which will allow you to deal with the majority of modern Microsoft file formats, offering you all of the features that you might want from a contemporary word processor.

Should you just be looking for a word processor to fire off the occasional letter, then something like *Kword* or *AbiWord* might be more suitable. You may even find that *LaTeX* does what you really want, for a better clue on that, take a look at pgs. 52 to 54.