

What on Earth is **Lernid**?

Bob Moss explains how this tool could expand your knowledge and broaden your horizons from the comfort of your living room sofa.

» **Do I get a prize for guessing that this is some kind of learning tool?**

Lernid is indeed a learning tool, developed to make it easier to follow online events. If you have ever seen events such as Ubuntu Developer Week advertised around the blogosphere and wondered how you could get involved or see what's happening then this could just be the tool for you.

» **What are online learning events?**

These are seminars, tutorials and the like held by various online communities including publisher/OSCON sponsor O'Reilly and saviour of Linux/control freak Ubuntu. Users watch a series of presentations online hosted by various speakers while they pose questions or discuss the session with other attendees in an online chatroom.

» **OK... so what exactly will I get to learn if I try *Lernid*?**

The range of topics covered by these online events could be anything. One day you could be learning about Python scripting, the next about web security and then the next about how to contribute to a wiki or documentation site. The possibilities are endless, with a range

“Lernid separates what the speaker is saying from the chat stream.”

of tutors potentially sharing their pearls of wisdom with the wider Ubuntu community.

» **Ubuntu community? I use Fedora!**

At present *Lernid* is only available on Canonical's Launchpad, which means you can only install it via PPA for pre-Lucid versions of Ubuntu and derivatives such as Linux Mint. By the time you read this Ubuntu Lucid Lynx will be released and you should find that *Lernid* is available in the Ubuntu Software Centre.

» **Oh dear, it looks like you're turning into *Ubuntu Format*!**

We agree; it's a shame that this tool was only available for Ubuntu at the time of writing, though you do expect this when the app is developed by Canonical employees such as Jono Bacon (whose name you may recognise from such pages as 48 and 52). However, thanks to the use of *Glade* and *GTK* it shouldn't be too difficult to port *Lernid* to other Gnome-based Linux distros. If this hasn't happened by the time you read this, we would be surprised if it isn't ported once it has a good end-user following on Ubuntu.

» **Hmm... So how exactly does this application make it easier to learn stuff over the internet?**

Typically with an online learning event you have to work out what time you should be present, as times are always displayed according to UTC rather than locally. Also, new users are often kept out of things because they have never seen IRC before and need to follow all kinds of setup steps, such as finding a free server, choosing a channel, making sure ports are open and so on.

» **Ack! One thing at a time! I'm guessing *Lernid* handles times well?**

They are indeed. During an online learning event you can see a schedule of upcoming sessions and see when they start according to your local time. Not only that, but if one of these sessions takes your fancy you can also set a reminder to pop up 10 minutes before the session is due to start, and a further reminder when the presentations begin just to make sure you don't miss out on any material.

» **So, what's this IRC, and how is it useful?**

IRC (Internet Relay Chat) is like an instant messaging protocol, but it is open to everyone

and is purely text only. You connect to any IRC server (freenode for example) and just select a channel to talk in. Create a username and you can then chat away with people from around the globe.

» **This doesn't sound so hard actually. Why do we need *Lernid* at all?**

Because not everyone has taken the time to download and set up an IRC client such as *X-Chat*, and while you are following an IRC channel it is difficult to put questions to the speaker as you don't stand out from the crowd. *Lernid* elegantly separates what the speaker is saying from the chat stream. However, you still see this in real time with moving slides, and this keeps the chatroom purely for the attendees to help each other or to make comments.

» **But this still doesn't make me stand out from the crowd!**

The clever thing about *Lernid* is that you need only type **QUESTION:** before your query for both the speaker and your fellow attendees to see it, and they can then help you out with your problem. This makes *Lernid* valuable for people completely new to a topic, and because you are answered in real time you don't have to sit and wait in limbo like you typically would with an after-event forum post!

» **That's awesome. I bet this is only available in English though.**

That's where you're wrong! At the time of writing, *Lernid* supports sessions in over 31 different languages (with more promised to follow), which together with localised times makes it very accommodating towards international users.

» **I like pretty pictures – tell me more about these presentation slides.**

These presentation slides are actually just PDF files that the speaker has uploaded to their own personal website. The tutor needs to type a simple **SLIDE n** command (where **n** is the

slide number) to move through them. You see the tutor's contributions together and the movement of slides in real time, which makes things much more interactive than previous attempts at online teaching. Don't worry if you miss a slide though, as you can usually download these along with speaker notes from the event website or wiki.

» **What happens if the speaker references somewhere on the web? Something clever should happen.**

Whenever the tutor types a URL you can click on the link to see the page in the built-in browser, which means that along with all the previous features you can feel comfortable that everything you need for a given session is likely to be supplied in this one integrated solution.

» **You mentioned PDF files...**

Yes, speakers can use PDF files and each page is considered a slide. This is a pretty good example of how easy it is to create your own

Lernid sessions: simply create a text file containing the information for it (in the format stated in the *Lernid* wiki) and save it with a **.lernid** extension. If you want to supply slide notes, you can link to its URL within the file.

» **So what kind of events should I expect to see on *Lernid*?**

We will admit that for now they are primarily Ubuntu-focused events such as Ubuntu Open Week and Ubuntu Developer Week, but each of these events covers diverse topics that are equally applicable to other distributions. Also, if *Lernid* sees a considerable following and is ported elsewhere then this could lead to a much broader range of learning events created by the wider Linux community. If this takes off then it could help a lot of people, whether they are trying Linux for the first time or are existing users who want to learn something new.

» **When are these learning events? I think I should try this out for myself.**

They're pretty thin on the ground at the moment: by the time you read this you will have just missed Ubuntu Open Week, which ran from Monday 3 May through to Friday 7 May. Ubuntu Developer Week tends to run in January, and there are more sessions due to be scheduled later this year that could potentially use *Lernid*. Disappointing though this is, if *Lernid* gains widespread usage then we could potentially see sessions offered by a multitude of different communities (rather than just Ubuntu specifically), which would add much more value to the application.

» **Well, I want to get learning right away! Where can I find more information?**

That's great to hear, though we can't promise there will be a learning event when you first try it out! You'll find the Ubuntu wiki article for *Lernid* at <https://wiki.ubuntu.com/Lernid>, which is a great starting point. If you'd like to get involved with project development, see <https://launchpad.net/lernid>. **LXF**

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python scripting
web security
how to contribute to a wiki or documentation site

QUESTIONS

And all from the comfort of your living room!

Online learning events are so much easier!

Lernid

