

Free Educational Software

Types of free programs

Software can be one of the most expensive parts of your computer. However, it does not have to be. There are many excellent programs available completely for free which you can download and use in place of expensive commercial software. And even though these programs are free, they can still be very professional and useful.

Such free programs generally fall into three main categories:

- **Freeware** – This would be any program that is simply free. Often the creator just wants to give something back to the world, so they give the software away for free, although they still own the copyright to the program. Usually freeware is made by a single person or a small group of people.
- **Open-source software** – This would be programs that are free for anyone to use, and also legal for anyone to modify and improve. Often these programs are continually developed over time by a large community of contributors working toward a common goal.
- **Shareware** – This would include any programs that can be tried for free for some period of time, but then some limitation gets imposed. For example, the software may no longer work after the trial period unless you purchase it. Or it may keep working, but just in a limited mode without all its normal features.

Where to get free software

To find free software you have two main options:

- First, you can simply **do a Google search** from something like “free math software” or “free Spanish programs” or such. You may be surprised to find how much is out there.
- Second, you can visit **web sites that specialize in cataloging free software**, making it easy for you to browse and search for something to meet your needs.

Either way, you should *always be careful about what you download and install*.

- Use common sense to evaluate the program, its web site, and any reviews it may have.
- Also, you need to make sure your anti-virus and anti-spyware programs are up-to-date and working. This will help protect you against a malicious program.
- Finally, always ask a tech person for assistance if you have any questions or concerns about downloading programs.

Below are a few of the better sites that catalog free software:

- **SchoolForge**
<http://www.schoolforge.net/>
“SchoolForge's mission is to unify independent organizations that advocate, use, and develop open resources for education. We advocate the use of open texts and lessons, open curricula, free software and open source in education.”

- **CNET's Download.com**
<http://www.download.com/>
At this site you can search by keyword or browse through categories. Once you get to a listing of programs you can filter by license (choose "Free") and you can sort by ratings and popularity.
- **SourceForge Educational Programs**
http://sourceforge.net/softwaremap/trove_list.php?form_cat=71
Here you will find all open-source programs. This link is for the educational category, although you can click off to different categories at the site.
- **Wikipedia's Open Source Software List**
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_open_source_software_packages
This is Wikipedia's collection of open-source programs. Many of the links here go to subcategories with more programs. Note: There are quite lot of non-Windows programs on this site, so make sure the software will work on your computer before downloading.
- **Educational Freeware**
<http://www.educational-freeware.com/>
This is a small collection of free educational programs, but they are all high-quality. This site has both downloadable programs and web-based programs.
- **Software Archives**
<http://www.softwarearchives.com>
Another general collection of free programs. Start by choosing your operating system (such as "Windows") and then choose your category (such as "Education & References")
- **Tucows Educational Programs**
<http://www.tucows.com/Windows/HomeEducation/EducationReference/>
Another large collections of free programs. Choose a category and then limit the results by license type.
- **It's Free 4 U – Educational Software**
<http://www.itsfree4u.com/ed.shtml>
A small but good collection of free educational programs.

Good examples of free software

There are so many great free programs. Here are just a few of the best examples, covering many needs and subjects.

General / Multiple Subjects

- **Open Office**
<http://www.openoffice.org/>
This is a free office suite of programs that can be used instead of Microsoft Office. You can even save your files in Microsoft Office format, so they can be opened with Office if needed. It includes the following programs:
 - Writer – A word processor similar to Microsoft Word
 - Calc – A spreadsheet program similar to Microsoft Excel
 - Impress – A presentation program similar to Microsoft PowerPoint
 - Draw – A graphics editor similar to CorelDRAW

- Base – A database program similar to Microsoft Access
- Math – A tool for creating mathematical expressions similar to Microsoft Equation Editor

- **Cmap**
<http://cmap.ihmc.us/>
 This is a free concept mapping program, similar to Inspiration or Kidspiration. It is not as “cute” as those programs, but it does have many of their features. Additionally it allows users to share their concept maps with the rest of the world and to search for concept maps created by others.

- **Skype**
<http://www.skype.com>
 This is a free program that allows you to communicate with any other Skype user through text chat, voice chat, and video chat. This is a great way to bring distance learning into your classroom.

- **Google Earth**
<http://earth.google.com>
 Google Earth is a fantastic free program that lets you explore a detailed 3-D version of our entire planet. This program is not just for Social Studies, but also has excellent applications in Math, Science, and Language classes.

- **GCompris**
<http://gcompris.net/-en->
 GCompris is an educational software suite comprising of activities for children aged 2 to 10. Some of the activities are game orientated, but nonetheless still educational.

Math

- **Tux of Math Command**
<http://www.geekcomix.com/dm/tuxmath/>
 "Tux of Math Command" is an educational math tutorial game starring Tux, the Linux Penguin.

- **GeoGebra**
<http://www.geogebra.org/cms/>
 GeoGebra is a free and multi-platform dynamic mathematics software for schools that joins geometry, algebra and calculus

- **GraphCalc**
<http://www.graphcalc.com/>
 GraphCalc includes many of the standard features of graphing calculators, but also includes some higher-end features.

Science

- **Celestia**
<http://celestia.sourceforge.net/>
 Celestia is real-time 3D space simulation which lets you travel through our solar system and to over 100,000 stars in our neighborhood.

Social Studies

- **Seterra**
<http://www.wartoft.nu/software/seterra/>
Seterra is a challenging geography program with 70 different exercises. Learn about countries, capitals, flags and cities in Africa, Europe, South America, North America, Asia and Australia, using outline map exercisesv
- **Centennia Napoleonic Edition**
<http://www.clockwk.com/clockwk2/napo.htm>
Centennia Napoleonic Edition is a subset of the Centennia Historical Atlas. It covers Europe and the Middle East during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. You can follow the march of French armies from just after the Revolution, through the rise of Napoleon's great French Empire, his unsuccessful campaign in Russia, and on to the final demise at Waterloo.

Language Arts

- **Spelling Activities**
<http://spellactiv.sourceforge.net/>
Spelling Activities is a program to educate elementary-school students in spelling and phonograms, with voice and animation.
- **Tux Type**
<http://tuxtype.sourceforge.net/>
Tux Typing is an educational typing tutor for children. It features several different types of gameplay, at a variety of difficulty levels.

World Languages

- **Before You Know It**
http://www.byki.com/free_lang_software.pl
This is an excellent program for learning the vocabulary of a foreign language. There are many words lists and multiple ways to learn and practice the words.
- **Words Galore**
<http://wordsgalore.com/>
This is a free program to help you learn Spanish. It has over 9,000 Spanish words along with audio of their pronunciation.

Arts

- **Tux Paint**
<http://tuxpaint.org/>
Tux Paint is a free, award-winning drawing program for children ages 3 to 12 (preschool and K-6). It combines an easy-to-use interface, fun sound effects, and an encouraging cartoon mascot who guides children as they use the program.

Utilities / Helpers

- **EclipseCrossword**

<http://www.greeneclipsesoftware.com/eclipsecrossword/index.html>

EclipseCrossword is a powerful but simple crossword puzzle creation application. Just give it a list of words and clues, and it puts the puzzle together for you. You can print the crossword, or save it as a web page to post on the Internet.

How to download and install

Once you have found a program you wish to use, you will need to download and install it. This process can vary between programs, but basically you want to follow these steps:

- 1) Go to the web site for the program
- 2) Locate and click on the download link (typically labeled “Download”)
- 3) Choose a place to save the file that will be easy for you to remember, such as your desktop or “My Documents” or such. You may even want to make a new folder just to hold things you download, such as “Temp” or “Stuff”.
- 4) Let the file download.
- 5) Now go find the downloaded file on your computer. Even though you have downloaded the file, the program is not ready to be used yet. You still need to install it.
- 6) Double-click the file to begin the installation process.
- 7) Note: If this does not automatically start the installation process, then the file may be “zipped”. This means all the different parts of the program have been put into one file which needs to be “unzipped” before you can proceed. To unzip a file you can use a free program such as WinZip (<http://www.winzip.com>)
- 8) Once the installation process begins, simply follow the onscreen directions specific to that program.
- 9) After the install is done, you can now use the program.
- 10) Also, you should be able to delete the original downloaded file since it is not needed anymore.

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