
Xfce: The Missing Manual Documentation

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This is an unofficial user manual for [Xfce](#), the lightweight desktop environment. This document is not meant to be comprehensive, and only attempts to cover the basics to get you up and running.

Contents

What is Xfce?

Xfce is a lightweight [desktop environment](#) built for simplicity and efficiency. Xfce takes up far less space than other desktop environments such as KDE, GNOME, Unity etc and is very responsive. Xfce philosophy is to get out of your way and let you complete your work efficiently and easily.

Xfce project has a high emphasis on stability meaning that core functionality does not change frequently causing you to re-learn your workflow.

Why not use other lightweight environments ?

You can! It is all about choice. There are a variety of reasons to use Xfce:

1. Familiar windows and other User Interface widgets.
2. Xfce is fairly powerful, despite being simple.
3. Xfce evolves slowly with bug fixes taking priority over feature addition and bloat.
4. Xfce is free, open-source and user-friendly

What is your point?

Since Xfce is a fairly simple environment to set up, many folks do this on their own. There are some who use pre-configured environments such as Xubuntu. While this is a very valid choice, it is recommended that you set up your environment yourself. There may be different aspects of your system you care about and it is useful to get those right trade-offs that help you work effectively on your computer. This is actually where Xfce excels at and there are only a few environments out there that help you get them exactly right.

Caveats of this document

First of all, this documentation is not in any way associated to the Xfce project. This is unofficial documentation. Hence, it may contain factual inaccuracies, outdated information and/or philosophical differences from Xfce and associated projects. Therefore, you should consult official documentation when in doubt.

Secondly, since there are a variety of configurations and environments to run Xfce on, this documentation will be based on Ubuntu 12.04 LTS installation of stock Xfce. Although the concepts explained here may be valid for other environments, it may also not be.

How to install Xfce?

Well, it depends on your system. Xfce is available on a plethora of Operating Systems including:

5.1 Linux

Linux needs no introduction. It is the most popular Unix based Operating System out there. Following are descriptions about installing Xfce on some of the major [Linux Distributions](#).

5.1.1 Ubuntu

To test out Xfce in Ubuntu you can use [Xubuntu](#).

Alternatively, you can download Ubuntu from [Ubuntu.com](#) and type the following command into terminal

```
sudo apt-get install xubuntu-desktop
```

If you want to use *stock* Xfce (which is highly recommended), you can use the following description.

Installing Xfce on Ubuntu 12.04 LTS involves three main steps :

1. Opening up terminal
 - Click on the dash icon
 - Now search for the terminal software. Click on the terminal icon to open the terminal application.
2. Entering the command to install Xfce

Once the terminal application opens up you need to enter the following command to install Xfce:

```
sudo apt-get install xfce4 xfce4-goodies
```

You may be prompted to enter your password and authenticate your install.

You will need to be connected to the Internet to begin the installation. Once you authenticate, Ubuntu will begin downloading and installing Xfce on your computer.

On Ubuntu 12.04 LTS, you may be prompted to answer a question about hddtemp during installation. Please do not worry about this and press ENTER to select the default “No” option.

3. Logging out, selecting and logging into Xfce
 - Now, if you want to use your brand new Xfce installation, please log out.
 - Click on the Ubuntu icon.

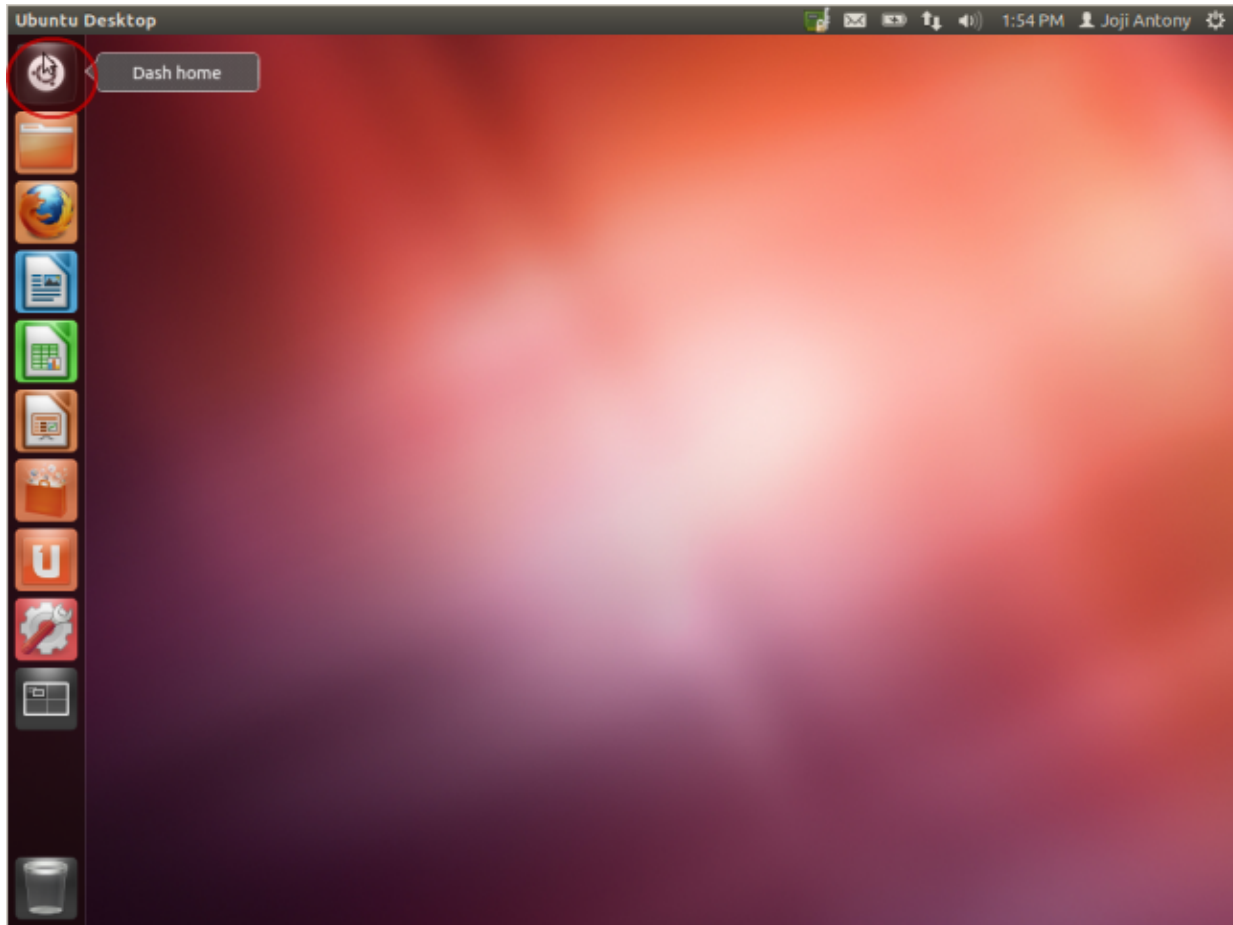


Figure 5.1: Click on the dash icon

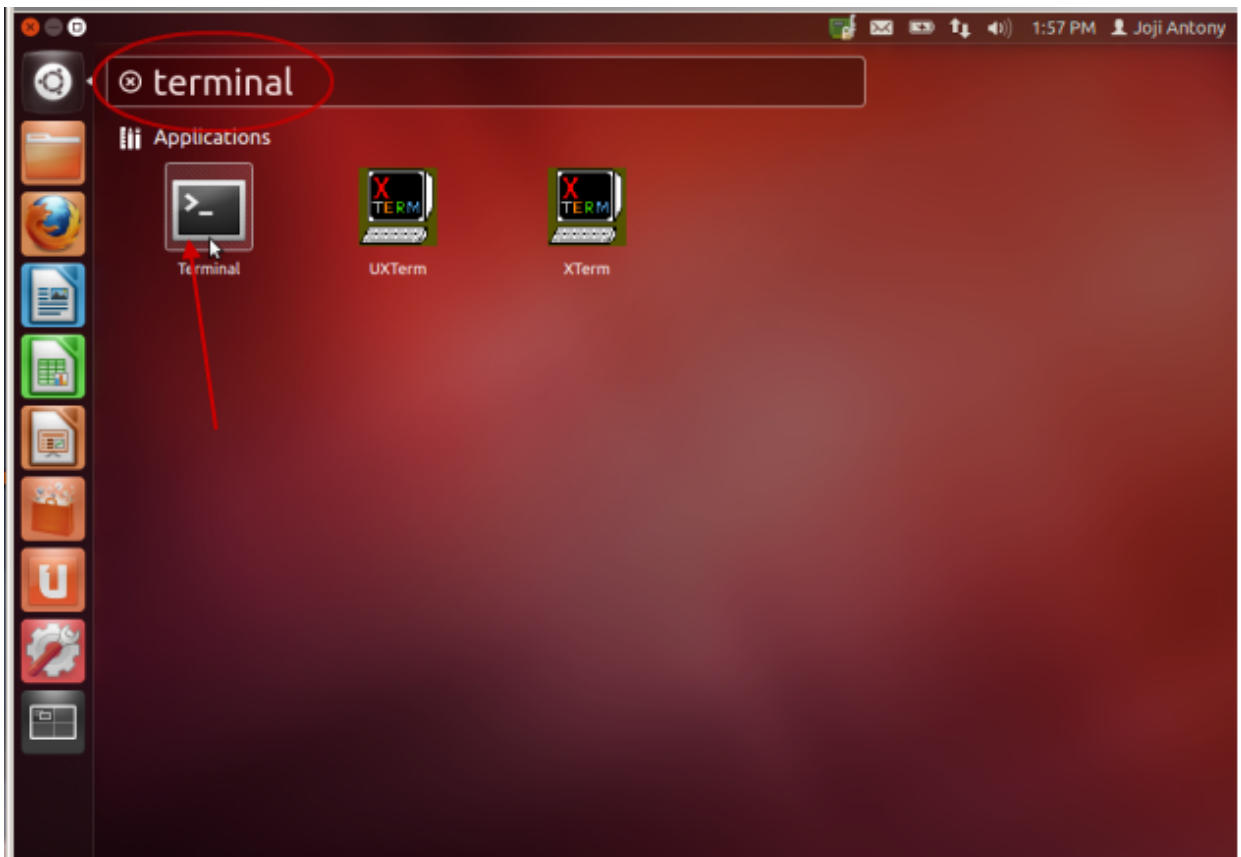


Figure 5.2: Search and find the terminal application

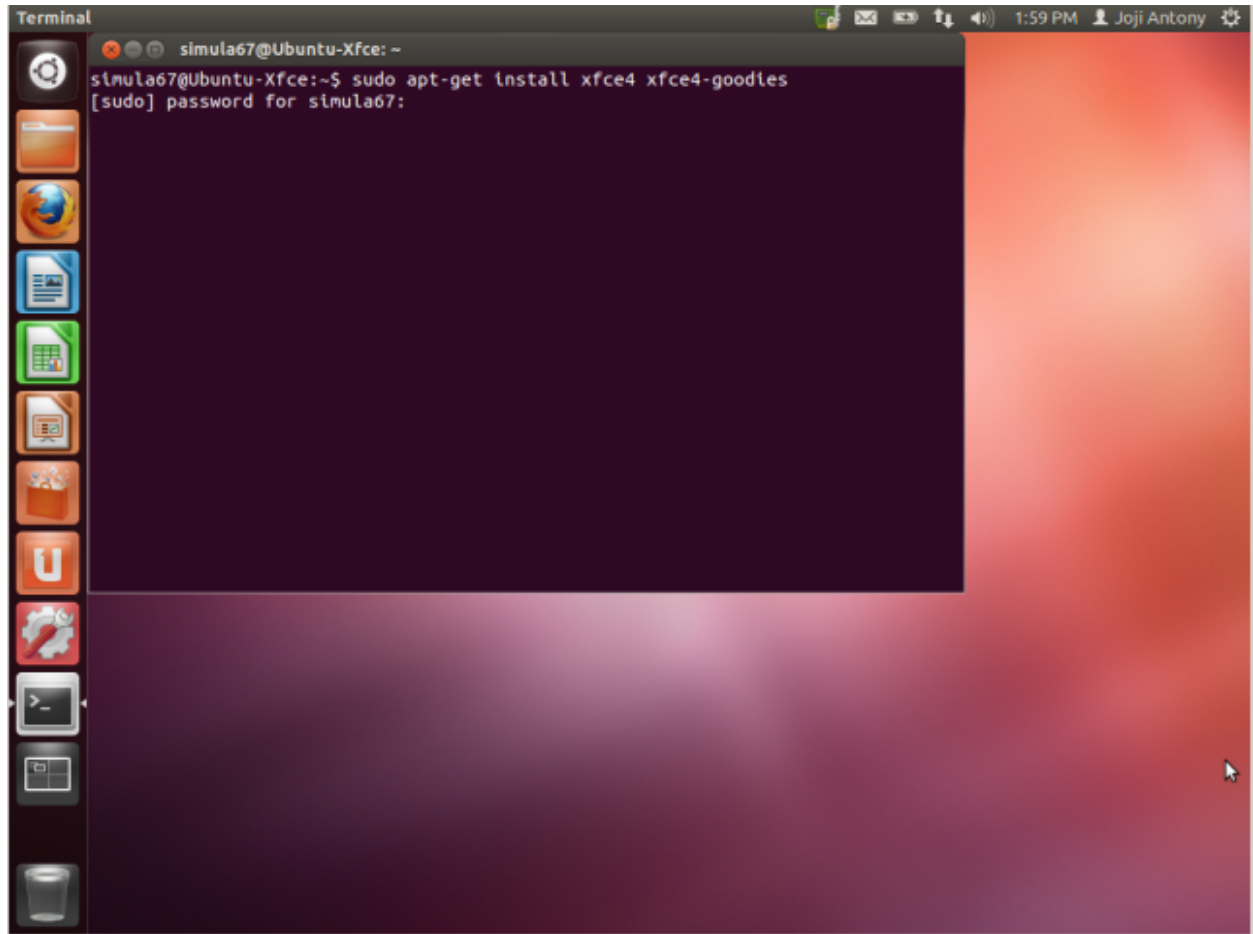
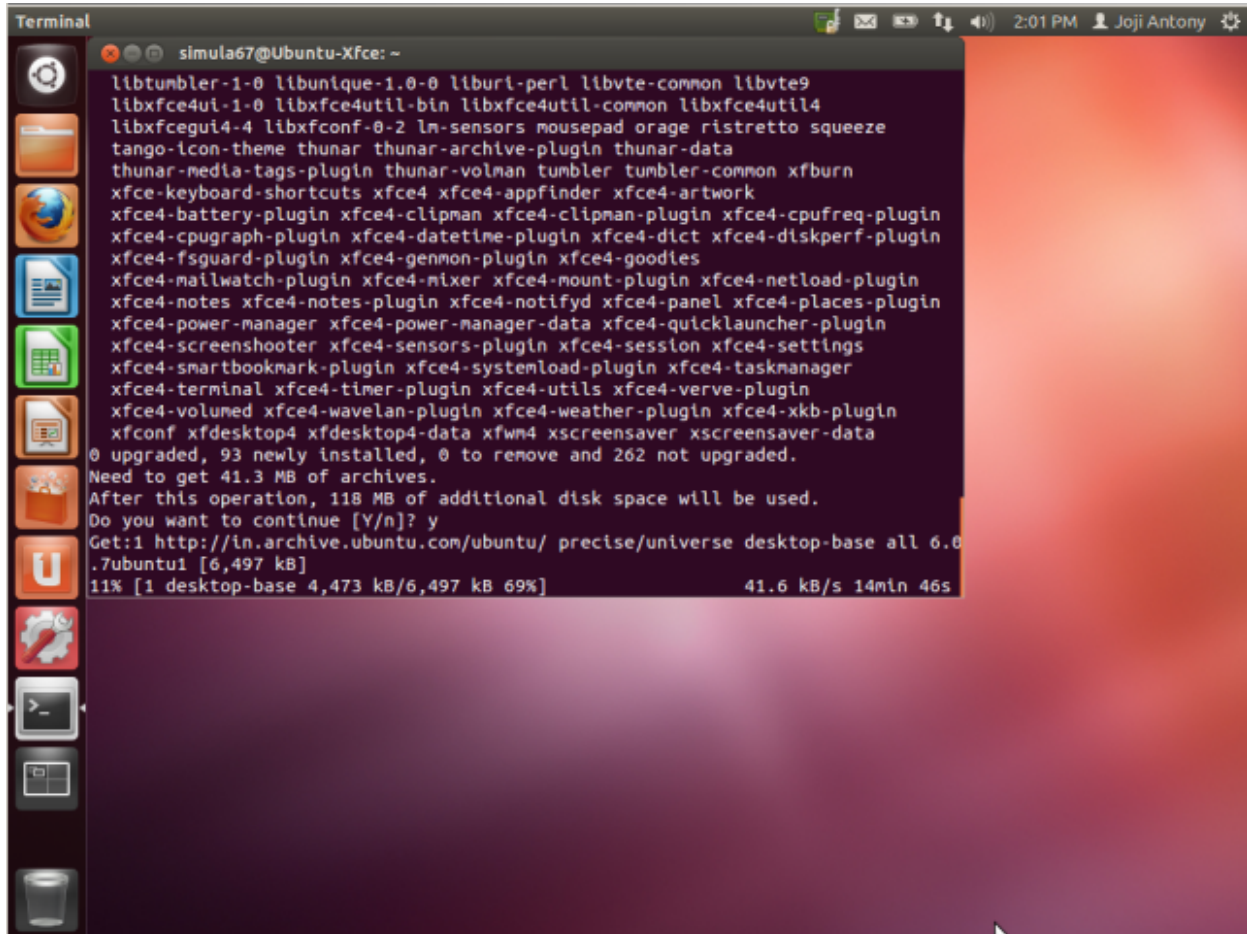


Figure 5.3: Enter the command to install Xfce



```
Terminal
simula67@Ubuntu-Xfce: ~
libtumbler-1-0 libunique-1.0-0 liburi-perl libvte-common libvte9
libxfce4ui-1-0 libxfce4util-bin libxfce4util-common libxfce4util4
libxfcegui4-4 libxfconf-0-2 ln-sensors mousepad orage ristretto squeeze
tango-icon-theme thunar thunar-archive-plugin thunar-data
thunar-media-tags-plugin thunar-volman tumbler tumbler-common xfburn
xfce-keyboard-shortcuts xfce4 xfce4-appfinder xfce4-artwork
xfce4-battery-plugin xfce4-clipman xfce4-clipman-plugin xfce4-cpufreq-plugin
xfce4-cpugraph-plugin xfce4-datETIME-plugin xfce4-dict xfce4-diskperf-plugin
xfce4-fsguard-plugin xfce4-genmon-plugin xfce4-goodies
xfce4-mailwatch-plugin xfce4-mixer xfce4-mount-plugin xfce4-netload-plugin
xfce4-notes xfce4-notes-plugin xfce4-notifyd xfce4-panel xfce4-places-plugin
xfce4-power-manager xfce4-power-manager-data xfce4-quicklauncher-plugin
xfce4-screenshooter xfce4-sensors-plugin xfce4-session xfce4-settings
xfce4-smartbookmark-plugin xfce4-systemload-plugin xfce4-taskmanager
xfce4-terminal xfce4-timer-plugin xfce4-utils xfce4-verve-plugin
xfce4-volumed xfce4-wavelan-plugin xfce4-weather-plugin xfce4-xkb-plugin
xfconf xfdesktop4 xfdesktop4-data xfwm4 xscreensaver xscreensaver-data
0 upgraded, 93 newly installed, 0 to remove and 262 not upgraded.
Need to get 41.3 MB of archives.
After this operation, 118 MB of additional disk space will be used.
Do you want to continue [Y/n]? y
Get:1 http://in.archive.ubuntu.com/ubuntu/ precise/universe desktop-base all 6.0
.7ubuntu1 [6,497 kB]
11% [1 desktop-base 4,473 kB/6,497 kB 69%] 41.6 kB/s 14min 46s
```

Figure 5.4: Downloading and installing Xfce

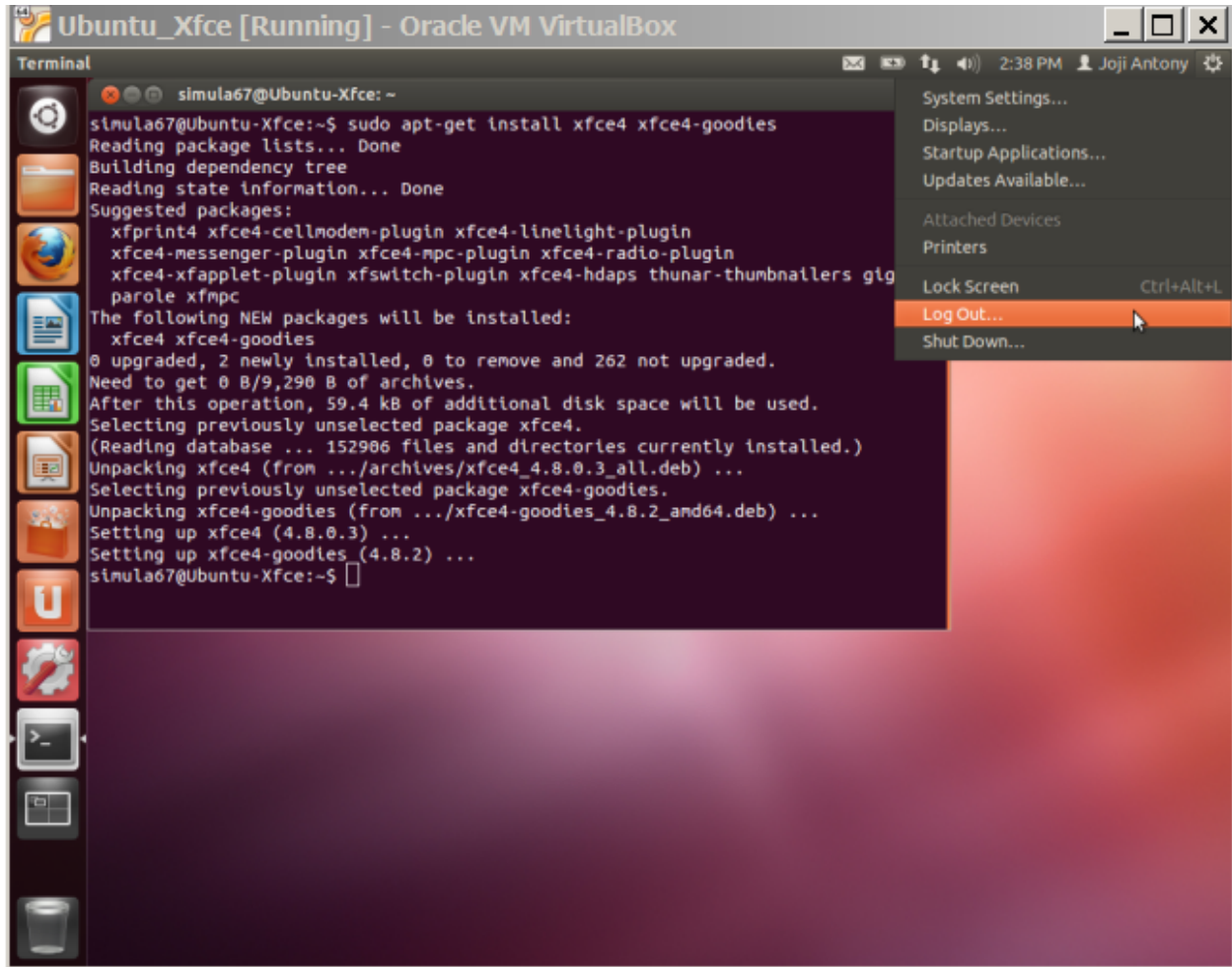


Figure 5.5: Logout

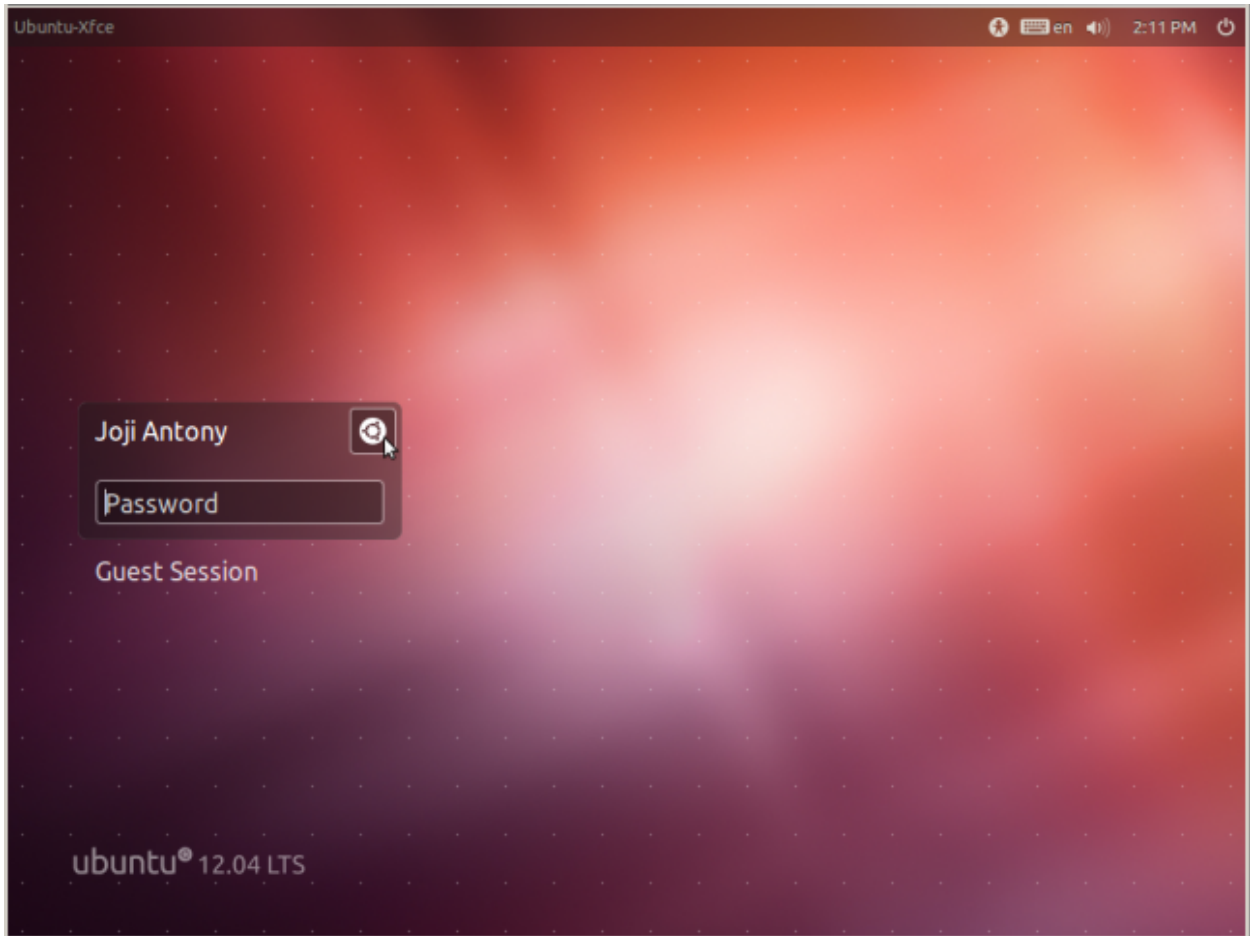


Figure 5.6: Click on Ubuntu Icon

- Click on Xfce Session

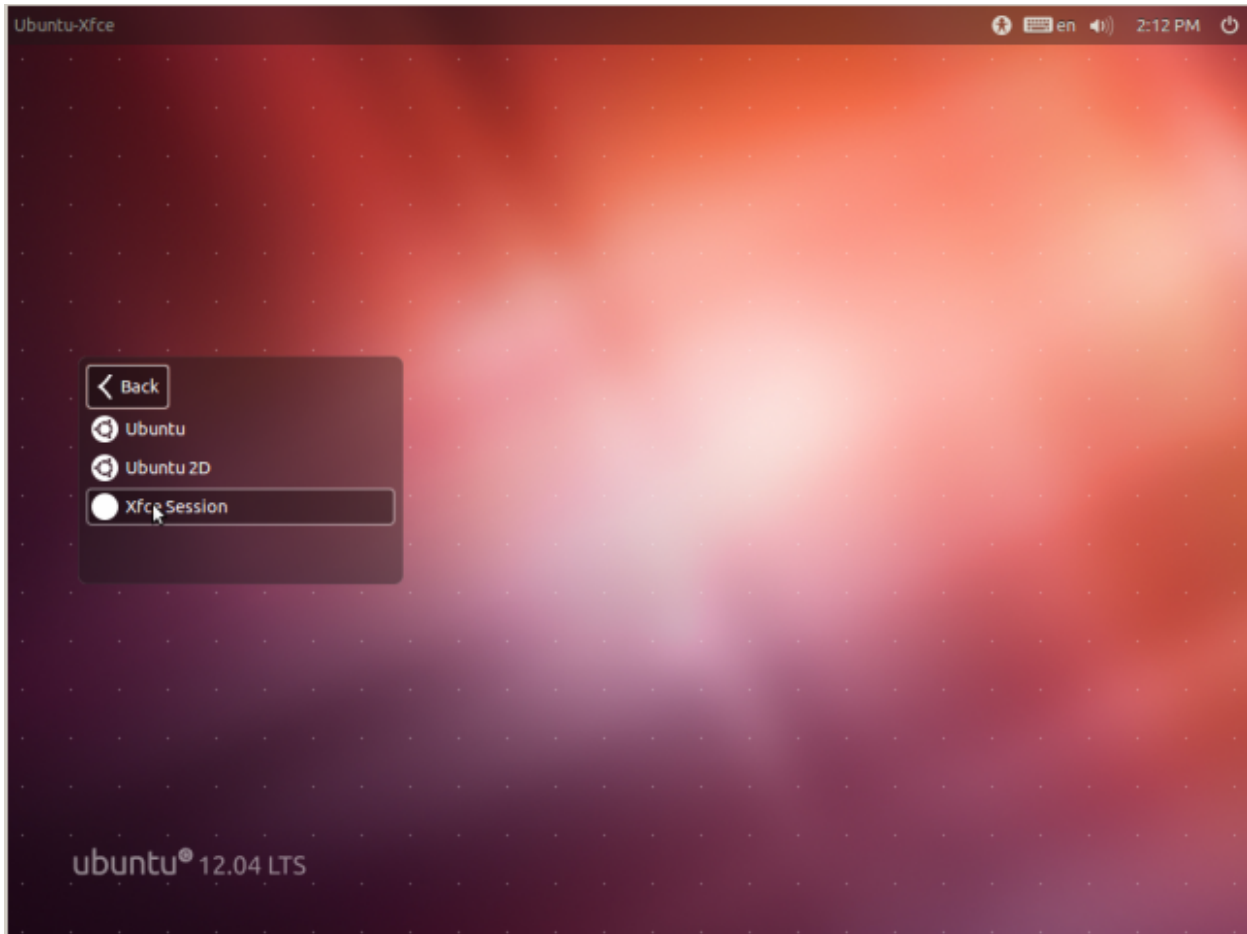


Figure 5.7: Click on Xfce Session Icon

- Enter your password and log into Xfce
- When logging in, select “Use Default Configuration” to get the standard Xfce desktop.

Voila! You have entered the default Xfce desktop.

Warning: Do not worry about the somewhat unnerving look of the default install. We will be looking into it in a few minutes. By default, the Xfce installation in Ubuntu has a nasty [bug](#) causing it to fall back on default GTK3 theme. You can work around it by entering the following command into terminal: `cp -fdr /usr/share/themes/Radiance/gtk-3.0 ~/.config/gtk-3.0/`

5.1.2 Fedora

5.2 Installing Xfce on FreeBSD

5.3 Installing Xfce on NetBSD

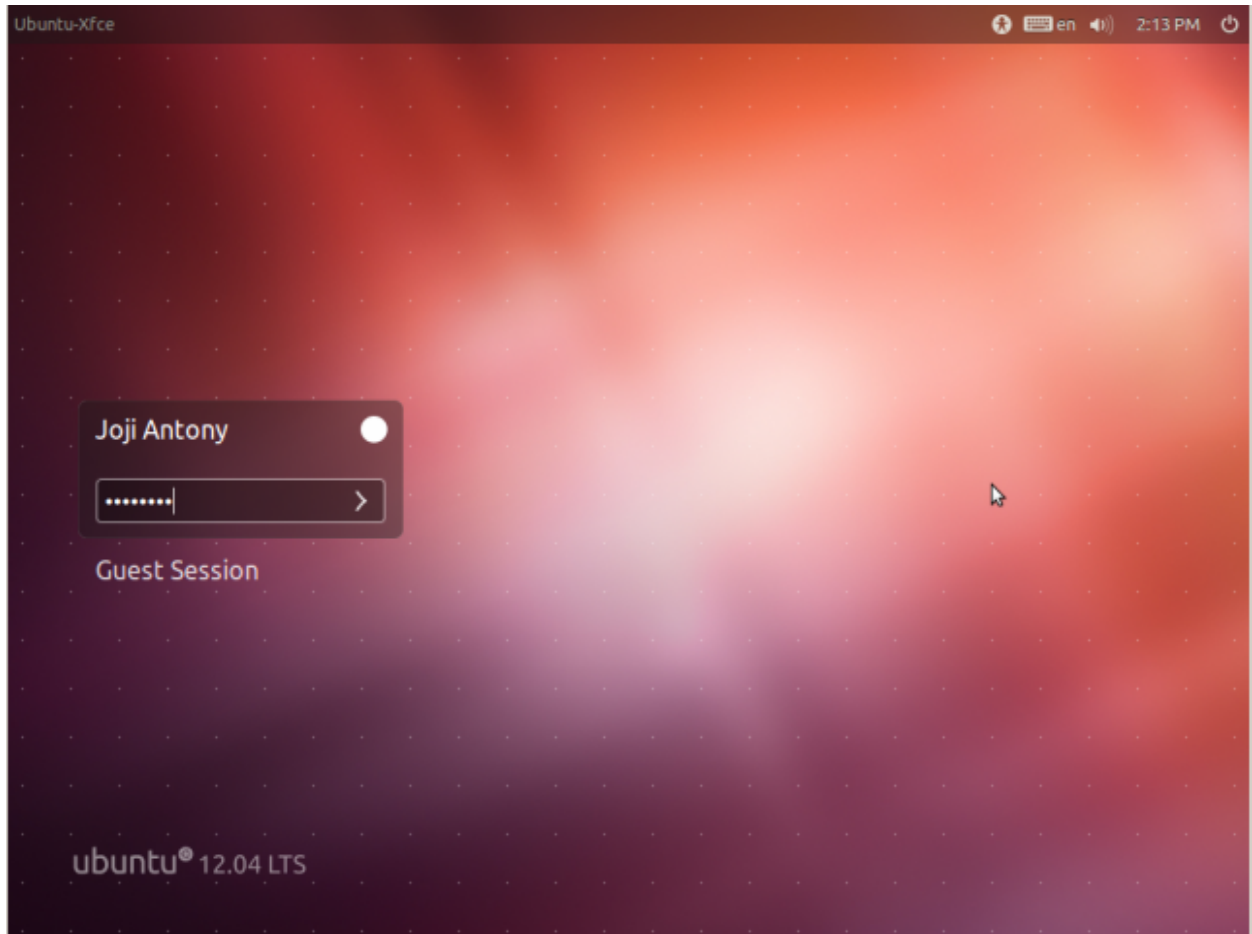


Figure 5.8: Log into Xfce

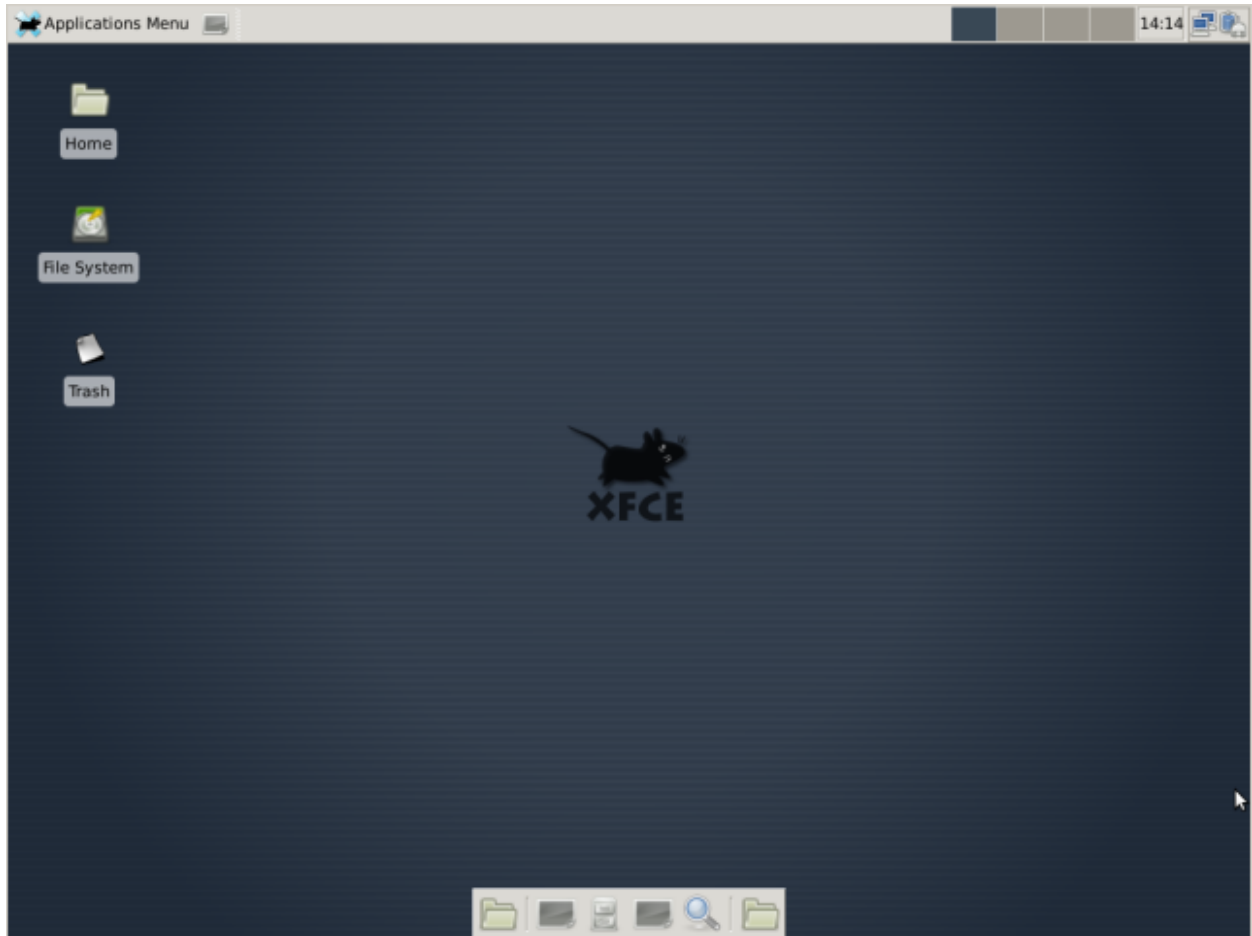


Figure 5.9: Xfce Desktop.

Components of Xfce

Following are the most important components of Xfce and a short description of what is possible with them.

6.1 Xfce4 Settings Manager

Xfce Settings Manager (*xfce4-settings-manager*) is the central point from where you can configure your whole Xfce installation.

Please be mindful to take a look under:

- Appearance
 - Style (Xfce Theme)
 - Icons
 - Fonts
- Keyboard → Application Shortcuts
- Window Manager → Style
- Window Manager Tweaks

6.2 Xfce Panel

Xfce Panel (*xfce4-panel*) is the panel application for Xfce. You can configure the Xfce panels using the following command

```
xfce4-panel --preferences
```

You can also find the panel preferences at Xfce Settings Manager → Panel.

Alternatively, you can also find panel preferences from Right Clicking on an existing panel and choosing Panel → Panel Preferences.

6.3 Xfdesktop

Xfdesktop (*xfdesktop*) manages your desktop. It displays your wallpapers, files and folders on your **Desktop** folder helps you copy and paste the file to and from your Desktop to other locations using your File Manager etc.

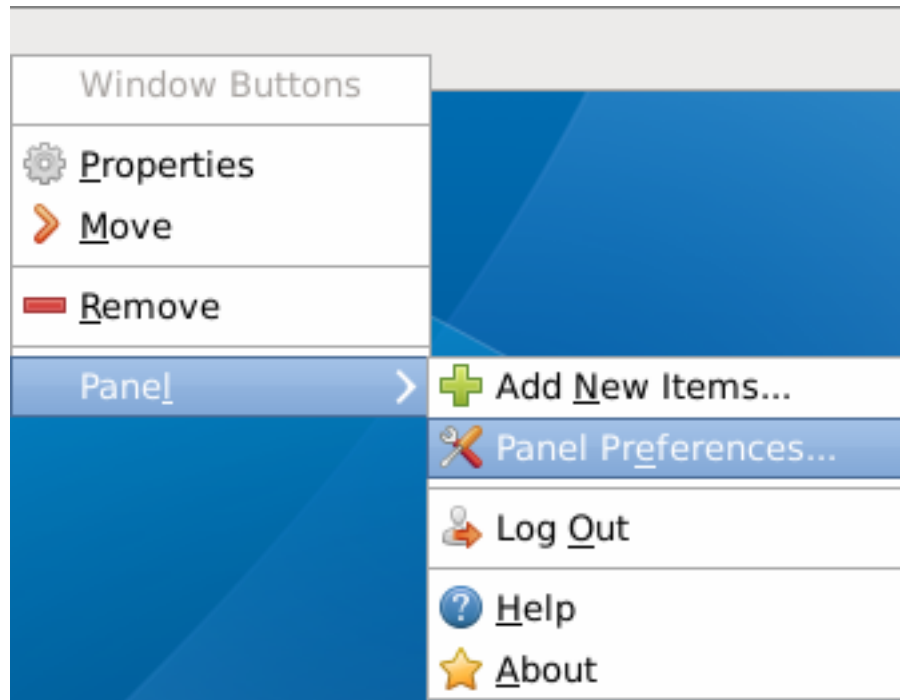


Figure 6.1: Another way to find panel preferences

6.4 Xfwm4

Xfwm4 (*xfwm4*) manages your windows. This application is what is usually called a Window Manager. Window Managers decorate your windows with close, minimize, restore buttons, provides title, icons and decides which windows should receive focus based on your actions amongst many other things.

This is why it is important to choose a proper theme for xfwm4 also (on top of standard Xfce theme) if you plan to use Xfce. This can be done inside Xfce Settings Manager → Window Manager → Style.

6.5 Thunar

Thunar (*thunar*) is the file manager written for Xfce. File Managers help you organize your files, transfer files between your computer and other devices like Pen Drive, and helps you preview and easily copy also helps you perform a variety of custom actions.

Some goodies available with Xfce

Along with Xfce core, the developers have also prepared a number of utility software to go with Xfce under another project called xfce4-goodies.

7.1 Xfce Terminal Emulator

Xfce Terminal Emulator (*xfce4-terminal*) is the Xfce version of the terminal emulators available for other desktop environments. A terminal emulator is a small program inside which your shell (such as bash, zsh etc) runs. You can use any terminal emulator of your choice with Xfce, however Xfce Terminal is very lightweight and very responsive. This means you can open tabs very easily, switch between open tabs and open large number of terminals in the blink of an eye. It is so fast and flexible that you will no longer need applications like GNU Screen.

7.2 Mousepad

Mousepad (*mousepad*) is an Xfce implementation of Windows Notepad. This will be very useful for temporarily saving small fragments of text, opening files quickly for previews or writing large amounts of text.

Using your keyboard shortcuts wisely

Xfce provides you with an easy to use way to manage your keyboard shortcuts. You should take full advantage of this to accomplish your common chores quickly. For example, it is very easy to set up your Super (Windows) key to start a terminal so that you can quickly start typing in your commands.

Another common use for keyboard shortcuts is to use your media keys to control your media players. For example you can bind your “Media PLAY button” to this command :

```
rhythmbox-client --play-pause
```

This would mean that you can use your Media PLAY button to PLAY/PAUSE your music from Rhythmbox.

Scrolling

Mouse scrolling is another useful feature in Xfce. In Xfce, scrolling is largely context based. That is, what a scroll does depends on where the mouse cursor is currently positioned.

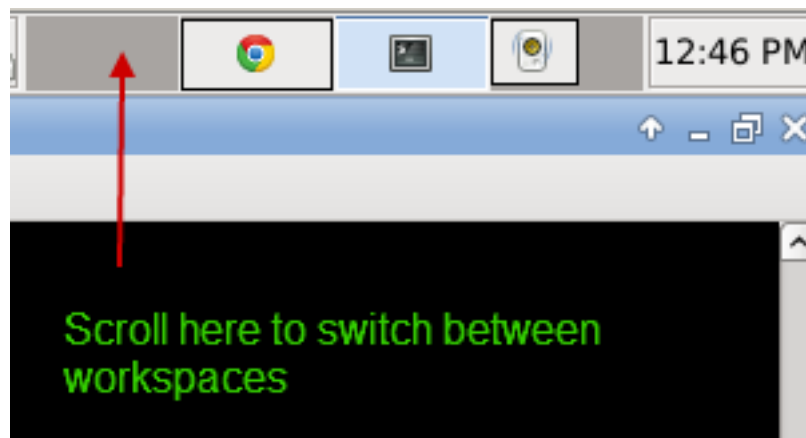


Figure 9.1: Scrolling at Workspace Switcher switches between workspaces

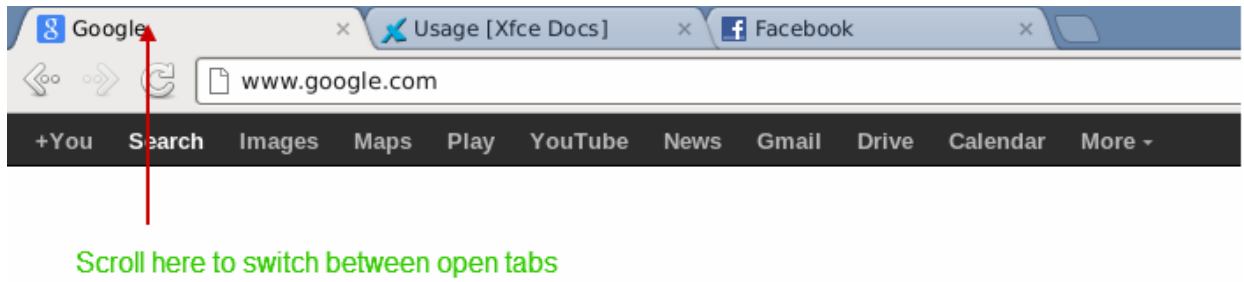


Figure 9.2: Scrolling at Tabs List inside Google Chrome switches between different open tabs

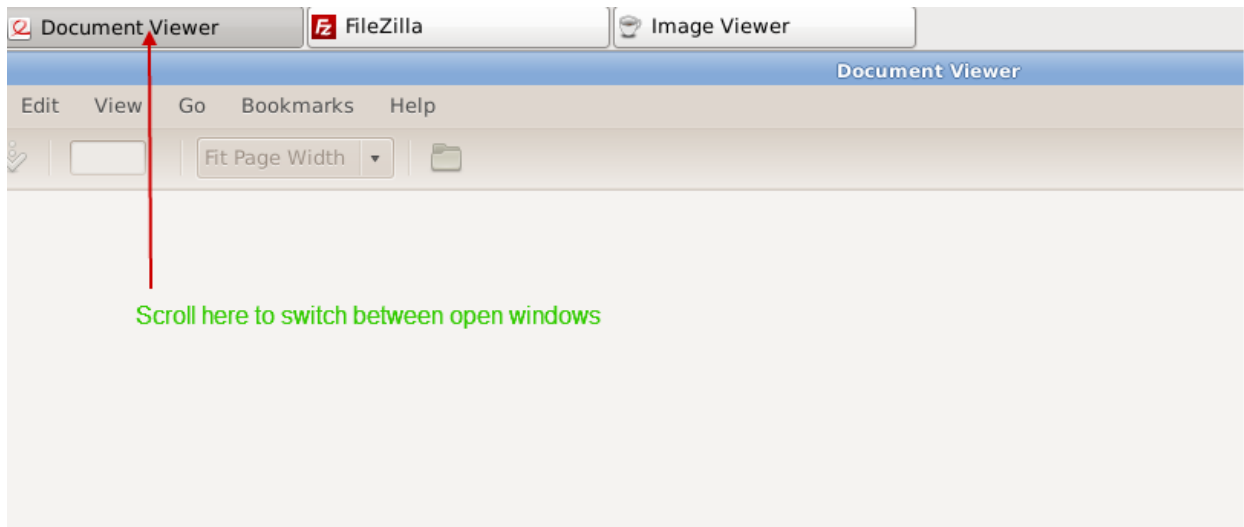


Figure 9.3: Scrolling at Task List switches between different different open windows

Indices and tables

- *genindex*
- *modindex*
- *search*