Imperial College London - Department of Computing

# An Introduction to the "nedit" Editor

## Introduction

On many occasions during your time here in the Department of Computing you will need to prepare and edit **text files**. These may be programs you write for your lab exercises, or simply files for your own use such as e-mail messages and the like.

We recommend the **nedit** text editor as a good one to start with if you have not used a text editor before. We have arranged for **nedit** to be the "default editor" in most circumstances where a software tool or package needs to call up an editor but does not have its own editor built-in. You can also invoke **nedit** by typing its name directly at the Linux prompt as explained below.

Other editors are available on the teaching machines, *e.g.* xemacs, vi, gvim.

## Getting Started

To enter **nedit** from your Linux command prompt, type:

```
nedit filename &
```

where *filename* is the name of the file you want to edit. (You can omit the filename if you want, but it means that later, when you are saving the text you have typed in, you will have to specify a filename then.) A new window will pop up. This is the **text buffer**. If the file already exists the text buffer will show the contents of the file straight away, otherwise the text buffer will be empty. You should not confuse the text buffer with the file itself! You can start typing into the text buffer, but the file itself (on disk) does not change until you **save** the text buffer. Saving means writing the text buffer contents into the file, overwriting what, if anything, was in the file before.

## On-line help

There is an on-line help system available within **nedit**. To consult it, move the mouse cursor to the **Help** menu item at top right and press the *left* mouse button. You will see a help menu with various choices. **Getting Started** is probably the best one to try first. Keeping the mouse button pressed, move down to **Getting Started** (or whichever choice you want) and then release the mouse button. You can try other options like **Basic operation** to get further information about the available commands as you need to find out more.

The on-line help is comprehensive, but you will probably only need to refer to it when you wish to use the more advanced features of 'nedit'.

## Adding and Erasing Text

**Note:** You can only add and erase text when you have 'write permission' on a file. If you only have 'read permission' you can view its contents, but cannot change it. (See the CSG Guide for an explanation of Linux file permissions.)

To enter new text, you can simply start typing. The text will be added at the flashing **text cursor** position. Press RETURN to move on to a new line.

If the text cursor is not at the desired position, you can **single-click** on the desired position to put it there. (Single-clicking, as you might guess, means pressing and releasing the left mouse button in rapid succession *once*, rather than twice as with double-clicking above.) You may also move the text cursor around with the arrow keys on the keyboard.

If the text buffer contains a lot of text, it cannot all be shown on-screen at once. There is a **scroll bar** at right which you can move up and down by pressing the *middle* mouse button while the mouse cursor is on the scroll bar, and sliding the mouse up and down with the middle button still pressed. This lets you select the part of the text buffer you are interested in.

To erase text you can use either *Delete* or *Backspace* (which erase leftward).

## Undo and Redo

There is an **Undo** facility on the **Edit** menu which moves you "back in time" to earlier states of the text buffer. So for example, if you erased some text and you suddenly realize you do need it after all, selecting **Undo** sufficiently many times in a row will get you back to the state before you erased any of it. It might take a lot of undo's though!

**Redo** (also on the **Edit** menu) lets you "undo an undo" and move "forward in time" to later states of the text buffer as if you had not used **Undo**.

## Cutting, copying and pasting

To manipulate a whole block of text as a unit, you can use the **Cut**, **Copy** and **Paste** options on the **Edit** menu. First, **select** a block of text with the mouse by going to the start of the block you want, pressing and holding down the *left* mouse button, then dragging the mouse to the end of the desired block and releasing the mouse button. The text will be "highlighted" in a different colour to show clearly what block you have chosen. If you make a mistake in your selection start selecting again from scratch.

Now that you have selected a block, you can either **cut** or **copy**. Both of these options place the selected block into an invisible buffer called the "cut buffer". The difference is: the **Cut** option erases the block from the ordinary visible text buffer, so it is then *only* in the invisible cut buffer; whereas the **Copy** option does not erase the block, so it is present both as the visible original and as an invisible copy in the cut buffer.

After you have cut or copied your block, you can **paste** fresh copies from the cut buffer into the ordinary visible text buffer as many times, and in as many places, as you like. Just move the text cursor to the desired paste position and use the **Paste** option from the **Edit** menu.

Note that when you next do a cut or copy, the cut buffer is overwritten with your new selected block of text, and therefore future pastes are of that new selected block.

## Saving

The ultimate point of an editor is to change the contents of a text file. It is important to remember that all the changes explained above are so far only to the text buffer, *not the file.*

To save your work, choose **Save** from the **File** menu at top left. The contents of the text buffer (all of it, not just the part immediately visible in the window!) are then written out to the file on disk, overwriting the earlier file contents.

It is good practice to save your file periodically, after you have made any substantial changes, if you are engaged in a long editing session. If the Linux system crashes you will likely lose the text buffer, but the contents of a file on disk are much less likely to be lost.

**Note:** You may also save your file under a different name to the one you originally gave. To do this select **Save_As** from the **File** menu. You will be prompted for a filename to "Save File As". (Ignore the rather complicated other fields in the prompt box!) Type in the desired filename (rub out the existing one if necessary) and click on **OK** to save or **Cancel** to change your mind.

## Leaving the editor

To leave the editor, select **Exit** from the **File** menu. If you have made changes to the text buffer that you have not yet saved to the file, you will be asked if you want to save these latest changes. You can click on **Yes** or **No**, or on **Cancel** to change your mind and not leave the editor after all. Note that if you click on **No** you will exit the editor and lose any changes that you have made.

## More advanced features

The above features should get you started with **nedit**. Most of the commands that require selection with the mouse can be done using "keyboard shortcuts". These can save a lot of time and are usually displayed on the pop up menu window next to a command. However, there are some more advanced features which you may find useful from time to time. It is impossible to cover them all in this introductory document (browse through the on-line help for full details), but we will mention three: searching and replacing, going to a specific line number, and multi-file editing.

### Searching and Replacing

You can *search* for a particular string of text characters by choosing **Find** from the **Search** menu. You will be prompted for the text string you want to look for. You can also make choices like whether the search is to be case sensitive (*i.e.* whether the exact pattern of capital and small letters has to match), and whether the search is to go forward or backward from the current position. Click on **Find Again** to start searching.

You can keep clicking on **Find Again** to find all the copies. If the end of the text buffer is reached you will be asked whether you want to continue from the beggining. (Or vice versa for a backwards search.)

Sometimes you will want to *Replace* the text string in question with another. There is a **Replace** option on the **Search** menu to cater for this. It prompts you to type in, not just the text string to be found, but the new text string to replace it. When you have done this you should click on **Find**. The cursor is then taken to the string in question and the prompt window disappears. Select *Replace Again* if you want the text replaced. To continue replacing alternately select *Find Again* and *Replace Again*.

If you are feeling brave, you could click on **Replace All** in the prompt window instead. This changes all occurrences in one go. Make sure this is what you want to do before using this! It can of course be reversed with **Undo** while you are still in the editor, but if you saved and quitted you might wish you had checked more carefully how much was changed!

### Going to a specific line number

If you know the exact line number you want to go to, for example if a program error message told you the line number it occurred on, you can select "Go to line Number" from the **Search** menu and enter the line number in the prompt box which will appear. You are then taken straight to the beginning of that line.

### Multi-file editing

You can edit two or more files in **nedit**. To edit another file, select **Open** from the **File** menu. You will be prompted for its name, which you should enter in the **Selection** field of the prompt box (again, ignore the other, more complicated fields).

A new text buffer window will appear, showing the contents of the desired file (or empty if the file does not exist). You can then perform editing in this window exactly as in the original. Indeed you can open as many such text buffer windows as you like by further application of the **Open** option.

If you are finished with one of these windows, close it using the **Close** option, also on the **File** menu. If there are any outstanding unsaved changes you will be asked if you want to save them.

Note that the **cut buffer** (discussed in the section on cutting, copying and pasting above) is common to all the windows. This provides a useful mechanism for transferring blocks of text from one file to another. Simply cut (or copy) in one file, and move over to the other window and paste the block into the desired position there.

Just as with editing of a single file, all these text buffers are not the same as the actual files. Therefore, in a long multi-file editing session, it is good practice to periodically go round *all* the text buffer windows and save each one separately by choosing **Save** from the **File** menu in that window.

If you ask to exit **nedit** (*i.e.* if you select **Exit** from the **File** menu) while it has several windows open, you will be prompted for whether you want to save the unsaved changes for each window separately in which any unsaved changes remain outstanding. Only after you have answered yes or no to *all* these prompts will **nedit** finally exit. This may take some time if there are many windows open.