

First Things First: Getting Access

In order to start learning your way around and putting your newfound knowledge to the test, you're going to need access to a Linux system. If you already have an account on a Linux system, you can skip ahead.

Web Based Command Line Access

The absolute quickest way to get access to a working Linux account is to visit SimpleShell.com in your web browser and click "Start my session." A terminal emulator that is connected to a Linux server will be displayed. You will be automatically logged in using a generic account and presented with a shell prompt.

Since you do not have a personal account your shell history and any files that you create will be destroyed at the end of your session. SimpleShell is great for trying out a few commands or working for a short period of time since sessions are limited to 15 minutes each. You can easily start another session at the end of your 15 minutes, but just be aware that you will lose any work from the previous session.

Web Hosting Shell Accounts

If you use a web hosting service to host your website you may already have a Linux account that you can use. Consult your hosting company's documentation and search for "SSH" or "shell access." SSH stands for Secure Shell and it provides a way to connect to a server over a network, like the Internet. If you don't already have a web hosting provider, you can sign up for one and use it for shell access. Shared web hosting providers typically charge just a few dollars a month.

Here are some shared web hosting companies that can provide you with a shell account and SSH access.

- 1and1.com
- BlueHost.com
- DreamHost.com
- HostGator.com
- Site5.com

Using Preinstalled Linux Images with VirtualBox

VirtualBox is virtualization software that can be installed on Windows, Mac, Solaris, or Linux. It allows you to run an operating system (guest) inside your current operating system (host). It's more time consuming than the other options, but it can be worth the extra effort to have your own personal Linux system. In this scenario you will spend a few minutes installing the virtualization software, downloading a pre-installed Linux image, and importing that image.

To get started, head over to the VirtualBox download page and grab the installer for your current operating system. Click through the install screens and accept the defaults.

Next, download a virtual disk image (VDI) from <http://virtualboxes.org/> to use. I recommend that you download a CentOS or Ubuntu image unless you already know which Linux distribution you will be working with in the future. Honestly, you can't make a wrong decision. The concepts that you will be learning in this book apply to any Linux distribution.

- [CentOS Virtual Disk Images](#)
- [Ubuntu Virtual Disk Images](#)

Launch VirtualBox, create a new virtual machine, and use the virtual disk image that you just downloaded. When you are asked for a hard disk image select the "Use existing hard disk" radio button and click on the directory icon. Next, click "Add" and select the virtual disk image. When the virtual machine is powered on you can log into the server using the username and password provided with the downloaded image.

Deep Dive

- [4 Quick and Easy Ways to Get Access to a Shell Account and Start Learning Linux Today](#) - This article covers more options and goes into greater detail.
- [Create, Build, Test Drive, or Deploy Your Very Own Linux Server with Full Root Access](#) - An article with even more strategies for getting access to Linux servers.
- [How to Install VirtualBox on Windows](#) - A video that guides you through the installation of VirtualBox on Windows.
- [VirtualBox Documentation](#) - Official VirtualBox documentation.
- [VirtualBox download page](#) - Where to obtain a copy of the VirtualBox software.
- [VirtualBoxes.org](#) - A good source of virtual disk images.