

open source your course

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With the 2008 CCCC Resolution supporting the use of open source (OS) software, many educators may wish to integrate OS technology into their courses but are unsure how to do so. Some may feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of programs available, while others feel thwarted because they have programs in mind but do not have the administrative capability or IT support to install software on institutional computers. Learn how to—and why—use OS technology in PC environments through the use of "portable apps"—programs that are installed and run from a portable USB flash drive.

Pedagogy:

- The culture of the typical computer lab is one of borrowed space, generic and impersonal. Writers have little to no control as to the look and navigation of their writing space. Portable apps enable writers to customize their composition space and bring their "writer's desk" with them. They are no longer writing refugees, but writing citizens.
- Writers can customize their space for accessibility—installing plugins and applications that facilitate the web reading process. Furthermore, web composers can test their page designs to ensure that their work is accessible.
- One of the major concerns about technology and literacy is that of access. Simply put, economically disadvantaged writers, especially multimodal composers, are thwarted in their studies because they cannot afford access to professional quality software. Portable applications—and a significant part of the open source movement as a whole—offers equal opportunity.

Process: Installing Portable Applications

Portable Applications are programs that you can run from your USB drive. You do not need administrator's permissions as you would if you were to install it on, for instance, a university computer. As these programs are portable; you simply plug in your USB drive to any computer and you run them as you would any program. The programs are open source/ freeware.

1. Go to <http://portableapps.com/download>
2. Determine whether you want to download the Suite Light (which includes a simplified word processor) or the Suite Standard (which includes the full version of OpenOffice, a set of programs comparable to Microsoft Office). Click to download. If you have a choice of where to download to, I'd suggest the desktop— it's the easiest place to find it after.
3. Find where you downloaded the file to, and double click on it to run it.
4. A screen comes up with an overview. Click Next to continue.
5. Read the terms of use; you will need to check the box accepting the terms in order to install the software. Once you've done so, click next (if you don't want to accept the terms... well... things pretty much end here).
6. You will be asked now where you wish to install the program. Click Browse and select the drive letter for your USB drive (if your USB offers two drives, chose the one that is not labeled a system drive). Click ok, then click install.
7. Once the program has finished installing, you will be see an apps menu pop up. Every time you plug in the drive this menu will come up for you.
8. Customize! Here are a few Add-ons for Firefox¹ that you should install:
 - **Zotero** helps you collect, manage, and cite your research sources: <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/3504>

¹ All descriptions are taken verbatim from <https://addons.mozilla.org>

- **Dictionary Lookup Extension:** Looks up the meaning of the highlighted word: <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/4037>
- **English United States (en-US) spellchecking dictionary:** <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/3497>
- **Video DownloadHelper:** The easy way to download and convert Web videos from hundreds of YouTube-like sites. Also works for audio and picture galleries: <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/3006>
- **Word Count Plus:** Counts number of words in selected text. Can add the count to a running total. <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/4718>
- **Tab Catalog:** This shows contents of all of tabs as a thumbnail-style list. <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/1937>
- **ColorfulTabs:** Colors every tab in a different color and makes them easy to distinguish <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/1368>
- **zoomFox:** Adds a menu for viewing images using advanced controls: The image is opened in a new tab which also contains a thumbnail view of the image used to scroll around more easily, zoom controls with various zoom levels etc. <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/1067>
- **Google Toolbar:** <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addons/policy/0/6249/44911>
- **TwitterBar:** <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/4664>
- **ScribeFire:** a full-featured blog editor that integrates with browser and lets you easily post to your blog. <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/1730>
- **FireFTP:** a free, secure, cross-platform FTP client for Firefox which provides easy and intuitive access to FTP servers. <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/684>

Add bookmarks; set home page. To add Writing Studio to your web toolbar, go to <http://writing.colostate.edu> and drag the web icon in the address bar down to the toolbar. Take advantage of a few other perks—check out Common Plugins for Firefox as well as Firefox Themes. Pimp your browser!

The above addons are just for Firefox, but the Portable apps suite offers so much more, including OpenOffice, a fully functional open source office suite (word processing, spreadsheets, database, and presentation software)

Other great portable apps for composers:²

- [Firefox Accessibility Extension](#) - Make Firefox more accessible
- [On-Screen Keyboard Portable](#) - Easily access an on-screen keyboard
- [Virtual Magnifying Glass Portable](#) - A full-featured screen magnifier
- [Nvu Portable & KompoZer Portable](#) - The easy-to-use Nvu web editor
- [GIMP Portable](#) - Photo and Image Editor
- [Sage Extension](#) (for Firefox) - A full-featured RSS extension
- [Audacity Portable](#) - A simple audio editor & recorder
- [VirtualDub Portable](#) - video processing and capture utility
- [PDFTK Builder Portable](#) - split, collate, watermark & password protect PDF documents

Outcomes:

- While students may need initial prompting to load portable apps, once they make it part of their routine, they tend to like the flexibility and freedom that the portable apps afford. Most students in research-intensive courses come to love the Zotero plugin for Firefox; as the data is stored in the browser, writers can store, tag, annotate, search, and generate citations for a library of texts.

² Descriptions taken verbatim from <http://portableapps.com>