

Making Your First Open-Source Contribution

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for the Dublin Girl Geek Dinner January meeting, January 30th

Slides will be posted on jpichon.net within the next couple of days.

Everyone can contribute to open-source, no matter their skill level and skill domain.

OpenHatch

<http://openhatch.org>

A non-profit dedicated to helping newcomers find their way into free software projects.

The Usual Steps/Workflow

These mostly apply to code contributions, though a good project would also have specific contributor guidelines for designers, translators, writers, etc.

1. Read the contributor guidelines. No need to remember everything but it's good to refer to them throughout the process.
2. Use the bug tracker to find an easy, interesting bug. The guidelines may specify a tag or keyword (gnome-love, easy picking, bite sized...) that indicates easy bugs for newcomers to the project. Sometimes this also means the person who added the tag is available for mentoring, if needed.
3. Build the software. There should be instructions, OpenHatch's training missions can also help.
4. Find the bug.
5. Fix it!
6. Submit your patch, following the format recommended by the contributor guidelines. If the project doesn't specify where to submit a patch, attaching it to the bug in the tracker is usually a safe bet.
7. Celebrate \o/ You have made your first open-source contribution..
8. Wait. Your patch may be accepted, or you may get some feedback on how to improve your patch and prepare a new submission, or there may be silence. Find out who you should ask to review your patch after a week or two without response.

Reception

Don't take silence personally, most open-source contributors are volunteers who would love to get more help.

Don't stick around in a project with a bad attitude though, it's not worth the headache and heartache. There are many projects with a friendly reputation out there, for instance:

- Gnome
- Dreamwidth
- GNU MediaGoblin
- The Mozilla projects, though they may be a little harder to get into
- Debian, if you have a mentor who can make sure you don't get lost in the process

Don't hesitate to get in touch with me, or with the folks at OpenHatch if you have any question!