



Free or low-cost software for creative work

Alternatives to Adobe CC and more



Photo editing and digital drawing

Photoshop alternatives



GIMP

<https://www.gimp.org/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: One of the most-recommended free graphic design programs, useful for photo editing and digital drawing. The site has a number of tutorials to help you get started. Since it's an open source program, many people have created plugins that you can install to add or change features.



Fire Alpaca

<http://firealpaca.com/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: A digital painting software, with some features meant specifically for making comics. The Fire Alpaca website has a tool called AlpacaDouga which you can use to make animated GIFs.



Krita

<https://krita.org/en/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: A digital painting software with tools for making comics as well as animation. Offers customizable brushes and customizable layout. Includes tools for making vector graphics.



Photopea

<https://www.photopea.com/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: any internet browser

Main features: An image editor that you can use in your browser, no software download required. The basic tools and layout will be familiar to users of Photoshop.



MediBang Paint

<https://medibangpaint.com/en/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, iOS and Android mobile devices

Main features: A digital painting program with a wide variety of free resources, including brushes, backgrounds, fonts and comic effects. The site has a number of tutorials to help you get started.



Sketchbook

<https://sketchbook.com/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, iOS and Android mobile devices

Main features: A digital drawing program by the well-respected software company Autodesk. Includes nearly 200 brushes you can customize, tools for aiding with perspective, symmetry, and line smoothing. With mobile devices you can take a photograph of a paper line drawing, and it will turn it into a digital line drawing with a transparent background.



Pixlr

<https://pixlr.com/>

Cost: free for basic tools, paid subscriptions available for more tools, starting at \$7.99 a month

Operating systems: any internet browser

Main features: A photo editing program that comes in two versions: Pixlr X is easier to use with few tools, while Pixlr E has more features. Both have the built-in option to look for stock photos to use in your project for free. The paid versions have an additional library of images, tests and overlays you can use in your projects.



Clip Studio Paint

<http://www.clipstudio.net/en>

Cost: Pro version is \$50 (but often goes on sale), EX version is \$220. Offers a 30-day free trial for Windows and Mac, 6 months free for iPad, and is free for iPhone.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, iOS

Main features: A digital drawing program that's especially popular with comic artists. Offers thousands of customizable brushes, the ability to make vector lines that you can move and resize without distortion, and tools for aiding with symmetry and perspective. It also offers the ability to make animations, complete with adding audio.



Paint Tool SAI

<https://www.systemax.jp/en/sai/>

Cost: price varies based on exchange rate between the Japanese yen and American dollar, usual range is between \$50-60. Offers a 31-day free trial.

Operating systems: Windows

Main features: A lightweight digital drawing program that's easy to learn.

Staff pick! **Rose says:** "I've been using Paint Tool SAI for years and I love it! It's excellent for drawing lineart due to features like automatic line stabilizing and the ability to make Linework layers, which allow you to edit the individual points of the line, similar to working with vector graphics. If you want more features, there's also a technical preview of SAI Ver.2 available, free for people who have bought SAI Ver. 1. Just keep in mind that Ver. 2 is still in development, so it will likely have bugs."



Affinity Photo

<https://affinity.serif.com/en-gb/photo/>

Cost: \$50 for Windows/Mac, \$20 for iPad (50% discount until at least April 20 due to Covid-19). Offers a 90-day free trial.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, iPad

Main features: A photo editing and digital painting program that includes a variety of basic and advanced tools for adding different effects to your images. It's able to edit RAW files imported directly from digital cameras. The Affinity apps are made to work seamlessly together, so if you have more than one downloaded, you can use the features of one app while working in another.



Pixelmator Pro

<https://www.pixelmator.com/pro/>

Cost: \$40, offers a 15-day free trial

Operating systems: Mac

Main features: A program used for photo editing, digital drawing, vector graphics and graphic design.



Paintstorm Studio

<https://www.paintstormstudio.com/>

Cost: \$20 for Windows/Mac/Linux. Free trial for 30 launches.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: A digital painting program with a focus on customizable brushes.



Procreate

<https://procreate.art/>

Cost: \$9.99 for iPad, \$4.99 for iPhone

Operating systems: iOS mobile devices

Main features: A digital drawing app popular among artists who draw on their iPads.

Vector graphics

Illustrator alternatives



Inkscape

<https://inkscape.org/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: A program that has a variety of tools for creating and editing vector graphics, including text and shapes of varying complexity. It has a series of interactive tutorials built in to the program.



Vectr

<https://vectr.com/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: any internet browser

Main features: A browser-based program to create simple vector graphics. It has some simple shapes built in, or you can draw or import your own, as well as add text. You can also import raster images and use it to create graphics with mixed raster and vector elements. The site has tutorials to help you get started.



Krita

<https://krita.org/en/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: A digital painting software with tools for making comics as well as animation. Offers customizable brushes and customizable layout. Includes tools for making vector graphics.



Boxy SVG

<https://snapcraft.io/boxy-svg>

Cost: \$10 for Windows/Mac/ChromeOS. Appears to be free for Linux. \$9 for web app (use in browser with no download).

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux, ChromeOS, any internet browser

Main features: A program to create and edit vector graphics, which access to an Open Clip Art Library from which you can pull thousands of free stock vector images.



Affinity Designer

<https://affinity.serif.com/en-gb/designer/>

Cost: \$50 for Windows/Mac, \$20 for iPad (50% discount until at least April 20 due to Covid-19). Offers a 90-day free trial.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, iPad

Main features: A program that has the option to switch between vector and raster workspaces, allowing both elements to be added to the same image. Includes options for setting up grids and guidelines to manage the layout of an image. The Affinity apps are made to work seamlessly together, so if you have more than one downloaded, you can use the features of one app while working in another.



Pixelmator Pro

<https://www.pixelmator.com/pro/>

Cost: \$40, offers a 15-day free trial

Operating systems: Mac

Main features: A program used for photo editing, digital drawing, vector graphics and graphic design.



Clip Studio Paint

<http://www.clipstudio.net/en>

Cost: Pro version is \$50 (but often goes on sale), EX version is \$220. Offers a 30-day free trial for Windows and Mac, 6 months free for iPad, and is free for iPhone.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, iOS

Main features: A digital drawing program that's especially popular with comic artists. Offers thousands of customizable brushes, the ability to make vector lines that you can move and resize without distortion, and tools for aiding with symmetry and perspective. It also offers the ability to make animations, complete with adding audio.

Photo processing and organization

Lightroom alternatives



RawTherapee

<https://rawtherapee.com/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: An open source photo processing program, used for RAW photo post-production. Useful for photographers who want advanced options for processing RAW files.



Darktable

<https://www.darktable.org/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: An open source photography workflow application and raw developer. It focuses on the workflow of quickly processing the many photos that a photographer may take in a single shoot.



Capture One

<https://www.captureone.com/en/>

Cost: starts at \$24 a month, annual and permanent prices available. Offers a 30 day free trial.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: A photo editing program with a customizable interface to tailor your workflow. It also has file management tools to help organize your photos.



Luminar

<https://skylum.com/luminar>

Cost: \$90 for a license for 2 computers

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: A photo editing program that can be used as a standalone app, or as a plugin for Adobe and Apple programs. Can be used to process photos, add lighting or remove objects from an image.



Affinity Photo

<https://affinity.serif.com/en-gb/photo/>

Cost: \$50 for Windows/Mac, \$20 for iPad (50% discount until at least April 20 due to Covid-19). Offers a 90-day free trial.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, iPad

Main features: A photo editing and digital painting program that includes a variety of basic and advanced tools for adding different effects to your images. It's able to edit RAW files imported directly from digital cameras. The Affinity apps are made to work seamlessly together, so if you have more than one downloaded, you can use the features of one app while working in another.

Animation

Animate alternatives



<https://www.blender.org/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: Open-source software used for 3D modeling, rigging and animation, which can also create 2D animations.



<https://opentoonz.github.io/e/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: Software developed by the renowned animation company Studio Ghibli, with all the tools used to develop some of their animated movies. The original user manuals are in Japanese, but there's a community of English-language users who offer tips and tutorials on how to use it.



<https://krita.org/en/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: A digital painting software with tools for making comics as well as animation. Offers customizable brushes and customizable layout. Includes tools for making vector graphics.



<https://www.pencil2d.org/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: An open source program for creating 2D animations. It allows you to switch between created raster or vector images. The website has a variety of tutorials to help you get started.



Fire Alpaca

<http://firealpaca.com/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: A digital painting software, with some features meant specifically for making comics. The Fire Alpaca website has a tool called AlpacaDouga which you can use to make animated GIFs.



wick editor

<https://www.wickeditor.com/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: any internet browser

Main features: A browser-based program that's used to create animations and interactive games. The website has a variety of tutorials to help you get started.



Clip Studio Paint EX

<http://www.clipstudio.net/en>

Cost: Pro version is \$50 (but often goes on sale), EX version is \$220. Offers a 30-day free trial for Windows and Mac, 6 months free for iPad, and is free for iPhone.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, iOS

Main features: A digital drawing program that's especially popular with comic artists. Offers thousands of customizable brushes, the ability to make vector lines that you can move and resize without distortion, and tools for aiding with symmetry and perspective. It also offers the ability to make animations, complete with adding audio.



ToonBoom Harmony

<https://www.toonboom.com/products/harmony>

Cost: starts at \$24 a month, annual and permanent prices available. Offers a 21-day free trial.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: Software used by major animation studios for professional 2D work. There are 3 versions of the program: in order of price and available features, they are Essentials, Advanced and Premium. The site has online courses to help you learn the software, and offers both self-directed and instructor-led lessons.

Desktop Publishing

InDesign alternatives



Scribus

<https://www.scribus.net/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: An open source page layout program whose tools and layout will be familiar to users of InDesign. It's useful for typesetting and color management, and some options to add vector graphics. It can create any size document, from small pamphlets to long books.



Canva

<https://www.canva.com/>

Cost: free version available, and well as paid Pro and Enterprise versions with more features. Offers a 30-day free trial of Pro.

Operating systems: any internet browser

Main features: An easy-to-use browser-based program useful for making graphics and small publications. It has built-in templates for different types of publications, as well as free images and fonts you can use.

Staff pick! **Colleen says:** "Canva is a fantastic designing tool for almost anything, including social media posts, flyers, business cards, posters, resumes and much more! With thousands of templates, top graphic designers have an easy way to get you started on something dynamic and engaging—you can also utilize their many customization tools to craft your own unique look and style. Intuitive and easy to learn, Canva is like going through a master course in graphic design but with less time and effort on your part—it is a helping hand for those interested, and has videos that can teach you how to implement the basics and move on from there to produce stunning works. Check it out!"



SpringPublisher

<http://www.springpublisher.com/>

Cost: free version available, or \$24 for Pro version with more features

Operating systems: Windows

Main features: A program for designing small publications, like fliers, labels and business cards. Includes various free templates, with more templates available to purchase.



PDFelement

<https://pdf.wondershare.com/>

Cost: Standard \$70 a year, Pro \$90 a year for Windows/Mac. Free for iOS and Android mobile devices. Free trial available.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, iOS and Android mobile devices

Main features: A publishing program dedicated to creating and converting PDF files and forms.



Affinity Publisher

<https://affinity.serif.com/en-gb/publisher/>

Cost: \$50 for Windows/Mac, \$20 for iPad (50% discount until at least April 20 due to Covid-19). Offers a 90-day free trial.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, iPad

Main features: A publication program that can handle a variety of projects, from labels and stationary to books and magazines. Supports double-page spreads, and has many options to customize the style and placement of text. The Affinity apps are made to work seamlessly together, so if you have more than one downloaded, you can use the features of one app while working in another.

Web design

Dreamweaver alternatives



Blue Griffon

<http://bluegriffon.org/>

Cost: most features free, some require a paid license (price varies based on exchange rate between the Euro and American dollar)

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Ubuntu

Main features: An editor for HTML, CSS and other elements of web design. One version of the paid license also allows it to edit EPUB documents. The base program is free, but the user manual must be purchased (paid licenses include the user manual).



Brackets

<http://brackets.io/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: An open source text editor for HTML, CSS and JS. Includes a Live Preview feature which will allow you to preview what your file looks like as a web page, and updates in real time as you change the text file.



Atom

<https://atom.io/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: An open source text editor that allows users to install third-party packages and themes to customize the features and looks of the editor.

Video editing

Premiere Pro alternatives



DaVinci Resolve

<https://www.blackmagicdesign.com/products/davinciresolve/>

Cost: free version available. Studio version with more features is \$300

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: Software used for video editing, color grading, special effects and sound mixing. The site includes training videos and free downloadable manuals to help you learn the software.



Hitfilm Express

<https://fxhome.com/hitfilm-express>

Cost: free/pay what you want: paying \$9 or more gains additional features

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: Software used for video editing, color grading, and sound mixing, with a variety of special effects options. The site includes many video tutorials, including a frequently-updated Youtube channel with tips and instructions.



Kden Live

<https://kdenlive.org/en/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: An open source video editor that supports a variety of video formats. It offers a customizable interface and many built-in video effects and transitions.



Shotcut

<https://shotcut.org/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows

Main features: An open source video editor that supports many audio and video formats and has a large selection of audio and video filters. It includes a recording function that lets you save and edit footage directly from a webcam.



<https://animoto.com/>

Cost: free, paid accounts available for more features

Operating systems: any internet browser

Main features: A browser-based video editor useful for short videos and slideshows. It includes a library of stock photos, music, templates, fonts, and other elements to help you compose your video.



<https://www.vegascreativesoftware.com/us/>

Cost: \$50, or pay more for upgraded versions with more features. Offers a free trial.

Operating systems: Windows

Main features: Video editing software that includes a Guided Video Creator that walks you step-by-step through creating a video.

Audio editing

Audition alternatives



Audacity

<https://www.audacityteam.org/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: An open source audio editing program.

Staff pick! **Austin says:** “Audacity is a free, open source, Digital Audio Workstation with an intuitive interface and large community of users worldwide. It is a great program for learning basic audio production skills and concepts. The tools and workflow in Audacity are parallel with industry standard softwares (Pro Tools, Logic, Reaper), and it can yield just as quality results. There are many tutorials and helpful resources for this program to be found online.”



Waveform Free/Pro

<https://www.tracktion.com/products/waveform-free>

<https://www.tracktion.com/products/waveform-pro>

Cost: Free is free, Pro starts at \$119, pay more for more features. Offers a 30-day free trial.

Operating systems: Mac, Windows, Ubuntu, Raspberry Pi

Main features: A digital audio workstation (DAW) with a built-in synthesizer and drum sampler. There are several other synthesizers and effects available for an additional purchase, each of which also offer free trials. The site includes user manuals and video guides to help you get started.



Reaper

<https://www.reaper.fm/>

Cost: \$60 for Windows/Mac. Offers a 60 day free trial.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, experimental versions for Linux

Main features: A digital audio workstation (DAW) for editing, processing, and mixing audio. Includes many built-in effects, and supports third-party plugins to add more effects. The site includes user manuals and video guides to help you get started.

3D modeling



<https://www.blender.org/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: Open-source software used for 3D modeling, rigging and animation, which can also create 2D animations.



<https://www.tinkercad.com/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: any internet browser

Main features: An easy-to-use CAD (computer aided design) program where you start with basic shapes like cubes, cones and spheres, then combine them together to make more complex shapes. It offers a series of interactive tutorials to help you learn to use the program.



<http://pixologic.com/sculptris/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: A “digital sculpting” program where you start with a sphere or slab, then use a variety of tools to shape it into your desired model. The tools allow you to create very organic-looking forms.



<http://zbrushcore.com/>

Cost: \$10 a month, or \$180 for a perpetual license

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: By the makers a Sculptris, a more advanced “digital sculpting” program that gives you more tools to refine your model, including adding textures and colors.