



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.



MediBang Paint

<https://medibangpaint.com/en/app-download/>

Cost: free (with in-app purchases)

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.



MediBang Pro

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

Cost: free (with in-app purchases)

Operating systems: iPad

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.



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 \$35-45. 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."



Clip Studio Paint

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

Cost: Pro version is \$50 (but sometime goes on sale), EX version is \$220, and is free for iPhone. Offers a 3 month free trial for Windows, Mac, Chromebook, Android, and iPad.

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.



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.



Affinity Photo

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

Cost: \$70 for Windows/Mac, \$20 for iPad. Offers a 30-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.



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.



Pixelmator Pro

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

Cost: \$50, offers a 7-day free trial

Operating systems: Mac

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

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.



Paintstorm Studio

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

Cost: \$20 for Windows/Mac/iPad/Linux. Offers a free trial.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

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



Imerge

<https://fxhome.com/product/imerge>

Cost: starts at \$8 a month, Pro version with more features starts at \$13 a month. Purchasing a license for Imerge also includes the video editor HitFilm.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: Image editing software with customizable effects that supports using RAW image files. The site includes many tutorials, including a blog and Youtube channel with tips and instructions.



Procreate

<https://procreate.com/ipad>

Cost: \$12.99

Operating systems: iPad

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



Procreate Pocket

<https://procreate.com/pocket>

Cost: \$5.99

Operating systems: iPhone

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



Photoshop Express

<https://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop-express.html>

Cost: some features free, Premium starts at \$5 a month. 7-day free trial of Premium.

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

Main features: By the popular company Adobe, an app designed for editing and sharing photos on mobile devices. Good for making collages or adding filters and effects, then sharing online.

Vector graphics

Illustrator alternatives



Inkscape

<https://inkscape.org/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: An open source 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. There are also many extensions available to add additional functions.



Vectr

<https://vectr.com/>

Cost: free for basic tools, paid subscriptions available for more tools, starting at \$4 a month

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 create graphics with mixed raster and vector elements. The site has tutorials to help you get started.



Boxy SVG

<https://boxy-svg.com/>

Cost: starts at \$10 for Windows/Mac/ChromeOS, \$99 a year for Premium version with more features. Standard version is free for Linux.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux 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.



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.

<https://nhfpl.org/ives-squared/>

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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.



Affinity Designer

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

Cost: \$70 for Windows/Mac, \$20 for iPad. Offers a 30-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.



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.



Luminar Neo

<https://skylum.com/luminar>

Cost: starts at \$12 a month, annual and permanent prices available, each license is for 2 computers. Offers a 7-day free trial.

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: \$70 for Windows/Mac, \$20 for iPad. Offers a 30-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.

<https://nhfpl.org/ives-squared/>

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Animation

Animate alternatives



Blender

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

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

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



OpenToonz

<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.



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Pencil2D

<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: An open source 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

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

Cost: Pro version is \$50 (but sometime goes on sale), EX version is \$220, and is free for iPhone. Offers a 3 month free trial for Windows, Mac, Chromebook, Android, and iPad.

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.



Procreate Dreams

<https://procreate.com/dreams>

Cost: \$19.99

Operating systems: iPad

Main features: An app used to create animations and motion graphics, which can include photos, videos and sound.

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 Team 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!"



PDFelement

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

Cost: \$80 a year, with 2-year, permanent, and team prices available. 14-day free trial available. Free for iPad and Android.

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: \$70 for Windows/Mac, \$20 for iPad. Offers a 30-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.



VivaDesigner

<https://viva.systems/designer/>

Cost: free version available, and well as paid versions with more features.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: A program for publishing, layout, typesetting and illustration. It can handle a variety of projects, including for various publications, posters, stationary, and social media posts.



Swift Publisher

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

Cost: \$20

Operating systems: Mac (mobile iOS versions are in development)

Main features: A page layout and desktop publishing app that includes templates for a variety of publications. It also includes many text tools and clipart, with mor available for an additional purchase.

Web design

Dreamweaver alternatives



Wordpress

<https://wordpress.com/>

Cost: free version available, as well as several plans at different price points with more features

Operating systems: any internet browser

Main features: A popular program for designing websites. It includes many templates for different kinds of websites, which can be edited using either a drag-and-drop interface or directly editing the code. It also offer tools for Search Engine Optimization (SEO), plugins you can add for more features, and services to host your website or purchase your domain.



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

Cost: free version available, as well as several plans at different price points with more features. Paid plans offer a 14-day free trial.

Operating systems: any internet browser

Main features: A popular program for designing websites with a drag-and-drop interface. It offers a variety of resources, such as templates for different kinds of web sites, tools for Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and web apps you can add for more features. The site has video tutorials to help you get started.



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.



Visual Studio Code

<https://code.visualstudio.com/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: A free coding editor that supports many coding languages, including Python, Java, C++, and more. It has tools to help people new to coding, including highlighting keywords to identify coding patterns, and suggesting fixes for common mistakes. The site has a variety of tutorial videos to help you get started.

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

<https://fxhome.com/product/hitfilm>

Cost: free version available, and well as paid versions with more 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 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.



Animoto

<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.



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.



iMovie

<https://www.apple.com/imovie/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Mac, iOS mobile devices

Main features: A video editing program that comes standard with most Apple devices. Includes a number of special effects and filters to add to your video. You can record your own audio, or use the built-in sound effects or soundtracks.



Adobe Premiere Rush

<https://www.adobe.com/products/premiere-rush.html>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, iOS, Android

Main features: A free video editing program made by one of the best-known companies for creative software. While it's less advanced than some of Adobe's other programs, it has enough features to get started. A free Adobe Creative Cloud account allows you to easily switch between devices (for example, start a video on a desktop PC, then continue editing on an Android phone or iPad).

To download Premiere Rush, go to the link above, then click on the blue "Start now" button. The "Buy now" button will instead direct you to one of Adobe's paid programs, such as the more advanced Premiere Pro.

Audio editing

Audition alternatives



Audacity

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

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: One of the most popular free, open source audio editing programs.

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.”



GarageBand

<https://www.apple.com/ios/garageband/>

<https://www.apple.com/mac/garageband/>

Cost: free

Operating systems: Mac, iOS mobile devices

Main features: A program for recording, editing and mixing music. There are a number of built-in instruments you can use to synthesize music, and more instruments are available to download. You can plug a guitar into your device and record music directly from the guitar. The Mac version also includes lessons on how to play piano and guitar.



Waveform Free

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

Cost: free

Operating systems: Mac, Windows, Ubuntu

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



Reaper

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

Cost: \$60 for a basic license, or \$225 for a commercial license. Offers a 60 day free trial.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, 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.



Avid Pro Tools

<https://www.avid.com/pro-tools>

Cost: starts at \$10 a month, more expensive plans available with more features.

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: Audio production software that includes a variety of collection of plugins, instruments, and sounds. The website has tutorials to help you get started.

3D modeling



Blender

<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.



TinkerCAD

<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.



SketchUp

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

Cost: free version available, as well as paid versions with more features. Discounted rates for students and teachers.

Operating systems: free version is for any internet browser. Paid versions can be used in a browser, on an iPad, or downloaded to Windows, Mac, or Chromebook computers

Main features: A 3D modeling program popular for architecture, interior design, and drafting. The website has a number of tutorials to help you get started.



ZBrush Core

<https://www.maxon.net/en/zbrushcore>

Cost: \$10 a month

Operating systems: Windows, Mac

Main features: A “digital sculpting” program used for making 3D models, which allows you to create organic-looking forms. It has many tools to refine your model, including adding textures and colors.

<https://nhfpl.org/ives-squared/>

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

Cost: free

Operating systems: Windows, Mac, Linux

Main features: An open source CAD (computer aided design) program designed for making 3D models of real-life objects. It offers the ability to start with a 2D sketch and build your 3D model from that. It also offers a series of “workbenches” with tools customized for various tasks.



<https://www.maxon.net/en/forger>

Cost: \$1.25 a month

Operating systems: iPad

Main features: A 3D modeling program that starts with a selection of basic solids, then lets you sculpt them into more detailed forms.