



My turn.....

Where does the time go? I'm probably not the only person who asks that question these days. Are you having that problem, too?



In any event, it's been a very busy six weeks for me with the newsletter, and getting ready for a trip to Brooklyn with my wife to see two of our three grandsons. It's birthday month there, as both boys were born in April, but two years apart. When we come home, it'll be Passover. Matzah—yum! Seriously, I like the stuff—but only one plus week a year. I hope you're all having a busy and healthy time, as well.

Late April and early May will see me in the Martha's Vineyard area for a National Parks At Night photo workshop, shooting lighthouses *at night*. I'm really looking forward to it.

I always have questions and some of them are for you. Not to worry. I know what your response will be...but here goes: do you still automatically answer the phone when it rings? We don't. We get very few legitimate phone calls anymore. 😞 But I got this one recently. I think it falls into the "it doesn't get any more obvious than this" category. I also think it's screamingly funny. What do you think?



Wasn't there a partial solar eclipse a week or so ago? I watched and attempted to photograph it from the balcony of our apartment. I had been planning to use my 100-500mm lens, but it turned out to be the wrong choice. So I used my go-to lens, my 24-105mm, mostly zoomed out. And yes, most certainly I used a solar filter on my lens and in front of my eyes. That filter is so dense unless one looks at the *sun*, one sees nothing!

I went to Baltimore with a friend to photograph the Dali and what was left of the Francis Scott Key Bridge. We arrived at Ft. McHenry in Baltimore at 0640 and found it closed and not opening to the public until 0900. We didn't want to wait. So we drove around the harbor and tried to get to Fort Armistead Park, but it was closed to the public (and will be for the foreseeable future while the cleanup continues), which I knew but my friend wanted to check out. But the bottom line was we couldn't get near the place. My friend went back a few days later to Fort Smallwood Park in Anne Arundel County and got some nice photos. I haven't made it back yet—and I'm not holding my breath.

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Thank this issue's proofreaders: Frank Fota, Leti Labell, Lynda Soady

A Low-Battery Alarm App For Apple Portables

By John Krout, Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society (www.patacs.org)

Introduction

This app does not support full-battery alarms but does support multiple low-battery alarms. It allows the assignment of a sound to each alarm and allows you to record your alert sound within the app.

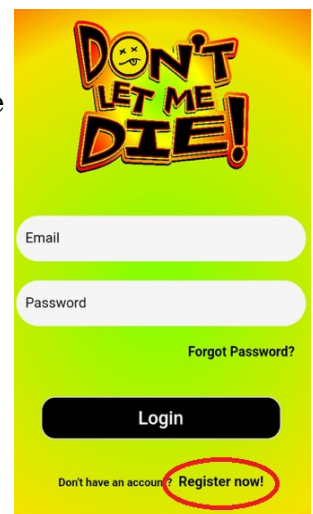
In my January 20, 2024 presentation to the PATACS General Meeting on Extending Your Battery Life, I focused on recharging when your portable device battery is in use and approaching complete depletion. During the discussion, an online visitor to our meeting mentioned that he prefers to recharge when the battery discharges to the fifteen percent level. I knew that battery discharge to no lower than fifteen percent to twenty percent would further extend battery life, but I did not know how to arrange for a visible and audible alert to the device owner that a low power level had been reached.

Whatever you prefer, fifteen percent or twenty percent, you can set an alarm for whenever your battery hits that low level while discharging, and for higher levels too, using a free app found on the App Store. The alarm will play its sound even if the app is not running when the battery discharges to that alarm level.

All of the screens shown here were captured from an iPhone X running iOS 16.7.

A free app

It is a bit unusual for me to recommend an app that has no reviews yet in the App Store. This one was quite new to the App Store when I



found it and decided to test it. The name of the app is **Don't Let Me Die!**, and its screens have a somewhat cartoonish feel.

Fortunately, the app offers a quite simple user interface. Simplicity is good. I do not care about the visual style so long as it does not make the functionality less obvious.

The app was buried deep in App Store search results, so I did not find it for quite a while. However, I can save you that search effort. At the end of this article, you will find a QR code that, when scanned by your portable's camera, will give you the option to go directly to the App Store screen for the app.

When first starting the app on your Apple device, the app displays the screen depicted in **illustration 1**. The app logs into your app account by providing your email address, and a password chosen by you. If you have no account, then tap **Register now** to begin the account creation process. I admit I am not sure this step is strictly required but, like a good follower, I did it.

After that, when first started, the app will display a splash screen briefly, and then the main screen appears as shown in **illustration 2**.

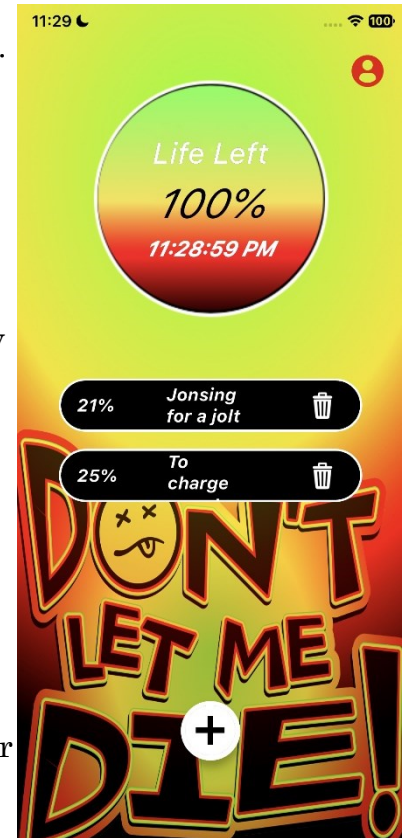


illustration 2



illustration 3

The main screen is depicted after I configured two alarms to test whether or not those alarms would sound when the battery discharged to the alarm levels shown, while the app was *not* running. Good news; they did sound while the app was not running. The words associated with each alarm identify tone titles provided by the app itself and selected by the user (in this case, me).

To create a new low-battery alarm, tap the **+** icon in the white circle at the bottom center of the main screen in **illustration 2**. An alarm creation screen appears, like the one depicted in **illustration 3**. The **Choose %** portion includes a scrolling percentage scale. Scroll the scale up or down and then tap to select the percentage at which an alarm will sound while discharging. Below that, you can select an alarm sound to be played. Tap **Choose File** to select either a tone provided by the app itself or any song or tone on your Apple portable.

When you tap Choose File, the popup shown in **illustration 4** appears. In the popup, tap **Add New** to select any tone installed on your device. If you prefer, below **Add New** appears a scrolling list of short songs provided by the app itself.

Scroll through the list and tap any title to audition it. If you want to use the tone you have heard as an audible alert, then tap the red **Select** button.

I auditioned a couple of those app-provided songs. Most include vocals. The lyrics weren't easy to understand, though they are in English, and their audio volume appears to be too low for an alarm to be heard while the Apple portable is in a pocket or purse.

If you give up on the popup options, then swipe the popup **down** to remove it from the screen.

In the **illustration 3** screen, tap **Record Audio** to use the device microphone to record a voice or any other nearby sound.

After you have finished creating or selecting a sound, then tap the **Submit** button at the bottom of the screen, as in **illustration 2**. The main screen reappears, showing the newly created alarm.

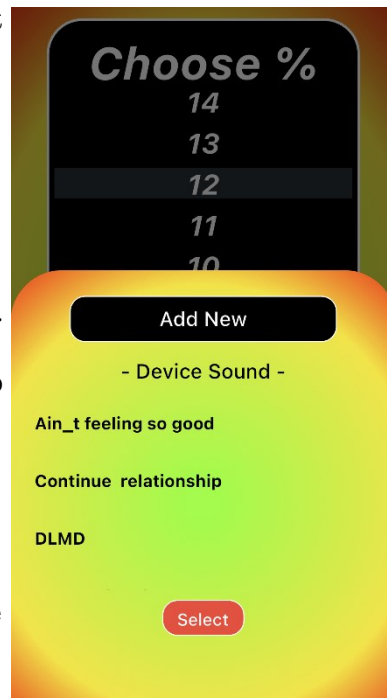


illustration 4

There is limited room on the main screen for listing alarms. If you create several, then the list appears to be scrollable to view all of the configured alarms.

Each of the alarms only sounds once. Because of that, I suggest using or creating a fairly long-duration audio tone.

Also, each alarm presents a screen display, known in iOS as a **banner**. That banner is configured by default to be *temporary*, it appears for a short time and then vanishes, so it can disappear before being seen. It may be more useful to change that banner style from **Temporary** to **Persistent** so that the banner will stay put until the user dismisses it.

Making the alarm banners Persistent

In **Settings**, there are two ways to reach the screen for the app settings. Select **Notifications** and then the **app name**, or the **app name** and then **Notifications**.

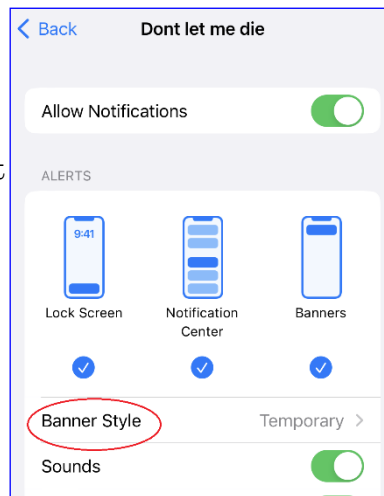


illustration 5

Either way, you reach the screen shown in **illustration 5**.

Tap the **Banner Style heading**, which is circled in the illustration.

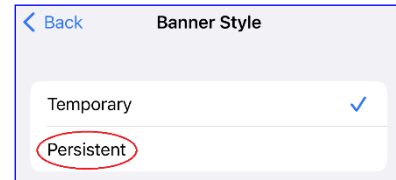


illustration 6

That tap opens the very simple **Banner Style** page shown in **illustration 6**. Tap the word **Persistent**, which is circled in the illustration.

You are done. You can close the **Settings** app.

Obtaining the app from the Apple App Store

Here is the QR code for finding the **Don't Let Me Die** app in the App Store. If you have a recent model Apple portable, then its camera app can scan QR codes.



If you focus the camera app on the QR code, and no popup appears on your device screen, then you have to enable the QR code scanning capability in the Settings screen for the camera app. On iOS 16.7 on an iPhone X, the Scan QR codes on/off switch is clearly labeled and very easy to see on the camera settings screen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John Krout is a retired software engineer. During his career, he did all the tasks related to software development, from requirements analysis to software documentation and training. He began writing and speaking about computer software in the early 1980s, and now also covers smartphones, tablets, electric vehicles (EVs), and plugin hybrid EVs (PHEVs).

###

WINDOWS CAN'T BUT LINUX CAN

by Frank Fota, fotafm@gmail.com,

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I noticed an interesting conversation on [Quora](#) concerning the capabilities of the Linux Operating System (OS). There are things that only Linux can do. There are certain things that Linux cannot do. John Dorsey says “Linux can run for years without being restarted. It has no registry to become fragmented, it has absolutely no corporate bloatware and no debilitating memory management issues.” John adds “Out of the box, no distribution of Linux can recognize as many peripherals as Windows. Also, many manufacturers create drivers for Windows only. Some devices, especially printers, can be difficult or impossible to set up with your Linux machine.” David Annett notes, however, that since the source code for Linux is open, he was able to modify drivers for an otherwise obsolete Video Capture Card. This made the card usable in Linux whereas with Windows, it was headed for the landfill. There are also advantages and disadvantages for both Linux and Windows (e.g., Linux is free and less susceptible to malware). Windows is expensive and needs an anti-

virus program to protect the Operating System. Many avid Linux users weighed into this discussion and their comments are truly eye-opening.

I asked ChatGPT and the response that follows was similar to those presented on Quora.

ChatGPT says that ...Linux is an open-source operating system, which means that the source code is freely available for anyone to use, modify, and distribute. This means that Linux is highly customizable and can be tailored to fit specific needs. Windows, on the other hand, is a proprietary operating system, which means that the source code is not freely available and can only be used and modified by Microsoft. One of the main advantages of Linux is its flexibility and versatility. Linux can be used on a wide range of devices, from servers and desktop computers to smartphones and embedded systems. It can also be used for a wide range of tasks, from web development and software development to scientific research and data analysis. Another advantage of Linux is its security. Linux is less prone to viruses and malware than Windows, and it has a built-in firewall and permissions system that makes it more difficult for attackers to gain unauthorized access to the system. Linux also has a large and active community of developers and users, which means that there is a wealth of documentation, tutorials, and support available for new users. Overall, Linux is a powerful and versatile operating system that can be used for a wide range of tasks, and it is particularly well-suited for people who need a high level of customization and control over their computing environment.

###

Taking Notes with Xournal

By Dick Maybach, Brookdale Computer User Group

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We all have our preferences for taking informal notes. If you prefer handwritten text and sketching graphics, you might like an application that supports this, such as Xournal. It was developed for Linux, <https://sourceforge.net/projects/xournal/>, but it's also available for Windows, <https://xournal.en.softonic.com/>, and Android, although the last is a beta version. A manual is available at <http://xournal.sourceforge.net/manual.html>; it has about 24 pages, but only the first third is really useful. If you like the concept but don't care for the Xournal implementation, there are alternatives, such as MS Windows Journal, Jamal, <http://www.dklevine.com/general/software/tc1000/jarnal.htm>, and Gournal, <https://www.adebenham.com/old-stuff/gournal/>.

The best interface for sketches and handwriting is a touch screen, preferably with a stylus, although a standard screen plus a graphics pad, such as Wacom, is also usable. Trying to use a mouse with a normal display will result in little but frustration. **Figure 1** shows the program's default opening screen. Although the default page style is ruled, you can change it to plain or graph.

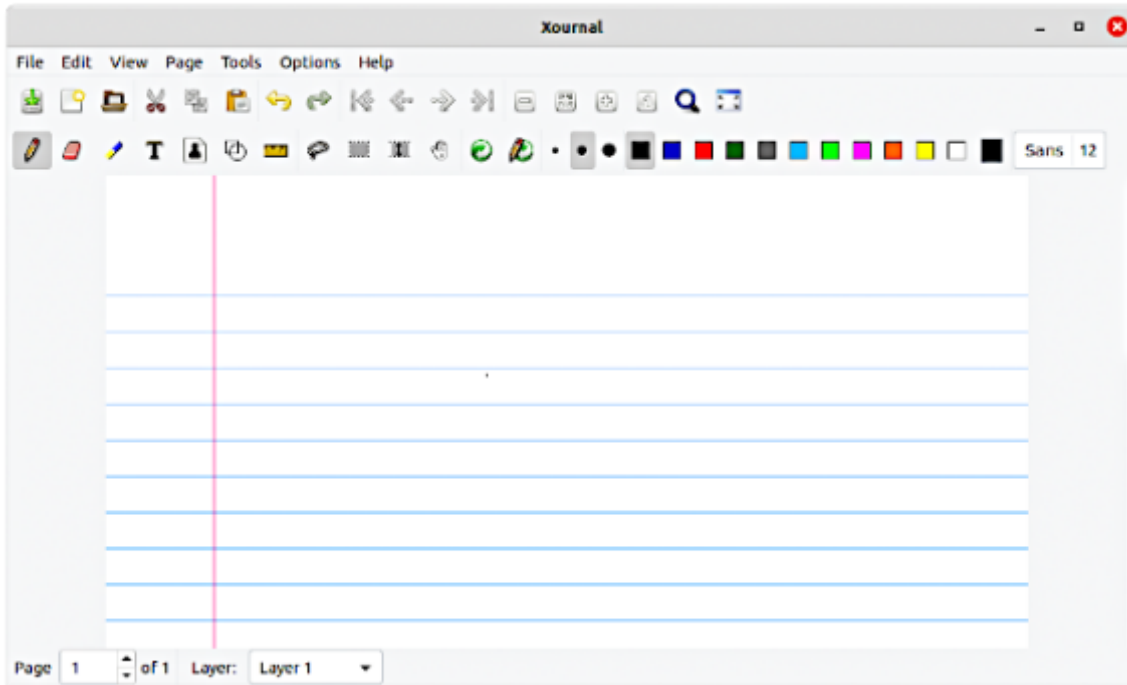


Figure 1. Xournal Opening Screen.

The menu bar (at the top) has file tools and settings. It duplicates many tools in the toolbars but with text labels instead of icons. The toolbars let you select the operation (line drawing, highlighting, erasing, inserting, and deleting objects), choose the colors, and designate areas for other functions. You have similar tools in your word processor and graphics software, making the tool easy to use.

Figure 2 shows the results of importing a logo, adding a line drawing and handwriting, importing text, and highlighting a portion of it.

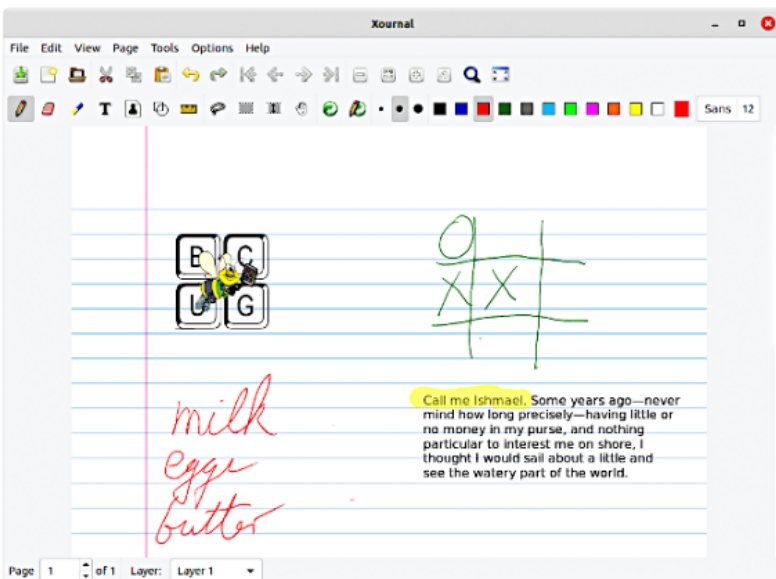


Figure 2.

Xournal saves each note in a separate file, and keeping them organized requires effort. You should use descriptive filenames, place them in logical folders, and delete them when no longer needed. It would be easy to scatter dozens of notes throughout the hundreds of directories on most PCs. If you can't find a note, it's the same as if you'd deleted it. (Editor's note: finding a "lost" file should be relatively easy using the search function.)

I frequently use PDF files, often as articles I download or documents I receive. While these are convenient, they are difficult to modify. For example, when I download an article, I like to add the URL where I found it. Also, some PDF documents are questionnaires or require a signature. **Xournal** can use a PDF as a background, over which you can add text or sketches. **Figure 3** shows an example.

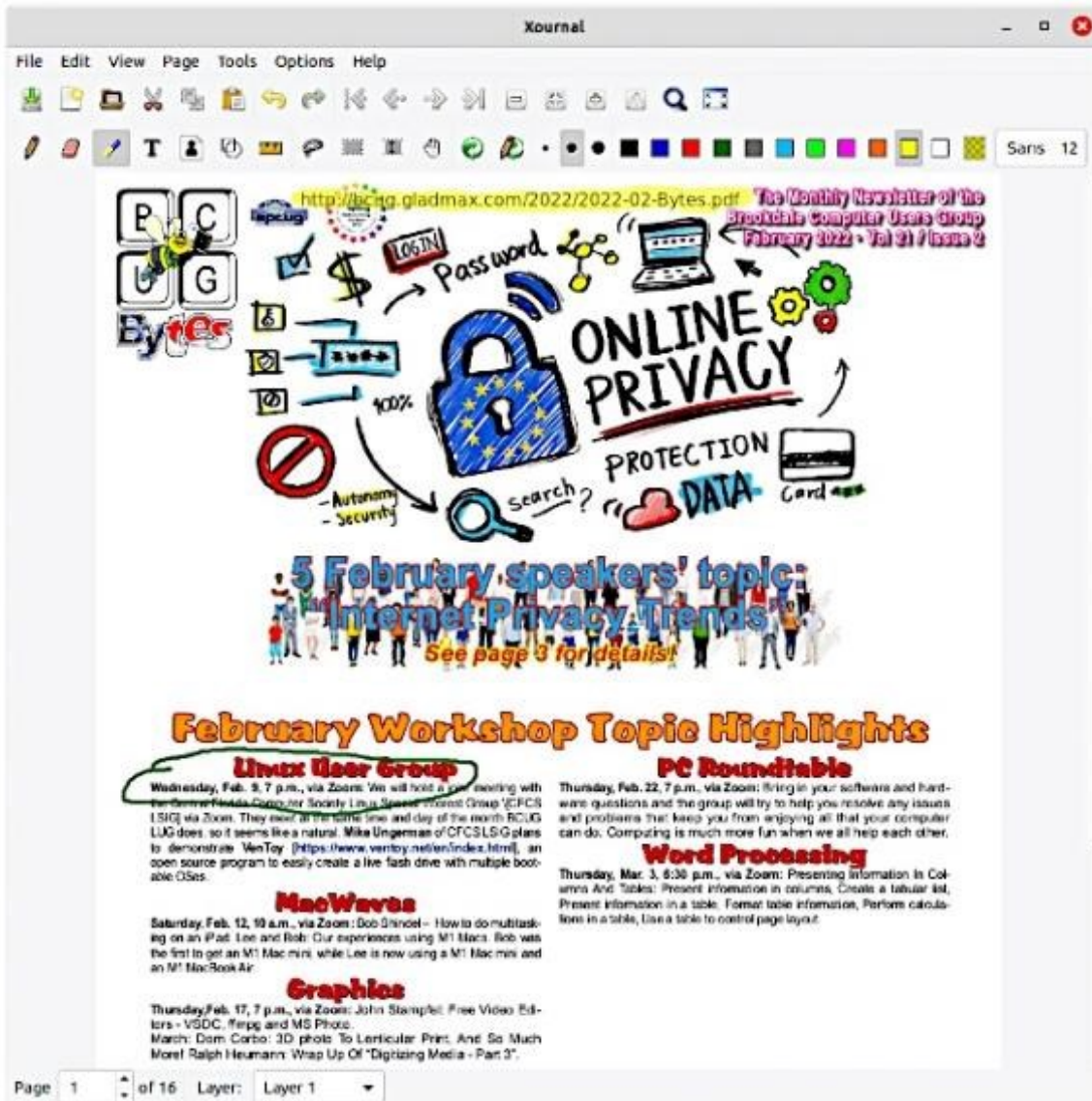


Figure 3. Modified PDF Document.

I've inserted (and highlighted) the document's URL at the top and circled a meeting here. The original PDF hasn't changed, but you can export the annotated result as a new PDF. This technique makes adding a signature far more convenient than my old method, printing the PDF, signing the paper copy, and scanning the result. You can use other graphics, and screenshots, for example, and annotate them. Do read the manual before doing this, as there are some subtleties.

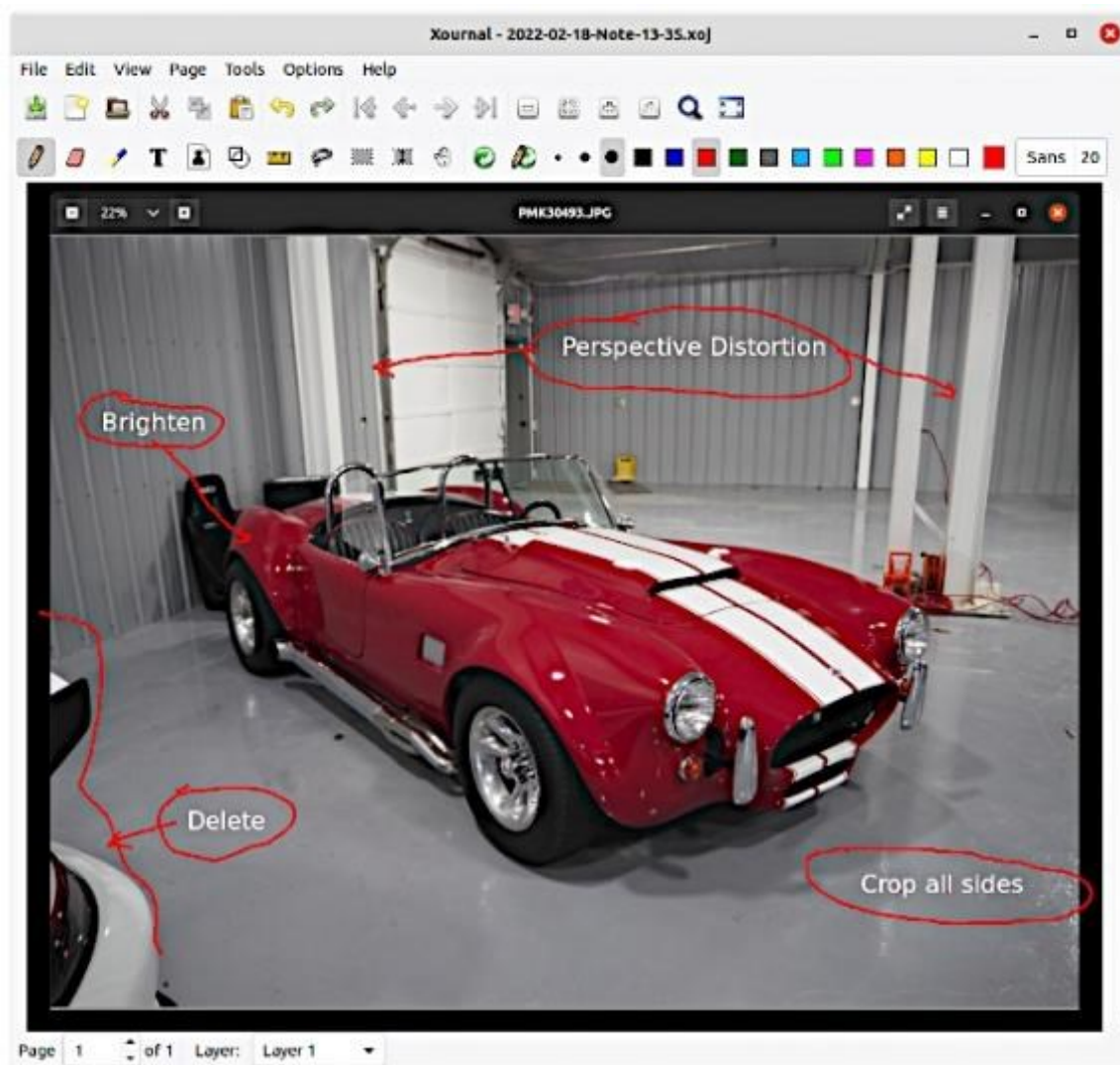


Figure 4. Annotated Photo.

Figure 4 shows another annotation example, this time of a photograph. It takes only a few minutes for an editor to clearly show a photographer what changes are needed. Here, the background image is a screenshot of the image viewer displaying the photo. **Xournal** can save files only as PDFs or in **Xournal** format. For this example, the editor would probably send his comments to the photographer as a PDF.

Choosing a notes tool for collaboration means considering what file formats it can use. PDF is the standard for documents, as are JPEG and PNG for images. If the tool can't import the file directly, it may have a convenient workaround. For example, **Xournal** can import the contents of any window, so you can open an image file with your image viewer and allow **Xournal** to import it as a screenshot. Then, after annotating it, you can export it as a PDF.

For me, **Xournal** is most useful for annotation, particularly as an aid to collaboration. Team members frequently exchange documents or graphics; annotating them is far clearer than

sending back printed comments. Of course, I prefer a text notes program when developing articles like this, but if you long for the Post-it days, you might like the **Xournal** approach.

###

What is Electricity?

(Hint, the answer is not what you think)

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Several months ago, I read an article on the internet about the first transatlantic telegraph cable.

Significantly, it was a failure. But after laying several more cables and making some important discoveries about electricity, cables, and technology, we all know it was a world-changing success. But that is another story.

What I want to share in this article is what followed my reading. Some of the discoveries surprised me as a college-trained Electrical Engineer (BE, EECS, Univ of New Mexico). I thought I knew how electricity works, What it is, what it does, how it moves. However, after much research on technical websites (many of them with mathematical proofs and discussions that are almost over my head, like <https://physics.info/electric-current/> and watching some profound videos such as those listed at the end of this article), I found out that I was wrong in almost all of my understanding.

For example, what is electricity made of? Well, I know the answer. It is electrons. And how fast do the electrons move? Everyone knows they move at about the speed of light.

Wrong. And wrong.

Using ChatGPT, I found a somewhat simplified but accurate set of questions and answers.

A. What caused the failure of the first transatlantic telegraph cable?

It failed due to a combination of technical problems, environmental factors, and human error.

The cable was laid in 1858 and stretched for more than 2,000 miles between Ireland and Newfoundland. At the time, it was the longest cable ever laid and represented a significant technological achievement. However, problems emerged soon after the cable was put into operation.

One of the main technical problems was the insulation used on the cable. The insulation was made of gutta-percha, a natural latex material that was supposed to protect the copper wires inside the cable from the seawater. However, it was discovered that the insulation was not strong enough to withstand the high voltages required for long-distance telegraphy.

As a result, the cable suffered from frequent breaks and signal interference.

Environmental factors also played a role in the cable's failure. The cable was laid at a depth of approximately 2 miles, which was much deeper than any previous cable. The extreme pressure and cold temperatures at this depth caused the cable to become brittle and break more easily.

Human error also contributed to the failure of the cable. During the initial testing of the cable, the technicians in Newfoundland used too much voltage, which caused the insulation to break down and the cable to fail.

There were also problems with the equipment used to transmit and receive the telegraph signals, which led to errors in the transmission and reception of messages.

Despite these setbacks, the first transatlantic telegraph cable laid the foundation for future cable communications and demonstrated the potential for global communication through undersea cables.

Part of the cause of the failure was the technical team's lack of understanding of the impact of the EMF waves when propagated under the ocean. They were working with the basic premise that it was all about the electrons moving in the cable in a linear fashion.

BUT...

B. Is electricity an EMF wave or movement of electrons?

Electricity can refer to both the movement of electrons and electromagnetic waves.

When we talk about electricity in the context of a circuit or a wire, we are usually referring to the movement of electrons through the wire. In this case, electrical energy is transmitted through the movement of charged particles, which can be electrons, ions, or other charged particles.

On the other hand, when we talk about electricity in the context of electromagnetic radiation, we are referring to the propagation of electromagnetic waves. These waves consist of oscillating electric and magnetic fields that travel through space at the speed of light.

In summary, electricity can refer to both the movement of charged particles and the propagation of electromagnetic waves, depending on the context in which the term is used. Later research led me to several YouTube videos trying to demonstrate the speed of electricity. (See references.)

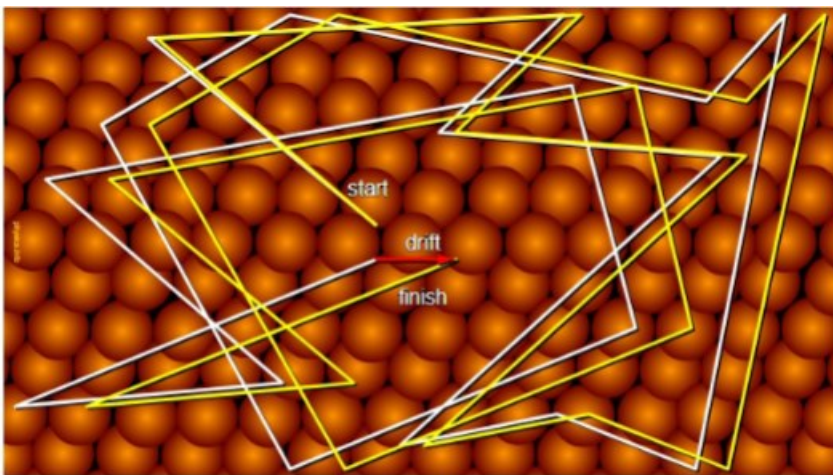
The earliest discoveries of electricity until the 1880s dealt with simple **Direct Current**. So let's ask:

C. Do **electrons** move through a **DC** circuit at the speed of light?

*No, **electrons** do not move through a **DC** (direct current) circuit at the speed of light. In fact, the speed at which **electrons** move through a circuit is much slower than the speed of light.*

*In a **DC** circuit, electrons move from the negative terminal of the voltage source (such as a battery) to the positive terminal. The speed at which they move is called the drift velocity, and it depends on the material the wire is made of and the strength of the electric field in the wire. Typically, the drift velocity of electrons in a wire carrying a current is on the order of **millimeters** per second, which is much slower than the speed of light (which is approximately 299,792,458 **meters** per second in a vacuum).*

It's worth noting that while electrons themselves move relatively slowly through a circuit, electrical energy is transmitted at the speed of light through the electric and magnetic fields surrounding the wires. This means that changes in the electric field at one end of a circuit can be detected at the other end almost instantaneously, even though the electrons themselves are moving much more slowly.



The Drift Velocity of electrons in a copper wire is about 3 mm per second. Drawing courtesy of <https://physics.info/electric-current/>

What about Alternating Current (AC)?" If electrons in an AC circuit move slowly, relative to the speed of light, how does the electrical energy from a distant power-generating station get to my home so quickly?

D. Do **electrons** move through an **AC** circuit at the speed of light?

*No, **electrons** do not move through an **AC** circuit at the speed of light. As with a **DC** circuit, the speed at which electrons move through an **AC** circuit is much slower than the speed of light.*

*In an **AC** circuit, the direction of the current periodically reverses, causing the electrons to oscillate back and forth. This oscillation is characterized by a frequency, which is the number of complete cycles of the current per second, and is measured in **hertz** (Hz). In a*

typical AC circuit used for power distribution in homes and buildings, the frequency is 50 or 60 Hz.

The speed at which electrons move in an AC circuit is still determined by the material the wire is made of and the strength of the electric field in the wire, just as in a DC circuit. The average speed of the electrons over time is still much slower than the speed of light, typically on the order of millimeters per second.

As with a DC circuit, changes in the electric field in an AC circuit propagate through the circuit at the speed of light, even though the individual electrons are not moving at anything close to that speed.

References:

The Big Misconception About Electricity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHIhgxav9LY&list=RDCMUCHnyfMqiRRG1u-2MsSQLbXA&index=1>

How Electricity Actually Works

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oI_X2cMHNe0&list=RDCMUCHnyfMqiRRG1u-2MsSQLbXA&index=2

The Big Misconception About Electricity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHIhgxav9LY&t=521s>

So what is surprising about my answer, which I hinted at in the title of this article??

The answers in *italics* to the questions above (which I do believe are accurate and true responses) were all generated as my test of ChatGPT, not written by me.

Now do you understand the problem sweeping through high schools, colleges, and elsewhere? If I had tried to pass the above answers as my own, would any of you doubt me? I think not.

Portions of this article co-written by ChatGPT, Feb 13 Version. Free Research Preview.

###

Interesting Internet Finds by Steve Costello

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In the course of going through the more than 300 RSS feeds, I often run across things that I think might be of interest to other user group members.

How To Have Unlimited Email Addresses

<https://davescomputertips.com/how-to-have-unlimited-email-addresses/>

It is easy to have many email addresses. And it is not necessarily expensive. Dave's Computer Tips blog post explains different ways to get alternate email addresses. It also explains why and when you might want to use the varying methods.

How To Block Google Popups

<https://firewallsdontstopdragons.com/how-to-block-google-popups/>

If you get popups to "Sign in with Google," you should check out this post to learn how to block them. The use of third-party tools to do the same thing is also discussed.

8 Streaming Services That Still Let You Share Passwords

<https://www.mentalfloss.com/posts/streaming-services-allow-password-sharing>

As you know, Netflix is cracking down on password sharing. In this blog post, you will learn about eight other streaming services that still allow password sharing.

10 Firefox Features You Should Be Using

<https://www.howtogeek.com/891045/10-firefox-features-you-should-be-using/>

If you use Firefox as your web browser, check out this post. I found three things I should have been doing all along but did not know about.

Skip The Wireless Earbuds And Buy Something That'll Last

<https://www.reviewgeek.com/152420/skip-the-wireless-earbuds-and-buy-something-thatll-last/>

Wireless earbuds are convenient but earbuds or their batteries, need to be replaced too often. That is what this post is all about. I know I can't go completely wired, but try to as much as possible. Check out this post and see if it makes sense for you too.

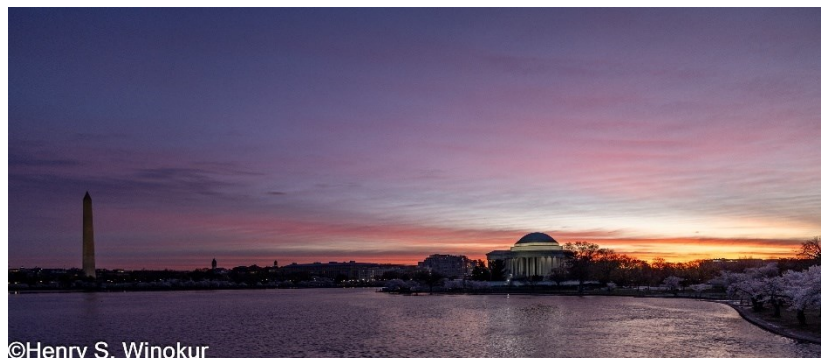
Will AI Crack Your Passwords?

<https://askleo.com/will-ai-crack-your-passwords/>

AI is the big thing right now. Leo Notenboom talks about AI and password cracking in this post. If you are concerned about AI and password cracking, you should check out this post for yourself.

Every spring I make at least one trip to the Tidal Basin for a little Cherry Blossom magic. Shooting east on the Ohio Drive SW bridge, before sunrise.

Canon R5, 1/160s, f/4, ISO 640, 21mm RF
14-35 f4 L IS USM, Gitzo tripod



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Meeting schedule (Zoom=Online Only, Hybrid=Online/In-person)

1 st Wednesday	7:00 - 9 PM	Arlington General Meeting	Hybrid
3 rd Monday	7:00 - 9 PM	Board of Directors Meeting	Zoom
3 rd Saturday	12:45 - 3:30 PM	Fairfax General Meeting	Hybrid
4 th Wednesday	7:00 - 9 PM	Technology & PC Help Desk	Hybrid
Arlington Meet: 5711 S. 4 th ST., Arl. VA		Fairfax Meet: 4210 Roberts RD., Fairfax, VA	

Meetings are Hybrid or Zoom (as above)
Fairfax Health/Safety: <https://www.patacs.org/fairfaxattreqmts.html>
Online Meeting Access Will Be Sent Via Email

PATACS Event Information
Messages may be left at 703-370-7649
Website: <https://www.patacs.org>

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