

Thinking About Different Devices and Operating Systems

As a trainer, you may come to a training event with your own experiences and (sometimes strong!) preferences regarding devices and operating systems. No matter what kind of device or operating system you have, the success of your training can rely in large part on being open-minded and knowledgeable about the devices and operating systems your learners already use.

Being open-minded about devices and operating systems

Some of us are lifelong Windows users; some can't imagine running anything but Linux; some are iPhone and Macbook devotees. Among particularly technical trainers and security professionals, certain operating systems can even be sources of great shame or pride.

When conducting a training, it can help to try to forget all of that. The devices and operating systems your learners come with likely say very little about them and their security abilities or values. Some learners inherit devices and operating systems from family members; some are restricted by available resources; some get used to particular devices and operating systems through schools, libraries, or other shared environments. [No matter what they use or why they use it, they deserve digital security as much as anyone else, and there are paths and strategies to help them achieve it.](#)

Along with this open-minded approach, *do not give people advice they are not likely to follow*. While you may have good reasons for recommending someone switch devices or operating systems, that can be a restrictively difficult switch for most learners. Similarly, recommendations that are theoretically great for security but require immense technical expertise—such as running Qubes, using TAILS, or switching to Linux—can do more harm than good. Instead, it is more helpful to meet your learners where they are and work with the devices and operating systems they already use.

Being knowledgeable about devices and operating systems

To help learners with the devices and operating systems they already use, you'll need to have some knowledge of major devices and operating systems. If you are planning on teaching a specific tool, be ready to troubleshoot on Windows, Mac, and even Linux. If it's a mobile tool, try to test it yourself on both iPhones and Androids. If you're aren't familiar with the basics of your learners' technical environment, it will be hard to guide them through the basics of installation and use. If possible, it can help to learn about your audience's hardware and software situation before the training begins.

You'll also need to be ready for the unexpected: Many learners may have out-of-date hardware and software, bootlegged copies of software, phones that are not iPhones or Samsungs, or a whole range of other stuff you just don't recognize. In most cases, a useful first step is to make sure their systems and software are all updated. You can also explore reasons why they might have downloaded a bootlegged copy of a certain software, and help them look into obtaining a legitimate copy.

Of course, hardware and software change all the time, and you don't have to be an

expert on every possible device or operating system your learners may bring. Just strive to be confident and familiar with the major choices, and know that it's okay to kindly admit when you run into something unfamiliar.

This is critical to building trust with your learners. If you look down on particular device or operating system choices, they will likely be able to sense and pick up on that. Put extra work into how you talk about and present different devices and operating systems, and be familiar with the pros *and* cons of different choices.