



Taking notes with Jarnal

WORKSPACE

Jarnal provides some handy features that make this application more than just a note-taking tool. **BY DMITRI POPOV**

Text editors and word processors are good for writing and editing text, but they are not up to snuff when it comes to taking notes, annotating documents, and doodling. For this purpose, you need a dedicated tool like Jarnal [1], a unique application that can make your computing more efficient.

Although Jarnal is a perfect companion for Tablet PCs, you can easily use it on your regular laptop and even on a desktop system. However, if you plan to use Jarnal for some serious work, you should consider investing in a pen tablet if you don't already have one. Pen tablets are cheap, and you can pick up a new or a used one for little money. Since Jarnal is written in Java, you must have the Java Runtime Environment installed on your machine in order to use it. Once you've done all the preparatory work, download the latest release of Jarnal, unzip it, and run the *jarnal.sh* script.

Using Jarnal

Jarnal is easy to use. When you launch the application, it creates a blank docu-

ment with the default page format, and you can start taking notes right away. Jarnal features several types of writing tools, including pens, highlighters, an eraser, and a text tool. The toolbar contains several preset pens and highlighters, and you can quickly switch between them by clicking the respective buttons.

If you don't fancy the default tools, you can easily customize them. Let's say you want to change the default highlighter. Choose *Tools | Choose Pen* and press *Get Default Highlighter* in the displayed dialog window. You can then tweak the highlighter settings like thickness, color, and type. The latter option allows you to specify whether the highlighter applies translucent color to the text (*Translucent Highlighter*) or under the text (*Bottom Highlighter*). Once you are satisfied with the changes, press the *Set Default* button. In a similar way, you can adjust the settings for the default pen (press *Get Default Pen* instead of *Get Default Highlighter*). In the *Paper and Background* dialog window (*Format | Paper and Background*), you can adjust

the paper settings by tweaking the myriad of available options. Finally, you can modify the default text style by choosing *Format | Text Style*.

Other Features

Besides the pen and text tool, Jarnal also features a handwriting recognition engine that can convert your notes into text. Using this feature can be a bit of hit or miss, and it only supports block letters, but it is an impressive feat nonetheless. To enable the handwriting recognition engine, simply choose *Tools | Recognize* and start writing letters. If you already have some handwritten notes on the page, you can convert them into text by choosing *Tools | Recognize | Recognize Page*. Jarnal also includes what is called a mini Jarnal, a custom module designed specifically for handwritten recognition. You can use it as a standalone module (*Tools | mini Jarnal*) or as a part of the current document (*Tools | Internal mini Jarnal*). You can greatly reduce the number of recognition errors by checking and adjusting the stroke order of the letters and numbers using the *Tools | Recognize | Edit Dictionaries*.

Although Jarnal is first and foremost a note-taking application, it's by no means

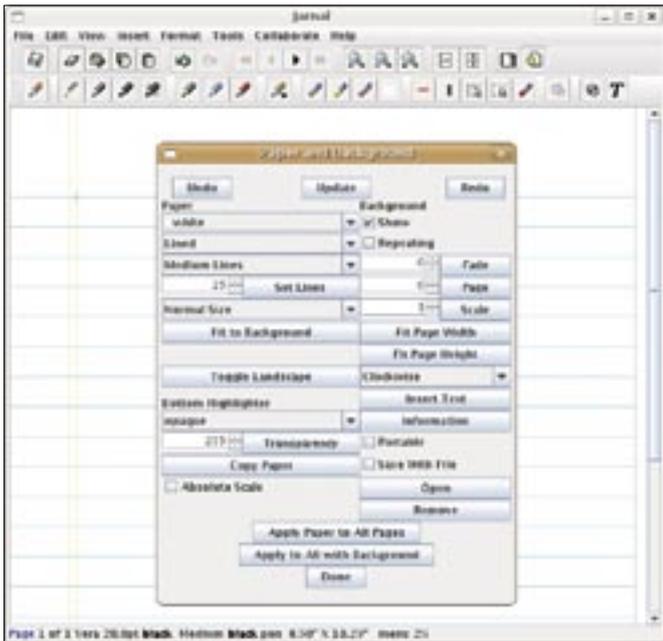


Figure 1: You can tweak the tool and paper settings using a multitude of available options.

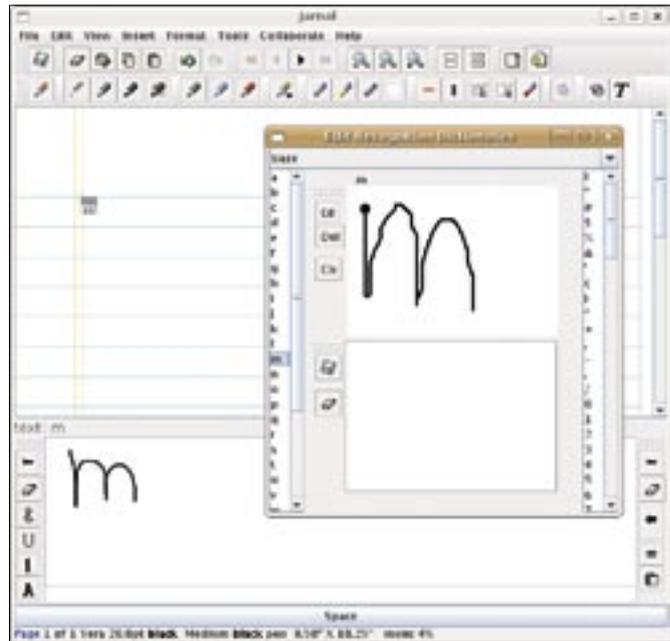


Figure 2: Handwriting recognition is one of Jarnal's impressive features.

a one-trick pony. In fact, Jarnal includes a couple of rather nifty features, which turn it into a versatile tool. One such feature is Jarnal's ability to add links to any object on the page. To insert a link, choose the *Insert Link* tool and click the object you want to add the link to. The *Insert Link* dialog window lets you link to a URL or external file, which can also be saved inside the Jarnal file itself.

You can add any file to the Jarnal document without linking to it, effectively turning the document into a file con-

tainer. To add a file to the Jarnal document, choose *File | Manage Internal Files*, select *Extras* from the drop-down menu, press the *Open* button, and point to the file you want to add. You can then send the file to another user, and the recipient can extract the file by choosing *File | Manage Internal Files | Extras*, and saving the file using the *Save* button.

Better yet, the recipient doesn't have to have Jarnal installed on his or her machine to open and edit the received Jarnal document. You can save your Jarnal

document as a self-running file by choosing *File | Save With Options* and ticking the *Save Self Executing* check box. The recipient can open the resulting *.jar* file using the following command:

```
java -jar Z
/path/jarnaldocument.jaj.jar
```

Collaborating & Annotating PDFs with Jarnal

Jarnal's ability to act both as a server and a client makes it a simple yet very

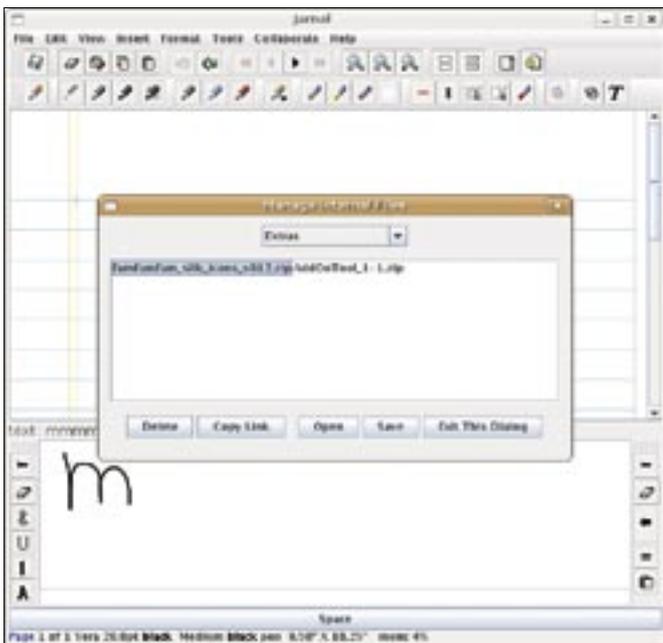


Figure 3: You can use a Jarnal document as a container for other files.

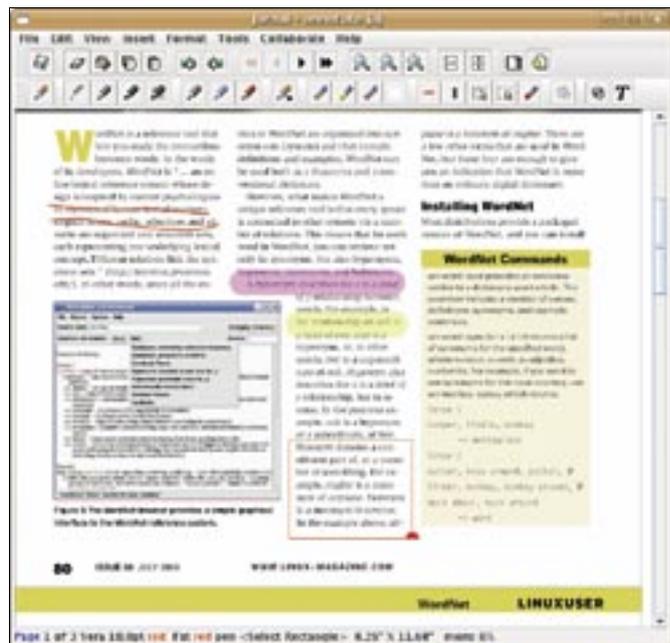


Figure 4: The ability to annotate PDFs makes Jarnal an indispensable tool.

effective collaboration tool. Choose *Collaborate* | *Start Server*, specify the port you want (or use the default 1189 port), and press *OK* to start the Jarnal server. Other Jarnal users can then connect to your server using the *Collaborate* | *Connect to Server* command and collaborate on the currently active document.

There is one thing you have to keep in mind, though. With the Jarnal server, only one user at a time can work on the document. This means that if you want to make changes to the shared document, you will first need to request permission to control the document first. This is done by pressing the *Request Control* button. Once it turns red, you have control over the document and you can modify it. The connected users can then see your changes in real time. When you are done with the document, you have to release it by pressing the *Release Control* button.

This is impressive, but its killer feature is the ability to annotate PDF documents, which makes it an indispensable tool when working with PDFs. To enable

support for PDF in Jarnal, make sure that the *xpdf* package is installed.

To annotate a PDF file in Jarnal, you must open it as a background in the active Jarnal document. First, you must adjust the paper settings, since the lined paper is not well suited for annotating PDFs. Alternatively, you can use the *annotate.jaj* template in the templates directory. To insert the PDF file, choose *Insert* | *Insert Background*. You can then annotate the inserted PDF using Jarnal's tools. When it comes to sharing the annotated PDF with others, you have three options. If the recipient has Jarnal installed, you can save the document as a regular *.jaj* Jarnal file. You can also save the document as a self-executing file, so recipients can view the document without installing Jarnal. Finally, you can use the *File* | *Print With Options* command to print the file as PDF, and you can send it via email in one go.

Final word

At first glance, you might think that Jarnal is a just a bare-bones note-taking

utility. But if you take a closer look at it, you'll discover that Jarnal has much more to offer. Most importantly, you'll find a few very clever features that make Jarnal an indispensable collaboration and productivity tool.

Handwriting recognition, convenient collaboration features, and the handy ability to annotate PDF documents make Jarnal a real productivity enhancer. ■

INFO

[1] Jarnal: <http://www.dklevine.com/general/software/tc1000/jarnal.htm>

THE AUTHOR

Dmitri Popov holds a degree in Russian language and computer linguistics. He has been working as a technical translator and freelancer contributor for several years. He has published over 500 articles covering productivity software, mobile computing, web applications, and other computer-related topics. His articles have appeared in Danish, British, US, and Russian magazines and websites.