

Chapter 1 — Origins

A Field Guide to Open Source Software

In the beginning there were tapes, and the tapes were passed hand to hand. Software was written, traded, modified, and rewritten — long before the term "open source" was coined.

This chapter traces the lineage from early academic computing through the free software movement, to the pragmatic re-branding that produced today's thriving ecosystems.

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Chapter 2 — Licenses

Licensing is the legal scaffolding that makes open source work.

GPL, MIT, BSD, Apache, MPL — each is a different answer to the same question: how do we share source code while preserving the contributor's intent?

The choice of license shapes everything downstream — what corporations can do with the software, how derivatives must be released, and whether patent grants travel with the code.

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Chapter 3 — Communities

Code is the artifact, but communities are the engine.

Maintainers, contributors, and the long tail of users who report bugs, write tutorials, and answer Stack Overflow questions all play a role.

This chapter is about the shape of those communities — what makes some thrive, what makes others burn out, and what new contributors should know when they arrive.

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