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# The Linux Ownership System Demystified

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Hence Linux would no longer be just a kernel. Torvalds ended up licensing Linux under the GNU general public license (GPL). This license allows users to modify and distribute the source code. However, whoever distributes Linux has to do so under the same terms. The terms basically assure that any modifications made to the Linux kernel also have to continue being free.

But none of that means that Torvalds himself or any other single entity has ownership of the Linux source code in full. Torvalds himself approves a number of changes made to Linux, but that doesn't give him the copyright to those changes. Therefore you can contribute code to Linux, which then gets approved by the community, but you get to retain the copyright to that piece of code.

That means you will become one of the thousands of collective owners of Linux. But keep in mind that because of the

terms of the GPL, you can't forbid anyone else from using or modifying your code in the future. Very many people own a copyright in the different parts of the Linux source code. That makes it hard to imagine that the terms Linux is licensed under will ever change.

[4]

[GNU Linux Legal](#)

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