

# Re: To dselect or aptitude, that is the question

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To: Debian-User <[debian-user@lists.debian.org](mailto:debian-user@lists.debian.org)>

J.S.Sahambi wrote:

> *I have been using apt and dselect for some time. Can any body tell me  
> about the advantages/disadvantages of dselect and aptitude? and which is  
> better?*

Nine reasons why you should be using aptitude instead of apt-get or dselect.

## 1. aptitude can look just like apt-get

If you run 'aptitude update' or 'aptitude upgrade' or 'aptitude install', it looks and works just like apt-get, with a few enhancements. So there is no learning curve.

(If you're a dselect user, learning curve is obviously not one of your problems.)

## 2. aptitude tracks automatically installed packages

Stop worrying about pruning unused libraries and support packages from your system. If you use aptitude to install everything, it will keep track of what packages are pulled in by dependencies alone, and remove those packages when they are no longer needed.

## 3. aptitude sanely handles recommends

A long-standing failure of apt-get has been its lack of support for the Recommends relationship. Which is a problem because many packages in Debian rely on Recommends to pull in software that the average user generally uses with the package. This is a not uncommon cause of trouble, even though apt-get recently became able to at least mention recommended packages, it's easy to miss its warnings.

Aptitude supports Recommends by default, and can be configured to support Suggests too. It even supports installing recommended packages when used in command-line mode.

## Debian-User: Re: To dselect or aptitude, that is the question

### 4. use aptitude as a normal user and avoid hosing your system

Maybe you didn't know that you can run aptitude in gui mode as a regular user. Make any changes you'd like to try out. If you get into a real mess, you can hit 'q' and exit, your changes will not be saved. (Aptitude also lets you use ctrl-u to undo changes.) Since it's running as a normal user, you cannot hose your system until you tell aptitude to do something, at which point it will prompt you for your root password.

### 5. aptitude has a powerful UI and searching capabilities

Between aptitude's categorical browser and its great support for mutt-style filtering and searching of packages by name, description, maintainer, dependencies, etc, you should be able to find packages faster than ever before using aptitude.

### 6. aptitude makes it easy to keep track of obsolete software

If Debian stops distributing a package, apt will leave it on your system indefinitely, with no warnings, and no upgrades. Aptitude lists such packages in its "Obsolete and Locally Created Packages" section, so you can be informed of the problem and do something about it.

### 7. aptitude has an interface to the Debian task system

Aptitude lets you use Debian's task system as it was designed to be used. You can browse the available tasks, select a task for install, and then dig into it and de-select parts of the task that you don't want. apt-get has no support for tasks, and aptitude is better even than special purpose tools like tasksel.

### 8. aptitude supports multiple sources

If your sources.list is configured to make multiple versions of a package available, aptitude lets you drill down to see the available versions and pick a non-default version to install. If a package breaks in unstable, just roll it back to the version in testing.

### 9. aptitude logs its actions

Aptitude logs package it installs, upgrades, and removes to /varlog/aptitude, which can be useful to work out why things started breaking after yesterday's upgrade, or when you removed a particlclar package.

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