



Community Experience Distilled

GitHub Essentials

Unleash the power of collaborative workflow development using GitHub, one step at a time

Achilleas Pipinellis

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BIRMINGHAM - MUMBAI

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In his free time he practices Aikido and enjoys going to conferences that promote the open source movement.

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Preface

GitHub is the leading code-hosting platform with literally millions of open source projects having their code hosted on it. In conjunction with Git, it provides the means for a productive development workflow and is the preferred tool among developers. Starting with the basics of creating a repository, you will then learn how to manage the issue tracker, where your project can be discussed. Continuing our journey, we will explore how to use the wiki and write rich documentation that will accompany your project. Organization and team management will be the next stop and then onto the pull requests feature that made GitHub so well known. Next, we will focus on creating simple web pages hosted on GitHub and lastly we explore the settings that are configurable for a user and a repository.

What this book covers

Chapter 1, Brief Repository Overview and Usage of the Issue Tracker, explains some of the main features GitHub provides and what you can make out of them. The issue tracker is the heart of communication between a project's developers and/or users. Consider it as a notepad dedicated to each repository where you track bugs, reports, feature requests, and anything else that can be written down. GitHub has implemented many other features that sit on top of the issue tracker, such as labels and milestones, which provide the ability to better visualize and categorize all the issues.

Chapter 2, Using the Wiki and Managing Code Versioning, helps you learn how to create, edit, and maintain a wiki by providing a home for your documentation that will complement your project. You will also learn how to create a new release out of an existing branch or tag, accompanied with optional release notes. In this way, the end user can understand the changes from any previous versions.

Chapter 3, Managing Organizations and Teams, helps you learn how to create and manage the organizations that you are the owner of. You will also learn how to create teams, add users to them, and assign different access levels according to your needs.

Chapter 4, Collaboration Using the GitHub Workflow, helps you learn how to work with branches and pull requests, the most powerful features of GitHub.

Chapter 5, GitHub Pages and Web Analytics, helps you learn how to build web pages around your project, hosted exclusively on GitHub. You have the ability to make static web pages using HTML, CSS, and JavaScript.

Chapter 6, Exploring the User and Repository Settings, explores the most common and essential settings of a user and a repository. As a user, there is a lot of information you can set up in your user settings page, such as associating more than one e-mail to your account, adding multiple SSH keys, or setting up two-factor authentication. Similarly, some functionalities of a repository can be set up via its settings page. For example, you can enable or disable the wiki pages and grant write access to the public or completely disable the issue tracker.

What you need for this book

For this book, you'll just need Git; any version will do.

Who this book is for

This book is intended for experienced or novice developers with a basic knowledge of Git. If you ever wanted to learn how big projects such as Twitter, Google, or even GitHub, collaborate on code, then this book is for you.

Conventions

In this book, you will find a number of styles of text that distinguish between different kinds of information. Here are some examples of these styles, and an explanation of their meaning.

Code words in text, database table names, folder names, filenames, file extensions, pathnames, dummy URLs, user input, and Twitter handles are shown as follows: "Let's first create a README file and push it to GitHub in order to explore the commits page."


A block of code is set as follows:


```
echo "# github-essentials" >> README.md
git init
git add README.md
git commit -m "first commit"
git remote add origin git@github.com:<username>/<repository>.git
git push -u origin master
```

Any command-line input or output is written as follows:

```
sudo gem install bundler
```

New terms and **important words** are shown in bold. Words that you see on the screen, in menus or dialog boxes for example, appear in the text like this: "The **Network** graph shows the branch history of the main repository as well as its forks."

[ Warnings or important notes appear in a box like this.]

[ Tips and tricks appear like this.]

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1

Brief Repository Overview and Usage of the Issue Tracker

The landing page of a project on GitHub depicts the contents of a person's local Git repository. Apart from the tree-like structure of the files, GitHub also provides some additional features that bring the most well-known and frequently used Git commands to your browser. Among others, these include the branches, commits, and tags of your repository.

In addition to the features mentioned above, GitHub also provides an issue tracker for each repository. This is where the discussions take place, bugs are tracked and reported, features are requested, and pretty much anything else that is relevant to the project is discussed.

GitHub has also implemented many other features that sit on top of the issue tracker, such as labels and milestones that provide the ability for better visualization and categorization of all the issues. We will explore all the features extensively, so don't worry if you aren't familiar with these terms yet.



Project and repository, although not the same thing, will be considered to have equal meaning and will be used interchangeably throughout this book.

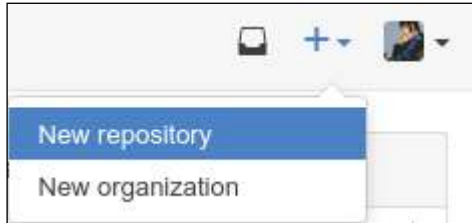
Exploring the repository's main page

The main page of a repository is the place where people spend most of their time when visiting a project. In this section, you will learn how to create a repository and then we will explore the vast features of GitHub that bring Git's command line to your browser.

Creating a new repository

Assuming you have already signed up in GitHub through <https://github.com/join>, we will see how to create a new repository that will host your code and explore the main repository's page.

Navigate to the top-right, click on the little cross beside your username, and choose **New repository**, as shown in the following screenshot:



Fill in a name under **Repository name**, which will ultimately form the URL under which your repository will be. This is the minimal action you need to perform in order to create a repository.

[ All the repositories on GitHub have the following URL scheme:
`https://github.com/<username>/<repository_name>`]

You can also provide a description so that people can tell with a glance what this is all about. Next option is whether your repository will be public or private. Generally, you go with public, unless you do not want your files to be seen by everybody. The private repos come with a price, though.

The very next thing GitHub provides is the ability to create the repository with a `README` file. Readme files usually include comprehensive information about the project you are hosting under your repository, such as installation guides, build and usage instructions, as well as guidelines on how one can contribute. You can always add a `README` file later, so leave this option unchecked for the time being.

Another nice feature is the ability to choose and include a `gitignore` file upon creation. You can choose from a collection of the useful `.gitignore` templates taken from <https://github.com/github/gitignore>.

Ultimately, the code that you will host on GitHub will be able to be forked and reused by third parties. If you are freshly starting a new repository, you can choose a license to include upon creation. Again, this is optional and you can always manually add a license file later.

Let's hit the **Create repository** button and finish the repository creation. Here's what it looks like so far:

The screenshot shows the GitHub repository creation interface for the repository 'axilcas / github-essentials'. It offers three main options for setting up the repository:

- Quick setup — If you've done this kind of thing before:**
 - Option 1: **or HTTPS** (selected) with the URL `git@github.com:axilcas/github-essentials.git`.
 - Option 2: **SSH** with the URL `git@github.com:axilcas/github-essentials.git`.
 - Text: "We recommend every repository include a README, LICENSE, and .gitignore."
- ... or create a new repository on the command line:**
 - Code block:


```
mkdir "github-essentials" && cd $_
git init
git add README.md
git commit -m "First commit"
git remote add origin git@github.com:axilcas/github-essentials.git
git push -u origin master
```
- ... or push an existing repository from the command line:**
 - Code block:


```
git remote add origin git@github.com:axilcas/github-essentials.git
git push -u origin master
```
- ... or import code from another repository:**
 - Text: "You can import code from any public repository on GitHub, Mercurial, or CVS page."
 - Button: **import code**

You can see that GitHub provides useful information on what to do next. If you already have an existing Git repository locally on your computer, you can push its code to GitHub or start fresh by following the instructions.



Since we will be working from the command line later, it is highly recommended to generate an SSH key to use with your GitHub account. Follow the guide at <https://help.github.com/articles/generating-ssh-keys/>. Also, make sure to properly configure your Git username and email settings; for more information, see <https://help.github.com/articles/setting-your-username-in-git/> and <https://help.github.com/articles/setting-your-email-in-git/>.

Congratulations on creating your first repository!

The next goal is to explore the repository's main page. This is the page you see when you navigate to `https://github.com/<username>/<repository>`, where you see the following:

- **<username>**: This is the username you registered with (found at the top-right corner)
- **<repository>**: This is the **Repository name** you filled in the previous steps.

The commits page and a comparison with the git log command

GitHub has a nice web UI that many common `git` commands can be presented to.

Let's first create a `README` file and push it to GitHub in order to explore the commits page:

1. Create the directory that will hold your code and `cd` into it:

```
mkdir -p ~/github-essentials
cd $_
```

2. Then, follow GitHub's instructions on a new project creation:

```
echo "# github-essentials" >> README.md
git init
git add README.md
git commit -m "first commit"
git remote add origin git@github.com:<username>/<repository>.git
git push -u origin master
```

Note that I use the Git protocol (`git@github.com`) that uses SSH underneath so I don't have to type my username and password each time. See the previous note on how to achieve this.



The directory name (in our example `github-essentials`) could be totally different from the repository name you entered upon creation. It is the remote URL you set with `git remote add` that must match with the repository URL GitHub provides.

Every time you add more commits, their total number will also appear on the project's main page. In the preceding steps, we did our first commit, so the count is set to one and hence the **1 commit** option is shown in the following screenshot:



Click on the highlighted link as shown in the preceding screenshot to enter the commits page.

From here, you can browse the list of commits (so far we got only one) and visualize the output of `git log`. Let's compare those two commits:

Type `git log` in your local repository; the output should be similar to this:

```
commit 304b13bd7100e213c4e5eeab9e180b6d0e3b06602
Author: Achilleas Pipinellis <achilleas@achilleas.com>
Date:   Thu Apr 7 23:26:40 2016 -0300
```

First commit.

Now, head over the commits page on GitHub. Here, you can see the same information depicted in a nice interface:



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