

Revival of the Compose Key a.k.a. Multi_Key

Many users are on a keyboard layout which does not allow to type other characters than those printed on the keys. There are some workarounds with so-called "deadkeys" so that you can type characters with accents, but that does not enable you to type all characters in your locale.

On many Unix-machines you can find a "Compose Key" on the attached keyboard. With that special key you can "compose" the desired character. For instance, typing the sequence `>compose> >"> >a>` will result in the Umlaut `Ã`. Or take `>compose>>>/> >o>` for a danish `Ã`. With X it is no problem to declare any key as the Compose Key, or "Multi_Key" as it is called in the internal routines. Just remember that a keyboard sends only keycodes, and that it is unimportant which keycode represents a given character or special key.

To enable the Compose Key you have to alter your `/etc/X11/xorg.conf`. There are other ways, like using `xmodmap` or its successor `setxkbmap`, but the global configuration with the `xorg.conf` ensures that the Compose Key will be available to all users. I recommend the right "Windows Key" (just one of the two on your keyboard enabled should be enough):

Code Listing 1: Enable the Compose Key in the xorg.conf

```
# Your section in xorg.conf about the keyboard looks similar to this:
Section "InputDevice"
    Identifier      "Keyboard0"
    Driver          "kbd"
    Option          "XkbModel"      "pc104"
    Option          "XkbLayout"     "us"
    Option          "XkbOptions"     "compose:rwin"
EndSection
```

After you restart X, you should be able to type the characters in the example above. To only temporarily test this new setting, you may try e.g. the command

```
setxkbmap -model pc104 -layout us -option compose:rwin
```

A complete list of available Compose Key characters with their description can be found in the file `/usr/X11R6/lib/X11/locale/>your_character_encoding>/Compose`.

From <http://www.gentoo.org/news/en/gwn/20041206-newsletter.xml>