



BOOK REVIEW

Mastering Vim Quickly

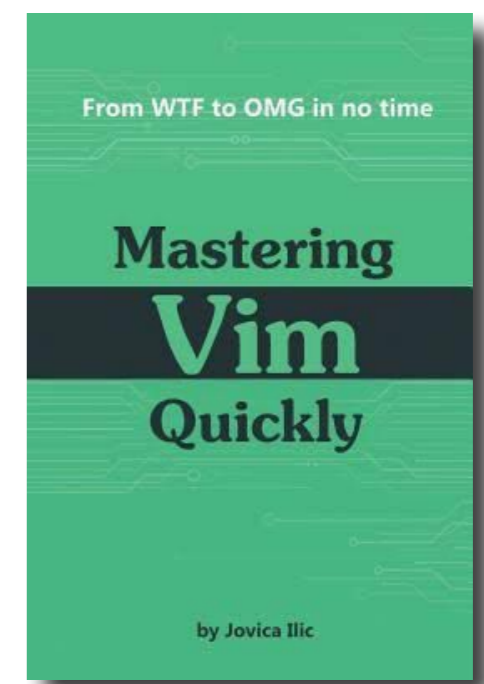
BY BENEDICT REUSCHLING

It's no secret that vi is the most common text editor on Unix. Omnipresent, yet difficult for beginners who don't understand the underlying philosophy. Vim (vi improved) is an enhancement of vi with the basics still present in the editor but easier to approach. You've probably seen someone doing amazing things in vim with just a few keypresses—and you may wonder how that was done.

Jovica Ilic's book was started because of that WTF feeling and it intends to teach people do these OMG editor productivity skills. There are many books on vim, but with roughly 140 pages, this one is the thinnest I've seen. But don't be fooled by its brevity, it is packed with tons of advice and examples on every page! It is written precisely for those who have shied away from vim until now or who only know some rudimentary tasks like opening, inserting, saving, and (most important of all) exiting the editor. Within a few pages, you learn how vim works and the concepts behind why it does things the way it does.

The author teaches you the "language" of vim to search within text, delete or add words by just knowing a few reusable keywords. That already gives you an edge, but the good stuff does not stop there. Common options for your .vimrc (the editors configuration file) are discussed and demonstrated. Much like a Michael W. Lucas book, it does not contain a single screenshot, yet succeeds in explaining everything using text and examples. Self-published, the book may contain the occasional typo, but that did not sour my reading experience at all. You can put the contents into action right away with short examples given by the author. The quick feedback loop paired with the occasional "I never knew vim could do that" moment make you want to learn more with each new page. From Navigation, netrw (vim's file browser), undo/redo branches (why doesn't every editor have that?), remote editing of files on other systems using SSH, to buffers, mappings, folds, windows, autocompletion (so useful and fast), and macros (you've been hiding in there from me all my life?), pretty much everything is covered. A separate chapter gives you extra productivity tips and plenty of ideas on how to apply them.

Since vim is a part of my University course, "Unix for Developers," I've added extra vim content to my course after reading the book. Explaining these concepts to students who would typically not touch vim, I think I can convince them that they'll be much more productive for learning it. Although mostly written for beginners, I'm pretty sure that even seasoned vim users will find something useful. The book is also useful for people using many of the vim-clones (neovim comes to mind). You may need some time to make these concepts stick. However, now that I know what vim can do, I definitely use it more often. Editing becomes much easier and my productivity has certainly increased. And if you still want more after reading this book, the author maintains a weekly newsletter with additional tips.



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