A Look at the Ubuntu Installer
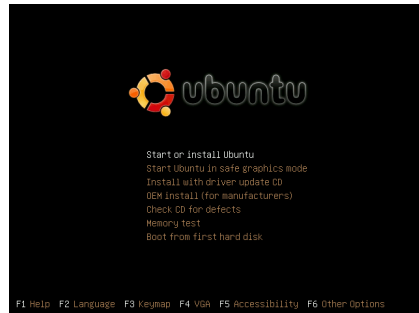

Thorsten Wilms   2008-01-07
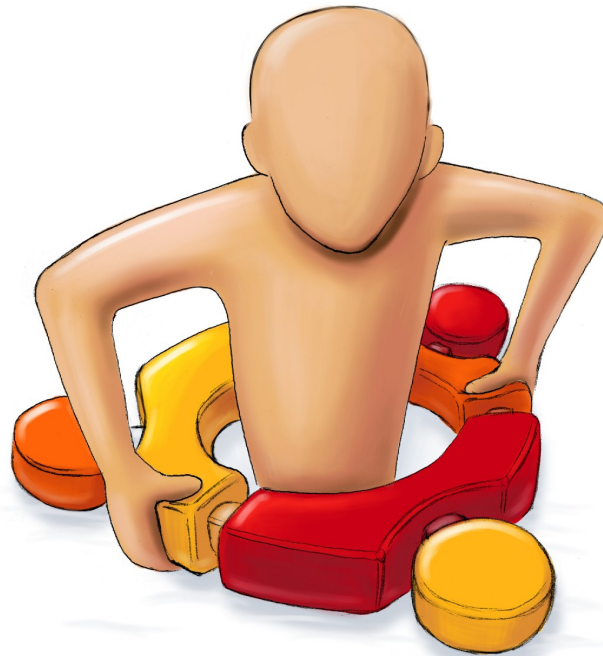
Table of Contents

Boot Menu

What if the user can't read English? It should be considered to start with language selection before presenting anything else.

Language and keymap menus should allow type-ahead (hit D for a language starting with D).

F4 VGA reads like it's about VGA options. F2 and F3 are followed by labels, not the chosen option, so the same should apply here.
VGA -> Resolution

F6 Other Options: The generic name doesn't help the user to build any expectations. A better name might be *Edit boot options*. This is a switch, not a menu and works on a different level than the other F options. A *[X]* in front of the label could be used to mimic a check box. But as things are, this option can't be turned off again!

Bug #164822

In some cases, F1 shows a strange table instead of *Help*. It seems to be random, but it could be that hitting F6 increases the chances.

Bug # 38526:

LiveCD: boot screen function key confusion

If the *Help* menu is up, all F keys except F1 have another meaning. So the legend on the bottom should be hidden.

Writing Esc might increase the chances of the user finding the key.
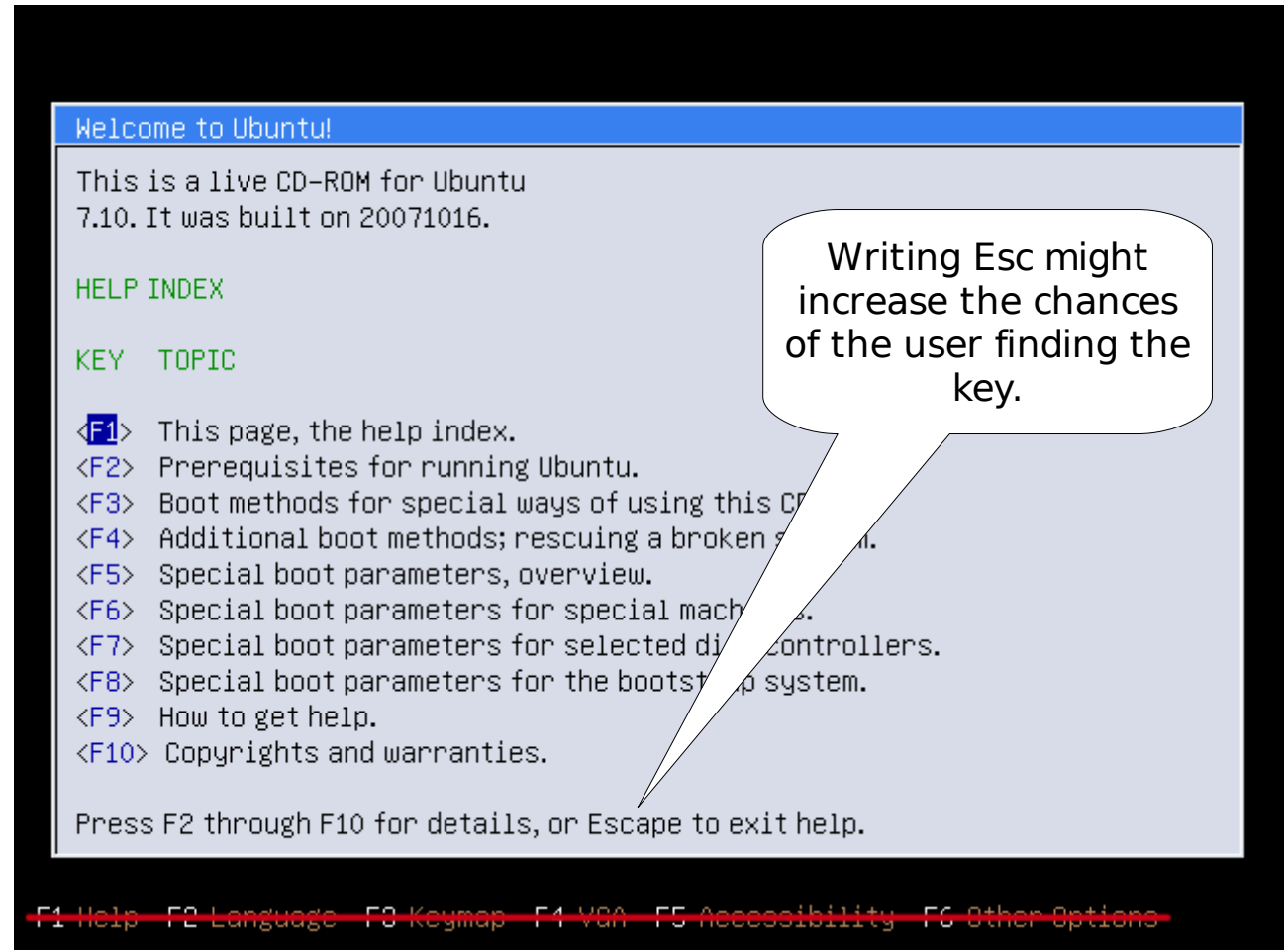
The user must know / figure out the use of F keys, arrow keys, Escape and Enter. An attempt at providing some help:

Live system

Language

The live system doesn't pick up the choice of key-map from text mode, but defaults to English instead. The installer ignores both the text mode choice and the live system preference.

Live vs installer

I think the CD suffers from trying to be both installation medium and live system. For me, mounting drives showed to be risky:
- In one case, the installer failed, reporting a drive still mounted. but *mount* listed no such drive.
- I lost screenshots I saved to a mounted drive. They were gone after quitting the installer, I think.
(No reports, because I'm not sure enough about my exact steps)

For installation, it would be better to:
- start the installer automatically
- hide all irrelevant preferences
- hide all productivity applications that make only sense if you can save
  to somewhere

A good live system should have:
- drive icons for easy mounting
- an option to save preferences to disk (or to make a package for online
  storage)

Disks

In *Computer*, the drives are listed with names like *14.0 GB Volume.*
Seeing the size is helpful, but not enough to identify drives that are
named by the hda/sda convention elsewhere. Mounted disks are
labelled *disk*, *disk*-1 … . Too generic and no connection with previous
name. Also counting from zero, which should be left in the coding realm.

User Switching

The User Switcher applet shouldn't appear with only one user.

Installer

Step 1

Release notes should only be offered if there is internet access.

Without, the existence of release notes could still be pointed out, but don't bother the user with this conditional statement.

Perhaps all languages could fit in without scrollbar?

Cancel

The *Quit* button should read *Abort* to match the question.

A few words about the consequences or lack thereof would be nice:
No changes will be applied. You can start the installation process again.

Cancel isn't a clear alternative. Better would be *Continue Installation*.
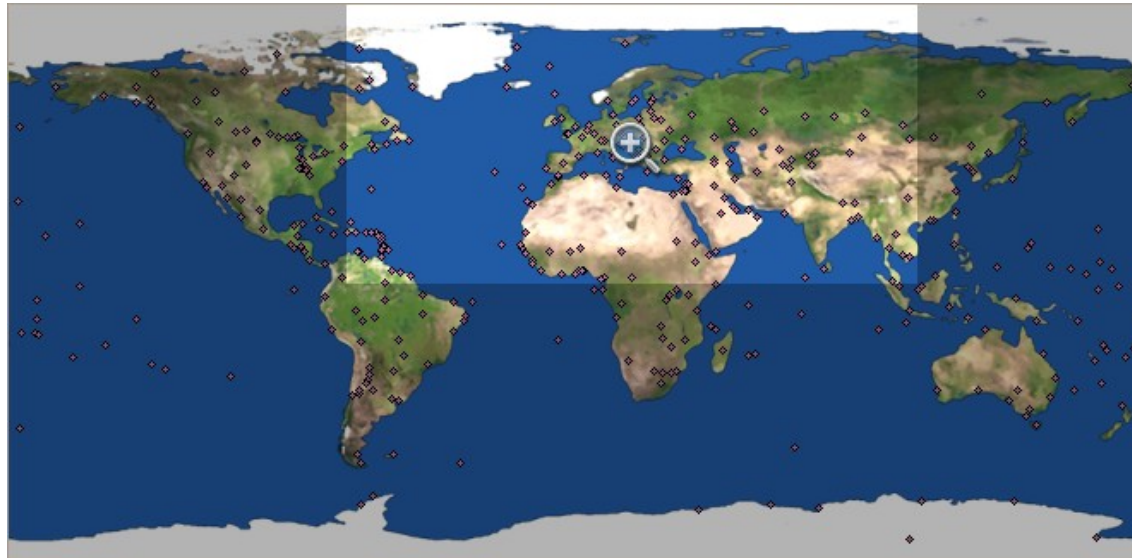
Step 2: Where are you?

A fitting city isn't necessarily in the user's country. The second sentence seems to be overly complicated. I suggest:

Select a city in your time zone. The exact time can be adjusted later on.

The map should fit without scrollbars and fill the horizontal space from border to border.

Time Zone and *Selected Region* could be menu-boxes like *City*.

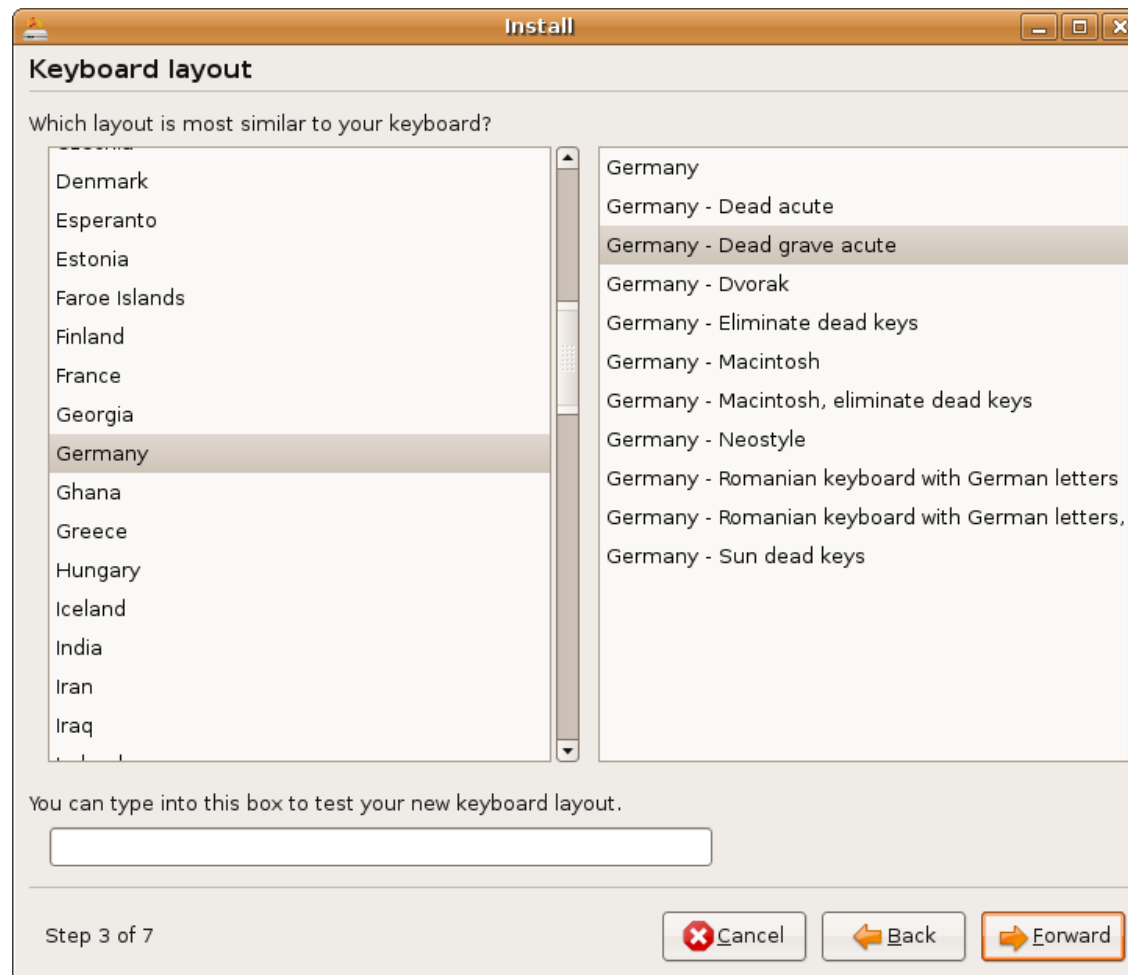The user shouldn't feel a need to aim precisely.

The cities should have tooltips.

There's no way to zoom out. A zoom-out button could be placed in the corner left empty by the scrollbars.

City selection is back in New York if you return to this page.

The actual time zones/regions would be larger targets.

Original Source (Wikipedia)
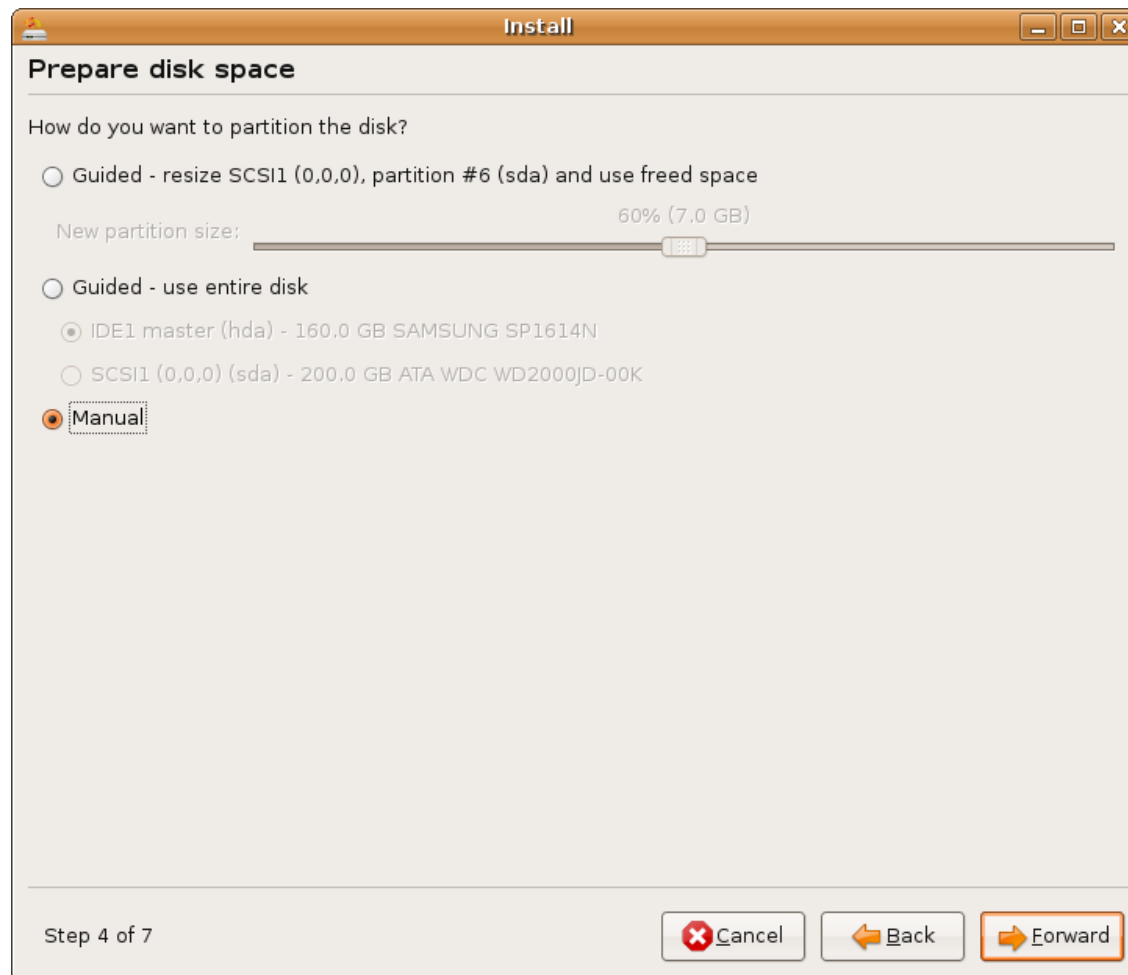
Step 3: Keyboard layout

Keyboard layout defaults to English, ignoring both the boot screen keymap and live system preference.

Asking the user to press certain keys like the text mode installer might be easier.
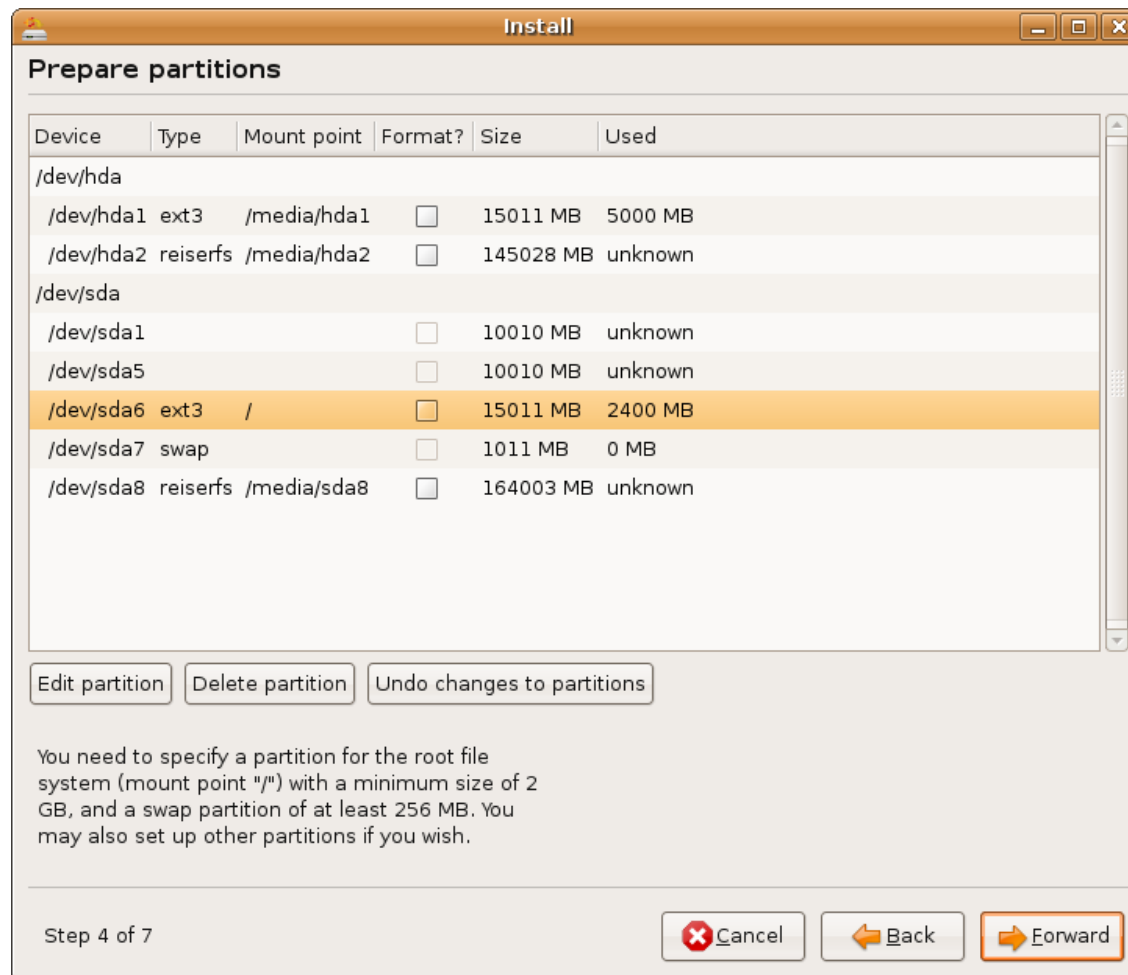
Step 4: Prepare disk space

I couldn't try the guided options. The first option doesn't make much sense for my system. The second disk isn't SCSI, but SATA!

Bug #136268

Another option should be replacing existing installations, especially older Ubuntu releases.

Many not technically inclined users will hardly understand partitions, but I currently don't see a way to hide them.

Step 4½: Manual

Device	Type	Mount point	Format?	Size	Used
/dev/hda					
/dev/hda1	ext3	/media/hda1	☐	15011 MB	5000 MB
/dev/hda2	reiserfs	/media/hda2	☐	145028 MB	unknown
/dev/sda					
/dev/sda1			☐	10010 MB	unknown
/dev/sda5			☐	10010 MB	unknown
/dev/sda6	ext3	/	☐	15011 MB	2400 MB
/dev/sda7	swap		☐	1011 MB	0 MB
/dev/sda8	reiserfs	/media/sda8	☐	164003 MB	unknown

Install — Prepare partitions

[Edit partition] [Delete partition] [Undo changes to partitions]

You need to specify a partition for the root file system (mount point "/") with a minimum size of 2 GB, and a swap partition of at least 256 MB. You may also set up other partitions if you wish.

Step 4 of 7 — Cancel — Back — Forward
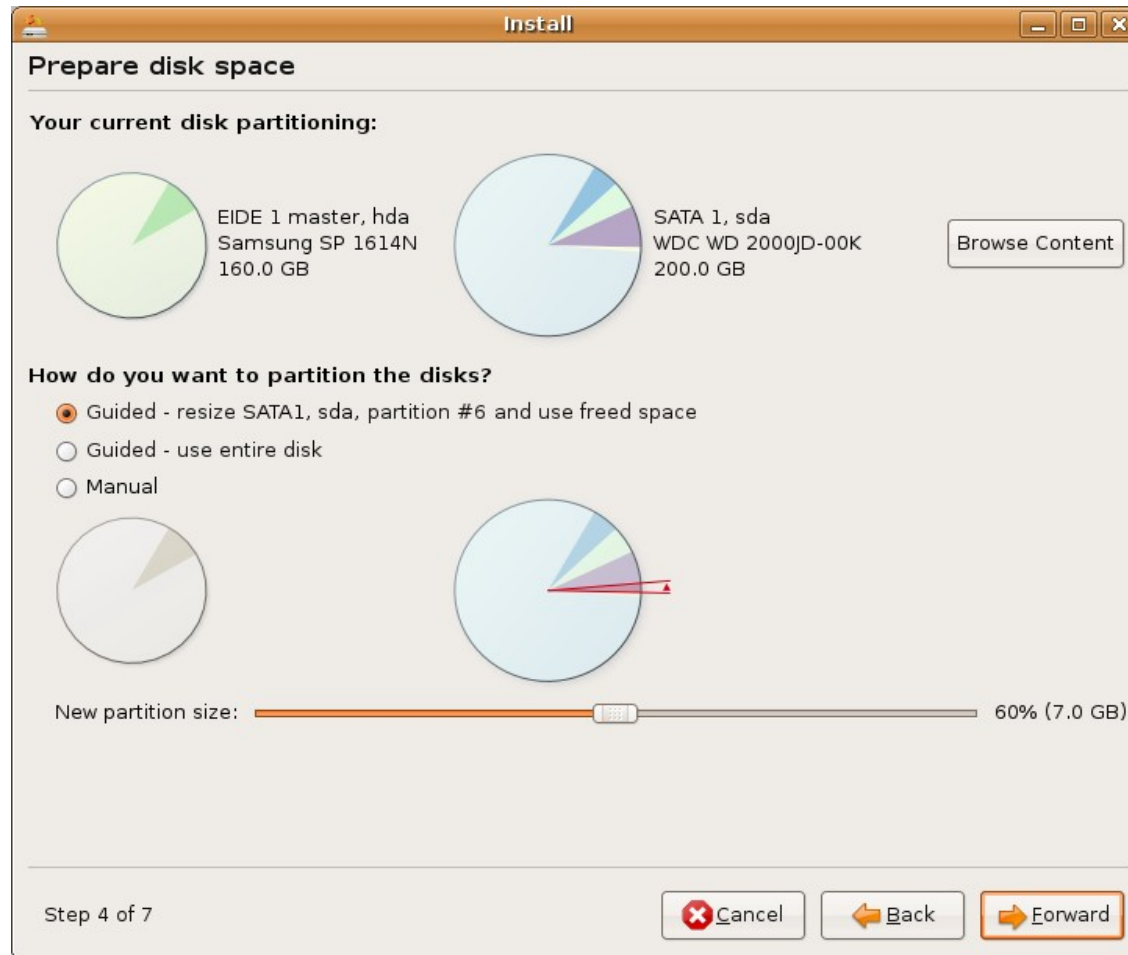
The explanatory text should perhaps be on the top.

It should be possible to format partitions of unrecognised types.

The many /dev are redundant.

There would be no need for an editing dialog with widgets in the table.
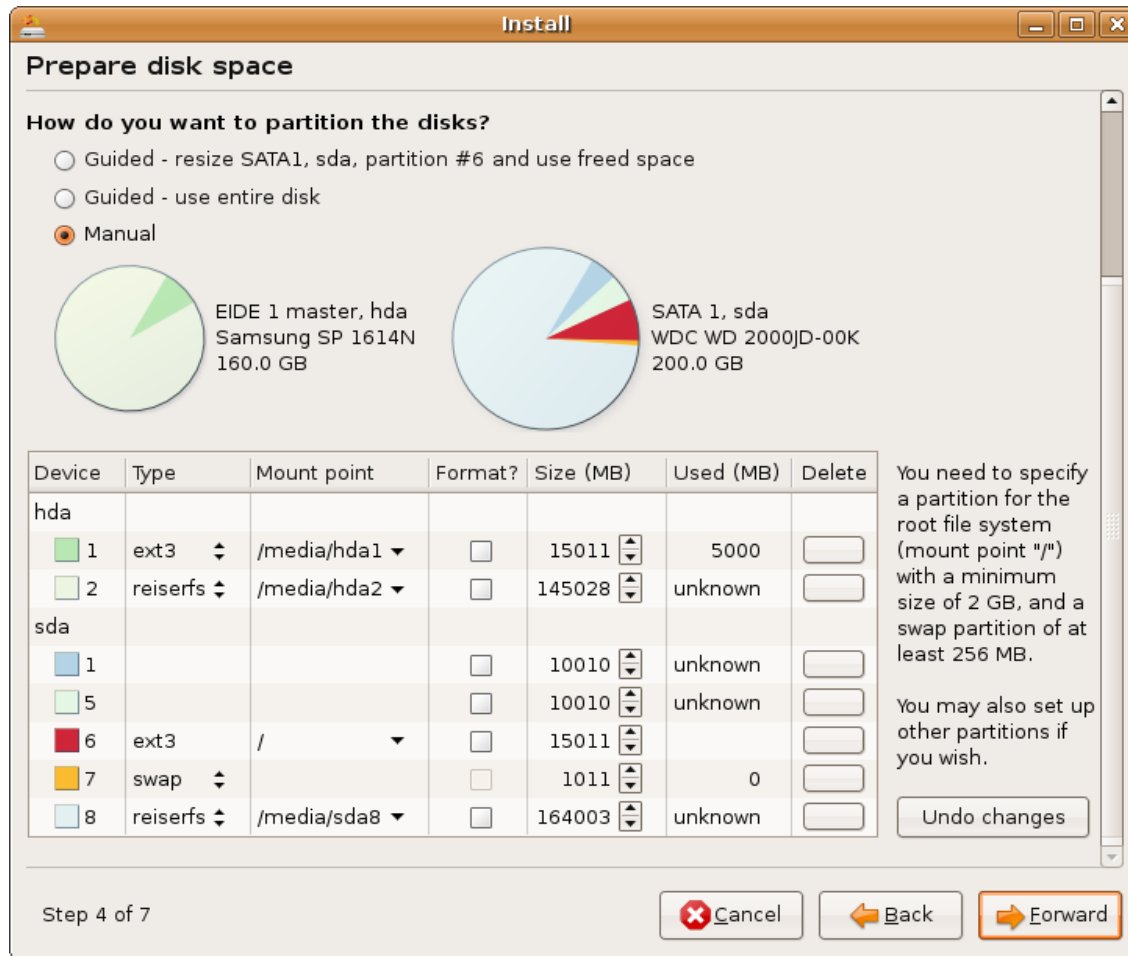
Navigating back from step 5 leads to the initial step 4. This breaks the step/page concept.

Step 4 more visual

Browse Content would open a browser window, allowing to take a look at the content of each partition.

It might be better to not have a slider for resizing, just going with the default.

On choosing Manual, the window contents should be updated, followed by a smooth scroll animation.

Other possibilities:

Up/down buttons instead of the scrollbar.

No table on the page, edit dialogs instead.

Step 6: Who are you?

Friendly text, but the layout looks a bit chaotic.

The GDM screen simply asks for a *Username*, so the label *What name do you want to use to log in?* is less conductive to creating the connection than using the same simple label *Username.*

The *Forward* button should be disabled on unequal passwords. A hint should appear as soon as the letters don't match or after typing stopped with unequal result.
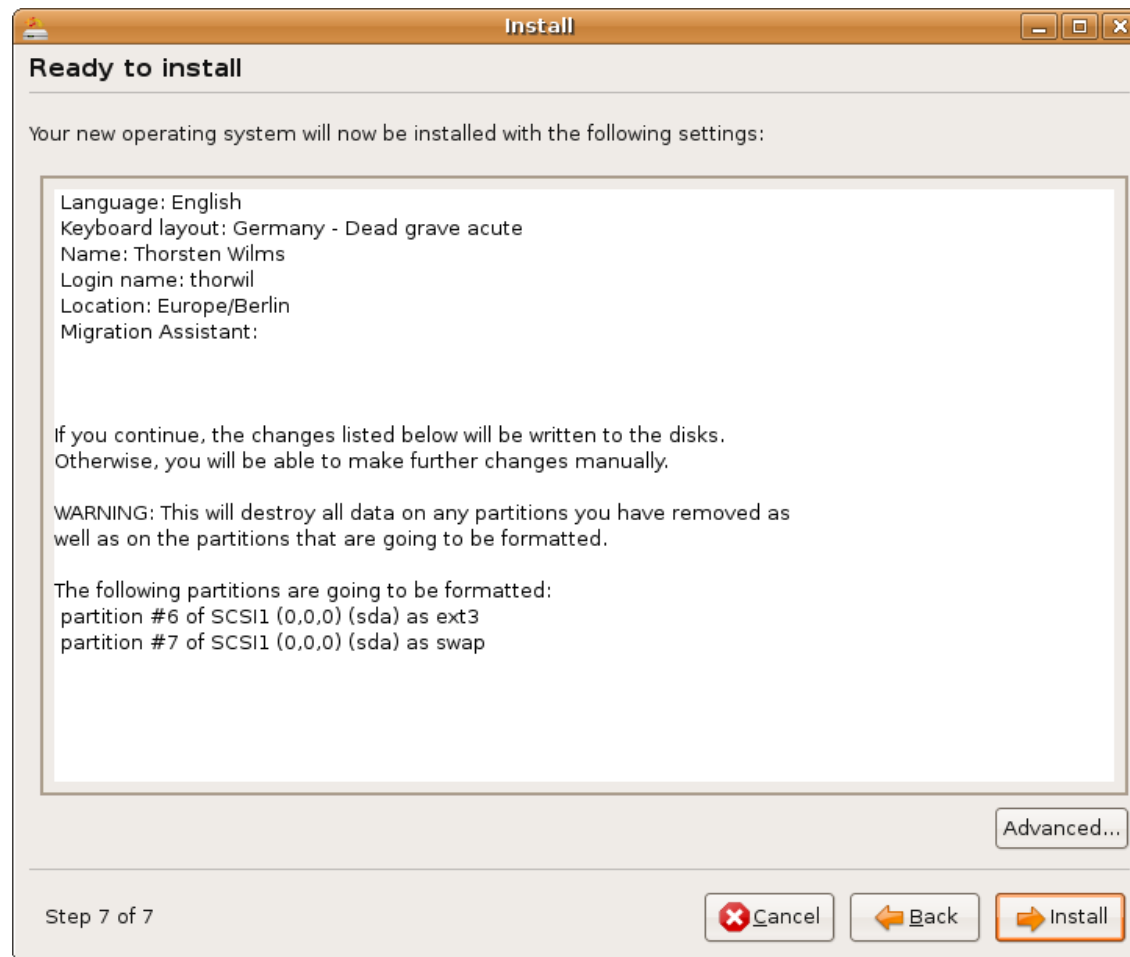
Step 6: Alternative Layout

Short labels should allow experienced users to quickly go through this, while the additional text still provides help for the less experienced.

Step 7: Ready to install

Strange frame around the text.

The 1st block could be easier to read with tabs / as table.

There's no way to go back to the relevant pages directly, if the user has to change something.

What is hiding behind the *Advanced* button? No user knows until looking.

Step 7: Advanced
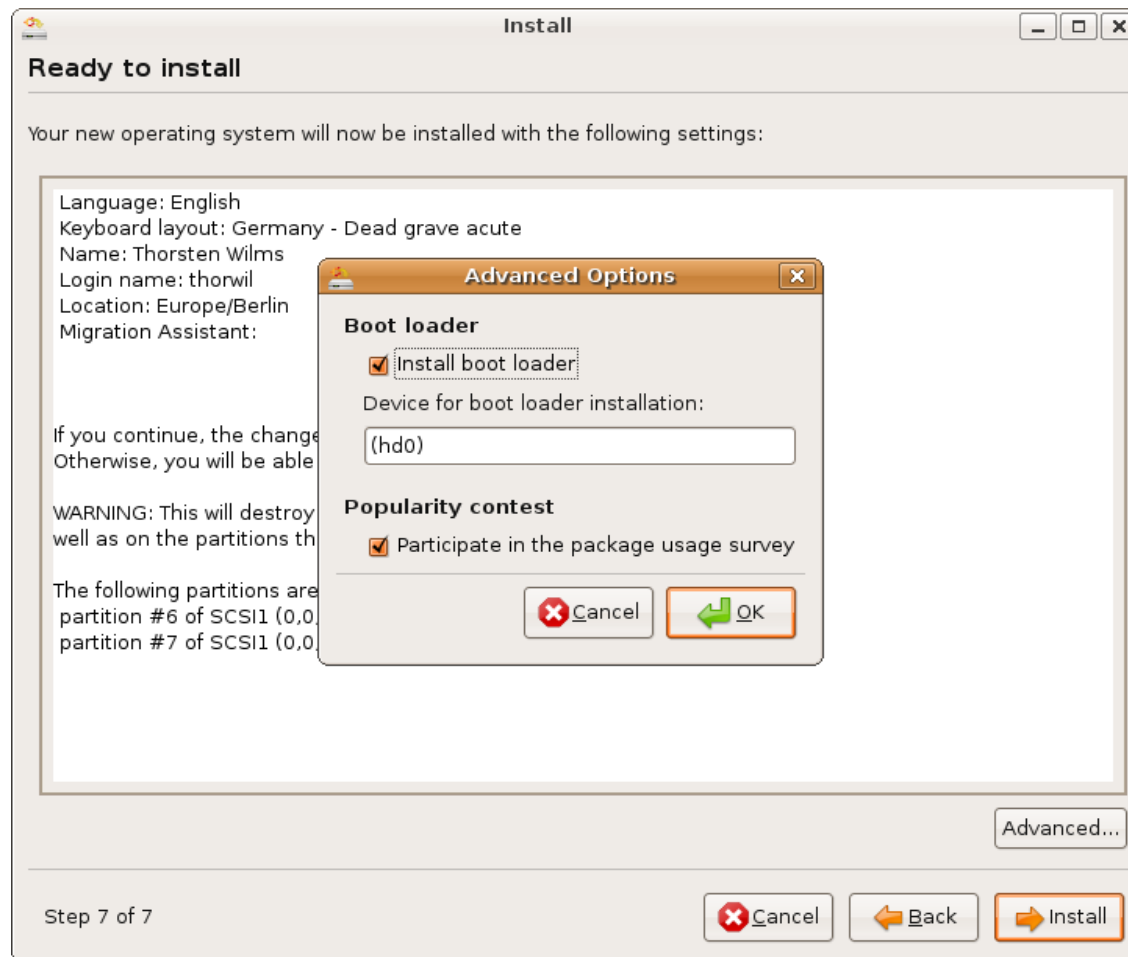
The boot loader options might be better off as part of the partitioning step. A menu should be used to list targets instead of having an error-prone entry.

If you want to encourage users to take part in the package usage survey, the option shouldn't be hidden behind a scary *Advanced*.

Step 7 Alternative

Ready to install

Your new Ubuntu will be installed with the following settings:

1 Language: English
2 Location: Europe/Berlin
3 Keyboard layout: Germany - Dead grave acute
5 Migration Assistant: -
   Name: Thorsten Wilms
6 Login name: thorwil

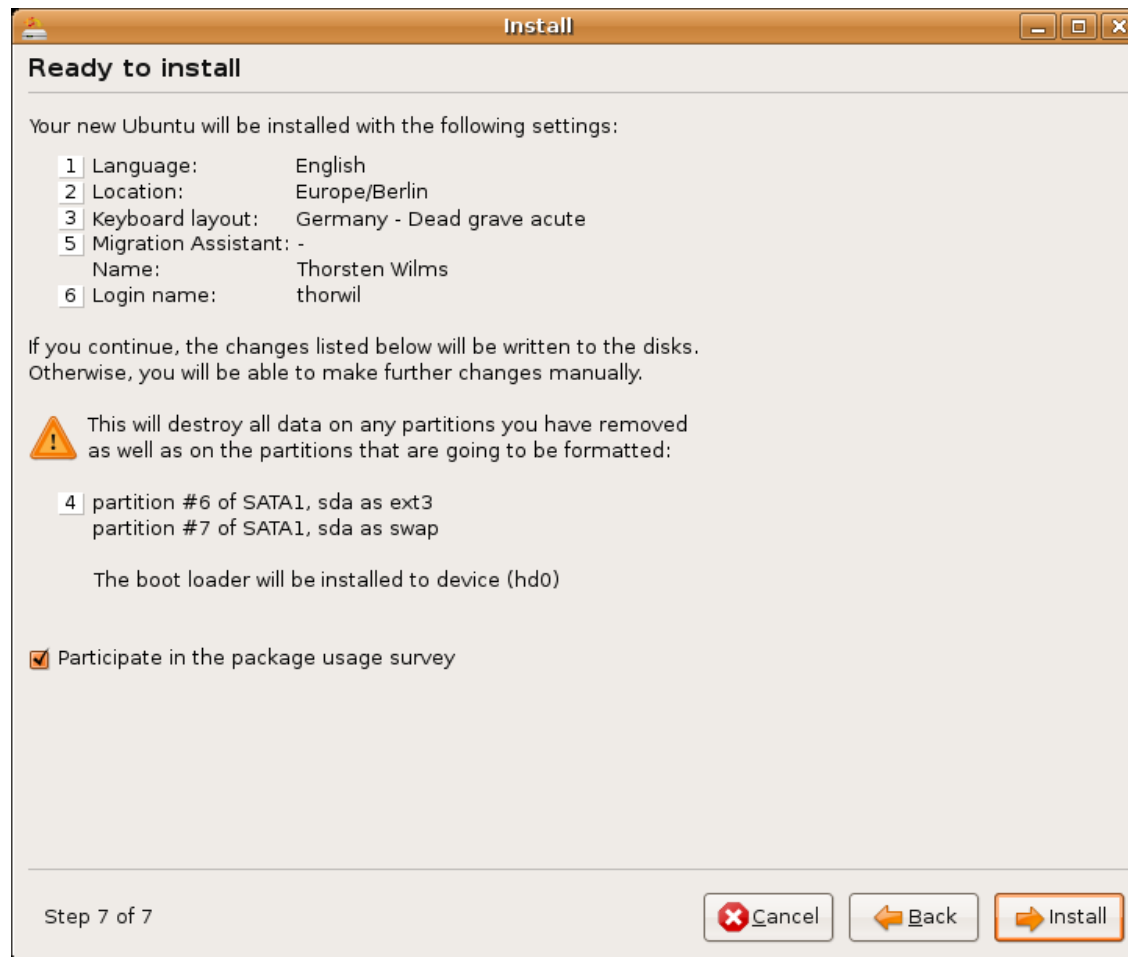If you continue, the changes listed below will be written to the disks.
Otherwise, you will be able to make further changes manually.

⚠ This will destroy all data on any partitions you have removed
  as well as on the partitions that are going to be formatted:

4 partition #6 of SATA1, sda as ext3
   partition #7 of SATA1, sda as swap

   The boot loader will be installed to device (hd0)

☑ Participate in the package usage survey

Step 7 of 7   ❌ Cancel   ⬅ Back   ➡ Install

The step numbers are meant as links, but there would have to be a way to navigate back to the end with the same ease.

Partitioning as step 6 would make this much nicer.

Installer unmounting problem

On the first attempt, the installer failed:

The installer needs to commit changes to partition tables but can not do so because partitions on the following mount points could not be unmounted:
/media/disk

Please close any application using these mount points.

Would you like the installer to try to unmount these partitions again?

[*Go Back*] [*Continue*]

According to mount, no partition was mounted.

The buttons are no clear answers to the question.
They could be labelled *Abort* and *Try again*.

Grub

Bug #29329
Bug #45989
Bug #46520
Bug #153019
Bug #80661

Grub had drive numbering backwards until I placed EIDE before SATA in my BIOS. I don't remember having such an issue with Gentoo's Grub.

Even this issue aside, installing systems side by side should be easier.

This is rather out of scope for Canonical, but with an open BIOS and perhaps Dell, maybe it could be made to happen:
A BIOS that checks all partitions for runnable systems to list them on startup, removing the need for boot loaders and installing to MBA.