

Getting Started with mBlock



What is mBlock

You write programs to control your computer. To do that, you need to know the languages of the computer - Java, C, or Python are among those. If you want to control a robot, probably you need to know Arduino C++ or a similar language.

mBlock comes to help. You can write programs by dragging and dropping building blocks. Furthermore, with mBlock, you can not only design games and visual effects in your computer, you may also write programs to Arduino based robots.

Tips

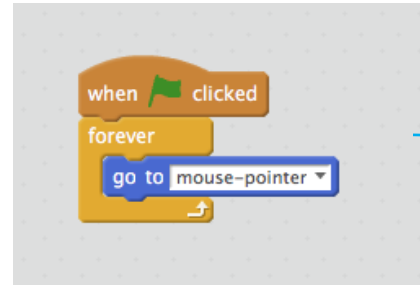
mBlock and Scratch

mBlock is an open source branch of **Scratch**, a graphic programming language developed by MIT Media Lab Lifelong Kindergarten. That means you can make almost all Scratch projects and open almost every Scratch files in mBlock; besides, you earn the possibility of working with Arduino based robots.

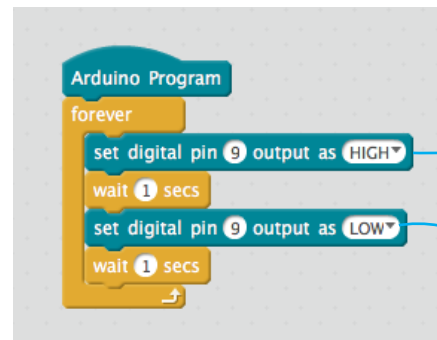
Tips

mBlock and Makeblock

Makeblock, the company making the famous mBot and construction kits for makers, is the one who translated Scratch into mBlock. Currently mBlock is actively maintained by Makeblock. But as an open source project, mBlock embraces a larger maker and educator community by providing features like extension center, supporting not only Makeblock's products by also arduino boards, Sseed Studio kits, Littlebits and more.



Controls pictures ("Sprites") on the screen



Controls robots and Arduino boards



Getting mBlock

mBlock can be downloaded for free at
<http://www.mblock.cc>

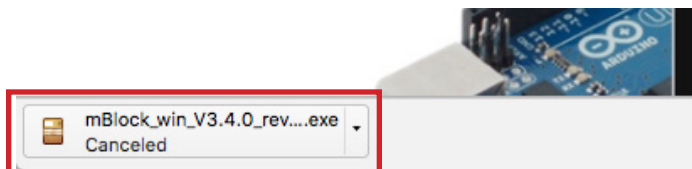
It supports windows and mac. Linux users can use an online beta version located at:
<http://edu.makeblock.com>

For Windows Users

- 1 Goto www.mblock.cc. Click the big "Windows Download" button.



- 2 After downloaded, click on the downloaded file or double-click it in the windows explorer.



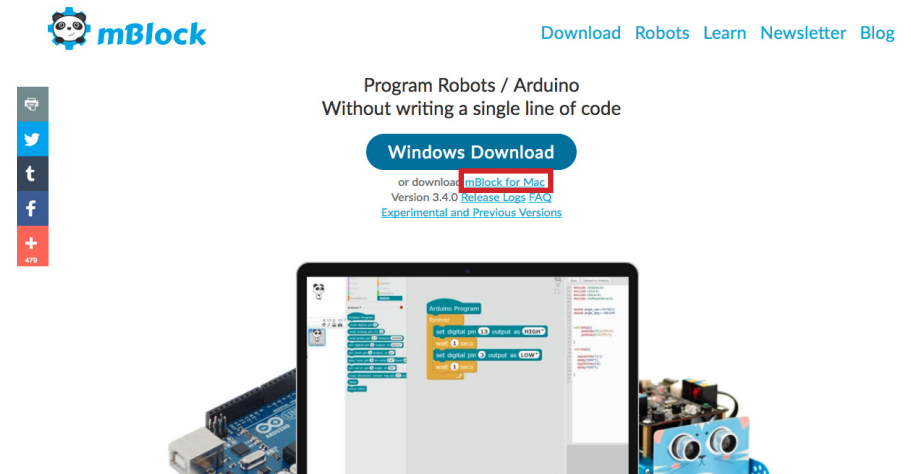
Tips

Virus?

Some old anti-virus software may claim mBlock as a virus. In this case you may need to close that software before installing. Every mBlock version is thoroughly tested, but since mBlock operates with the hardware (Robots), some anti-virus software are just vigilant about this kinds of software.

For Mac Users

- 1 Goto www.mblock.cc. Click "mBlock for mac" link.



- 2 After that, open the .zip file, and drag the mBlock.app to your Applications folder.



Tips

Mac OS Sierra

For the latest Mac OS Sierra Users: When opening mBlock the first time, you need to go to the "Application" folder, right click mBlock icon, and choose "Open" to avoid the "unknown source" error.

A tour around mBlock

Open mBlock and you'll see the following interface. You may try to experiment around.

The screenshot shows the mBlock software interface with several annotations:

- Connect to your robots or upload firmware.** Points to the **Connect** menu item.
- Introduce new blocks by downloading extensions.** Points to the **Extensions** menu item.
- Select which type of hardware you're using** points to the **Boards** menu item.
- Save or load project files.** Points to the **File** menu item.
- The "Stage" to hold drawings and moving pictures (we call those pictures "Sprites")** points to the Stage area showing a panda sprite.
- Switch between different types of command blocks.** Points to the block category menu on the right, specifically the **Robots** category.
- Arduino and robot related blocks are located here.** Points to the **Robots** category in the block menu.
- the "script zone", where you place your command blocks.** Points to the main workspace area where code blocks are placed.
- Drag blocks from here to the script zone.** Points to the block category menu on the right.
- The Sprite panel. You can create new sprites here.** Points to the **Sprites** panel at the bottom left, which shows a list of available sprites including "M-Panda".

The interface includes a menu bar (File, Edit, Connect, Boards, Extensions, Language, Help), a toolbar, and a workspace area. The workspace area is divided into a Stage (for sprites) and a Scripts area (for code blocks). The Scripts area contains a list of block categories (Motion, Looks, Sound, Pen, Data&Blocks, Events, Control, Sensing, Operators, Robots) and a list of specific blocks (Arduino Program, read digital pin, read analog pin, read pulse pin, set digital pin output as HIGH, set pwm pin output as 0, play tone pin, set servo pin angle as 90, serial write text, serial available bytes, serial read byte, read ultrasonic sensor trig pin, timer, reset timer, Joystick(Arduino Mode Only), 2.4G Joystick RX, 2.4G Joystick pressed, Component Kit for Arduino Mode).

Playing with Scratch

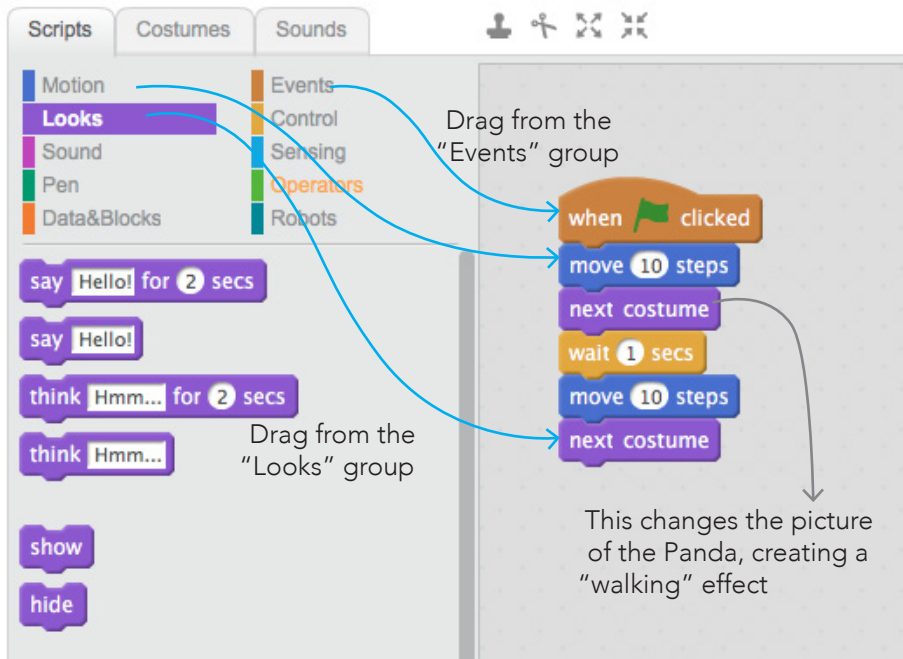
As a branch of Scratch, everything you learnt from Scratch works with mBlock.

A good way of getting started with Scratch is through Scratch's website: <http://scratch.mit.edu>. You may also search "Scratch" in Amazon.com to find a book on this topic.

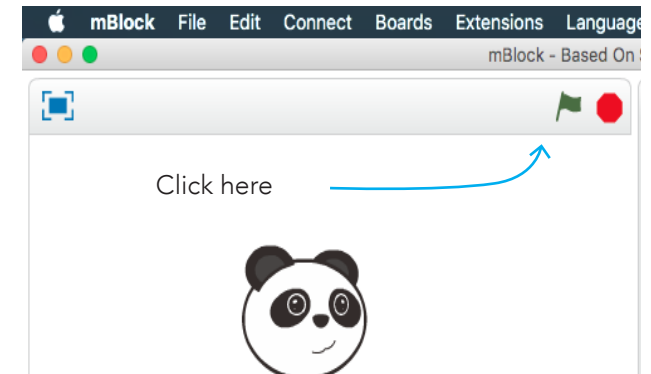
As a brief introduction, this guide will provide an example on the Scratch part of mBlock.

Example 1: The First Step

- 1 Open mBlock, and place the blocks as shown in the picture

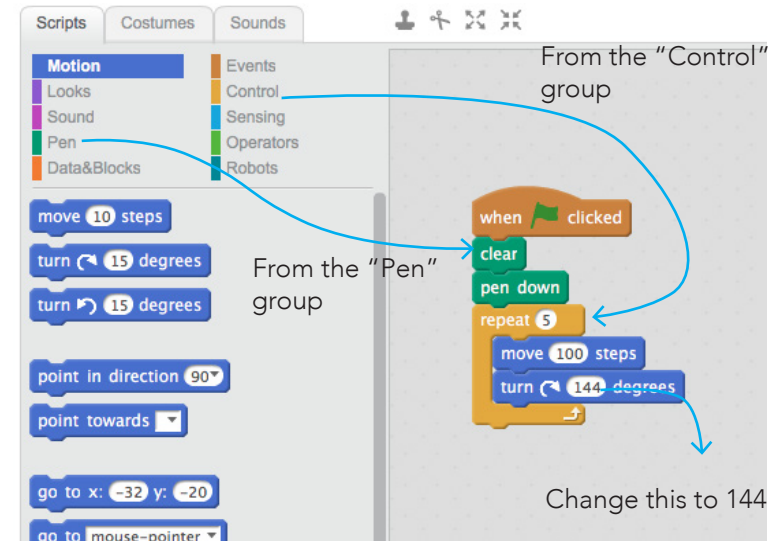


- 2 Click the green flag on the top of the screen, to let mBlock run your program. You should see the Panda "walks a small step".



Example 2: Draw a star

Scratch also has the drawing function. Complete the following program, click the green flag, and let the Panda draw a star!



Tips

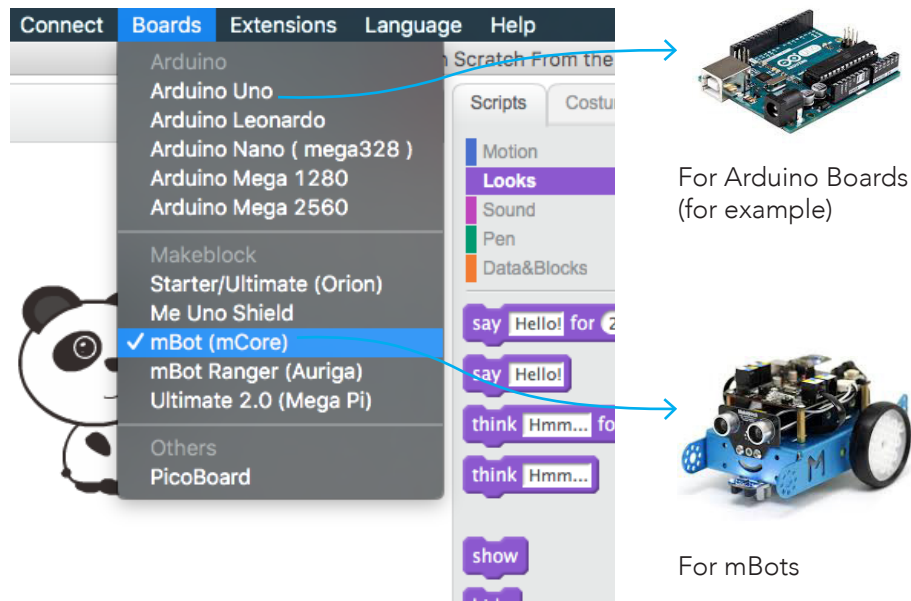
Don't forget to visit Scratch's website: <http://scratch.mit.edu>. There are animations, games, greeting cards and more to learn from!

Connect Your Robot / Boards

The primary reason of using mBlock is its power to control and program robots. Here is a short guide of how to connect it in several methods.

Connect through the USB cable

- 1 Open mBlock, click on the "Board" menu, and select the type of robots or boards you are using.

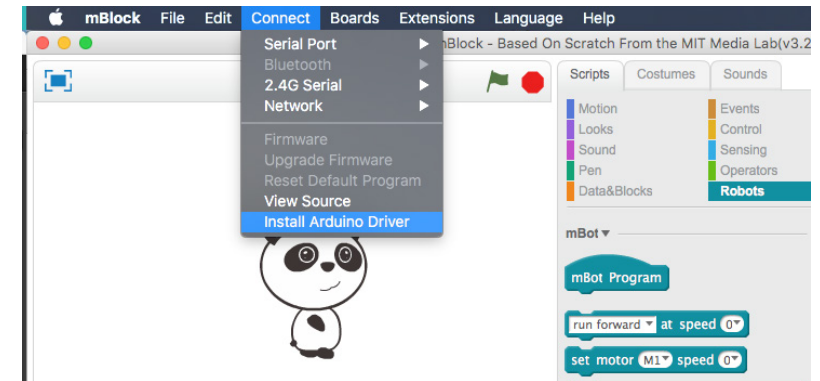


- 2 If you are using mBlock the first time, select "Install Arduino Driver" from the connect menu. This will install the programs necessary for communicating between the computer and the robot.

Note for Mac OS Sierra users: Please skip this step and follow the instructions in this article:

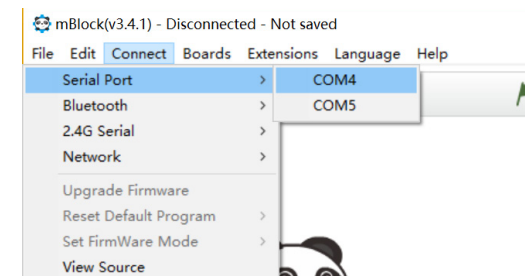
<http://www.mblock.cc/posts/run-makeblock-ch340-ch341-on-mac-os-sierra>

This is because Apple changed the way drivers work in their new operating system.

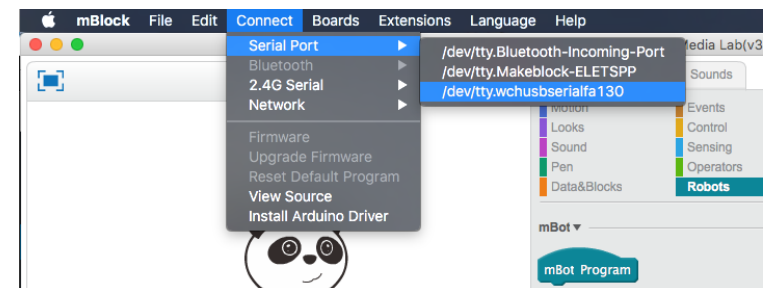


▲ Note: Not for the latest Mac OS Users!

- 3 **For Windows Users:** From the menu bar, select Connect, Serial Port, and the item like COM1 listed there. You may need to try multiple times if you have more than one devices connected.



For Mac Users: From the menu bar, select Connect, Serial Port, and the item like /dev/tty.usbserial... listed there. You may need to try multiple times if you have more than one devices connected.

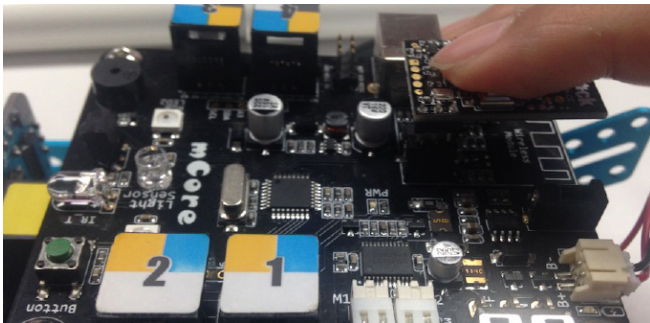


Connect through the 2.4G dongle

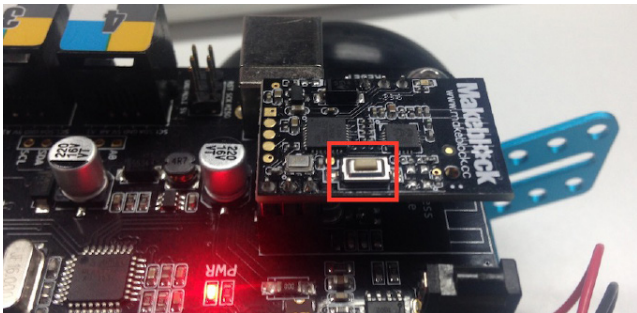
The 2.4G dongle is a nice way to control your Makeblock robots wirelessly. It comes in a dongle for your computer, and a 2.4G module for your robots.



- 1 Plug the 2.4G Module to your robot, and turn on the power switch.



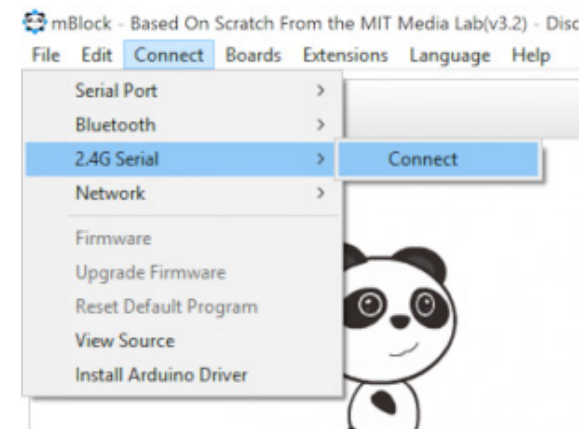
- 2 Press the button on the top of the 2.4G module, the LED light should turn from blinking to blinking very quickly.



- 3 While the LED light on top of the 2.4G module is blinking quickly, plug the 2.4G Dongle into the computer.



- 4 After that, the light on the 2.4G Module should lighten on Steadily. Select "Connect, 2.4G Serial, the Connect" from the top menu.

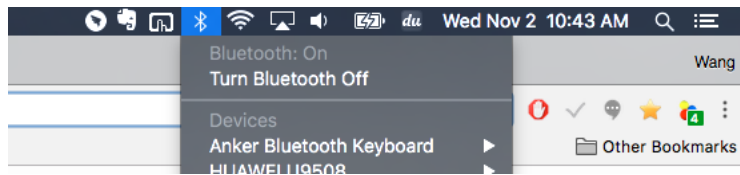


Now you can use your robot freely with the 2.4G dongle!

Connect through the Bluetooth (Beta)

You may try to connect to your boards/robots through Bluetooth, but **this function is still unstable and is not guaranteed to work in every computer**. This is because Bluetooth chips differ between computers, and operating systems (eg. Windows 7, Windows 10) treat them in different ways.

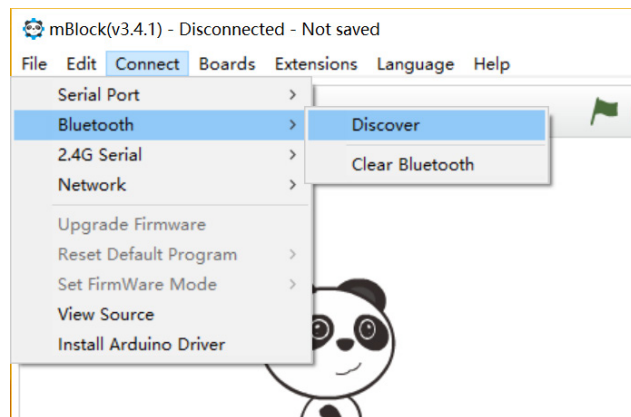
If you wish to try, here is a short guide about connecting boards/robots via Bluetooth. To finish this guide, you need a computer supporting Bluetooth, and the Bluetooth function needs to be enabled from the system settings menu.



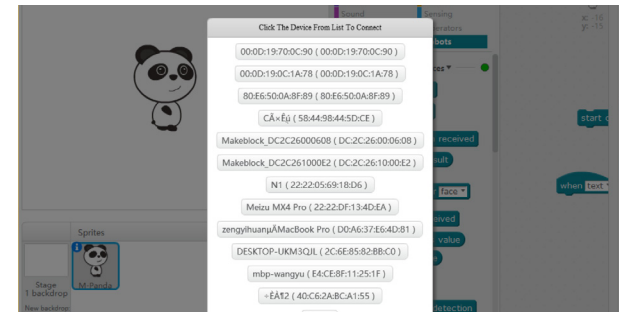
▲ Make sure the Bluetooth is "On" in your computer

For Windows Users

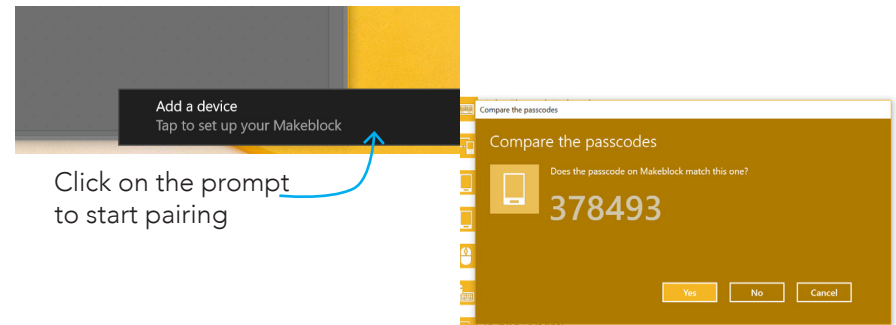
- 1 Click "Connect, Bluetooth, Discover". It will then pop up a list of discovered Bluetooth Devices. Note that this process may take around 60 seconds.



- 2 Select one from the list according to its name. For example, if you are using Makeblock products, it will have "Makeblock" in its name.

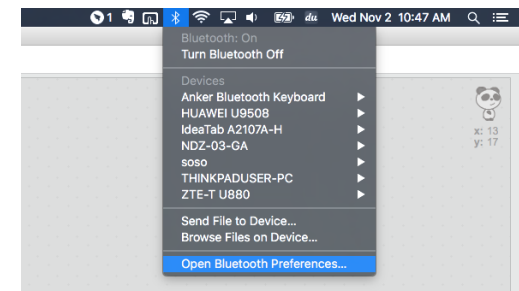


- 3 If it asks about "Pairing", click "Yes" to allow the computer talks to the board/robot.

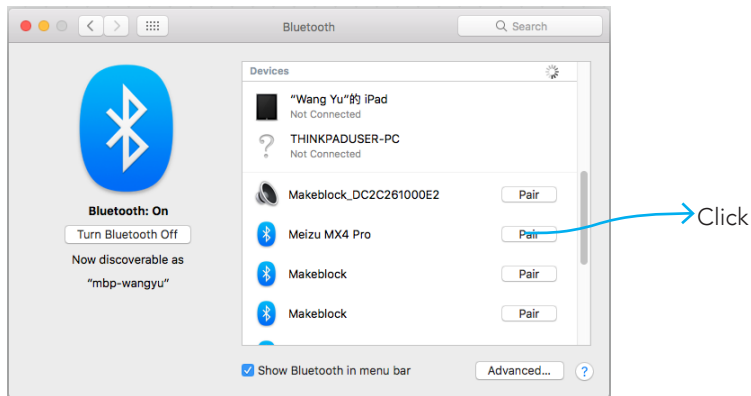


For Mac Users

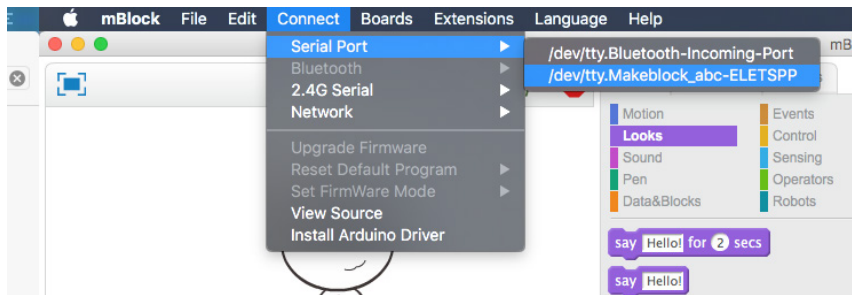
- 1 If it is the first time you connect this device through Bluetooth, open the Bluetooth Preference through "Bluetooth Icon, Bluetooth Preference".



- 2 Click on the Pair Button on the right of the device you wish to connect. For example, for Makeblock products, it usually have "Makeblock" in its name.



- 3 After that, in the mBlock window, select, "Connect, Serial Port", and the new item corresponding to your Bluetooth device - in my case, it is /dev/tty.Makeblock-ELETSPP.



Tips

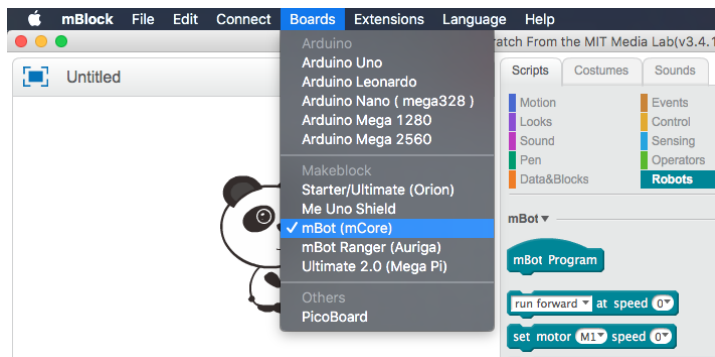
Why Serial Ports?

MacOS does not provide the API (Application Programming Interface, the tool for programmers to work on something) for Bluetooth Devices. Instead, through using drivers, we can map a Bluetooth device to another type - in this case, serial ports.

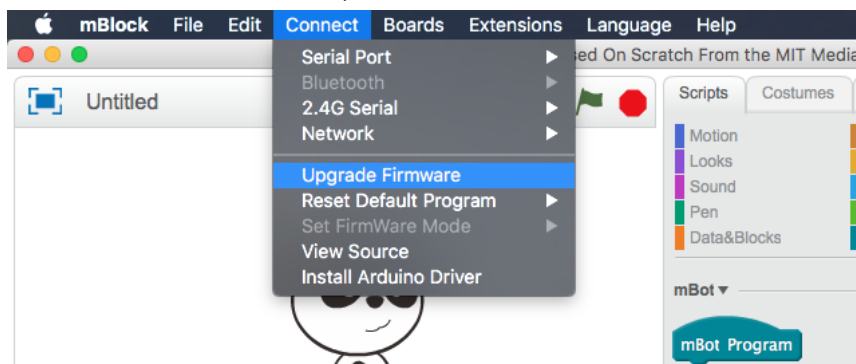
Hello, mBot

This tutorial will guide you through writing the first program for mBot, Makeblock's educational robot. If you are more interested in Arduino, you may jump to the next chapter.

- 1 Connect the mBot with one of the three methods described above (USB Cable recommended). When connected, it will say "connected" in the title bar.
- 2 Select mBot from the "Boards" menu. This will bring up mBot related commands in the "Robots" group.



- 3 (Optional) From the "Connect" menu, select "Upgrade Firmware". Wait until the upgrade is complete. This will allow the mBot to talk with the computer.

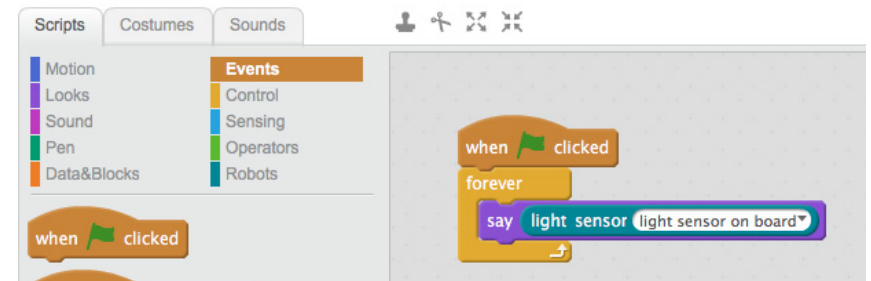


Tips

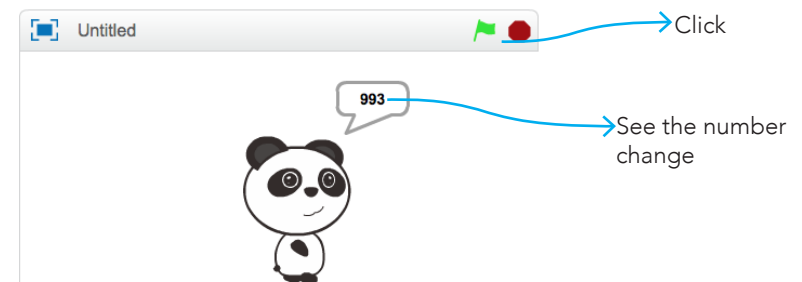
"Upgrade Firmware" and "Reset Default Program"

"Upgrade Firmware" will allow you control the mBot from mBlock, but it will disable the IR remote controller and switching mode with the on-top button; "Reset Default Program" will enable these functions like the mBot has just come from the factory, while it only support a part of the sensors available in mBlock. If you buy extra sensors from Makeblock, you may need to "Upgrade Firmware".

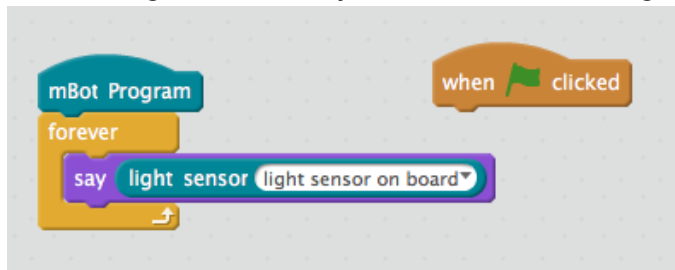
- 4 Drag "when (Flag) clicked" from the "Events" shelf; "forever" from the "Control" shelf; inside the "forever" block, place "say" from "Look" shelf, then "light sensor" from "Robots" shelf.



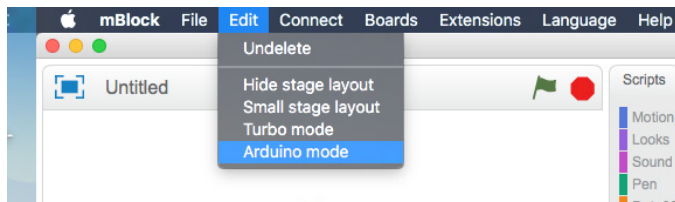
- 5 With mBot connected, click the green flag, and you will say the panda "saying" readings from the light sensor. Try cover the mBot with your hand, and you will see the number decrease.



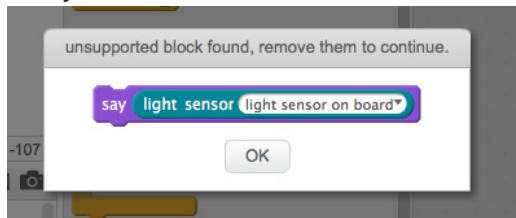
- 6 Now let's try upload a program into the mBot. Drag "mBot Program" from the "Robot" group, and attach "forever" to "mBot Program". You may delete the "When (flag) clicked" block



- 7 Select "Edit, Arduino Mode" from the menu. See what happens

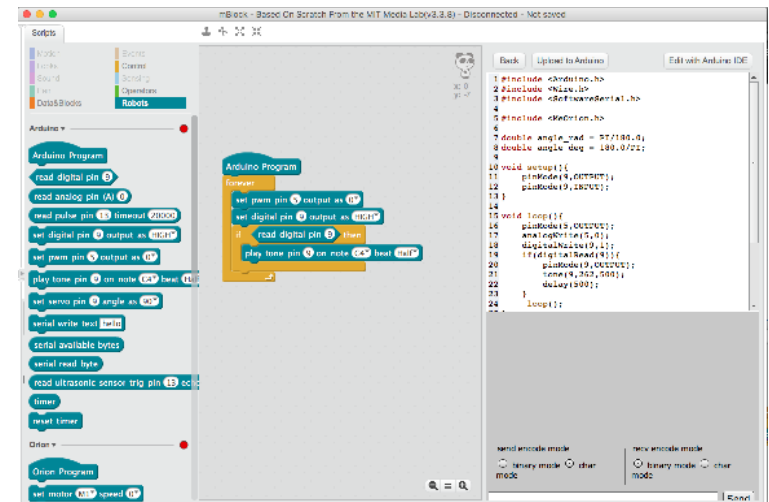
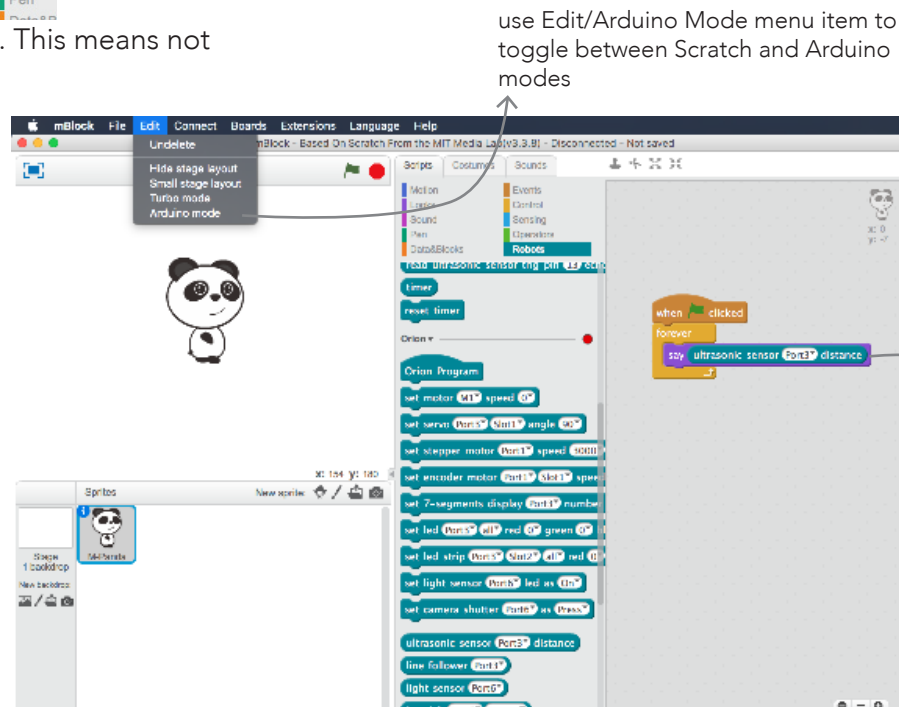


Oops, mBlock says "unsupported block found". This means not every block can be run in the Arduino Mode.



► Scratch Mode

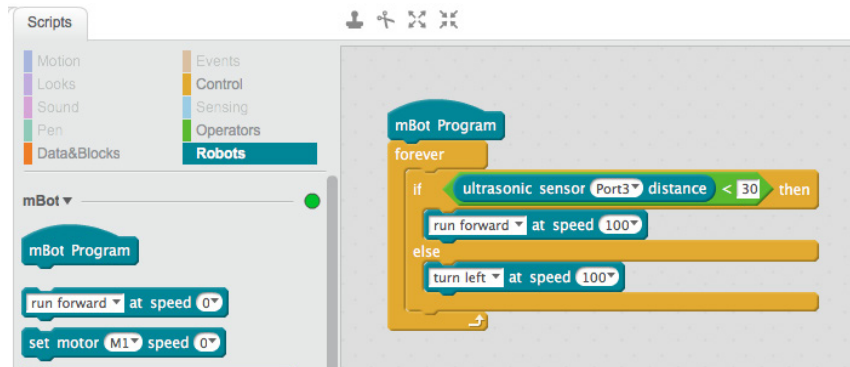
In Scratch Mode, the robot or Arduino board **must be connect to the computer** in order to run the program. You **can** use Scratch blocks to create graphics or make games.



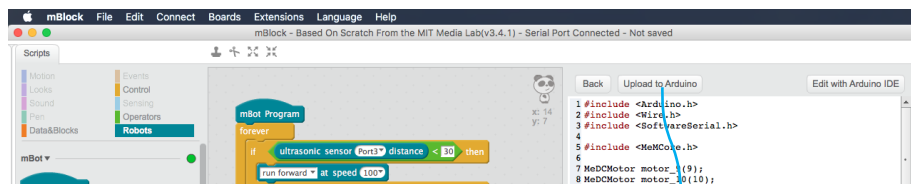
▲ Arduino Mode

In Arduino Mode, the program is **uploaded into the robot** and the robot is **run on its own**. However, you **cannot** use graphics from Scratch since the computer is no longer there.

- 8 Now let's try another program. Place blocks as shown below: The green block is from the "Operators" shelf.



- 9 Make sure "Arduino Mode" is selected in the "Edit" menu. Find "Upload to Arduino" button and click it.



Click

- 10 Now unplug the USB cable, put the mBot on the ground, you'll find it keeps running forward and turns left when there is obstacles ahead!

Tips

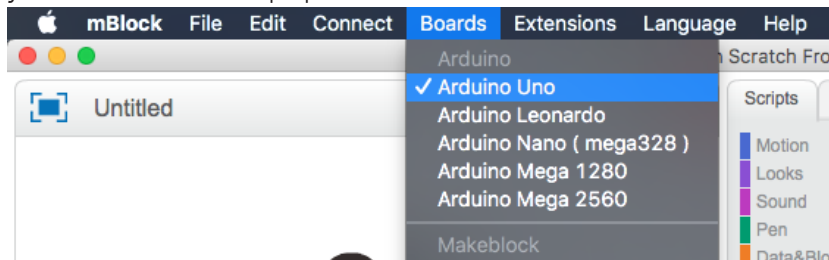
Reset Default Program?

You will find that mBot now does not respond to your command from the Makeblock App or the Scratch Mode in the mBlock. This is because the default program used to talk with these apps is overwritten by the obstacle-avoiding program you uploaded. You'll need to update firmware or "reset default program" to let it work again with the Scratch Mode or other Apps.

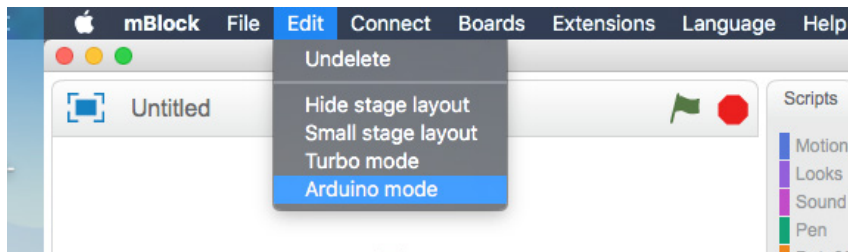
Hello, Arduino

This guide will give a short introduction on how to program Arduino boards with mBlock.

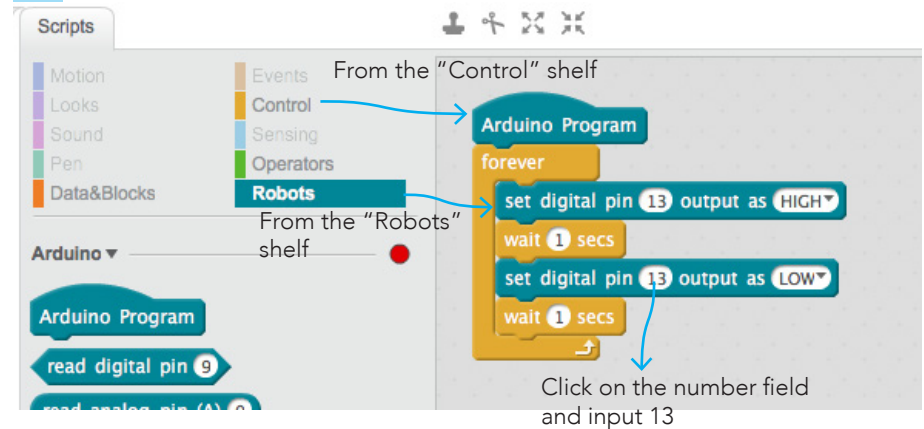
- 1 Connect the Arduino board through the USB cable, and follow the steps list on the "Connect through the USB cable" section.
- 2 From the "Boards" menu, select the board that match the one you have. The most popular choice is Arduino Uno.



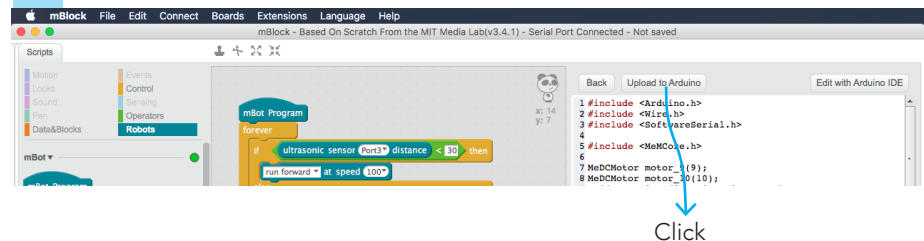
- 3 Select "Edit, Arduino Mode" from the menu.



- 4 Place the following program in the script region



- 5 Click the "Upload to Arduino" button on the right panel



- 6 You will find a LED on the Arduino board starts blinking.

Tips

Why the LED blinks?

This is because in Arduino Boards, PIN13 is connected to an on-board LED; this is usually used as a test device. The program we wrote tells PIN13 to output high(on) and low(off) every 2 seconds, resulting in a blinking LED.