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How to Do Some Code Changes in Gitlab

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I'm not a developer but was encouraged to try a one character change to some software. I felt that I couldn't break too much so I did my first tiny change. Literally one character text edit. However, it was a bit scary so I'm just posting this to show the basic workflow. This assumes you already have a gitlab account and username and can log in.

1. Find it.

probably you found or someone sent you a link to where the code is and you are on the gitlab page and can see the line of code you'd like to change. If not, get there.

Also, make sure you're on the right branch. I tried to click 'edit' but I was not allowed because I was not on the branch called 'master'. Your branch that you can edit may have a different name but just be aware that you have to be on the authorized branch that accepts changes. the left side has 'branches' and you can look at them there and select the right one.

2. Fork it

When you click 'edit' it seems to automatically force you to 'fork' the code. This makes sense. You wouldn't want to disrupt the main code until the overseeing person has reviewed your changes and authorized them. So you 'fork' it and do your changes there. I think a fork is basically a copy/paste of the whole block of code for that file

3. Change it.

On the page where you change there is a box where you can comment. I was a bit worried about this but it wasn't so bad. it's just a comment box but it seems a bit more important than that. I put my personal comment about the change I made and then saved it.

4. Merge it.

Once you save the changes it becomes a 'Merge Request' also known as MR.

I think this part depends on how the project is set up. It might merge automatically into the main software or, it might require a 'stamp of approval'. Regardless, once you send the MR it's out of your hands unless you are the developer overseeing the project, also known as the 'maintainer'.

Hopefully this helps someone else make their first change and thanks to the folks in free software who helped me do this!

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