

The power of word processing

INTRODUCTION TO WRITER

A reliable word processing application is a basic computing requirement. We'll show you how to get started with OpenOffice.org's Writer. **BY DMITRI POPOV**

For many users, daily computing means writing and editing documents in one form or another, so a decent word processor is an essential tool for their work. Although other word processors are available for Linux, such as AbiWord and KWord, they are no match for OpenOffice.org Writer, a heavy-duty word processor that you can use for pretty much anything. From simple letters and invoices to books and mail merge documents, Writer handles all these tasks equally well.

Users familiar with other word processors will feel at home with Writer: It sports a rather conventional interface (some might call it dated), and all its basic features are imme-

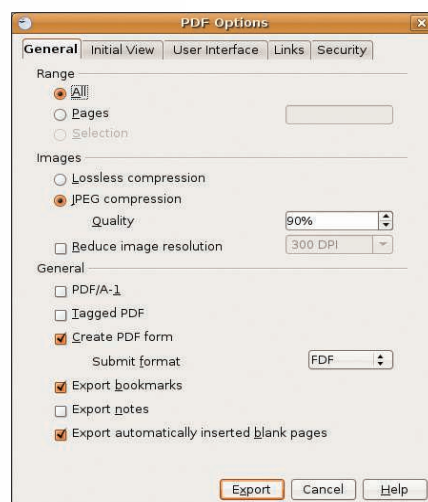


Figure 1: Save your Writer documents in the PDF format with ease.

diately available via the main toolbar. The Formatting toolbar gives you quick access to the formatting options, such as font, font size, alignment, numbered and bulleted lists, etc. In other words, even if you are completely new to OpenOffice.org Writer, you can start using it right away. However, behind Writer's simple interface hides a rather powerful application containing a slew of clever features. Writer, for example, includes a built-in PDF export feature, which allows you to generate a PDF version of your

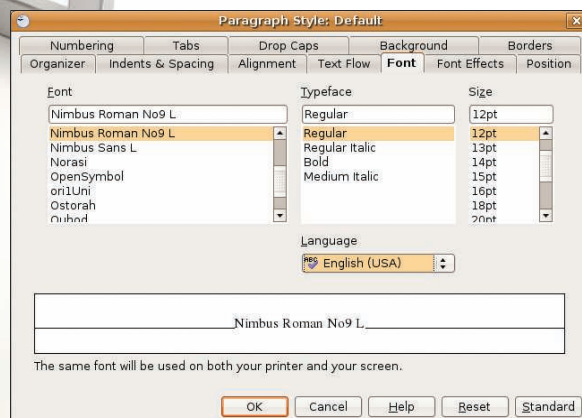


Figure 2: Tweaking styles in Writer.

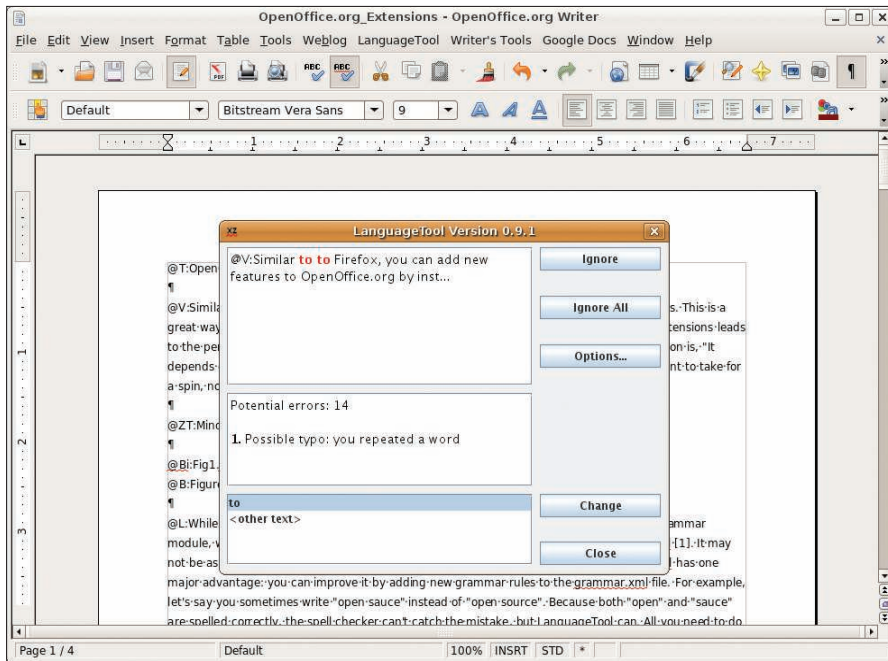


Figure 3: Checking grammar with LanguageTool.

document in a matter of a few clicks (Figure 1). To do this, choose *File | Export as PDF*. This opens the PDF Options dialog window that allows you to tweak the available export options.

Besides the PDF file format, OpenOffice.org supports a number of other formats, including Rich Text Format (RTF) and Microsoft Word 2003. The latter can be particularly useful for people who need to exchange documents with Microsoft Office users. Keep in mind, though, that although OpenOffice.org Writer usually does a commendable job of handling the Word format, it can occasionally stumble on some complex documents containing a lot of formatting. With the use of OpenOffice.org's export feature, you can also save Writer documents as MediaWiki-formatted text files – a boon for users who use wikis for web publishing.

Like any word processor worth its salt, Writer supports version tracking, on-the-fly spell checking, footers, headers, footnotes, tables, and other features essential for basic word processing. Users interested in mail merge will be pleased to learn that Writer comes with a powerful yet user-friendly Mail Merge Wizard. The Frames feature can help you lay out complex documents in Writer, and you even have a Media Player to play media files and insert them into documents. All of these tools are indispensable, but two features really make Writer stand out

from the crowd: styles and master documents. Moreover, you can expand Writer's and other OpenOffice.org applications' capabilities with extensions.

Work in Writer with Style

Styles is one of the features that make OpenOffice.org Writer a rather powerful word processing application. In fact, if you really want to get the most out of Writer and take your word processing skills to the next level, you should learn how to use styles. The Styles feature allows you to specify paragraph and char-

acter formatting properties (Figure 2). For example, you can create a character style called *My_bold_head* that uses Bitstream Vera 9pt Bold font. The next time you have to format a heading, you simply apply the *My_bold_head* to it.

"But why bother creating a separate style if you can just use the **Bold** button on the Formatting toolbar?" you might ask. Well, say that you have a 99-page document with dozens of words and text fragments in bold. Now, what if you need to change all headings to bold italic? Without styles, you have to go through the entire document and manually change every single head individually. Needless to say, this is a lot of manual work. With styles, performing this operation is simple: Open the *My_bold_head* style for editing, choose the *Font* tab, select **Bold Oblique** in the *Typeface* list, press OK, and you're done.

The Styles feature offers a few other creature comforts. The *Organizer* tab in the Style dialog window allows you to specify which style should follow the current one (the *Next Style* option) and which style inherits its properties (the *Linked with* option). For example, you can create a special style for the document header and set the *Next Style* option to the *Text body* paragraph style. Next time you type a header in your document and press Enter, Writer automatically switches to the *Text body* style. Using the *Linked with* option, you can link several styles together. For example,

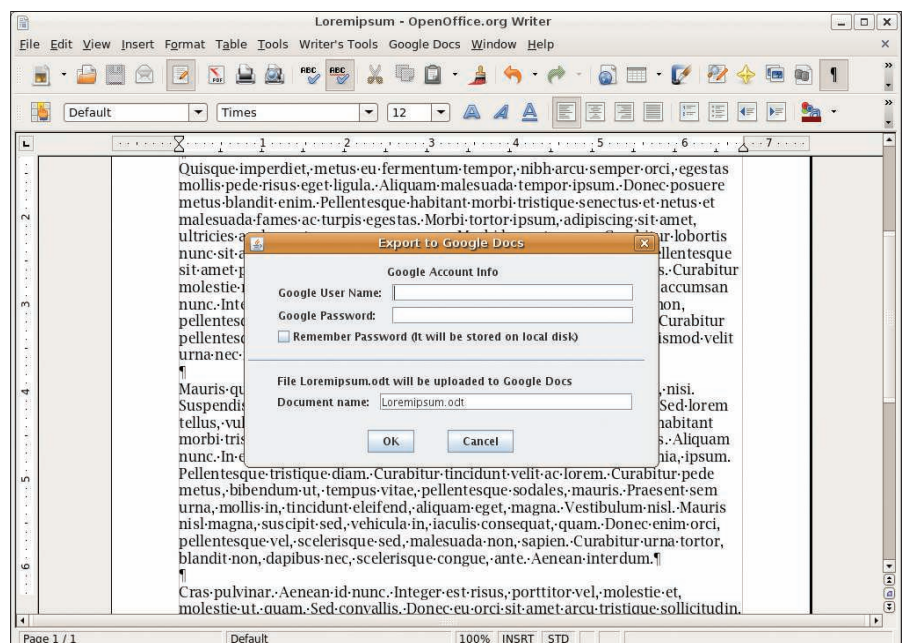


Figure 4: Use the ooo2gd extension to upload your documents quickly to Google Docs.

you can link the *Heading 1* style with *Heading 2*, so that the latter style inherits the properties of the former. Then if you change the font in the *Heading 1* style later, for example, this change will be applied automatically to the *Heading 2* style and any other style linked to it. In this way, you don't have to go through each style and change its properties manually.

To keep tabs on styles, Writer sports the Stylist tool, which can be evoked by pressing the F11 key or by choosing *Format | Styles and Formatting*. Styles can be a bit intimidating in the beginning, but once you've learned the ropes, they can save a lot of time and make you look like a real OpenOffice.org Writer pro.

Styles is not the only feature that makes Writer a perfect word processing tool for complex documents. When working on a long document, like a book or research paper, you save individual chapters as separate *.odt* files and assemble them in a master document.

The master/subdocuments concept is not new. This feature has been available in Microsoft Word for a while, but it was (and probably still is) so buggy that even Microsoft recommends that you stay away from it. The master documents in Writer work like a charm, so if you are planning to write your next book in OpenOffice.org Writer, you should consider using its master/subdocuments capabilities.

Creating a master document in Writer couldn't be easier: choose *File | New | Master Document*, and Writer creates an empty master file ready for use. Then you can use the Navigator tool (press F5 or choose *Edit | Navigator*), which allows you to add subdocuments to the master and manage them with ease.

Extending Writer

Like Firefox, you can add new features to OpenOffice.org applications with the use of extensions. The best place to find extensions for OpenOffice.org is the official extension repository [1]. Here you can find extensions for all OpenOffice.org applications, as well as rate and comment on them.

Writer Tips

Writer offers many advanced features that can help you to create anything from a simple letter to a book with a complex layout. But as with any powerful application, you often have to dig deep to get the most out of Writer. The following tips will help you quickly master Writer's many useful features.

Remove a word from a user dictionary

To remove a word from a user-defined dictionary, follow these steps:

1. Choose *Tools | Options | Language Settings | Writing Aids*.
2. In the User-defined dictionaries window, select *soffice* and press the *Edit* button.
3. Select the word you want to remove and click *Delete*.
4. Press *Close* | *OK* when done.

Use Reject changes for selective undo

If you want to undo an action several steps deep with the Undo command, you are bound to undo all the previous steps as well. However, you can perform a selective undo using the Accept/Reject changes feature. This way, you can select the exact action you want to undo.

1. Do *Edit | Changes | Accept or Reject*.
2. Select the change you want to reject (it becomes highlighted in the document).
3. Press the *Reject* button.

Keep in mind, though, that to be able to use this feature, you have to activate the Changes feature first.

Add a watermark to a document

Sometimes you need to add a watermark to your document (for example, CONFIDENTIAL, URGENT, or COPY).

Here is how to do this:

1. Choose *Insert | Frame* to insert a frame into the document.
2. Enter the desired text and change its color, if necessary.
3. Click on the frame to select it.
4. Right-click on the frame and choose *Wrap | In Background*.

This technique also allows you to use a picture as a watermark: In step 1, choose *Insert | Picture | From File*.

Create a new default template

If you want every new document to have user-defined settings, you must create a new template and set it as the default.

1. Create a new document, add or modify styles, and change other settings as desired.
2. From the File menu, choose *Templates | Save*.
3. Give the template a name.
4. Select a category in the Categories list (e.g., My Templates).
5. Click *OK* to save the template.
6. Choose *File | Templates | Organize*.
7. In the Category list, double-click on the My Templates folder.
8. Right-click on the template you want to use and choose *Set as Default Template* from the menu.
9. Click the *Close* button.

Use landscape and portrait pages in the same document

Here is the problem: You have a document in which all pages are in Portrait mode, but you need to insert a page in Landscape mode. To do this, you must create a page style with landscape page orientation:

1. In the Stylist, click on the *Page Style* button, right-click in the window, and choose *New*.
2. In the Page Style dialog box, click on the *Page* tab.
3. Under Orientation, click on the *Landscape* radio button.
4. Specify other settings and press *OK*.

Insert a landscape-oriented page

1. Choose *Insert | Manual Break*.
2. Click on the *Page break* radio button.
3. Select the newly created landscape page style from the *Style* drop-down menu.

To get back to the portrait mode, repeat the procedure, but in step 3, select the portrait page style.

Link text frames

Although Writer is not a DTP application, it contains tools that allow you to create complex layouts. For example, using the Link Frames feature, you can insert frames in the document and then link them together.

1. Start by creating a frame (*Insert -> Frame*) and typing some text in it. Alternatively, you can frame an existing text fragment.
2. Create an empty frame and click on the edge of the first frame.
3. Click the *Link Frames* button on the Object toolbar.
4. Click on the edge of the second frame.

When the first frame is full, the text flows into the second frame. To unlink frames, select a frame and press the *Unlink frame* button on the Object toolbar.

Installing OpenOffice.org extensions is rather straightforward. First, you have to download the desired extension. Then launch OpenOffice.org, choose *Tools | Extension Manager*, and select the *My Extension* section.

Finally, press the *Add* button and select the downloaded *.oxt* file. Once the extension is installed, restart OpenOffice.org to enable it.

Which extensions you choose to install on your system depend largely on your needs, but there are at least two extensions you might want to try: LanguageTool [2] and OpenOffice.org-2GoogleDocs [3].

Although OpenOffice.org comes with a competent spell checker and thesaurus,

it lacks a grammar module, which many users find rather useful. If you are among them, then try LanguageTool (Figure 3). Although it might not be as powerful as the grammar checker bundled with Microsoft Office, it lets you perform a basic grammar check on your documents with ease, and it even supports several languages.

Right from the start, Google Docs has been a useful complement to OpenOffice.org. Because this web-based office suite supports the OpenDocument format, you can send documents back and forth between OpenOffice.org and Google Docs. Although this works fine when you have to upload or download documents every now and then, trans-

ferring dozens of documents between OpenOffice.org and Google Docs can quickly become a nuisance.

The OpenOffice.org2GoogleDocs (ooo2gd) extension solves the problem by allowing you to upload OpenOffice.org documents easily to Google Docs, as well as to open existing Docs files in Writer (Figure 4). The upload feature

INFO

- [1] OpenOffice.org extension repository: extensions.services.openoffice.org
- [2] LanguageTool: www.languagetool.org
- [3] OpenOffice.org2GoogleDocs: <http://extensions.services.openoffice.org/project/ooo2gd>

Writer Tips (continued)

Advanced Find & Replace options

The Find & Replace tool offers a few advanced options to make your search more precise. You can use the *Attributes* button to select the text attributes that you want to search for. For example, if you tick the *Font color* checkbox, the search finds all occurrences of text in which the default font color was changed. Using the *Format* button, you can specify the text format criteria for your search. This option can be used, for example, to find all occurrences of the word "OpenOffice.org" in a particular font, typeface, size, or any other text format characteristic. Similarity search allows you to perform fuzzy searches. For example, searching for the word "office" with Similarity Search turned on returns both "office" and "official."

Enable line numbering

In certain situations, like collaborative editing, line numbering can be rather useful. To enable line numbering, choose *Line Numbering* from the Tools menu and tick the *Show numbering* checkbox. In the Line Numbering dialog window, you can tweak other settings, such as Character style, Format, and Position.

Set page number offset

The problem: You have a document containing a blank or title page, and you want to start page numbering with the next page. Here is how this can be done:

1. Click in the first paragraph of your first page.
2. Choose *Format | Paragraph | Text Flow*.
3. Under Breaks, check *Enable*. Make sure that Type is set to *Page* and

Position is set to *Before*.

4. Tick the *With Page Style* checkbox and choose *Default* (or whatever page style you want).

5. Enter the page number you want in the Page Number field.

Note that 0 in the Page Number field doesn't denote a page number, but simply means that the current page number won't be changed.

Lock text segments

In certain situations, you might want to prevent other users from editing parts of a Writer document.

1. Select the text segment that you want to protect.
2. From the Insert menu, choose *Section*.
3. Tick the *Protect* checkbox.
4. Click the *Insert* button.

If you tick the *With password* checkbox and define a password, users can edit the text segment only if they enter the correct password.

Because Writer applies the Hyperlink character style to TOC entries, you might encounter a situation in which you want your TOC to have its own character style. Right-click on the TOC and choose *Edit Index/Table*. Click on the *Entries* tab, click on the *LS* button, select the desired style from the *Character Style* drop-down list, and press *All* then *OK*.

Extract pictures from a Writer document

If you need to extract pictures from a Writer document, you can do this using the following trick:

1. Make a copy of your Writer file.
2. Change its extension to *.zip*.
3. Unzip the file.

4. The unzipped folder contains a *Pictures* folder with all the pictures from the document in the PNG format.

Alternative open source fonts

OpenOffice.org includes the open source Bitstream Vera font family, which is a good all-around font. However, there are other high-quality open source fonts you might want to try:

DejaVu (<http://dejavu.sourceforge.net/>), Arev (<http://tavmjong.free.fr/FONTS/>), MgOpen (<http://www.ellak.gr/pub/fonts/mgopen/>), Junicode (<http://junicode.sourceforge.net/>), Gentium (<http://tinyurl.com/2ro72>).

Insert dummy text into a document

Do you need to fill your document with dummy text? Type "dt" (without the quotes) in the document and press F3.

Change default dummy text in Writer

The dummy text in Writer is just a regular text snippet stored in AutoText, so you can edit it the same way you would edit any AutoText entry. To modify the existing dummy text:

1. Press Ctrl+F3 to open the AutoText dialog window.
2. Expand the Standard list and scroll down to *Dummy Text*.
3. Click the *AutoText* button and choose *Edit*. The dummy text opens in Writer and you can edit it to your liking.
4. Save the changes by pressing Ctrl+S. Next time you type "dt" and press F3, you'll have your modified text. By the way, you can find everything you want to know about the classic Lorem Ipsum dummy text at www.lipsum.com. The website also features a handy Lorem Ipsum generator.

supports not only ODT documents, but also SXW, DOC, and RTF. Moreover, OpenOffice.org2GoogleDocs can send spreadsheets in ODS, XLS, and CVS formats, as well as PPT and PPS presentations. The download part of the Open-

Office.org2GoogleDocs extension is still in the experimental stage, and for now, you can only open Google Docs documents in Writer as plain text files.

With this extension, it couldn't be easier to transfer documents. When

installed, it adds a top menu containing two commands: *Export to Google Docs* and *Import from Google Docs*. Simply choose the command you need and enter your username and password, and the extension does the rest. ■

Writer Shortcuts

F2	Activate the Formula bar	Alt+Enter	Insert a new paragraph without numbering
Ctrl+F2	Open the Fields window	Alt+Enter	Insert a new paragraph directly before or after a section or a table
F3	Complete the AutoText entry	Arrow Left	Move the cursor to the left
Ctrl+F3	Open the AutoText window	Shift+Arrow Left	Move the cursor with selection to the left
F4	Open Data Source View	Ctrl+Arrow Left	Go to the beginning of the current word
F5	Turn Navigator on/off	Ctrl+Shift+Arrow Left	Select words to the left from the current cursor position
Ctrl+Shift+F5	Turn Navigator on	Arrow Right	Move the cursor to the right
F7	Evoke spell check	Shift+Arrow Right	Select characters to the right from the current cursor position
Ctrl+F7	Evoke Thesaurus	Ctrl+Arrow Right	Go to the end of the word
F8	Enter the Extension mode	Ctrl+Shift+Arrow Right	Select words to the right from the current cursor position
Ctrl+F8	Turn Field shadings on/off	Arrow Up	Move up one line
Shift+F8	Additional selection	Shift+Arrow Up	Select lines in the upward direction
F9	Update fields	Arrow Down	Move the cursor down one line
Ctrl+F9	Show contents of fields	Shift+Arrow Down	Select lines in the downward direction
Shift+F9	Calculate table	Home	Go to the beginning of the line
Ctrl+Shift+F9	Update input fields	Shift+Home	Select the current line from its beginning to the current cursor position
Ctrl+F10	Turn non-printing characters on/off	End	Go to the end of the line
F11	Turn Stylist on/off	Shift+End	Select the current line from the current cursor position to the end of the line
Shift+F11	Create a new style	Ctrl+Home	Jump to the start of the document
Ctrl+Shift+F11	Update style	Ctrl+Shift+Home	Select the text from the document's start to the current cursor position
F12	Turn numbering on	Ctrl+End	Jump to the end of the document
Ctrl+F12	Insert or edit table	Ctrl+Shift+End	Select the text from the current cursor position to the end of the document
Shift+F12	Turn bullets on	Ctrl+Page Up	Switch the cursor between the text and the header
Ctrl+Shift+F12	Turn numbering/bullets off	Ctrl+Page Down	Switch the cursor between the text and the footer
Ctrl+A	Select All	Insert	Turn the Insert mode on/off
Ctrl+J	Justify the selected text	Page Up	Scroll one screen page up
Ctrl+D	Apply double underline attribute to the selected text. If the cursor is positioned in a word, this word is also underlined.	Shift+Page Up	Scroll one screen page up and select it
Ctrl+E	Center the selected text	Page Down	Scroll one screen page down
Ctrl+F	Open the Find & Replace dialog window	Shift+Page Down	Scroll one screen page down and select it
Ctrl+Shift+P	Apply double superscript attribute to the selected text. If the cursor is positioned in a word, this word is also double superscripted.	Ctrl+Del	Delete the whole word to the right from the current cursor position
Ctrl+L	Align the selected text left	Ctrl+Backspace	Delete the whole word to the left from the current cursor position
Ctrl+R	Align the selected text right	Ctrl+Shift+Del	Delete the whole sentence to the right from the current cursor position
Ctrl+Shift+B	Apply double subscript attribute to the selected text. If the cursor is positioned in a word, this word is also double superscripted.	Ctrl+Shift+Backspace	Delete the whole sentence to the left from the current cursor position
Ctrl+Y	Redo the last action	Ctrl+Tab	When Automatic Word Completion is turned on show the next suggestion
Ctrl+1	Apply single line spacing	Ctrl+Shift+Tab	When Automatic Word Completion is turned on show the previous suggestion
Ctrl+2	Apply double line spacing	Alt+W	In the spell checker dialog window: Call back the original unknown word into the text box
Ctrl+5	Apply 1.5 line spacing	Ctrl+double-click or Ctrl+Shift+F10	Dock or undock the Navigator, Stylist, or other window.
Ctrl+Plus key (+)	Perform a calculation on the selected text. The result is copied to the clipboard and can be pasted into the document.		
Ctrl+Hyphen (-)	Insert a hyphen		
Ctrl+Shift+Hyphen (-)	Insert a non-breaking dash		
Ctrl+* (numeric pad)	Run macro field		
Ctrl+Space	Insert a non-breaking space		
Shift+Enter	Insert a soft line break		
Ctrl+Enter	Insert a manual page break		
Ctrl+Shift+Enter	Insert a column break in multi-column text		