

Calc functions, formats and data

There is more to a spreadsheet than just numbers – here are some handy tips to help make organising your spreadsheets easier.

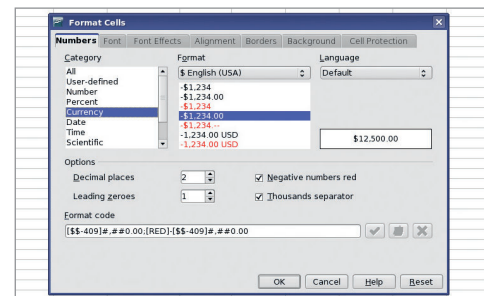
One of the best things you can do to make your spreadsheets easier to understand and work with is to pay special attention to formats and styles. The styles are really the same as those you would find in *OOo Writer*, but it is really amazing how much difference a bit of bold can make to the appearance of your label fields, or how changing the font can make some data fit much better. All you need to do to change the style of the cells is select them, then choose one of the many tools that are available just above the main spreadsheet area. A well-styled spreadsheet looks better and is easier to read, so it is worth your while familiarising yourself with the options.

Alternating rows in different coloured backgrounds – akin to a highlighter pen – also makes them a lot easier to read, and you can

change the colour of the font too: but please, nothing too eye-searing and garish!

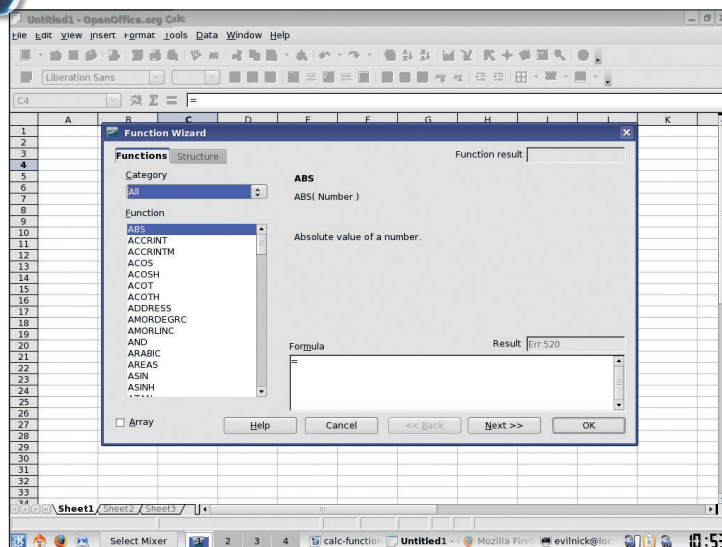
Perhaps more importantly, you can change the format of the cells. This defines how values such as numbers are displayed. There are default settings for all sorts of data, and *Calc* is usually pretty good and determining what kind of data you are entering. Currency can cause problems though. If you just enter a number like 4.99, *Calc* isn't to know you mean £4.99. Does it make a difference? Not really, but standard number formats won't automatically do two decimal places, so it can look a bit wrong to see 4.9 and make the mental leap to £4.90. Also, you can have special effects (!) if you chose the proper formats – negative currency values can be made to turn red, for example.

To change the format of your cells, just select them and choose **Format > Cell Format** and skip through the requester to choose the one that fits your data best.



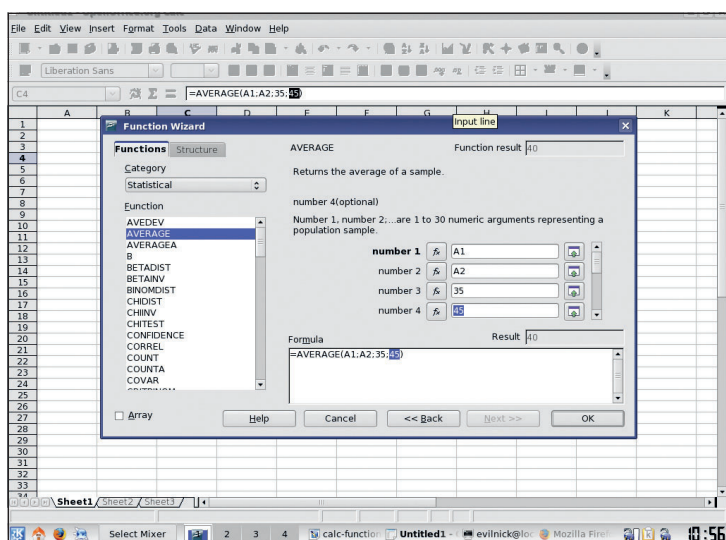
› **Formatting your cells makes them easier to understand, and potentially more colourful too!**

Calc: using the function wizard



1 Select the function

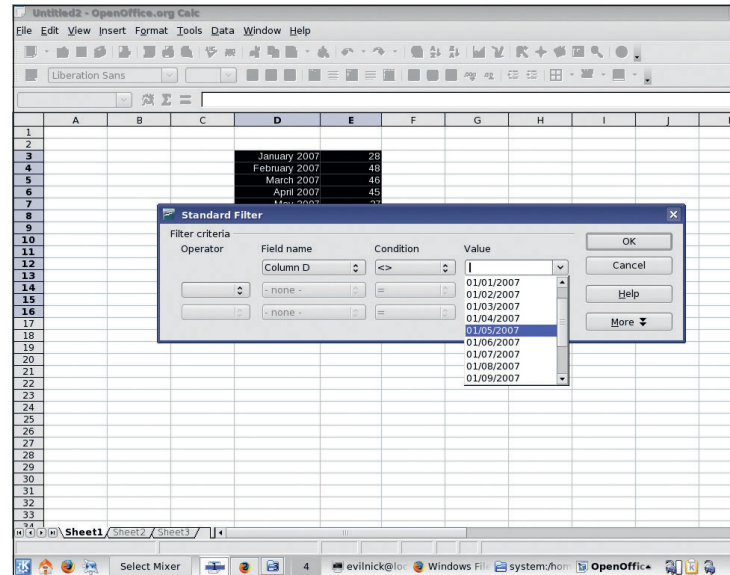
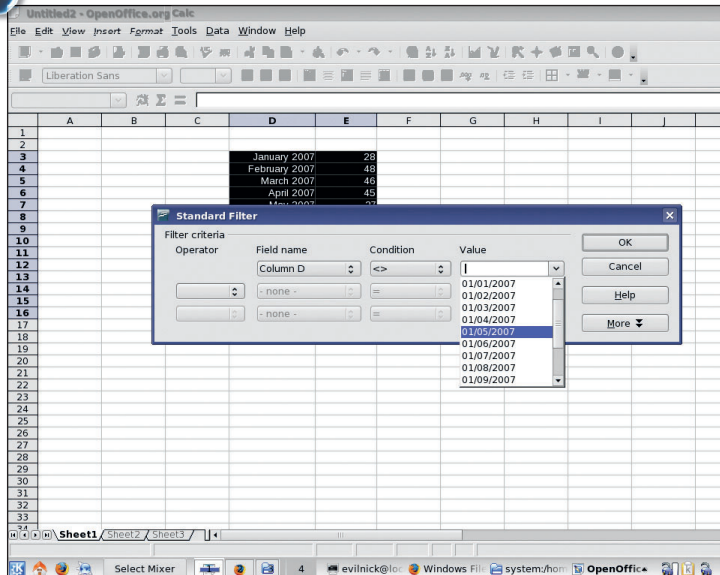
Click on the function wizard button – it's the one marked **Fx** just above the main spreadsheet window. This brings up a dialogue window. Down the left hand side are all the available functions. You can use the drop-down menu to select a particular type of function, or scroll up and down the list. As you click on the function names, a description will appear in the panel on the right.



2 Fill in values

Double-click on a function, and the right-hand panel will turn into a customised area for inputting the variables to the function. The entries can usually be literal values, cell references, ranges or even other functions! All the while you are changing the parameters of the function, you will see an updated status of what the result will be (it will usually have an error message to begin with).

Calc: filtering data



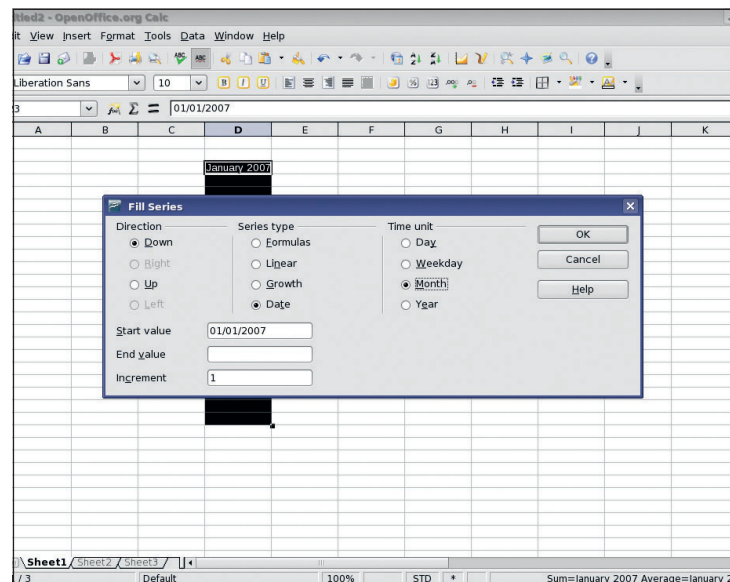
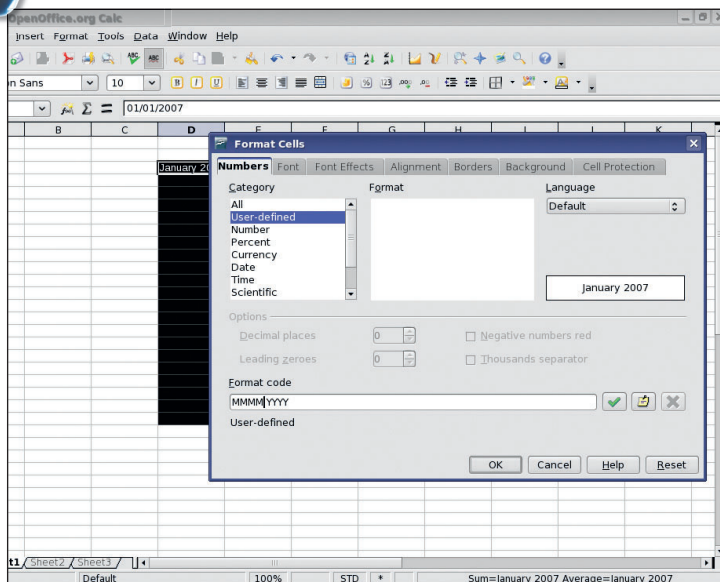
1 Clear out the clutter

There are many ways to remove extraneous data from your spreadsheet, and we'll see some more of them in a moment, but one of the simplest ways is to apply a filter. The first thing you need to do is select a column or row of data that you want to filter values from – maybe it is a list of dates and you just want the ones in March, for example. Select the dates column and then choose Data > Filter > Standard Filter from the menu

2 Filtering out

In the requester that pops up, you can specify any filters that you want with standard operators that are easy to understand. The Value pull-down will even populate with the real data from your spreadsheet to make it easier. Once you have applied the filter, the data still exists, but you will see that the rows relating to it simply don't show. To remove the filter again, select a cell in the column and choose Data > Filter > Remove Filter from the menu.

Calc: create a date series in seconds



1 Choose your date

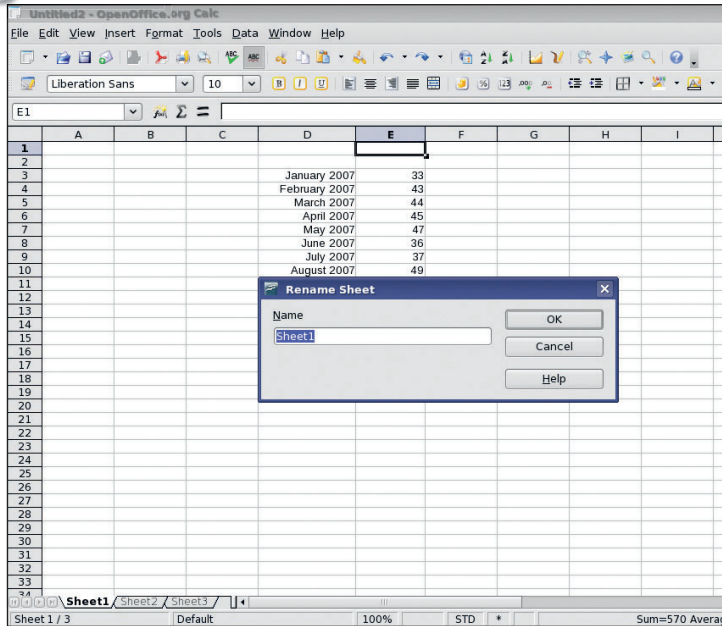
You often need to fill in columns of data with dates right? Well, you can have *Calc* do the hard work for you, all you need is a single date. Enter a date value (like 01/01/07) into a cell. Select the cell and make sure it has picked up a date format, or change it to the format you want to use. (this same trick works with numbers by the way, but this is more impressive). Now hover the mouse over the tiny square bottom-right of the selected cell.

2 Click and drag for multiple dates

Holding the mouse button down, drag out the selection to fill the area you want with dates and then release. The series fill requester will pop up. Leave the increment at 1, choose Date and Month as a time unit then click on OK. You'll see the column fill up with months in the correct format! You can try this with multiple columns too if you are feeling brave!



Calc: time-saving tips



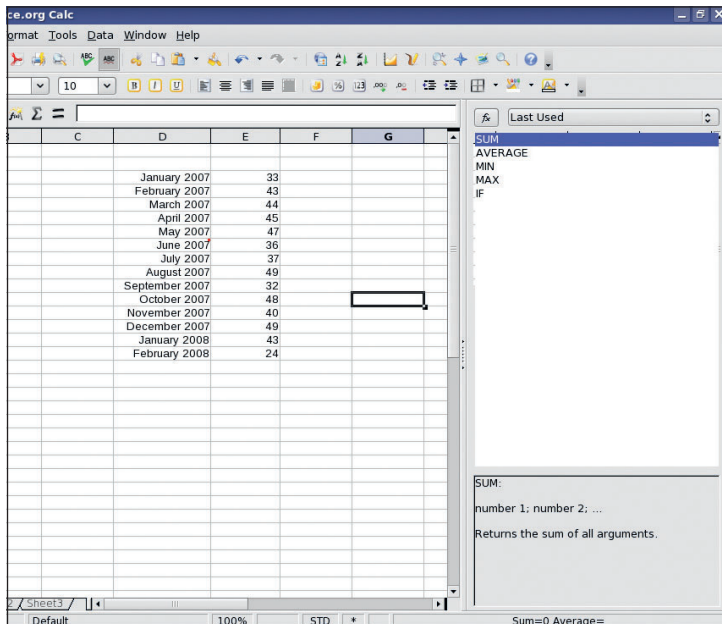
1 Rename sheets

You can use cells on different sheets as a reference by using the format 'Sheet1.A1:B3'. But this method can be a bit clumsy. Why not rename the sheets so that they actually mean something? It will save mistakes and could be a lot easier to follow. Just right-click on the Sheet tab in the bottom left corner of the main display and choose Rename. Any references you have already made will be updated.

	C	D	E	F
		January 2007	33	
		February 2007	43	
		March 2007	44	
		April 2007	45	
		May 2007	47	
		June 2007	36	
		July 2007	37	
		August 2007	49	
		September 2007	32	
		October 2007	48	
		November 2007	40	
		December 2007	49	
		January 2008	43	
		February 2008	24	

2 Your own tooltip-style annotations

Sometimes numbers and data need a little extra explanation. *Calc* has a facility to add notes to cells. Right-click on a cell and choose Add Note from the menu that appears. A funky yellow-flavoured text box will appear on the end of an arrow pointing at the cell you chose. Just click in it and add any text you like. A cell with a note attached appears with a small red indicator in the top right – just hold the mouse pointer over it to see the text.

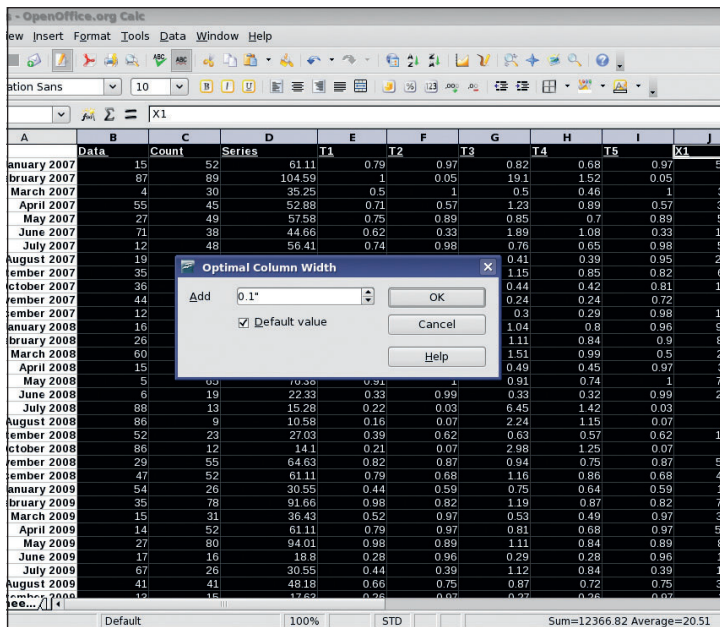


3 Function list panel

If you are entering a lot of functions on your spreadsheet, it can be a pain to remember what functions are available, never mind clicking on the wizard every time. As an *aide memoire*, you can split the screen and show the function list in a panel on the right-hand side of the spreadsheet. Just choose Insert > Function List from the menu. Choose it again to remove this view.

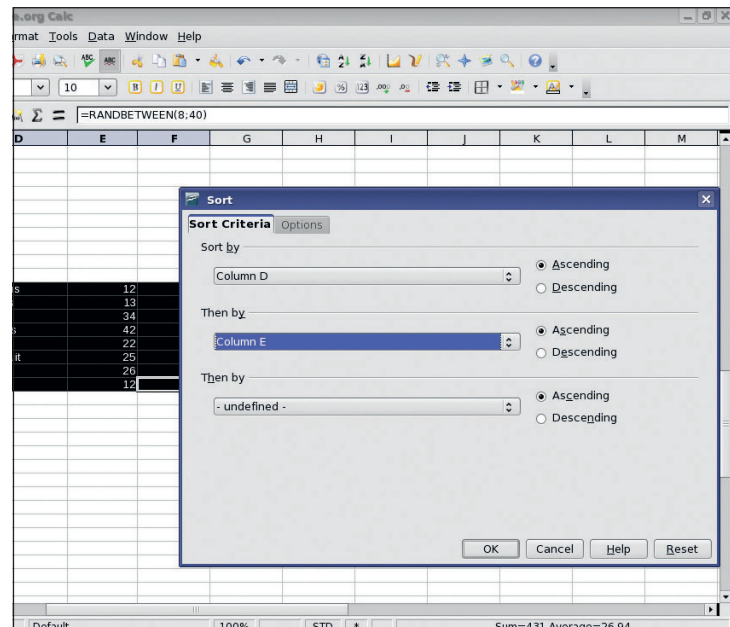
4 Split rows/columns

If you have a lot of data, when you scroll around the spreadsheet you might lose sight of some important data, or even just the column labels. Fortunately you can split these areas of the spreadsheet so they are always on display. Select the first cell of data that isn't a label, then choose Window > Split from the menu. Now you can scroll around and leave the labels intact.



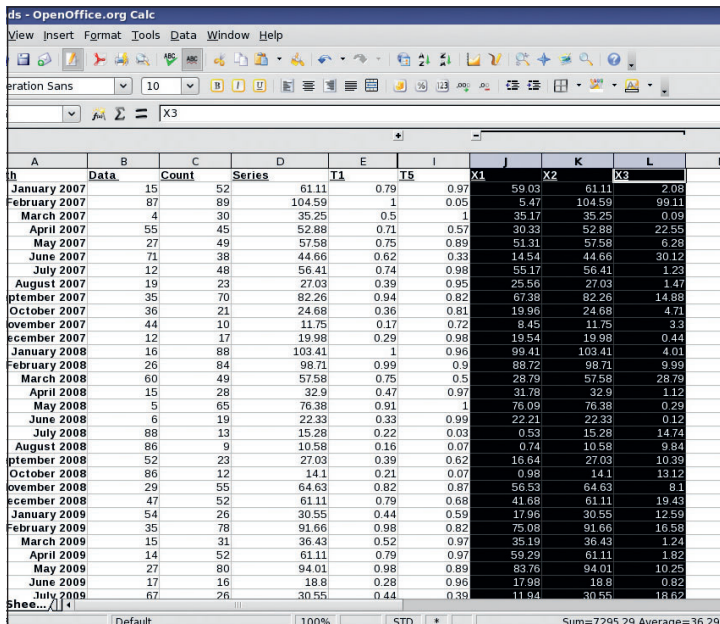
5 Optimise columns/rows

Space is often tight in spreadsheets. You can adjust the widths of columns and the height of rows by dragging the dividers around, but who wants to do that on a huge spreadsheet? Nobody. Help is at hand with the optimise column width/row height tool. Not only will it resize the cells to fit the data, but you can even tell it how much clear space to leave around the edges to keep things looking nice. Select some data and choose Format > Columns > Optimal Column Width to get the requester.



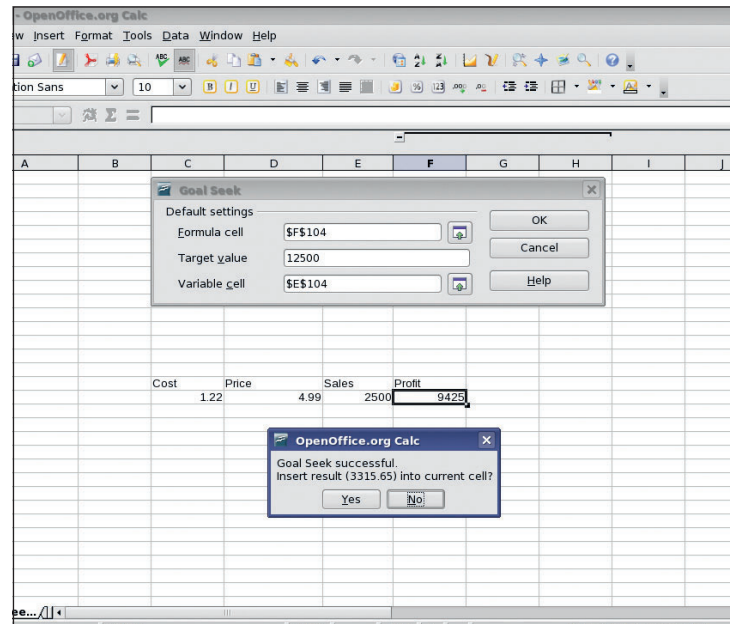
6 Sort out your data

This can save you a lot of time and make your data look neater. Got lots of values the same but in different rows? Got a list of fruit all jumbled up. Everything looks a lot better when it is put into some sort of order. Select the data range and choose Data > Sort to get some options. You can sort in both directions, and if multiple columns have been selected, you can sub-sort them in whatever order takes your fancy.



7 Outlines

Another way of clearing away necessary but fussy groups of cells is to use the outline tool. Rather like in a word processing document, this simply folds away whole rows or columns so you don't have to look at them any more. Select some rows or columns, then press F12 to group them. A small area will appear above the spreadsheet (or at the side) with a 'twisty' on it. When you click on this, a whole chunk of the spreadsheet will be hidden from view, though the values will still be there.



8 Goal seek

Goal seeking is a quick cheat. Imagine you have a widget to sell. It cost you so much and you want to sell it at a price of £4.99. How many would you have to sell to make a profit of £10,000? Well, with goal seeking, such things are easy. The goal seek will change the value of one variable until the target cell reaches the desired value. In this case the profit cell is the target and the variable would be the cell containing the sales data. Easy! The tool will even pop the calculated value in the correct cell at the end if you want!