

Tips and tricks

You've mastered the basics, now it's time to acquire 34 good habits to work more effectively – get more from Writer, Calc, Impress and Base right away!

OpenOffice.org suite

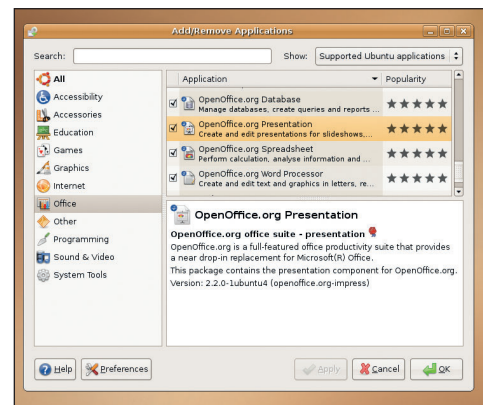
1 Styles on your keyboard

Difficulty: Hard It's one thing spending time adjusting the *OOo* styles to fit your needs, but it's quite another to be bothered to apply those styles everywhere they are needed! And admittedly it's a bit of a pain to take your hands off the keyboard, point and click your mouse on a style, then carry on typing, so it might be surprising that *OOo* doesn't allow keyboard shortcuts for styles. But here's the thing: it *does* let you apply keyboard shortcuts, but it takes a bit of hacking. First, set up your styles just as you want them. Then go to Tools > Macros > Record Macro, and click the style you want to apply. Now click the floating Stop Recording button and save your macro as "ApplyingStyleXYZ" (you can't use spaces in your names, remember!). You've basically made *OOo* write a little program to apply that style for you. Now for the magic: click Tools > Customize, select the Keyboard tab, then scroll down the list of shortcut keys until you find one you like, eg Ctrl+Shift+A. In the bottom part of the

window, choose OpenOffice.org Macros > user > Standard > Module1 from the Category list, then you should see your macro name appear in the Function list. Choose that, then click Modify – this assigns the selected macro function to the selected shortcut key, essentially making Ctrl+Shift+A apply your style immediately.

2 Per-word spell checking

Difficulty: Medium This is another powerful *OOo* feature that's hidden away in an unlikely place: per-word spell checking means that you can mix and match languages in a single document, and, as long as you tell *OOo* which languages the words come from, it will spell-check them all at the same time. To set up a specific language for a word, sentence, paragraph or other section of a document, select the text you want to change then choose Format > Character from the menu. Under the Font tab of the window that appears, look for the Language selection box, and change it to whatever you want!



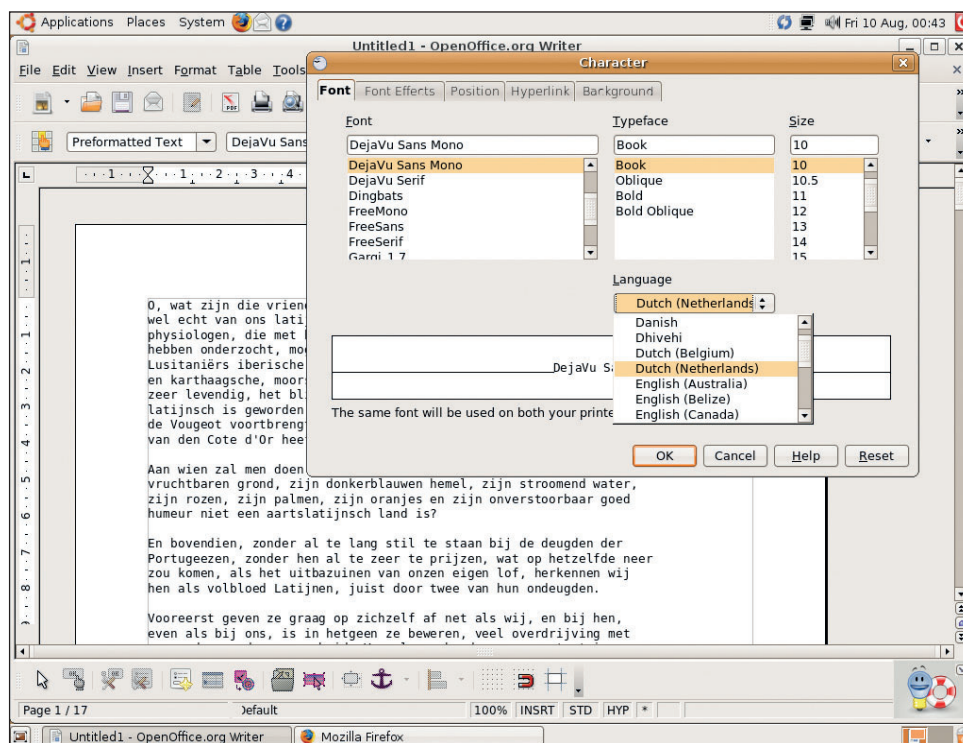
› If you installed *OpenOffice.org* using a Linux-based package manager, there's no need to uninstall it before upgrading.

3 Quick picture fixes

Difficulty: Medium Sooner or later you'll find yourself working in *OOo* and struggling with an image. Maybe its colours aren't quite right, or it's not sharp enough – it doesn't matter, because *OOo* has simplified image editing functionality built in, located under the Picture toolbar. If you don't see the Picture toolbar when you drop a picture in your document, try choosing View > Toolbars > Picture from the menu. This toolbar has a small selection of filters (Sharpen, Blur, etc), but the most important bit of it is the Color dialog – its icon is a small rainbow with a hand over it. This lets you adjust the red, green and blue parts of your picture, but also the brightness, contrast and gamma values – it's perfect for making quick tweaks!

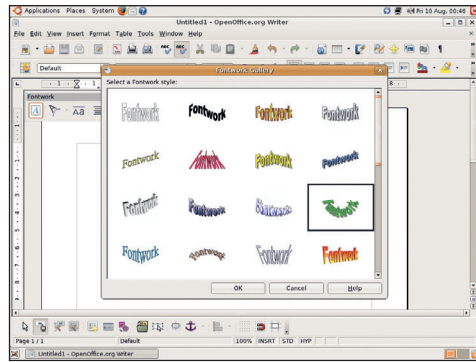
4 Uninstall before upgrade

Difficulty: Easy Although we've included a recent version of *OpenOffice.org* with this guide, the *OOo* developers release new versions quite frequently – usually at least once a month. These versions come in three main varieties: major releases (eg 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0), minor releases (eg 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) and point releases (eg 2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.2.9). Major releases contain the most new functionality, whereas point releases add nothing except bug fixes and security updates. However, regardless of what version upgrade you install, it is generally recommended that you uninstall your current



› *OOo* checks all your words in your default language, but you can specify other languages for specific words, sentences and paragraphs.

release of *OpenOffice.org* before installing the new one – make sure and backup your files first, though! The exception to this is if you installed using a Linux package manager, because you can use that to upgrade *OOo* without removing the current version first.



› **Fontwork: a little restraint goes a long way.**

5 Fancy FontWork

Difficulty: Easy *WordArt* is the *Microsoft Office* system for drawing fancy text in documents. Well, we say “fancy”, but really *WordArt* tends to be overused, and, let’s face it, no matter *how* you report Year End Revenue Report for FY06/07, it’s still going to put people to sleep!

Still, if you’d like to try the *OpenOffice.org* equivalent to *WordArt*, you should look for *Fontwork* – try going to View > Toolbars > Fontwork to bring up the toolbar. Click the small “A in a box” icon to choose what kind of *Fontwork* design you want to add to your document. Once added, double-click the text and replace the default with something else to see how it looks. *Fontwork* has some pretty impressive advanced options, including the ability to render fonts in 3D with accurate lighting! But remember this all needs to be weighed up against the question: is this piece of *Fontwork* actually making my documents more useful, or does it just look pretty?

6 Embedding complex objects

Difficulty: Hard Reading through this magazine you’ll have seen how you can insert various types of media into your documents, but you might not have realised just how much media *OOo* supports. For example, did you know that you can embed live Java applets into an *OOo* document? It sounds crazy, but it’s true! Look under the Insert > Object menu to see a list of available media, but remember: most of those object types won’t appear when printed, so choose carefully!

7 Re-use good-looking templates

Difficulty: Easy No matter how good you are with *OOo* – and let’s face it, if you’ve made it this far, you’re pretty darn hot – there’s always going to be someone better than you out there. Fortunately, if they send you a document with neat styling and an attractive layout, you can have a look in their document to see if they used a template, and download it yourself if they did! When people use a

template for a document, it automatically shows up at the bottom of the File > Properties dialog. Sometimes you might also find a telling comment in the Description tab of that same dialog box, so make sure and check it out!

9 Skip the branding

Difficulty: Hard Sick of the way you get a splash screen every time you open an *OOo* program? Well, if you can find the *OOo* configuration file on your computer, you can disable it. Windows users should find the configuration file in their *OpenOffice.org* installation directory, under the ‘program’ subdirectory – look for **soffice.ini**. Linux users should look for the **sofficeerc** file. Open that using your text editor, and change this:

Logo=1

...to this...

Logo=0

OOo will now load faster, and take up less screen real estate while it loads – winner!

10 Make OOo feel like home

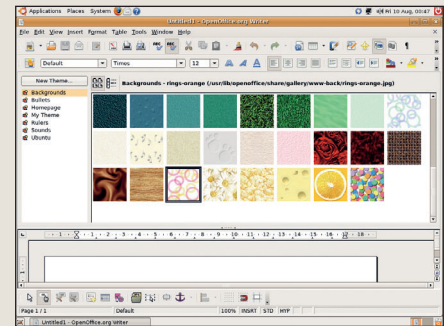
Difficulty: Easy *OpenOffice.org* has more than 20 toolbars full of buttons to press, values to change and thinks to fiddle with, but most of them are hidden by default. If you find there’s a particular feature you use regularly, try enabling the relevant toolbar – you might find it floats by default, but if you grab a floating toolbar and drag it over the other toolbars, you can position it to be part of the main *OOo* window. Don’t over-kill, though – if you enable all the toolbars, *OOo* becomes rather hard to use!

11 Getting the most from PDF

Difficulty: Medium A lot of people think of PDF as being “virtual paper” – it stores a picture of what a document ought to look, then prints it out. This isn’t strictly true: PDF contains a simple computer language that understands how to lay things out on a page, and the graphics are just stored as scalable vectors to save space. When you export to a PDF file, we recommend you at least look at the

8 Get graphical!

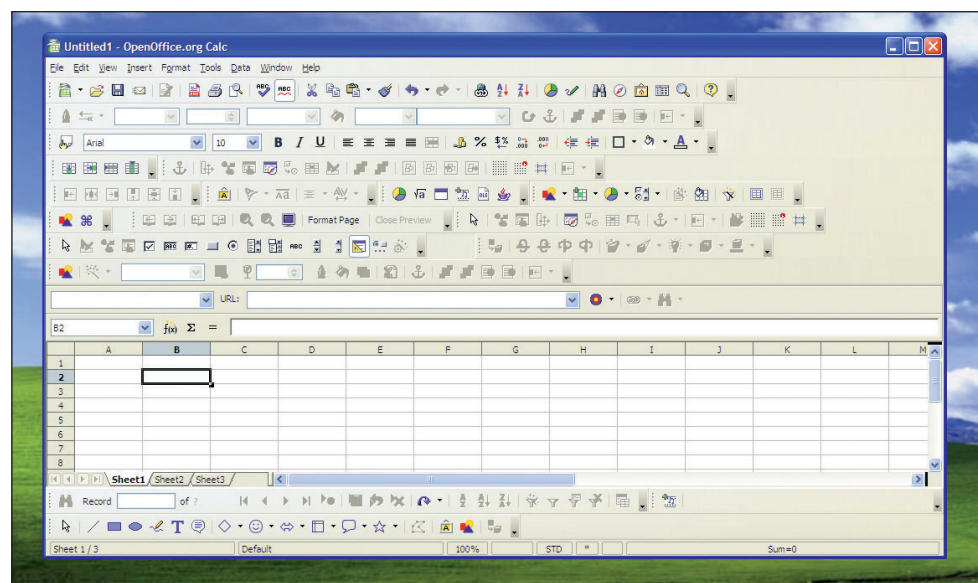
Difficulty: Easy If you’re a happy *OOo* convert and want to see what others are doing with it, can we recommend you investigate *OxygenOffice Professional* first? It’s a free rebuild of *OpenOffice.org*, except it merges in clip art, photos, templates, fonts and more – all for free. If you’d like to learn more and download it for yourself, go here: <https://sourceforge.net/projects/ooop/>.



› Once you’ve grown tired of *OOo*’s built-in selection of graphics, give *OxygenOffice* a try – it has much better clip art and photos on offer for Windows, Mac OS X and Linux!

following four options:

- 1 Lossless JPEG compression** JPEGs are by default “lossy”, which means they look OK in pictures, but as you ramp up the compression levels to save more space, the pictures look worse and worse.
- 2 JPEG compression** is specified in per cent, meaning that 100% means “use the original picture”. 90% is fine for most purposes.
- 3 Export Notes.** If your notes are for internal use, you almost certainly don’t want them appearing on the PDF, so make sure this option is turned off.
- 4 Encryption.** This is enabled under the Security tab, and lets you set a password that users must enter before they can read the document.



› **Calc with all its toolbars enabled and neatly arranged: it’s usable, but why would you want to?**

OpenOffice.org Writer

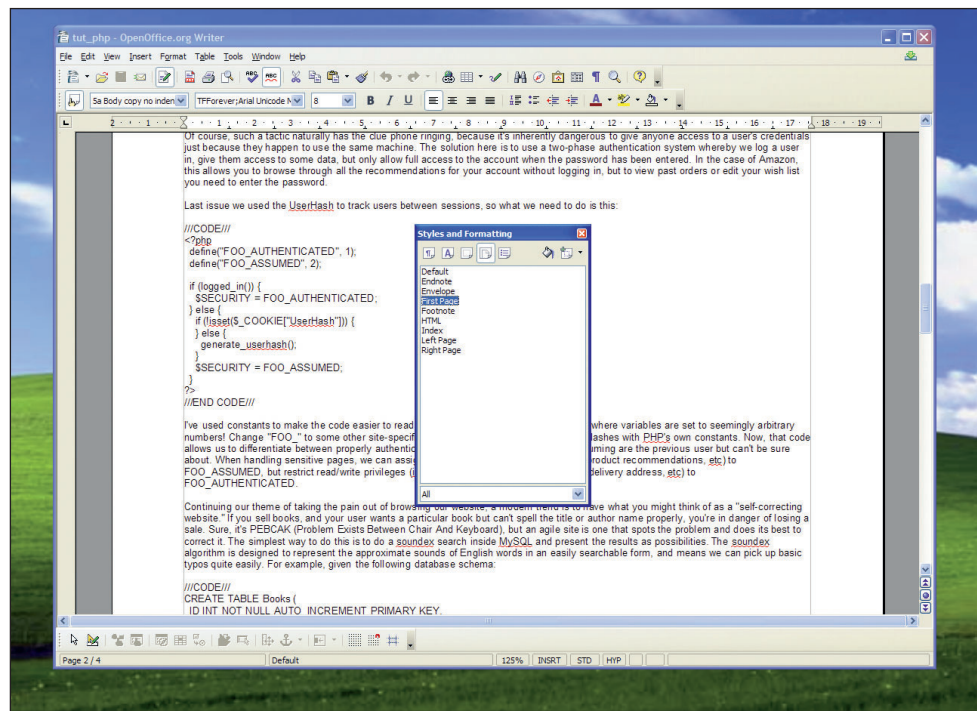
› The Styles and Formatting window has some page styles defined by default, such as index pages, left/right pages and first pages. Make sure you know what they are and how to use them!

12 Easy Lorem Ipsum

Difficulty: Easy OK, here's a quickie for you: if you want to add some dummy text to your page, type "dt" (without the quotes) and press F3 – it's not quite the traditional *lorem ipsum* text that publishers normally use, but it fills the gap nicely and should make your page look pretty complete. Note, though, that the dummy text *OOo* provides is real English text rather than a page full of XXXs – if you're not careful it might easily be confused with finished text, and might get printed!

13 Fine-grained protection

Difficulty: Medium You've probably already noticed that *OOo* can protect your documents with passwords, but did you know it also has much more finely grained protections available? Well, it does – but it's hidden so cleverly that most people don't know it's even there. In *Writer*, you can make individual *words* password-protected if you really want to, although usually this facility is reserved for protecting whole paragraphs. When you lock down a paragraph in this way, the rest of the document remains editable by anyone – it's only the protected section that becomes read-only – very handy for business documents. To add protection, select the text you want to keep safe and click Insert > Section. Under the Write Protection header



options, choose Protect and optionally also choose With Password – and that's it.

14 Make your spaces unbreakable!

Difficulty: Easy To stop *OOo* wrapping your text at the end of a line, try inserting non-breaking spaces by holding down the Control key (Command on OS X) before pressing space. For example, if "Hello World"

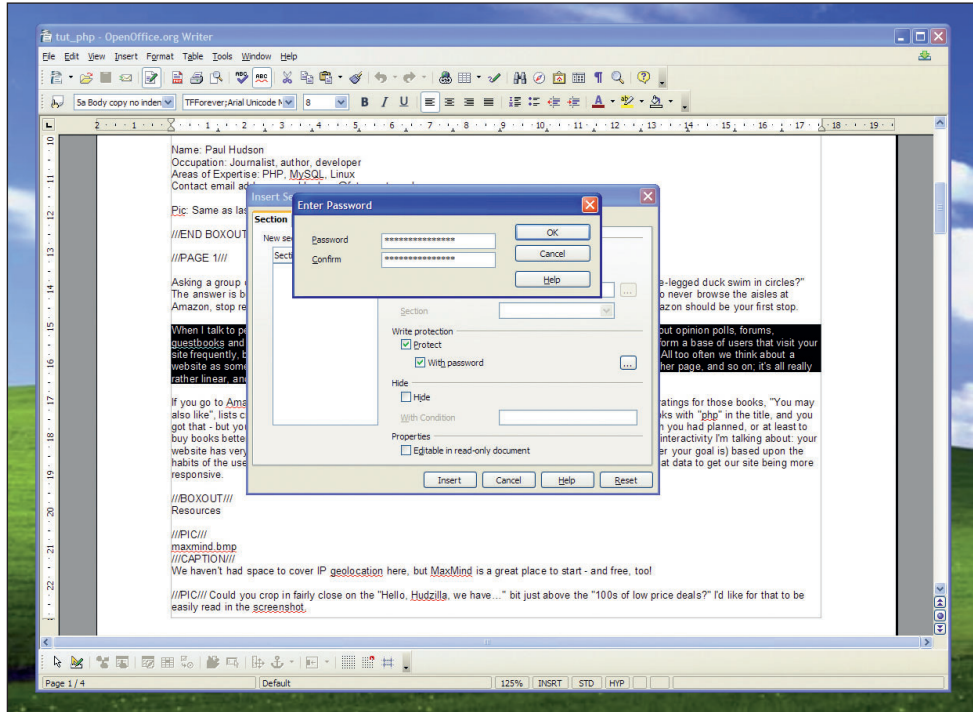
appears at the end of a line, "Hello" will appear on the first line and "World" will get pushed onto the second line. Adding a non-breaking space to that means that "Hello" will always be on the same line as "World", even though there is a space between the two. Magic!

15 Add custom link text

Difficulty: Medium Here's one that annoys even the most veteran of *OpenOffice.org* users: when you type a link into *OOo*, it automatically turns it into a clickable hyperlink. So how can you go back and change the link text to something other than the URL? Most people try clicking on the link in various different ways, but all that usually does is open the link in your browser several times! The smart way to do it is to look down in the *Writer* status bar – do you see about two-thirds of the way to the right of the screen, it says "HYP"? Click that, and it will change to "SEL" – you can now select the text of hyperlinks and modify them to read whatever you want. Just click SEL again to go back to HYP mode.

16 First page headers

Difficulty: Medium Ever found you've managed to get the styles for your *Writer* document just right, only to think "damn, I wish I could make the front page look a bit different to the others..."? Well, now you can! The Styles and Formatting window (press F11 to show or hide it) splits its styles up into various categories: Paragraph Styles, Character Styles, Frame Styles, Page Styles and List Styles. The Page Styles list can be accessed by clicking the fourth button in the Styles and Formatting window. The default page style is called Default, cunningly enough, but you'll notice there's also a First Page style in there that you can adjust to fit your needs. To apply the style, place the system caret (that's the name for the flashing text entry bar) on your first page, then choose the First Page style. Your other pages should



› You can set a password on an entire *Writer* document, or just one small part so that people can edit most of the document, but not the parts you specify.

“OpenOffice.org lets you Find & Replace by Style, which makes formatting of documents a swift and straightforward process compared with having to do it all by hand.”

retain the Default styling, but if they don't just select them all and choose Default.

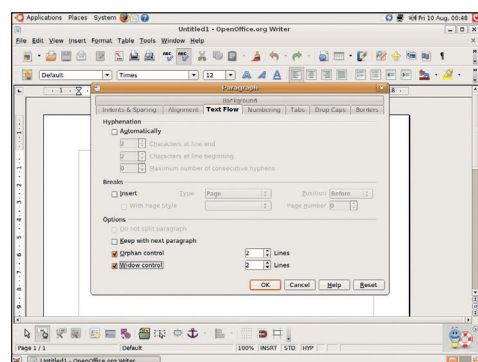
17 Working with textual tables

Difficulty: Medium If someone sends a table of data to you in text format, either as part of an email message or by using the plain-text .txt format, you need to call on *OOo*'s data conversion tools to help you out! *OOo* can convert text into tables depending on what characters are used to separate the data. To try it out, select your plain-text data and choose Table > Convert > Text To Table. This will prompt you to choose whether your data includes a header field, whether it needs to be formatted, and so on – you can just ignore that. You can also create text from a table by reversing the operation, which is particularly helpful if you want to rearrange data quickly.

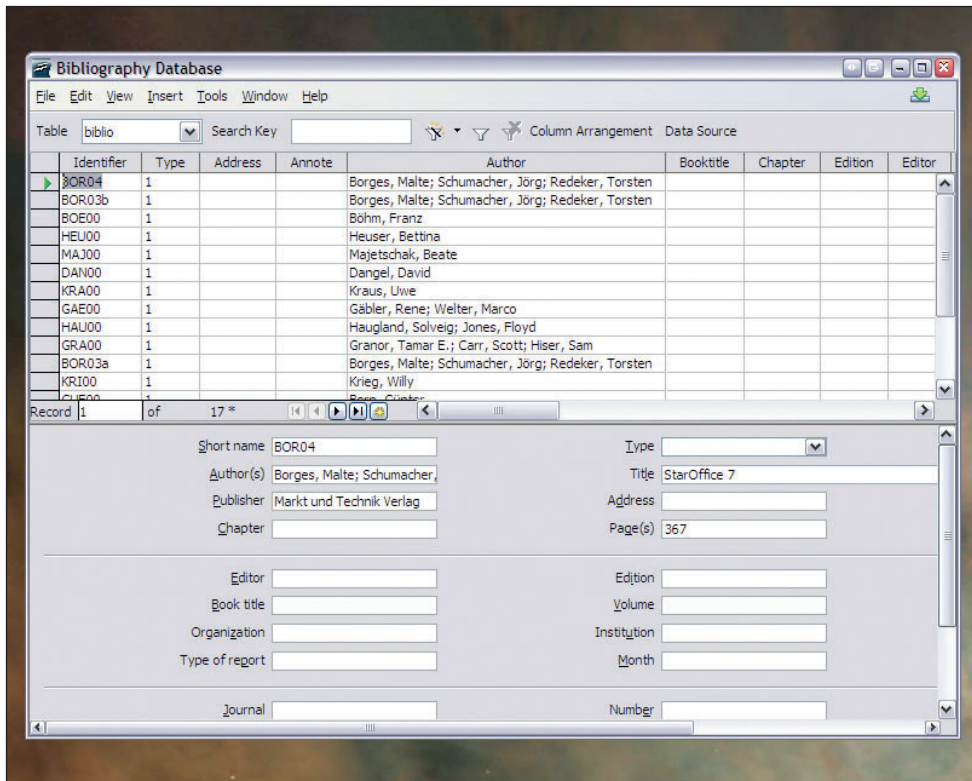
18 Back to imperial

Difficulty: Easy Perhaps owing to its roots as a German office suite, *OpenOffice.org* defaults to using centimetres for all its measurements in all its tools. If you're more of an imperial measurement aficionado, don't fret: you can cast off *OOo*'s metric horrors and replace them with a measurement unit of your own choice – go to Tools > Options > OpenOffice.org Writer > General, where you'll be able to dump centimetres forever!

19 Help the widows and orphans



▶ Make *Writer* take care of orphans and widows for you automatically by changing your paragraph text flow settings.



Difficulty: Easy There are two things that make magazine proofreaders pull their hair out: orphans and widows, and spelling errors. OK, so there are three things that make them pull their hair out. And late text arriving from writers. And stale style guides. And art staff's inability to make the page design more flexible to accommodate the written content. And... well, OK – all sorts of stuff makes them angry, but lets deal with the orphans and widows for now! An orphan in the publishing world is any word that appears on a line by itself at the end of a paragraph, and a widow is a part of a sentence that finishes a paragraph that runs over to the start of a new page or column – or indeed a title without any text beneath it, like the one for this very tip! Both look bad, but rather than making creative use of empty line breaks, you should let *Writer* do the hard work for you – go to Format > Paragraph > Text Flow, and make sure Orphan Control and Widow Control are both enabled.

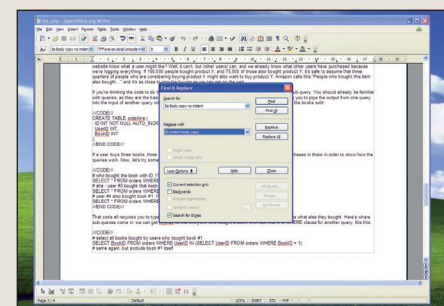
21 Book page numbering

Difficulty: Medium If you've tried adding page numbers to your document, you'll have found that it's pretty easy to make them appear in the bottom-right-hand corner of each page automatically. But while that's fine for stacked pages, what about if you want to show your document as if it were a book or a magazine, where there's a left-hand page and a right-hand page? Yes, the easy fix is just to make the page numbers centred, but a smarter fix is to use the Left Page and Right Page page styles in the Styles and Formatting window. To get fully automatic results, modify the Left Page style so that the next page style chosen is automatically Right Page, and vice versa. To do that, right-click a style, choose Modify, then set the Next Style option under the Organizer tab.

▶ *Writer* uses the power of the *OpenOffice.org* database application *Base* to manage the bibliography references within your documents.

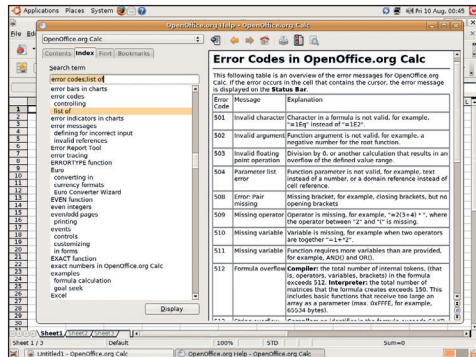
20 Style police

Difficulty: Hard *OpenOffice.org*, like most programs, has a Find & Replace dialog box that lets you search for one value in your text and replace it with another. Fair enough – that's a pretty common feature. But *OOo* also lets you Find & Replace by style, which means you can say thing like “find me all paragraphs with the style ‘FizzBuzz’ and change them so they use the style ‘Whizzbuzz’ right away!” You can also use the Find & Replace dialog to search for text using regular expressions and other advanced searches, but they are definitely out of this book's remit! To search and replace by style, go to Edit > Find & Replace, click More Options, then choose Search For Style.



▶ Search and replace text, or, with a few extra clicks, styles – choose one old style you don't want any more, and *OOo* will replace it with a new style for you!

OpenOffice.org Calc



Search Calc's help for "error codes", then choose 'list of' to see plain-English translations of Calc's error code numbers.

22 Decoding messages

Difficulty: Medium Your computer: "Error 513: String overflow." You: "What? I've installed dictionaries for 100 different languages and that's the most helpful text you can give me?!" Yes, OOo's error messages are cryptic to the extreme, with Calc's being a particularly grim example. But never feature: your built-in OOo documentation has a complete list of error codes for your reference, should you ever succumb to one. But we hope you don't...

23 Spot the blanks

Difficulty: Hard Computers can find, sort and juggle data easily enough, so it's no surprise that they can also perform some visual inspections of data to make that even faster. Take Calc, for example. If you have a

spreadsheet that tracks the last 1000 days of employee absence for your 1000 employees, that's a lot of data to have to check through by hand if someone asks the question "can you tell me how many days were taken off sick in total?" And yet Calc jumps to the rescue with the magic **COUNTBLANK()** function. To use this, just specify the cell range Calc should count, and it will return the total number of cells in that range that had no value provided. For example **=COUNTBLANK(A1:J10)** will count all the rows and columns between A1 and J10 to see how many blanks there are.

24 Keep a note of it

Difficulty: Easy Both Writer and Calc support a 'notes' system where any document editor can leave little messages to others embedded into the documents. For example, a note in Writer automatically embeds your text as a small yellow box in the document – hovering over it shows the contents of the box in brief, whereas double-clicking reveals all the text and lets you change it if you want to. In Calc, the note taking system is a bit more immediate – as soon as you click Insert > Note you'll be prompted to type some text into the note. Notes in Calc are marked with a tiny little red colour in the corner of an annotated cell – just hover your mouse over there for a second or two and the note will appear.

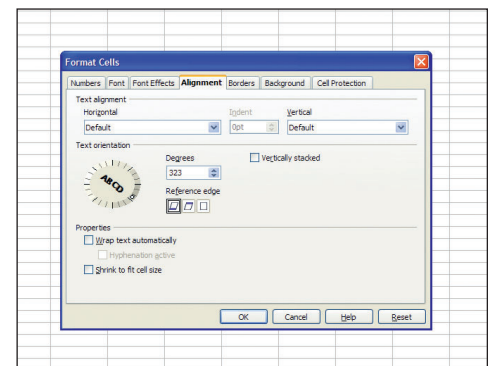
25 Making a # of it

Difficulty: Easy So, you've spent hours finely crafting your spreadsheet to factor in every possible expense for the next ten years. But suddenly some of your rows change from healthy

values to be "###" - what could be wrong? Don't worry, your data is safe – OOo shows ### whenever the size of a cell's contents are too big to fit into the assigned cell. To fix it, just drag that cell's column header so that it has more space, and you should see its normal number in there just fine.

26 Choose your alignment

Difficulty: Easy The key to making your Calc sheets look perfect is to take full advantage of OOo's feature set. For example, if you have one long, thin column that contains the occasional heading (eg January, February) for sets of rows, the best way to show that data is to have the month heading rotated vertically so it sits directly alongside the cells it's referring to. To make that change, go to Format > Cells > Alignment, enter 90 into the Degrees box and click OK.



Enter a text rotation value into the Degrees box, or just drag the dot around the circle to get a quick preview of how the text will turn.

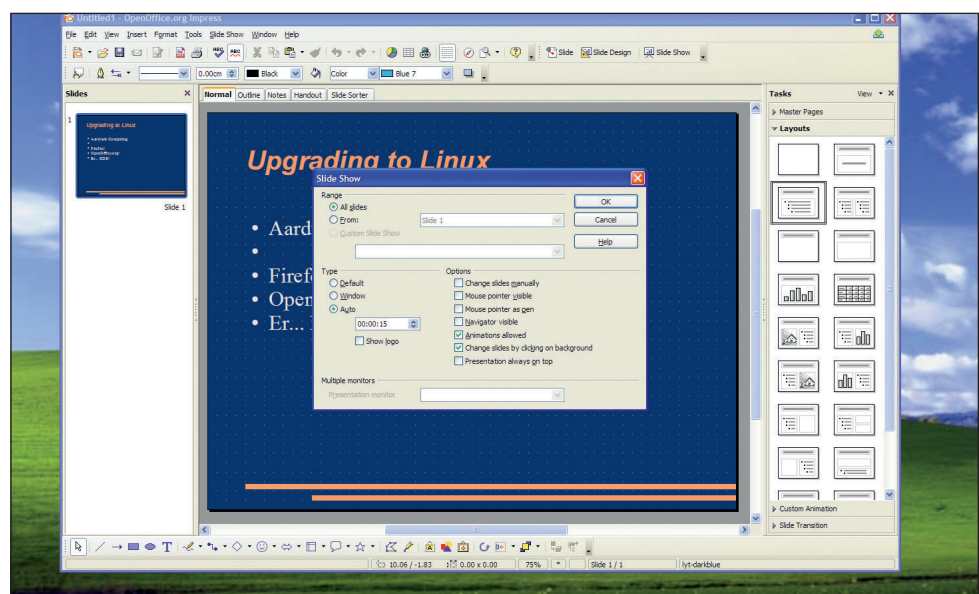
OpenOffice.org Impress

27 Knock out the background

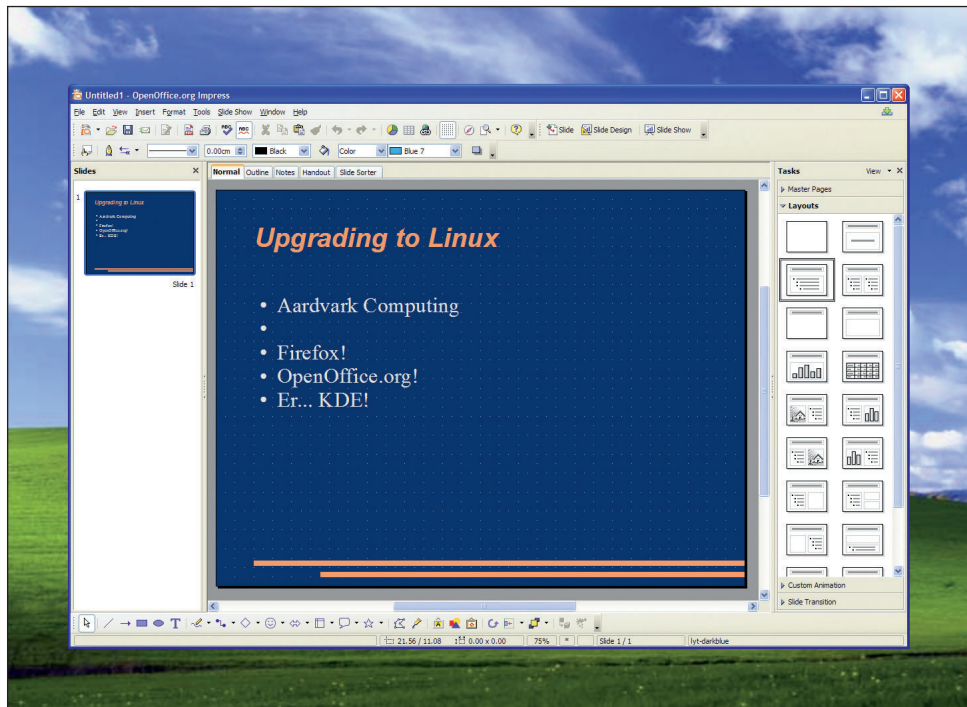
Difficulty: Easy The business presentation we showed you how to make back on p54 had white text on a black background, which looks quite stylish on screen. But when printed, it looks poor – and wastes a huge amount of ink, too! So, when printing these kinds of slides, may we humbly recommend you try changing the print quality to black and white inside OOo? This forces Impress to use a white background with black text, overriding whatever values are used in the presentation.

28 Never-ending slideshows

Difficulty: Medium You can get great impact from your presentations without even being there to present them! OOo Impress can automatically move between slides after a given time limit, and can even auto-loop your presentation with a delay at the end so it's not repeating 24/7. To make slides transition automatically, change its Advance Slide option from the Tasks pane to read "2 sec"; then go to Slide Show > Slide Show Settings and set the



Sick of talking in front of an Impress presentation? Use the automatic slide changing system to present your talk without you!



› **Aligning objects isn't easy to do by eye, but if you turn on the grid in Impress or Draw as shown here, you'll be able to see exactly where things are on the screen in relation to one another.**

Type to be auto. That last part is the amount of time Impress ought to wait until it accepts a new client.

29 Grid lock

Difficulty: Easy After using *Impress* or *Draw* for a few minutes, you'll already have noticed that all its shapes are naturally placed onto invisible grid lines so they line up neatly. Well, if you'd like to see that grid so you know what *OOo* is up to, right-click on a blank area of your document, and choose **Grid > Visible Grid**. You'll also see the option in there for disabling grid support if you really hate it!

30 Printing your handouts

Difficulty: Easy Obviously worried that it wasn't been as confusing as its *OOo* siblings, *Impress* makes it remarkably tricky to print out handouts without also printing out full copies of your slides. The magic options to fix this annoyance lie under the **File > Print** menu – click the **Options** button, then disable **Drawing** and enable **Handouts** from the **Contents** menu. Yes, you can also override the colour option here to get black and white (see tip number 27).

“Still worried about giving that important presentation at work? Use our five steps to success on p58 and it will go just fine!”

29 Lost in space

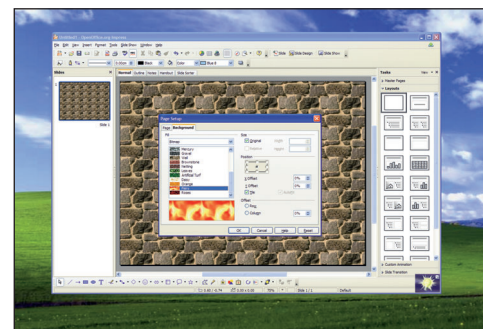
Difficulty: Easy If you want to distribute some shapes equally over a drawing or an *Impress* presentation, select all the shapes, right-click and choose **Distribute**. The **Horizontal – Center** option should do what you're looking for!

32 Toggle slide visibility

Difficulty: Easy We've already seen how easy it is to create custom presentations showing off all of your slides except the few you're not happy with. Well, if you want to remove a slide without outright deleting it, here's an even easier solution: select the slide(s) you want removed, then click **Show/Hide Slide** from the main menu.

33 Hang up some wallpaper

Difficulty: Easy Irrespective of the way your slide design works with your master, you can override the master and customise your background colour until you heart is content! If your master has no background of interest, you can change the current background colour to flat colours, cross-hatching or even a texture by using the **Format > Page > Background** menu. Textured wallpapers might look kinda cool at first, but remember that you'll be layering text over the top of it, and you want your presentation to look professional!

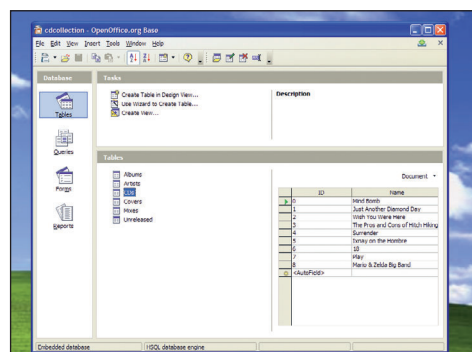


› **Textured slide backgrounds: good for you if you own shares in an opticians; otherwise, avoid them, and your audience will thank you heartily for it!**

OpenOffice.org Base

34 Knee deep in SQL

Difficulty: Medium Creating tables and queries using the designers and wizards is all very well if you are a desktop user without much in the way of requirements, but if you're a demanding server admin who wants to treat *Base* as nothing more than a pretty front-end to your database server, the SQL view is perfect for you. To get to this, go to **Tools > SQL** from the *Base* menu bar, and you'll be prompted to enter your SQL queries. You do know SQL, right? If not, this isn't really the right place for you! This view is generally only for people who have SQL queries they made elsewhere and want to import into *OpenOffice.org* without having to use the fussy query editor. **LXP**



› **If you're using Base as a front-end for SQL or another database, you'll need some additional knowledge beyond the scope of this guide.**

