

Converting from MS Office

Already an experienced Word or Excel user? OpenOffice.org is nothing to be afraid of...

With *Office 2007* Microsoft has drastically redesigned the user interfaces of *Word*, *Excel* and the other *Office* programs. Gone are the standard menu bars and toolbars – they've been replaced with "ribbons" that show you a limited selection of options based on what other users like to do. So, all those people who have spent the last decade mastering the *Word* user interface are now about to find themselves very lost indeed, but *OOo* provides a solution: it looks and works just like *Microsoft Office* used to, which means you can jump ship to *OOo* and transfer all your skills across without having to learn what ribbons are.

However, there are a few "gotchas" when switching to *OpenOffice.org* – things that can catch you out because they work in slightly different ways to *Microsoft Office*. In these two pages we'll be covering the most common problems people tend to experience when switching, so if you're a regular *Office* user and want to become a regular *OpenOffice.org* user, read on...

› **Microsoft Office 2007 has introduced a wholly new user interface that confuses long-time users, which is one more reason to try OpenOffice.org...**

Choose your file format

As mentioned back on p6, *OOo* uses the OpenDocument family of file formats as standard, which is an open standard that lets anyone create, open and save data easily. This is quite different to the *Microsoft Office* standards, such as .doc, which is closed and Microsoft-only. Although *OOo* does a good job of opening

these proprietary formats, we'd recommend you stick with OpenDocument for your own files, and only change to the Microsoft formats when sending your work to people who don't have *OOo*; for more on this, turn to page 86.

The default file save format is set under Tools > Options. On the left of the options window, open the tree marked Load/Save, then choose General. At the bottom of that dialog you will see Default File Format, which is where you can choose how you want

“Unlike Microsoft Office, OpenOffice.org is updated several times a year.”

the different *OOo* apps to save your files. For example, you might want *Writer* to choose the *Microsoft Word 97/2000/XP* format, which saves your work as a .doc file that any other *Office* or *OpenOffice.org* user can read.

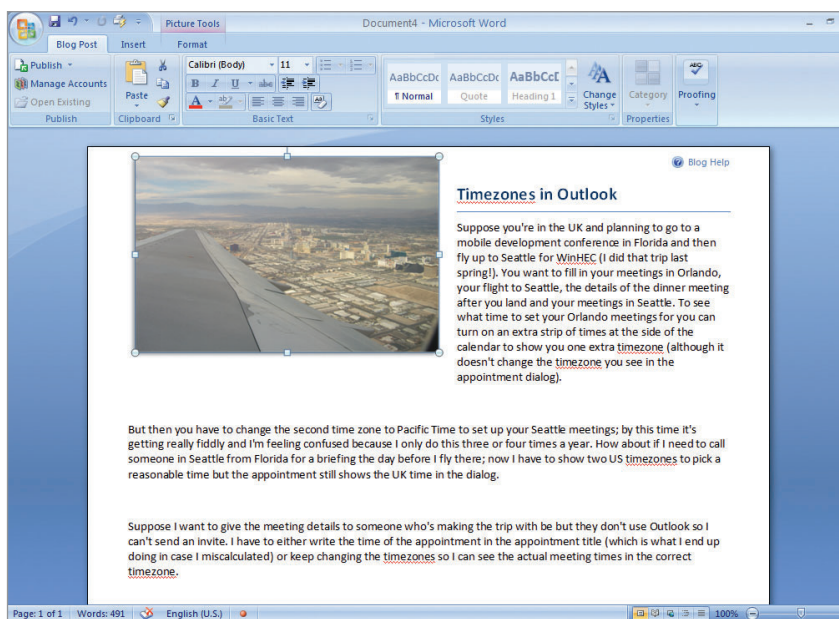
If you want to change your file format on a file-by-file basis, click the Save As Type selection box when saving a file – you can choose the exact format to use for the current file only.

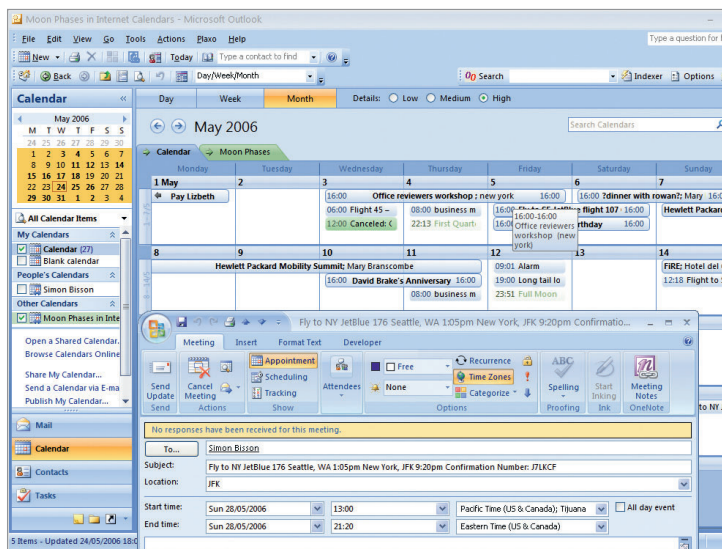
Working with styles

No matter what *OOo* application you're in, press F11 to bring up the Styles And Formatting window, or go to Format > Styles And Formatting in the menu bar. This is where you can apply styles to elements in your document, such as making a line of text into a heading. From a user's point of view, these are just quick ways to make some text large and bold, some other text italic, and so on, but they serve two much more important purposes:

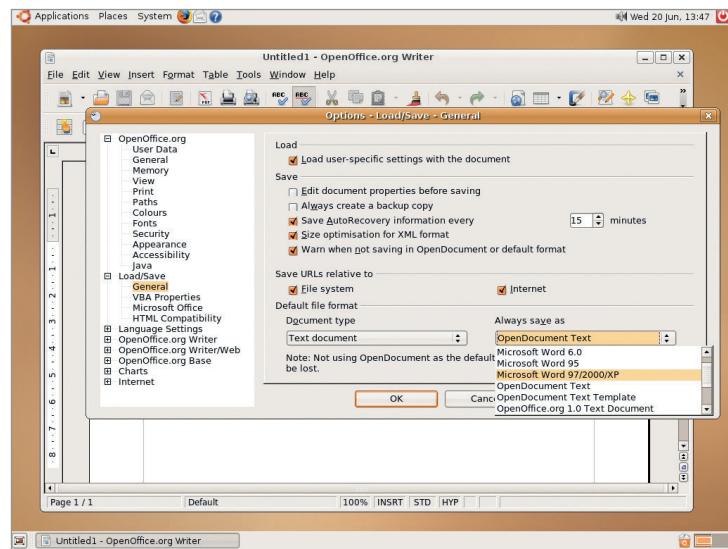
- 1 If you use the Heading1 style on all your page headings, then changing the Heading 1 style will automatically update the formatting for all your page headings. This saves you having to change the headings individually, which is quite painful!
- 2 When generating automatic page content, *OOo* reads these styles as structure. For example, if you use Heading 1 for your top-level headings, Heading2 for your second-level headings, and so on, then *OOo Writer* will be able to generate a table of contents for you automatically, which saves a lot of work!

The default selection of styles in *Writer* is quite extensive, and you probably don't need to worry about Heading5 through to Heading9, but the others are very useful. To apply a style to some text, just highlight the text with your mouse and click the style. You can modify the formatting of a style by right-clicking on it and





➤ Even if your *Microsoft Office 2007* interface looks as cluttered and busy as this, you'll be able to replace it completely with *OpenOffice.org* functionality!



➤ If you always have to work with *Microsoft Office* users, change the default save format for *OpenOffice.org*.

choosing Modify. A window will appear where you can change every aspect of the style – should it use drop caps? How should its text flow? Should it have a background colour? What style should automatically come next? You can create new styles if you want to, but it's much easier to modify an existing one to suit your needs! There's more details about using styles on page 22.

Using Wizards

Similar to *MS Office*, *OOo* ships with a number of 'wizard' tools to help you get started with common projects. For example, *Writer* has built-in wizards for letters, faxes and agendas, which kickstart your document with some common formatting. But *OOo* changes the mix a little bit by having some wizards available through the menu bar (look under File > Wizards), and some that run when a program starts. The *Writer* and *Calc* wizards are all available from the menu, but in *Impress* – where style plays a much bigger part in making your presentation look right – the wizard runs automatically when they program starts, so that you can choose a template for your presentation. However, *Impress* does share with *PowerPoint* the apparently inalienable decision that all presentation templates must look awful – if you don't believe us, try seeing the default selection for yourself!

Almost as if it were designed confuse, *OOo* also uses its wizards system for installing new dictionaries and fonts – again, look under the File > Wizards menu to find this functionality.

Quirky options

There are two *OpenOffice.org* features that many people learn to hate pretty quickly, but sometimes it can be quite frustrating finding where they are disabled. The two features are *OOo's* automatic link highlighting for URLs, and *Writer's* automatic word completion system that tracks which words you type and tries to help you complete them faster in the future. To turn off the first option, go to Tools > AutoCorrect, and choose the Options tab from the window that appears. Look in the list of options for URL Recognition, then uncheck the box under both the M and T headings. To disable the word completion, go back to the same window and choose the Word Completion tab. Make sure all the checkboxes on that tab are disabled, and you should be all set.

Working with macros

As you may know, Microsoft has had quite a bad rap over the years thanks to its *Office* macros – little programs people write to automate tasks. These are very helpful for performing

repetitive tasks quickly, but the problem is that hackers caught on to them and found that they could write damaging programs and embed them inside otherwise innocuous *Word* documents. So, you can imagine that the *OOo* developers are very hesitant about adding support for *Office* documents to *OOo*, because they don't want the same virus problems!

To work around this problem, *OOo* reads in macro data stored in *Office* documents, but doesn't execute it. If you want to create your own macros using the built-in macro recorder, *OOo* saves it in its own format, which is more secure against problems like viruses. In short: if you're using macros, you can often use them in *OOo* too, but we'd recommend against it.

Installing updates

On most releases of *OpenOffice.org* (the exception being packaged Linux versions), *OpenOffice.org* can check for updates to itself, and, if they exist, download and install them for you. To check for updates, go to the Help > Check For Updates menu item – if there any available, it will offer to take you to the *OOo* website where you can download the latest version. If you're on Linux and have installed *OOo* through your package manager, you'll need to use that same system to update the software because the menu item is probably hidden.

Unlike *Microsoft Office*, *OpenOffice.org* gets updated several times a year. Usually the updates are "minor" releases, which means that only the first number after the decimal place changes – eg 2.0, 2.1, 2.2, etc. These reflect minor feature updates and bug fixes. If you get a major version change, eg 3.0, then that means there are substantial new features on offer – but a 3.0 release isn't likely for quite some time yet! Please keep in mind that this guide applies only to *OpenOffice.org* 2.2 – if you upgrade to a newer version, particularly if its a major version number change, then you might find some features, added, removed or changed, and vary from what this guide says. **LXFP**

Creating formulas

Ever wondered what that *OpenOffice.org Math* program does? Well, it's an advanced formula editor for mathematics, designed to let you create all sorts of advanced formulas in the right styling – as you might expect to find on a school blackboard, for instance. Unless you're into your maths or physics, the chances are you won't have much call to use *Math* very frequently!