

# MULTIMEDIA TRAINING KIT

## INTRODUCTION TO OPENOFFICE.ORG WRITER HANDOUT

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### ***About this document***

These materials are part of the Multimedia Training Kit (MMTK). The MMTK provides an integrated set of multimedia training materials and resources to support community media, community multimedia centres, telecentres, and other initiatives using information and communications technologies (ICTs) to empower communities and support development work.

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## Introduction

In this unit we will be developing all the basic skills you need for creating word processed documents using OpenOffice.org Writer. This is the word processing arm of the OpenOffice.org suite – a collection of open source office productivity tools.

This unit does not cover every aspect of OOO Writer, but should leave you with enough familiarity and confidence to explore more features on your own.

More specifically we will be looking at:

- Creating new documents: opening, closing and saving options
- Writing: deleting, undoing, copying and pasting
- Formatting: editing fonts, paragraphs, colouring, and styles
- Adjusting the settings for the way you like to work: spelling, viewing and page sizing
- Problem solving – how to find solutions not covered in this unit, understanding the menu-bars, and using Help.

## Creating new documents

All word processing work is organised into documents – these are the separate pieces of work that you write. You may think of them as:

- Letters
- Reports
- Minutes of meetings
- Project proposals
- CVs / resumés
- Any piece of work that needs documenting separately from other work

The blue bar at the top of the page displays the **file name** of the document:



In the example above, **mmtk\_ooo\_writer\_1\_handout** is the name the writer gave this documents; **.sxw** is the file extension which tells you that it is an OOO Writer file.

In general all the work we do on computers gets stored as units called files.

- Word processed files are called documents
- Picture files are called images
- Matrix files are called spreadsheets

The document's file name is the name that the file will go by once it is stored in a folder in your computer's memory. It needs to be something which allows you to easily identify its contents, and that distinguishes it appropriately from other files.

The empty document (rather like a blank page) is ready for you to start writing on straight away. The cursor blinks in the top left hand corner of the page, a margin's width away from the edge of the page. This is where your work begins and it will be committed to the computer's memory as soon as you save the document.

Every time you add new text or edit old text, you are changing the document from the version which was last saved. In order for those changes to be securely recorded in the computer's memory, you must always remember to save your work.

There are circumstances, however, where simple replacement is not appropriate. These include:

- Needing to create different versions of the document e.g. versions altered for different readers.
- Needing to save the document in a different location from the original one – perhaps on a floppy disk or CD, or network space, so that you or others can access it from another workspace.

To keep a copy of the unchanged (previous version) document as well as a copy of this newly edited one, you must **Save As**.

#### **Review**

**File > New > Text Document** : creates a new empty, untitled document for you to work on.

**File > Open** : opens the file (document) that you locate in your computer's filing system. The last saved version of the document will open.

**File > Close** : closes the document you are working on. If changes have been made since your last save, you will be prompted to save or discard those changes.

**File > Save** : saves the document you are currently working on, replacing the previously saved version with this updated one – in the same place with the same name.

**File > Save As...** : saves an updated version of a document in a different location, with a different name, from the previously saved version.

## ***Writing: deleting, undoing, copying and pasting***

It is inevitable that as you write, you will occasionally make typing errors. You may also rethink the wording of some sentences, or indeed whole paragraphs, when you review your work. Ooo Writer offers various ways to delete, rewrite and move text around.

The following are probably already familiar to you:

The **Delete** key deletes the character in front of the cursor.

The **Backspace** key deletes the character behind the cursor.

Deleting one character at a time may be appropriate for small typos, but there are more efficient ways of **editing** bigger chunks of text. Highlighting the text you want to remove is often a more efficient way of working. This can be done:

- By dragging your mouse across the relevant section
- By double-clicking on a word – to highlight the word
- By triple-clicking on a word – to highlight the line that it's in
- By typing **Control + A**, or **Edit > Select All** to highlight the entire document

Once highlighted, text can be

- Deleted using the **Delete** or **Backspace** key
- Dragged to another part of the document using the mouse
- Cut out of the document and pasted back in a different place where the cursor has been positioned, using the **Cut**, **Copy** and **Paste** tools

The actions of cutting text and then pasting it elsewhere involve the selected bits of text being stored on the computer's clipboard – a special part of the computer's memory - which is used for storing pieces of data (words, numbers, pictures, sounds) temporarily, so that they can be easily retrieved for re-use.

We can also copy text onto the computer's clipboard without cutting it out of the document first. Copying is a useful tool for words or sections of the document that you want to repeat elsewhere.

Text which has been **cut** or **copied** will remain in the computer's clipboard memory for pasting into the document wherever you choose, until it is replaced by something else – i.e. until you select some other piece of text and copy it using the copy icon.

Word processing is all about making the work of writing and producing documents easier and more efficient. Ease of use is often about finding ways of working which feel the most comfortable. These ways of working can vary from one person to another, and so OOo Writer often provides a number of different ways of doing exactly the same word processing task. By experimenting with the different methods, you will quickly see which feel most comfortable for your style of working.

See the review table below for alternative ways of carrying out all the tasks we have looked at so far.

Most of the tasks listed can be achieved using any one of three different methods:

- Clicking on a toolbar icon or
- Choosing an item from a menu or
- Typing in a combination of different keys (usually the Control key + one other)

<b>Review</b>			
<b>Task</b>	<b>Toolbar icon</b>	<b>Menu route</b>	<b>Keystroke</b>
New document		File > New > Text Document	Control + n
Open document		File > Open	Control + o
Save document		File > Save	Control + s
Close document		File > Close	Control + w
Select All		Edit > Select All	Control + a
Undo		Edit > Undo	Control + z
Cut		Edit > Cut	Control + x
Copy		Edit > Copy	Control + c
Paste		Edit > Paste	Control + v

## Formatting: fonts and paragraphs

By far the most obviously sophisticated aspect of word processing is the way it allows you to format your work in all kinds of different styles. You can choose which fonts you write your work in, how you space the lines of text, how to display lists of items, which colours your work appears in, which colours it appears on! There are numerous options for styling your document so that it looks the way you want.

### Editing fonts

Fonts refer to the lettering style of your work. OOo Writer lets you control the font style, size and colour for any text in your document. You can choose to keep this the same throughout a document or vary it for different paragraphs, lines, words, or letters. On opening a document you can see what default font has been set by OOo Writer, by looking in the font box on the formatting toolbar.

#### Review

- Changing the font style when the cursor is blinking will affect all text that you type from the point where the cursor blinks, onwards. It will not affect text which is already typed.
- Changing the font style when text is highlighted will affect only that text which is highlighted.

Mastering these methods of changing the font style is relevant for a number of other formatting options. We will use the same procedure to change the font size, emphasis (bold, italic or underlining), and colour.

Remember, these tools are there to help you make your work easier to read, not more confusing.

By emphasising headings using **bold**, and **larger font sizes**, they can stand out and make skim-reading easier.

By *italicising* certain words, you can make it clear that these are key words to check – perhaps they are glossaried or from another language.

Similarly, careful use of **other colours** and **font styles** can make your document eye-catching and give the work a look which conveys a certain mood and style.

Check the review sheet below for alternative methods of formatting:

Review			
Task	Toolbar icon	Menu route	Keystroke
Font style		Format > Character > Font tab	–
Font size		Format > Character > Font tab	–
Font colour		Format > Character > Font tab	–
Font highlight colour		Format > Character > Background tab	–
Bold		Format > Character > Font tab	Control + b
Italic		Format > Character > Font tab	Control + i

Review			
Underline	<u>U</u>	Format > Character > Font Effects tab	Control + u

## Formatting paragraphs

As we have seen text formatting can be applied to an individual character, a selection of words, or an entire document. Paragraph formatting, on the other hand, relates specifically to the layout of an entire paragraph.

It concerns your choices around:

- Line spacing
- Background colouring
- Text justification (left, right, centered, justified)
- Line indentation

Again OpenOffice.org applies default settings for all of these options. So you don't need to set things up before getting on with your document.

The **Format > Paragraph** dialogue box is full of information about the formatting of the paragraph within which the cursor is blinking. And it is this box that you need to return to in order to change that formatting. As with other OpenOffice.org dialogue boxes, it contains a number of tabs, each of which offers ways of altering the settings around an aspect of the paragraph formatting.

Notice how positioning a blinking cursor in any paragraph allows you to change settings for that whole paragraph.

Conversely, highlighting and selecting just a part of the paragraph, will not limit the effect of the formatting to the selection only. It will be applied to the whole paragraph.

Paragraph formatting is always applied to a whole paragraph. In order to understand what the computer understands as the beginning and end of a paragraph, it is helpful to switch on **Non-Printing Characters**. This is done by clicking on the ¶ button on the main toolbar. The button toggles non-printing characters on and off. When they are switched on, a ¶ will be displayed at the end of every paragraph (wherever you have used the enter button to create a paragraph break). You can then easily see the section of text that paragraph formatting will be applied to if you make any changes.

Whilst the paragraph dialogue box works like a control panel for detailed altering of your paragraph, there are more direct ways for changing paragraph basics.

See the chart below for alternative ways of altering basic paragraph settings:

Review			
Task	Toolbar icon	Menu route	Keystroke
Left justified text		Format > Paragraph > Alignment tab	Control + l
Right justified text		Format > Paragraph > Alignment tab	Control + r
Centered text		Format > Paragraph > Alignment tab	Control + e
Justified text		Format > Paragraph > Alignment tab	Control + j
Increase left hand indent		Format > Paragraph > Indents and Spacing tab	–
Background shading		Format > Character > Background tab	–
Single line spacing	=	Format > Paragraph > Indents and Spacing tab	Control + 1
1.5 line spacing	=	Format > Paragraph > Indents and Spacing tab	Control + 5
Double line spacing	=	Format > Paragraph > Indents and Spacing tab	Control + 2

## Putting it all together – understanding styles

Any document you work on will be shaped by a number of sets of formatting decisions. We call these sets **Styles**.

We have seen how the **Default** style set up by OOo Writer applies a group of formats at the same time, to any new document you open.

You can use these existing (pre-defined) OOo Writer styles as they are, or alter their formats. You can also create new styles with other names.

The advantage of applying styles to your document, is that you are dealing with several different formats in one click. See the chart below for the formats that make up some of OOo Writer's styles:

Style name	Spacing	Alignment	Font	Emphasis
Default	Single	Left justified	Arial, 10 pt	No emphasis
Heading1	Single	Centered	Arial, 16 pt	Bold
Footer	Single	Left justified	Arial, 9 pt	No emphasis
Quotation			Thornton, 12 pt	Italic
Subtitle	Single	Centered	Albany, 14 pt	Italic

Whichever style you are working with, it is always possible to override the formatting by manually changing the formatting settings, as we did at the beginning of this section.

## ***Adjusting the settings for the way you like to work***

A large part of successful word processing is finding a comfortable way of working with the tools. The more intuitive you find the way of handling them, the faster and more effectively you'll use them. In this section we will look at various ways of adjusting the OOo Writer working environment.

Your preferences will be informed by:

- Other word processing systems you have used and become accustomed to.
- How good you are at typing and spelling; whether you are working largely in your mother tongue or a foreign language.
- The way in which you plan your work – stream of consciousness first followed by careful redrafting and editing, or careful outline first followed by “final-draft” writing.
- The sorts of documents you tend to write – short memos, decorative invitations, business letters, long reports, meeting minutes, or project proposals.

### **Spelling**

There is a standard spell checker in OOo Writer which you can start by clicking on the icon on the main toolbar:



This works by checking your spelling against a dictionary that comes as part of the OpenOffice.org package. If you have the English version loaded on your system, then the US English dictionary will be set up ready for use. If you want to use another English (e.g. UK) you will have to install that as an extra manually.

To check which dictionaries are installed and to choose the correct one for your document, Choose **Tools > Spellcheck > Check** (this dialogue only appears if the spell checker finds a spelling mistake) then click **Options**. **User-defined dictionaries** lists the available user dictionaries. Mark the user dictionaries that you want to use to check spelling and hyphenation.

### **AutoCorrect/AutoFormat**

As well as the spell checker there are other options available for help with spelling, most of which you can explore in the **AutoCorrect** dialogue box. To access this tabbed dialogue box, click on **Tools > AutoCorrect/AutoFormat**.

A few of the most commonly used features are explained below:

#### ***Replace***

If you switch on the replace tool OOo Writer will correct typing errors as you make them. It will recognise when mistakes are made and correct them as soon as you press the space bar or a punctuation mark on completing the misspelled word.

You can manually add to the list of words that are automatically corrected by using the **Replace** tab in the **AutoCorrect/AutoFormat** dialogue box. You can also add to it as you have your work spell checked. The spell checker gives you the option to add any misspelled words to the AutoCorrect list as it goes through your work.

#### ***Options***

If **AutoCorrect/AutoFormat** is turned on, certain text will automatically be corrected/reformatted as you type. For example, by default if you type two capitals at the beginning of a word (e.g. BEginning) this will be automatically corrected. The **Options** dialogue lets you select which common formatting problems should be automatically corrected.

## **Word completion**

If you switch on the word completion tool, as you type your document, OOo Writer will automatically build up an intelligence about the longer words you tend to use. It will compile a list of any words over 5 letters long that you are using. This list can always be found in the **Word Completion** tab dialogue box.

It will use this intelligence to complete the words you are typing as you type them. You will notice entire words appearing (with remaining letters highlighted in yellow) as you begin typing the first few letters of words contained in the list, e.g.

Autom<sup>atic</sup>

If you want to accept the complete word as suggested by OOo Writer, you must use the **End** or **Enter** key (depending on which was given in the Word Completion dialogue box).

## **Getting to know and customize the OOo Writer workspace**

As you become more familiar with the OOo Writer workspace, you can start to strike a balance between the need to have an uncluttered workspace on the screen and the need to have your favourite tools within easy reach.

This is largely about clearing away the unnecessary tools, and knowing how to find them again, should they become more relevant.

As well as the main toolbars listed in the View menu, there are a number of fly-out toolbars that you can select by long-clicking on the icons that have tiny green arrows in the right hand corner. These include the **Forms**, **Drawing**, and **Stylist** toolbars.

As with the icons on all toolbars, their function can always be revealed by holding the mouse over the icon, without clicking.

Other options on the **View** menu will allow you to hide/include text boundaries and non printing characters. You can also choose to **zoom** in on your text so that it appears bigger on the screen.

## **Navigating OOo Writer on your own**

There are various ways of moving on from this introduction to using OOo Writer.

- Attend a course based on the next unit level
- Study Jean Hollis Weber's **Taming OpenOffice.org Writer**
- Explore, experiment with, and use OOo Writer

This last option is best done by spending time getting to know the menus of the top menu bar and the right-clicking menus.

Understanding how to use OOo Writer is as much about understanding the organisation and logic of the tools as it is about remembering how to operate them.

If you can get a *feel* for the system, you will build up a sound *OOo Writer* knowledge base.

Take the time to play around with these menus and test the different options. Armed with the knowledge of how to save your work (  or Control + s) and how to undo unwanted changes (  or Control + z), there is really very little to worry about whilst you experiment.