



Organise your office with OpenOffice.org

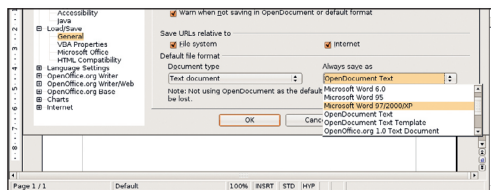
Learn your way around this stylish and effective alternative to *MS Office*.



IF YOU'RE using Linux as your primary desktop, sooner or later you'll want to use *OpenOffice.org*. It competes directly with *Microsoft Office*, and comes with so many features that it would take months to truly master it. If you're like most people, though, you'll only ever use a tiny fraction of the features that come with this office suite – word counts, charts, animations and the like – for which the learning curve is nice and gentle.

OpenOffice.org (usually referred to as just *OOo*) is made up of several individual components:

- **Base** Database.
- **Calc** Spreadsheet.
- **Draw** Art tool.
- **Impress** Presentation creator.
- **Math** Formula tool.
- **Writer** Word processor.



OpenOffice.org lets you select whether you want *Microsoft Office* or *OOo* file formats.

In practice, only four of these see much use. *Draw* is really little more than a cut-down version of *Impress*, and there are other art programs for Linux that are far more useful (notably *Gimp*). *Math*, meanwhile, offers far more power than anyone needs unless they are doing a degree in mathematics! That leaves *Base*, *Calc*, *Impress* and *Writer*: database, spreadsheet, presentation tool and word processor. Each shares the same look and feel, and if you've used *Microsoft Office* you'll already be a long way towards understanding how they work.

BEFORE YOU START

OOo is perfectly happy working with *Microsoft Office* file formats, so you don't need to worry about opening *Word* documents and so on. But it also has its own file formats, which save just as much information and are frequently less than half the size of *Office* formats. The downside is that *Office* does not support *OOo* documents, which means you need to use the *Office* formats if you want to retain compatibility with *Microsoft* users. The first time you run each *OpenOffice.org* program you'll see a box similar to the one shown at left, where you get to choose the default format for each program.

The *OpenOffice.org* user interface is slightly different from its *Office* equivalent, particularly in

WHAT YOU KNOW ALREADY

OOo shares many of its keyboard shortcuts with *Office*, which means you should be able to jump right in and get started straight away. Here are some of the most common *OOo* shortcuts:

Tool	Shortcut	
Cut.....	Ctrl+X	Save.....Ctrl+S
Copy.....	Ctrl+C	Print.....Ctrl+P
Paste.....	Ctrl+V	Undo.....Ctrl+Z
New.....	Ctrl+N	Redo.....Ctrl+Y
Open.....	Ctrl+O	Find.....Ctrl+F
Close.....	Ctrl+W	Spellcheck.....F7

Impress. Part of this is because of differences in naming (*Office* and *OOo* have wizards to help you work, but *OOo* calls them *AutoPilot*), and part is differences in positioning of menu items and buttons. If you're having problems, be sure to look up *OOo*'s comprehensive documentation from the Help menu.

Finally, you should know that *OOo* has several great features that either are missing in *Microsoft Office* or come as paid-for additions. For example, *Writer* comes with a built-in PDF writer; and you can save your *Impress* presentations as *Macromedia Flash* movies – great for working on the web.



BASE FOR DATABASES

If you have ever used **Microsoft Access**, you'll know that sometimes it's very helpful to be able to create a basic database system by yourself – perhaps something to store your CD collection, or some very basic business information. This is where *Base* steps in for Linux: it's a graphical database designer that makes a very complex problem into something anyone can solve.

There are three main ways to use *Base*:

- As a table designer and data store. This is where you design tables and insert data, then retrieve that data later on either through the same table access or some other program.
- As a reports system. This is where you create queries on your data, such as 'Print the names of everyone who has a dog.'
- As a forms system. This is where you use *Base* as a graphical user interface development system: you can create GUI dialogs to display your data and allow people to change it through them.

Whichever you choose – and you might choose all of them – you'll find that *Base* is quick and easy to learn, so let's get started!

CREATING A TABLE

When you first start *Base* you'll be asked whether you want to create a new database or open an existing one. For now, make sure that Create New is selected and click Next, then select Create Tables Using The Table Wizard and click Finish.

The Table Wizard works by offering various types of pre-made fields. For example, if you select 'CD-Collection' from the Sample Tables list you can add things like Album Title or Artist. Use the Business or

Personal radio button to choose what types of fields you want to add. When you find fields you want to use, click the > button to add them to the Select Fields list, or use the >> button to add all the fields in the Available Fields list. To remove fields, click <, or << to remove all of them.

When you click Next you'll be asked to specify the field types for your table: should Artist hold text, or do you want it to hold a number that references a different table? As we're using the Table Wizard, *Base* will insert sensible defaults for us here.

The last step before you create the new table is to assign a primary key (PK). A PK is designed to uniquely identify each row in your table, which means that even if you have two friends called Richard Hartis in your address book you will still be able to differentiate between them. *Base* can (and is set by default to) create a PK for you, so you can just click Next on this screen, then click Finish to go ahead and create the table.

INSERTING DATA

With a database and table created, you can now insert your data into *Base*. The main window of *Base* shows you all the tables, queries, reports and forms you have available; under Tables should be your new table, so double-click on it to open it for editing.

The default table-editing view looks a lot like a spreadsheet: along the top you'll see the names of your fields (ID, Name, Address etc). Each new row you insert is a new row in your table, and you can supply values for it according to the fields. Be sure to follow the field types you defined when you created the table: if a field only holds integers, you won't be

able to type 'Paul' in there. Insert a few rows into your table, then close it to get back to the main window. You can if you want change your table structure after you have inserted data – fields with data in will be destroyed, and fields you add will have default values entered (usually blank or 0).

GETTING GRAPHICAL

With the data in place, we can perform our finale: presenting it in a graphical user interface so that everyone can view and edit it.

As with table design, creating a form (a GUI window) is done through a wizard. Click the Forms tab from the main window, then select Use Wizard To Create Form. *Base* uses *Writer* for its form design and viewing, so this will appear beneath the wizard.

To create a basic form, click the >> button to add all your fields to the form. Click Next twice, and you'll come to the screen asking you which layout you want. You can change all this later, but for now a good option is In Blocks – Labels Above rather than As Data Sheet.

Click Next twice more and you'll come to the Styles window. These are very basic options, but again you can change these later. For now, choose Bright Blue, then click Next. Enter a name for your form, then click Finish to bring it up. Along the bottom of the form you'll see navigation buttons, plus search options and save/undo controls – these are all provided for you by *Base*. ●



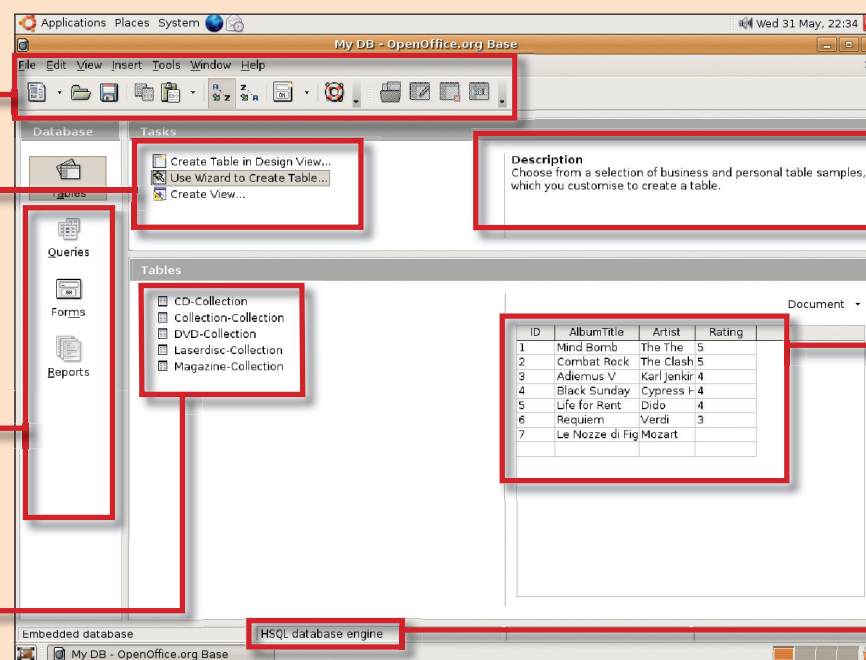
BASE AT A GLANCE

The top toolbar lets you link to other OOo documents, and create new *Base* objects (eg Tables).

These quick links vary depending on the tab you have selected on the left.

Switch between Tables, Query, Form and Reports view using these tabs.

As we're in the Tables tab, our tables are listed here. Double-click to open them.



This context-sensitive Help briefly explains the options to the left.

If you set this option to Document you'll get to see a preview of the currently selected table.

The status bar shows the type of database engine you're using to store your data.



CALC FOR SPREADSHEETS

Keeping track of large data sets isn't easy, so it's no wonder that most of us turn to spreadsheets to help us, be it for an informal job such as organising our finances for the next month or a task in a business environment such as auditing our company's accounts.

Fortunately, spreadsheets are easy to learn: if you've ever used *Excel*, you will immediately feel at home in *Calc*, simply because the two look almost identical. Furthermore, the only real differences in the way the two work lie in the look and feel, and if you've tried your hand at *Writer* you'll already be familiar with the way *OOo* works.

As with *Writer*, *Calc* does a great job of importing *Microsoft Office* documents, but it also has problems importing documents that have

passwords attached. If you want to import protected documents, you will need to remove the password using *Excel* beforehand.

BASIC CALCULATIONS

Like most spreadsheets, the main focus of *Calc* is its data grid. Along the top are the columns, labelled A to Z, then AA, AB, AC, and so on. Along the side are the rows, numbered 1 to 32,000. Each box in the grid is called a cell, and is usually referred to by its column and row positions (A3, B9).

And again, as with other spreadsheets, the real power in *Calc* is being able to program cells to contain an equation, so that it displays the result of a sum based on other cells. To see this at work, let's enter 100 in A1, 200 in A2, 300 in A3, and 400 in

A4. In A5, enter `=SUM(A1+A2+A3+A4)`.

This will add up all four cells, and place the result (1,000) into A5. If you now change the value of A1 to 50, A5 will also update to read 950.

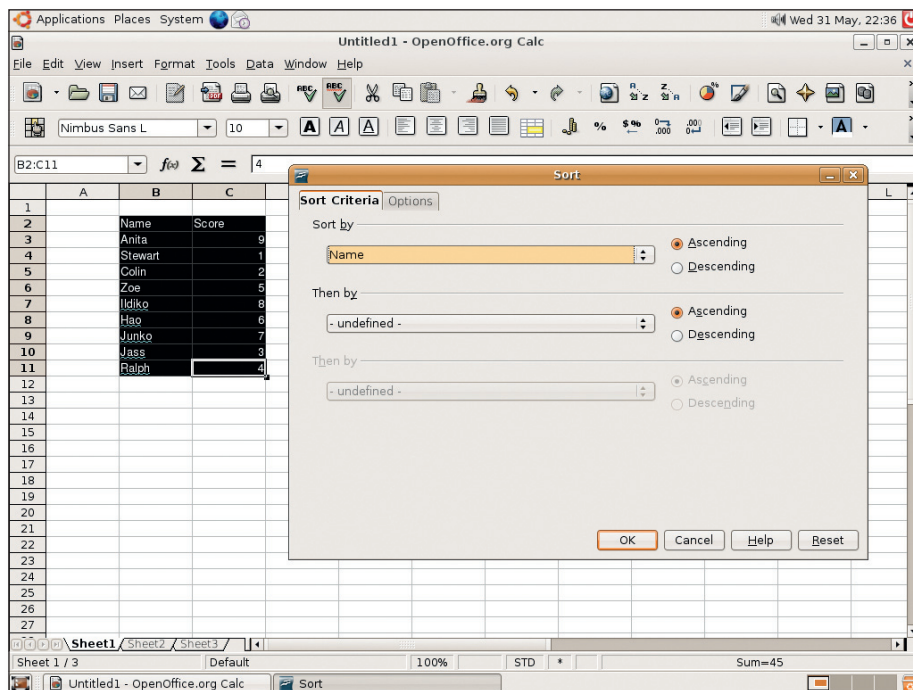
There are quite a few different types of calculations you can use in your equations. Adding A1 to A4 can be done with three plus signs, as in the previous example, but a much smarter route is to specify a range of cells to add using a colon. So, rather than `=SUM(A1+A2+A3+A4)`, you can use `=SUM(A1:A4)` to add up everything from A1 to A4. You can also multiply, using an asterisk; and divide, using a forward slash, so `=SUM(A1/A2)` would divide the first cell by the second.

More advanced calculations can be done using more brackets. For example, if you want to add A1 and A2, multiply by A3, then divide by A4, you would use `=SUM(((A1+A2) * A3) / A4)`. You can also use different kinds of mathematical functions; SUM itself is a simple function, but you can use MOD to calculate modulus, AVERAGE to calculate the mean average, or MAX to display the maximum number in a range. For example, `=AVERAGE(A1:A4)` will add up A1, A2, A3, and A4, then divide by four (the number of cells added).

FILTERING AND SORTING

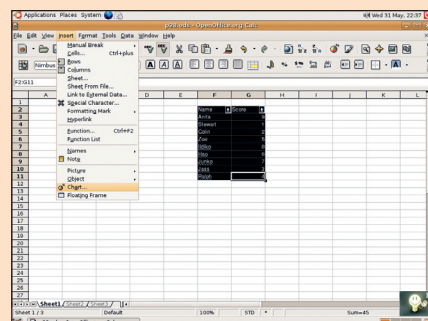
Once your data is inserted, you'll want to be able to manipulate your view of it so that you can read it more easily. There are two ways of doing this: sorting rearranges the rows in the order you specify, and filtering selectively hides fields by removing the ones that don't match your criteria.

The most basic filter is AutoFilter. It's easy, and it works like this: select the rows and columns you want to filter (including the title of that row, such as

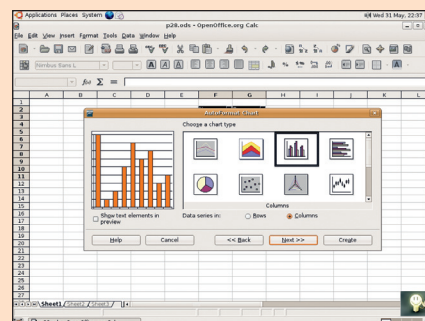


You can sort by up to three fields in *Calc*, which should be enough even for complex spreadsheets.

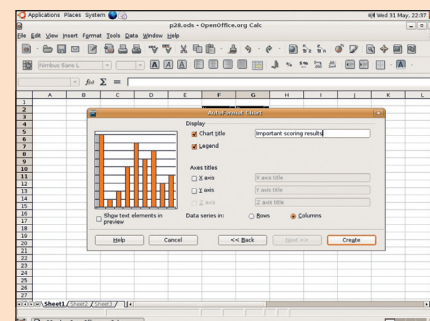
HOWTO... ADD A GRAPH



1 Select the fields from which you want to make a chart, then go to the Insert menu and select Chart.



2 Click Next on the first screen that appears, and you'll be prompted for a chart type. Just click Next for a bar chart.



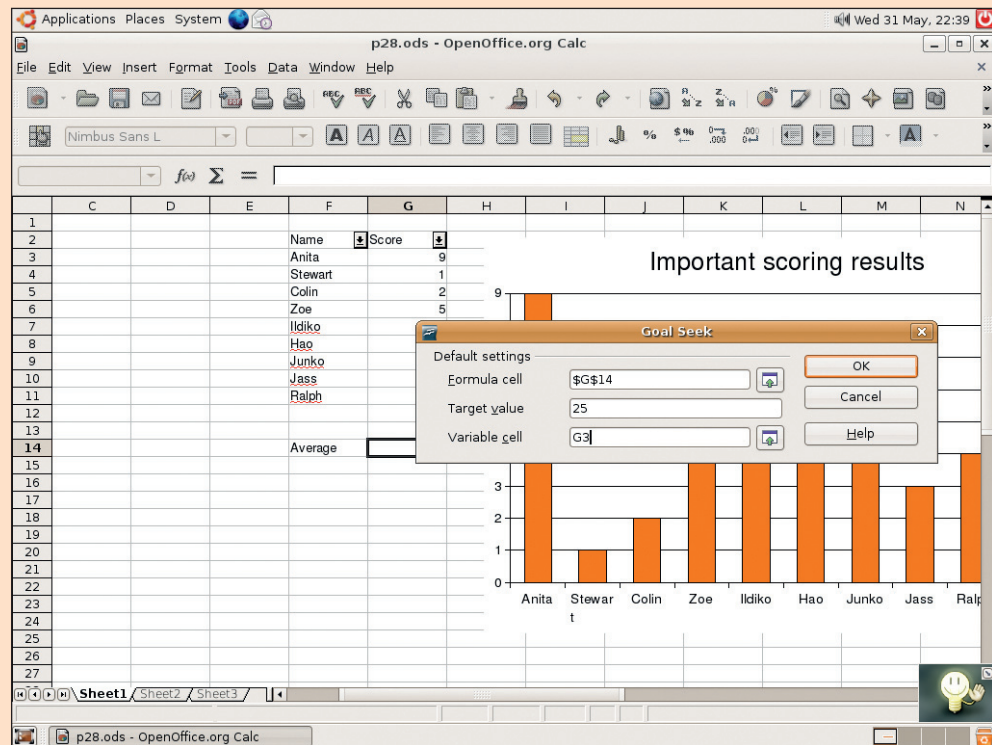
3 Click Next again to choose the default bar chart variant, then enter your chart title and any axis titles on the next screen.



GOAL SEEK

What do you do if you know what the result of an equation should be, but you don't know what input to give it to get that result? The answer is Goal Seek (under the Tools menu). To use this, select the cell with the equation, and click the Goal Seek menu item. This prompts you for the target value (what you want the equation result to be), and the variable cell (the cell you want to change to get the result). When you click OK, *Calc* will try all possible values for the variable cell until it finds the result you're after, and if it finds a suitable number it will prompt you to accept it.

Goal Seek is the fastest way to get the result you want from your equations.



Name or Age), and go to the Data menu, select Filter, then AutoFilter. This adds clickable arrows to

set the filter to show only rows that have that score. The others haven't been deleted; they're just

“Looking at a long list of numbers isn't easy on the eye, but *Calc* allows you to add colours, borders and shading.”

your column headers that you can click to select types of filter. For example, in the picture at left, we've placed a filter on Name and Score; if we click the button next to Score it will show a list of all distinct Score values – clicking on one of them will

invisible. To bring them back, click the button again and select All For Score.

Sorting is just as easy. Again, select the rows you want to sort (including the column header), then click Data > Sort. This brings up the window shown in the picture, which allows you to select how you want the data to be sorted. In the picture, there are names and scores, but neither is sorted; ideally we want to sort it by Score ascending (so a score of 1 would come before a score of 2), and for any scores that are the same it should sort by name.

To do this you'd set the Sort By field to Score, and the Then By field to Name. Unlike filtering, sorting is destructive: it rearranges the cells according to your criteria, and there's no way to go back to the original except by hitting Undo to reverse the sort.

FORMATTING YOUR CELLS

Looking at a long list of numbers isn't easy on the eye, but *Calc* allows you to add colours, borders, shading, fonts and other such bells and whistles in order to emphasise certain fields and to make reading your data easier. As in *OOo Writer*, *Calc* presents the basic font tools in a toolbar at the top;

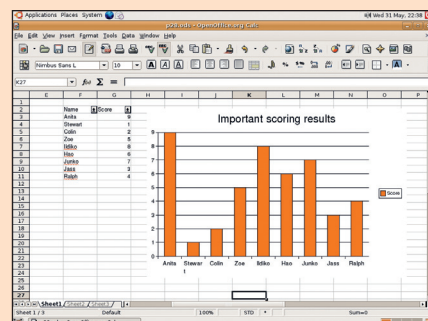
you can use these to change the font name and size, set it in bold, italics or underline, and also change the alignment. However, it comes into its own in the Format menu, particularly in the Cells option. Here you can choose how the cell should be treated (does it contain currency? Is it a date?), whether you want a thousands separator, how many decimal places you want and so on.

Along the tabs at the top of the Format Cells window, you can also find options to change the style of the cell. Under the Font and Font Effects tabs you can select the name, size, weight and colour of the text, as well as add shadowing and underlining. Under the Alignment tab you can choose the angle of the lines of text, how much space there should be between the text and the grid lines around it, as well as whether you want it left-, centre-, or right-aligned.

The Borders tab lets you select the size and position of the lines around each cell. To do this, first specify the thickness of the line you want, then click on the diagram to the left where you want your borders to appear. If you're really feeling artistic, you can add shadows to the borders around your boxes – if you find yourself doing this, try to remember that no matter what you do to your spreadsheet, it will still be a big long list of numbers! ●

OR TRY: KSPREAD & GNUMERIC

Linux has two popular alternatives to *Calc*: *KSpread* and *Gnumeric*. Both have advantages over *Calc* in terms of their features, but neither is quite so good at importing *Excel* documents. If you're looking for a tool to help you enter complicated mathematical formulas, try *OOo Math*.



4 Click Create to create the graph and embed it into your worksheet. You can then resize it and edit it all you want.



IMPRESS FOR PRESENTATIONS

The only thing worse than listening to an hour-long lecture is listening to an hour-long lecture accompanied by a really bad slideshow presentation. And Linux hasn't escaped this. As good as the PowerPoint-like *Impress* is, it's still easy to churn out dull presentations by overusing animations and font styles, so we recommend you read this carefully!

As you'll have come to expect by now, *Impress* looks and works just like its *Office* counterpart. When you start it up, you'll see a blank slide ready for you to add content to, and also a control window where you can add new slides. To get started, click on the T icon in the bottom toolbar, and drag a text box on to your slide. Enter the title, '50 Tips for Better Photos',

and give it a nice large font using the font selection tools above. Put another line of text beneath it, giving your name and the date, again in fairly large type so it's easy to read. If you want to change the colour of the text or add any effects to it, select it and right-click, then choose Character. If you have more than one line of text, you can choose Paragraph from the same menu to change how the lines fit together.

That's enough for the text: now let's add a background. From the Insert menu, click Graphics. This brings up a filesystem dialog where you can pick which picture to import. There are lots of good

backgrounds bundled with Linux; these are stored in the `/usr/share/wallpapers` folder, and you

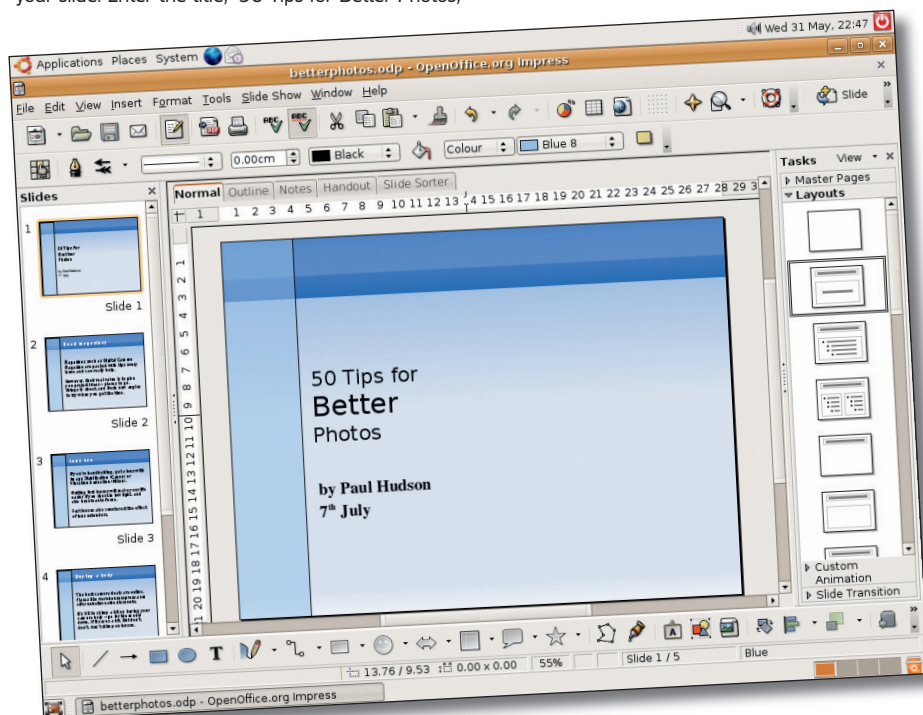
should be able to find something that suits your taste in there (hint: click the Preview checkbox at the bottom of the dialog to have *OOo* show you the picture before you open it). We've used Blue Bend, which is a nice and natural background for the text.

When you click Open, *Impress* will place the picture on your slide, but the chances are it won't fit. If not, just right-click on it once, then use the handles at the edges of the picture to resize it to your needs.

Although the slide probably looks OK, we can do a bit more to spice it up. Draw another rectangle to the left of your text, from the top to the bottom of the slide. From the toolbar choose a colour that works well with your background – in the example at left we've used Blue 2, which is a fairly dark, purplish colour. Now the magic: right-click on your new rectangle and select Area from the menu – this is where you can customise how your box will be filled. Go to the Transparency tab and set the transparency of your box to 50% to make it see-through, but not invisible. When you click OK, you'll be back at your slide and it should look quite respectable – well done!

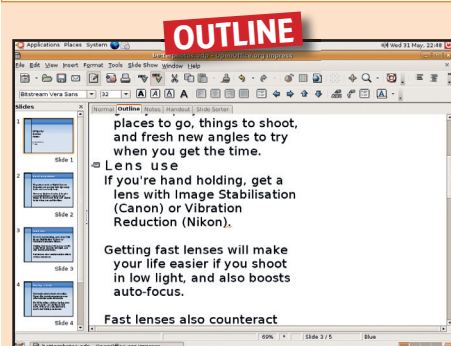
MAKING A MOVE

You probably can't wait to start making individual letters fly in from the side of the screen as in all the best *PowerPoint* presentations, so let's look at some animation tricks. Select the main title of your slide, and choose Effects from the Slide Show menu. Here you can apply animation effects to the object (the text container) and the text itself, add sounds to

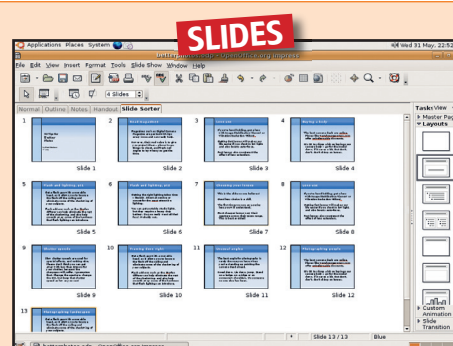


Some text, a background picture and a little transparency are all it takes to inject a bit of style.

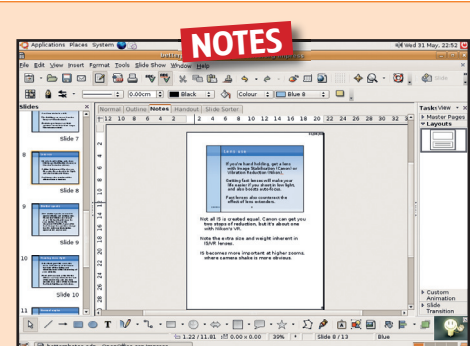
IMPRESS WORKSPACES EXPLAINED



There are five ways of looking at your presentation, and you've already seen one: the Drawing view. Shown above is the Outline view, which gives you a basic list of the content in your slides as well as a preview. Drag and drop things to move them around.



The Slides view lets you see all your slides in miniature, so you can see how the presentation fits together and reorder it if need be. If you right-click on a slide you can set slide transitions, and also temporarily hide the slide if you have last-minute changes.



The Notes view acts as a prompt for you if you forget your lines, but also as a quick and easy print-out for your audience. Each slide note prints to a page of A4, and includes the slide itself plus your accompanying text.



coincide with the effects and also order the effects so they happen when you want them to. As we're working with the title, we should apply the effects to the text rather than its container, so click Add from the Custom Animations window on the left. There are quite a few effects to choose from – you can make the text slide around, appear in a dissolve, spiral around or, inevitably, fly in letter by letter. To do that, select the Laser effect and choose where you want the letters to appear from.

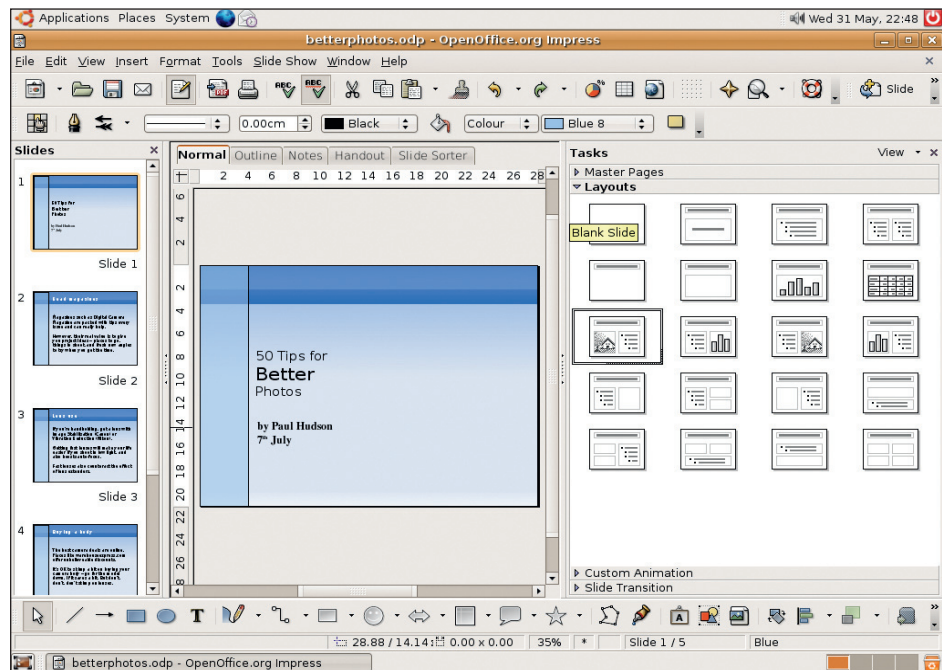
Still in the Custom Animation window, you can select other objects in your slide and assign animations to them. When you've animated everything you want to, click the last button in the window (it has the text '1...9' on it) to order the effects as you want them. For example, if you want the title to animate after the subtitle, just drag the title object (it will be called something like 'Object 1 (Text Frame '50 Tips')') under the subtitle object.

TEXT BOXES COME ALIVE!

It's also very easy to transform your text boxes and graphics into clickable buttons that you can use while giving the presentation. As an example, let's create a small exit button we can put at the bottom-right corner of our slide, which will take us out of our presentation when clicked.

Click the T button from the bottom bar, and create a small text box in the bottom-right corner. Type the word EXIT in there, then select a nice bold font. Right-click on the text and select Character; then choose the colour white for it as well as any extra text effects you want. Click OK, then go to the Format menu and select Area. By default, the Fill is set to None, but you should change that to Color, and pick something bold like red. Now go to the Shadow tab, tick the Use Shadow box, then set the shadow 0.06 inches away from the box, coloured black, with a transparency of 50%. Click OK again, and you should have a small graphic button, ready to be clicked on to exit.

Of course, we haven't attached the exit action itself yet. To do that, go to the Slide Show menu and select Interaction. From the window that pops up,



Keep your layout consistent by using a stock slide design for all your slides.

“It's very easy to transform your text boxes and graphics into clickable buttons to use in the presentation.”

choose Exit Presentation for the Action At Mouse Click option, and click OK one last time – and you're done!

To try out all these animations and interactions, you need to actually run the slide show. Hit F9 to view the slide show, and try clicking your new Exit button.

TEMPLATES AND MASTERS

So far we've been working only on one slide, but when you have a whole presentation to create it will save time and lead to a more professional document if you can make each slide look consistent without having to design them all from scratch. The easiest way to get uniformity is by using a slide master, which is where you put together the basic design of the page without any of the text or graphics that change from slide to slide. In our case, that's the picture background, the blue box and the Exit button. Moving these to our master slide has the advantage that all new slides will have these elements on automatically. Furthermore, when you're editing slides, you aren't able to move or otherwise adjust any of the master elements by accident.

To set up a master slide, select the elements you want to move to the master and cut them to the clipboard by pressing Ctrl+X. Now select the View menu, then Master, then Drawing to bring up the master drawing slide. It's probably largely blank at this point, and you should see a small Preview window appear, which shows you how the first slide looks given the current master. Hit Ctrl+V here to paste the elements in, and you should see the

HOWTO... EXPORT TO FLASH

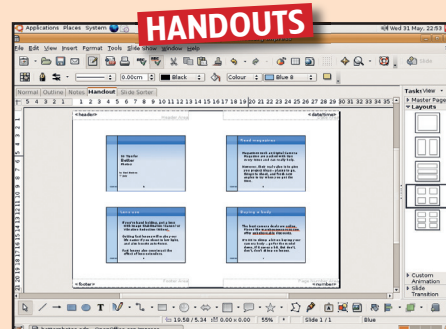
The standout feature of *OOo Impress* is its ability to export presentations, complete with animations, to *Macromedia Flash* format. Flash is popular on the web, and most web browsers come with a Flash plugin so that people can view Flash movies through their browser. Although you can save in *Microsoft PowerPoint* format, using Flash for your final export means that you can build your presentation into your website rather than having to make it available as a separate download. To export as Flash, go to the File menu and click Export, then select *Macromedia Flash* from the File Format drop-down box.

preview update to reflect the new master. To get back to your slides, click View > Slide.

The other option is to use a stock layout for your slides, and *Impress* has a number of these templates to choose from. With your slide selected, click the Modify Slide Layout from the helper window (where you insert new slides), and it will bring up a window where you can choose from a list of AutoLayout options – pre-made text layouts that include text boxes, pictures, bulleted lists, and a host of others. ●

OR TRY: KPRESENTER

The KDE *KOffice* suite (responsible for *KWord* and *KSpread*) also comes with *KPresenter*, which performs many of the same functions as *OOo Impress* – and many people find it easier to use.



Finally, the Handouts view fits several slides on to one A4 page so that you can easily give printed copies of your slides to your audience. Right-click on the Default tab near the bottom of the screen and select Modify Slide to change the arrangement of slides per page.



WRITER FOR WORD PROCESSING

OOo Writer is a powerful word processor that offers really helpful features such as spellchecking, change tracking, mail merging and lots more. On the surface it looks similar to *Microsoft Word*, so if you're a former *Word* user you should be able to pick it up quite easily. Things like the font selection tools and the text formatting buttons (bold, italics, underline and alignment) are all by default in the place you'd expect them to be – just above the document window. The icons are a little different, but follow the same theme as in *Word*.

Each button that has a small blue arrow next to it holds a drop-down menu – if you click on it briefly, it will take a default action, but if you click and hold you will get a menu with more options. Some buttons, such as the font and background colour buttons, bring up miniature windows when you click and hold. If you drag the background colour window away from the button it will stay visible even after you choose a colour.

One notable difference from *Word* is that *Writer* pops up a Paragraph Styles window when you start. This underlines the fact that *Writer* places far greater emphasis on predefined 'styles' for different parts of text than *Word* does. For example, to make headings stand out in *Word*, most people just change the font size and weight in the Formatting toolbar, but in *Writer* you're encouraged to use the Paragraph

Styles window to accomplish the same thing. If you need to bring the Paragraph Styles window back up, press F11 or click the Stylist button from the toolbar (it's the one next to the gold star). To style text up, just select it with your mouse, then click the style you want to assign it.

These styles are about more than just formatting. *Writer* considers a heading style not only to be larger and bolder than normal text, but also to have special responsibilities when it comes to generating a table of contents or index.

OPEN AND SAVE

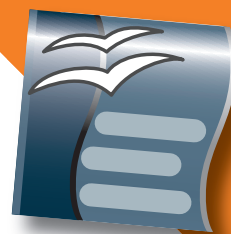
As in *Word*, documents are opened and saved through the File menu. In *OpenOffice.org*, each of these dialogs is capable of opening any type of file – if you're in *Writer* and open a *Calc* document, say, *OOo* will just fire up *Calc* and load it in there. The default format for opening files will depend on what you chose when you first started *Writer*, but you should find both *OpenOffice.org Writer* and *Microsoft Word*, be it 97, 2000 or XP, in the File Type drop-down box.

Most types of *Microsoft Word* document can be loaded, although files that the writer has locked with a password can't. This works going the other way, too – so you can't save *Word* files with a password from *OpenOffice.org*.

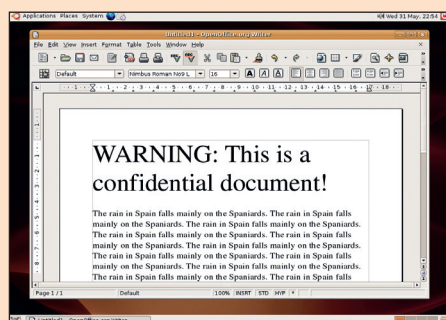
Both the Open and Save windows have three buttons along the top to help you navigate around your filesystem. From left to right they: move up a folder (to the parent directory); create a new directory; and navigate directly to your home directory.

If you want to send your document to someone who has neither *Word* nor *OpenOffice.org*, or if you simply want to fix the layout to make the document easier to print, you can save to a PDF file directly from *OOo*. You can only do this in *MS Word* if you've paid for a commercial plugin, but in *OOo Writer* it's free, and as easy as clicking Export As PDF from the File menu.

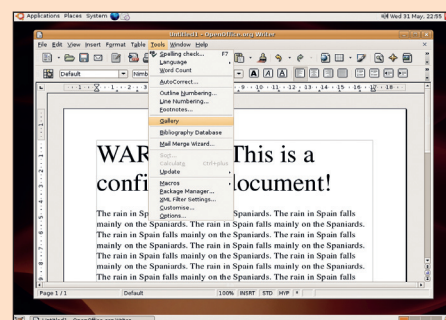
Once you've done that, *OOo* will ask you two things: which pages you want to export, and how you want them saved. You'll probably want to save all the pages as PDFs, so leave the top half of the dialog alone. In the bottom half you need to choose the quality of the PDF – Screen Optimized is the lowest quality, and Press Optimized is the highest.



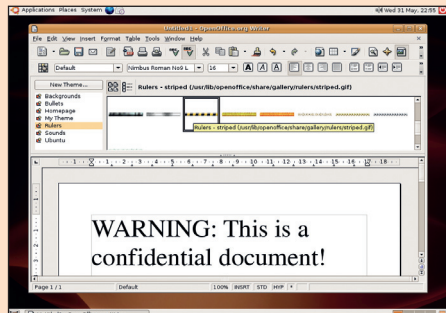
HOWTO... ADD CLIP ART



1 Using just plain text, this document looks quite dull. We need to spice it up with some clip art – some sort of warning colouring would do it.



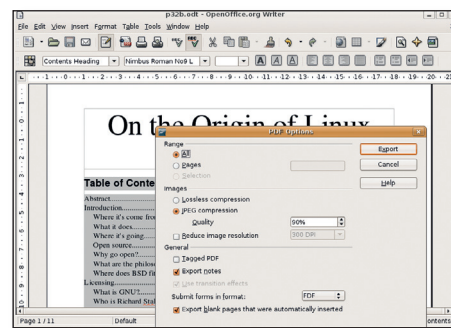
2 All OpenOffice.org's stock images and sounds are stored in the OOo Gallery, located under the Tools menu.



3 Select the clip art you want, then drag it where you want it in the document. In our example, that's just below the header.



4 Drop in as much clip art as you want, then click the Gallery item on the Tools menu again to close the Gallery window.



The PDF's compression level affects its quality.

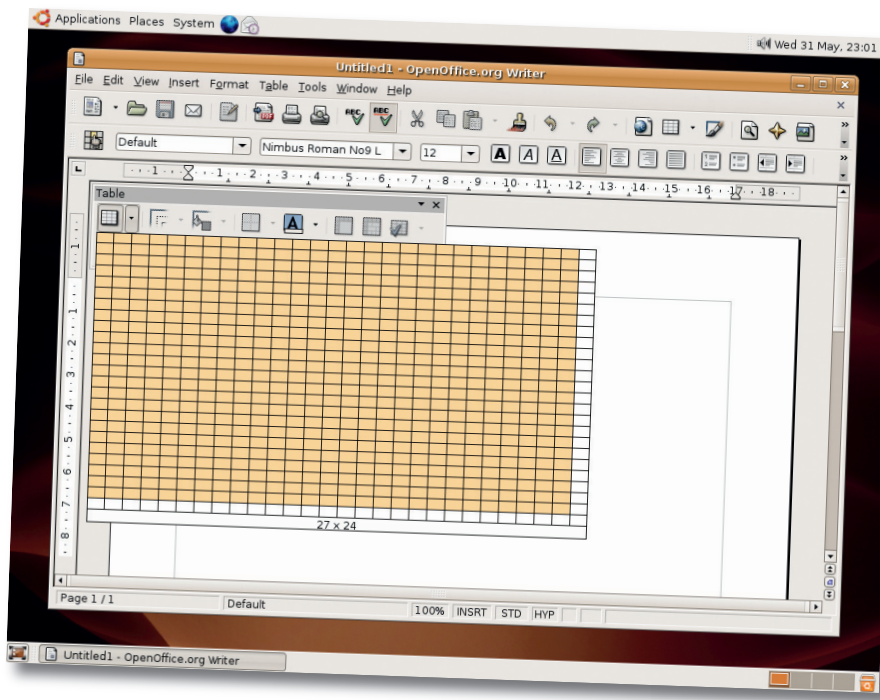
CORRECTING MISTAKES

Before you send anything out, you might want to use *Writer's* spellchecker to double-check your work – even if your spelling is good! To activate the spellchecker, go to Tools > Spellcheck, then Check – or just hit F7. As with most spellcheckers, you can replace your questionable words with corrections, or add words to a custom dictionary so that *OOo* learns your vocabulary. You can also jump to the Thesaurus for synonyms.

If *Writer* isn't using the correct language for its checks – perhaps using UK English rather than US English – go to Tools > Options > Language Settings to change the default language for new documents.

WORD COUNT

The *Writer* Word Count function is in a different place from *Word's*. To find it, go into the File menu, select Properties, then choose the Statistics tab from the window.



Creating a table with the flyout tool is faster than using the dialog, and is much more visual.

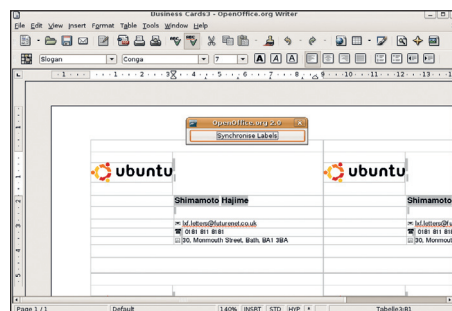
While you're in Tools, you might want to turn off the Word Completion feature. This stores words you type, and offers to complete them for you later on. It's enabled by default in OOo, but most people find it annoying. If you're one of them, disable it by going to Tools > AutoCorrect > Word Completion.

ADD TABLES AND GRAPHICS

It'd be a shame not to explore some of the more under-used features common to word processing programs, such as inserting graphics and data into your document. *Writer* is certainly capable, as you'd probably expect by now, of these tasks.

The easiest way to add a table to your document is by using the Table menu. From there, go to Insert, then Insert Table, and a window will appear where you can specify the number of rows and columns you want, whether you want a header and border, and whether *Writer* should be allowed to split the table across pages (see image, top).

If you prefer a more graphical way of working, click and hold on the first button on the toolbar to



When making items like these business cards, use the Synchronize Labels button to copy content from one card to the others.

DESIGNING A FLYER

We can use these tools to design a very simple flyer by combining simple shapes with text.

Start by selecting a rectangle: click and drag on your page the shape you want for the flyer and it should appear – probably in a light blue colour, which is the default. Right-click on it and select Area

font at size 40, using white text with a shadow.

Beneath that, draw another box and add the words, 'You need Sunblock 500!', and colour that white too.

Beneath that you can add all the text you want – try to experiment with the various font sizes, colours and effects that *Writer* offers, but also with some of the more advanced drawing functionality such as Bezier curves.

ADDING A CONTENTS LIST

Having spent hours/weeks/years creating your masterpiece, the last thing you want to have to do is create the table of contents (TOC) for it – that's something that can be automated, meaning more work for *Writer* and less for you. Hurrah!

Creating an automatic TOC requires two things. You need to tell *Writer* which parts of your text are headings, then you need to insert the TOC itself. You need the Stylist for this, so press F11 to open it.

Go down to your first top-level heading, select it, then choose Heading 1 from the style window. Mark your second-level headings as Heading 2, and so on.

Now click where you want your TOC to go, and select the Insert menu, then Indexes and Tables, then Indexes and Tables again. In the new window, click OK to accept the defaults – your new TOC should appear where you clicked.

MAKING BUSINESS CARDS

The best way to learn about the program is just to dive in and use it, so let's try making something else nice and simple – business cards. *Writer* has a number of AutoPilots to guide you through various basic types of document – the Business Cards AutoPilot will help us here.

The first thing you need is some perforated business card paper, available from most high-street stores. This is plain sheets of A4, with business-card shaped perforations, allowing you to print on to them, then easily pop them out. *Writer* knows how big each business card should be for a number of different brands of perforated paper; if you're able to buy one of these brands you'll have the easiest job, but often as long as the cards you buy are a standard size you should be OK.

Go into *Writer* and click on File > New > Business Cards to bring up the AutoPilot. Then select the brand name and type of paper (or the ones that are closest to the type you bought), and click on New Document. *Writer* will create a new document matching your paper type – you'll see it has divided up the page into card-sized blocks. Each of these represents one finished card, but you don't need to fill them out individually. Instead, just design the one in the top-left corner, then click the Synchronize Labels button to have it copied over to the other labels. *Writer* really is easy to use. Enjoy it! ●

OR TRY: KWORD & ABIWORD

Linux has several alternatives to OOo *Writer*, of which the most popular are *KWord* and *AbiWord*. Both are very fast and come with many of the same features as *Writer*, but they aren't so compatible with *Microsoft Office* formats.

“If you're sending your document to someone, you can save it as a PDF. This is as easy as clicking a button”

bring up the flyout, then click and hold on the grid icon (by default, this is usually third from the left) to bring up the quick table creator. Drag your mouse down and to the right to make the table larger, then click when you want to insert it.

The toolbar along the bottom is the place to get started with your own graphics. The icons along here offer you a variety of drawing primitives, such as straight lines, circles, boxes, curves, callouts, arrows, stars and text.

to choose the colour you want it to be, then choose Gradient Fill from the window that appears. Gradient 3 (a yellow to red fade) should do fine, so select it and click OK.

On top of this, we need to place some text, so select the text box icon from the drawing group (the icon is a big T), and make space over the gradient. Type in 'In the sun?'; then right-click on the text and select Character to customise the font style, size and effects used for the text. We used the Nimbus Sans



18 OPENOFFICE.ORG TIPS AND TRICKS



We're coming to the end of our tour of *OpenOffice.org*, but you've only really taken the first steps to being an advanced user. Here are our top 18 tips to help you progress.

ALL PROGRAMS

MACRO MAGIC

1 If there are tasks you perform regularly, such as adding a style and a colour to a particular word, then you should try *OOo's* macro systems. These are simply groups of actions you can record and play back at will, effectively performing actions for you. To record a macro, click on **Tools > Macros > Record Macro**. Do all the actions you want, then click the **Stop Recording** button. You'll need to assign each macro a name when you have recorded it, and when you've done that you can re-run the macros from the same **Macros** menu as before.

THE STRONGEST LINK

2 All *OpenOffice.org* applications are capable of Object Linking and Embedding (OLE), which is a technology that allows you to embed files from one *OOo* app in another. To try this out, go to the **Insert** menu, select **Object**, then **OLE Object**. From the screen that appears, select **Create From File**, then click **Search** to select an *OOo* file from another application. When you click **OK**, it will be inserted into your current document as you would see it normally. However, the real magic comes when you double-click on the object – you will see all the menus and toolbars change to look like the application it belongs to!

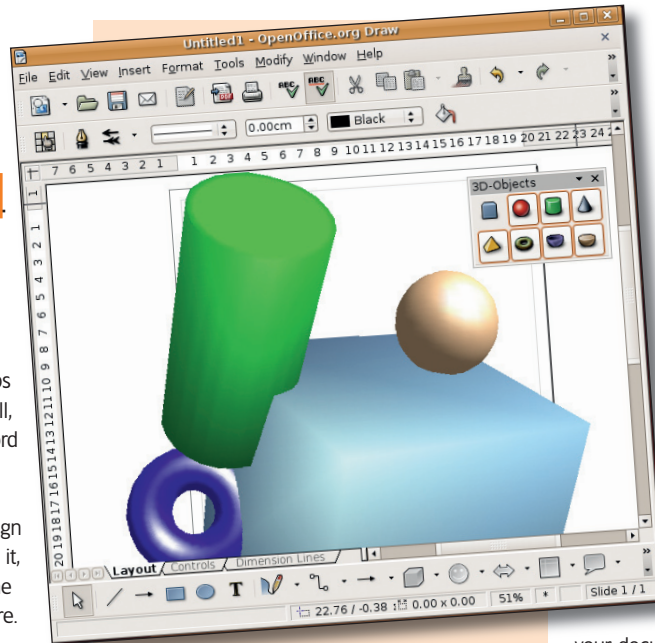
TURN OFF THE ASSISTANT!

3 By this time you're almost certainly sick of the *OOo* Help Assistant, which pops up regularly. Granted, it's not as annoying as *Clippy* from *Office* – this one doesn't say things without you clicking on it – but most people turn it off anyway! To do that, go to the **Help** menu and deselect the **Help Agent** option – and it'll never bother you again.

WRITER

TRACK CHANGES

6 Anyone who has to work in a group environment should know that changing someone else's documents is easy enough – the hard part is telling them what you've changed. *Writer* has help at hand through its **Track Change** features. Go to the **Edit** menu, select **Changes**, then click **Record** to have *OOo* monitor what changes you make so that others will be able to see them later on. If you receive a document set up like this, you can go through each change and choose to either accept or reject it.



3D shapes galore: squares and spheres, cones and cylinders all come with movable lighting, custom shading and metallic finishes. *Draw* is a pretty sophisticated art application.

DRAW

GET DRAWING!

4 Once you're competent in the presentation maker *Impress*, you can make the jump to *OOo Draw*, the integrated vector art package. It looks and works much like *Impress* (although slides are called pages), and you can apply your new skills to it. We don't have space here to cover the 3D artwork, which really is *Draw's* highlight. You can drop cubes, spheres, cones and cylinders on to the page, then move them around in 3D. If you right-click on a 3D shape, you can also adjust the lighting and many other options in the 3D Options dialog.

GET CONNECTED

5 When you're using *Draw* to make flowcharts, don't waste your time drawing and redrawing lines between the shapes – when you move the shapes, the lines won't follow. Instead, use a connector (it's to the right of the **Line** tool on the bottom toolbar), as this automatically redraws itself to follow the shapes you've attached them to.

COMPARE DOCUMENTS

7 If someone made changes to your *Writer* document without change tracking turned on, you might think you would have to read through the entire thing to spot the differences. Fortunately, *OOo* has a **Compare Document** function

hidden away in the **Edit** menu that will scan two documents and report the differences for you. To use it, open the first document, then click **Compare Document**; it will then prompt you for the second document. Once the comparison is complete, *OOo* will list the changes for you to accept or reject, as with change tracking.

SAVE ON RAM

8 If you're working on a document in *Writer* that's packed with pictures and your computer is starting to slow down as a result, click **View > Toolbars > Tools**, then look for the icon that has a square, a circle and a triangle on. Clicking this hides all the pictures in

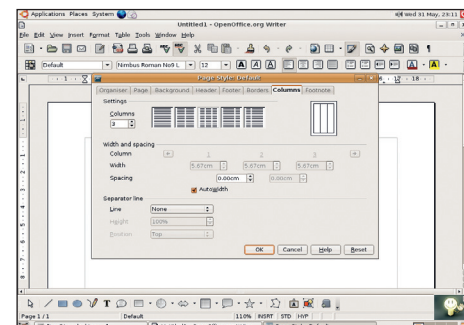
your document. To get the pictures back, click the button again.

PLAY WITH FONTWORK

9 If you're looking to do cool or unusual font effects, you should try out *Fontwork*. Select the text you want to play with, go to the **Format** menu, then choose *Fontwork*; this brings up a window full of options. The first part of the window lets you select a path the text should follow – do you want it to go left-to-right? Do you want it to curve upwards, or go around in a circle? Do you want the text to be placed directly on to the path, or be curved according to the path? You can choose all this and more, but we suggest you save your work before trying anything!

NEWSPAPER COLUMNS

10 *Writer* uses a one-column layout by default, which means that your text reads from the far left of the page to the far right of the page on each line. If you want to change this to use two or more columns, click the **Format** menu, then **Page**, then select the **Columns** tab from the window that appears. Here you can choose from



Don't feel restricted to a single-column layout of your text: you have the option of more sophisticated layouts in the **Columns tab.**



IMPRESS

REUSE BUT DON'T TELL

11 If you're planning to give the same *Impress* presentation several times over different days, don't bother changing the date on the slide each time you give the presentation. Instead, use the Date Stamp field, which automatically shows today's date. To do this, go to the Insert menu, click Fields, then select Date (Variable).

LOW-QUALITY DISPLAY MODE

12 Working with complex slides on a slow machine isn't fun: it can turn a five-minute editing job into an hour-long slog simply by chewing up more resources than your system has. Fortunately you can change the quality that *Impress* uses while you work by setting the Display Quality option under the View menu. By default it's set to Color, but you can also choose Grayscale, Black & White and High Contrast. The latter is particularly helpful if you want to design your presentation to save eye strain, without affecting the final result.

EXPAND AND SUMMARISE

13 There are two helpful options under the Insert menu in *Impress* that can save you a lot of work. The first, Expand Slide,

The Rehearse Timings option in *Impress* shows a timer to help you ensure all the animations and slide transitions take place at the right time.

00:00:11

00:00:11

50 Tips for Better Photos

Paul Hudson
July

turns all the top-level headings in a given slide into slides in their own right. So, if you have a slide called 'Fishing Techniques Made Easy', which has the headings 'Rod', 'Tackle' and 'Bait', using the Expand Slide button will create three new slides – one each for the three headings.

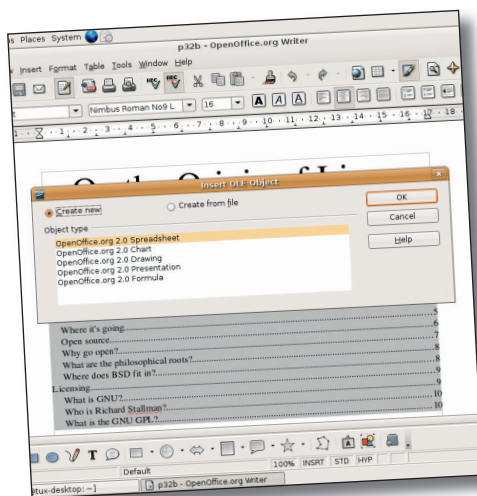
The second helpful option under this menu is Summary Slide, which creates a new slide containing the top-level headings of the current slide and all that follow it. Most presentations end with this sort of wrap-up slide anyway, and this saves you making it yourself.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

14 Getting the timings right on your *Impress* slideshows is no easy task, particularly if you have complex animations or lots of slides. The solution here is to rehearse again and again until you get it right, and *Impress* can help you do that with the Rehearse Timings option under the Slide Show menu. This goes through your presentation as normal, but runs a timer in the bottom-left corner so you can make sure you're working at the right pace.

"The Object Linking and Embedding tool enables you to embed files from one OOo application in another."

five basic column styles (one, two, and three columns), but also set custom widths and separator lines. Perfect!



Object Linking and Embedding lets you insert a *Writer* document into *Draw*, or vice versa.

BASE

AUTOMATIC KEYS

15 Understanding primary keys is not fun, and so is best left to people who have read books on the topic. For the rest of us, *Base* can add an incrementing integer ID field, assign it to be the primary key, and thus ensure that it exists and is unique without us lifting a finger. The key is to do nothing: design your table as normal, but don't add a primary key. When you click Save, *Base* will offer to make one for you.

CALC

TRACK YOUR FORMULAS

16 Building complex formulas often results in data being drawn from a very large spreadsheet. In this situation, how can you find out what caused an unusual result? Use the OOo Calc Detectives, available from the Tools menu. For example, if you select a cell that relies on input from other cells, go to the Detectives list and choose

Trace Precedents to have *Calc* show you which cells are used in the formula.

FORCED INPUT

17 You can force a *Calc* cell to only accept values within a certain range through the Validity options under the Data menu. The Criteria tab lets you specify what size and type of numbers you want to accept, but you can also use the Error Alert tab to set a message that should appear if someone tries to ignore the rule.

FUNCTION REMINDER

18 *Calc* has functions to perform all sorts of calculations, but we've only looked at SUM, MOD, and AVERAGE so far. Rather than try to memorise all the various functions, you can just click Insert > Functions to get to the full list. This shows you all the functions available, and also tells you what each does, and what it would return given sample input. You can also get to this window by pressing Ctrl+F2. ●

WHAT NOW?

We've only had time to scratch the surface of *OpenOffice.org's* features – it's absolutely huge, so have fun exploring. For more guidance around the suite, tutorials and access to the project's user mailing list, visit <http://support.openoffice.org/index.html>.