Koffice Workshop, Part 1

PRACTICAL **EXERCISES** WITH K. IN THE **OFFICE**

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The long-awaited Version 2.0 of the popular desktop environment KDE is now accompanied for the first time by a small, almost complete office packet. Like KDE itself, KOffice - as it is called - is subject to the GNU Public Licence (GPL). This means that there is, at last, a second free office suite under Linux apart from StarOffice. Unfortunately the documentation in the packet is full of gaps, which is reason enough for us to try and familiarise you with the use of the individual office components in a series of workshop articles. In this first part we will start with the word processor, Kword.

The whole Koffice packet is sold with the new desktop environment KDE2 as standard. If you are not yet using any of the more recent distributions, which already contain this as standard, you can download the appropriate version for your distribution free of charge from *http://www.kde.org*. Anyone who shies away from downloading should be able to find it on many cover CDs.

KOffice has been completely integrated into the KDE2 desktop environment. Although under some circumstances it can be started under a different desktop, such as the old KDE or GNOME, inexperienced users or less-ambitious hobbyists should steer clear of this. In the worst case, some facilities could end up being unusable or unpleasant disruption could occur throughout all phases of operation. For these reasons, we generally advise you always to use KDE2 as the basis for the implementation of KOffice.

Workshop Schedule

1. *Word processing with Kword – Part 1: A business letter*
2. *Word processing with Kword – Part 2: A newspaper*
3. *Tables and Diagrams with Kspread and Kchart*
4. *Graphics and Images with Killustrator*
5. *Presentations with Kpresenter*

Eyes on the future

The first two parts of the Workshop are concerned solely with the word processing package, Kword. Using two small examples that you can join in with, it will become clear how the program functions and how to use it. In this first part, we will do this by producing a business letter, which in addition to appropriate formatting will also include a small table. Please note that at present, the whole Koffice packet is still at the development stage. Crashes of the individual applications are not uncommon, so you should not entrust important data to any of the current Koffice components (see Problems and Future Prospects).

All in the box

Unlike all other popular word processor programs, such as StarOffice or Applixware, Kword makes use of a concept which at first seems a bit strange. While the first two applications mentioned both have a page-oriented method of working, Kword acts as a so-called frame-based word processor. In an ordinary word processing program, you always enter your text straight onto the page. And all additional objects such as images, tables, etc, are usually also placed straight onto the page. Kword, on the other hand, always works on the basis of an empty page, on which you can arrange the frames.

These frames, in turn, include the actual contents, such as graphics or – and this is what's new – all text. For each of these objects there is always an individual, appropriate frame type. The developers of Kword want this concept to take a definite step towards a desktop publishing program. The ultimate purpose here is that the user can create more complex documents, such as a newspaper, actually in Kword, without having to bring in an additional, external application. The high price for this flexibility lies in what is, at first, less beginner friendly. But don't worry: Our introduction below will shed some light into the jungle of terms and operations.

Start

To be able to join in this Workshop, you should now start Kword either via the Koffice workstation (see box "KOShell or everything is exchangeable") or via the KDE start menu under *Office programs/Kword*. A window should now open, in which you can select a template, open an existing file or begin with a blank document. As you can see from the two register pages, there are two categories of templates: *Normal* and *Publishing*. For all normal templates, a large text frame is automatically created for each new page in your document, which cannot subsequently be simply deleted. Kword then behaves almost like one of the ordinary word processor programs.
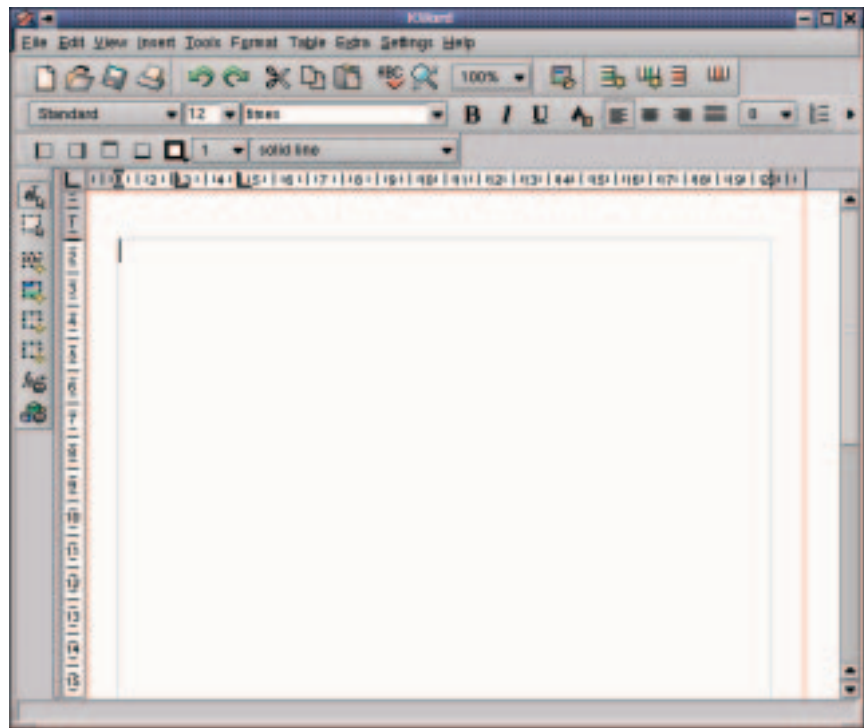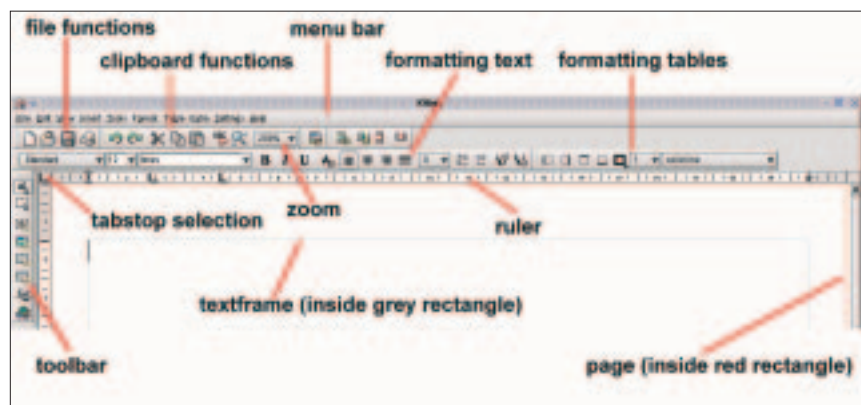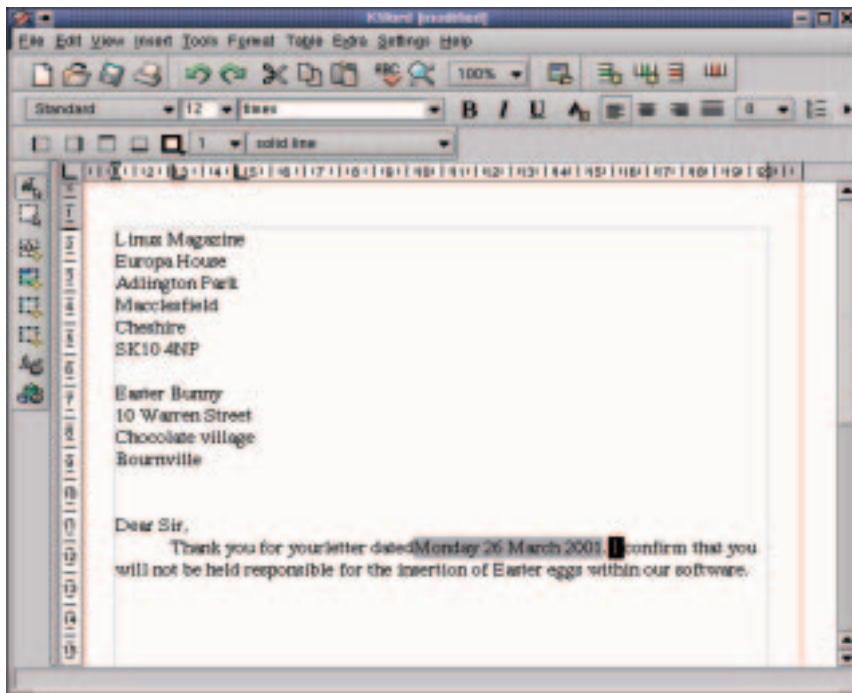
With a publishing template, on the other hand, you can decide for yourself right from the start how many frames, in what size you wish to position in your document, and where. But more on that in the next Workshop instalment. For our letter, select the template *A4* and confirm your choice by then clicking on *OK*.

Kword should now start and display the standard A4 page. If you wish to make additional page settings, you can select from the main menu the item *Format/Page*. The settings window which now appears allows you, among other things, to turn the page landscape, or set up additional columns. For our business letter, you should leave all the default settings as they are for the time being.

If the page view in the main window seems too small or too large for you, you can change the enlargement factor, with which the page is displayed on the monitor, to your own requirements. Using either *View/Zoom* or by selecting a corresponding entry from the list headed with 100 per cent from one of the symbol bars.

Figure 1: Kword once started
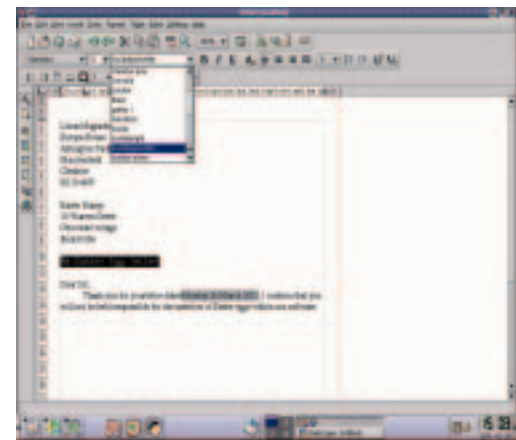

Figure 2: Symbol bars in Kword

The toolbar is on the left. Since this is used to create and edit the various frames, the symbols listed on it will play an important role in the next Workshop instalment.

The first time

Kword works with two different input modes: in the text editing mode, switched on by default, you can change the content of the individual frames, which in this case means entering your text as usual, while on the other hand the frame editing mode is used to arrange all the frames included in the document such as inserted images. This second mode thus serves to change the page layout.

Now you can enter a sample letter, as you may be accustomed to doing in other word processing programs, similar to the one shown in Figure 3. For the time being leave out all the special formatting, such as italics, and concentrate completely on the content. For the date in your document to appear exactly as in Figure 3, two little tricks are necessary.

First off, there's no need to write out the date yourself. For these types of values, which are often used in everyday documents, such as date, time or

[left]
Figure 3: Input of a sample letter

[right]
Figure 4: The altered subject line

Symbolic

Under the menu bar you should find some symbol bars, which at first glance look somewhat chaotic. Each line displayed there consists of several of these symbol bars. The start of a new bar is recognisable by the two double bars placed between a few symbols. In the top line, immediately below the menu bar, you will find all the frequently needed, more common functions, such as the file functions (for example Open, Save), and also often-used clipboard functions (for example Copy or Insert). The symbol bars below contain functions which relate to formatting, firstly of text and secondly to tables. Incidentally, the latter can be applied to the individual lines in the text.

KOShell or everything is exchangeable

The facility of mutual integration of the individual Koffice modules is an essential functional characteristic of the free office packet. So it is possible, for example to build a table from Kspread directly into a text document from Kword. Depending on which element you are currently working on in your document, an application responsible for processing will be loaded and displayed. It was the professed aim of the developers here that the user would not even notice which application he was working in.
The best example of this integration facility is offered by the so-called KOffice Workstation, which is often found under the name of KOShell. This application is also part of the Koffice packet and is intended to serve as a sort of switchboard or starting point, similar to the Desktop under StarOffice. After starting via the corresponding menu Office programs in the KDE2 startlist, a window opens which is at first empty, where on the left side a symbol bar with all available Koffice components is displayed. You can now create a new document by clicking on the associated application with the mouse or selecting File/New from the menu. In the same way, via File/Open you can open any existing document. In both cases the workstation automatically starts the appropriate application and integrates it into its own interface. One advantage of the workstation is that the symbol bar on the left edge continues to be visible, so that in any situation you can rapidly access individual office components.
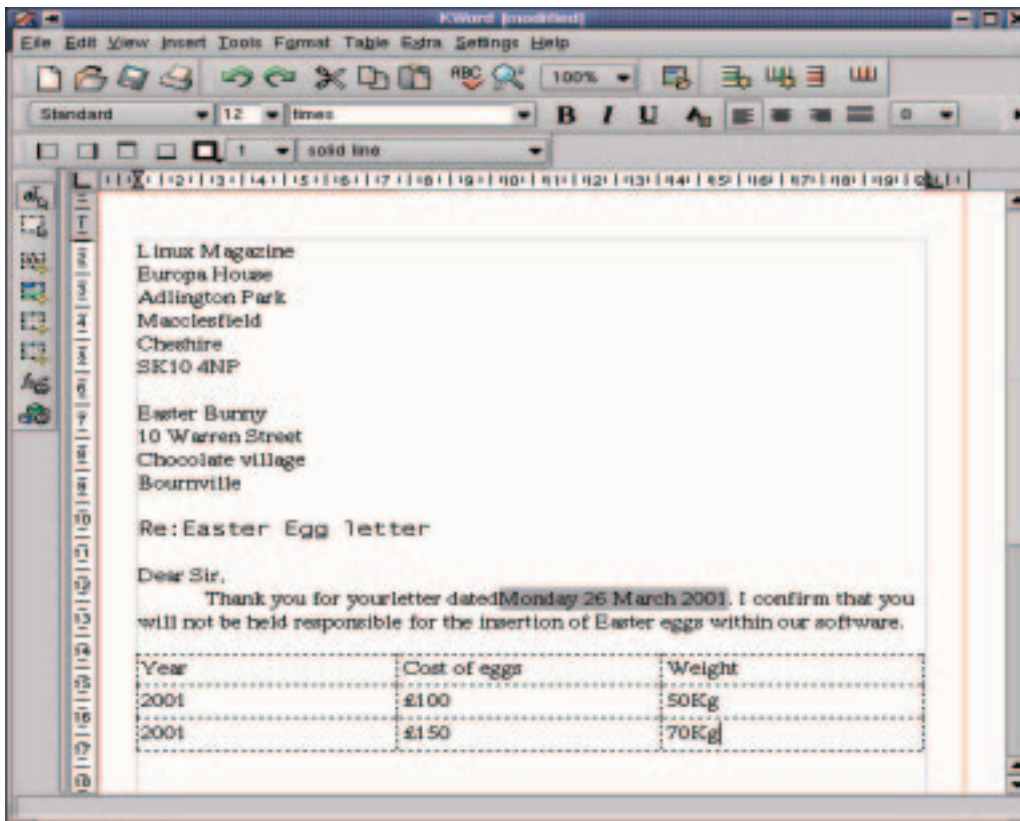
Figure 5: The completed sample letter with table inserted

the current page number, Kword provides so-called variables, found under *Insert/Variable*. A variable after an entry there means that once inserted this variable will always be automatically updated by Kword. For example, a date inserted in this way would always display the actual date of your computer after the document was opened. So that you can still tell, even after later editing, which symbols in your document are part of a variable, the text thus added is backed in grey in your document.

So that the date appears indented, as in Figure 3, you can use the tabulators provided by Kword. To jump forward by one tab stop at a time, press the tab key the corresponding number of times. You can see where these individual marks are located from the ruler: wherever a black tick is placed, is where such a tab stop lies. To change the position of the existing tab stops, click on the corresponding ticks with the left mouse button, hold it down and simply drag the tab stop to the desired position. To help you to do this, a broken line is inserted.

Defining tab stops

If you enter the date for our sample letter at the corresponding tab stop, you will notice that the text

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Problems and Future Prospects

Below is a brief list of the problems which struck us as unpleasant on our test computer when working withKword (Version pre-BETA 1 (KDE2.0)):
- *Kword frequently crashes abruptly during work, so you should save your documents often.*
- *The Help file for Kword is only in English and also has too many gaps.*
- *Representation errors can crop up in the text, if the right or left edge of the page does not fit completely into the window. If this happens, increase the resolution or enlarge the window.*
- *If parts of text are marked using the mouse, the marking might be shown as graphically incorrect.*
- *The import filters offer only a rudimentary import of Word97 documents.*
- *Working with graphics can provoke very rapid crashes. It can also happen that graphics frames disappear forever after processing.*
- *In future versions all stability problems should obviously be corrected and a few more features, especially with respect to the area of import filters, are to be added. To find out more about the future of Kword, take a look at the Koffice homepage at http://koffice.kde.org.*

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is always lined up to the right of this stop. If you want to alter this action, you must create a new stop with the correct, special characteristics. For this, at the top left, where the two ruler lines meet, there is a small triangle with a symbol. This symbol indicates which tabs are subsequently created in each case. By simply clicking on them with the mouse you can change the current type in Kword. In order then to finally create the tab stops, simply click with your mouse at the desired place on the ruler. If you go wrong and want to get rid of these tabs, simply click again on them, hold down the mouse button and drag them downwards. Once the mouse pointer has left the ruler and you release the mouse button again, Kword should immediately make the edited tabs disappear.

As you will certainly have noticed by now, in the horizontal ruler, where the left side of the page begins, there are two more, smaller triangles. With the upper one you can define the precise point at which the first line of a paragraph should appear. On the other hand, the lower triangle shows how far the other lines of the paragraph should be moved out or be indented. Incidentally, these two triangles are moved about in exactly the same way as the tabs.

When working with the ruler, you should take note that the changes always relate only to the line or paragraph in which the cursor is positioned at the time. The exception to this is the last entered line of your document: all settings applied to this always apply for all subsequent ones.

The method just presented for creating and/or moving tabs and the paragraph format by mouse is very easy, but in many cases it is a bit too imprecise. Via *Format/Paragraph*, you can reach a window in which you can define and adjust all the elements addressed above by entering values directly.

This is where it gets interesting

Now the subject line will be designed a bit more ambitiously. To do this, mark it either with the mouse, or alternatively move the cursor to the corresponding line, hold down the [Shift] key and mark the respective text using the arrow keys. Using the symbol bar for text formatting at the top edge of the screen, assign the text just marked, a different font size (second button from left), a different font (using the third button from the left) and a different colour (via the *A* symbol with the bin). Similarly, you can also select from the menu the item *Format/Font* or *Format/Colour* and make all the settings mentioned in the windows which pop-up in each case. By the way, the fonts available to you now should be precisely those that KDE already has.

Finally

In our sample letter, there is still no table. To create one of these rectangular collections of cells, there are just two options available under Kword: either

insert a Kspread table or rely on a considerably less effective table from Kword. Please bear in mind that a Kword table is designed only for formatting - it is not possible to perform calculations in it. For our example, though, this simple table from Kword is perfectly adequate. To create it, click in the tool bar on the symbol "create table" (fourth from bottom). With the symbol underneath, you can insert a Kspread table in the same way. Alternatively, instead of the symbol bar, you will find the corresponding commands in the main menu under *Tools*.

In any case, a window should now open, in which you should limit the size of the table for our example to three rows and three columns. After clicking on *OK* the mouse pointer turns into a set of cross hairs. Move this pointer to the position in your document at which the table in to be inserted. Now hold down the left mouse button, drag up a frame and then release the mouse button. The size of the frame does not matter by the way in this case, as in the previous window, the value *Automatic* was already set by default in both lists on the left side of the window. If the inserted table gets in the way of text, Kword will automatically move this.

 If the table does not meet your expectations, you can delete it using the menu item *Table/Delete table*. Under this menu item you will, incidentally, also find some more commands with which you can quickly add or remove lines or columns to or from an existing table.

Now enter, roughly as shown in Figure 5, a few fantasy values in the individual table fields. You reach the next table field either by clicking on the mouse or pressing the [Down arrow] key.

To finish off, give the whole table a more interesting look, using the functions from the last of the symbol bars on the top edge. Important: first select a line type in the big list (click on the long button, far right) and only then assign the line, via the four left, smaller buttons, to the actual cell.

This brings us to the end of the first section of our five-part Koffice Workshop. But we are not quite ready to take our leave of word processing: Next time we will look at the somewhat more complex functions, where dealing with frames will play an especially important role. Using a newspaper as an example, we will then be coming back to Kword.   ■

These tabs are available

The symbol which resembles an L, after jumping to this text mark, always formats the text entered there left-justified, while on the other hand the reversed L always makes it right-justified. The upside-down T is especially useful for figures as all text at this tab mark is centred. If a dot is added to the T, the decimal point of the figure entered there is always lined up on this tab.