

## OpenOffice Templates

# Preparation Will Get You Everywhere

Stylesheets can save you lots of time when working with OpenOffice, if you are manipulating large documents or perform repetitive tasks. So, how do you create useful templates for letters or memos quickly? We explore the finer points of creating the master templates that prove to be so useful in everyday operations.

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It is a common scenario: you need to compose a letter quickly, but where can you find an appropriate letterhead? Getting the layout right might involve hours of tinkering – but things could have been so simple if you had taken the trouble to create a template. After all, OpenOffice does provide template management free of charge.

If you have not installed this Office suite, you can download it from <http://www.openoffice.org>. The word processor, *OpenOffice.org Writer*, is launched by typing *soffice &* in the command line; you may need to edit the path.

## The Letter

An empty text input window welcomes you to the program. As you use the same steps to create a template as you would to create a normal text document, you could just start typing. However, a letter template is only useful as a basis for all

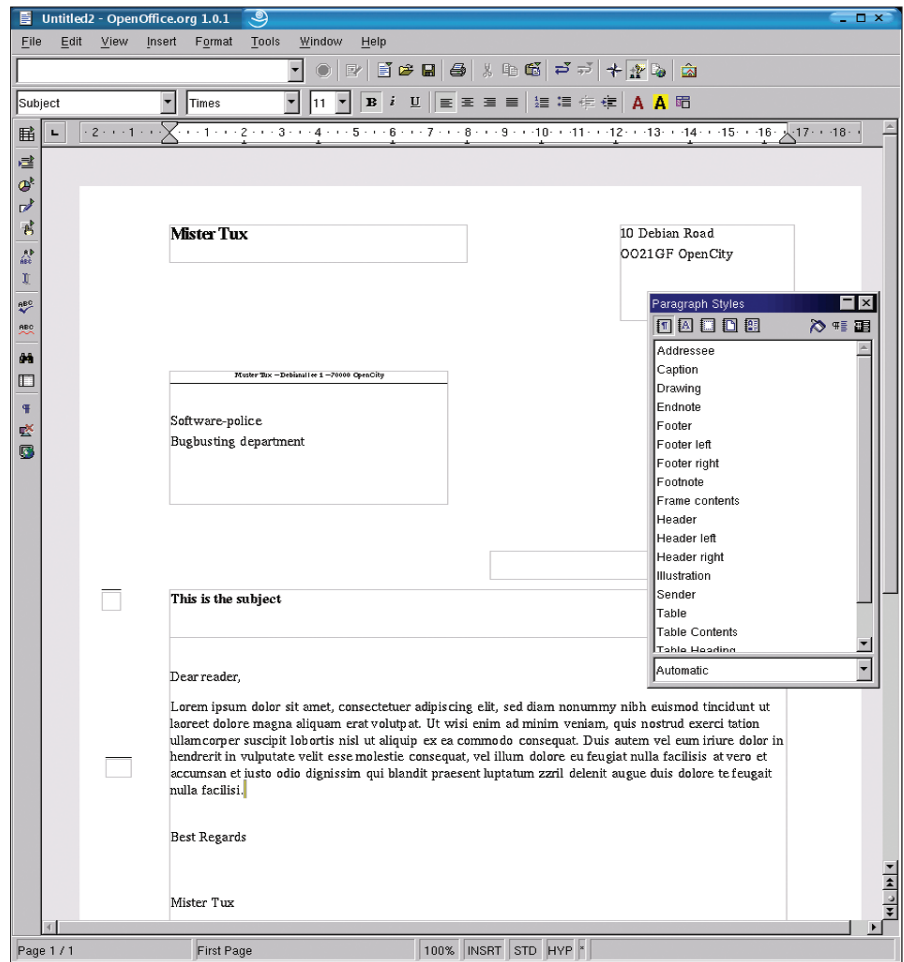


Figure 1: Your template could look like this

your correspondence if it defines parameters that every letter uses. These include text frames for the address, the sender's details and possibly a footnote.

To add a text frame, click *Insert / Frame*. This opens a dialog box where you can specify options for the frame (Figure 2). In the case of frames in templates, you should anchor the frame to the page to prevent it from being moved by the text content later. Movable elements in templates only cause confused layouts and texts with nothing landing up in the right place.

You can then enter the co-ordinates and size of the frame, while still working in the *Type* tab. Instead of assuming absolute lengths and widths in centimeters, the dialog box also uses percentage values, if you check the *Relative* checkbox.

Clicking on *OK* allows Writer to insert the frame, which is indicated by a light gray border, at the specified position. However, the border is only used for ease of viewing and will not appear in the hard copy. Most templates will tend to avoid a visible border (*Borders* tab), as

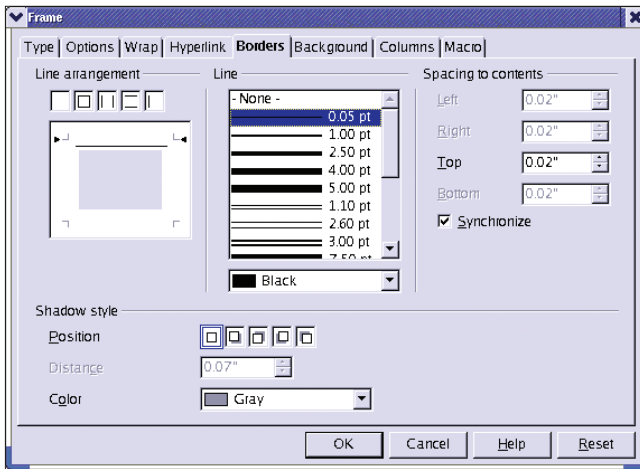


Figure 2: Frame Characteristics

the frame is intended for layout and grouping purposes rather than as an optical split. To modify the characteristics of an existing frame, simply double-click on its border.

You can add frames as required for address fields. The sample template, *brief.stw* (Figure 1), contains examples and can be downloaded from [1].

## Fold Mark

To simplify folding the page, you should create at least one fold mark. You can use a simple trick to do so. Create a small frame 0.5 cm x 0.5 cm, and attach it about 10.50 cm from the top margin and about 0.60 cm from the left margin of the page. The page is folded at the top border of this frame. You may need to change these values, depending on your printer or paper size, the example here being based on A4.

The fold mark can be made visible by changing the characteristics of the frame, using the *Borders* tab (Figure 2). The dialog box shows a frame icon. You can click on the borders of the icon to toggle between invisible (on line) and

visible (black line). Clicking on the top border of the frame ensures that the fold mark is shown in your document and in the hard copy. OpenOffice uses a default of 0.05 points for the line width. You should modify this value in the *Line* drop-down to ensure that the mark is visible in the hard copy.

## A Question of Style

The *Stylist* is probably the most important tool, when creating templates; you can press the [F11] key to display the tool (Figure 3). It has a small taskbar of its own that allows you to switch between paragraph, character, frame, page and numbering styles (from left to right). You can create your own styles for these categories and modify existing styles.

To change the font for default text, select the *Default* style in the *Paragraph Styles* tab (the icon on the left), right click to open the drop-down menu and click on *Modify...* You can now change the font, and the numbering for paragraphs and layouts.

Note that these changes will be reflected in any documents that use this style. OpenOffice prompts you on opening a file whose template has been modified. This can save time, if a layout has been changed simultaneously in multiple documents.

However, it does take some organizing: parts of a template that require different formats should be placed in

styles of their own, to avoid extra editing if you change the layout.

## ... and Management

The *File / Templates / Save ...* dialog allows you to store the modified template. OpenOffice stores templates stored by selecting this function in the *template* subdirectory below the OpenOffice working directory. You can store a template by selecting *File / Save as...* of course, but that bypasses the office package's management mechanism and involves manual template management for the user.

When you use the normal facilities to store a template, a window with the columns *Categories* and *Templates* appears. The relationship between these two is like the relationship between folders and files. Thus, letter templates should be stored in a letter category and memo templates in a memo category.

As the *Letter* category does not exist, you will need to launch the *Organizer...* In the window that appears (Figure 4) right click on the left column (*Templates*) to open the drop-down menu. You can then select *New* to add a new category called *Letters*. After closing the window, the category will be displayed in the template area. To store a template in this area, click on the area and type a name for the template in the upper input box.

Now you can write letters extremely quickly by selecting *Templates* in *File / New / Templates and Documents*, then double-clicking the appropriate category and selecting the required template. Now you can concentrate on the content of the letter. Of course, you will have to enter the text for the letter yourself, but that is an issue that is unlikely to be resolved in the near future. ■

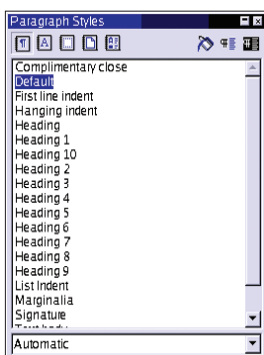


Figure 3: The Stylist

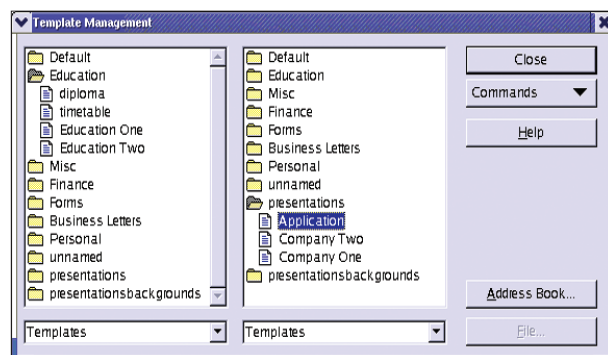


Figure 4: Template Management

**INFO**

[1] Sample Template for Letters: <http://www.killesberg.org/linuxuser/templates/>

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