OpenOffice

OpenOffice Tips & Tricks

Just made the move to OpenOffice? If you previously worked with the Microsoft Office product, your new OpenOffice environment may at first feel unfamiliar. Read on for tips and tricks that will help you enjoy the OpenOffice experience.

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◼ On the Dot

OpenOffice provides a function that allows you to start typing at almost any position on a page. The feature is known as the *Direct cursor*. It is enabled by checking *Direct Cursor* in *Tools / Options / Text Document / Formatting Aids* or by clicking on the *Direct Cursor on/off* icon in the main toolbar.

If the direct cursor is enabled, you can click any position in the document to place the cursor as near as possible to that position, and insert a paragraph with various properties, depending on the options you select. By default, the feature will use tabs to position the direct cursor. You can select a different option in the area below *Insert*:

• *Paragraph alignment*: The direct cur-

Figure 1: If the space bullets in the formatting aids display annoy you, simply remove them by unchecking the ***Spaces*** **checkbox in** ***Tools / Options / Text Document / Formatting Aids***.

sor defines the alignment of the current paragraph. Depending on where you click, the paragraph will be aligned left, centered, or aligned right. The cursor displays an arrow symbol to show the alignment.

• *Left paragraph margin*: The left paragraph margin is set to the horizontal position you clicked after enabling the direct cursor.

• *Tabs*: This sets the direct cursor to the tab position closest to the position that you click.

• *Tabs and spaces*: This allows for precise positioning by using as many tabs and spaces as necessary.

To change the color of the direct cursor, first click on the plus sign next to *OpenOffice org* in the left-hand panel of the *Tools / Options* menu. Then click on *Appearance* to display the color scheme on the right. In the list choose a color (see Figure 2). ◼

◼ Displaying Characters

You can click on the *Nonprinting Characters on/off* button in the toolbar, select *View / Nonprinting Characters* or simply press [Ctrl + F10] to toggle nonprinting characters on or off. There are various kinds of nonprinting characters:

• *Paragraph end*: This is the character at the end of a paragraph that resembles a back-to-front *P*.

• *Custom hyphens*: These are hidden hyphens entered by pressing [Ctrl + -] in a word. This tells OpenOffice to separate the word at the position marked by the user-defined hyphen.

 • *Spaces*: If enabled, this displays a small bullet point for each space.

 • *Non-breaking spaces*: Non-breaking spaces are shown as a gray box-shaped bullet point. Non-breaking spaces are not broken at the end of a line, and are entered by pressing [Ctrl + Space].
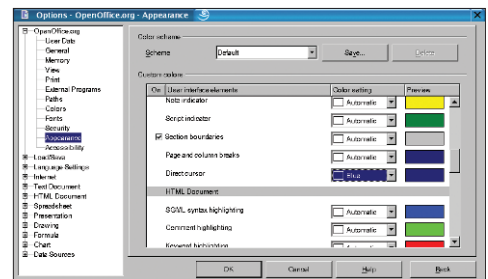

Figure 2: Use ***Tools / Options / OpenOffice org / Appearance*** **to assign a custom color to the direct cursor.**

• *Tabs*: Are shown as arrows.

• *Breaks*: This refers to a line break, which is created by pressing [Shift + Enter]. A break allows you to start a new line within the current paragraph keeping the current paragraph style.

• *Hidden text*: Text entered using the *Conditional text* or *Hidden text* field functions can be displayed or hidden.

• *Hidden paragraphs*: As above, except that this text is inserted using the *Hidden Paragraph* field function. This can be enabled/disabled by selecting *View / Hidden Paragraphs*.

It was a good idea of the developers to allow the user to enable or disable formatting aids individually. For example, if the bullet that represents the space character bothers you, simply select *Tools / Options / Text Document / Formatting Aids* and uncheck the *Spaces* checkbox below *Display of* to hide the bullet (see Figure 1). ◼

◼ Read Only Access

If you need view a document without risking inadvertent changes, it makes sense to open the document in read-only mode. To do so, select a file in the *Open* dialog box, and check the *Read-only* checkbox. This opens in a write-protected mode as indicated in the title bar. The toolbar, object bar, and some menu items are hidden.

If you decide to change something in the file after all, there is no need to re-open the file. Simply click the *Edit file* icon in the function bar to change the status of the file. ◼
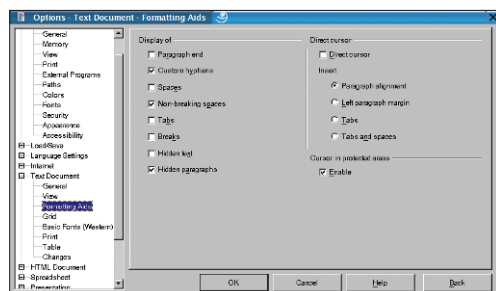
Points of View

OpenOffice 1.1 introduced a new approach to defining the appearance of the various document types. It removes some of the redundancy from the previous dialogs by grouping items for multiple document types below the *OpenOffice org* heading. To access these items, click on *Tools / Options* and then on the plus sign to the left of *OpenOffice org*. The group of functions in the tree structure allows you globally to customize the view and appearance of all OpenOffice document types.

View Options

You can configure the look & feel of OpenOffice by selecting *OpenOffice org / View* in the *Tools / Options* dialog. This takes you to a window with options for the general look & feel, font antialiasing, previews and history, button displays, and mouse settings.

Color Scheme

The *OpenOffice org / Appearance* area allows you to customize the OpenOffice color scheme. Let's look at some examples:

- *Document background*: Changes the color of the virtual page. The default setting, *Automatic*, displays a white background.
- *Application background*: Changes the color of the background area (the area between the virtual page, if currently displayed, and control elements such as toolbars, rulers, scrollboxes).
- *Font color*: Changes the default font color. The default setting, *Automatic*, uses a black font.

Some of the items previously stored below *Text Document* and *HTML Document* have now been moved to the color scheme (*OpenOffice org / Appearance*):

- *Text boundaries*: Enable/disable and define the page margins for your documents.
- *Table boundaries*: Enable/disable and define the lines between the cells in a table – this is a gray hairline by default.
- *Object boundaries*: OpenOffice defines objects as "screen elements containing data", that is images, spreadsheets, texts, and so on. If checked, this option displays borders between objects in the selected color.

URLs can appear in many document types. OpenOffice allows you to use the color scheme to distinguish between visited/unvisited links and normal text.

- *Visited links*: Enable/disable highlighting of visited links in the selected color.
- *Unvisited links* Enable/disable highlighting of unvisited links in the selected color.

Color Scheme Options for Document Types

Additional color scheme options for the various document types are accessible in the *Tools / Options* dialog. The subheadings are *Text document*, *HTML document*, *Spreadsheet*, *Drawing/Presentation*, and *Basic syntax highlighting*.

Options for Document Types

In addition to the viewing and color scheme options available in the *Tools / Options / OpenOffice org* section, the window contains a number of document type-specific settings for the document types *Text Document*, *HTML Document*, *Spreadsheet*, *Presentation*, and *Drawing*. Although a *View* section is available for each document type, each has a different selection of options.

Let's look at the *Text document*, noting that most of the options shown here are also available for the *HTML document* type.

The area below *Guides* allows you to modify the way guides are displayed. The options are:

- *Guides while moving*: If you check this option, frame borders are extended to allow precise positioning using the values on the rulers.
- *Simple handles*: If this option is checked, handles are displayed as simple rectangles without 3D effects.
- *Large handles*: If this option is checked, larger handles are displayed. The area below *View* allows you to select which scroll bars and rulers you would like to display: *Horizontal scroll bar*, *Vertical scroll bar*, *Horizontal ruler* and *Vertical ruler*. The *Smooth scroll* option provides for smoother scrolling of the page. The speed will depend on the area and color depth.

The *Display* area allows you to define which elements of the page to display on screen:

- *Graphics and objects*: If the checkbox is unchecked, both of these elements are replaced by empty placeholders. You can also toggle this option by selecting the *Graphics on/off* icon in the toolbar.
- *Tables*: If this is checked, any tables the document contains are shown on screen.
- *Drawings and controls*: If this is checked, drawings and controls are shown on screen.
- *Field codes*: If this is checked, the field code is displayed instead of the field contents. You can toggle this option using *View / Fields*.

- *Notes*: If this is checked, notes and scripts are displayed as small colored boxes. You can double-click a box to edit the script it contains.

HTML documents have an additional *Settings* area that allows you to specify the unit of measurement for the rulers. The default is *Inch*, but you can opt for *Point*, *Pica*, *Centimeter*, or *Millimeter* instead.

Spreadsheets

You can choose a color for the *Grid lines*, to brighten up the default *Light gray*, and enable or disable thicker lines for *Page breaks*. Spreadsheets use the same *Guides* and *Handles* as text and HTML documents.

The *Display* area allows you to select the table elements to be displayed on screen:

- *Formulas*: displays formulas rather than their results
- *Zero values*: displays cells with a value of 0
- *Note indicator*: displays a bullet to point out notes in the cells
- *Value highlighting*: cells with text content are displayed in black, cells with numbers are blue, and all others green
- *Anchor*: displays the anchor symbol for an image when you select that image
- *Text overflow*: tells you whether a cell contains more text than it can display
- *Show references in color*: highlights references both in formulas and by drawing a colored border around a cell.

The area below *Objects* allows you to specify whether to show, hide or display placeholders for *Objects/Graphics*, *Charts*, and *Drawing objects*.

The *Window* area on the lower right of the panel allows you to specify the help elements that you want to display in spreadsheets. All of the following elements are enabled by default: *Column and row headers*, *Horizontal scroll bar*, *Vertical scroll bar*, *Sheet tabs*, and *Outline symbols*.

Presentations and drawings

The *View* submenu is identical for presentations and drawings. There are four options which speed up the screen refresh, all of which are disabled by default.

The *Display* area allows you to specify which elements will be displayed on screen and includes *Rulers visible*, *Guides when moving*, *All control points in Bézier editor*, and *Contour of each individual object*. The *Alternative display* area has selections for *Image placeholders*, *Contour mode*, *Text placeholders*, and *Line contour only*.