Beginning OpenOffice 3: From Novice to Professional

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CHAPTER 1

Writer: Basic Documents

We'll begin in the obvious place with a run through the core applications in the OpenOffice.org (OO.o) suite beginning with Writer, and then moving on through Calc, Impress, Draw, and Base.

If you have two hours to prepare for a seminar presentation, feel free to leap into the Impress section straight away. However, it might be a good idea to read through the following annotations that explain the user interface conventions used in OO.o. Although the screenshot is from Writer, most of the interface elements are consistent across applications (see Figure 1-1).

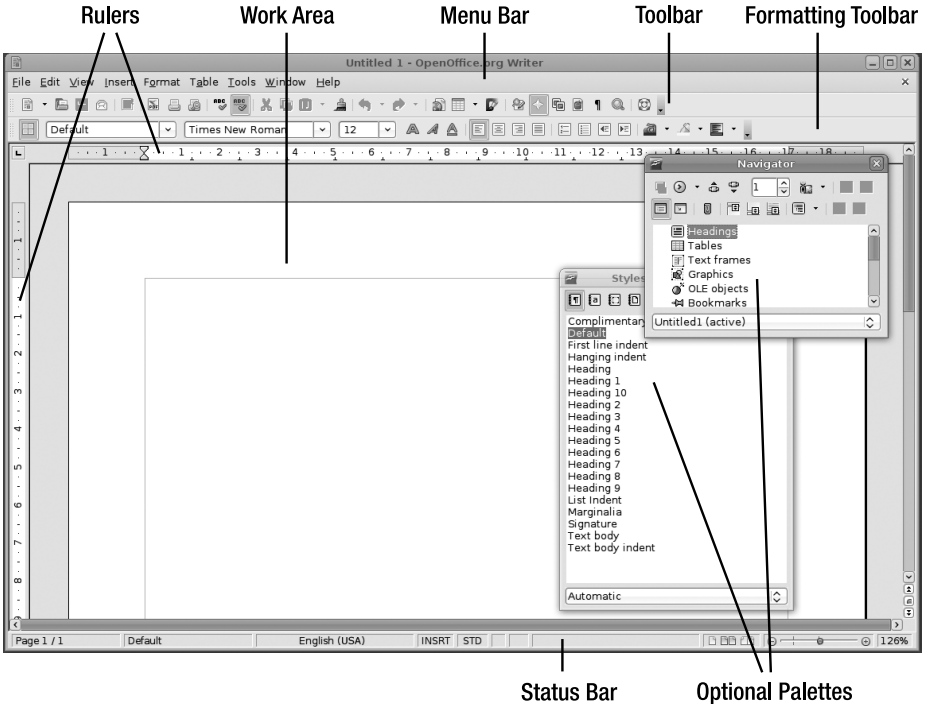

Figure 1-1. *The advantage of using an office suite is that the user interface is consistent across the different elements.*

Menu Bar

The *menu bar* (see Figure 1-2) is standard across most desktop applications. Almost all of Writer's tools are accessible via these menus, and most of the options available have keyboard combinations assigned to them. For example, to quickly save a document, you could choose File ➤ Save or simply press Ctrl+S.

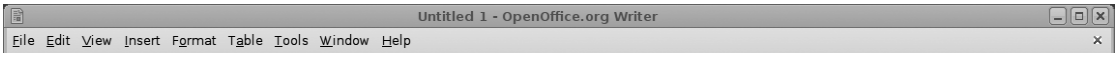

Figure 1-2. *The menu bar*

The menu system in OO.o is configurable via Tools ➤ Customize, so you can redesign the whole application to look like your favorite package. The menus are described here:

- *File*: Deals with file operations such as opening, saving, and closing documents, but also contains the document properties section and print options.
- *Edit*: Allows you to cut, copy, and paste as well as find and replace particular words or phrases.
- *View*: Provides options for setting the view in the main window and also opening and closing Writer's various toolbars.
- *Insert*: Allows you to add things to the page, including frames, images, headers, footers, and breaks in the text.
- *Format*: Allows you to make changes to everything from pages and paragraphs to individual characters.
- *Table*: Provides options for adding tables to a document. Tables can be used to present data like a spreadsheet and also to position elements when it comes to building web pages.
- *Tools*: Enables you to configure OpenOffice, configure the user interface of Writer (or another of the applications), perform a word count, and set up options for the spell checker.
- *Window*: Allows you to manage multiple documents or multiple views of the same document.
- *Help*: Provides access to the OpenOffice.org documentation.

Toolbar

The *toolbar* contains a range of commonly used shortcuts for opening, saving, and adding various elements to your documents. The toolbar is divided into logical regions, which, from left to right, are file operations, output, spelling, clipboard features, formatting, inserting, and searching (see Figure 1-3). As with the menus, these are completely customizable from Tools ➤ Customize.

Figure 1-3. *The toolbar*

Although the default view of Writer displays two toolbars, many more toolbars are available that contain tools for performing specific tasks such as designing forms, adding rich media to web pages, or offering more control over elements such as line spacing and bullets or numbers. These can all be accessed using the View ➤ Toolbars menu entry. Once added to a page, they can be dragged from the edge of the page and either left as a floating toolbar (which means they will have a standard Close icon in the top right of the window) or docked to another edge of the window. Docking a toolbar to the top or bottom of the screen renders it as horizontal, whereas docking to the left or right edge positions the icons vertically.

Formatting Toolbar

The *Formatting toolbar* is a specialized toolbar used to make changes at either the character or paragraph level. This element is actually context sensitive, so in most cases, a version similar to this will be displayed. However, if you were editing a picture, configuring a frame, or drawing a shape, the Formatting toolbar would display a toolset relevant for that task.

The Formatting toolbar in Figure 1-4 is the standard text model, which has options for changing the font, font size, style, justification, indents, and color options. The disclosure arrow to the far right of the toolbar offers quick access to customization tools for that particular toolbar.

Figure 1-4. *Context-sensitive Formatting toolbar*

Rulers

Rulers provide a visual guide to your page (see Figure 1-5). By default, the rulers are set to increment in centimeters; however, you can change this to inches, millimeters, and even points and picas through the application preferences (see Figure 1-6).

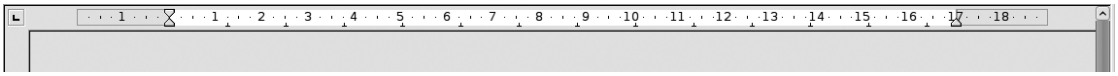

Figure 1-5. *Rulers*

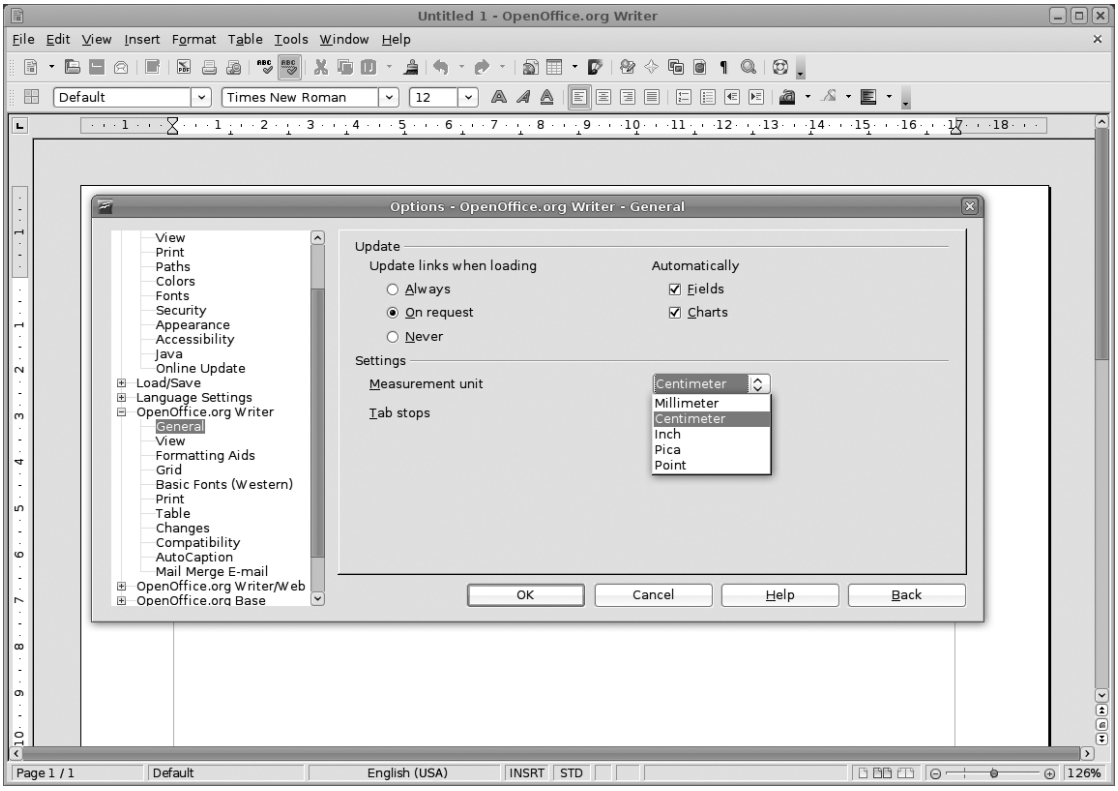

Figure 1-6. *Set the measurements to the value you're most comfortable with.*

To access these preferences, choose Tools ➤ Options, click the OpenOffice.org Writer disclosure arrow on the left edge of the window, and choose General. Alternative measurements are available in the drop-down list. You should notice the Tab stop value (i.e., the distance the Tab key will move your cursor across the page) updates automatically to reflect the measurement change. Select the appropriate value, and click OK.

At the left edge of the horizontal ruler is a pair of marker icons that can be used to visually define the indentation used in the document. The lighter colored space shows the usable area of the page. The top icon can move independently of the bottom one, which sets the first line indent. The bottom icon defines the standard paragraph indent (it has a companion on the right side of the ruler), and it can be simply dragged and dropped to the right place. You can create a hanging indent by dragging the top icon to the left of the bottom icon (see Figure 1-7).

This method of creating paragraph indents is quick but imprecise. More refined control is available via the options available by choosing Format ➤ Paragraph.

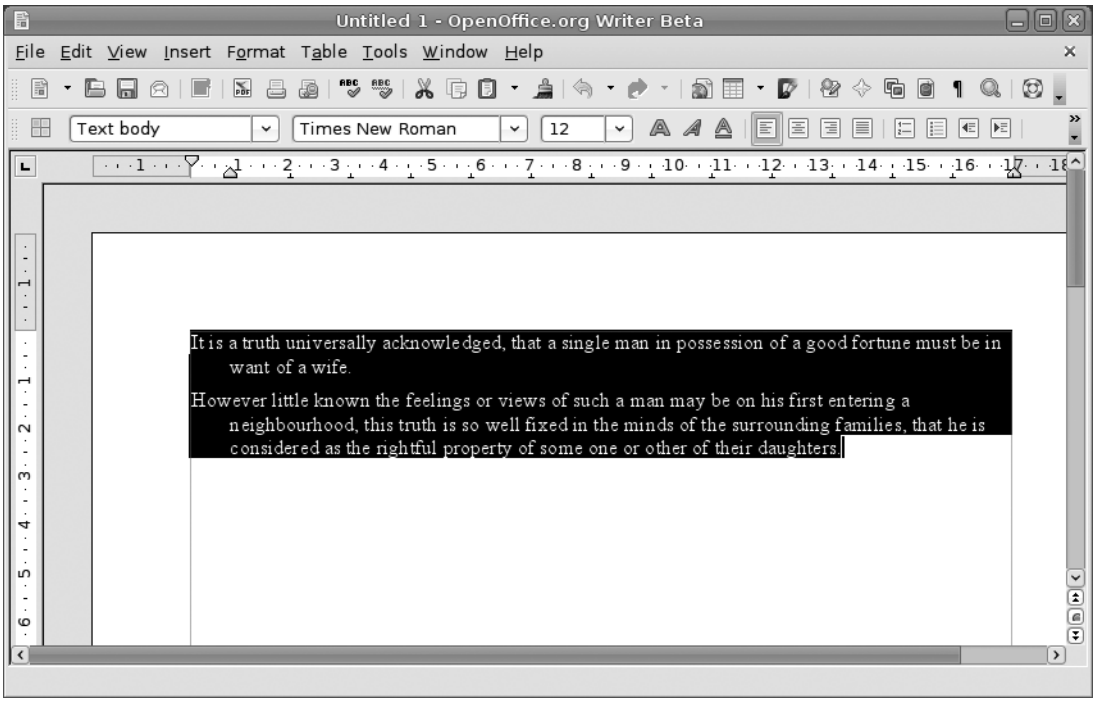

Figure 1-7. *Use the ruler widgets to make a hanging indent.*

Work Area

The *work area* is where your document is displayed (see Figure 1-8). Writer features a number of display modes, which are accessed through the View menu. The standard view is a so-called WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) view, which means the text and images onscreen attempt to represent the look and feel of the final document, including headers, footers, and page numbers. A more accurate rendition can be seen by choosing File ➤ Page Preview.

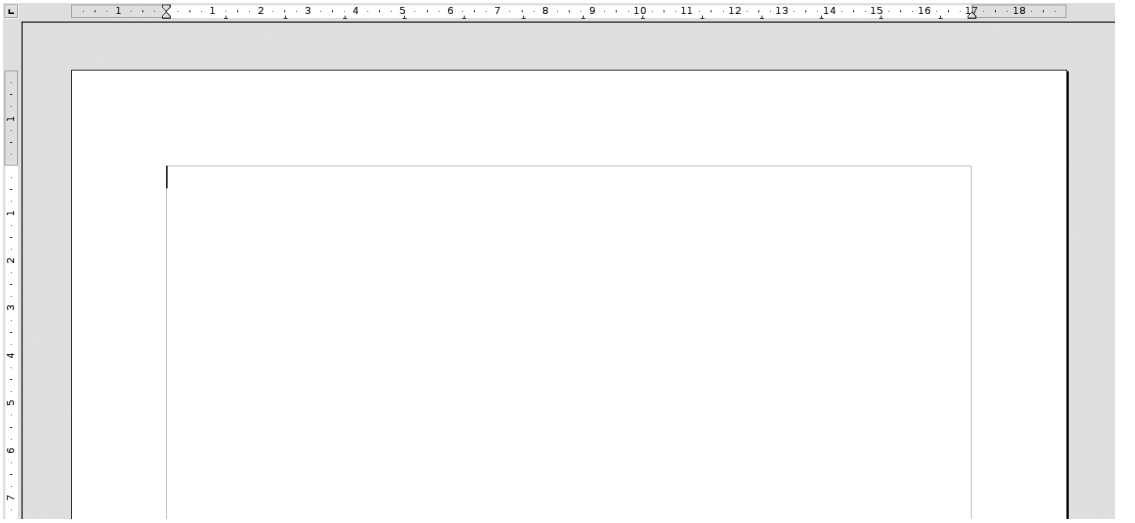

Figure 1-8. *The main work area*

The two other main views are Web View and Full Screen. The former displays documents as they would appear on the Internet, whereas the latter is excellent for writers who prefer not to have the distractions of toolbars, menus, and palettes onscreen with their words. The work area can be zoomed to various levels by choosing View ➤ Zoom. Options available here include Fit Width and Height (i.e., full page), Width, Optimal, or Variable. The last option allows you to set the zoom level as a percentage. This edition of Writer also allows you to see double-page spreads in the full-page view.

In some parts of the application suite, notably in Impress and Draw, the main Formatting toolbar is augmented by a set of drawing tools arranged across the bottom of the screen.

Optional Palette

During normal use, most of Writer*'s* facilities are available through either menus or toolbars; however, some options launch a new palette with a further set of tools (see Figure 1-9). The advantage of these palettes is that they can be freely positioned on the screen and, when necessary, removed completely with the click of a mouse. Examples of optional palettes include text styles, the document Navigator, and the bibliographic database.

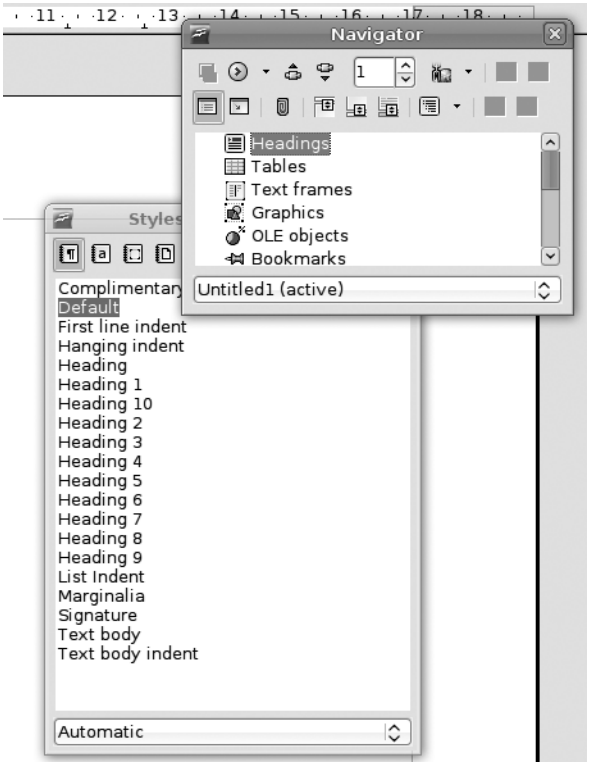

Figure 1-9. *There are a few optional palettes that you may leave open as you work.*

These palettes behave just like ordinary application windows, which can be minimized, maximized, and removed. However, they always stay on top of the main Writer window. The Navigator may become more useful as you investigate the powerful document creation options in OO.o because it provides ready access to the deep structure of a document. For example, when working on a long document with chapters, sections, and subsections, the Navigator can display these elements in a hierarchy, so that selecting the element takes you directly to that section for editing. Navigator also presents a list of (labeled) images, making it easy to select a picture even if it's obscured by other page elements.

Status Bar

The *status bar* at the bottom of the window (see Figure 1-10) is mainly informational, although it does have a few user editable options. Most useful are the mode switch in the center of the bar that changes editing from inserting (i.e., preserving the existing text) and overwriting; the selection options; the page mode; and the zoom slider, which allows you to zoom in and out of the document without having to visit the menu. Note the two small notches on the slider; these correspond to the Whole Page view and the Page Width view.

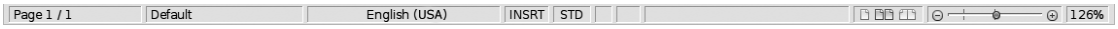

Figure 1-10. *The status bar*

In the very center of this bar is the currently selected dictionary. This should conform to the default language of your computer system, but it can be changed by clicking the language name and selecting a new language. If your language isn't listed, select More to access more language options.

Creating Your First Document

The word processor is one of the core applications for almost every type of computer user. Whether you're writing a novel, report, dissertation, or just a shopping list, a decent word processor, such as Writer, is a good thing to have around.

At its most basic, you can launch Writer, click into the work area, and begin typing. Words will appear on the screen within a representation of your page, and these can be highlighted (click and drag across your selection with the mouse) and then adjusted in a variety of ways using the Formatting toolbar. The options on the Formatting toolbar (from left to write) allow you to apply a style to the text (we'll cover these later); change the font and size; make the text appear bold, italic, or underlined; change the alignment; create a list; change the indentation of the paragraph; or adjust the color or highlighting of the text.

Your first project is based on producing a letterhead for a small business or solo trader. You'll add a small graphical flourish, the essential address details, a space for a reference number, and a footer. After the design is satisfactory, you'll save the whole thing as a template for use the next time you need to write a letter.

Create the Page

To begin, launch the application by either selecting the Start Center or Writer from the Start menu. The former launches a new window containing icons for each of the individual applications—choose Writer to get started—whereas the latter takes you straight to the application itself. Either way, a new document is displayed onscreen using a default page size and margins setup.

READY FOR LAUNCH

The first time you launch OO.o, you are prompted for your name (this can be used to automatically add details to documents), and given the option of setting automatic application updates and registering the software with the OO.o project. Although I recommend using both of these options, neither is mandatory.

The first task is to set up the most fundamental elements of your document, the page size and margins. To do this, choose Format ➤ Page, and select the Page tab. A number of predefined page sizes (A4, Letter, etc.) are available via the Format drop-down list, and you can also define a new page size using the Height and Width options (see Figure 1-11). Page sizes that are higher than they are wide are Portrait (and will thus be defined as such), and pages that are wider than they are high are Landscape. You can switch these around using the two buttons below the page dimensions. For this document, choose A4.

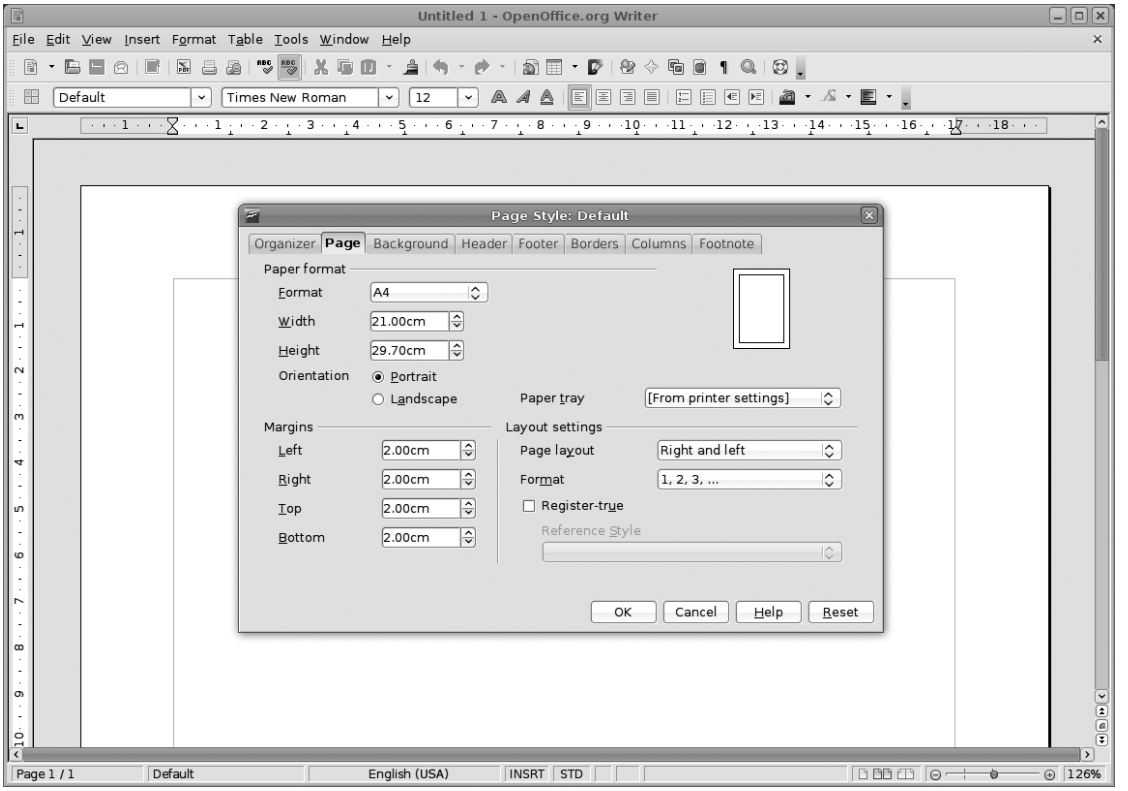

Figure 1-11. *The Page Style window is used to define the dimensions of the document.*

At the bottom left are the margin values for the page, which can be altered either by clicking on the increase/decrease arrows or by simply typing new numbers in the spaces. You can also use the Tab key to move from one value to another, which automatically highlights the next number ready for editing. For this document, use 2.54cm all round, as this equates to about an inch.

Next move onto the Layout settings, where you can set up how the pages will be displayed, that is, as either a series of left or right pages, right and left (as in a book or magazine), or mirrored. The two first options are good for single-sided short documents or individual pages; with Right and Left, you can set master objects such as page headers

and footers independently for left and right pages. Finally, the Mirror option allows you to design on one side and have those changes mirrored on the opposite page. For example, a page number that appears on the left edge of the left page appears on the right edge of the right page. Because this is a simple letter, choose Only Right from the list.

The Format option defines how automatic page numbers will be displayed when added to a document. The choices are pretty straightforward.

The final option of interest in this dialog box is the Register-true check box. This is a typographical tool that attempts to line up the text on both sides of a page so the reader doesn't see the shadow of the back side when reading the front side. When you select Register-true, the text style chosen in the drop-down list will be anchored to a grid on the page regardless of its size. This can be problematic on simple documents, so ignore that for now.

Many other options are available in the Page Style dialog box, which you'll learn about in Chapter 3.

A Word About Templates

Later in this chapter, you'll learn how to create a template based on the style of this particular letter. But it's worth noting that OO.o ships with a few templates, albeit templates designed for presentations. These are accessed by choosing File ➤ New ➤ Templates and Documents. Existing templates are available under the various headings, and custom-made templates, including the one you'll make later, will eventually be accessible in the MyTemplates folder.

Fortunately, the OO.o community comes to the rescue here. From within the New ➤ Templates and Documents dialog box, select the Get more templates online link (see Figure 1-12) to open a web browser on a web site that contains hundreds of downloadable templates covering everything from text documents and spreadsheets to presentations and labels. I've selected the Professional Templates Pack II, (available in English or German) and downloaded it to a folder on the hard disk.

Close down the browser, and go back to OO.o. Close the Templates selector, choose Tools ➤ Extension Manager from the menu bar, and select Add. This launches the system's file browser, and you can navigate and select the recently downloaded file that has the extension `.oxt`. Click the Open button, read and accept the license agreement, and then wait for just a few seconds as the extensions are installed.

Finally, close the Extension Manager, and choose File ➤ New ➤ Templates and Documents to see the collection of new available templates that are all housed under sensible headings.

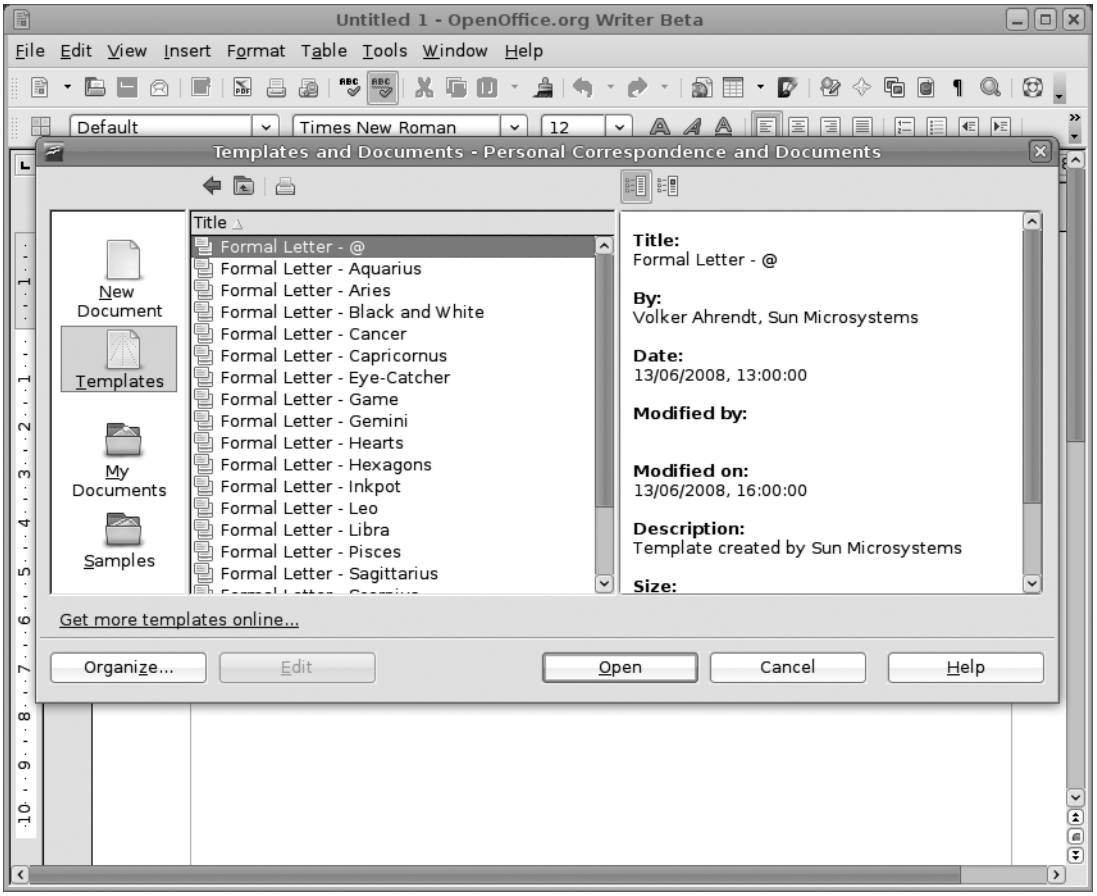

Figure 1-12. *The Web is a good source of new templates.*

Add and Format the Main Text

Now that you have a suitable page set up for a letter, you can add some text (see Figure 1-13). Add the name, recipient address, your address, date, salutation, reference, text, signoff, and your name using the default font and hard returns (i.e. press the Enter key) after each line.

You can format sections of this letter by highlighting the text you want to effect and then choosing the appropriate options. To begin with, adjust the size and position of the first element to make it look more like a letterhead by highlighting that and choosing 24 from the Font Size drop-down list (third from the left on the Formatting toolbar). You can also draw more attention to this particular element by making it bold. With the text highlighted, click the B icon on the Formatting toolbar or press Ctrl+B. Finally, select the Centered icon from the Formatting toolbar (or press Ctrl+E) to center the new heading.

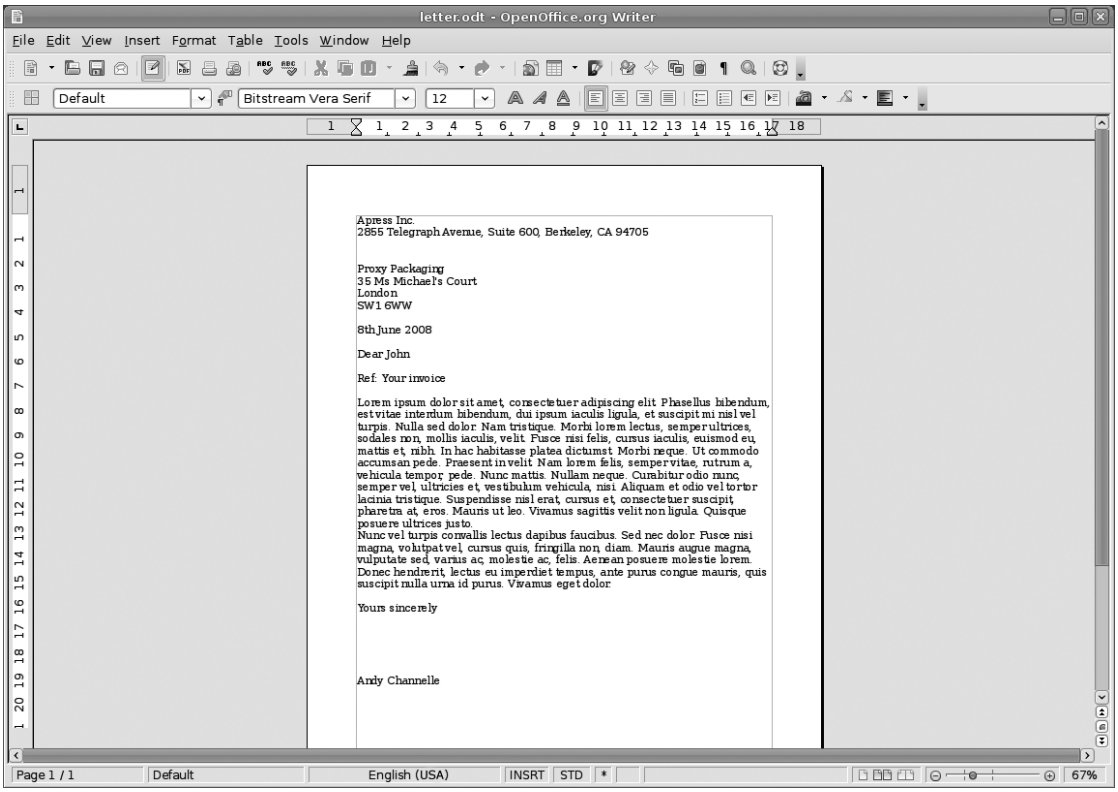

Figure 1-13. *If you launch the application and begin typing a letter, you'll end up with something like this.*

Next you need to reposition your address so it's flush with the right edge of the page by highlighting the whole address and then clicking the Align Right button or pressing Ctrl+R.

■ **Note** You can highlight text using just the keyboard. You can move around the document with the Up, Down, Left, and Right cursor keys, and if you hold down Shift, these movements will select the text. For example, Shift+Right Cursor Key selects the letter to the right of the cursor. However, pressing Ctrl+Shift+Right Cursor Key, you can select the whole word to the right of the cursor. Putting a cursor at the far left of a paragraph and pressing Shift+Down Cursor Key selects the whole line.

Although you can leave the address set right, it might look better set as a single line below the centered letterhead. Highlight the address, and choose Edit ➤ Cut (or press Ctrl+X) to cut the text to the application's clipboard. Now click below the letterhead text, and choose Edit ➤ Paste (or Ctrl+V) to paste the text back in. Obviously, it will be written

across a lot of lines, so position the cursor on the left of each line, press Backspace, add a comma between each element, and then click the Centered icon to center the text.

Next, make the Reference section bold, and you're ready to move on to the main text.

Introducing Paragraphs

Most of what you've done so far has worked with small amounts of text, but you can also effect large changes with just a few clicks. One of the methods often used to mark out paragraphs is to indent the first line of each paragraph. In Writer, this can be accomplished through the Paragraph dialog box, which is available by choosing Format ➤ Paragraph (see Figure 1-14).

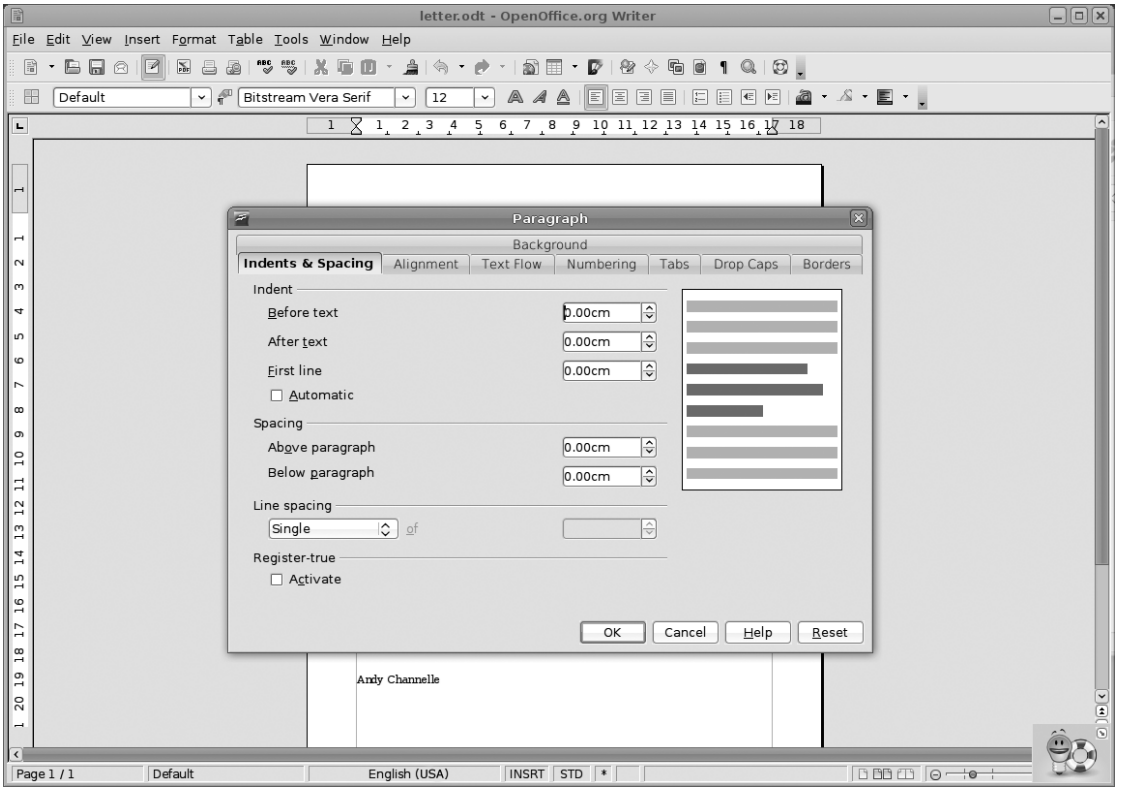

Figure 1-14. *We'll be revisiting the Paragraph dialog box later, but for now we're just interested in the Indents & Spacing section.*

There are two levels of formatting in Writer: character level and paragraph level. When working on the character level, for example, selecting a font or making some text bold, then every part of the text that is to be changed needs to be selected. When

working on the paragraph level, as you are here, it's enough to just click anywhere inside the paragraph to be changed. If you're formatting multiple paragraphs, the selection (click and drag with the mouse) needs to touch each paragraph to be changed. You don't have to worry about selecting every single character.

Although the Paragraph dialog box contains a lot of options under various tabs, we're sticking with Indents & Spacing for the moment.

The top section deals with *indents*, which are the distances between the edge of our work area and the text itself. The Before text option defines the gap between the left edge and the text, whereas the After text option deals with the right. Earlier you saw how you can alter these values visually using the widgets on the ruler, but this method offers far more control.

The Spacing section allows you to define the gap that appears before or after each paragraph. Usually you'll only use one of these options, but there are exceptions such as when adding subheadings to a piece of text. For this letter, I've set a small gap Below paragraph to create a visual break between each section of text. In most cases, a more elegant solution to identifying the beginning of a paragraph is to have a first line indent (discussed next), but on documents where the text covers a large horizontal area, a small gap can improve readability.

The third option in this dialog box, and the one you're going to actually change, is the First line indent. We can increase the value by using the up arrow next to the box, or by typing a value in the box. Enter **1.50cm**. The Automatic check box just below the First line section allows Writer to define the "perfect" first line indent value based on your font style and size. It overrides any value defined in the First line box.

The final two options, which you'll use later, are Line spacing and Register-true. The former can be used to adjust the space between lines of text in various ways, from the blunt instrument approach of single- or double-line spacing (typically, a letter has single-line spacing, whereas an essay or a manuscript has double-line spacing to accommodate notes) to more refined options based on the proportions of the text or a proper DTP-like leading setting. The latter is a paragraph-specific version of the tool we looked at earlier in the Page Style dialog box and can be used to override the global setting. To set this—it's not particularly useful for a single-sided document—simply select the Register-true check box.

After the indent is set, click the OK button to go back to the document and see the effect of the change.

Personalizing the Interface

As you advance through Writer, you'll be revisiting the Paragraph dialog box quite often. You can save some time by adding a new icon to the Formatting toolbar to launch the dialog box and also giving it a keyboard shortcut.

Usually there are levels of keyboard shortcuts in use on most computer systems. First, there are systemwide shortcuts that work across many applications. These include things like Ctrl+S for saving, Ctrl+C for copying, and Ctrl+P for pasting. The second-level shortcuts are suite-specific; Ctrl+B makes selected text bold in all of the OO.o applications (and in many other office suites), but launches, for example, a text options box in Adobe's InDesign. The third level is application specific, such as using Ctrl+1 to apply a particular text style to some selected text.

Although you can assign any combination of keys to almost any task in OO.o, it's best to steer clear of the most common combinations when defining or redefining shortcuts using the following method.

To do the former, choose Tools ➤ Customize, and select the Toolbars tab (see Figure 1-15). Under the OpenOffice.org Toolbars section, choose Formatting from the drop-down list, and scroll down the long list to find Paragraph. Click Paragraph, and a new icon will appear at the far right of the Formatting toolbar. You can change its position by clicking the up arrow next to the list; the higher it appears in the list, the farther left it will be on the toolbar.

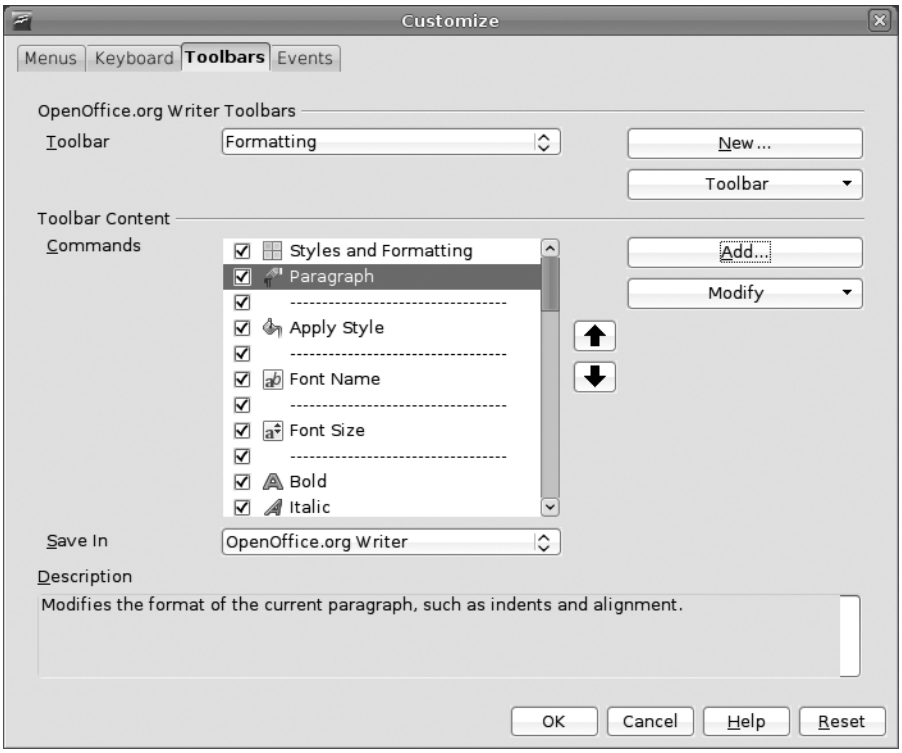

Figure 1-15. *The Paragraph button has been added to the Formatting toolbar next to the styles drop-down list, making it much quicker to access.*

The keyboard shortcut is again added by choosing Tools ➤ Customize, but this time, you choose the Keyboard tab. Although hundreds of options are available here, the process is actually quite simple, as you can see in Figure 1-16.

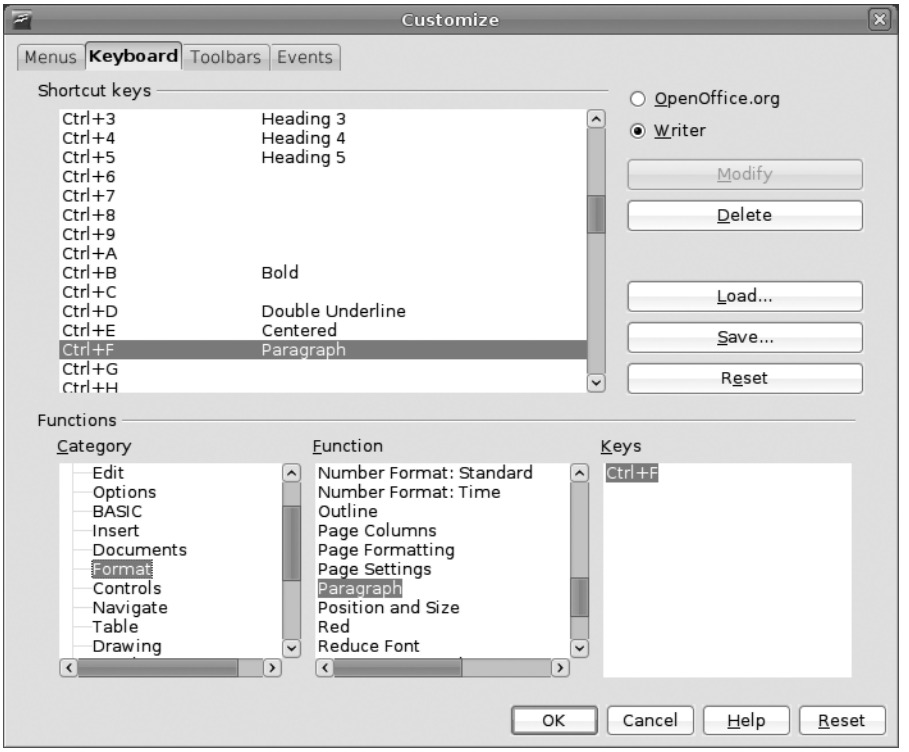

Figure 1-16. *Commands can be bound to any keyboard shortcut, making it possible to replicate the workflow of your favorite applications.*

Start by choosing a vacant key combination to contain the command from the Shortcut keys section. Ctrl+6 is free, so you can use that. It might seem sensible to choose something like Ctrl+P for the paragraph settings, but that is a standard keyboard shortcut for printing, so it's better to opt for something that doesn't conflict. With the shortcut defined, you can now add the command using the three windows at the bottom of the dialog box, which is just an alternative way of looking at the menu structure of the application.

In the Category pane, select Format to repopulate the Function pane in the center. Scroll through the list until you find Paragraph, and click it.

Click the Modify button on the top right of the dialog box, and the key combination will be bound to the command. Note that commands can be bound to any number of key combinations, but each shortcut can only have one command.

You can also edit a shortcut; for example, if you wanted to bind Ctrl+P to the Paragraph options, you find the shortcut in the list, reconfigure the Functions at the bottom

of the dialog box, and click Modify. More importantly, if you're working with OO.o across a number of computers, you can save reconfigured shortcuts by using the Save button, moving the file to the second machine, and importing them with the Load button, which means there's no need to duplicate a lot of effort across machines. You can also restore the default combinations using the Reset button.

Any changes you make are written to the system only when you click the OK button, so if you mess things up, just select Cancel to revert to the pre-edited state.

Now the all-important paragraph options are just a button or shortcut away; but while you're editing the user interface, think about the other tools that might be useful on one of the toolbars or that might need to be moved. The entire interface can be edited through the Customize option. Moreover, if you only need regular access to a particular button for a short time, you can hide previously added buttons from a toolbar (and, obviously return them) by clicking the down arrow at the far right of any toolbar, selecting Visible buttons, and then deselecting the appropriate option. This is different from removing a button using Tools ➤ Customize because the button is not completely removed; you can add it again by going back to the Visible buttons and reselecting the tool.

COMMON KEYBOARD SHORTCUTS

- Ctrl+B: Bold
- Ctrl+I: Italic
- Ctrl+U: Underline
- Ctrl+Shift+P: Superscript
- Ctrl+Shift+B: Subscript
- Ctrl+C: Copy selection
- Ctrl+X: Cut selection
- Ctrl+V: Paste selection
- Ctrl+A: Select all the text
- Ctrl+R: Align text right
- Ctrl+L: Align text left
- Ctrl+E: Center text
- Ctrl+P: Print

Refer to the appendix for more keyboard shortcuts.

A Word About Toolbars

The primary use for a word processor is creating largely textual documents, so the developers of any piece of word-processing software have, as their primary goal, the desire to make creating and editing text easy. This means ensuring that the most commonly used tools are always available.

However, many users need more extensive tools as their documents become more sophisticated, and Writer can accommodate this growth with the addition of no fewer than 20 other toolbars.

Most of the toolbars are set up to cover very specialized work such as adding formulae, building web forms, and adding hyperlinks, but others, such as the Drawing Tools and Bullets and Numbering, can provide quicker access to particular tools than using menus and dialog boxes. All toolbars can be enabled or disabled by choosing View ➤ Toolbars. They will either appear as docked toolbars—that is, they will be appended onto an existing toolbar—or they will be floating free (see Figure 1-17). You can undock a toolbar by clicking on the dotted vertical line at the left of the toolbar (this is also true for the two default toolbars) and dragging out to the page. The toolbar then becomes a regular window that can be placed anywhere on the screen. Redocking involves dragging a free-floating toolbar back into the space at the top of the window.

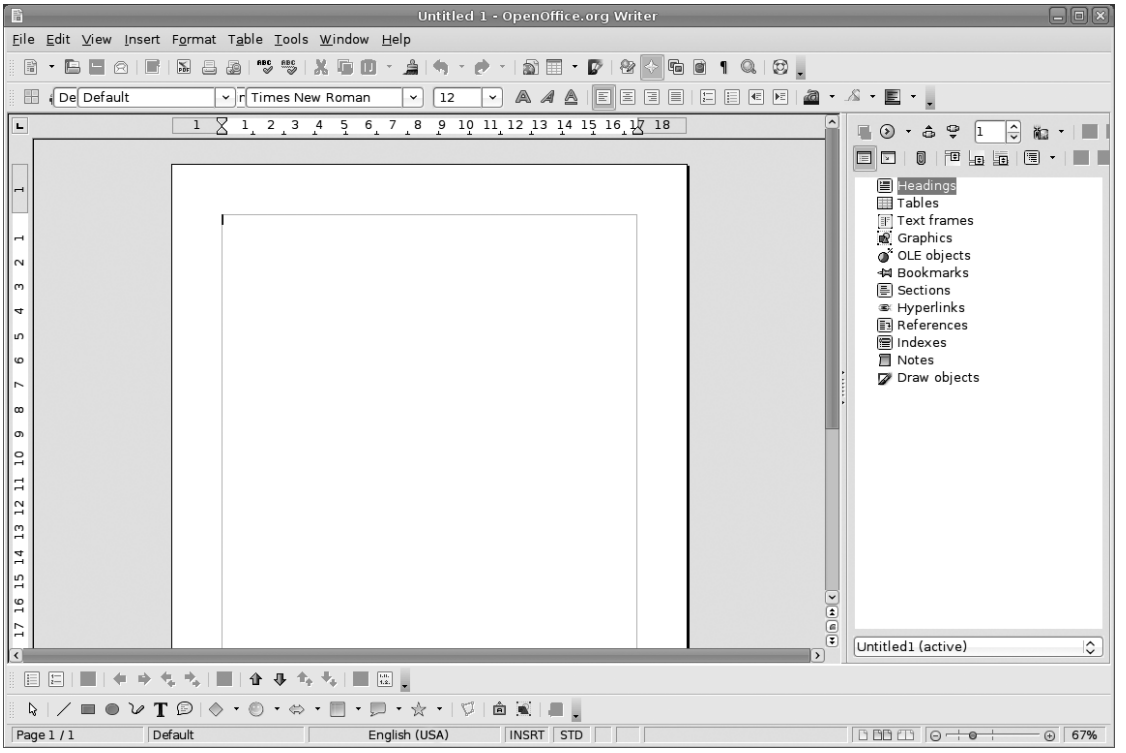

Figure 1-17. *Toolbars can be either free-floating or docked to any edge of the screen.*

If the top of the user interface is getting cluttered, you can drag any toolbar to any edge of the main window, and it will be docked to that edge. Many applications place a selection of drawing tools along the base of the window, and you can re-create the experience by enabling the Drawing toolbar (View ➤ Toolbars ➤ Drawing), which will default to the base of the window.

If none of the available toolbars suit your requirements, new ones can be built from scratch, which become accessible (either locked, movable, or floating) in the same way as the pre-made ones.

■ **Caution** It's important to remember when you're adding, removing, and editing the Writer user interface (or any other part of the suite) that the purpose of productivity software is to increase productivity. If your computer screen is totally obscured by buttons and widgets that you might use once every three weeks—or even just once a week—you might think about simplifying things a little.

Saving

With your basic document created, you now need to save it to the hard disk. Choose File ➤ Save as, navigate to the desired location on your disk, and input a file name. After you click the Save button, the document will be written to the disk and can be opened by choosing File ➤ Open. As you work, save the most recent version of your document by pressing Ctrl+S or choosing File ➤ Save. For peace of mind, OO.o performs an autosave periodically and can also be set to make a backup of the document that can be recovered in the event of a crash. In fact, OO.o has some pretty smart crash recovery systems, which means you won't lose too much work should anything unforeseen happen.

You also can take a snapshot of the document, which allows you to return to a previous version (this is especially useful if you're going to make a radical, experimental change) by choosing File ➤ Versions. This launches a new dialog box with a large area (which will eventually hold the different versions of the document) and a series of buttons on the right. Click Save Version to create a new snapshot and close the window. Save the document in the normal fashion as you're working and then save a new version using the same method when necessary. You can roll back to a new version by selecting it from the list and clicking Open. You can also compare versions, delete old versions, or set the software to create a new version whenever the document is closed. All of these versions are saved with the document.

Template Building

Templates are one of the most versatile tools available in OpenOffice.org. They allow users to create designs that can be reused again with new content, thus saving you time. The template system is common across all applications in the suite, so you can build templates for text documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and even databases.

Add Placeholders

The purpose of using word-processing software, as opposed to a manual typewriter for example, is to reduce the need to perform repetitive tasks such as inputting the same address or date on every letter you write. Now that you've created a simple letterhead, you'll remove the unique content from it, replace that with a series of placeholders, and then save the whole thing as a template that can be reused over and over again (see Figure 1-18). This means that the next time you need to write a letter, you can open the template, add the unique content again, and save it as a new document without the fear that you're saving over some other important document.

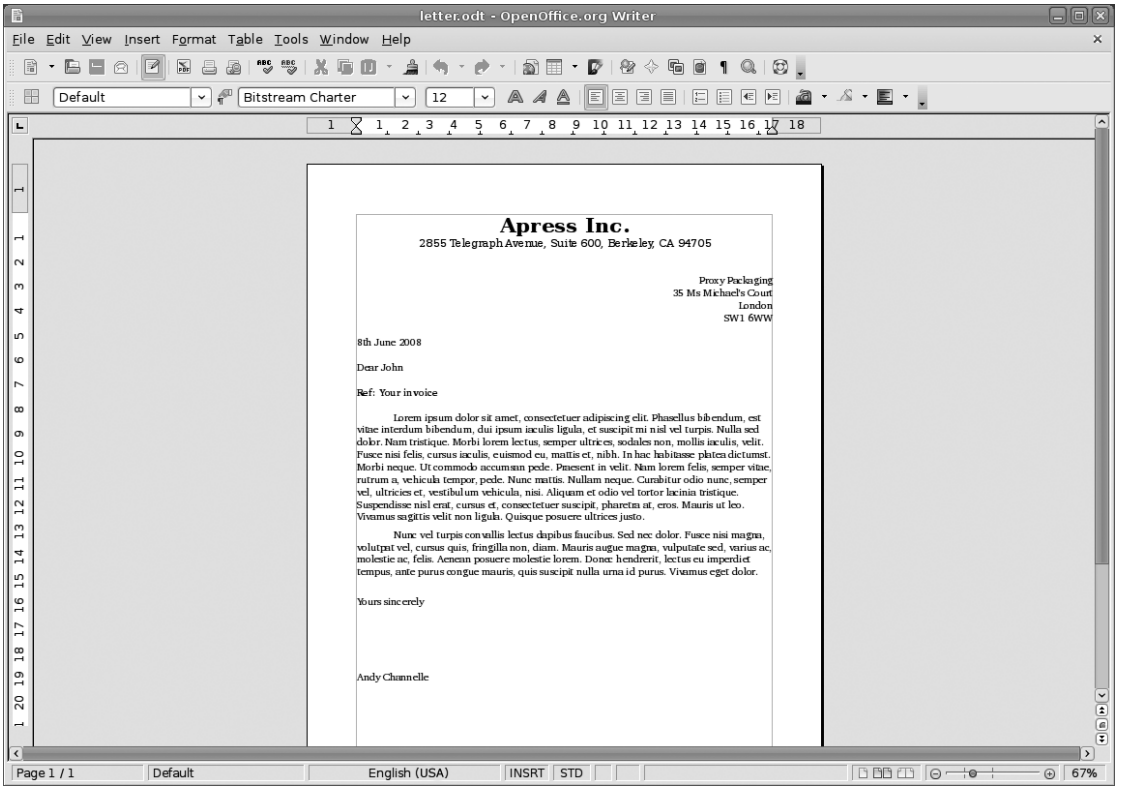

Figure 1-18. *From very plain text, we've added a little style. We'll save even more time by creating a template from this document for all of our letters.*

You'll start from the top of the document and work down, changing items as you come across them. The recipient address is likely to be variable data—that is, it will change on every letter—so you need to add placeholder text. This text includes a description of what the placeholder should contain, which disappears when the element is clicked, and is formatted so that any added text assumes that format.

Highlight the first line of the address in your letter and then choose Insert ➤ Fields ➤ Other to launch the Fields dialog box. Placeholder is a predefined variable field that is accessible under the Functions tab, so select Placeholder to reveal the three-column configuration box. The Type of field we're adding is a Placeholder and the Format is Text. On the right side of the dialog box, in the Placeholder text box, you can add the text that will appear as the placeholder in a fetching green, encased in <> angled brackets and, just in case you don't realize their special use, highlighted in gray. Anything typed into the Reference text box that appears below the Placeholder text box will be displayed as a tool tip when you or some other user hovers over the placeholder text; it's especially useful if you're designing for another user and you want to offer some instruction or advice on the placeholder's content (see Figure 1-19).

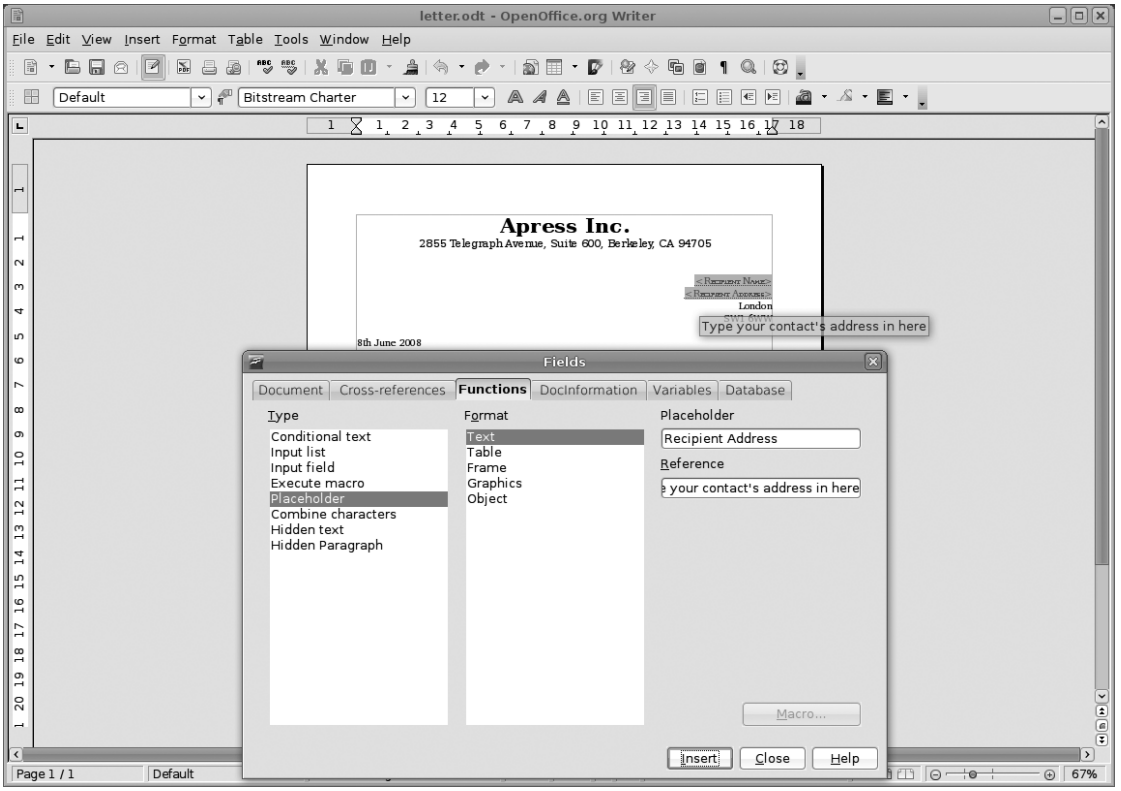

Figure 1-19. *Tool tips are especially useful if you're designing a document that is destined to be used by someone else.*

The Fields dialog box is entirely "live" so you can keep it open while working on the actual document beneath it. This means that with the window open, you can select each part of the address in turn, define the Placeholder and Reference elements, click Insert, and see that placeholder added over the top of the selection. Complete the recipient address by adding details such as town or city, postal/ZIP code, and phone number, and then close the Field dialog box.

The placeholders can be formatted in the same way as any other text—simply highlight and adjust—and so can be designed to fit in with the rest of the document. When you reuse the template at a later date, you'll be able to click a placeholder and begin typing, and whatever you add will assume the location and formatting of the placeholder text.

Choose the Date

The date is next down the page, and there's a special field available for just this purpose. Because this field should dynamically update as you create new documents, instead of hard-coding the date into the page, you're going to add a date field by selecting Insert ➤ Fields ➤ Date. This adds a standard format date to the document and adds the gray background to indicate that this is a field. You need to make a few changes by double-clicking on the date to open the Edit Fields dialog box.

This box consists of three columns, but you can ignore the left column. The Select column has two options: Date (fixed) and Date. Selecting the former inserts today's date into the document, which stays the same regardless of when you edit the letter. This is not really appropriate for a template, so select Date to ensure the document includes the current date. From the multitude of date formats in the third column, choose MMMM DD YYYY, which will display Christmas Day as December 23 2008.

If none of these options suit, you can also create your own format by scrolling to the bottom of the options list and choosing Additional formats. This opens up a more extensive dialog box where you can make more radical changes to the date.

Here again you'll see the list of available formats, but at the bottom of the window is an area for creating a totally custom date field (see Figure 1-20). The various elements you can add are shown in Table 1-1.

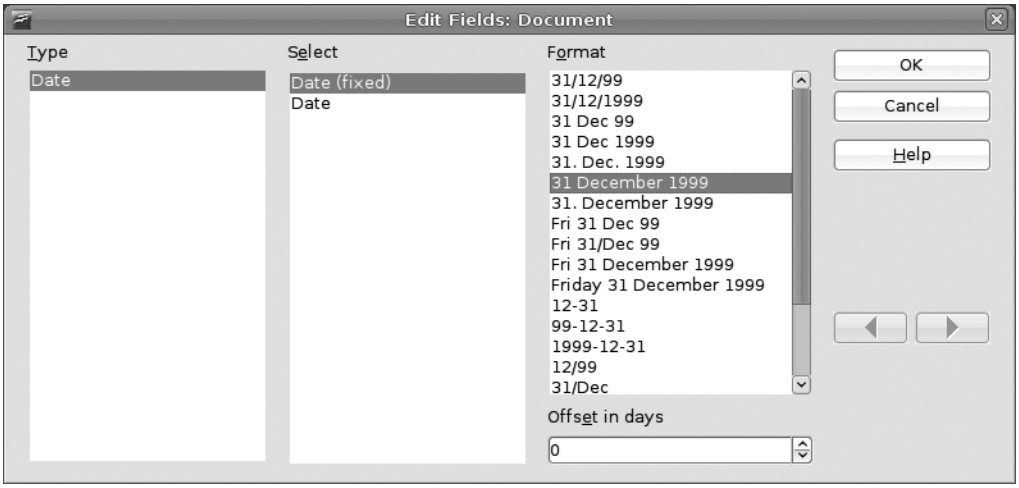

Figure 1-20. *Many date options are available, but if nothing fits the house style, then you can create custom dates.*

Table 1-1. *Date Elements Are Given Representative Codes*

Code	Description	Example
NN	Short day	Fri
NNNN	Full day	Friday
DD	Numerical day	25
MM	Short month	Dec
MMMM	Full month	December
YY	Short year	08
YYYY	Full year	2008
HH	Hour	
MM	Minute	
SS	Second	

You can also delimit each element with any character. For example, to create 12/23/08, you would enter MM/DD/YY, but to add a more formal dateline, you might have NNNN MMMM DD YYYY, which would render as Thursday December 25 2008. The options for adding hour, minute, and second information are likely to be useful in a spreadsheet but can usually be ignored in letter writing.

Now you need to add placeholder elements for the salutation and reference because these too are likely to change on each new letter. You'll also select the body of the text and put a placeholder there. Remember that this placeholder will inherit the formatting from the present text, so when you write a new letter, it will automatically retain the first line indent you set earlier.

Finally, you'll add placeholder text for the signoff (with a short note in the tool tip about letter-writing etiquette), add a few punctuation elements to save typing them every time you use the template, and you're ready to save.

Save the Template

Ordinarily, you would save documents as documents, as you did earlier in this chapter, but in this special case, we want to save as a template (see Figure 1-21). This means that the next time the document is opened, it will open as if it were the first time, and users will be prompted to supply a new file name when they attempt to save it. If you saved as a document, edited the text or replaced the placeholders, and clicked Save, it would automatically save over the original—you don't want this to happen as that would destroy your previous work!

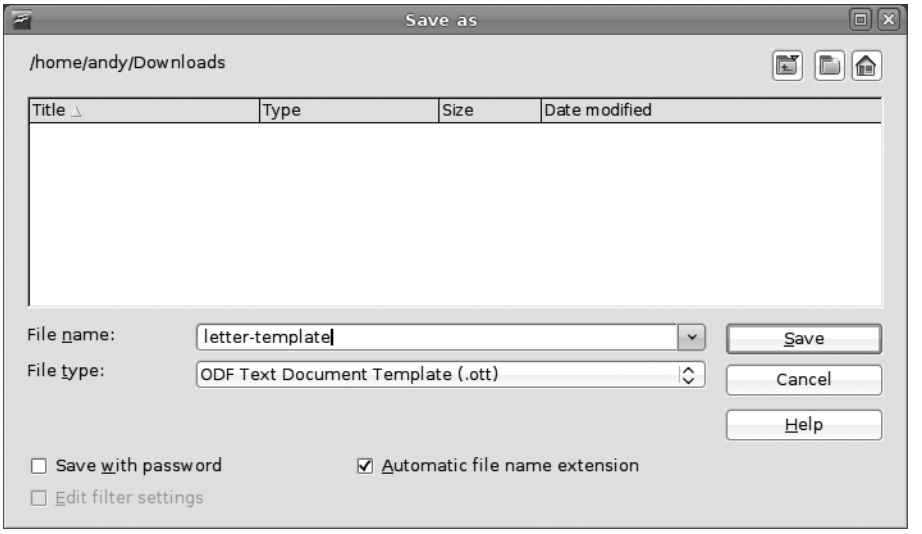

Figure 1-21. *Save the document using the correct template format so that you can create a new document from it at a future date.*

Templates can be saved to any location, but if you want them to pop up in the My Templates section of the New Document selector, they need to be saved from within OO.o or manually moved to the correct location.

To save within OO.o, choose File ➤ Template ➤ Save. Select the `MyTemplates` folder, and provide a name for the template. Click Save to add the template to the folder. To make changes to the template name or the location of a particular file post-creation, choose File ➤ Templates ➤ Organize. This will launch a two-paned organizer window where individual files can be moved around or deleted (see Figure 1-22).

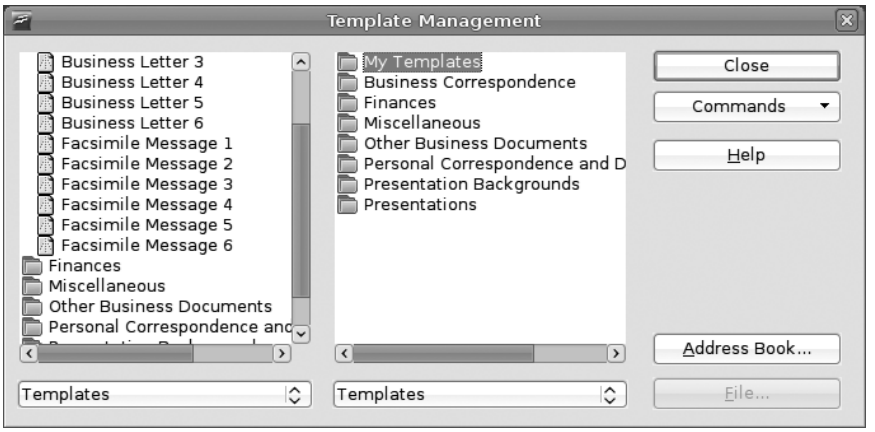

Figure 1-22. *Organize templates by moving them between folders.*

TEMPLATE LOCATIONS

The location of the template files that make up the My Templates collection varies from system to system.

Windows

Windows stores templates in `C:\Documents and Settings\username\Application Data\OOo3\user\template`.

Linux

Linux users need to save in `~/.openoffice.org3/user/template`, which is a hidden directory. The simplest way to get the template into the right location is to save it first to your desktop or documents folder, and then manually move it. After the template is saved, open up your File Manager, and select View ➤ Show Hidden Files. If you're already sitting in your home directory, a bunch of folders should have appeared, including the one you need. Navigate through this in the usual manner until you open the `/template` folder, and then drag the previously saved file into there. Remember to hide hidden files again if you're not a fan of filesystem clutter.

OS X

The new Mac OS version of the application stores its templates in `/Users/username/Library/Application Support/OpenOffice.org-aqua/3/user/template`.

■ **Note** You can set your own location for templates, which makes it much easier to add and remove them. Go into Options (Tools ➤ Options), open the OpenOffice.org section by clicking the little plus (+) icon next to the label, and find the Paths section. Choose Templates, click the Edit button, and click Add. This launches a standard file selector where you can navigate to an existing directory or create a new one. This new location is added to the default location, which means you'll retain access to the suite's included templates while being able to manage custom templates much more easily. Make sure you select the radio button next to the new path to set this as the default save location for new templates.

To test that everything's working, open up Writer, and select File ➤ New ➤ Templates and Documents. Look under the MyTemplates tab, and your blank letter should be there. Select this letter, and then begin adding content. The placeholder text should be clickable, so you can enter repeated detail without having to either delete or format anything. The other important thing about this method is that when you save the document for the first time, it will automatically Save As, which means there is no risk of accidentally overwriting some piece of vital correspondence.

Checking Through a Document

Writer contains a selection of tools designed to help you create great documents and present a professional image to the world. And despite being fairly simple documents to design, when drafting a letter, which these days tends only to be used for very important things, you don't want bad spelling and a flaky layout to let you down.

By default, Writer has the Auto Spell Check tool turned on. This feature draws a wavy red line under any misspelled words. Right-clicking such a word opens a context-sensitive menu (see Figure 1-23) offering a selection of words you may have intended to use and also a few other options with which you can add the word to a dictionary if it is correct or set the language correctly if, for example, you're attempting to use the word "colour" and the document is set to US.

If the red wavy lines are annoying, switch off the Auto Spell Check (which is in the fourth section of the main toolbar) and, after the document is finished, use the normal spell checker (Tools ➤ Spellcheck, or press F7). This launches a dialog box where each "incorrect" word is shown with options for selecting a different word or redefining the current selection as correct (see Figure 1-24). The Ignore Once button will move over a word by highlighting it again if it appears in the text. Ignore All will note the word as acceptable on a document-wide basis and will not highlight it again.

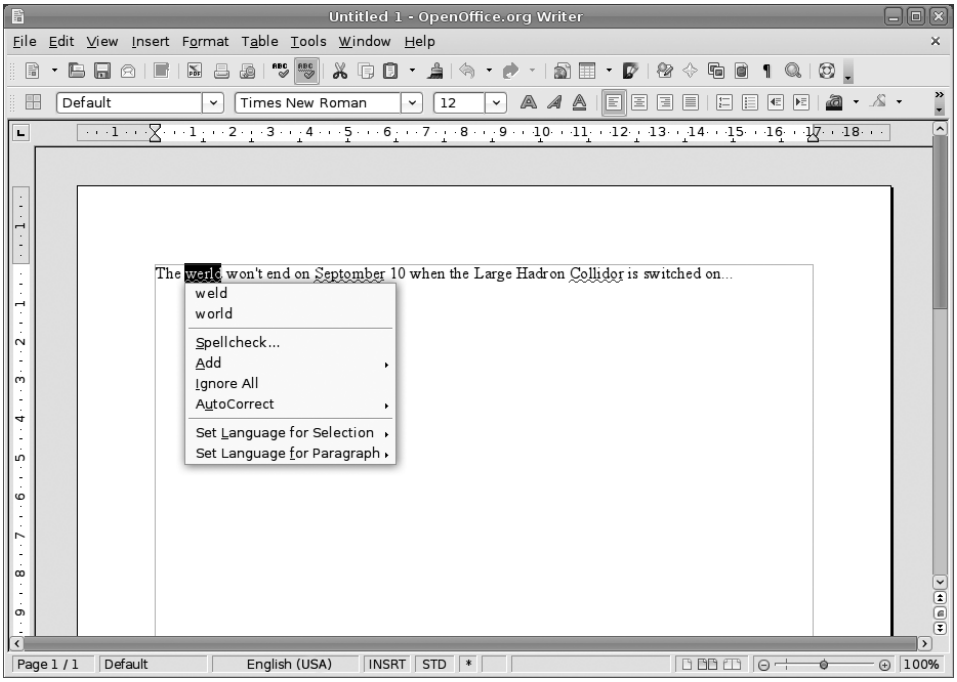

Figure 1-23. *The right-click menu offers a selection of words "close" to the incorrectly spelled one.*

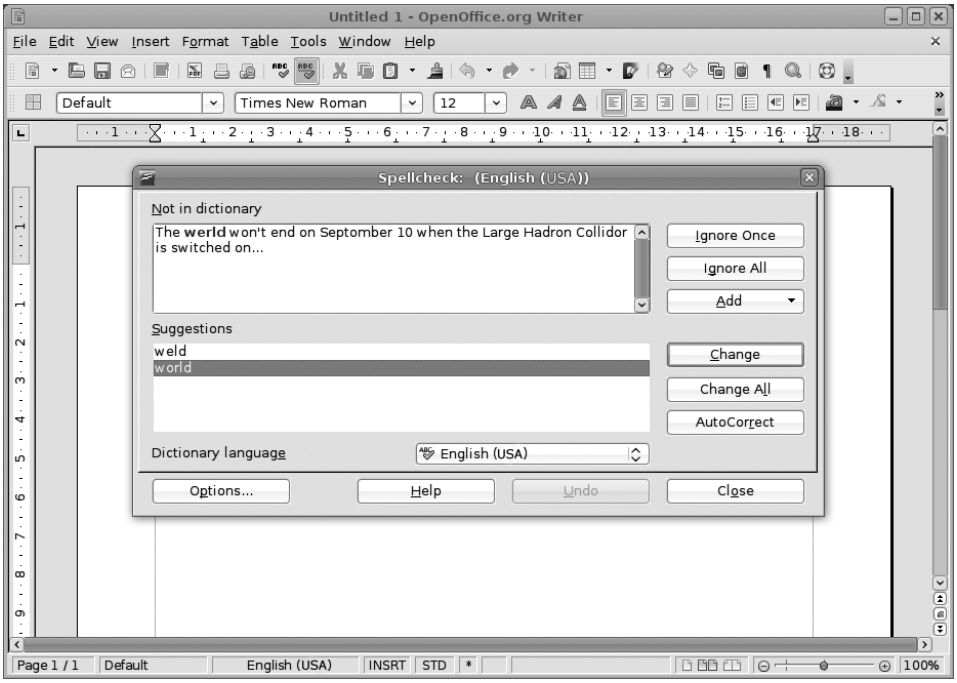

Figure 1-24. *The Spellcheck dialog box allows you to go through every incorrectly typed word in the document.*

The Add button adds the highlighted word to the standard dictionary, and the AutoCorrect button adds the word, and the selected "correct" version to the AutoCorrect dictionary. This latter tool is really useful if you consistently spell a word wrong (we'll cover this more in Chapter 3), and you want the software to change it as you type.

■ **Tip** If your version of OpenOffice.org is not displaying the wavy spelling lines, it could mean that no dictionaries have been installed. Dictionaries in many languages can be downloaded from the OpenOffice.org web site as `.oxt` files. These can be added to the software using the Extension Manager (Tools ➤ Extension Manager) as shown in Figure 1-25. Once added, a dictionary is accessible by right-clicking and choosing Tools ➤ Spelling and Grammar.

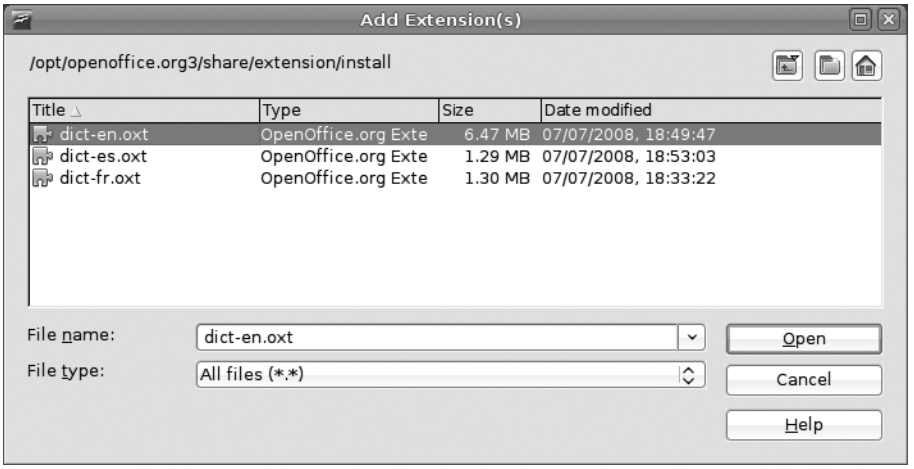

Figure 1-25. *OpenOffice.org can have a number of dictionaries installed at one time.*

Another presentational problem that often besets word processor documents is incorrect spacing between words. For example, in the day of the typewriter, users got into the habit of adding two spaces after a full stop (after a period). When using a typewriter with a fixed-width typeface, this might have made sense, but in the age of dynamic fonts, it's unnecessary. Finding an instance of two spaces within a document can be quite a challenge, but there are two ways you can eliminate them.

The first is to choose View ➤ Non Printing Characters to expose all of the hidden parts of the document—the spaces, paragraph returns, soft returns, and tabs—allowing you to comb through the text and remove anything that is out of place (see Figure 1-26). The text remains editable in the normal way, and when printing, will print as normal.

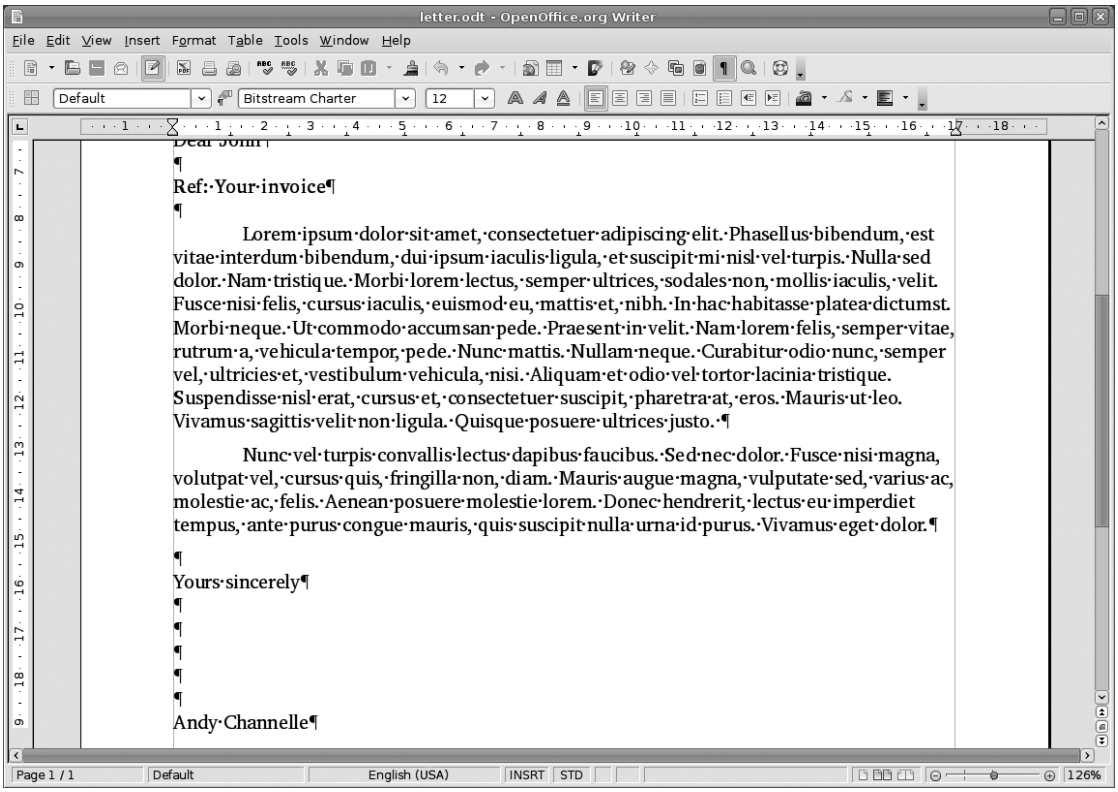

Figure 1-26. *The dots in this screenshot represent spaces. Each "hidden" character in a document has its own symbol that can be used for search and replace.*

The second way to remove annoyances such as double spaces, especially if there are a lot of them in a single document, is to use the Find & Replace option under the Edit menu. The top text area of this dialog box contains the text you need to find, and the bottom area contains its replacement (see Figure 1-27). After these have been added, use one of the buttons on the right to find and replace single entities or use Replace All to replace all instances of a certain term at once. The Match Case option is useful when you want to change, for example, "Hope" (the town) but not "hope" the concept. The Whole words only option is useful if you want to change "Man" to "man" but don't want it to affect "Manchester" or "Manager."

Of course, the Find & Replace option can be used to make more drastic changes as well. For example, you may write a novel with the lead character called Harry. If, 55,000 words in, you decide his name should be John, Find & Replace will save a lot of effort. And if you ensure that Whole words only is not selected, it will also change "Harry's" to "John's," just as using the Match case option will ensure that the sentence "The boss used to harry his staff . . ." doesn't become "The boss used to john his staff. . . ."

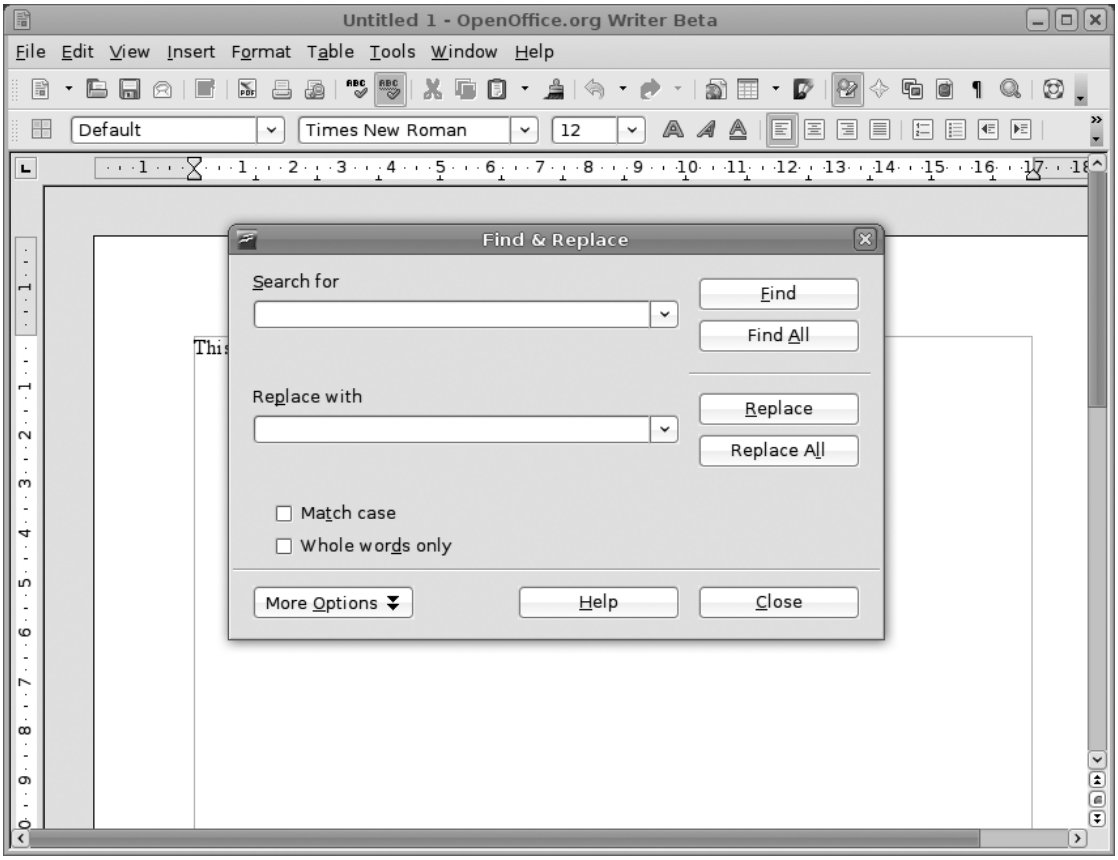

Figure 1-27. *Use the Find & Replace feature to make large-scale textual changes to a document.*

Printing

The final stage of any production—well, any traditional production—is printing out a hard copy. First, however, you can get a better idea of how the final result will look by using the Preview button (the eighth button from left on the main toolbar) or by choosing File ➤ Page Preview. This displays a more accurate rendition of the page.

The Print button (next to the Preview button), the File ➤ Print menu, or the Ctrl+P shortcut key will launch the standard Print dialog box. You can select a printer, set the page size, define the number of copies, and set the pages to be printed in this dialog box (see Figure 1-28). Options relating to the selected printer are accessible from the Properties button, while the Options button has many things to change, including preventing graphics from being printed, setting left- or right-only page printing, or turning off backgrounds. These options can be useful for proofing documents without wasting ink and time. Click OK to initiate the printing process.

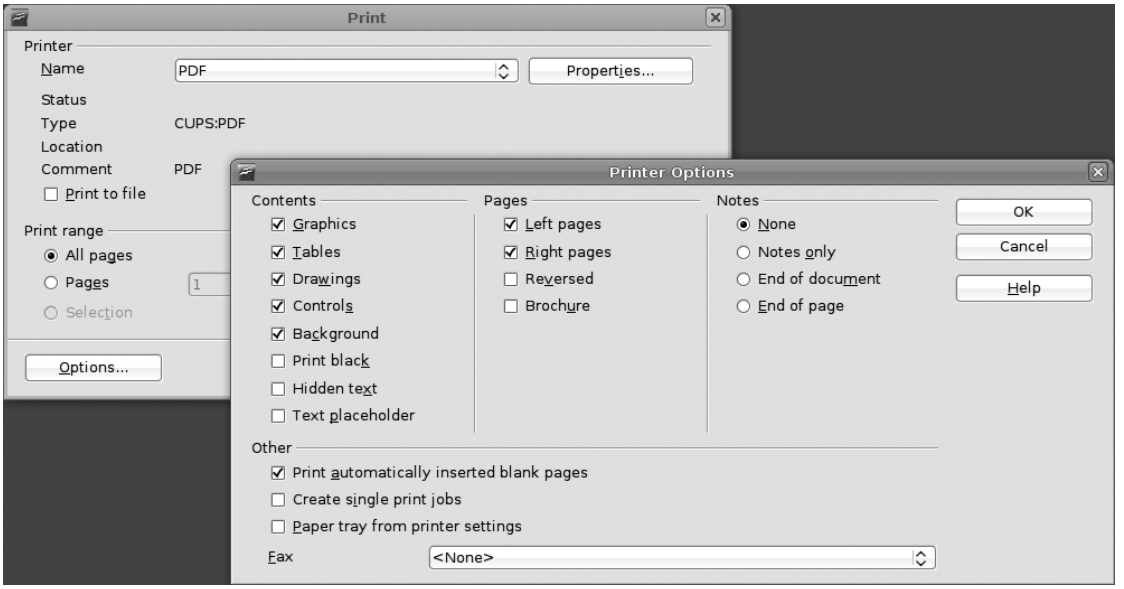

Figure 1-28. *Comprehensive printing options provide good control over how your final document appears.*

Recap

In this chapter, you've used OO.o Writer to create a basic text-based letter. You've made some simple alterations to the format of characters and paragraphs and made a few changes to the application's interface to put important tools a few clicks away. You've taken this letter, removed all the unique content, and repurposed it as a template that will save time in later uses. Finally you've delved into the Placeholder text system—in readiness for more extensive edits later—and changed the way that OO.o deals with dates at the document level.

In the next chapter, you'll work with some of these elements again, but this time, you'll focus on a more design-intensive document and adding some graphical flourishes.