KOffice UI and Functionality design

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Overview

There are three particular aspects that I try to emphasise in this design:

1. simplicity - show only what is necessary,
2. immediate feedback - rolling over buttons and paragraph text should provide immediate feedback
3. extra-textual data - organisational data, annotations, notes and comments need to be integrated into the document

The most obvious feature of this design is a four stage work flow that helps focus the end user on specific tasks, as well as allows the interface for each mode to be highly customised and simplified (i.e. there is no need to clutter the screen with editing/formatting functionality when the user is in the middle of data entry). The four stages or modes are:

1. organize
2. write
3. edit
4. view

I have chosen at this stage to center the design around KWord, but most principles should translate cleanly to KSpread and KPresenter.

Work-flow

Organize

To encourage users to enter and maintain meta data about the document, a section is devoted to such things. This may be integrated with a KOffice document management database.

Write

This is the first stage of writing the document, where the user is directed to focus on inputting the text. This includes the data entry, identifying sections, headings, enumerated lists, footnotes etc.

The current active paragraph might be highlighted to help direct the user's focus. Only relevant tools/actions need be displayed, dramatically cutting down the number of buttons, menus.

Comments need also be encouraged, to allow users to write notes related to particular sections. Having them appear in the sidebar would emphasise their separation from the actual text.

Research and reference features (dictionary, thesaurus etc) can be given more emphasis in this section.

Edit

This stage might most resemble current word processors, but with a stronger focus on styles editing and comments/annotations. A strict implementation might disallow editing the actual text, to discourage users from writing the entire document here.

The current Style Manager can be completely integrated into this section, and styles can be selected with immediate feedback on the resulting effect on the document as a whole, and there is no need for popups, dialogs.
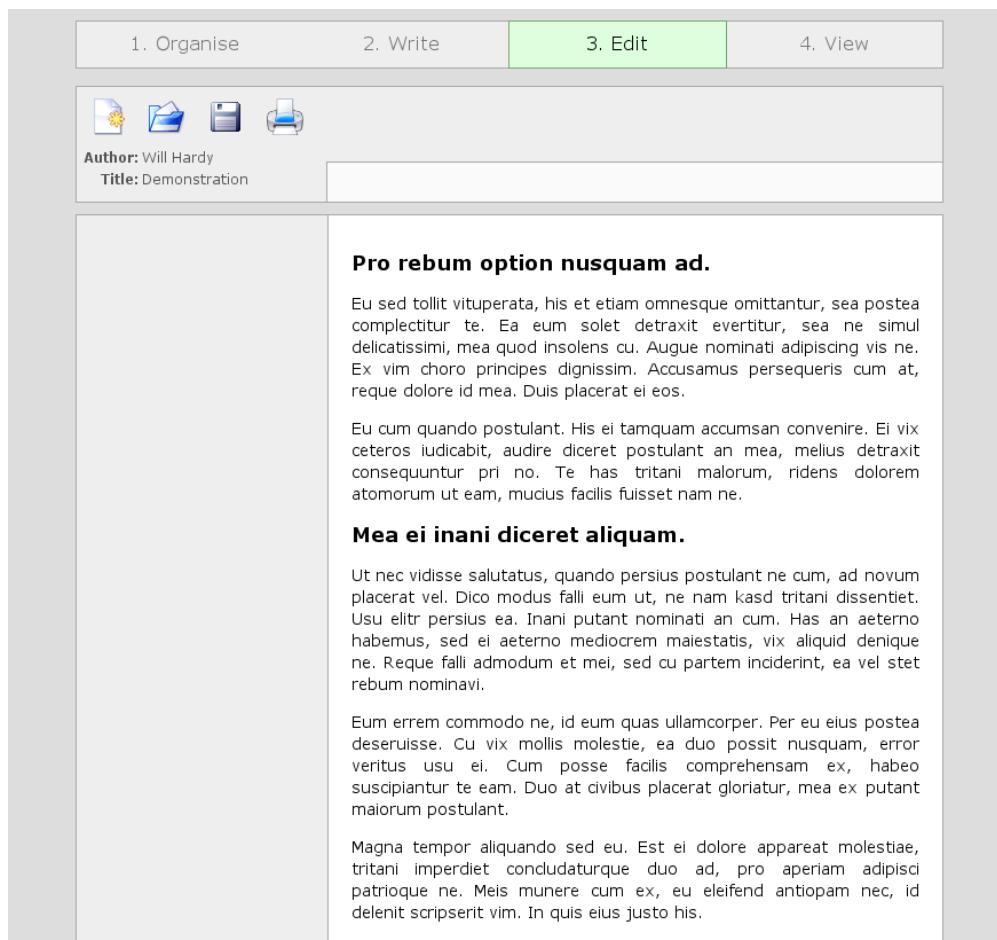
View

For reviewing your creation, or viewing someone else's (read only). This might also give the user an idea of how their document will look in the various different formats available to them, i.e. HTML, PDF, OASIS and MS Office.

Again, the screen need no longer be cluttered with non-viewing options, drawing the users attention to the important ones.
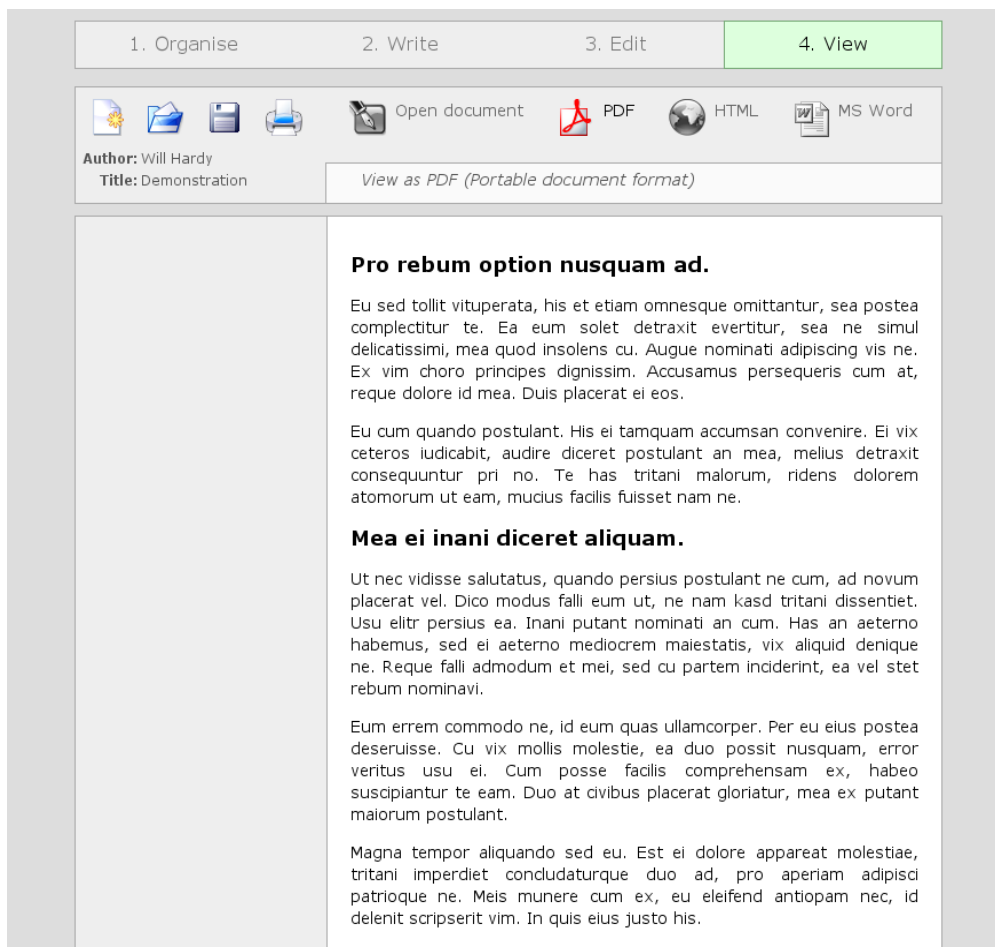
Screen areas

Mode Bar

See *Work-flow*. The Mode Bar provides the user with clear directions and guides them through the recommended work-flow. The current mode is highlighted to remind the user of what the program currently expects. It also prompts the user to explore the other stages, if they want to start doing something else with their document.

1. Organise	2. Write	3. Edit	4. View

Information bar

I would like to position the information bar in a static, prominent position, ensuring that it catches the users attention. The information that would ideally go here would be hover information, keyboard shortcuts for recently performed actions (to teach the user), documents statistics and any alert information (i.e. "you have been working on this document for 10 minutes").

Preview Scroll

The Preview Scroll is a static overview of the shape of the entire document. It provides the user with a clear indication of what they are currently looking at, and helps jumping from one end of a document to another because the user is able to recognize where particular paragraphs begin/end. It would be most use full on larger screens whilst editing medium sized documents and it should be possible to hide/extend it where appropriate.

It may also be worthwhile extending the Preview Scroll to provide clickable chapter/section headings or anything else that might be useful.

Annotation Column

This column provides a space for annotations, comments, and editing buttons. Adding a comment should be quick, easy and obvious that it is separate from the text itself.

In *write* mode, a style selection box might appear next to the focused paragraph.

In *edit* mode, any comments, annotations or links might appear here.

In *view* mode this may be removed to highlight that it normally holds information that is separate from the text. Or it can hold visible annotations, footnotes and references, which might be static or appear on particular text rollovers.

Toolbar

If possible, it would be good to avoid having a toolbar, but not all functionality can be contextual, and users may like to have a place where they know they'll find what they're looking for. Perhaps this could hide and appear on rollover.

One idea would be to have the toolbar buttons follow the active paragraph and return to the top where no paragraph is selected.

Other features

Notepad

A rough area for taking and organising notes. I imagine it might be possible to minimise KOffice except for a floating, always-on-top button which restores the notepad, allowing the user to continue e.g. web-based research and take notes that can be associated with an open document.