# **Libre Office: Open Source Word Processing**

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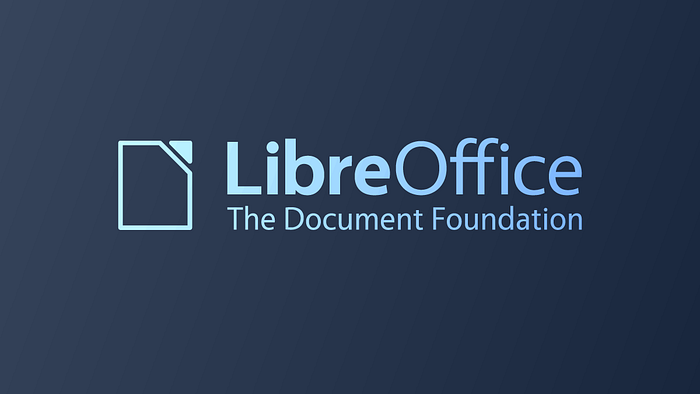
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# **Libre Office**

As an open-source replacement for the entire Microsoft Office suite, Libre Office offers a terrific word processor. They call it ‘Writer’ but the tool is closer to a true page layout program. Aside from providing the same functions as a complete Office suite, Libre Office beats out Microsoft in a few important ways for authors.

And it’s entirely [free and open source](https://www.libreoffice.org/download/download/)!

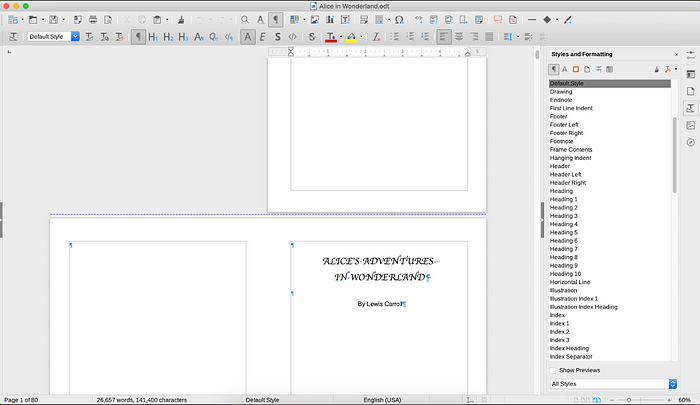


# **Writing with Libre Office**

Like Word, Libre Office’s Writer is a very standard word processor with all the expected functions and tools. You can write and do some basic page formatting using Styles, just like MS Word uses. For drafting your work, Libre Writer is just as good as Word.

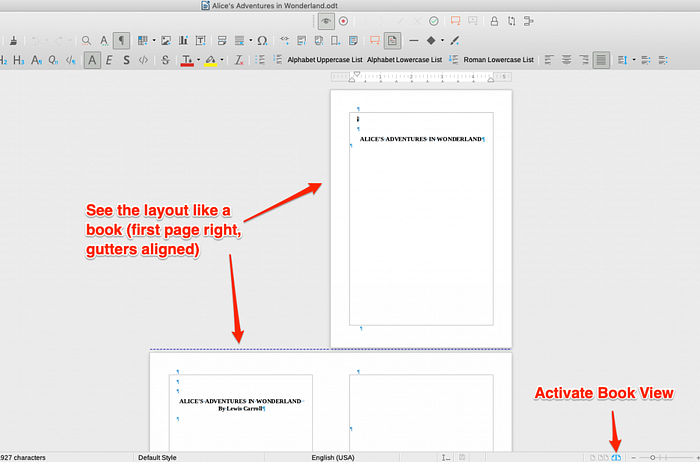
Libre Writer’s focus mode is good for distraction-free writing. The actual writing is smooth and quick. In fact, I found fewer ‘pauses’ while using Libre Writer versus Word; those moments when the text would stop appearing and seconds later a dozen characters will burst onto the screen.

Libre Office organizes menus different from Word’s ribbon, but the content is all still there. In fact, with the right sidebar dedicated to style, format, and a document directory, I find the Libre design easier to use than Word’s.



# **Page Layout With Libre Office**

The point of separation between Word and Writer (excluding the cost) lies in the editing and design options. Foremost, Writer includes a ‘book view,’ functionality long missing from Word.



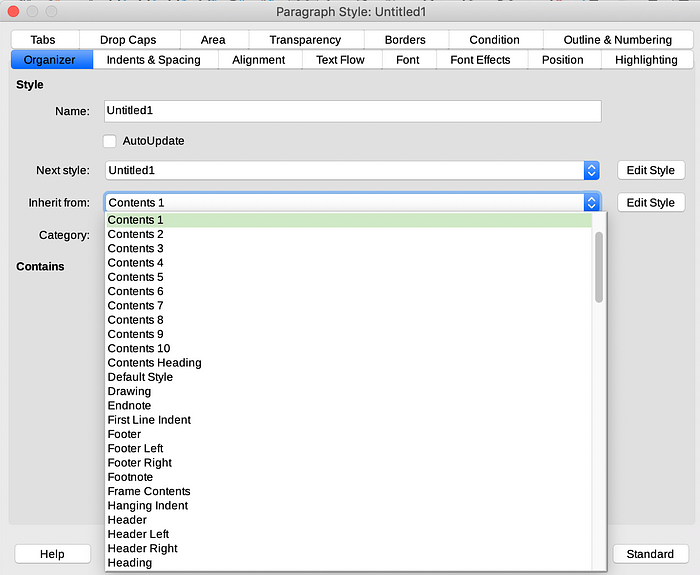
As you work through the layout of your book, seeing the file in a true Book View can prevent many headaches.

That said, many of the problems Word presents for page layout carry over into Libre Office. The most challenging aspect is working with Styles. Much like any other word processor, Libre Office uses text and page styles to define things like font, spacing, and unique elements.

# **Using Styles In Libre Office**

Styles are great if you’re just creating a simple text document. You’ve got some heading styles, a normal body text, and some list styles. Maybe a couple of additional styles you can define for specific uses.

But for page layout, you need control over the style on each page. With Libre Office, you control styles more broadly. That means doing something as simple as inserting a header with the chapter title on the correct pages can be a tedious process.



Libre Office offers some [documentation on how to create and manage styles](https://help.libreoffice.org/Writer/Creating_and_Applying_Page_Styles). The short version for creating even a simple header with varying text is something like this:

1. Create a unique page style for the first page in a chapter
2. Edit this style to remove the header
3. Define the chapter’s unique style (different from this first page style) as the style to follow this ‘first page’ style.
4. Insert a ‘manual break’ and apply the style to it.

With that done, you’ll now insert headers and footers to your different pages. Once added, that style (which now includes a header/footer), will persist. You can then repeat this process, weaving together styles from page to page to define the layout and elements on each page.

It works. And Libre Office’s process might be a tiny bit tidier than Word’s own means of using styles and sections to define header content. But only just. Neither tool offers the kind of control over page layout I’d like for my book files.

# **Design Elements**

Once I got some headers inserted that I was moderately happy with, I played with the other design options. Managing elements like images, tables, columned text, and even drop caps were all pretty simple.

Again, Libre Office focuses on styles. For example, I created a copy of the basic body style and made it ‘body + drop cap’ and just applied this style to the first paragraph of each chapter. The drop caps worked perfectly.

I also found layering in images and charts worked quite well. Word often presents overlapping or poorly spaced content when layering. I’ve seen this particularly if I’m doing two or three-column designs that include an image that spans multiple columns, like a magazine page might include. Libre Office did get hung up on a couple of image inserts I performed, but more often than with Word, I was able to quickly fix the problem and continue working.