

1 Introduction

1.1 First Things First

The spreadsheet file, named *Finances-2019.ods*, is free. The file could help you to better track and budget your finances. It is to be understood as a tool for managing your household's books and savings. It was *not* engineered to analyze different offers for brokerage accounts, modeling possible pension plans with regards to tax optimization or buying and selling stocks. So in a sense, it all is about bookkeeping. How much money is coming in, how much is going out and knowing where it is going.

On top of that you will be able to budget for expenses and income, should you choose to use the sheets for budgeting your expenses and income, So the file might also enable you to budget your cash, e. g. for allocating a certain amount for spending on groceries each month, or on a single item (or 3) you intend to purchase in a few months (or more). However, you can basically track and budget anything with this file.

Finances.ods was created in LibreOffice's spreadsheet program named *Calc*, hence I strongly suggest you use it when working with this file.¹

I have used this file and its countless previous iterations for roughly 4–5 years now and would like to share it. I'm not saying it is perfect and/or free of bugs, but I think I've maintained, updated and improved it quite a lot over the last few years so I am putting it online. Nevertheless, it is provided to you as-is.

1.2 Basic Understandings

1.2.1 Core Concepts

Let's get rid of the sugarcoating and rename "core concepts" to "principles". These are as follows:

- **Data Entry:**
You will need to enter data for the use of this file. Or rather: for this file to have a purpose, you need to enter data into the *tracking sheets*². Please do so diligently and thoroughly.
- **Frequency:**
My advice is to update the file at least every 2 weeks. It might take an hour or two then. At the end of each month, please go through your monthly bank statement line-by-line and check if all lines were documented correctly.
- **Human Error:**
You are human. It is inherently impossible to not make an error. (Unless you don't, which would be weird because you probably are not human.) Don't get upset if you lost a receipt or forgot to write down a note with the exact price/amount of a purchase, activity or whatever.³ The best course of action then is to enter a rough estimation. That is good enough and considerably better than to enter nothing.

¹From here on forth, whenever *file* or *Finances.ods* is mentioned or referenced, it shall be interpreted synonymous with *Finances-2019.ods*.

²These sheets are all the sheets which exist just to document your spending and income.

³This type of error is irreversible, unlike typos or logical errors within the file, e. g. a wrong cell reference, incomplete sum and so forth.

- **The Drift:**

An inevitable occurrence when using the file is what I like to call *the drift*. It is a fancy term for the direct consequences of the human error (it most definitely is a human error that causes it, i. e. an error within the file, and not a banking error). With time, you will undoubtedly notice a difference between the cash you have per your file vs. the real-world amount. But in case there is a difference, accept it because otherwise you are fighting a fight you cannot win. To offset the drift, enter values in the *drift cells* in the *Overview* sheet. With the best intention at heart, I can only implore you to follow these understandings.

1.2.2 Implications

With 1.2.1 Core Concepts in mind, we move on to talk about what it actually means to work with the spreadsheet file. Let us take a look at a list of important statements:

- You need to work with LibreOffice Calc.⁴
- You need to enter data into spreadsheet files. In case you would like to edit the spreadsheet file beyond entering data, you would obviously need to learn about editing spreadsheet files with Calc and understand how exactly the budgeting calculations work.
- You need to enter data, e. g. from collected receipts.
- You might need to write down (whether digitally or on paper) what you spent in case you did not receive a receipt. This might be mitigated with the next point.
- You need to remember what you spent in case you neither received a receipt, nor made a note of it or were unable to.
- You do not expect the file to somehow conjure up awesome graphs and diagrams with great insights on its own.
- You are ok with facing numbers about your spending head-on. You have the discipline that is required to manage Finances.ods.

All the aforementioned bullet points entail important aspects which are crucial for using the file. If multiple points in the list represent something negative for you, I strongly suggest that you might find it more pleasant to use another program or app for managing your cash/finances overall.

1.3 Motivation and A Little Bit of History

I share the file because I hope for a win-win outcome:

1. This file might help others.
2. I would like to receive feedback and suggestions for changes.

Originally, I only used the spreadsheet to track my cash spending, i. e. what I spent on groceries, how much money I spent on eating out, clothing and so forth. Over time, I started to add sections for tracking more and other kinds of categories. It grew into something that is possibly invaluable in my day-to-day life nowadays, yet perhaps there are still some things that are missing but I

⁴Unless you use the file with Excel, that is. However I do not own Excel and really like Calc's capabilities as free software. More on that topic in 2.1 Introducing LibreOffice Calc, p. 2.

haven't thought of, so I think the file can do some good for lots of people.

2 First Steps

2.1 Introducing LibreOffice Calc

LibreOffice is a free office suite and great software.⁵ You can download it on the official download page of course.

Per its official website:

Calc is the free spreadsheet program you've always needed. Newcomers find it intuitive and easy to learn, while professional data miners and number crunchers appreciate the comprehensive range of advanced functions. Built-in wizards guide you through choosing and using a comprehensive range of advanced features. Or you can download templates from the LibreOffice template repository, for ready-made spreadsheet solutions.

Now before I elaborate on some key aspects I regard as crucial, here are the 2 most important links for finding proper help on LibreOffice Calc:

- The Official Documentation is really great. The *Getting Started* guide was released for LibreOffice Calc 6, so I suggest to at least take a look at pages 1–14 (important for Mac users) and the pages for Calc, starting on page 118 (by the way, you can quickly jump to that page with the shortcut `CTRL + N` in Adobe Reader).
- Google or DuckDuckGo

In case you did not read the relevant part of Here are some suggestions for first steps if you intend to follow through with learning how to work with LibreOffice Calc. The most important bit beforehand: you can relax a bit. LibreOffice Calc is not so different from Excel.

- To properly work with Finances.ods, you should learn about *cell templates* and the *navigator*.
- Style and cell templates are the core properties of proper formatting the whole thing. Without them, you would certainly go crazy. They can be found in the stylist (press F5 for that), which enable you to make fast changes to the look (format-wise) of the file.
- The navigator enables you to navigate arguably fast between the sheets if you do not use keyboard shortcuts. It not only lists all visible sheets in the file, but also all other kinds of elements that can be found in it.
- For the case of editing formulas and/or copying/replacing cells in bulk, look at keyboard shortcuts on p. 129 in *Getting Started*. You can mark and select multiple cells of the same block via `SHIFT + CTRL + →`, for example.

2.2 The Start

As you first open Finances.ods, you should navigate sheet called *Introduction* is the first one you'll find at the beginning of the file. If not, please navigate to it. For this, please either open the navigator by pressing `F5` (this is a toggle operation, pressing `F5` again will close it) or click on View above in the task bar and then on Navigator.

As its name declares, it features an overview of several things:

- First of, on top there are the the budget headers for the month before the current month, the current months and the two consecutive ones.

3 Tracking

Clearly the most riveting part of the guide. This insanely complex topic can be summed up with: do the damn tracking. For this, there are *tracking sheets*. These sheets simply contain data which is to be put into 3 columns:

- Date: You may use any format, but I strongly suggest using YYYY-MM-DD based on the international standard ISO 8601.
- Description: Put anything in here, e.g. Name-of-Supermarkt, Something Street
- Amount: The amount

Here are some tips:

- Collect your receipts, bills, notes and whatever you have that documents the amounts you paid (not: liabilities you will have to pay *in the future*).⁶
- Sit down at least every 2 weeks and enter the data. As soon as you worked through a receipt and split up its content into your spending categories, mark it or throw it away instantly.
- I suggest to split up your spending into as many categories as possible. But again, do what works *for you*!
- Splitting a single bill: When I shopped at a store where I bought multiple kinds of various items, I split the bill like this:

Date	Description	Amount
2018-06-01	Aldi tot. 78.65	23.44

So this would be an entry in the sheet for, say, Groceries I bought at Aldi and spent 23.44 Euro on.

⁵See <https://www.libreoffice.org/discover/libreoffice/>.

⁶Maybe collect them in a shoebox, an envelope or in a plastic pocket.