

Styles in Open Office Writer

The Basics

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1 Introduction

In this tutorial, I'll be looking at what styles are and how they can be used to lay out simple pages and paragraphs. Finally, I'll show how to turn a document that you have created into a template for similar looking documents in the future.

2 Styles

Documents tend to look better if all the paragraphs look similar in shape, if headings have the same fonts and size, and numbering is consistent. All these things are examples of a "style". Writer enables you to define them for each document, and each document has their own set of definitions.

In Writer, styles are used to format many different things and form the basis for all subsequent changes you make to way a document looks. They can define the appearance of pages, paragraphs, characters, frames and lists. In this talk, I'll look only at paragraphs and pages but the principles can be applied to the other items too.

To follow the detail, open the OpenOffice Writer application.

2.1 Paragraphs

Getting started

When you start a new document, Writer selects a default template and you will see an empty page displayed. To see the styles in use, do either:

Format menu -> Styles and Formatting

or:

Hit function key F11

A window with the styles listed will appear. At the top of this window are some icons. By pressing these, the selection of style is restricted to paragraphs, characters, frames, pages or lists respectively from left to right. If you allow the mouse to hover over an icon, the text will show indicating which type it refers to. Selecting the left one brings up the paragraph styles.

At the bottom of the window, there is a bar, which when pressed shows a drop-down menu. To follow this tutorial, select "Hierarchical" from the drop-down list. You should now see in the window a long list of all the styles for paragraphs that are defined in the default style. In front of some is a box containing a - or a +. Clicking on this box will expand or contract a sublist, much like selecting files in folders. Each sublist is a style that has most of its definition taken from its parent with some small changes to it.

Viewing the properties of a style

To see what the default style consists of do:

Select "Default" with the mouse -> right click -> Modify

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This brings up a dialog enabling you to look at the properties or change them. First, let's look at what is in the definition. At the top of the window are a number of tabs. The "Organizer" tab shows the name of the style, what the next paragraph in the text should be ("Next Style"), and its place in the hierarchy ("Linked with").

An important item under the organizer tab is the check box labelled "AutoUpdate". If this is not ticked, then only changes made through the style dialogs will take effect on the style. If it is ticked, then when any change is made to the style (for example by a right click of the mouse), then they are propagated to all styles and not just the single paragraph. Later an example will be given of how you might wish to use this.

To follow this tutorial, make sure that the AutoUpdate box is not ticked.

While we are here, just check some other features that should be the same as my default if this tutorial is to work as expected. Go to the Font tab and check that the font is a Roman style of font; Times, Times New Roman, Nimbus Roman No9 L, or Liberation Serif are all suitable. Also, make sure the Typeface is Regular, and the size is 12pt. In this section, you can also see the language for checking the spelling. I am using English (UK) and if the dictionaries are installed, then a tick mark will appear in front of the selected language. No tick mark means that the spelling will not be checked.

Under the Numbering tab, the Numbering style should be None. You could also browse among the other tabs to see what other features there are.

When you've finished, hit OK.

2.2 Using existing styles

A practical demonstration

You'll need the text of this leaflet if you want to perform the actions described in this tutorial so get a copy from the website or tutor as an ODT (.odt) file. Open this in Writer, but do not operate on it directly as that would not necessarily correspond to the defaults you have set up in your system. Instead do:

File -> Open, and select the .odt file you retrieved
Click somewhere in the text
Edit -> Select All
Edit -> Copy
File -> New -> Text Document
Click in the text area
Edit -> Paste Special -> Unformatted text -> OK

You will now have the text in a default style in a new document and you are ready to follow the rest of this tutorial. Note that the default will be your default style and not the one used in the retrieved file. This is done to ensure that you have the fonts, etc. that you need to operate on a document, and have not imported anything inaccessible from the reference text. Since this is a new document, you

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will have to make any changes to the Default style that you found you had to do in the previous section.

Setting text to a particular style

Now, we want to put it into a format with differing styles for the headings, etc. and make it look more attractive.

Instead of the default style, a better one for normal paragraphs of running text is “Text body”. In the hierarchical list of style, we can see it is derived from the default style, so it will have some changes. You can apply it to all the text in one go by:

Select all the text in the document (CTRL-A will do that).
Note that CTRL-A means hold down the “Ctrl” key and at the same time, press the “A” key.

Find “Text body” in the list of styles, and double click on it. That is how you set a selection of text to a style; just double click on the name of the style from the list.

Is this style just what we want? Let's look. As before, bring up the properties of the style with right click on the name and choose “Modify”.

You will also see under the Organizer tab that each Text body style is to be followed by another Text body style, so that as you type in, starting a new paragraph will automatically be given this style.

It is usually not a good idea to leave single lines at the bottom of a page to start a new paragraph (these are called “orphans”). To change this look under the Text Flow tab, and tick the orphan box. By default, the number of lines will be 2 and you can change that if you like. Similarly, it is not good to have a new page starting with the remains of a paragraph only one line long (“widows”), so tick that box, too.

Now hit “OK” and all the text will have these properties. The name of the style is (by default) in the upper left of the Writer window and should change from Default to Text body.

2.3 Creating a new style

Some of the comments in this leaflet are instructions to you. Suppose we want those lines to be made prominent. To do that, we define a new style. We can take any existing style as the base for the definition, but we will use the Text body as the base. So:

select Text body from the style list -> right click -> New

We must give it a name; call it “Instruction”. We want to indent it from both the left and right margins, so go to the “Indents & Spacing” tab and set 2.00 cm in both “Before Text” and “After Text”. Now we want to change the font in the instructions, so go to the Font tab and choose one from the list. This leaflet uses Arial, but you can try anything you like.

Now hit OK to create the new style.

To see what it looks like we must apply it to some text. If you look through the text of the leaflet, you will see which parts are indented (they have boxes round them). Place the cursor in each of the paragraphs in your working text and double click on Instruction in the list of styles.

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Putting boxes around paragraphs

The observant among you will notice that there are boxes around the instruction text in the leaflet, so let's do that next. As usual, right click on Instruction and Modify to bring up the dialog. Now go to the Borders tab. On the left, under "Line arrangement" there are five boxes. The first from the left is no borders, the second is all four borders; click the second of them and you will notice it will indicate where the borders are in the diagram below.

In some cases, there is more than one instruction in a box. To get that, tick the box at the bottom "Merge with next paragraph".

Click OK and the effect takes place on all paragraphs of that type.

2.4 Making headings

You will see that there are three types of headings (the lines in bold) in the body of the leaflet. To achieve that we will use the existing style "Heading" for the major one, and create two more, "SubHeading" and "MinorHeading". We will then put numbers on Heading and Subheading, but leave MinorHeading unnumbered.

(Do not confuse Header with Heading. Header refers to the lines at the top of a page. Heading refers to the "title" of a section of text. Here, we want to change the Headings.)

First, though, it's a good idea to prevent a heading being separated from its subsequent text. Right click to modify Heading, and make sure that under the Text Flow tab, the box "Keep with next paragraph" is ticked; and the font should be Arial, 15pt and Bold. We will add numbering later. Then you can set all the headings with a single number in front with style Heading.

To create a new style, SubHeading, based on Heading do:

Select Heading in the list of styles -> right click -> New Select Organizer tab
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Make sure that the Next Style is "Text body" and set the font size to 13pt to match what is here.

MinorHeading can be created from SubHeading in the same way, again make the Next Style "Text body" and change the font size to 12pt.

You are now in a position to set up all the paragraph styles in almost all of the text. Only the first page is unset yet – we will deal with that later, when we look at page styles.

Selecting style for existing text

It is worth noting one more thing here. When you have used a paragraph style from the list, you will find it will appear in the drop-down list from the style name given in top left of the Writer window. This can make it easier to find and correct paragraph styles during editing at any later time. This drop-down list always contains the names of styles that are in use in the document, so they must be used first before they will appear automatically.

You can now go through all the text of the leaflet setting the lines with a single number at the front to style Heading, the lines with two numbers to style SubHeading, and lines in bold text with no numbers at the front to style MinorHeading.

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Changing a style without using the style dialogs

The text of a single paragraph can be changed in other ways, too. Sometimes it is more convenient to use the AutoUpdate feature. To show an example, modify the MinorHeading style by ticking the AutoUpdate box under the Organizer tab. Now put the cursor in one of the minor headings, and highlight the whole paragraph, by, for example, clicking the left button three times in succession. Now right click and select Style and Italic. You should notice that all the minor headings have changed, and not just the one you chose. So you easily experiment with strength of the font, or underlining, and many other options that are available from the right-click context menu for a paragraph.

3 Numbering

We have defined the styles and applied them to the text. Now we want to add numbering to some of the headings. This is accomplished using:

Tools -> Outline Numbering

In the dialog box that appears, go to the Numbering tab and select the level of numbering being defined from the box on the left. Then, under the Paragraph Style, select from the drop-down list Heading. Under Number, use the drop-down list to select the type of numbering you want to see (Arabic, Roman, etc.) This leaflet uses the ordinary, 1, 2, 3, ...

3.1 Defining the type and level of numbering

The position of the number and text on the line is defined by the Position tab. There you can set the indent of the heading (this leaflet uses 0.25cm), and a Minimum Space Numbering <-> Text of 0.5cm. As you change these values, you can see the effects in the diagram below. When you are satisfied with the results, hit "OK", and you will see numbers against the Headings.

Lower levels

To set the second level numbering, again go to Tools and Outline Numbering, but this time highlight the number 2 in the list of levels on the left. Set the Paragraph Style to SubHeading, and if we want to see the lower levels printed as 3.4, for example, then set "Show sublevels" to 2. Set the numbering again to 1, 2, 3, ... as before.

There are up to 10 levels pre-defined, and many different types of numbering schemes possible.

4 Handling pages

4.1 Types of pages

Typically, the questions you need to ask yourself when laying out a document are whether you want a different page on the front, and whether the left and right should be the same or different styles (think about where the page number goes, or the header of the page). This tutorial will not address how to set up frames, indexes, contents lists, etc.

When you have the list of styles available (F11 if not), then:

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click on the fourth icon along the top to show the list of page styles

The ones we will be using are Left Page, Right Page and First Page.

Modifying a page style

Again right click on Left Page and select Modify to bring up the properties. If you now look at the Page tab you will see that the Page Layout is given as Only Left. This style is used only for the left hand pages of the leaflet.

However, there is an oddity in the default settings which we must change. Under the Organizer tab, you will see that the next style is also set to Left Page. That should be changed to Right Page so that the page styles alternate. Also, go to the Header and Footer tabs and tick the boxes to turn on headers and footers.

Then repeat for Right Page to make sure that the headers, footers and sequencing are correct.

Using the page styles

To bring them into use, there is a small adjustment needed to the text. Go to the first/title page and insert a page break (Insert -> Manual Break -> Page break) at its end.

Now return to the title page and make it a right-hand page by double clicking on Right Page from the style list. We will make the title page a special one later.

Inserting text in the header and footer

It is now easy to put in the text for the headers and footers by placing the cursor in the appropriate box and typing in the text. As the left and right headers have different text, you will have to change both headers. To centre the text, modify the Header style under the Alignment tab by clicking on Centre (for US interface) or Centre (if you have a UK interface). The font I've used here is Nimbus Sans, regular italic, 14pt, but select what you like. The same style is used on left and right pages, so only the one style needs to be changed.

Inserting page numbers

To put page numbers in the footers, first change the paragraph style Footer Right so its alignment is Right. That for Footer Left is already aligned to the left. Then you can insert the page numbers in each of the pages by

Insert -> Fields -> Page Number

but you will notice that the paragraph styles for both left and right footers are defaulted to just Footer. So you must also change the paragraph styles of the two page footers to the appropriate (left or right) one.

4.2 First page

If we look at the properties of the style First Page, under the Organizer tab, we see that the next page is set to Default. This is wrong for us, so ensure it is set to Left Page.

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To make a special first page, put the cursor in the title page and double click on the page style First Page. That's all there is to that since I've chosen no special other properties.

Wrapping up

To complete, the text on the first page must be given a Title style, and the lower lines are in style Subtitle. You can find these under the Heading style in the Hierarchical list.

To bring the title lower on the page, the Title style was modified. Under the Indents & Spacing tab, the Above Paragraph spacing is set to 6cm.

Since both Title and Subtitle are derived from Heading, they have inherited a bold font. To put Subtitle back to a simple Italic form, it must be modified as usual under the Font tab.

That should make your copy of the document pretty much like the leaflet you are reading, and you can save it to your own space wherever you like.

5 Saving styles in a template

You now have a document containing some styles that perhaps you want to re-use in a later document of a similar type. One obvious way of doing this is to start by editing a previous document and make all the necessary modifications. However, that is prone to errors when you forget to change some parts of the document that are not relevant any more. I'm sure almost all of us have done something similar.

To save the styles in a template, first make sure that you have already saved the document itself as a .odt file otherwise you will lose the contents of the document. You can tell whether there are unsaved edits by looking at the bottom of the OpenOffice window where you will see an asterisk in a little box when edits are not saved. It is blank when there is nothing new to be saved.

To create an empty template, clean out all superfluous text. For this leaflet, you could just put the cursor in the body of the text and:

Edit -> Select All
Hit Delete key

Note though, if you want to remove header and footer text, then you should do this first, or you will not see the pages after removing all text. The page style sequence is still remembered in the document.

Saving the template

To make a new template with these styles, do:

File -> Templates -> Save

and save where you want it. In this simple tutorial, use the My Templates folder.

It is important to remember that when you now exit from the document you saved as a template to discard these most recent edits, or you will overwrite the real text in your document. It is sometimes best to do a Save As before saving as a template to avoid serious errors.

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Recovering the template

To re-use it as the basis of a new document do:

File -> New -> Templates and Documents
Select Templates on the left

If necessary, double click on the folder where you saved the template. You should now see the list of available templates and you can select the leaflet template. Doing so will open a new document based on that template and all the styles you have set up will available for use.

6 Conclusion

There are many other aspects of styles that are useful, but I'll let you experiment. Remember that you can always undo the results of any change by:

Edit -> Undo
or
CTRL-Z
or
clicking the "Undo" icon (a leftward curved arrow)