Tips and Tricks

The February 2011 session involved a good interchange among those present of various ideas and that they had found while using their computers. Here are some of those introduced to us.

The following notation is used.

> ESC means the Escape key (usually top left).
>
> Fn means the Function key with the number n on it (usually along the top).
>
> CTRL means the Control key (either left or right on a PC keyboard).
>
> SHIFT means the shift key (either left or right).
>
> ALT means the left ALT key.
>
> ALTGR means the right ALT usually inscribed AltGr to mean Alternate Graphic).
>
> MENU means the key inscribed with a picture of a menu (usually lower right).
>
> WNDWS means the key inscribed with the MS Windows logo (usually lower left, and sometimes also lower right).
>
> When two or more keys are to be depressed together, they are combined with a + symbol. So SHIFT+a gives the normal way of entering a capital A.
>
> When a sequence of key strokes is required, they are enclosed in brackets and separated by commas. So the sequence (ALTGR+#,a) means first the combination of AltGr and # key together, followed separately by just the 'a' key. Under Linux, this gives the character: à (a grave).

Font size in browsers

To increase the size of the font of the text on a webpage, almost all browsers will accept the key combination CTRL++ (or CTRL+=) and to decrease it CTRL+- . But this changes only this page, or only what is displayed in the current tab (depending on browser).

If you want always to have a larger font for the text, then Firefox has an option to set the minimum size of font it will use when rendering a page for display. Go to Edit → Preferences → Content. Then under Fonts and Colours, hit the Advanced button. Then you will see a drop down list to set the minimum font size it can use. The default is no lower limit.

Black backgrounds

A few web pages use a black or dark background, and they can be very hard to read. Sometimes it can help in such a case to select all the text, using CTRL+a, when the contrast can be greatly enhanced as the browser highlights all the text on the page.

Search ideas

Google has lots of options available to help in searches. For example, type into the search bar the string "define: widget" and it will show you the various definitions of the word widget.

Basic tips to refine searches are given here: http://www.google.com/intl/en-GB/help/features.html

Examples of some of the more useful ones are described at
http://www.google.com/support/bin/static.py?page=guide.cs&guide=30275&topic=1051770

You can use Google as a calculator or for unit conversions. For example put the string "speed of light in furlongs per fortnight" (without quotes) and see what it does.

OpenOffice and LibreOffice

LibreOffice (LO) is the fork of OpenOffice (OOo) that is getting most of the volunteer developers' time at the moment. For instance, LO supports more document types than OOo does and can read things that OOo fails to.

LO is currently internally compatible with OOo, so when an extension cannot be found yet for LO, then you may get it at OOo (http://extensions.services.openoffice.org/en/getmore?cid=920794). However, this situation may not last and we should keep an eye out for announcements on when it will change.

The important ones to know about are the various foreign language dictionaries which are yet to be transferred to the LO extension list.

Obtaining special characters from the keyboard

When writing in a language other than English, it is necessary to access the characters in its alphabet. For Latin-based alphabets, this is completely covered in Linux by means of the standard UK keyboard driver. The AltGr key is very handy to apply diacritics. I have produced a list of its use for all keys and put it at
http://www.u3ainbath.org.uk/group_pages/foss/LinkedFiles2011/AltGrKey.pdf

Note that if there is no glyph for the combination, then nothing will appear. For example, you cannot add a double acute accent onto an E; only O and U can receive that diacritic in the Unicode standard. Other means are possible to obtain those glyphs should you wish to do so, but not directly from the keyboard.

For OpenOffice (and LibreOffice), there is a macro available to enable pairs of characters to be collapsed into single accented characters, or other characters. The way it has been written enables you to modify the macro yourself easily to obtain any special characters you may need. You can find it here: http://extensions.services.openoffice.org/en/project/accentuate

Other special key combinations

All operating systems and display managers have their own special sets of keys strokes for managing workspaces, windows, menus, etc. The best resource I know for these is at
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_of_keyboard_shortcuts

It covers Macs and Windows as well as two flavours of Linux desktops, together with sundry other applications-style actions.

All the browsers I tried on that page garbled the table formatting to a greater or lesser extent. For a clean visible version, get a pdf copy by clicking on the Print/export line in the left column. This opens a small list, one entry of which is Download as PDF. That will generate a pdf file of the page that is much more readable in my opinion. It generates it on the fly, so you may have to wait while it does it.

Right clicks

A common action that is often overlooked is to do a right click on the mouse when the cursor is over a feature or in a window, or at the window header bar, etc. The result is known as the "Context Menu" and will contain various options and actions that you may not be aware of.

Under most Linux window managers, the MENU key will also bring up the context menu. ESC will clear it if you do not want it. The up and down arrow keys will move the selection to a menu entry and the ENTER key will perform the action.

Multiple clicks

In both OpenOffice and LibreOffice, a single mouse [left] click will position the action to the cursor location.

A double click will select a word.

A treble click will select the sentence.

Four quick clicks will select the paragraph.

Footnotes and Bibliography on OOo

Footnotes can easily be added by use of Insert → Footnote/Endnote menu item.

To modify where and how they are placed, use Tools → Footnotes/endnotes.

There is an bibliography feature embedded in OOo for ease of access and reference. To see it, use Tools → Bibliography Database, where you can add to, edit and delete the entries that have been provided. It can be extended at will for your own use.

To insert a bibliographic reference, use Insert → Index and Tables → Bibliography Entry, where you can select from the data base. It will automatically generate a new section at the end of the document in which to place the citations.