

Design a Book

with

OpenOffice.org Writer

Luke Muehlhauser

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About the author

Luke Muehlhauser is a regular guy. He holds no awards or high-ranking positions. All he did is write a book that will make your life easier.

Other material by the author

Please visit lukeprog.com.

Thanks to

The OpenOffice.org community and John T. Reed.

Technical Notes

This book was designed entirely with OpenOffice.org Writer, following the steps in this book. Cover, title page, and chapter titles use Arno Pro Light. Computer code uses Bitstream Vera Sans Mono. Everything else is Adobe Caslon Pro.

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Preface

Today, anyone can publish a book. Many of the most valuable books in my collection were self-published, and by authors who could not afford a professional designer. I could not have read those books if publishing was done only by large companies, or if design could only be done by expensive professionals. So I want to help authors publish their work even if they can't afford a professional book designer or prove to a major publisher they will sell millions of copies. That's what this book is about.

Here's the deal: You write the content. *Design a Book with OpenOffice.org Writer* helps you design the book, quickly and easily. A site like lulu.com or createspace.com lets you self-publish your book. You promote the book with tips learned

from something like *Plug Your Book!* by Steve Weber. And then the rest of us get to read it.

Why this book is different

I'll teach you how to design a good-looking book with free software, quickly. No other book can tell you how to do that. Your first book will take a while to design, but after you know what you're doing, you might design a whole new book in *one hour*.

I'll give you a crash course on how a professional would design each part of your book, then show you *exactly* how to do it in Writer.

Usually, book design is a self-publisher's nightmare. You don't want to spend months fiddling with complex design software. You just want to write your damn book. My goal is to make book design *trivial* for you.

We're going to build a complete book from scratch. Along the way, you'll learn all the principles of good design you need to know.

This isn't a manual. I won't teach you every feature of Writer. I assume you know how to use a computer, how to type, how to use Google, and how to search the help file. I'll just tell you how to design a book, fast.

To save time and stress, I'm not going to teach you book design lingo. To designers, page numbers are "folios," right-

hand pages are “rectos,” etc. Those are fine terms. Use them if you like. But to keep things simple and help you learn *fast*, I’ll just call them “page numbers” and “right-hand pages.”

Other books

I found only three other books on this topic.

OpenOffice.org 2.x Writer Guide by OOoAuthors is a typical software manual. Dig through it to learn about some features I don’t discuss here.¹ As of this writing, it has not been updated for version 3.0.

Writer for Writers by Dmitri Popov is badly designed and organized. But it has a few good tips.²

Perfect Pages by Aaron Shepard tells you how to design a book with Microsoft Word. It misses lots of topics, and doesn’t teach you good design.³

Those books serve their purpose. My purpose is different. I’ll teach you *good book design*, then show you exactly *how to do it* in *Writer*.

1 Get it from oooauthors.org.

2 Get it from www.lulu.com/content/221513.

3 Shepard’s page is www.aaronshp.com.

Color

I don't discuss color in this book. Printing in color is a complex topic, and deserves its own book. (A book that is *itself* in color).

Writer vs. other software

Yes, typesetting programs like InDesign and QuarkXPress are more powerful than Writer. They also cost hundreds of dollars and take months to learn.

In the past, you had to send publishers or book manufacturers a file from one of these expensive design programs. Now you can just create a PDF file from Writer and send them that.

Some print-on-demand publishers will take a manuscript you wrote in Microsoft Word and do the book design for you. That service is expensive, doesn't give you control, and often produces bad results. This book will help you design things exactly the way you want them.

What about designing in Microsoft Word? Frankly, Word 2007 is a pain in the ass for book design.⁴ Writer is much more powerful.

4 See www.aaronshp.com/publishing/Word2007.html.

Versions

This edition of *Design a Book with OpenOffice.org Writer* was designed with (and is intended for) Writer 3. But don't worry; very little will be different if you're using another version.

Our strategy

Steal from good designers

You're not an expert. Experts spend decades figuring out which page margin ratios work, which font combinations work, which type conventions work, etc. You don't have time for that. You just want your book to *look good*. You do that by stealing from the people who spent years figuring out how to make things look good.

Find a book of the same genre or style as your own that you *really* like looking at, and copy it. Every part. What do the headings look like? How far are they from the text above and below? How much space is there between lines of text? Are the page numbers centered, or in opposite corners? How wide is the body text area? Take it all.

Don't mix elements you like from different books unless you and ten friends agree it looks good. Elements from different books weren't designed to go together. Elements inside *one* book were designed to go together.

Don't reinvent the wheel. It will take a long time and your wheel will be crap.

Keep it simple, stupid

Every little thing you add to your design is just another opportunity for it to go wrong. The best designs are simple and consistent. Don't add too many elements. Don't use five different fonts. Don't try to be creative. Keep it simple, keep it smart.

If you try to do something fancy, it will look like crap. If you follow the rules of basic book design, your book will look better than 90% of self-designed books. It will even look better than some professionally-designed books.

Mark Pilgrim uses a minimal design for his website⁵ because he's not very good at design. Without hardly trying, his website is elegant and beautiful. Be like Mark Pilgrim.

Remember CARP

The four basic principles of design are **contrast**, **alignment**, **repetition**, and **proximity** (CARP). Use them in everything.

Contrast. You should be able to tell each element apart. Don't let headings and body text look too similar. Etc.

Alignment. Align everything to strong lines to get a clean, professional look. There are no strong lines in a

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centered alignment, so centering text is almost always a bad choice.

Choose a few vertical lines on your pages and align everything to them. Align headings, paragraphs, tables, and graphics against the left margin. Align paragraph indents, poetry quotations, block quotations, and other special elements all to the *same line*, a bit further in.

Repetition. Repeat lines, pictures, shapes, and spatial relationships to give unity to your book. For example, put the same illustration next to every chapter title.

Proximity. Elements that belong together should be close together. Elements that don't belong together should be further apart. For example, make headings closer to the text below them than to the text above them.

Just tweak it until it looks good

Follow the rules in this book to get a good design. Align everything to the same mathematical lines. But if something doesn't look quite right, tweak it. Arrange things *optically*. If it *looks* good, it *is* good. In design, always trust your eyes.

Make your content better than your design

I have a confession to make. Though I teach good book design, three of my all-time favorite books are very *badly*

designed.⁶ Why do I love those books so much? Because their *content* is so much better than the other books in their fields.

Good design is no excuse for poor content. I hope this book will save you time and money on book design, so you can focus your attention on *writing good content*.

Design as you write

Lots of people write a book in Word or Writer, then import it with InDesign to do the design. How silly. That's a *lot* of extra work. Just design *as* you write. That's what we're going to do with Writer.

Let's get started.

6 For the curious, I'm referring to *A History of Rock Music, 1951–2000* by Piero Scaruffi, *Succeeding* by John T. Reed, and *Psychological Self-Help* by Clayton E. Tucker-Ladd.