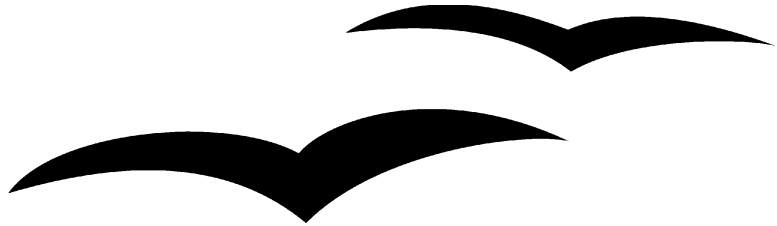


Mail Merge Data Sources:

Converting Word Tables To Calc Or dBase



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Overview

This documentation describes the steps necessary to convert any existing *Word* table documents used for mail merge with *MSOffice* towards *Calc* spreadsheets in order to use them as data sources for the same purpose with *OpenOffice.org*.

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This documentation wouldn't have been what it is without their feed-back and comments.

Modifications and updates

Version	Date	Description of Change
0.5	11/21/2004	Initial translation

Introduction

While migrating from *MSOffice* (MSO) to *OpenOffice.org* (OOo), many people encounter difficulties converting *Word* tables that are used as mail merge data sources.

Indeed, though MSO offers several options for mail merge data sources – summarised as *Word* tables or *Excel* spreadsheets –, one often chooses to use *Word* tables for that task. Unsurprisingly, this seemingly user friendly feature of *Word* leads to misunderstanding about the very nature of the data being used, and hence to potential problems.

Choosing to use *Word* tables deprives the user of the calculation abilities that a spreadsheet offers and creates more problems when one has to extract the data to some other format.

This How-To aims to demonstrate painless conversion of *Word* tables to *Calc* spreadsheets or *dBase* files. From there, it will be possible to use the resulting files as data sources for OOo mail merge activities. Conversion methods shown here need only be executed *once* for each *Word* document.

As an example, the How-to will deal with the conversion of an address table. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the file is called **Addresses.doc**. The aim is to get a *Calc* spreadsheet or *dBase* file, as quickly as possible, from this original *Word* file, then use the resulting files as data sources for the mail merge operations using *Writer*.

Two methods will be shown here : a quick one and a “lengthy” one. The latter will give us a greater degree of control in the conversion process. At the end of this How-To, you will find a few links to additional documentation that will give more insight into mail merge functions using *OpenOffice.org*.

Save!

If you follow the steps described here, you won't lose the initial data. Before starting any other action, it is however strongly recommended to first make a backup of your data!

A Fast Conversion Scheme

As its name implies, this conversion mode is very fast. The counterpart being the very little control it will give in the conversion process. In fact, what is called “conversion” in this fast method isn't really one at all: it is merely a standard copy and paste task between tools!

Since the aim is to be as safe as possible while converting, and though the copy/paste action is a classic one, it will be described in length in the following paragraphs.

Copying The *Word* Table

Start *Writer* and open the *Word* document to be converted to a *Calc* sheet. The screen should look like that of Figure 1.

<i>FirstName</i>	<i>LastName</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>ZipCode</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Fee</i>
John	Doe	123 Main St	12345	LittleTown	MA	123.45
Mary	Jenkins	The Manor	98765	TheVillage	NY	98,76
Helen	Roderick	9876 East Ave	65439	Los Olvidados	NA	45.67

Figure 1 - The Word table to be converted

- Selecting the whole table
It is probably safer to use the keyboard instead of the mouse to copy the table to the clipboard. Call the **Edit > Select All** menu (keyboard shortcut : **Ctrl + A**) *twice*: the first call selects the first cell in the table, the second one selects the whole table;
- Copying to the clipboard
This is a standard operation that is carried out via **Edit > Copy** (or **Ctrl + C**).

So far so good.

Pasting in Calc

Start *Calc*, by opening a new spreadsheet.

Check that the active cell is **A1** and proceed with pasting of the clipboard contents using the **Edit > Paste (Ctrl + V)** menu.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	<i>FirstName</i>	<i>LastName</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>ZipCode</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Fee</i>
2	John	Doe	123 Main St	12345	LittleTown	MA	123.45
3	Mary	Jenkins	The Manor	98765	TheVillage	NY	98.76
4	Helen	Roderick	9876 East Ave	65439	Los Olvidados	NA	45.67
5							

Figure 2 - The result of the pasting into Calc

Figure 2 shows the result after pasting.

Remarks

- *Column width is not adjusted;*
- *Cell formatting is kept;*
- *Note that the numbers in the Fee column are correctly interpreted, whatever their decimal separator, a dot (.) or a comma (,).*

Saving The Final Document

Save the new spreadsheet, using the **File > Save as...** menu option. A choice of formats is proposed : the default **OpenOffice.org 1.0 Spreadsheet (.sxc)**, or the *dBase* format (**Type** list positioned on **dBase (.dbf)**).

A “Lengthy” Conversion Scheme

This modus operandi is a bit longer than the former one but it gives much greater control in the conversion process: doing it this way means that useless columns may be disposed of, or that the data conversion is correctly set up. Moreover, the column width will be correctly adjusted.

The original *Word* file conversion starts using *Writer* with which an intermediate file will be generated that will be then imported into *Calc*.

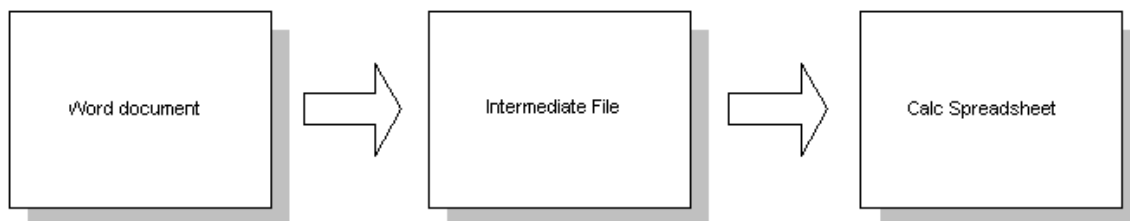


Figure 3 - The lengthy conversion process

There are a very few simple conversion steps. The diagram of Figure 3 is a recap of the process, as detailed in the following paragraphs.

Opening The Original Word File

Start *Writer* and open the *Word* document to be converted.

Figure 1 (page 2) shows the *Writer* screenshot after the document is loaded.

Converting The Table To Text

Calc can't read a *Word* table per se. Thus, the document will be modified so that this goal can be achieved.

Using the **Tools > Text<->Table** menu shows the dialog of Figure 4.

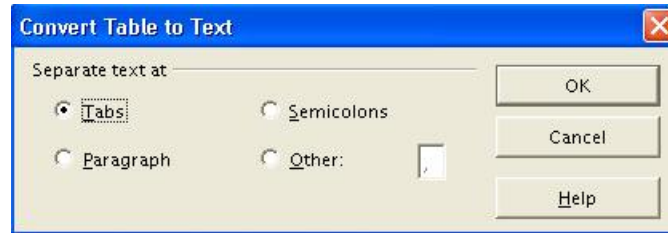


Figure 4 - Table to text conversion dialog

Select **Tabs** (default selection), then confirm using **OK**.

The original table has now disappeared. Columns are now separated with the Tab character (à), that was chosen (Figure 5)¹.



Figure 5 - The text after the table conversion

Saving

The document as displayed in Figure 5 can now be saved to an intermediate format that *Calc* can read: the CSV format (*Comma Separated Values*²).

Use **File > Save As...**

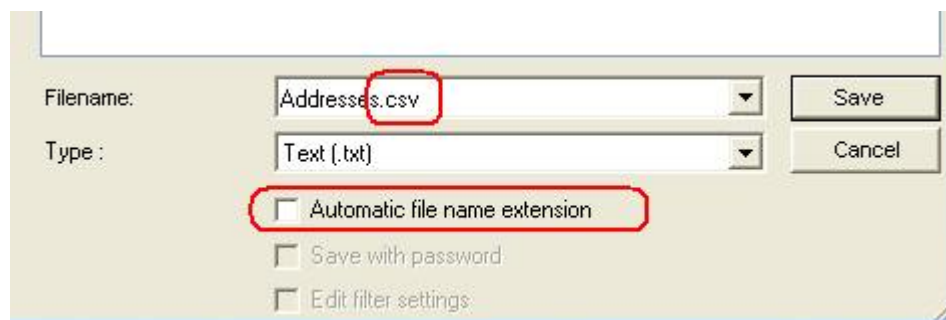


Figure 6 - Saving to CSV format

Check the **Type** zone and select **Text (.txt)**. Make sure that the **Automatic file name extension**

- 1 Note : Tab characters are shown in the Figure 5 screenshot because the display option **View > Nonprinting Characters** (or **Ctrl + F10**) was selected.
- 2 Yes, although Tabs were requested (and are shown), but the output format is still CSV...

checkbox is *unchecked*, then enter the **File name**, remembering to specify the **.csv** extension, as shown in Figure 6.

Click on **Save**.

Note 1

The default **.txt** extension is not recommended, since Calc wouldn't open such a file automatically, resorting to Writer to actually open the file.

Note 2

Remember to check the **Automatic file name extension** checkbox afterwards!

Two documents are now available: the original **Addresses.doc**, that is untouched, and the newly created **Addresses.csv** that *Calc* will read.

We may close *Writer*.

Importing The CSV File into Calc

Open *Calc* and, using **File > Open**, point to the **Addresses.csv** document that was created above. Click on **Open**.

Calc knows about the CSV format and can turn it into a new spreadsheet. Such an operation is called *Importing* and will be processed under the user's control, with the help of the **Text import** dialog as in Figure 7.

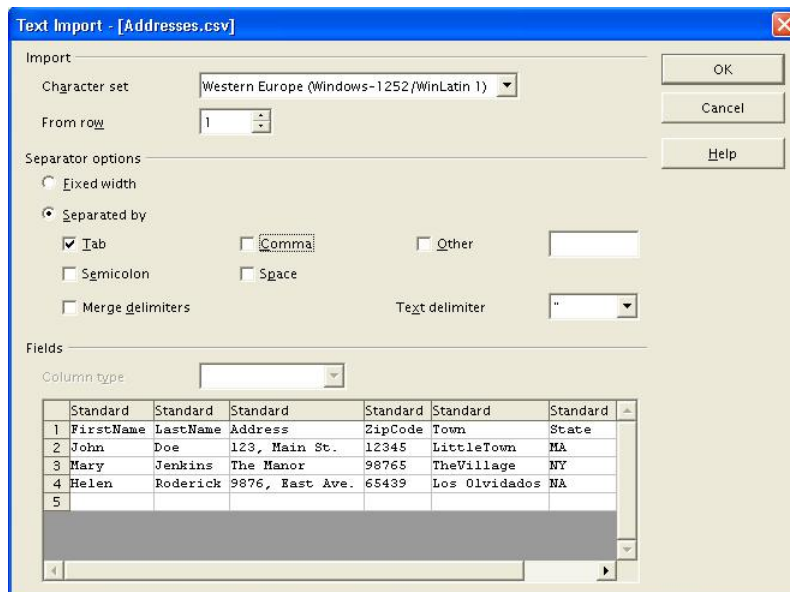


Figure 7 - Text import dialog in Calc

Usually it is safe to keep the value selected in the **Character set** list. This option only needs to be changed when the imported document (the original *Word* table) comes from a foreign

system.

The **From row** option allows the user to skip any number of unwanted lines, starting from the beginning of the table. By default, *Calc* imports all data.

More importantly, it is necessary to specify the **Separator Options** that fit the situation: select **Separated by**, then **Tab** and *untick any other option in this category*.

The preview panel at the bottom gives feedback with which one can check that the current selection fits the to-be imported file format.

Deleting columns

*There are situations where the user may not want some columns from the original file to be imported. In this case, just select them in the preview panel and select **Hide** in the **Column type** list (Figure 8). The hidden column headers show the current selection status.*

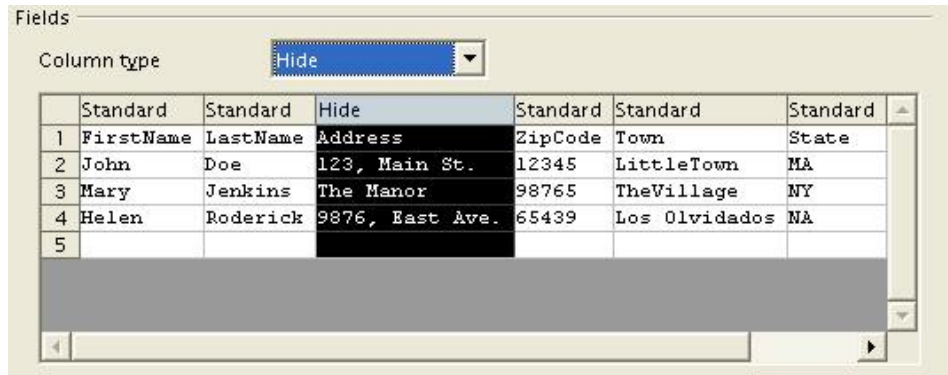


Figure 8 - Hiding a column

Hidden columns won't be part of the final document.

Columns with numerical values which are incorrectly interpreted

If typos in numerical values in the original table are noticed (using a comma instead of a dot), these errors can still be fixed.



Figure 9 - Fixing a number format typo

Select the "faulty" column in the preview panel, then force the **US English** option which will prevent any misreading of numbers (Figure 9).

Click **OK** when the preview is satisfactory.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	FirstName	LastName	ZipCode	Town	State	Fee
2	John	Doe	12345	LittleTown	MA	123.45
3	Mary	Jenkins	98765	TheVillage	NY	98.76
4	Helen	Roderick	65439	Los Olvidados	NA	45.67
5						
6						

Figure 10 - Data in Calc after import

Calc now displays the data as a result of the import process (Figure 10). Browse the spreadsheet to check that the data are correctly organized.

Notes

- Column widths are adjusted;
 - Cell formatting is lost.
-

Note

Where mistakes are noticed in the spreadsheet layout, one of the above described operations has failed:

- Saving with a text format in Writer (page 4);
 - Import process in Calc (page 5).
-

Saving The Final Document

Is the aspect of the new spreadsheet correct? Perfect! Now save it under any of the required formats for use as a mail merge data source: Calc format (**.sxc** file) or dBase format (**.dbf**).

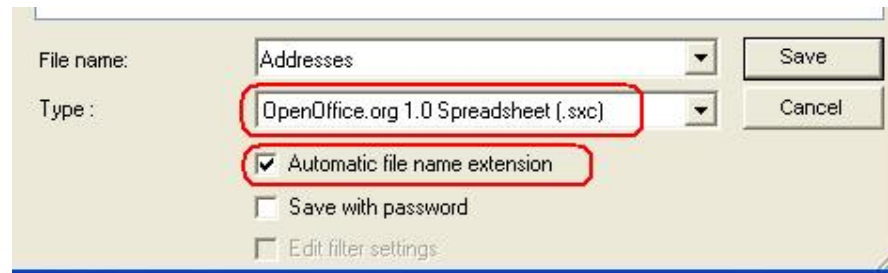


Figure 11 - Saving under Calc format

Call the **File > Save as...** menu (Figure 11).

In the **Type** list, choose either **OpenOffice.org 1.0 Spreadsheet (.sxc)** (at the top of the list) or **dBase (.dbf)**, according to the desired target file format.

Make sure that the **Automatic file name extension** checkbox is *checked* and confirm using **Save**.

There are now three documents:

- **Addresses.doc** The original *Word* document, which is now useless;
- **Addresses.csv** The intermediate document that can be deleted;
- **Addresses.sxc** (or **Addresses.dbf**).
The new datasource document.
Do not forget to save this latter document before starting work with it!

Miscellaneous information

Calc or dBase ?

As suggested, one can use either *Calc* spreadsheet or *dBase* files as data sources for mail merge needs. A "database" format is usually advised in order to gain access to the advanced editing and query functions.

The how-tos listed in the next paragraph give more details about the mail merge functions with *OpenOffice.org* and will be of help in deciding which format best fits any given situation.

More Information

The following *how-tos* provide more information about mail merge using *OpenOffice.org*:
http://documentation.openoffice.org/HOW_TO/word_processing/writer2_EN.pdf
http://documentation.openoffice.org/HOW_TO/data_source/data1_EN.html

These documents are freely available, along with many others in the documentation area of the *OpenOffice.org* project: <http://www.openoffice.org/>

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