

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS TEXT

These tutorials have been designed to introduce teachers and student teachers to the essential functionality of the *LibreOffice* suite of software applications. The learning objectives are thus threefold:

- to help the learner acquire the fundamental skills involved in using the *LibreOffice* suite of productivity programs;
- to help the learner apply these skills in the context of the classroom, lecture hall, or other home or office environment;
- to motivate the learner to go on to acquire more advanced features of *LibreOffice* not covered in these tutorials.

1.2 WHY *LIBREOFFICE*?

Unlike Microsoft *Office*, *LibreOffice* is FREE of any charge. It has been developed and is maintained by a global team of developers, most of whom provide their services free of charge.

To quote from the *LibreOffice* Discover website: “*LibreOffice* is a powerful office suite; its clean interface and powerful tools let you unleash your creativity and grow your productivity. *LibreOffice* embeds several applications that make it the most powerful Free & Open Source Office suite on the market: *Writer*, the word processor, *Calc*, the spreadsheet application, *Impress*, the presentation engine, *Draw*, our drawing and flowcharting application, *Base*, our database and database front end, and *Math* for editing mathematics.”

Aside from the look and feel of *LibreOffice*, the functionality is not greatly different from other office productivity tools such as Microsoft *Office*.

In *LibreOffice* you have a computing environment that will help you handle most of the admin tasks expected of a teaching professional. Furthermore, after you have learned the various productivity features taught in these tutorials, and when you, in your turn, teach *LibreOffice* to your students—and integrate the software into the curriculum—you will help them gain skills in the use of computer applications expected of the citizens of today’s and tomorrow’s world.

The user of these tutorials should be aware that the goal is to learn the ESSENTIALS of *LibreOffice*. It is beyond the scope of the tutorials to cover *all* the features of this function-rich software. Your task, as a teacher, is to become sufficiently familiar with *LibreOffice* so that you can use it to produce your own teaching and assessment materials, and, more to the point, to help your students learn.

It is the author’s hope that students and teachers, on completion of the tutorials, will be motivated to venture forth on their own and become proficient in the many quality and productivity-enhancing aspects of this and other computer-based teaching and learning tools.

1.3 WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THIS TEXT?

This may not be the only set of *LibreOffice* tutorials available for the education marketplace. Why, then, will the pre-service or in-service teacher select this text rather than another? What features set it apart?

- The tutorials go beyond a cookbook approach to *LibreOffice*. It emphasizes the concepts behind the keystrokes. On completion of the tutorials, the student or practicing teacher will understand the fundamentals of managing a computer-integrated teaching environment. Students of education also will be made aware of methodologies for teaching their students essential computing concepts and skills that will serve them well throughout their personal and professional lives.
- The scope of the material presented in ESSENTIAL *LibreOffice* is intentionally limited to what can be reasonably covered in 10-15 class hours, depending on the computing abilities of the students. It will thus fit nicely within the context of a course devoted either to the broader issues of computer literacy, or for a standalone, hands-on course that introduces *LibreOffice*.
- All the examples that are worked in the exercises are related to activities that might take place in K-college classrooms. At the end of the tutorials, the pre-service or in-service teacher will take away a set of files that will have direct application in the classroom and elsewhere.
- Proficiency is promoted by frequent reinforcement of skills learned. Appropriate exercises at the end of each tutorial provide an opportunity for skill consolidation. Teachers are encouraged throughout the text to build on, and grow beyond, the skills learned in the tutorials.
- The author understands that there are still teachers out there who may not be naturally inclined to get excited about the latest technology. For more than 40 years, the author taught at all scholastic levels, K through college, including experience teaching various disciplines in the Arts and Sciences in countries around the globe. He thus has worked extensively with teachers from across the range of the technology spectrum and has written these tutorials with every teacher in mind, no matter what their technology-savvy may be.

1.4 THE STATUS OF COMPUTING IN SCHOOLS

The question is no longer: "*Should* the computer be used in schools?" Rather the question is: "*How* should the computer be used in schools?" This tool for teaching and learning, available since the mid-1970s, is just one amongst many in the grab-bag of tools for teachers and students in the K-college curriculum.

If you believe the hoopla—and everything you see and hear in the education media—you would think that most of the children in our schools are today soaking up a large proportion of their education from a computer. But the reality is that the majority of teachers—in the USA and even more so elsewhere—have not yet had a realistic opportunity to integrate computer-based activities into their K-12 classrooms. This may be because they do not have in their classrooms a sufficient number of institutionally and centrally-maintained online computers for their students to use. Even if they do, the time it takes for the teachers to prepare appropriate technology-integrated lessons is often too much to bear in school systems where the teachers are expected to teach 30-40 hours a week with inadequate allowance for preparation time.

In other words, integrating technology into any curriculum, let alone the K-12 curriculum, is *hard*. Let me say that again: It's *HARD*. It takes untold person-hours of out-of-school time and effort and, above all, commitment on the part of teachers at every level to using all means necessary to help students learn.

Staff development and ongoing administration support are therefore key to successful integration of the computer as an aid to provide students with the best possible learning experience. Hence these tutorials.

1.5 TEACHING IS A COOPERATIVE ENDEAVOR

No tutorial in and of itself can teach you anything unless you are committed to the learning process. Computing is a set of skills, rather than a body of knowledge. As such, it demands *practice* in order to foster and maintain proficiency. As Thomas Edison observed: "The most important method of education always has consisted of that in which the pupils were urged to actual performance."

You, the teacher, must be prepared to work at mastering tools such as *LibreOffice*, along with the myriad other examples of educational software and hardware, as well as the non-computer-based tools and techniques that have been developed, over the years, for your area of pedagogical expertise, if you are to ever feel comfortable integrating these technologies for teaching and learning.

All your efforts will yield abundant fruit when you thoughtfully incorporate computer-based instruction into your curriculum. Your students will partake in that fruitful harvest and you will touch their future even as you touch your own.

1.6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

They say good teachers are born, not made. So I must begin with a debt of gratitude to my mom and dad, neither of whom were teachers, but both of whom taught me so very much. In the 1980s, my sister-in-law, Susan Shamey, helped me put together a database all about birds. That database started out as *AppleWorks*-compatible, and has migrated to just about every incarnation of productivity software since, including *LibreOffice*.

I also am thankful to my students at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, Pennsylvania, USA, who class-tested the tutorials since I first started to make them available free-of-charge online. Their feedback has been voluminous and invaluable.

For her help with the art work in the lessons on PowerPoint, I am grateful to Dr. Netiva Caftori of Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, USA. My thanks, too, to Lorrie Jackson for her help with Lesson 10. Then I must thank Lara E. Eakins, of the University of Texas at Austin, for her help with the graphics for the *Tudor Monarchs* presentation which accompanies the *LibreOffice* Work Disk and for the several illustrations in the text for Lesson 10.

I must offer a special vote of thanks to the *LibreOffice* community worldwide. Years ago I was encouraged by Ben Horst to do for *LibreOffice* what I have been doing for *Microsoft Office* since the mid-1990s. Throughout the writing of this book, I have had the technical support of Jay Phillips, in particular, and the moral support of Paul Joseph. But I have constantly needed to call on the many online resources that provide help with technical aspects of the *LibreOffice* suite. In the course of writing this book, I have been frequently stymied as to how to proceed with regard to one *LibreOffice* function or another, and somewhere, somehow, I was able to find the help necessary to proceed.

Needless to say, Google was an absolute Godsend!

To all, my heartfelt gratitude. Life is a work in progress, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank, in anticipation, those from whom I will continue to draw inspiration and ideas to improve the quality of my work.

A final word for non-USA users of this text. I have used USA spellings for words along the way. For example, in the UK, and in most former UK colonies such as Zambia or Nigeria or Australia, "initialize" is spelled "initialise," and so forth. Please adjust to this Americanization since, for the past number of years, as both a UK and USA citizen, I have adjusted to being Americanized, too.