A Basic Guide to Keyboard Keys
&
Shortcuts

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LibreOffice The Document Foundation **7.0**

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Introduction

This basic guide provides an understanding of all the keys on a typical UK keyboard and how keyboard shortcuts can be used to work more efficiently. The keyboard is the main interface tool a user has with a computer. Although written mainly for the newly released LibreOffice Writer version 7, the user will be able to apply the techniques learnt to many other Windows and Linux based operating systems and programs.

There are many different styles of keyboard available in the UK. Apart from the main character keys, there may be slight differences in the layout of the keys and some could have extra keys. This is especially the case for laptop computer keyboards which can vary significantly. This basic guide is based on the ISO keyboard layout (105 keys) with UK engravings. Individual keyboard keys can be combined to access commonly used program features such as making text bold or saving a document. These key combinations are called keyboard shortcuts. Some of the most useful keyboard shortcuts for LibreOffice Writer version 7 are shown later in this guide.

Additional examples and helpful notes are illustrated like this throughout the guide.

Access to a computer with LibreOffice Writer version 7 installed is recommended as you read through this guide.

Acknowledgements

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UK QWERTY Keyboard

Typical UK keyboard layout.

The guide is arranged alphabetically in key groupings. Many keyboard keys, including all the character keys, have a repeat action to them. Pressing and holding a key down will repeat until the key is released. A few keyboard keys, for example the caps lock key, have what is known as a toggle action to them.

If the caps lock is on, pressing the caps lock key will turn it off. Pressing the same key again will turn the caps lock back on.

Most computer users now use a graphical user interface (GUI) to interact with the computer; the Microsoft Windows and Linux operating systems with the icons and buttons being typical examples. Text only commands were used in the early days of computing.

It is possible to control a computer using only the keyboard.

On many keyboards there is a tiny raised marker on the letter F and J keys. A typist is trained to place their fingers on the home row keys. These are A, S, D, F, for the left hand and J, K, L, ;, for the right hand. The thumbs are used on the space bar. The index fingers are placed on the F and J keys and hence the markings indicate that they and the rest of the fingers are positioned correctly. The tutor of my typing class was quick to correct anyone caught looking down at the keys as they typed! I highly recommend professional typing training to all regular keyboard users. This skill has served me very well indeed.

Character Keys

These keys are likely to be the most familiar to keyboard users and usually require little further explanation. The character keys do though combine with other keys such as the modifier keys and this is covered in detail later in the guide. It is worth noting that all of the number keys and symbol keys have two markings on them one above the other, examples being: 1 and !, 5 and % and # and ~. The shift key is used to obtain the second upper character on the key. The shift key is covered further in the modifier keys section.

Start Writer, press and hold down the shift key and then press the number 3 key to obtain the £ sign. Note that it does not matter if the caps lock key is on or off when you do this.

The really observant of you will have noticed that there is actually one character key on the keyboard that has three markings on it. It is situated at the top left hand side of the character block and it has the markings ` ¬ and ¦ on it. But how do we obtain the third character ¦? Jumping slightly ahead at this point, we are going to use two modifier keys together. Start Writer and then press and keep holding down the ctrl key, now press and keep holding down the alt key and finally press this key to obtain the ¦ character. Release all keys when the action has taken place. More on this later.

Enter & Editing Keys

Backspace

The backspace key was originally used to push a typewriter carriage one position backwards. I learnt to type and passed my exams on a manual typewriter and remember this key well as it usually required a firmer press. On a modern computer system it is typically used to delete one character to the left of the text cursor position. It can also be used to delete tab stop positions or a selected block of text.

Start Writer and type in a line of text. Position the text cursor in the middle of the line of text. Now press the backspace key and it will delete one character to the left of the text cursor position. On a blank line in a Writer document, press the tab key a few times in order to create some tab stop positions. Now press the backspace key and this will delete the newly created tab stop positions one at a time. Be careful when using the backspace key if you have already selected a block of text within a document, it will behave in the same way as pressing the delete key.

Delete

The delete key does exactly what it says on it, it deletes things. This can be a single character of text, a selection of files or a whole page of text within a large document. What it actually deletes though depends on the context in which it is being used and what is selected.

Start Writer and type in a line of text. Position the text cursor in the middle of the line of text. Now press the delete key and it will delete one character to the right of the text cursor position. Select the rest of the line of text given in the above example and now press the delete key. This time it will delete all of the remaining line of text. The delete key can also be used to delete a file or folder from your computer.

Be careful when using the delete key, especially when deleting files and folders.

Enter

The enter key is also commonly referred to as the return key. There are two enter keys on a typical UK keyboard. The main one is the larger key spanning two rows at the right hand side of the character keys block. It is marked with a left pointing arrow with a tiny up angled line. It can be used to create blank lines in a Writer document, end a paragraph and start a new one, or close a dialog box. The second enter key is on the numeric keypad at the bottom right hand side of the keyboard and is normally marked with just the word enter.

Start Writer and press the enter key a few times to create some blank lines within a document. Now close Writer. As the document has been changed (adding the blank lines), you are asked if you want to save the document. Note the three option buttons of save, don't save or cancel. Look carefully at the save button, note that it has blue border around the button and a feint dotted box around the word save. The default option in this case has been automatically chosen by the program developer to be save. Press the enter key at this point to accept the default save option. You are then prompted to name the document, but if the default name is acceptable, simply press the enter key again. Using the enter key in this way saves the user having to reach for the mouse to click on buttons.

Insert

The insert key has a toggle action and the default setting is off. It controls the insertion and overtyping of text. A typical use would be if you wanted to add to or correct some text within a Writer document. Open an existing document containing text and position the cursor at the point where you wish to add or correct the text. When the insert key is off, the existing text will automatically move to the right to create room for the new characters being typed. When the insert key is on, any character key presses will overtype the existing text.

Start Writer and look in the program status bar at the bottom of the screen. Press the insert key and you will see the word "Overtype" appear in one of the status bar fields. Press the key again to turn the insert action off.

The Writer status bar also shows information about your document that you may find helpful.

Function Keys (F1 – F12)

Many of the function keys can be programmed by a software company to provide features specific to its requirements. Pressing the F6 key whilst using a program developed by company x may not respond in the same way as one developed by company y.

There is, however, one function key common to all Windows based programs; this is the F1 key. Pressing the F1 key will display the help menu of the program currently active on the screen.

If no programs are currently running and you are on the Windows desktop, pressing F1 will display the Windows operating system help menu.

An active program is also referred to as having the focus.

LibreOffice Writer has a number of function keys programmed for ease of use and some of them are included in the keyboard shortcuts section of this guide.

Lock Keys

Caps Lock Light & Key

The caps lock LED light indicates the status of the caps lock key which is located at the left hand side of the keyboard. if the light is illuminated the caps lock is on and all the character keys typed will be in upper case.

Num Lock Light & Key

The num lock light indicates the status of the num lock key which is usually located underneath the LED light itself. pressing the num lock key will turn the light on or off depending on the previous state. The num lock key controls the numeric keypad located at the right hand side of the keyboard. This keypad is ideal to use for entering a large amount of numeric data or doing calculations. Note that some of the keys have additional markings on them, for example, the number 8 key also has an upward pointing arrow (↑) on it, the number 1 key also has end on it and the number 7 key also has home on it. This is because these keys have a dual purpose. Pressing the number 8 key when the num Lock light is on will type the number 8. If the number 8 key is pressed when the num Lock light is off the cursor will move up one line.

The default setting is for the num Lock to be on when the computer starts. This can be changed to suit individual preferences. Check your computer manual.

Scroll Lock Light & Key

The scroll lock LED light is at the right hand side of the three LED keyboard lights. It indicates the status of the scroll lock key. If the light is illuminated the scroll lock is on. Pressing the scroll lock button will turn the light on or off depending on the previous state. This key is rarely used and some keyboards, especially laptops, no longer have a scroll lock light or key. It has its origins in the early days of computing and was programmed to lock all scrolling techniques.

Modifier Keys

The alt, altgr, ctrl and shift keys are known as modifier keys. Such keys modify the normal action of another key when they are pressed in combination.

Alt

The alt key is situated on the bottom row of the keyboard at the left hand side of the space bar, it is used to change the function of other pressed keys, similar to the shift and ctrl keys.

Pressing and holding down the alt key and then the F4 key will cause a program to close.

The alt key can also be used to select menu options.

Start Writer and then press and release the alt key. Look at the menu bar and the file menu item will be selected. Note the letter F is underlined. Look along the menu bar and you will see one other letter of each menu option is underlined (E, V, I, o, y, a, r, T, W, H). Now press the F letter key to show the file options of save, save as etc. An even quicker way to display the file menu options is to press and hold down the alt key and then press the letter F key. Pressing the alt key when using other Windows programs will select the first menu item (most commonly, file). You can also use the right or left navigation key to change the selected menu item. Pressing esc will cancel this action or press enter to accept it. More on this very efficient method of using a keyboard along with many examples are given in the keyboard shortcuts section.

It can be used to insert special characters like copyright © or registered trademark ®.

Press and hold down the alt key, now on the numeric keypad (num lock on) type the numbers 0169 and then release the alt key. Repeat this using the numbers 0174. These characters can also be obtained by typing (C) or (R) and then pressing the space bar. Note the letters must be in capitals for this to work.

AltGr

The altgr (alt graph) key is mainly used to type characters such as accented letters.

Press and hold down the altgr key and then press the letters a, e, i, o, u to obtain the acute letters à, è, ì, ò, ù. In capitals if using the caps lock or shift key.

Shift

There are two shift keys on a typical keyboard. The shift key is normally used to type one or perhaps up to three letters in upper case. Press and hold down the shift key and then press the letter key you want to type in upper case. Both keys work exactly the same so it generally doesn't matter which one is pressed. If more than three upper case letters are required it is recommended that you use the caps lock key.

If the caps lock is on, pressing the shift key and then typing a letter will cause it to be in lower case. This is useful when typing something like a serial number consisting of mostly capital letters, but does have one or two lower case letters. Leave the caps lock on and press the shift key to type in lower case.

Ctrl

There are two control keys on a standard keyboard. Both keys work exactly the same so it generally doesn't matter which one is pressed. The control key is similar to the shift key in that it rarely does anything when pressed by itself. It is normally pressed in combination with another key or keys.

Press and hold down the ctrl key and then press the S key to save a document in Writer and most other programs. Press and hold down the ctrl key and then pressing the F key will bring up the find menu in Writer.

Navigation Keys

Arrow Keys

See navigation keys

End Key

The end key is most commonly used within a word processing or text editing program to move the cursor to the end of a line of text.

Home

The home key is most commonly used within a word processing or text editing program to return the cursor to the beginning of a line of text.

Start Writer and type a line of text. Position the text cursor in the middle of the line and press the home and end keys to move the text cursor to the beginning and end of the line of text.

Navigation Keys

Quite often referred to as the arrow keys these four keys are situated at the bottom right hand side of the keyboard between the character keys and block of numeric keys. Navigation keys are also available on the numeric keypad.

The navigation keys are commonly used to move the cursor within a document in the direction the arrow points. Pressing one of the navigation keys, in a Writer document for example, will cause the cursor to move one character to the left or right, or one line up or down, depending on which key is pressed.

Page Down

The page down key is mainly used to move down one page within a multiple page document. Sometimes this key is abbreviated to pgdn.

Page Up

The page up key is mainly used to move up one page up within a multiple page document. Sometimes this key is abbreviated to pgup.

Tab

The tab (tabulator) key is at the top left hand side of the character block next to the letter Q. It is slightly larger than the letter keys and is marked with a left pointing arrow above a right pointing arrow. The tab key is commonly used to move the cursor to the next tab stop position in a text document or moving between text entry fields on a web page. LibreOffice Writer has default tab stops set at 1cm. If you open a blank document in Writer and press the tab key twice, it will move the cursor 2 cm from the left hand margin. This can be handy for aligning text on different rows.

Numeric Keypad

The numeric keypad typically consists of a block of 17 keys at the right hand side of the keyboard. The function and use of the numeric keypad is controlled by the num lock key explained previously in the lock keys section of this guide.

The navigation keys and the home, pgup, end, pgdn, del and ins keys on the numeric keypad have the same functionality as the home, page up, end, page down, delete and insert keys.

This numeric keypad is perfect for users who frequently need to enter numeric data and do calculations.

System and GUI Keys

Esc

The escape key is used to escape from or cancel out of an action currently being undertaken. This can quickly be demonstrated by clicking on the Windows start button. The start menu is displayed showing installed programs and other options. Now press the esc key and this will clear the start menu as it has escaped from the action currently being undertaken (displaying the Start menu).

Pause/Break

This key has its origins in the earlier days of computing prior to Windows, where typically it was used to interrupt communications and pause scrolling text on the screen. It also acted as a way of breaking out of a currently running program or task. It is rarely used on a modern computer system.

The pause key will halt the start-up process when a computer is first switched on (commonly referred to as booting up). You can then read the system information showing the amount of memory installed etc. Press any key to resume the boot process.

PrtScn/SysRq

The print screen/system request key is another key with its origins in the early days of computing and is rarely used. Prior to Microsoft Windows, computers used to display text to the screen line by line. Pressing prtscn sent this screen display to a printer. It also acted as a way of communicating with another computer by sending a system request to it for attention.

Windows Logo Key

Nearly always referred to as the Windows key, there are two such keys on a typical modern keyboard. The addition of these two keys and the Windows menu key marked a change from earlier keyboards to the keyboard layout used today. Pressing the Windows key will display the Windows start menu. The menu can be cleared by pressing the same key again, or the esc key.

Windows Menu Key

The Windows menu key is marked by a menu list and sometimes includes a cursor pointer. Pressing the menu key is the equivalent of right-clicking the mouse button. The menu options displayed will depend on the program being used and the current cursor position.

Start Writer. On a blank page type a line of text and include some misspelled words. Position the text cursor in one of the misspelled words and then press the menu key. Note that the options are related to spelling. Now move the text cursor to another correctly spelled word and press the menu key again. This time the options include changing the font, paragraph, bullet or numbering.

Keyboard Shortcuts

Individual keyboard keys can be combined to access commonly used program features such as making text bold or saving a document. These key combinations are called keyboard shortcuts.

Most keyboard shortcuts are shown in an abbreviated form with a plus sign between them, like ctrl + shift + end (move to the end of a document). This indicates that you must press and hold down the ctrl key, then press and hold down the shift key, and then finally press the end key. Release all keys after the action has taken place. From now on all shortcuts will be shown in the abbreviated form. Remember, many keyboard shortcuts are common to other Windows based programs.

There are many additional keyboard shortcuts available for LibreOffice Writer and the Windows operating system. Some programs have literally dozens of shortcuts. To find additional shortcuts use the program help and type 'keyboard shortcuts' in the search box.

It is possible to customise and assign additional keyboard shortcuts in LibreOffice Writer and they can be found under the tools menu, customise, (keyboard tab). Using your new knowledge of keyboard shortcuts, go there quickly by alt + T (release the keys), press C and then click on the keyboard tab option. If you really wanted to show off your new skills, instead of clicking with a mouse on the keyboard tab, use the tab key to move through the different fields until you see the actual word of the first tab option (menus) with a thin dotted box around it. You may have to look carefully to see this. Use the navigation keys (← or →) to move the selection to keyboard. You can progress further and make all changes using only the keyboard keys.

Keyboard shortcuts cannot be used in LibreOffice Writer if they are already assigned to the Windows operating system.

Some Windows operating system shortcuts are specific to the version being used. Depending on the configuration of your computer, not all shortcut keys described here may work as expected. Depending on what you are seeking to achieve, many shortcuts may require some preparatory actions. For example, if you want all text in a new Writer document to be in bold type, pressing ctrl + B is all that is required before you start typing. However, if you want to make some text in an existing document bold, you need to open the document and select the required text before using the shortcut ctrl + B.

LibreOffice Writer

Action Required >> Shortcut
Body paragraph style >> Ctrl + Zero (0)
Bold formatting >> Ctrl + B
Bullets off >> Crtl + Shift + F12
Bullets on >> Shift + F12
Cancel an action >> Esc
Centred >> Ctrl + E
Close window >> Crtl + W

Copy selected >> Ctrl + C
Cut selected to clipboard >> Ctrl + X
Decrease font size >> Ctrl + [
Delete one character to left >> Backspace (←)
Delete one character to right >> Delete
Delete one word to left >> Ctrl + Backspace (←)
Delete one word to right >> Ctrl + Delete
Delete text to beginning of sentence >> Ctrl + Shift + Backspace (←)
Delete text to end of sentence >> Ctrl + Shift + Delete
Double underline >> Ctrl + D
Enter data from the clipboard >> Shift + Insert
Find >> Crtl + F
Find and replace >> Crtl + H
Go to page >> Ctrl + G
Heading 1 paragraph style >> Crtl + 1
Heading 2 paragraph style >> Crtl + 2
Heading 3 paragraph style >> Crtl + 3
Help >> F1
Increase font size >> Ctrl +]
Insert hyperlink >> Ctrl + K
Insert mode On / Off >> Insert
Insert non-breaking space >> Ctrl + Shift + Spacebar
Italicised formatting >> Ctrl + I
Justify >> Ctrl + J
Left align >> Ctrl + L
Manual page break >> Ctrl + Enter (↵)
Move cursor to beginning / end of document >> Ctrl + Home / End
Move cursor left / right >> Navigation (← / →)

Move cursor one word left / right >> Ctrl + Navigation (← / →)
Move cursor paragraph up / down >> Ctrl + Navigation (↑ / ↓)
Navigate to beginning / end of line >> Home / End
Navigator on / off >> F5
New document >> Crtl + N
Numbering off >> Crtl + Shift + F12
Numbering on >> F12
Open document >> Crtl + O
Options >> Alt + F12
Paste clipboard >> Ctrl + V
Paste clipboard as unformatted text >> Ctrl + Alt + Shift + V
Print document >> Ctrl + P
Print preview >> Ctrl + Shift + O
Redo last action >> Ctrl + Y
Right align >> Ctrl + R
Save as >> Crtl + Shift + S
Save document >> Crtl + S
Select all >> Ctrl + A
Select one character left / right >> Shift + Navigation (← / →)
Select one line up / down >> Shift + Navigation (↑ / ↓)
Select one word left / right >> Ctrl + Shift + Navigation (← / →)
Select text to beginning / end of document >> Ctrl + Shift + Home / End
Select text to beginning / end of line >> Shift + Home / End
Select text to beginning / end of paragraph >> Ctrl + Shift + Navigation (↑ / ↓)
Spellcheck >> F7
Subscript >> Ctrl + Shift + B
Superscript >> Ctrl + Shift + P
Table insert / edit >> Crtl + F12
Thesaurus >> Ctrl + F7

Underline >> Ctrl + U
Undo last action >> Ctrl + Z

Windows Operating System

Action Required >> Shortcut
Desktop >> Windows Logo Key + D
Maximise active window >> Windows Logo Key + Navigation (↑)
Minimise active window >> Windows Logo Key + Navigation (↓)
Navigate between open programs >> Alt + Tab
Open file explorer >> Windows Logo Key + E
Start menu >> Windows Logo Key
Windows task manager >> Ctrl + Shift + Esc
Lock desktop / switch users >> Windows Logo Key + L

Control-Alt-Delete

No keyboard guide would be complete without mentioning the computer keyboard command of Ctrl + Alt + Delete. This can be used to reboot the computer or start the task manager program. Task manager displays the current processor and memory usage and a list of running programs.

This keyboard command is most likely to behave differently on a workplace computer. Typically it will display a login dialog box where a user name and password have to be entered in order to gain access to the computer.

Conclusion

I hope this basic guide has been useful to you. It has grown to be much larger than I ever intended it to be and I know there is much more I could write about this subject. But having laid the foundations, I feel this is a good point to conclude and encourage you to progress further by discovering for yourself the many additional keyboard shortcuts that will assist you.

About the Author

I have taught various computer subjects, including word processing, at adult further education classes at schools, colleges and workplace training centres, mainly in the Humberside area. I also worked as an eLearning officer for my local authority providing IT support and training to teaching staff on computer and multimedia equipment loaned to schools in the area.

I am currently a self employed IT services provider in my local area.

Thank you for your interest in this guide.

George