Introduction to fields

Fields are extremely useful features of Writer. They are used for a variety of purposes; for example, data that changes (such as the current date or the total number of pages) or might change (the name of a product or book under development), user-defined numbering sequences, automatic cross-references, and conditional content (words or paragraphs that are visible or printed in some conditions but not others). Index entries are also fields.

This chapter describes some common uses of fields. A full discussion of fields and their use is beyond the scope of this book. Power users can find more details in the application Help.

Tip	Fields have a gray background when viewed on screen, unless you have deselected the **Field shadings** option or changed the color of field shadings on the *Appearance* page of the **Tools > Options > LibreOffice** dialog. This gray background does not show when you print the file to hard copy or PDF. To turn field shadings on or off quickly, choose **View > Field Shadings** or press *Ctrl+F8*.

Quick and easy field entry

You can quickly insert common fields into your document by choosing **Insert > Fields** from the menu bar and selecting the required field from the list, as shown in Figure 1.
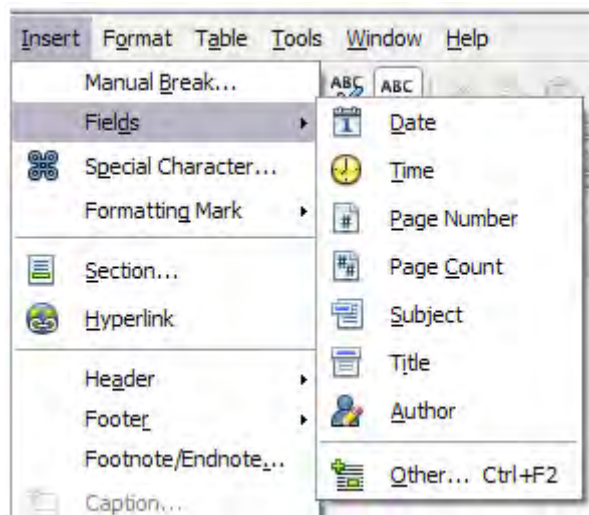

Figure 1: Inserting common fields

Using document properties to hold metadata and information that changes

The Properties dialog (**File > Properties)** for a document has six tabs. The information on the *General* page and the *Statistics* page is generated by the program. Other information (the name of the person on the Created and Modified lines of the *General* page) is derived from the *User Data* page in **Tools > Options > LibreOffice**.

The *Internet* page is relevant only to HTML documents (Writer/Web). The file sharing options on the *Security* page are discussed elsewhere in this book.

Use the *Description* and *Custom Properties* pages to hold:

- Metadata to assist in classifying, sorting, storing, and retrieving documents. Some of this metadata is exported to the closest equivalent in HTML and PDF; some fields have no equivalent and are not exported.
- Information that changes. You can store data for use in fields in your document; for example, the title of the document, contact information for a project participant, or the name of a product might change during the course of a project.

This dialog can be used in a template, where the field names can serve as reminders to writers of information they need to include.

Later in this chapter, we will see how to use this information in fields. You can return to this dialog at any time and change the information you entered. When you do so, all of the references to that information will change wherever they appear in the document. For example, on the *Description* page (Figure 2) you might need to change the contents of the *Title* field from the draft title to the production title.
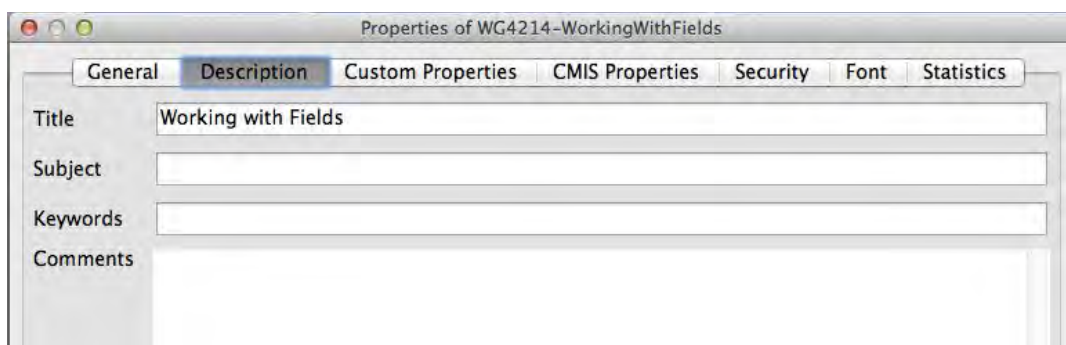

Figure 2: The Description page of the document's Properties dialog

To open the Properties dialog, choose **File > Properties**.

Use the *Custom Properties* page (Figure 3) to store information that does not fit into the fields supplied on the other pages of this dialog.

When the Custom Properties page is first opened in a new document, it may be blank. (If the new document is based on a template, this page may contain fields.)

Click **Add** to insert a row of boxes into which you can enter your custom properties.

- The *Name* box includes a drop-down list of typical choices; scroll down to see all the choices. If none of the choices meet your needs, you can type a new name into the box.
- In the *Type* column, you can choose from text, date+time, date, number, duration, or yes/no for each field. You cannot create new types.
- In the *Value* column, type or select what you want to appear in the document where this field is used. Choices may be limited to specific data types depending on the selection in the Type column; for example, if the Type selection is Date, the Value for that property is limited to a date.
- To remove a custom property, click the button at the end of the row.

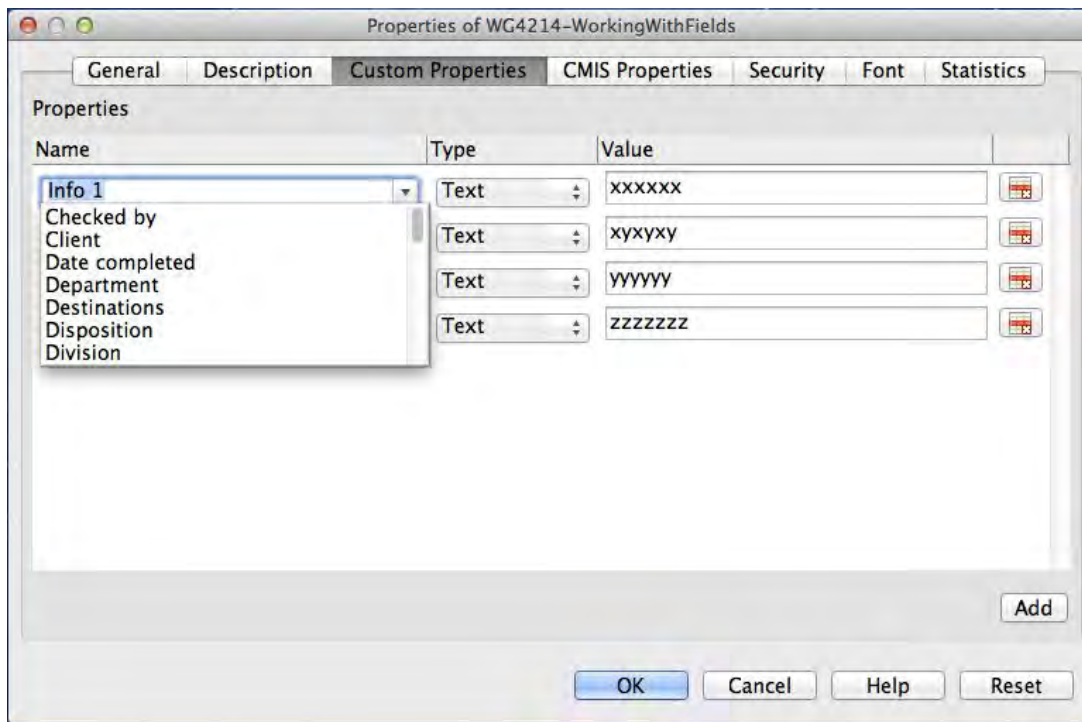| Tip	To change the format of the Date value, go to **Tools > Options > Language Settings > Languages** and change the Locale setting. Be careful! This change affects all open documents, not just the current one.

Figure 3: Custom Properties page, showing drop-down lists of names and types

Using other fields to hold information that changes

One way that people use fields is to hold information that is likely to change during the course of a project. For example, the name of a manager, a product, or even your entire company may change just before the document is due to be printed. If you have inserted the changeable information as fields, you can change the information in one place, and it will automatically change in all the places where that field occurs.

Writer provides several places where you can store the information referred to by a field. We will look at some of them here.

Seven document properties (Date, Time, Page Number, Page Count, Subject, Title, and Author) are on the **Insert > Fields** menu (Figure 1). To insert one of these fields, click on it in the menu. Some of these fields get their information from the Document Properties dialog (Figure 2.)

Other document properties are on the *DocInformation* and *Document* pages of the Fields dialog (Figure 4 and Figure 5), reached by choosing **Insert > Fields > Other** or pressing *Ctrl+F2*. Notice the *Custom* item in the *Type* list of the *DocInformation* page; this is derived from the *Custom Properties* page of the Document Properties dialog (Figure 3).

To insert one of these fields, select it in the *Type* list and then select from the *Select* and *Format* lists if choices appear. Finally, click **Insert**.