

Drop Caps in OpenOffice.org Writer

From time to time, I like some minor embellishments in my design, and one such embellishment I use is the drop cap that you commonly find in magazines and so on. In OpenOffice.org (OOo) it is pretty easy to do this throughout a document. As with the last tutorial, this one is also going to focus on how it can be done automatically using “styles and formatting” rather than having to manually recreate the effect on each paragraph.

First, there is one assumption. We do not want a drop cap on all paragraphs—that would look silly. The only place we want the drop cap is in the first paragraph immediately following a level 1 heading (which we'll assume is being used for chapter titles and so on).

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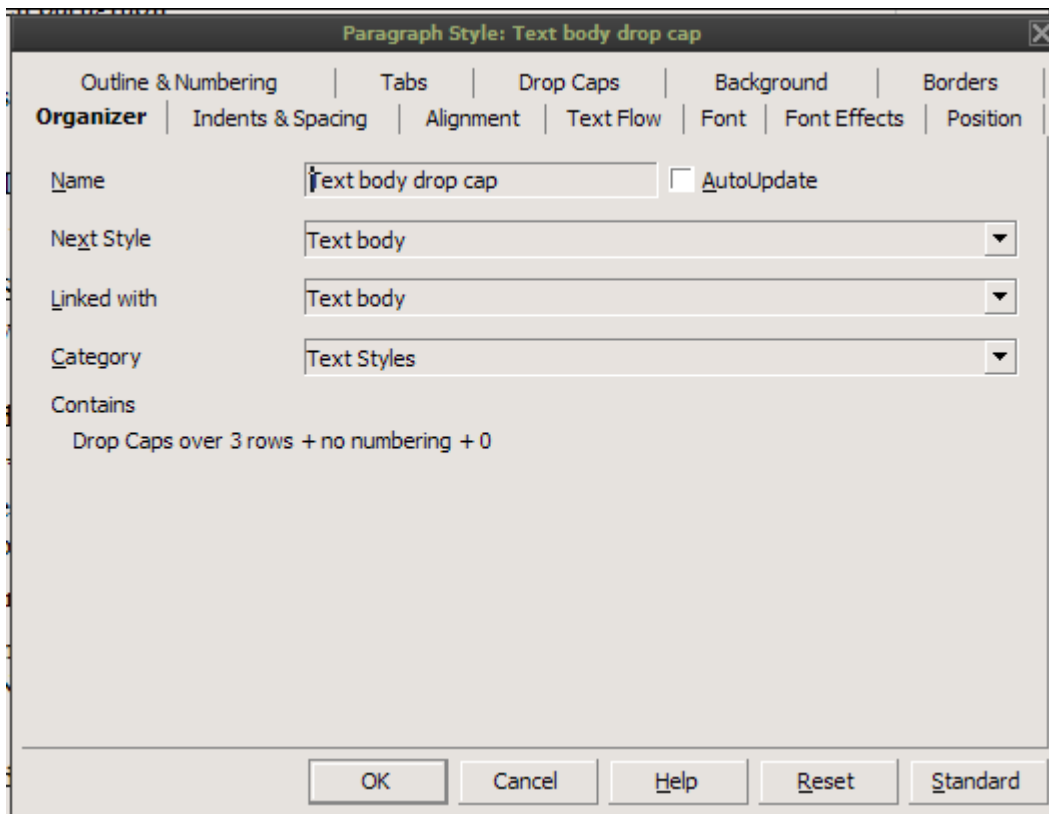


Illustration 1: Paragraph Style Organizer Tab

With that assumption, here's how I would proceed.

1. Create a style called “Text body drop cap”.
 - To do this, first open “Styles and Formatting”, then right click in the “Paragraph Styles” section and select “new”.
 - Under the “Organizer” tab, use the following settings: “Next Style” is “Text

- body". "Linked With" is also "Text body" (see Illustration 1).
- Under the "Drop Caps" tab, make sure that "Display drop caps" is checked and modify according to your preference. Note here that you can either have single letter drop caps, multiple letter drop caps, or whole word drop caps (See Illustration 2).
 - When you're done setting your styles, click on "OK."
2. With "Styles and Formatting" still open, style your "Heading 1" to your liking. Also, on the "Organizer" tab, change "Next Style" from "Text body" to your new style, "Text body drop cap".

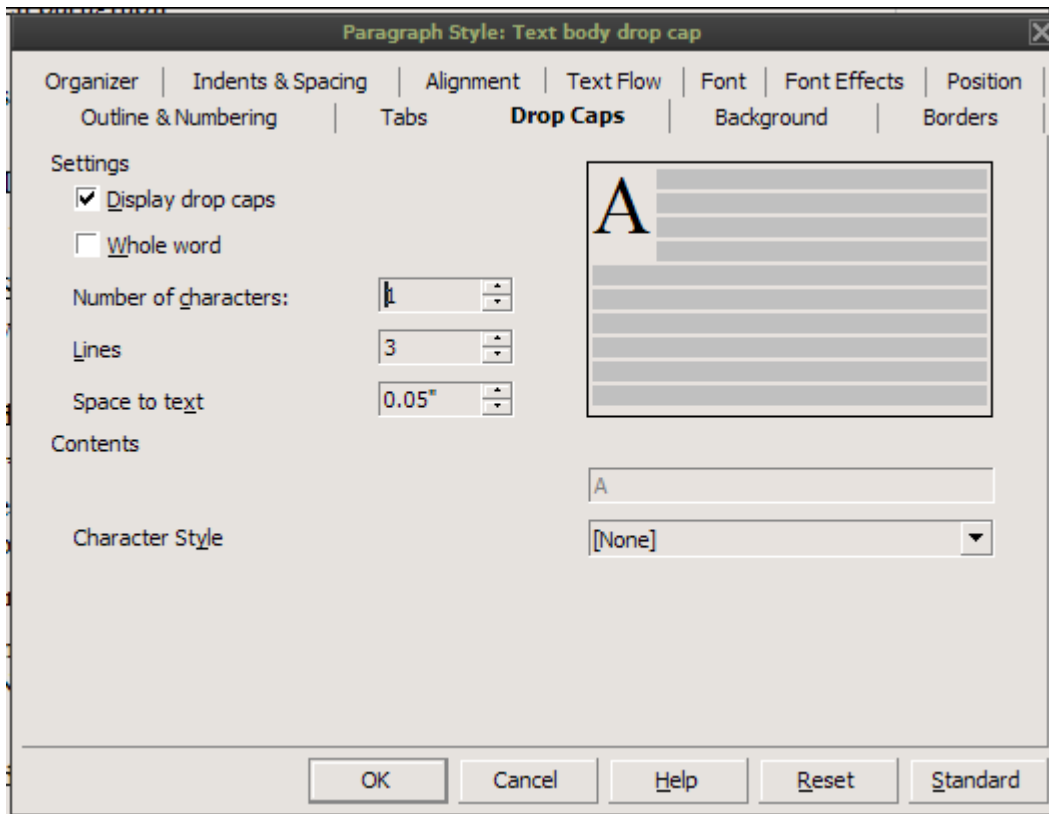


Illustration 2: Paragraph Style Drop Cap Tab

And that's it! Now you have nice drop caps for your document.

Making your drop caps fancy

Sometimes, it is nice to make your drop caps look a little different from the rest of your text by, say, using a different font or a different color. Again, using "Styles and Formatting" this is quite easy. What is required is that we also create what's called a "character style" to be applied to the drop cap. (OOo lets you create styles for paragraphs, characters, frames, pages, and lists.)

You'll see that there is already a character style called "Drop Caps". Right click on that and select "Modify" to get a dialogue box where you can change things like the font, the font color, and so on. Then, go back to the third sub-point of step two above and, where it says "Character Style", select "Drop Caps" from the drop-down menu.

Additional notes

One of the things that OOo does automatically for you is eliminate drop caps or make drop caps smaller according to your paragraph length. If, for example, your drop caps were set to be three lines, but your paragraph is only one line, it would not have a drop cap; similarly, if the paragraph were two lines, the drop cap would only cover those two lines.

Another thing you can do is adjust the spacing between your drop cap and the rest of your text. This can be useful if the font you've used for the drop cap is particularly ornamental and needs to be visually offset from the rest of the text.