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Tracks to Success

How to Increase Office Productivity Using Free Software

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Google Docs: Creating Dynamic Documents

Part Five

Over the last several weeks, this series has introduced you to some of Google's free applications, including Gmail and Google Calendar. You may be impressed, but not completely satisfied. After all, there are lots of free webmail programs with calendar applications to choose from, and Google's online tools may not seem all that different.

This week, we're going to begin learning what sets Google's suite of online tools apart, the application that stacks up nicely against any Office program Microsoft has created: Google Docs. As we cover the word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation functions of this application over the next three weeks, you'll notice how these tools utilize the most important and most-used features of their Office counterparts (Word, Excel, and PowerPoint) while adding new elements like document collaboration.

We'll start by discussing the word processing function. Here are some examples of different types of documents you can create:

[Holiday Newsletter](#) • [Fax Cover Sheet](#) • [Business Cards](#).

You'll begin by logging in to your [Google account](#). Once you've logged in, select the "more" link at the top left of the Google homepage (it has a down arrow next to it) and select the tool you want to use from the list. In this case, select "Documents."

When Google Docs loads, you'll see an interface similar to the ones we've encountered in the earlier Google applications we've discussed.

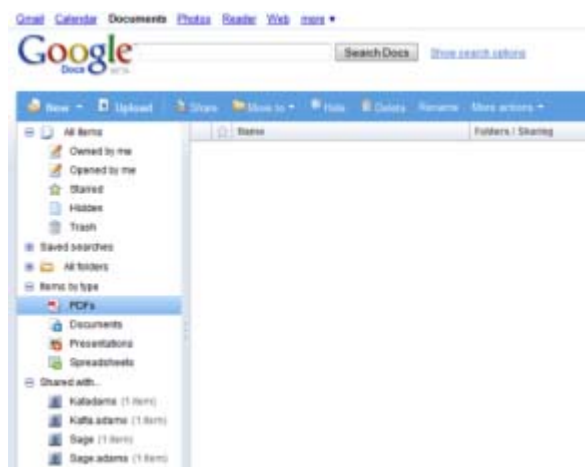


Fig. 7 Google Docs main page

For instance, a search bar appears at the top of the page. This feature works just like it always does; you can search through your documents using keywords. Just beneath that you can see several tool options, including "New," "Upload," "Share," "Move to," "Hide," "Delete," "Rename," and "More actions."

To create a new document, select the "New" tool button. A drop-down list appears; select "Document." A new tab or window

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[March 2 – Setting up Your Google Account – Part Two](#)

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[April 27 – Google Docs: Harnessing the Power of Spreadsheets – Part Six](#)

[May 11 – Google Docs: Developing Presentations – Part Seven](#)

will open with "Untitled" written across the top.

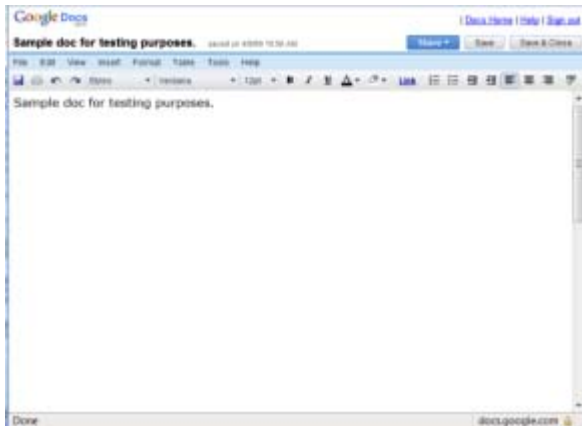


Fig. 8 New Google Docs word processing document

Several drop-down menus similar to those used in Microsoft Word appear below the title, and a set of tool buttons runs across the top of the page. You can click in the blank space below these buttons to begin your document.

You'll notice many similarities to Microsoft Word, including inserting images, links, and tables; formatting your text through either the "Format" menu or the tool buttons above the content; conducting spell checks, word counts, or synonym searches using the "Tools" menu. Keeping that in mind, here are some of the Google Document function's more interesting features:

You can save your documents to your computer hard drive in several formats (such as PDF, RTF, HTML, or Word) once you are done creating or editing them. To save your document in one of these other formats, click "File" and select "Download file as."

You can share your document with up to fifty of your Gmail contacts by clicking the "Share" button in the upper right-hand corner and selecting "Share with others" from the drop-down menu. (Note: In order to share an online Google Document with non-Google users, you must first publish the document as a webpage, an option which is also available in the Share button's drop-down menu.)

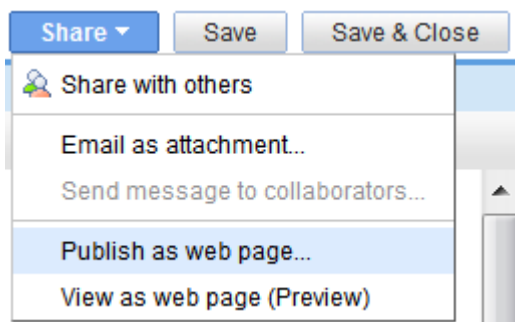


Fig. 9 Drop-down menu for "Share" button

This is a great way to share documents with people in your office or with clients. You can share your document by choosing to invite others as either "viewers" or as "collaborators." Viewers cannot make edits to your shared document; collaborators can edit shared documents.



Fig. 10 Invitation to share with others as viewers or collaborators

Once you have determined how you would like to share your document, enter the email addresses of your viewers or collaborators in the appropriate field and click the button to make it available. Collaborators can make revisions and notes directly on the shared document.



Fig. 11 Document which has been shared with collaborators

All changes to the document, whether made by you or by your collaborators are logged. You can review any changes made (and by whom) by clicking "File" and selecting "Revision History." From the history that is generated, you can select any version of the document since its creation, thus permitting you to easily restore any text that may have been lost or removed by you or one of your collaborators.

You may have some concerns about this program because it is unfamiliar and entirely online. Let me allay a couple of these concerns. Your first concern may be about security. Google adheres to a strict [privacy policy](#) and all documents you create are private unless you specify otherwise in the "Settings." Google regularly backs up its many servers, so you don't need to worry about losing any of your online documents. You can view Google's [Terms of Service](#) for additional information.

You may also worry about saving your documents regularly. What if you forget to save and close the window when you're done editing? What if the power goes out and your computer shuts off for some unexpected reason and you lose your document? Again, not to worry: Every document you work on is automatically saved every few minutes.

With Google, you never have to worry about attachments getting lost in someone's spam filter because of size restrictions or unrecognized document types. Using Google Docs' word processing function means you don't have to be concerned that the person you're sending the document to doesn't have the newest version, or an older version of the same program. Finally you never have to buy anything! Google Docs is continuously being updated and expanded upon and these features will automatically be available as Google makes them live.

In the next article, we're going to look at the spreadsheet function of Google Docs. This is one of Google's most impressive tools and it compares well with Microsoft Excel.

Disclaimer: Google offers two editions of its online software suite, Google Apps. The Standard Edition is free, but has a

limitation of fifty user accounts per organization, which should be sufficient for most nonprofits. Users of the Premiere Edition pay an annual fee of \$50 per user account and enjoy additional benefits. To see a detailed comparison, click [here](#). To learn more about how registered nonprofits can take advantage of Google's discounted Education Edition, click [here](#).

Sage and Lena Adams are the founders of and senior consultants for TWS Consulting in Fairbanks, Alaska. Since 2005, TWS has specialized in large-scale research projects, database development, interactive website solutions, and training. TWS currently offers bi-weekly webinars on Google's suite of tools. To learn more about TWS and its services, visit its [website](#).

Tracks to Success is edited by Katy Mulcrone. Questions, comments, suggestions, and useful tips for other *Tracks* readers can be sent to her at katy@grantstation.com. If you would like to suggest a topic for a future *Tracks to Success* series, or if you are interested in writing a series for us, please [email Katy](#), or call our toll-free number: 877.784.7268.

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