Teaching With Templates
(Published in the TechEdge, Spring 2000)
by Wesley A. Fryer
www.wesfryer.com

It is amazing how easy it is to waste time on a computer. Whether a student or a teacher, computer users can literally spend hours fruitlessly searching the internet, changing fonts or sizes, slowly keyboarding in text, or searching for a document they thought they saved in the proper folder instead of completing the task at hand. Just as an experienced driver does not focus principally on the mechanics of shifting and checking for traffic when they are behind the wheel, literate computer users should not spend too much time on the technical aspects of technology tools. Like a driver, computer users should focus on the destination where they are traveling, rather than on the tool helping them get there. To help both students and teachers avoid getting bogged down in the technical details of completing a task with technology, educators can create "template" files that streamline and expedite the document and presentation production process.

A "template" is a partially created document, saved in a format that allows multiple users to open separate copies of it at the same time. When opened, a template file will open as "Untitled," "Document 1," or "New Document" (that has not been saved yet) instead of opening as a named, previously saved file. The term "stationary" is used interchangeably with "template" in some software, like AppleWorks (formerly ClarisWorks). Templates can be student documents, ready for students to insert their own ideas and information into it. They can also be designed for teacher use, like a form letter including your school letterhead and mascot.

This article describes the reasons and techniques required to create template files on Macintosh and Windows computers. The methods described here can become some of the most essential "tools in your technology toolkit" as a professional educator. A linked copy of this article is available on http://www.wtvi.com/teks.

Why templates?

-

Once teachers become familiar with the instructional uses of template files, they often wonder how they ever got along without them. There are several different reasons to use templates in the classroom.

1. **Templates help lessons using technology proceed much faster.** When students are required to set up margins, font type and size, and other formatting features in a word processing document, it takes much longer for them to get into the "meat" of an instructional technology lesson. In the case of a multimedia presentation, it can take a considerable amount of time to create new slides, select background designs and text colors, navigational buttons, and transitions (not to mention sounds and animations.) To fulfill the requirements of the TEKS for Technology, students do need to know how to create and manipulate these file elements. They do not have to create all their documents from scratch, however. Limited time on the computer, whether in a lab or regular classroom setting, makes the need for using time-saving templates even greater. Primary age children, who usually possess fewer literacy skills and abilities than intermediate or secondary students, can often complete a lesson using productivity software that starts with a template, but could not if they had to create the entire document from scratch.

2. **Use of template files allows students and teachers to focus more on the content of the lesson rather than the mechanics of technology use.** Changing the font to 72 point Old English in lime green does entertain many students, but is rarely a lesson objective. Inserting a table into a word processing document is an important skill, but it is probably not nearly as exciting as the civil war battle details included in a social studies lesson, or information about star formation and supernovas in a science lesson. Technology tools should ideally become "transparent" in the classroom setting, just like the overhead projector or the television. Templates can help educators employ technology tools in a more transparent manner, letting students primarily focus on their curriculum content.

3. **Template files can streamline student research and internet access.** Some teachers mistakenly believe that using technology in the classroom just means letting students search the internet for

information. While internet search skills are vital, students tend to waste at least 90% of their time on the computer if they are simply turned loose to find information about a topic on Altavista or Lycos. (Yahooligans, www.yahooligans.com, is actually one of the best search engines for this scenario.) Teachers need to use lessons created by others that include grade level and content appropriate websites for student use. Alternatively, or in addition, teachers should spend time before the lesson begins searching the internet for appropriate sites. These URLs (internet addresses) can be copied and pasted into student template files. They can then be made into "hot links" that students click on. After clicking on a link, the default web browser will launch and display the selected website. For other techniques like this one, refer to the article "Streamlining Student Internet Access" at http://www.wtvi.com/teks/article2.html.

4. **Template files make good independent student assignments / center activities.** Few classrooms in the United States presently have enough computers for all students. Computer labs may allow each student to have his/her own workstation, but available time in computer labs is usually in short supply. Because technology resources and the time to use them are limited, students must take turns. Teachers at all levels can create assignments with template files which students can read and complete independently, when it is their (or their team's) turn at the classroom computer.

What does a template file look like?

The amount of text and formatting inserted into a student template file will depend on the objectives of the instructional lesson and the amount of time students will have to complete the assignment on the computer. The computer literacy skill level of students should also be considered.

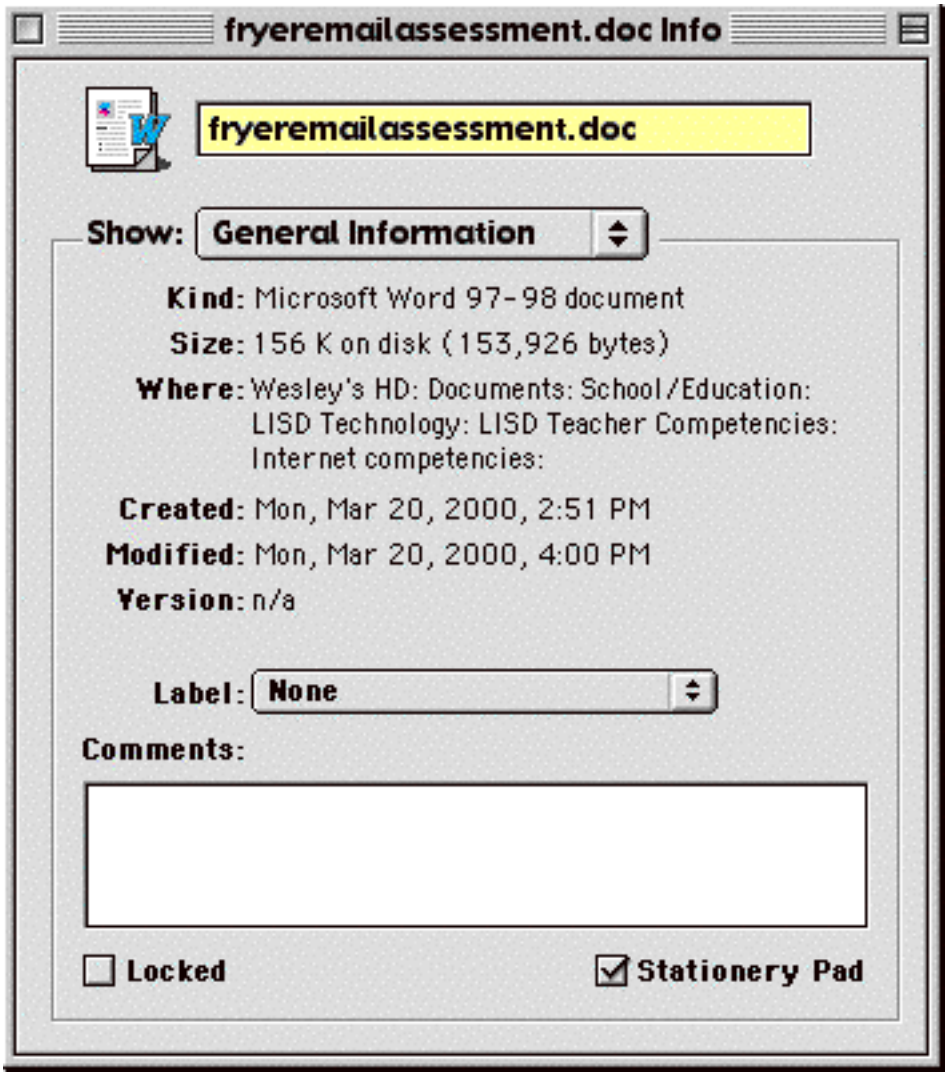
For a multimedia project, templates can included already created cards/ slides and navigational buttons (if desired). A presentation design can be applied, with font type and size already selected. Slide designs (in the case of PowerPoint) can be selected. Text boxes (in the case of HyperStudio) can be created, positioned, and formatted on the desired slides so students do not have to spend time with these tasks.

Hyperlinks to internet websites can also be inserted as appropriate in the file. The "Voices & Stories from World War II Activity" on http://www.lubbock.k12.tx.us/rush/lessons (in both Word and AppleWorks formats) is a good example. Students link directly to websites featuring first person accounts of wartime experiences, including some recorded audio. These internet links are inserted in the student template before the questions pertaining to them, making access to them as straightforward as possible.

Creating Templates on Macintosh Computers

It is relatively easy to make any file into a template on a Macintosh computer. Once a Word document, HyperStudio stack, AppleWorks spreadsheet, PowerPoint presentation, KidPix drawing, or other file has been created:

1. Locate the file on your hard drive.
2. Click once on the file's icon.
3. From the FILE menu, choose GET INFORMATION.
4. Click on the check box in the lower right corner of the information window, beside "Stationary Pad."
5. Close the information window.



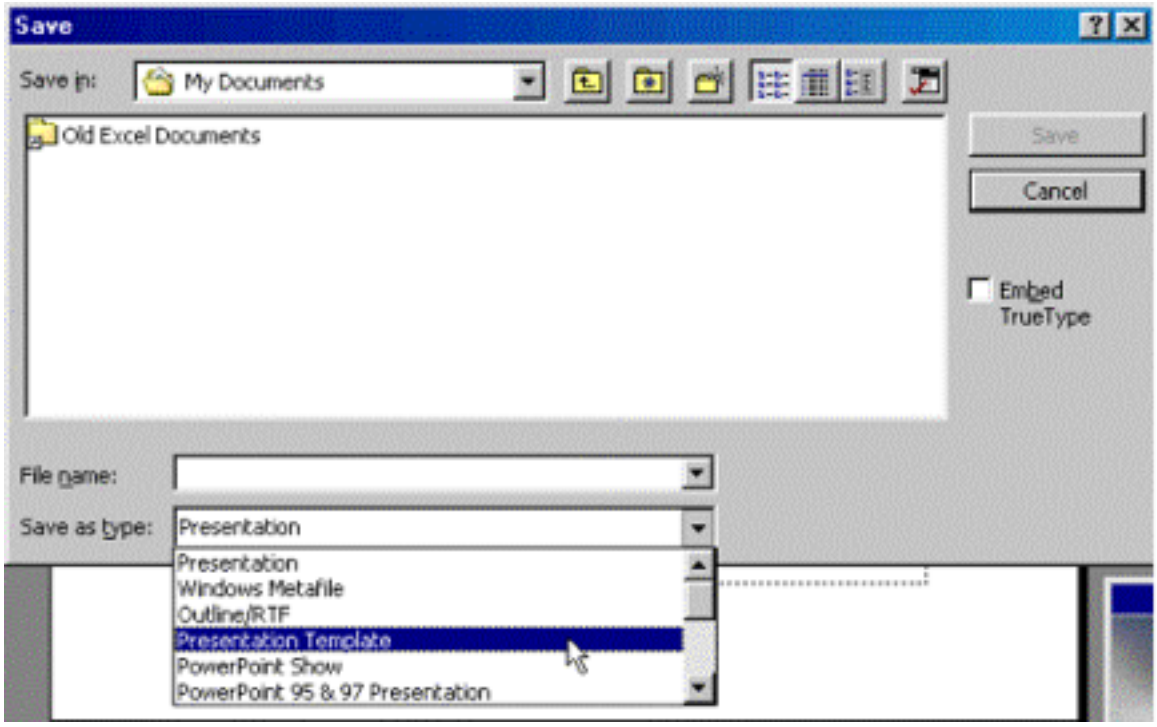
Macintosh users can also use the technique described next for "creating template files on Windows computers," but this "save as" method will not work for all file types. For example, Kid Pix and HyperStudio do not allow files to be "saved as" templates or stationary. With this Get Information / Stationary Pad method, however, even these file types can be turned into templates on Macintosh computers.

Creating Templates on Windows Computers

After creating a document in Word, AppleWorks, PowerPoint, or many other productivity software packages on a Windows computer, save a copy

of the document normally on your hard drive (or network folder if available). Then:

1. From the FILE menu, choose SAVE AS.
2. At the bottom of the save dialog window, click on the "down arrow" next to SAVE AS TYPE.
3. Choose to save the file as a "Document Template" (Word 97), "AppleWorks Stationary," or "PowerPoint Template" (PowerPoint 97) as appropriate for your software application.
4. After you choose to save the file as a template or stationary, your application will likely switch the SAVE IN folder of your document to a templates/stationary folder inside the application's folder on the C: drive. If you are creating this template file for students to use, you probably don't want it saved in a folder nested deep on your workstation's hard drive. Click on the "down arrow" next to SAVE IN at the top of the save file dialog window, and choose the location where you want to save the file. You may want to choose DESKTOP and move the file to another location later, after you close the document.
5. Beside FILE NAME, enter an appropriate name for your file.
6. Click the SAVE button.



Windows computers use a three character "extension" after the filename to determine what application and file type is associated with a particular document. Word documents use the ".doc" extension, ClarisWorks (AppleWorks) files use the ".cwk" extension, and PowerPoint uses ".ppt" as unique identifiers within the Windows operating system. Changing or eliminating a file's extension can change the application which opens the file automatically when it is double clicked, and the way the file is handled in the application.

When a file is saved as a template or stationary file, a different file extension is assigned by the Windows program to the document. Word documents are saved as ".dot" files, ClarisWorks as ".cws" files, and PowerPoint as ".pot" files. Once you learn the correct template/stationary extension for a Windows program, you can change it into a template file by changing its 3 character extension as appropriate. Right click a file and choose PROPERTIES to view its extension, if it is hidden from view. To change its extension, right click the file and choose RENAME. After typing the filename, a period, and the correct three digit extension, press enter and click OK to confirm this change to Windows.

A Wonderful Template Technique on a Network

If you are fortunate to have a school network in place, it is possible to save one copy of a student template on the "file server" so that all workstations (both Macintoshes and Windows computers) can quickly open local copies. To do this:

1. Ask your network administrator to create a new folder on your network hard drive, with teachers assigned "read/write rights" and students assigned "read only rights" to the folder. Name this folder "Templates."
2. Create a desktop shortcut/alias to this folder on the desktop of all the computers in your computer lab and classroom(s).
3. After creating a template file (while logged in to the network as a teacher with corresponding "rights"), move a copy of the template file into this folder on your network.

When students need to open a template file, they can double click the shortcut/alias on their desktop to the network "Templates" folder, and then double click the template file they want. Because students only have "read rights" to the Templates folder, if they choose FILE - SAVE at the end of the period and do not specify a folder to save their file in, the computer will display an error: FILE SAVING NOT PERMITTED IN THIS LOCATION. This technique can be a huge headache saver. Students still may name their file poorly or not save it in the correct place, but at least the templates folder (where they opened the file and likely the default saving location) will not be filled with twenty untitled student documents at the end of the period!

Wesley Fryer is an elementary computer teacher and technology facilitator in Lubbock ISD. He maintains a free, bi-monthly educational newsletter for educators around the world interested in educational technology issues. Sign up at www.wtvi.com/teks.

--

This content is licensed by Wesley Fryer under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en_US
http://www.wesfryer.com
Republished in January 2014 on http://publications.wesfryer.com