

iWORK:

Getting sectioned: the route to great layouts in Pages

Pages' Layout mode will slowly drive you insane if you try to produce decent layouts, so use sections in its Word Processing mode instead.

Happily, Pages' Layout mode isn't human. Otherwise I could quite happily strangle it. I've just spent half an hour walking a new user through creating a new Pages document, and – as always – he hesitated when presented with Pages' Template Chooser. The reason? Having to choose between Layout and Word Processing modes.

You can almost hear new users pondering which to choose. And, inevitably, the answer is dictated by a simple rule: if they're producing a newsletter with images, they choose Layout mode; if they're writing a letter to the bank, they choose a Word Processing template. In my view, however, the correct answer is simpler: just never use Layout Mode in the first place.

My disdain for Layout mode stems from a growing realisation that it isn't actually needed. Essentially, the only real difference between Pages' two primary modes is that there's no text layer in Layout mode. That means text doesn't flow automatically between document pages and you can't adjust anything that would be affected by text flow, such as text margins, headers and footers, or images that flow along with the text.

And even though you can manually construct links between text boxes so that text flows between them, all elements in a Pages layout sit independently of each other.

It's tougher to export content from Layout mode. That might not be a concern if all you want to do with a document is print it out or

create a PDF, but if you're exporting to plain text, be warned: it's messy and unreliable, and there's imply no way to convert a Layout document to ePub format for reading in an eBook reader.

That's because images need to be rendered inline for conversion to ePub and all images in a Layout document are locked as floating. Word Processing documents, on the other hand, can have both inline and floating elements and you just have to convert to inline to save as ePub.

'All Pages' layout features are accessible in Word Processing mode. You can create floating text boxes and drag them anywhere'

Word conversion is similarly tricky. You can't directly save a Page Layout document in Word format. Pages instead converts it to a Word Processing layout on the fly. Admittedly, the results of conversion are better than you might expect, but you're still a hostage to fortune.

So what has Layout got going for it? Good PR, is my bet. By offering plenty of lush Layout templates, Apple seems to be making the case that you should use this mode to produce layout-heavy documents. But that's not a good argument.

Yes, it can be hard to picture how you can produce something that looks good from the dowdy built-in Word Processing themes, but

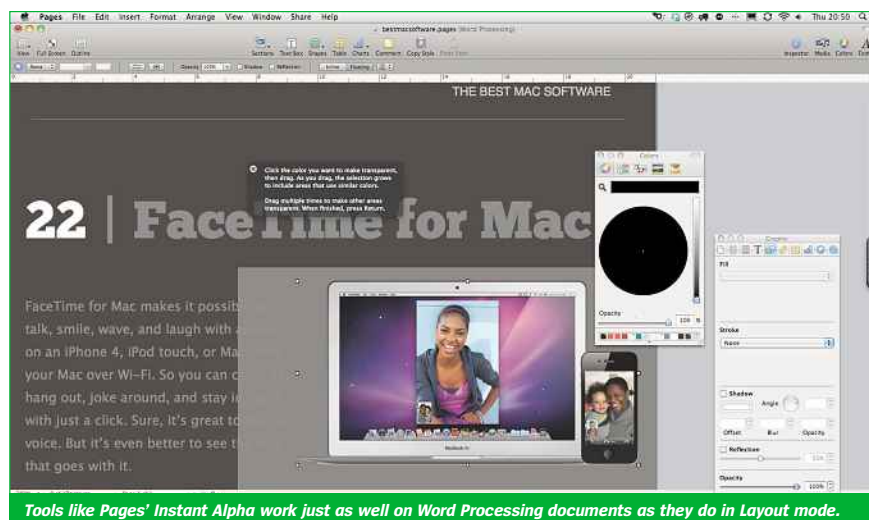


Tom Gorham has worked with Macs since 1991. Although his background is in print and web publishing, he's a devotee of any software that makes his life easier.

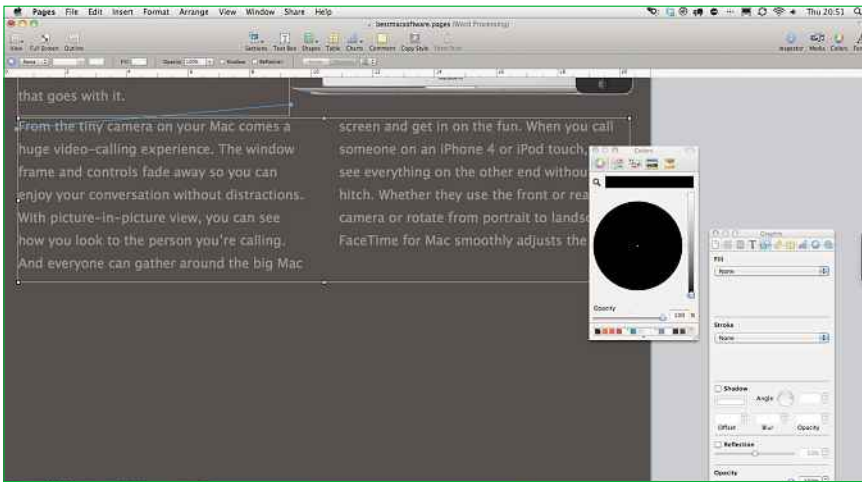
The Colors window

As an aside, while I was introducing someone to the delights of creating documents in Pages, I was asked about changing the document background. The person hadn't really explored Pages' standard Colors window, and it's always interesting to see how a newcomer to Pages uses it. They found it easy enough to change colours with it, but, like a lot of iWork users, they didn't fully appreciate its power – for example, the way you can create your own palette, which can be shared with other Mac OS X applications that use this window, by dragging a colour to the palette at the bottom.

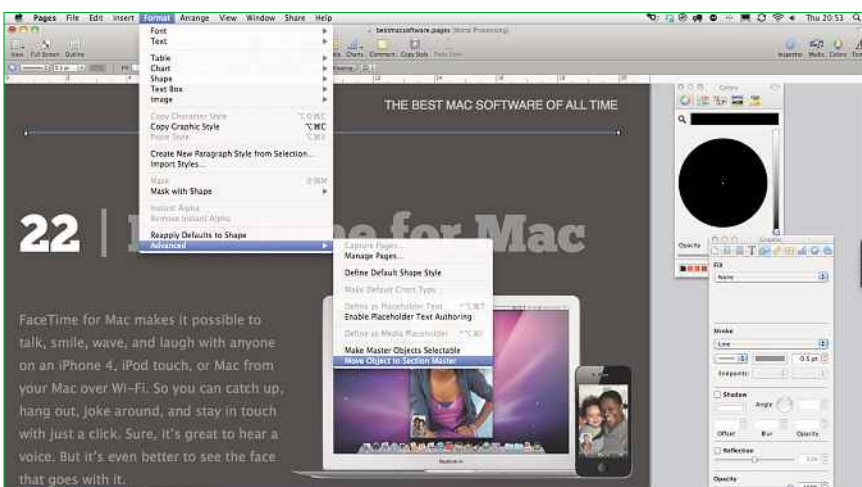
Even better is its role as a colour sampler to ensure consistent colours throughout a document. To match an existing colour anywhere in a document, just click on it with the palette's magnifying glass icon and that becomes the active colour.



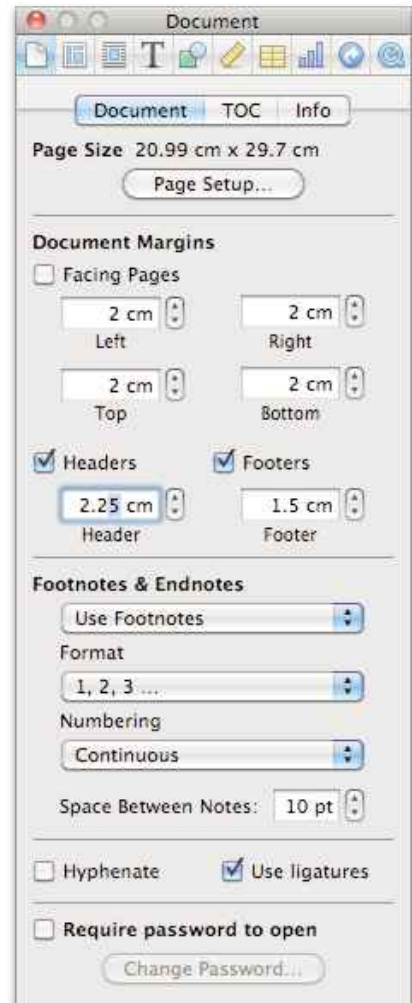
Tools like Pages' Instant Alpha work just as well on Word Processing documents as they do in Layout mode.



In Word Processing mode you can still create text boxes and build links between them.



The secret to fancy backgrounds in Word Processing mode is to use section masters.



▲ Sadly, not everything is vastly customisable: the ability to adjust headers and footers is still limited.

there's nothing to stop you. All Pages' layout features are accessible in Word Processing mode. Just as you can in Layout mode, you can create floating text boxes and drag them anywhere, or mask or use Instant Alpha on images. Text can still wrap around images.

The key to producing a magazine-style layout in Word Processing mode is to use sections. Sections aren't present in Layout mode simply because every page is treated as a separate section.

Their role can be illustrated by a question I was asked this week: how can you produce a different coloured background across several pages? You probably know that the simplest way to create a background in Pages is to select a shape from the Shapes drop-down menu, cover the page with it and send the shape to the back of the page (Arrange > Send Objects to Background) so it sits behind text. That works fine, but if you left it like this, you'd have to repeat the same process for every page, which would be a pain if you later wanted to change the background colour, or you have multiple background elements.

The best way to create a background image is to move the shape to the background, then with the shape still selected, choose Format > Move Object to Section Master. (If you can't select it, you can make background objects selectable from the

Arrange menu). By creating a section master, as new pages are added in the same section, they automatically include the elements you've added to the section master.

When you want a different background, you just create a new section by choosing Insert > Section Break. You can then add a new section background to this.

And the role of sections is critical in any Word Processing document. By splitting a

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document into sections, you can create unique headers and footers for each part of the document. However, you can still play about with multiple layouts within a section, even without text boxes. Just create a new layout (Insert > Layout Break) and you can add more text, with a different column structures. It's a handy way to create boxouts that still flow with the main body of the text.

Word Processing also comes with built-in extras: automatic headers and footers on every page, although you'll have to accept some limitations. The only way to control their

location is through the vertical placement options in the Document Inspector. It's hardly precise control and I'd love to know a way to adjust horizontal placement.

Of course, the more layout features you add to Word Processing documents, the less compatible the document becomes, and weighing up the benefits of the text box approach against the text flow advantage of standard word processing is something you have to balance. But at least you can adjust these elements if you need to.

If you've already created a Page Layout document, that's an option that isn't open to you. But all isn't lost: you can still return to Word Processing mode. To convert an entire document, you can take advantage of the fact that Pages converts to Word Processing format when you export to Word. Just open the exported document back in Pages and it will open as a Word Processing file.

Another way to convert is to open both documents in Thumbnail view, and copy and paste page thumbnails from the Layout mode document to the thumbnails view of the Word Processing document. Or for smaller chunks of content, just copy from the Layout document and paste into the Word Processing document.

So the revolution to end Layout mode starts here. Who's with me? 