

Getting started with Writer's Café

by Harriet Smart

What is Writer's Café?

Writer's Café is a software toolkit for creative writers of all kinds. It consists of two main applications – Writer's Café Desk, and StoryLines. Writer's Café Desk has many functions, while StoryLines is dedicated to the task of story structuring.

Writer's Café is a little different from other fiction writing software packages you may have tried. This is because I've tried them too and found they didn't help with the specific writing problems that I was trying to solve in my work: and many of our customers have reported the same experience.

Successful writing comes when you get into a particular state of mind. It's like shifting into a different gear. Ideas for stories aren't so very hard to come by but transforming them into a successful, well-written narrative is another matter entirely. Writer's Café is designed to be a nurturing environment that lets your mind explore all the possibilities. It won't tell you what to do. It won't churn out pre-drawn plot schedules for you to follow, or hinder you by demanding answers to unanswerable questions. It will let you relax so that you can jump into the world of your imagination and play there.

Fiction: The Facts

I've written a 60-page e-book to support the tools which you can find in the **Bookshelf** section (to read within Writers Café) and in the **Café Menu** (as a PDF file, to read or print out using Adobe Acrobat). *Fiction: The Facts* is a distillation of 20 years of writing experience and should help you form a good understanding of the art and craft of story. If using Acrobat, try the Full Screen view (from the Window menu) and press the Escape key when you're done.

Using Writer's Café Desk

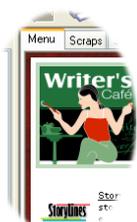
The basic elements of Writer's Café Desk are shown in this picture. There's a menubar and toolbar, the scrapbook index which we'll explain shortly, and a variety of tools, accessed by the tabs underneath the toolbar. The tools are **Menu**, **Scraps**, **StoryLines**, **Journal**, **Notebook**, **Web**, **Cookies**, and **Bookshelf**.

Beneath these, there's a status bar which displays the timer display, useful for timed writing. The status bar also displays brief help when you're hovering over toolbar buttons and menu items.



There's a variety of ways to get further help. Click on  to show online help for the tool you're currently working with. Click on  (or **Help | What's This?**, or  in a dialog box caption) and then on a window to show a short description of the window. You can show the online help contents with **Help | Contents**, or you can browse the online help and other Writer's Café documents from the **Bookshelf** tool. Most dialog boxes also have a **Help** button that shows a detailed description of the dialog box.

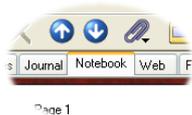
The Café Menu



Click on the **Menu** tab to access a variety of tools and documents, including our writing guide *Fiction: The Facts*, StoryLines, the Forty Thieves card game, the WordTiles poetry creator, the thesaurus Aiksaurus, and more. If you need to get your adrenalin going, turn up the volume and play *Untie My Tongue* by British singer-songwriter Jay Goldmark.

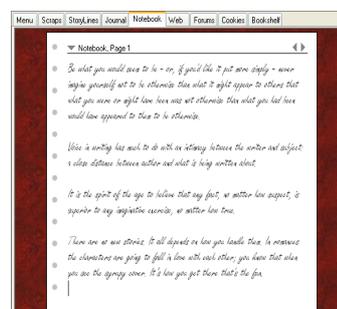
The tools displayed here are also available from the **Tools** menu, and on Windows you can access them by right-clicking on the Writer's Café tray icon and selecting from the **Tools** menu.

Notebook



Write a little every day if you can!

If you have been trying to write, but aren't sure what direction to take just yet, the Writer's Café Notebook is the place to explore those first thoughts. We've designed it as a friendly, simple, non-distracting space that isn't dauntingly large. After all, there is nothing so scary as a huge sheet of blank paper or an empty screen to be filled. If you find yourself on a word roll (and we hope you do), the page will scroll down as you write. The notebook automatically saves your pages and you don't have to give it a filename unless you want to use several notebooks, for example for different projects, subjects or stories.



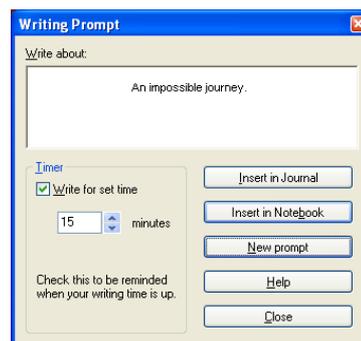
If you are stuck for something to write, try pasting one of our writing prompts into the notebook and take it from there. To show the writing prompt dialog, use the **Help | Writing Prompt...** menu item, or **Alt+P**, or click the  button on the toolbar.

Writing Prompts, for instant inspiration



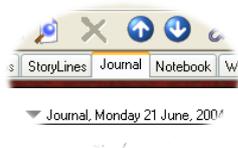
If you are stuck for something to write, try pasting one of our writing prompts into the notebook and take it from there. To show the writing prompt dialog, use the **Help | Writing Prompt...** menu item, or **Alt+P**, or click the  button on the toolbar.

If you are really stuck, try setting the timer for only ten minutes. You may find it easier to focus if you only have to write for ten minutes than if you have an unspecified amount of time. It is also ideal for when the rest of your life is pressing in on you and you are trying to make time for your writing. Using the timer, half an hour a day can easily be marked out as your special writing time – and become part of your daily routine. You'll be surprised how your material mounts up and you'll feel you are really achieving something.



To use the timer for other purposes, click on the digital clock face on the bottom right of the Writer's Café window, or use **View | Timer...** or **F11**.

Journal



For many writers, keeping a record of their life and thoughts is a fundamental part of their method. It's certainly a great habit to get into and the Writer's Café Journal is always there to get you writing every day. As with the notebook, you can paste in a writing prompt if you are stuck for a subject, but it's your decision.

Remember, you don't have to write something brilliant every time. Just writing is enough.

Access the journal by clicking on the **Journal** tool tab.

The Writer's Café Scrapbook



The Scrapbook is a multifunctional space designed to help you explore and research your creative projects. It's like a big pin-board, for all those bits and pieces that stir your imagination and you need to keep handy.

You can browse the structure of your scrapbook on the scrapbook index, the left-most window in Writer's Café Desk. You can view the scraps themselves in the Scraps tool.

To create a new scrapbook (collection of scraps), click on the  toolbar button (or **Ctrl+N**, or **File | New Scrapbook**) and choose a name and filename. Now you can create scraps and folders using the  toolbar button. Save the scrapbook with  (or **Ctrl+S**, or **File | Save Scrapbook**) and open an existing one with  (or **Ctrl+O**, or **File | Open Scrapbook**).

These are the types of scrap you can create:

Text Scrap: Just type! This is the place for recording those back-of-the-envelope, inspirational moments.

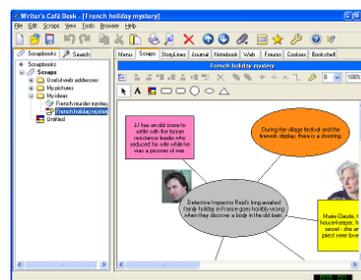
Image Scrap: You find a great picture in a magazine that says something about your story or a photograph of someone who looks just like your heroine. This is the spot for keeping them.

Web Link Scrap: Surf in the Web tab and when you find a site that interests you and you want to bookmark, click on  to store the address as a web link scrap. Then when you look at the scrap again, the web site will immediately appear (Windows only).

Folder Scrap: you can use this to make hierarchies in your scrapbook.

Shortcut Scrap: store references to documents or programs on your computer. Drag a file from Windows Explorer or browse for a file, then click on **Launch** to edit the document or run the program.

Collage Scrap: This is a flexible brainstorming tool to encourage blue-sky thinking and constructive daydreaming. There is a stage in creating a story when you have collected a heap of ideas which appeal to you but which you can't get into any coherent order. The collage tool allows you to lay down ideas in an unstructured but graphical form so you can see exactly what you've got. You can put text in shapes, and add images.



Everything can be moved about at will, and you can add links with arrows between items if you like. You can change all the colours. All in all, it's a fun place to explore your ideas.

And of course the Scrapbook isn't just useful for writing-related organisation. You can use it to plan weekend trips or family celebrations, store details if you're moving house, organise your recipes or CDs – whatever you like.

Cookies

This is a collection of my favourite quotations about writing, randomly presented for your sustenance and amusement!



To see a new cookie, press the spacebar or click on the border around the cookie.

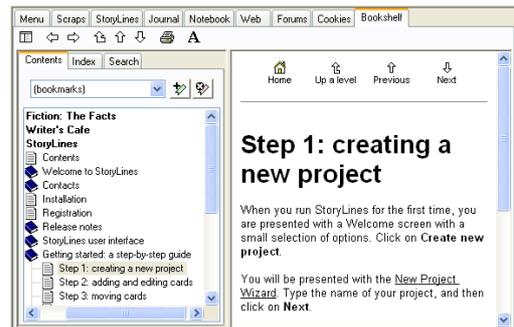
Web

On Windows, you can browse the web from within Writer's Café. This integration means that you don't have the distraction of switching away from the writing environment so often, and it's easy to create a web link scrap for the currently-viewed site.



The Bookshelf

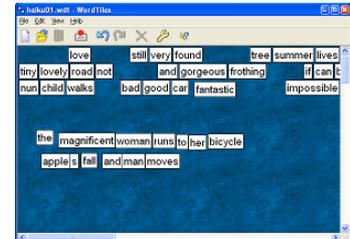
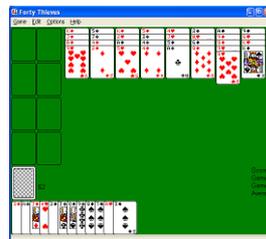
The Writer's Café manuals and *Fiction: The Facts* book are all available from within Writer's Café Desk without using an external help viewer. Click on **Bookshelf** and select a book to view. You can browse through the topics using the **Contents** tab on the left, or you can use the **Index** or **Search** tabs to find the topic you're looking for.



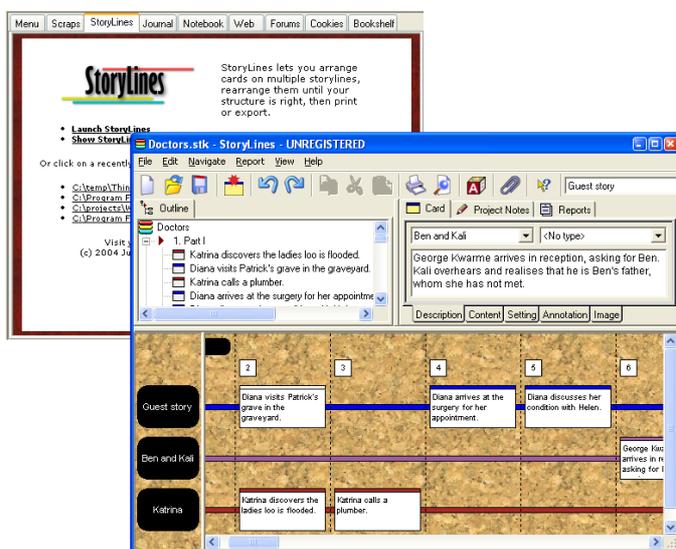
Fiction: The Facts is also available as a PDF file for viewing or printing, which you can access from the **Café Menu** tool or the opening Welcome screen.

Other tools

As mentioned above, the Café Menu gives you access to further tools, such as Aiksaurus (Windows only), Forty Thieves, and WordTiles as illustrated here.



Using StoryLines



StoryLines is all about helping you to develop and transform your ideas into a detailed blueprint that you can use to write a script or a novel.

Writers have always used scraps of paper, blank index cards or postcards to record separate incidents in their stories and then sort them into the best possible order and identify the gaps in the story. StoryLines takes this concept to the next level, allowing you to write and record and organise your virtual cards *really* quickly.

Keeping track of a plot, making sure it has a unity and a proper structure is no easy feat – and these

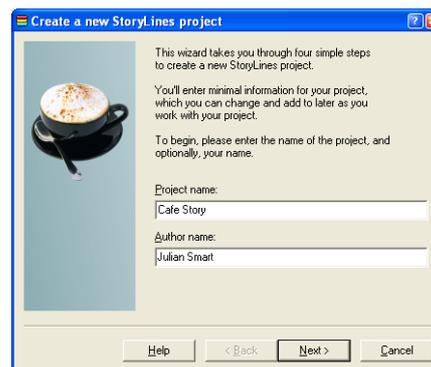
days, most stories have more than one plotline. StoryLines allows you to plan each plot on a separate line and arrange the events you have recorded on the cards to create the best effect. If you have the idea that you want your love story to be resolved before the espionage plot plays itself out, StoryLines makes it easy to see if that works, and to try out all the alternatives without loads of rewriting.

How to open StoryLines

From Writer's Café Desk, click on the **StoryLines** tab. You'll see a clickable list of all your recent StoryLines projects so your current work is never far away. From here you can click on a project, or launch the StoryLines application.

Creating a StoryLines project

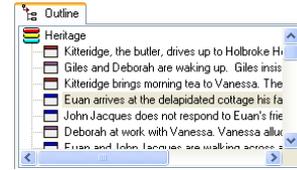
Click on  (or **File | New Project** or **Ctrl+N**) to start creating a new project. StoryLines asks you to give a name for your project, and to name up to three storylines. You only need to name one storyline, and the name can be quite arbitrary, so don't worry if you haven't got all the details straight in your mind. You can easily add or delete storylines at any time.



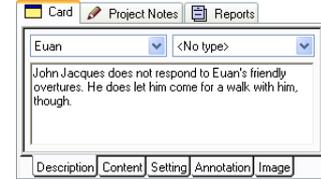
The elements of StoryLines

StoryLines is divided into three main areas.

The **project outline** on the left, where you can see a bird's eye view of your story.



The **card editor pane** on the right, where you enter text and other details for each card. You can also record project notes and view reports.



The **storyline window** at the bottom where you arrange your cards.



To add a new card, click on  (or type **Ctrl+N**, or **Edit | New Card**). You can now start typing text into the **Description** tab of the card editor, and create further cards, dragging them to the appropriate storyline. To keep creating cards on a specific storyline, select the storyline from the drop-down list on the toolbar.

You'll see the cards being added to the outline, and you can click on an item in the outline to go to that card quickly. Click on the **Reports** tab to see a linear version of your project, updated as you work. You can export the report to a variety of formats, or change the style of the report using the drop-down list on the **Reports** tab or by clicking  and tweaking the style in the **Report Preferences** dialog box.

You can switch the **Master Storyline** view on using **View | Master Storyline**, so you can see the overall shape of your story.

As well as a description (brief facts about the scene or incident you are dealing with at this point in the story), you can use the **Content**, **Setting**, **Annotation** and **Image** tabs to enter more details for each card.

The **Content** tab can have as much detail as you want – perhaps the entire scene. We have included some simple screenwriting formatting commands so that you can really run with an idea if you wish to. Click on the  button to see a summary of these commands.

The **Setting** tab allows you to specify location and time details.

The **Annotation** tab lets you write notes about the scene or incident, and the card will show a yellow corner if there is an annotation.

The **Image** tab lets you associate an image with the card, from a file or pasted from the clipboard. The image will show on the card depending on options you set in the **Preferences** dialog.

Advanced editing

Left-click on a card to edit it (on the Mac, just click), and right-click on a card to popup a context menu with commands that apply to this card (on the Mac, use control-click).

Cards can be dragged individually using the left mouse button, or you can select several by left clicking on the card's coloured bar with control held down (hold down shift on Mac) or by dragging a selection box around a group of cards, or by choosing **Select All** on the context menu (also by **Ctrl+A**). You can deselect cards using the context menu, or by clicking anywhere on the window background.

Undo  and **Redo**  can be applied to most commands. This can be handy when you've dragged a card somewhere you didn't want to, for example, and want to quickly revert to the previous position.

A card can have the navigation focus as well as be selected. There is only ever one card with the focus, and it is highlighted by a flashing colour bar. When you create a new card with **Ctrl+N** or the **Edit | New Card** command, it is created after the focus card in an available column or in a newly created column.

You can navigate around the storyline window with the keyboard arrow keys, using **Alt+Left**, **Alt+Right**, **Alt+Up**, and **Alt+Down**. The current focus will be set to the first card in the specified direction. **Alt+Home** and **Alt+End** will take you to the start and the end of the storyline window respectively.

You can insert a column in front of the focus card with **Alt+Insert**, and delete selected cards or the focus card using **Alt+Delete**.

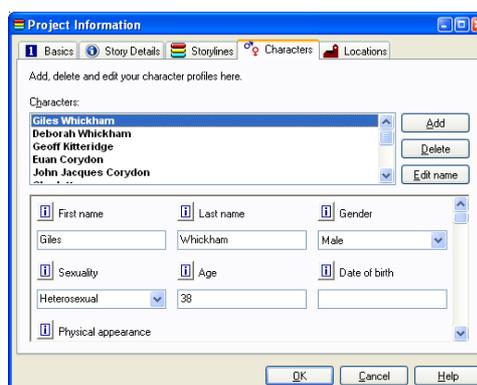
Columns can have labels: left-click on a column number to edit a label, and press Return to finish editing the label. Column labels will often contain a date or time; but you might wish to use a more qualitative term.

You can divide your project into numbered sections. Insert a new section marker by left-clicking near the top of a column and entering some text (or leaving the section name blank). A context menu that pops up when right-click over the section label allows you to delete or move the section marker (on the Mac, use control-click). Note that you can only delete the first section marker if there are no other sections present.

You can **Copy** , **Cut**  and **Paste**  cards, so long as the storyline window is focused and not a text field. Click on the storyline window background to ensure that the focus is on the window.

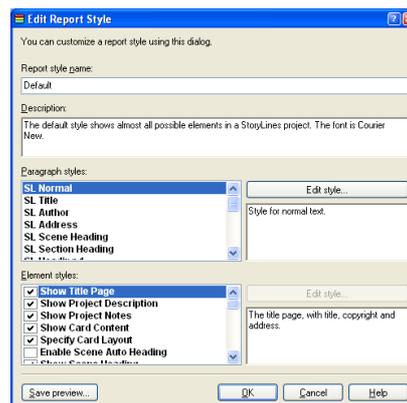
Editing story details, and character and location

A lot of important information about the project is edited and viewed in the **Project Information Dialog**, which you can open by clicking on  (or **Edit | Project Information**, or **Ctrl+L**). Here you can edit a description of your story, and create, delete or rename your storylines. You can also fill out profiles for your characters and locations.

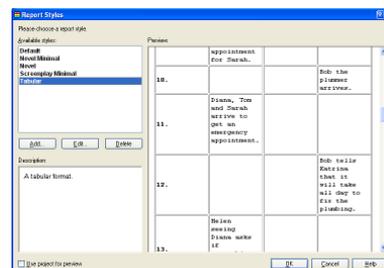


Printing and exporting reports

After selecting a suitable report style for your project, you can preview it by clicking on , and print it by clicking on . You can also export it to a number of formats, including OpenOffice.org Writer: screenplay formatting styles will be preserved so you can continue to apply the appropriate styles as you refine your story.



The level of detail shown in a report, as well as the visual styles, can be changed in the Report Style Dialog (above). You can create your own report styles to show exactly the content you wish. If you wish to print out your story using a similar layout to the storyline window, you can choose the tabular format (shown here), which displays the card text in columns as if the storyline window were rotated by 90 degrees. There is a Tabular report style provided using this format, but you can also enable or disable this format for any report.



StoryLines suits your style

There are two established schools of thought about starting a project. On the one hand there is the school of meticulous planning that considers it a sin to start chapter one or scene one until everything is worked out down to the last plot twist. The other school tells you to plunge right in and just do it, trusting to instinct and inspiration. The first method means you are well prepared, but can trap you by giving you too rigid a blueprint for your story. On the other hand, the second method means you can find yourself lost in a fictional desert without a map or a clue.

Storylines can help you to avoid the pitfalls of both systems and lets you harvest their respective strengths. When you are planning your intricate plot and you feel you have to write a particular scene out in full, you can switch to the content section of a card, and go with the flow. If, on the other hand, you are exploring the substance of your story by writing actual scenes and suddenly the best ending ever occurs to you, it's easy to play with the cards and get on top of the structural demands of your story. Whichever way you like to play it, StoryLines is there to help you.

Where next?

This brief guide can only scratch the surface of Writer's Café Desk and StoryLines, but we hope it has given you sufficient information for you to get stuck in and explore the tools, samples and online help. If in doubt, remember the  button in Writer's Café Desk, and the context-sensitive help buttons  and  plus the **Help** button on each dialog box. If the manuals don't help with a particular problem, do pop by the Writer's Café support pages and see if the question is already answered: if not, post your question to the mailing list or to us directly and we'll respond.

Keyboard Shortcuts for Writer's Café Desk

These are the shortcuts you can use to accelerate your use of Writer's Café Desk.

	Ctrl + A	Selects all text in an edit control.
	Ctrl + C	If a text control is selected, copies the selected text to the clipboard. If an image scrap is selected, the image is copied to the clipboard.
	Ctrl + M	Shows the File Manager, for easy back-up and other file related activities.
	Ctrl + N	Creates a new scrapbook.
	Ctrl + O	Opens a scrapbook.
	Ctrl + P	Shows the print dialog for printing the current scrapbook or scrap, or journal.
	Ctrl + S	Saves the active Writer's Café scrapbook and all its contents.
	Ctrl + T	Shows the Settings dialog.
	Ctrl + U	Opens a URL (web address).
	Ctrl + V	Pastes text or an image from the clipboard to the text control or image scrap.
	Ctrl + X	If a text control is selected, copies the selected text to the clipboard and deletes the text.
	Ctrl + Y	Redoes the previously undone edit in a text field or collage scrap.
	Ctrl + Z	Undoes the previous edit in a text field or collage scrap.
	Ctrl + Backspace	Goes back a page in the embedded web browser.
	Ctrl + Page Up	Goes to the previous journal entry or notebook page.
	Ctrl + Page Down	Goes to the next journal entry or notebook page.
	Alt + B	Shows the Bookshelf tab.
	Alt + C	Shows the Café Menu tab.
	Alt + J	Displays the Journal tab.
	Alt + K	Shows the Cookies tab.
	Alt + L	Shows the StoryLines tab.
	Alt + N	Shows the Notebook tab.
	Alt + P	Shows the Writing Prompt dialog.
	Alt + S	Shows the Scraps tab.
	Alt + T	Goes to today's journal entry.
	Alt + W	Shows the Web tab.
	Alt + X	Deletes the active scrap.
	Alt + Enter	Shows the current scrap properties dialog.
	Alt + F4	Closes Writer's Café Desk.
	Alt + Up	Goes to the previous scrap.
	Alt + Down	Goes to the next scrap.
	Ctrl + Alt + C	Creates a collage scrap.
	Ctrl + Alt + F	Creates a folder scrap.
	Ctrl + Alt + I	Creates an image scrap.
	Ctrl + Alt + S	Creates a shortcut scrap.
	Ctrl + Alt + T	Creates a text scrap.
	Ctrl + Alt + V	If there is image data on the clipboard, it will be pasted into a new image scrap. If there is a web address on the clipboard, a new web link scrap will be created. If there are multiple lines of text on the clipboard, a new text scrap is created.
	Ctrl + Alt + W	Creates a web link scrap.
	F5	Reloads the current browser page.
	F10	Shows a slideshow of all image scraps below the currently selected scrap.
	F11	Shows the Timer dialog.
	F12	Checks the notebook or journal for spelling mistakes.

Keyboard Shortcuts for StoryLines

You can make your StoryLines experience smoother by using keyboard shortcuts. Note that some shortcuts are dependent on context: that is, which window has the focus. For example, if you are typing text into a card, Undo and Redo affect the text field, while if the storyline window has the focus, Undo and Redo apply to edits such as card creation, deletion and moving.

	Ctrl + A	Storyline window: selects all cards. Edit field: selects all text.
	Ctrl + B	Plays the Forty Thieves patience game to relax your mind.
	Ctrl + C	Edit field: copies any selected text to the clipboard. Storyline window: selected cards are copied to the internal clipboard. Set the focus to the storyline window by left-clicking on it.
	Ctrl + E	Exports the project to a file using the current report style.
	Ctrl + F	Shows the Find window, for searching through card text.
	Ctrl + G	Generates the report, if not in auto-generate mode.
	Ctrl + H	Shows the thesaurus (Windows only).
	Ctrl + I	Imports a text file into the Project Notes area.
	Ctrl + K	Shows the Pockets Dialog.
	Ctrl + L	Shows the Project Information Dialog
	Ctrl + M	Shows the card properties dialog for the focused card, if any.
	Ctrl + N	Creates a new card on the currently selected storyline.
	Ctrl + O	Opens a StoryLines file.
	Ctrl + P	Prints the current StoryLines project.
	Ctrl + R	Shows the Find and Replace window for searching through cards and replacing text.
	Ctrl + S	Saves the current StoryLines project.
	Ctrl + T	Shows the Preferences Dialog.
	Ctrl + V	Edit field: pastes text from the clipboard to the field. Storyline window: pastes any cards in the internal clipboard in front of the focused card, or at the current pointer position.
	Ctrl + W	Closes the current StoryLines project.
	Ctrl + X	Edit field: cuts any selected text and copies it to the clipboard. Storyline window: the selected cards are copied to the internal clipboard and then deleted. You can set the focus to the storyline window by left-clicking on it.
	Ctrl + Y	Storyline window, edit field: redoes the previously undone edit.
	Ctrl + Z	Storyline window, edit field: undoes the previous edit.
	Ctrl + Tab	Cycles through the tabs in the card editor window.
	Del	Edit field: deletes the selected text, or if none selected, the next character.
	Alt + I	Shows the Card Icons dialog for associating icons with the current card.
	Alt + F4	Closes StoryLines.
	Alt + Home	Goes to the beginning of the storyline window.
	Alt + End	Goes to the end of the storyline window.
	Alt + Left	Goes to the previous card on the current storyline.
	Alt + Right	Goes to the next card on the current storyline.
	Alt + Up	Goes to the previous card on the current column.
	Alt + Down	Goes to the next card on the current column.
	Alt + Insert	Inserts a new column at the focused card.
	Alt + Delete	Deletes the selected card(s) or focused card.
	Esc	Leaves column label or section label editing.
	Return	Leaves column label or section label editing.
	F2	Shows the card description window.
	F3	Shows the card content window.
	F4	Shows the card setting window.
	F5	Shows the card annotation window.
	F6	Shows the report window.
	F7	Shows or hides the edit and outline windows.
	F8	Shows the Floating Card Editor, allowing you to edit different parts of a card at once.
	F9	Shows the card image tab.
	F12	Checks your project for spelling mistakes.