are to thrive, then some simple tools and strategies need to be in place. Planning this in advance will enable the group to spend the bulk of their time together writing, planning and sharing, not getting frustrated and fighting the technology.

OPTION 1: STICK WITH OSAPAC SOFTWARE

There are several ways to resolve the software dilemma. One of the most obvious is to limit software choices to what the Ontario Software Acquisition Program (OSAPAC) from the Ministry of Education has to offer. The full list of Ministry-acquired software can be found at www.osapac.org (or www.ccpalo.org for the francophone crew). "Licensed Software" is released annually in English and French for both Windows and MAC. For collaborative document writing, the available cross-platform word processing applications include **Appleworks/Clarisworks** and **Word Perfect.** By sticking with one freely accessible word processor across your writing group, most document format conflicts are gone. Narrow down the fonts you use to a standard palette supported on both Mac and PC and even your layout stays consistent.

For images, the OSAPAC-licensed Adobe **Photoshop Elements** is the only choice worth looking at. Completely cross-platform and easy to use, it is able to open and convert formats from almost any other program. Edited images can be shared as multi-layer .psd files, facilitating the collaborative editing process. Finished images can be saved in a wide variety of densities and formats depending on the end output for your project (web, print).

OPTION 2: OPEN SOURCE AND SHAREWARE

There's a large (and growing!) "open source" software community. Exploring the purpose and intent behind the whole open source movement could be a whole article unto itself, but the key part to remember is that open source applications are intended to be platform neutral and freely accessible.

One great application to consider for collaborative work is **OpenOffice.org** - the open source office suite. This multi-platform office productivity suite is sophisticated and flexible, working transparently with a variety of file formats, including those of **Microsoft Office**. The suite covers everything you need with a word processor, spreadsheet, presentation software, equation editor and a drawing program. It opens most major document formats flawlessly, saves to PDF, has comprehensive help, and spellchecking in 15 languages. **OpenOffice Suite** includes;

 WRITER: a sophisticated Word Processing and document layout program

 CALC: the spreadsheet program you've always wanted

 DRAW: from a quick sketch to a complex plan, this program gives you the tools to communicate with graphics and diagrams

 IMPRESS: effective multimedia presentations with 2D and 3D clip art, special effects animation, and high-impact drawing tools.

Everyone in your group could agree to download and use **OpenOffice** as the application of choice – a free and easy solution. This approach is gaining great popularity with the eLearning community. On-line students are using this suite – it doesn't cost anything, it's easy to use, and everyone can see and share in group projects and presentations.

There's a solid open source image editor as well. **Image Magick** www.imagemagick.org/ is a robust collection of tools and libraries to read, write, and manipulate an image in over 87 major formats including TIFF, JPEG, PNG, PDF, PhotoCD, and GIF. With **Image Magick** you can resize, rotate, sharpen, colour reduce, or add special effects to an image or image sequence and save your completed work in the same or differing image format. **ImageMagick** is quite portable, running under Windows '95, '98, ME, NT 4.0, 2000, and XP, Macintosh (OS 9 and 10), VMS, and OS/2.

Shareware conversion utilities
If you don't want to completely flip to a new application, be aware that there are great shareware utilities which will enable you to open foreign file formats for both word pro-