

Foreword

This document originally accompanied a two-day introductory training course. It became obvious from repeated questions in class and afterwards, as well as from general queries on `comp.text.tex` that many people do not read the FAQs, do not use the TUG web site or the CTAN repositories, do not buy the books and manuals, do not use the newsgroups and mailing lists, and do not download or read the free documentation. Instead, they try to get by using the time-honoured training technique known as ‘sitting by Nellie’, which involves looking over a colleague’s shoulder in the office, lab, library, pub, or classroom, and absorbing all of ‘Nellie’s bad habits along with the good ones. And they use guesswork or imagination for the rest.

People do this for many reasons: shortage of time, lack of information (no-one ever told them there was free documentation), dislike of reading manuals, or even just laziness (my own excuse). But chiefest of reasons is that so much of the existing documentation is written for people who are already experts at reading documentation. Most beginners don’t want extensive reasoning over the available choices: they want simple, direct, prescriptive instruction. If you want one of *these*, do *this*.

In the summer of 2001 I presented a short proposal on the marketing of \LaTeX to the annual TUG conference held at the University of Delaware, and I showed an example of a draft brochure¹ designed to persuade newcomers to try \LaTeX for their typesetting requirements. As a result of questions and suggestions, it was obvious that it needed to include a pointer to some documentation, and I agreed to make available a revised form of this document, expanded to be used outside the classroom, and to include those topics on which I have had most questions from users over the years.

It turned out to mean a significant reworking of a lot of the material. Some of it appears in almost every other manual and book on \LaTeX but it is essential to the beginner and therefore bears repetition. Some of it appears in other forms elsewhere, and is included here because I felt it needed explaining. And some of it appears nowhere else but this document. I took the opportunity to revise the structure of the training course in parallel with the book, and to include a more comprehensive index. It is by no means perfect, and I would be grateful for comments and corrections to be sent to me at the address given under the credits. As I also noted earlier, it can be used as a one-day course if the users already have some experience of writing formal documents for publication or assessment (e.g. books, reports, essays, theses, articles, etc.).

I had originally hoped that the \LaTeX version of the document would be processable by any freshly-installed default \LaTeX system, but the need to include font samples which go well beyond the default installation, and the

¹ <http://latex.silmaril.ie/brochure/>

need to use some less-common packages which the new user is unlikely to have installed, meant that this document itself was not really a simple piece of \LaTeX , no matter how simply it may describe the process itself.

However, as the careful reader may already have seen, the master source of the document is not maintained in \LaTeX but in XML. Installations of \TeX are becoming more comprehensive, which means that modern systems are likely to include all the fonts and packages needed, so what I called last time ‘a future task’ is now creeping up fast: to rewrite the transformation to that it can be guaranteed to process with all the current full \LaTeX installations.

If you are just starting with \LaTeX , at an early opportunity you should buy or borrow a copy of *\LaTeX : A Document Preparation System* which is Leslie Lamport’s original manual. More advanced users should get the *The \LaTeX Companion*, the *The \LaTeX Graphics Companion* and the *The \LaTeX Web Companion*. Mathematical users might want to start with the *Short Math Guide for \LaTeX* . Details are in p. 180.

Online resources



There are hundreds if not thousands of web pages about how to use \LaTeX . The online version of this book is just one, but a couple of others I recommend are:

- Marc van Dongen’s \LaTeX and Friends (Author’s publication, Cork, Ireland), 2011, at <http://csweb.ucc.ie/~dongen/LaTeX-and-Friends.pdf>
- Peter Flynn’s The Very Short Guide to \LaTeX (Author’s publication, Cork, Ireland), 2011, at <http://latex.silmaril.ie/veryshortguide/veryshortguide.pdf>