

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, perhaps most, users 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, mailing lists, or web forums, and do not download or read the excellent 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, Googling topics to try and find an answer, but unable to distinguish a reliable site from a poor one.

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, as well as being expert in using L^AT_EX. Most beginners don't want extensive reasoning over all 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 at the annual TUG conference, held that year at the University of Delaware, on the marketing of L^AT_EX (Flynn, 2001), and I showed an example of a [draft brochure](#) designed to persuade newcomers to try L^AT_EX 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 the document you are now reading, 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 L^AT_EX 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 on the home page (at the front of the book, if you are reading this on paper or in an ebook). As I also noted earlier, it can be used as a one-day course if the users already have some experience of writing, editing, or reviewing formal documents for publication or assessment (eg reports, white papers, essays, books, 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 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. That was then; nowadays I would hope most people install the full works, so everything should work as-is.

However, as the careful reader may already have noticed, the master source of this 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 XSLT transformation to that it can be guaranteed to process with all of 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 Lamport's original manual. More advanced users should get the *Companion*, the *Graphics Companion* and the *Web Companion*. Mathematical users might want to start with the *Short Math Guide*. Details are in section F.13 on page 283.

Published resources

There are hundreds if not thousands of web pages about how to use \LaTeX , and the online version of this book is just one. There are dozens of books about \LaTeX too, and these are a few of the printed ones that I strongly recommend:

- van Dongen's *\LaTeX and Friends* covers \LaTeX and mathematics with reference to the latest packages and techniques. I've known Marc for many years: he works at the same institution that I do, and this is a shameless plug for a really excellent book.
- Oetiker's *A (Not So) Short Introduction to $\text{\LaTeX}2_{\epsilon}$* started as a translation and rationalisation of a ground-breaking German-language introduction to \LaTeX . It has since taken on a momentum of its own, and has itself been translated into a many languages. It remains the best short guide, even if it has grown a bit.
- Grätzer's *Practical \LaTeX* is a very approachable, non-technical introduction to everyday \LaTeX usage. The first chapter is designed as a standalone guide to get you started.

There is a much bigger list of online resources [on the \$\text{\TeX}\$ Users Group web site](#), and a much longer list of books there at tug.org/books/.

If you've just finished a \LaTeX course, or read a book or web site, and you want a refresher or *aide-mémoire*, my leaflet '[The Very Short Guide to \$\text{\LaTeX}\$](#) ' is what it says it is: a 4-page guide to the bare essentials of document construction, designed as a reminder of what you've just learned.

