

Programming L^AT_EX —

A survey of documentation and packages

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December 14, 2020

Abstract

A survey of documentation for L^AT_EX. Included are references to printed and electronic books and manuals, symbol lists, FAQs, the L^AT_EX source code, CTAN and distributions, programming-related packages, users groups and online communities, and information on creating packages and documentation.

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Introduction

Reinventing the wheel may be useful if you think that you can do it better. Worse, though, is not even being aware that the wheel has already been invented in the first place, which can be an embarrassing waste of time. Such can be the case both for a new L^AT_EX programmer who isn't aware of the many ways things may be done, but also for someone, this author included, who learned L^AT_EX many years ago but may have missed some of the recent advancements in package code and documentation.

A wealth of information is available, not only in print and online, but also directly embedded in the typical L^AT_EX distribution. The following is meant to be a broad overview of some of today's resources for L^AT_EX programmers.

(The latest version of this document is available in the docsurvey package.)

Printed books

Even in an electronic/online era, printed books still have the advantage of being able to be opened for reference without taking up space on the screen. Printed books also provide extended discussion of useful topics, have extensive human-edited indexes which are more useful than a simple document-wide search function, and some are also available in electronic format.

L^AT_EX: A Document Preparation System:

The classic introduction to L^AT_EX, in continuous reprint for decades. [33]

Guide to L^AT_EX:

An introduction and more advanced material, including an extensive reference guide. Fourth edition: 2004. [30]

More Math into L^AT_EX:

Updated to a fifth edition in 2016. [24]

L^AT_EX Beginner's Guide:

An overview with numerous examples. [31]

L^AT_EX Cookbook:

More examples. [32]

The L^AT_EX Companion:

Provides extended discussion and examples of the inner workings of L^AT_EX and numerous useful packages. Second edition: 2004. [38]

Additional books:

Listed at the T_EX FAQ. [16]

(<https://texfaq.org/>)

Electronic books and documentation

Most of these are provided with the T_EX distribution, and may be updated with each release. Access the embedded documentation from a command line using the texdoc program.

TEX

T_EX by Topic, A T_EXnician's Reference:

A reference for T_EX. This may be useful for understanding the source code of L^AT_EX packages, many of which are quite old and written in low-level T_EX. [15] (texdoc texbytopic)

L^AT_EX

Getting something out of L^AT_EX:

Create your first document in L^AT_EX. [27] (<https://ctan.org/pkg/first-latex-doc>)

The very short guide to typesetting with L^AT_EX:

A four-page introduction. [20] (<https://ctan.org/pkg/latex-veryshortguide>)

Formatting Information:

A beginners introduction to typesetting with L^AT_EX. [18] (<https://ctan.org/pkg/beginlatex>)

L^AT_EX for Complete Novices:

An extensive introduction for a non-technical person. [50] (texdoc dickimaw-novices)

Using L^AT_EX to Write a PhD Thesis:

A followup to *L^AT_EX for Complete Novices*, including extensive discussion about bibliographies, indexes, and glossaries. [51] (texdoc dickimaw-thesis)

Getting Started with L^AT_EX 2_ε:

A beginner's bare-bones overview. [40] (texdoc startlatex2e)

Writing Scientific Documents Using L^AT_EX:

An introduction to typesetting scientific documents. [7] (<https://ctan.org/pkg/intro-scientific>)

The Not So Short Introduction to L^AT_EX 2_ε:

Covers introductory material, customizations, and a simple package. Available in many languages [41] (texdoc -l lshort) (<https://ctan.org/pkg/lshort>)

L^AT_EX 2_ε: An unofficial reference manual:

A thorough but concise reference manual for L^AT_EX 2_ε, available in several languages. [25] (texdoc -l latex2e-help) (<https://latexref.xyz>)

LaTeX WikiBook:

An online book, includes information about creating L^AT_EX packages and classes. [58] (<https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/LaTeX>)

L^AT_EX 2_ε for authors:

An overview of the new features of L^AT_EX 2_ε compared to L^AT_EX 2.09. [54] (texdoc usrguide)

LuaL^AT_EX

A guide to LuaL^AT_EX:

An introduction. (texdoc luatex-doc)

LuaL^AT_EX Reference:

The full manual. (texdoc luatex.pdf)

X_εL^AT_EX

The X_εL^AT_EX reference guide:

A summary of additional features. (texdoc xetex-reference)

Font-change-xetex:

Macros for using fonts. (texdoc font-change-xetex)

L^AT_EX 3 and expl3

The L^AT_EX 3 Interfaces:

Reference documentation for the expl3 programming environment. (texdoc interface3)

Math typesetting

Users Guide for the amsmath Package:

How to use amsmath. [4] (texdoc amsmath)

Also see [International languages](#) for the Italian, Japanese, and Vietnamese translations.

Short Math Guide for L^AT_EX:

A summary of features in L^AT_EX and packages for writing math formulas. [13]
(texdoc short-math-guide)

Farbige Mathematik:

Math in color. In German, but with easy-to-use examples. [57] (texdoc voss-mathcol)

Music typesetting

L^AT_EX for Musicians:

Packages and programs for music symbols, lyrics, chord sheets, sheet music, and guitar tablature. [22] (texdoc latex4musicians)

Symbol references

These are lists of the L^AT_EX commands which produce symbols.

Comprehensive L^AT_EX Symbol List:

More than 14,000 symbols and L^AT_EX commands. [43] (texdoc symbols-letter)
(texdoc symbols-a4)

Every symbol (most symbols) defined by unicode-math:

Unicode math symbols. [47] (texdoc unimath-symbols)

Source code

The source code for L^AT_EX 2_ε itself is also included in the distribution.

The L^AT_EX 2_ε sources:

Occasionally useful for figuring out how something really works. [9] (texdoc source2e)

List of internal L^AT_EX 2_ε macros useful to package authors:

A list of the core L^AT_EX macros, each of which is linked to the source code. [48] (texdoc macros2e)

FAQs

T_EX FAQ:

A wide-ranging list of frequently-asked questions. (Formerly the UK TUG FAQ.) [16]
(texdoc letterfaq) (texdoc newfaq)

Visual L^AT_EX FAQ:

Click on a visual element to learn how it is programmed. [44] (texdoc visualFAQ)

International languages

Multiple languages: The following are available in several languages.

The Not So Short Introduction to L^AT_EX 2_ε:

Covers introductory material, customizations, and a simple package. [41]
(texdoc -l lshort) (<https://ctan.org/pkg/lshort>)

L^AT_EX 2_ε: An unofficial reference manual:

A thorough but concise reference manual for L^AT_EX 2_ε. [25] (texdoc -l latex2e-help)
(<https://latexref.xyz>)

Ebook Foundation Free Programming Books:

A variety of T_EX-related and other programming books and documents. [21]
<https://github.com/EbookFoundation/free-programming-books>)

Brazilian Portuguese:**L^AT_EX 2_ε Via Exemplos:**

A study course. [36] <https://ctan.org/pkg/latex-via-exemplos>)

French: Also see [Online communities](#).

TeXniques:

A collection of resources. [56] <https://www.gutenberg.eu.org/TeXniques>)

Tout Ce Que Vous Avez Toujours Voulus Savoir Sur L^AT_EX Sans Jamais Os Er Le Demander:

A book for beginners. [34] <http://lozzone.free.fr/index.php?vlunch=latex>)

Apprends L^AT_EX!:

A full textbook written for École Nationale Supérieure de Techniques Avancées. [5]
http://www.babafou.eu.org/Apprends_LaTeX)

Initiation à L^AT_EX:

A guide on L^AT_EX for beginners or advanced users. [8]
<https://ctan.org/pkg/guide-latex-fr>)

Rédaction avec L^AT_EX:

An introductory course prepared for Université Laval, Québec, Canada. [23]
 (texdoc formation-latex-ul) (texdoc formation-latex-ul-diapos)

German: See [Math typesetting](#), [Users groups](#), and [Online communities](#).

Indian:**A practical guide to L^AT_EX and polyglossia for Indian Languages:**

L^AT_EX and polyglossia for Indian languages. [28] (texdoc latex-mr)

Italian:**Manuale utente per il pacchetto amsmath:**

Manual for amsmath. [2] (texdoc amsldoc-it)

Japanese:**L^AT_EX 2_ε for authors:**

[53] https://www.latex-project.org/help/documentation/usrguide_jpn.pdf)

Users Guide for the amsmath Package:

[3] https://www.latex-project.org/help/documentation/amsldoc_jpn.pdf)

Short Math Guide for L^AT_EX:

[14] https://www.latex-project.org/help/documentation/short-math-guide_jpn.pdf)

Portuguese:**Introdução ao Uso do Preparador de Documentos L^AT_EX:**

A tutorial as PDF slides. [10] (texdoc cursolatex)

Vietnamese:**Hướng dẫn sử dụng gói amsmath:**

Manual for amsmath. [1] (texdoc amsldoc-vn)

General typesetting theory

Discussion about general typesetting theory, presented by various T_EX-related authors.

A Few Notes on Book Design:

Discussion about book design and typography. 100+ pages. [59] (texdoc memdesign)

KOMA-Script The Guide — Calculating the Page Layout with typearea:

Discussion about the page layout of a book. [29] (texdoc typearea)

A TUFTE-STYLE BOOK — The Design of Tufte’s Books:

Emulating ideas from the books of Edward R. Tufte. [12] (texdoc tufte-latex)

The Octavo Package:

Design principles and guidelines emulating books from the Renaissance. [46] (texdoc octavo)

Package canoniclayout:

Ideas regarding text-block proportions. [6] (texdoc canoniclayout)

Publication-quality tables in L^AT_EX:

Improved design of tabular layouts. [17] (texdoc booktabs)

The TikZ and PGF Packages — Guidelines on Graphics:

“General guidelines and principles concerning the creation of graphics for scientific presentations, papers, and books”. [52] (texdoc pgfmanual)

Accessing embedded information

texdoc

A large amount of documentation is included in a T_EX distribution. Most can be accessed with the `texdoc` program. Enter “`texdoc -l <name>`” to search for matching package, file, or program names. In some cases the same document is available in both letter or A4 paper sizes, or in several languages. `texdoc` is also available online [55], with popular packages sorted by category. (<http://texdoc.net>)

kpsewhich

The program `kpsewhich` may be used to find out where a file is located. `kpsewhich filename` searches for and returns the path to the given filename.

`kpsewhich` can also return directories, such as:

```
kpsewhich -var-value TEXMFROOT
kpsewhich -var-value TEXMFDIST
kpsewhich -var-value TEXMFLOCAL
```

Some package authors choose not to include the source code in the package documentation. To view the source code:

1. To locate and read a package’s `.sty` file:

```
kpsewhich package.sty
```

Usually these files have their comments removed, so it is better to use the `.dtx` file instead.

2. The `.dtx` file is usually available, and will have the package’s source code.

```
kpsewhich package.dtx
```

If it is not installed on your local system, it will be necessary to download the `.dtx` file from CTAN (see the next section).

The comments are not yet typeset and so will not be as easily read.

3. To typeset the documentation with the source code, copy the .dtx file and any associated image files somewhere local and then look for \OnlyDescription in the source. This command tells the ltxdoc package not to print the source code.
4. Remove \OnlyDescription, then process the .dtx file with


```
pdflatex package.dtx
```

 Barring unusual circumstances, this will create a new documentation .pdf file with the package source code included.

Obtaining packages — Comprehensive T_EX Archive Network (CTAN)

The Comprehensive T_EX Archive Network (CTAN) provides a master collection of packages. A search function is available, which is useful when you know the name of a package or its author, and a list of topics is also provided. There are so many topics, however, that finding the right topic can be a problem in itself. One useful method to find what you are looking for is to search for a related package you may already know about, then look at its description on CTAN to see what topics are shown for it. Selecting these topics then shows you related packages. [11]

Useful packages

General use

A First Set of L^AT_EX Packages:

A list of packages useful for beginners. [26] (texdoc first-packages)

Programming L^AT_EX

A number of packages are especially useful for L^AT_EX programmers: (texdoc <packagename>)

xifthen: Conditionals.	ifplatform: Detect operating system.
etoolbox: A wide range of programming tools, often avoiding the need to resort to low-level T _E X.	xstring: String manipulation.
etextools: Adds to etoolbox. Strings, lists, and more.	keyval, xkeyval, kvsetkeys: Key/value arguments.
xparse: Define macros and environments with flexible argument types.	pgfkeys, pgfkeyx: Another form of key/value arguments.
environ: Process environment contents.	kvoptions: Key/value package options.
arrayjobx, fifo-stack, forarray, forloop, xfor: Programming arrays, stacks, and loops.	expl3: L ^A T _E X3 programming.
iftex: Detect T _E X engine.	l3keys, l3keys2e: Key/value for L ^A T _E X3.
	chktex: Locates typographic errors.
	CTAN topic macro-supp: An entire topic of useful programming macros.

Creating and documenting new packages

How-to

Documentation for those interested in creating their own package or class:

How to package your L^AT_EX package:

A tutorial. [42] (texdoc dtxut)

L^AT_EX 2_ε for class and package writers:

Programming a package or class. [45] (texdoc clsguide)

The doc and shortvrb packages:

Packages for documenting packages. [37] (texdoc doc)

The DocStrip program:

The program which processes .dtx and .ins files to generate documentation and .sty files. [39]
(texdoc docstrip)

Published articles about creating L^AT_EX packages

Related articles from *TUGboat*:

Rolling your own Document Class: Using L^AT_EX to keep away from the Dark Side:

An overview of the article class. [19]

Good things come in little packages: An introduction to writing .ins and .dtx files:

How and why to create your own .dtx and .ins files. [49]

How to develop your own document class — our experience:

A comparison of developing class vs. package files. [35]

Users groups

T_EX Users Group: <http://tug.org>

Dante: German users group. <https://www.dante.de>

List of international users groups: <http://tug.org/usergroups.html>

Online communities**English forums:**

T_EX — L^AT_EX Stack Exchange: Almost any question has already been asked, and a quick web search will find answers, ranked by vote. <http://tex.stackexchange.com>

L^AT_EX Community: A traditional forum with quick replies to your questions
<http://www.latex-community.org>

German forums:

TeXwelt: <http://texwelt.de/wissen/>

goLaTeX: <http://golatex.de>

French forums:

TeXnique.fr: <http://texnique.fr>

Mailing lists: Several dozen, spanning a wide range of T_EX-related topics.

<http://tug.org/mailman/listinfo>

Newsgroup: comp.text.tex

Distributions — L^AT_EX for various operating systems

TeXLive: <http://tug.org/texlive> Unix and Windows

MiKTeX: <https://miktex.org> Windows and Mac

proTeXt: <http://tug.org/protext/> Windows

MacTeX: <http://tug.org/mactex/> Mac

Change log

2017/03/06: Initial version.

2017/10/04: Added users groups, mailing lists, distributions, LuaT_EX, X_YT_EX, chktex. Organization and formatting improvements.

2017/10/14: More information about accessing embedded documentation.

2018/01/18: Added `texdoc.net`.

2018/01/21: Added latex-veryshortguide, first-latex-doc, beginlatex, intro-scientific, guide-latex-fr.

2018/03/24: Added interface3, dickimaw-novices, dickimaw-thesis.

2018/04/01: Added TeXnique.fr.

2018/06/28: Added sections for non-English documents and general typesetting theory. Updated host and name for T_EX FAQ. Added latex-via-exemplos and Ebook Foundation free programming books.

2018/10/18: Updated URL for *L^AT_EX 2_ε: An unofficial reference manual*.

2020/12/14: Improved bibliography. Added categories for math and music; startlatex2e; items written in French, German, Indian, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Vietnamese; Dante users group.

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