
Editorial comments

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Help wanted — The UK T_EX FAQ

An era has come to an end. Robin Fairbairns, long-time keeper of the CTAN node at the University of Cambridge (UK) has retired, and with this, the Cambridge CTAN node itself.

Hosting of CTAN has been consolidated on the DANTE server, but a separate project hosted at Cambridge, the UK T_EX FAQ, which Robin has lovingly curated for many years, has been relocated. The node name `tex.ac.uk` has been retained, and is now resident on a new server. The announcement of the move can be read at uk.tug.org/2015/07/07/tex-ac-uk-server-on-the-move/.

Joseph Wright reported to TUG 2015 on the “State of the (UK-)T_EX FAQ” (river-valley.zeeba.tv/state-of-the-uk-tex-faq/). Going into his well deserved retirement, Robin left behind a long list of FAQ topics that deserve updating. Even if everything on the list is taken care of, the list will continue to grow. In order to ensure its continued validity and usefulness, assistance is solicited for its maintenance. Volunteers can make themselves known by sending a message to the site managers at faq-devel@tex.ac.uk.

Many thanks to Robin for his devoted and careful work on the FAQ (and for many other things as well), and the best of wishes for a long and happy retirement.

Bigelow & Holmes and the Wingdings font

Dingbats have been in the repertoire of printers since the creation of movable type, and even before that in manuscripts (although they weren’t called dingbats then). Also known as fleurons, they are used to indicate breaks in continuity, highlight important points in a text, occupy otherwise empty space in an attractive manner, form borders (see Peter Wilson’s “Glisterings” column in *TUGboat* 32:2, pages 202–205), and plenty more.

The best known font of dingbats is probably the one by Hermann Zapf, one of the “base 35” PostScript fonts; others exist as well. When a font of dingbats was wanted for Windows, Microsoft bought the rights to Bigelow & Holmes’ Lucida Icons, Lucida Arrows, and Lucida Stars, then combined its favorites into a single font. The name “Wingdings” was coined, combining the two words, “Windows” and “Dingbats”. The font became an unexpected success.

Read the story here: www.vox.com/2015/8/25/9200801/wingdings-font-history.

Choice of font *does* make a difference

The *Nature* website, on 29 October 2015, reported a “Grant application rejected over choice of font” (www.nature.com/news/grant-application-rejected-over-choice-of-font-1.18686).

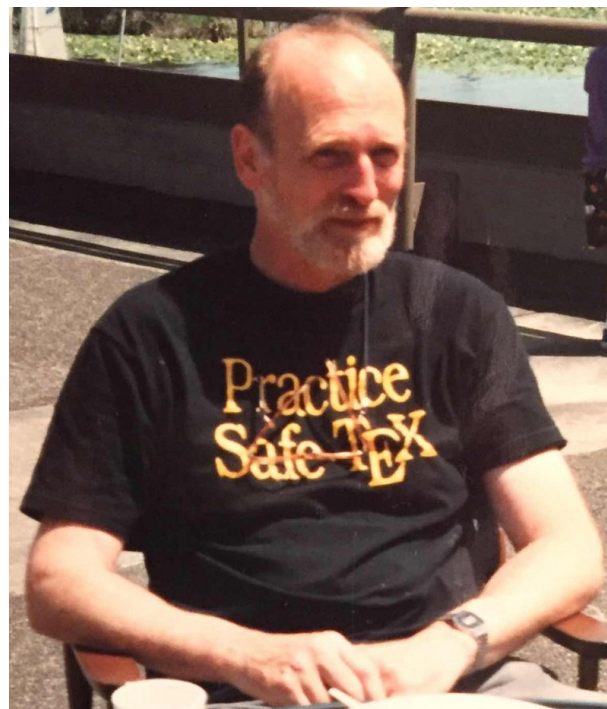
Briefly, submission guidelines (which were updated between the time the applicant started writing her proposal and the time it was submitted, changing the relevant requirement) specified a particular font. A different font used on a fellowship application had more compact letter widths, which could result in more text fitting within the allowed page limits. The application was summarily rejected on grounds that had nothing to do with the technical merits of the proposal.

Moral of story: Be *very* careful to follow instructions to the letter when submitting a proposal asking for funding.

A sidebar on the page revisits the kerfuffle raised by a review comparing Word and L^AT_EX reported in my column earlier this year (*TUGboat* 36:1, page 5).

Safe T_EX

Pierre MacKay was always willing to support a good cause. These t-shirts appeared at a TUG meeting in the mid-1980s. Maybe some of you old-timers remember the stir they caused.



Thanks to Diana Wright for providing the photo.

More help wanted: Names of Unicode symbols in languages other than English

In support of assistive technology and accessibility for math, I've been asked whether there is any "official", or even organized effort to provide translations of Unicode names into languages other than English. The specific request was about German; for example, for U+2A0C one would look for translations of "quadruple integral operator" such as "Vierfachintegral".

The MathJax project is currently building in a full accessibility feature, and since most screenreaders do not voice things like codepoints from mathematical blocks (which are mostly humanly unintelligible anyhow), the names generated by the current tool are being used in the speech text strings. Localization is a highly desirable goal.

If you know of a resource that already exists with such information, or is being developed, please share the information with Peter Krautzberger, <peter.krautzberger@mathjax.org> with a copy to me.

What is a template?

A template (to me) is a receptacle just the right shape and size into which to pour contents, suitable for producing a desired result. A template for a \LaTeX document is (or should be) an outline that a user can fill in for a particular purpose.

One area in which \LaTeX templates are particularly useful is for academic theses. A student embarking on writing a thesis will need all the support s/he can get, since that exercise is the capstone of years of effort, and the public demonstration that the effort was worthwhile.

Many universities have very particular specifications for the format of a thesis. Templates for that purpose are in plentiful supply,¹ and steadily increasing.² Even more are posted somewhere on the web, many on CTAN, but many not. Another "productive" area for template creation is for CVs. Whole sites are devoted to collecting such templates.

Unfortunately, the quality of posted templates is uneven — many show evidence of accretion over "generations" of student thesis writers and lack of careful initial design or subsequent maintenance. Old (plain \TeX) font commands, redundantly-loaded packages, and conflicting packages are only some of the unadvertised flaws. And there is no concerted effort to "clean them up" or even evaluate them: a poten-

¹ See Peter Flynn's survey in *TUGboat* 33:2, pages 172–177; tug.org/TUGboat/tb33-2/tb104flynn.pdf.

² Two more were reported at TUG 2015; see *TUGboat* 35:2, pages 128–132; tug.org/TUGboat/Contents/contents36-2.html.

tial user has little guidance in selecting a reliable offering.

Publishers are not immune from this practice. Reports of problems with the templates provided for various journals or books demonstrate such problems every day. Although sometimes an author has a special requirement that wasn't predicted when a template (or a document class) was created, lack of maintenance is more frequently the culprit.

A discussion about this topic has been going on for months on the \TeX stackexchange chat (<http://chat.stackexchange.com/rooms/41/tex-latex-and-friends>), and some ideas have been proposed to establish a working group to explore possibilities for improvement. If you are interested, send mail to tugboat@tug.org with your ideas; we will collect information and keep potential participants in such a discussion informed of plans.

Still more help wanted:

The \LaTeX Wikibook

A comprehensive online \LaTeX manual sounds like a great idea, for finding quick information on how to approach unfamiliar problems. And that's what the \LaTeX Wikibook tries to be. It is apparently the resource that is most often high on the list from a Google search.

Unfortunately, this resource is far from a compendium of "best practices", so I hesitate to recommend it to new users — the individuals most in need of such help. Wikibooks are intended to be "crowd maintained", and anyone with knowledge and time is encouraged to step up and contribute.

A question on this topic has been posted to \TeX stackexchange: "How can we, as a community, improve the LaTeX WikiBook?" <http://meta.tex.stackexchange.com/q/6393>. So far, no one contributing to the discussion has said that this Wikibook is fine as is. One contributor has gone so far as to say that a Wiki is unsuitable for beginners and intermediate users of \LaTeX because it is "essentially a reference source", and that indeed a Wiki *format* is inherently unsuitable for a pedagogic purpose.

The fact remains, the \LaTeX Wikibook is not going to go away. Like the template confusion, what is there now will simply lead to more and more questions, with many repeats. Join the discussion, and help to organize the available resources in a way that will both improve the quality of what is there, and make undertaking \LaTeX less forbidding for newbies.

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