

Review of 'Making T_EX Work'

Paul Thompson

Department of Psychiatry
Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, OH 44106, USA
pat@po.CWRU.Edu

Title : Making T_EX Work
Author : Norman Walsh
Publisher : O'Reilly and Associates
Date : April, 1994
ISBN : 1-56592-051-1
Pages : 518
Price : US \$29.95

-- * --

I have recently received a review copy of Making T_EX Work, by Norman Walsh (published by O'Reilly Associates). From my perspective, I am a somewhat to rather sophisticated user of L^AT_EX/T_EX.

Making T_EX Work (MTW) is another book along the lines of The L^AT_EX Companion (TLC). MTW takes a wider view of the entire T_EX/L^AT_EX enterprise than does TLC, in that MTW involves editing, plotting, and all the aspects of using T_EX, rather than TLC, which involves merely L^AT_EX. The chapter titles for MTW are The Big Picture, Editing, Running T_EX, Macro Packages, Fonts, Pictures and Figures, International Considerations, Printing, Previewing, Online Documentation, Introducing METAFONT, Bibliographies, (Tools) Non-Commercial Environments, Commercial Environments, T_EX on the Mac.

Generally, I like the book and have found it to be useful. From the user standpoint, it is probably most useful for the somewhat naive, but somewhat experienced user. For instance, consider the chapter on Editors. Subheaders are What can an editor do?, GNU Emacs, AUC-T_EX, Multi-Edit, Brief, MICROEmacs, epm., Other Tools, T_EX as a compiler, Spellchecking, Revision Control, T_EX Shells. The first sections discuss various capabilities of editors. I found the section on GNU Emacs and AUC-T_EX to be most helpful, not being familiar with AUC-T_EX prior to

reading the book (although I was an emacs user for a long while). The other editors are discussed as well at the same level - very interesting for the person not familiar with the product, not enough detail for anyone else.

Similarly with the Fonts chapter. The matter of fonts is exceedingly poorly described in T_EX/L^AT_EX as a whole, IMVHO. I did find this chapter describing fonts in a clear and simple fashion. The chapter begins with a discussion of the process by which T_EX locates font information. Some examples of font information are presented. A variety of issues are considered, including magnification, font size, location of font information, and other issues of standard font information. Some more advanced issues are also discussed - NFSS2, Postscript fonts under NFSS, encoding vectors, virtual fonts and automatic font generation. My overall impression is that this information is very helpful to persons like myself who are still a little confused when fonts are discussed. The term "Cork encoding" is defined in the book, although not in this chapter. So, I generally found the information here quite helpful.

I must wrap this up at this point. My overall impression of the book is pretty positive. The author has made a real effort to tie in a lot of disparate pieces of information. This information is all out there, but very hard to pull together. However, the book is not 100% problem is that the book lacks a critical overview, but this is probably not the author's interest. For instance, in the discussion of T_EX shells, the author mentions 5, but doesn't spend any time comparing and contrasting. So, if you were trying to select a T_EX shell, you couldn't just use this book. I guess that I am saying that the book is not the Consumer's Reports of T_EX stuff, but is that a problem? I dunno. I did find book very helpful at times.

Note: I have no financial interests in O'Reilly and Assoc. I did get the review copy free.