

Re: What Software to Type Math In?

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- *From:* Marc Olschok <invalid@xxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 13 Feb 2006 19:52:12 GMT
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Herman Rubin <hrrubin@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

Marc Olschok <invalid@xxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

Herman Rubin <hrrubin@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

[...]

If there is somebody else available who can take care of the typesetting aspect of your document, you may as well say "I just want to type it quickly, the `_final_appearance_` of the document is not `_my_ business`". And of course this makes sense. The same applies, if the final appearance does not matter as such, e.g. in a personal not[e] for yourself. (even in this case, I would feel `_very_ uncomfortable` with a format that is not plain text and where readability depends on the existence of a particular version of a particular software)

What is "plain text"?

Something that I can process with simple editors and other text-tools across a variety of different platforms, independent of the particular fonts or encodings available. Something I can e-mail or post in newsgroups without having to assume any special capabilities on the part of other readers. In short: I want to be able to use ed in a dumb terminal, if needed. I admit that such a notion of "plain text" is a moving target: right now it is still ASCII for me; in the near future, when all those tools will have migrated, it will perhaps be Unicode.

To me, mixing Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic characters in a text is "plain text". Put in subscripts and superscripts with full or reduced size and crude "half-spacing", and recognizable mathematical symbols, and you have LOTS of power. I want to be able to put the characters on the screen exactly where I want them, and I want it to be read by a fixed-width "editor"

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which has the relevant fonts. I would settle for a "super-ASCII" with the "gazillions" of characters.

You want an Unicode-capable editor.

The old Apples has a way to put the typewriter decoding for a particular font in a corner of the screen. One did not have to mouse the character in, but knew how to type it.

And one needed an Apple to begin with.

If instead, the final appearance matters and can not be delegated to somebody else, one may as well start right away with the real thing. As far as I could see, this is to be the situation of the OP.

In many cases, fixed width typing is much easier to read than typeset material.

As others already pointed out, there is no antagonism between 'typesetting' and 'fixed width type'. Whether fixed width is easier to read depends on the material and the medium.

Another advantage of at typewriter rather than a typesetter is that the author has easy control of line breaks. Also, fixed width fonts are necessary for easy communication. This goes completely against the typesetting mentality.

Depending on the final format it might also go completely against the idea of readability. Nobody suggested that you typeset your e-mail.

I still use Berkeley mail for sending email or responding. The email with this newsreader is like that as well. Email sent by many of the fancier mailers lacks line breaks, and can be difficult to handle.

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Sure. The same point could be made against special fonts in mail.
Compare "JiYí visited Würzburg" to " $Ji\{v\{r\}\{i\}$ visited W\"urzburg".
Observe, that I can type the left version directly into LaTeX.

In fact, easy documentation depends on plain text format.
This is one of the reasons for using TeX and LaTeX, even if all the
fine points of typesetting are ignored.

I am asking for a plain text format, with a huge character
set. This is feasible. TeX and LaTeX use plain text
CHARACTERS, but not a plain text FORMAT.

There are two issues here.

One is your need for an editor able to handle all these fonts in a
coherent way. The question of typesetting does not even enter here.

The other is the question, whether TeX or LaTeX could handle such
texts as input. For TeX the answer is most likely 'no' since it is
meant to be frozen. However, LaTeX is actively developed further and
it might well be able to handle this in the future, like it already
can for several encodings, as pointed out in the example above.

Marc

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