Introduction

What is \texttt{\LaTeX}?

\textbullet \ \texttt{\LaTeX} (‘lay-tex’ or ‘luh-tex’) is an open source typesetting system used to generate scientific and academic documents with high typographical quality. \[1\]

\textbullet \ For graduate students, \texttt{\LaTeX} is part of the hidden curriculum – it is rarely taught formally, and learning to use it can be a frustrating and isolating experience.

Workshop Details

\textbullet \ Goal: To introduce \texttt{\LaTeX} to novice users in the graduate community at UC Davis. No prior \texttt{\LaTeX} or coding experience was required.

\textbullet \ Duration: Three sessions (March 21st to 23rd, 2022) lasting 2 hours each (1 hour of interactive lecture + 1 hour of \texttt{\LaTeX} exercises).

\textbullet \ Content: Days 1 and 2 focused on the basics of \texttt{\LaTeX}. Day 3 focused on common \texttt{\LaTeX} templates (CVs and beamer slides).

Materials and Methods

\textbullet \ Workshop registration was conducted through Eventbrite.

\textbullet \ Workshop materials (Zoom recordings, slides, other resources) are available at \texttt{mdelrosario.com/latex101/}.

\textbullet \ Lectures were adapted from the online \texttt{\LaTeX} tutorial, \texttt{learnlatex.org} \[2\].

\textbullet \ Participants used Overleaf, a free \texttt{\LaTeX} system which can be loaded in a browser.

\textbullet \ A post-workshop survey was sent out using Google Forms.

Attendance

\textbullet \ Out of 79 registered people, 42 people attended at least one session (\approx 52%). See Table 1 below.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Registered & Total Attendees & Day 1 & Day 2 & Day 3 \\
\hline
79 & 42 & 24 & 21 & 21 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Summary of participant registration and attendance.}
\end{table}

Survey (Quantitative)

13 PhD students answered the following questions in a post-workshop survey.

Lecture/Review Session Sentiments

\textbullet \ Q1: How useful did you find the lectures?

\textbullet \ Q2: If you attempted them, how useful did you find the exercises?

\textbullet \ Q3: If you attended them, how useful did you find the exercise review sessions?

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{survey_results.png}
\caption{Survey results for lecture and review sessions.}
\end{figure}

Document Types

What documents will you typeset using \texttt{\LaTeX}?

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{document_types.png}
\caption{Distribution of document types respondents plan to typeset.}
\end{figure}

Insights/Improvements

\textbullet \ Review sessions: Respondents found these sessions less useful than the lectures or the exercises. The sessions could be improved by changing exercises to be group-based or by changing the workshop format (i.e., in-person over Zoom).

\textbullet \ Templates: Given the high interest in using \texttt{\LaTeX} for dissertations and research papers, the templates we review on Day 3 should be changed accordingly.

Survey (Qualitative/Feedback)

Respondents provided free-form answers to two questions. The questions and a few representative answers are included below.

What did you like about the workshop series?

\textbullet \ The lectures were great! I feel like I learned so much in just a few hours. It helps that people were asking really good questions and then the answers were very insightful.\[1\]

\textbullet \ [The exercises were] wey the rubber hit the road for me; they were very effective for reinforcing the topics discussed in the lectures, and even gave rise to new questions that I wouldn’t have otherwise encountered.\[1\]

\textbullet \ It is a very organized workshop, lecturer Mason did very detailed explained and question answer, and great demonstration, kind attitude! and we also have Carlos cover the chat part!\[1\]

What suggestions would you make to improve the workshop series?

\textbullet \ I’d like to have gone through other templates for resumes or posters that were coded in \texttt{\LaTeX}...\[1\]

\textbullet \ [S]ometimes folks’ questions were a bit tangential to the topic – I thought it would have worked well to take slightly fewer lecture breaks for question answering and lump the questions into a few time slots.\[1\]

\textbullet \ I think adding an extra hour to each day and making it more interactive so that people can follow along with their own Overleaf documents would help.\[1\]

Insights/Improvements

\textbullet \ \textbf{Answering questions:} Some folks appreciated my willingness to answer questions, but others found it distracting. Setting aside time at the end of the lecture to answer questions might be a good way to address this.

\textbullet \ \textbf{Timing:} Some participants wanted more time to work on exercises in a group setting, so a longer review session (\approx 1.5 or 2 hours) may be warranted.

References


\[2\] J. Wright, “Learnlatex.org,” \texttt{https://www.learnlatex.org/}. 

\[\]