

# What do you do with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt?

## Abstract

User responses to the question: “What do you do with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt?”.

This message was posted (by me) on the ntg-context mailing list on November 4, 2005.

Hans and I believe it would be nice to publish the collected responses to this simple question:

What do you do with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt?

We think it would be nice to see all the various ways in which people experience ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt. We are not looking for articles, in fact we really want just a small amount of text per user, nothing longer than you would normally type in an email message.

The following article is a collection of the replies I received. I have not performed editorial corrections except formatting, but the majority of the replies has been shortened for reasons of length or pointedness. What is left is an overview of the kind of typesetting projects people use ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt for. I hope you find the results interesting.

Taco Hoekwater (editor)

## Nikolai Weibull

I use ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt for any document that I figure someone will want to print out on paper some day. This includes resumes, letters, and articles. I even considered typesetting software documentation with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt, but haven't yet decided if PDFs are the right medium for that kind of text. I also typeset my master's thesis using ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt and probably spent as much time hacking ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt as I did on doing “actual work” for the content. Not because ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt couldn't do what I wanted, but because ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt allowed me to do anything I wanted.

## Mari Voipio

I first learned ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt because of work: My employer makes measuring instruments for industry and I write and/or compile and layout the end-user manuals for those instruments. Traditionally, those manuals were written and edited in Word, but when the mass of text and the amount of figures grew, it was obvious that I needed a new tool before becoming a

total wreck due to corrupted and unruly Word files. A workmate had written his thesis in T<sub>E</sub>X and started to look for various T<sub>E</sub>X based solutions, of which I finally chose ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt.

## Duncan Hothersall

I have a repository of learning materials which are marked up in (DocBook-based) XML. They are in a few different languages (majority English, with Spanish, Dutch and recently Chinese) and belong to several different universities/training organisations on whose behalf we maintain them. I convert the XML into ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt code in a batch process using a text processing language, and then use ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt to typeset the result into books and booklets of different styles. We also produce web versions of a lot of the materials, and I use ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt (plus ImageMagick) to create equation GIFs for maths that can't be rendered in pure HTML.

## Luigi Scarso

1. price-lists from XML (DB exports) ;
2. labels for shoes and dresses, from XML/CSV;
3. data sheets (barcodes, code number and so on), from XML/CSV;

## David Wooten

I'm using ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt to typeset my Ph.D. dissertation, and have used it over the last few years to typeset seminar papers, outlines, and so on. Recently I've also helped a friend typeset his monograph. He is an architect and painter, so this text is full of diagrams, paintings, fold-out pages, prose, and indexes.

## Willi Egger

ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt has become *the* tool for all typesetting purposes. So in my environment letters, invoices, address-labels, envelope-printing, greeting cards etc are made up in ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt together with functionality provided by Metafun. A favorite issue is making flowcharts for e.g. bookbinding guides, meatprocessing or visualization of the production of a tool. Next to all this I write my own books which are completely made up in ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt including imposition of the pages for folding sections in order to end up with sewn books. E.g. I prepared a 600 pages book which includes over a 120 drawings and metapost-figures. This book is bound as a girdle-book. – Whenever I am asked to give a presentation there is ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt involved.

**Gerben Wierda**

I have decided not too long ago to move my book-project from LaTeX to ConTeXt (it was my second try, the first one I stopped because there were too many problems). Reason: I dislike how LaTeX output generally looks (though I found memoir to be pretty good) and after reading the documentation I liked how ConTeXt looked as an interface.

**Patrick Gundlach**

- use it as a reason to run <http://contextgarden.net> :-)
- Do presentations on it and with it. The tight metapost integration is just great too nice.
- I love to play with new things that I think have a vital future and ConTeXt persuaded me right the first time I saw it on a presentation in Oldenburg or Dortmund (a DANTE meeting).
- prepare University papers and other PDF-based material.

Actually, I do 50% of my typesetting with LaTeX. There are still several things that I can't yet do with ConTeXt (some footnote layout and table typesetting).

I still need some time to generate test documents and ask on the lists for the right way to layout these special cases.

**Andrea Valle**

I started using LaTeX just not to use MS, and because I was curious. Then I had that idea of creating my scores using one of the LaTeX packages. Good idea but nothing worked (namespace collisions, e.g.). So I found ConTeXt, fully equipped with Metafun. The chic solution for my A2 scores with PDF graphics.

Actually I use ConTeXt:

- i) as my algorithmic musical composition typesetting environment
- ii) for my university courses' presentations
- iii) as an output device for all text-based communication.

**Matthias Weber**

I use typesetting mainly for math: papers, class notes and slides. I started with Signum (a wysiwyg program for the Atari, which was great), switched to AmsTeX, then to LaTeX, and now to ConTeXt. I am bad at remembering macros, I wrote most papers using cut & paste, and when I needed to do something in LaTeX that I couldn't look up in a previous paper, I spent lots of time digging through the 1001 macro packages available for LaTeX.

**Mikael Persson**

I am mostly playing around a bit. However, since I work with math it is mostly something that has to do with math. Some examples:

- Slides from a conference talk;
- Notes to my students;
- A "second-rental" contract;
- Some playing with the Mathematica fonts;
- Some sudokus;
- Melodikrysset;
- A crossword for a friend;
- Love letter paper;

**Olivier Billet**

I use it over plain TeX for mainly these reasons:

- ease of type1/otf font set up
- ability to easily deal with layers
- tight connection with PDF file format (like interactive features)

I also thought learning a new macro package was worthwhile because of the support for XML file format will enable to connect TeX with a lot of other applications.

Up to now, I used it for typesetting my thesis and conference slides.

**Henning Hraban Ramm**

There are two books that I typeset with ConTeXt:

- a collection of Kofi Annan's speeches
- a portrait of and story collection for German Unitarian religious fellowship

Personally I use ConTeXt for PDF/paper output of my planner including address database, calendar and songbook. (Addresses are stored in a database, collected with a script and written to a ConTeXt table; calendar data including moon phases is computed, combined with events, holidays, personal appointments etc. from several lists and written to ConTeXt files by another script; the songbook contains LilyPond scores in ConTeXt files.)

**Steffen Wolfrum**

We are using ConTeXt for typesetting wonderful books ("werksatz"), mostly in the fields of arts and humanities. This kind of books often show an advanced use of footnotes, languages and alphabets.

**Idris Samawi Hamid**

Present activities: I use ConTeXt to

1. typeset an academic journal
2. typeset my own books

Planned or in-progress activities: I am striving for

1. advanced critical edition support
2. advanced Arabic-script support, including complicated scripts like Nastaliq
3. related to 2) I would like to see an integration of aleph and pdftex (for full left-to-right and right-to-left typesetting)

### **Xiao Jianfeng**

I use ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt to typeset:

1. slides
2. mathematical formula
3. Chinese

It is far easier to write slides in ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt than in LaT<sub>E</sub>X. And ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt can produce PDF directly.

The math environment is not as good as in LaT<sub>E</sub>X, but it is enough for me now.

The Chinese environment is not as good as LaT<sub>E</sub>X(CJK) either, but it is easier to learn. I hope the Chinese module can be enhanced some day.

### **Tobias Burnus**

As big project I typeset my Diploma ( $\approx$  Master) thesis with it – and I will do so for my PhD as well. Otherwise I use it for slides and writeups. For papers I so far used LaT<sub>E</sub>X, but I'm toying with the idea to use it also for a paper; unfortunately APS and arXiv.org don't support ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt. However, if enough authors bug them, they will probably do so at the end. ;-)

### **Peter Münster**

My first experience with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt was typesetting my brother's PhD thesis in chemistry. Used features: modes (A5 and A4), project-structure, a lot of floats, bibliography.

ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt at work:

- technical specifications for electronic devices
- presentations
- documentation
- reports

ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt at home:

- construction plans (one page per figure with well defined scale)
- letters
- finding solutions for problems with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt at work (with the help of the mailing-list)

### **Hans van der Meer**

I use ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt for the presentations in my lectures on Cryptography at the University of Amsterdam. I am considering changing my lecture notes (some 300 pages) from LaT<sub>E</sub>X into ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt, especially because the ease of incorporating MetaFont pictures into the

text. Also for small documents as for example cd-covers.

### **Charles Doherty**

I use ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt for

1. my class guides (incorporating genealogical tables and other graphics) and book-lists in both paper and screen versions
2. for typesetting the Newsletter of the Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement
3. my daughter used ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt (with my help) to typeset her thesis
4. I have given three classes in the use of ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt to my postgraduate students urging them to use ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt to typeset their theses. Together with Omnigraffle and Bibdesk ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt is ideal for students writing theses. I have been using XeT<sub>E</sub>X more and more for the ease of getting diacritical marks (when transliterating Sanskrit for example) or medieval characters using the SIL font Gentium.

### **Alan Bowen**

One of the key features of ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt for me is its ability to create platform independent output that combines the ancient languages and mathematics in ways typical of publications in the humanities. So, first, my heartiest thanks to you both and also to Thomas Schmitz for his Greek module.

I currently use ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt to publish the Institute's review/journal (which is available on line, in print, and on CD), as well as its brochures and announcements. I will also be using it to produce its books too.

I have designed a book publication series for my brother using ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt; and I use it to write my own papers, reviews, and books.

### **Ciro Soto**

I wrote my novel using ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt. Inside figures with metapost, the cover layout with Scribus.

See <http://www.TheGuitarMakerExploration.com>

### **Olivier Turlier**

I started informatics at 33 when coming back to studies: 2 years later i've done my thesis with LaT<sub>E</sub>X (took me 2.5 years!). Now i try to teach building technics and design, with the help of paper and electronic courses made with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt. Hopefully, my boss doesn't know that it took me sometimes 2 days for writing a one morning course!

I must recognise that sometimes I think of having a good dtp software, but after some test, I come back to ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt. In the next decades, I'll try to succeed in quiz making and/or nice looking book. I wish to meet people using Context one day.

**Bernd Militzer**

I typeset examinations and tests for my wife's students at school. For that task I wrote based on exam.cls (LaTeX) a ConTeXt-module.

All private and business letters are typeset with my special DIN-Brief-Modul, based on akletter.cls (LaTeX) and DIN-letter (ConTeXt) from Holger Schöner.

I typeset different articles for my father.

I typeset a book (350 page) with lots of tables, german and many czech words.

My next project is a book about my family from 1600 to now.

**Thomas A. Schmitz**

I'm a scholar in Classics, and I mostly use ConTeXt

- to write my own lecture notes and typeset them on index cards,
- to prepare my screen presentations,
- for all kind of course-related materials;
- and I'm currently preparing a book that will be typeset with ConTeXt.

**Frank Sonnemans**

After using LaTeX I use ConTeXt in my work environment (MS office based) for:

- Letters, Quotes and Faxes
- Reports (with floats and references)
- Price lists using perl based conversion of a database export

But I must admit that I now increasingly use Apple Pages to write letters, faxes and the like as it just works faster (copy/paste graphic for example). For large documents ConTeXt stays the preferred option.

**Otared Kavian**

I am a mathematician and I use ConTeXt mainly for my conferences when I do a presentation on computer.

Since I am a Mac user, it is possible to use XeTeX for writing Right-to-Left material and profit from (almost) all ConTeXt features (many thanks, among others, to Hans Hagen, Johnaton Kew, Adam Lindsay, and Gerben Wierda who made this possible). I use XeTeX + ConTeXt for writing Persian (or Faarsi), which is a non-Arabic language using Arabic alphabet.

Recently I use also ConTeXt for some lecture notes in mathematics for my students, but unfortunately I gave up learning enough of ConTeXt capacities to write a book with it... For this still I use plain TeX and some personal macros, since it seems easier to adapt them to the publisher's constraints.

**Volker RW Schaa**

I developed a workflow for (particle accelerator) conference proceedings using XML, Perl, and LaTeX. This

task was an easy one, because it doesn't matter whether you need to combine 50 or 1400 papers, each page or book will look exactly the same for each conference series.

But I became very dissatisfied with the standard abstract booklet(s) which have to be produced for the participants of such conferences. Here you (nearly) have the full freedom of putting the information together. When my original design (using bleeding boxes for titles, author names, and paper code information) brought me to the limits of LaTeX, I discussed what I wanted with Hans. His statement, 'No problem!', led to the question 'How?'. Within a week I learnt basic ConTeXt, and Hans provided the macros to combine METAPOST and TeX in a way that still leads to questions 'How was that done?' So I now always include a 'Production Note' in my books and booklets to tell people what you can do with ConTeXt and TeX.

**Jose Antonio Rodriguez**

Til now I used to typeset/illustrate books with DSP tools and my aim is use ConTeXt/MetaFun to do it. Right now I'm converting html based documentation through the xml toolchain (texml), but most of the time I fight with some obscure parameter trying to put things where I want. Integrating MetaPost is definitely a plus for a designer.

**Tom Fossen**

I use ConTeXt for making the church-magazine of the parish of which I am the minister. With Metafun I constructed headers, page-numbers and all sorts of symbols - forming a style that connects all sorts of input from members and bodies within the community. It's great fun to see each monthly edition grow, from (sometimes) scraps of paper into an well-organized and good looking magazine, complete with photos and other illustrations.

I learned using ConTeXt while writing papers for my training as a contextual therapist. And since I started a practice as contextual therapist I use it for flyers, correspondence, bills.

**Vit Zyka**

- proceedings from individual PDFs,
- presentations,
- posters,
- logos, visiting cards,
- manual (HTML and PDF form from XML source),
- personal electronic travel-journal
- booklet with very complex layout (sometimes seems to me over my ConTeXt skills) with two-column, margin, many, many floats, balancing, sorting, in Czech, ... I will write some experience with this – if I will finish it and survive two times postponed deadline...

**Lutz Haseloff**

- I write all my personal documents with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt
- I prepared some complicated fillable Forms including calculations by Javascript and sending the data to a web server
- I convert some Manuals to ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt (step by step)
- I query an Oracle database with perl and write the results to ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt files
- all my presentations I create with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt
- I typeset chinese texts

**Jörg Hagmann**

As the editor of the 70+ page annual report of an ornithological society, I learned to hate word. When I was approached by a publisher with the offer of writing a textbook of biochemistry, I decided to try something more suitable and chose – just why is hard to say, I didn't know anything about any of the possibilities – ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt. It was very hard simply to find out what it was and then how to install it and after that how to get some presentable result. But it's great – thanks to everybody.

It is always claimed that writing in a text editor and leaving the layout/typesetting part for later is better because you concentrate on writing. This is not true, at least not when working with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt. It is much more fun to “tex” what you have, to try out this and that, than to think about the next sentence. I now write with a Parker Duofold (bought years ago while on a bicycle tour in the Netherlands!) in a notebook before I go to the computer.

**Mark Pearson**

I'm currently working in a team which is building a system for the automatic production of office stationery (business cards, letterheads and compliment slips) with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt at its heart.

The system provides a web-application front end for selected users to create stationery orders. These orders are then processed to produce .tex files, which are processed by ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt to produce press-ready PDFs. The PDFs are sent with order details straight to our in-house printing department.

**Nicolas Grilly**

What I do with ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt:

1. Produce sales and marketing reports for my customers (we are a marketing and data mining consultancy). We have a very simple templating language written in Python that connects to an SQL database, generates the ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt file, launches ConT<sub>E</sub>Xt and launches Acrobat Reader to see the PDF file.
2. Produce totally personalized mailings for customers of companies we work for. Everything is personalized: text, background, photos, etc. We produce it with the same templating solution (see previous point).

Taco Hoekwater (editor)