Typographers' Inn

Peter Flynn

Layouts

The three main default document classes in LaTeX (book, report, and article) implement a consistent page layout with conservative features:

- centered title block or title page;
- wide set and wide margins;
- centered, narrower Abstract in smaller type, indented;
- justified text;
- indented, unspaced paragraphs;
- bold sectional divisions, widely-spaced;
- heavily-indented lists with wide spacing;
- non-hanging footnotes;
- floating tables and figures with caption position dependent on caption text quantity;
- same-size type in block quotations with independent indentation;
- a single typeface throughout (Computer Modern).

At the time LaTeX was written (1985), these defaults were already quite conservative, and have been described as 'based on then-common conventions for scientific publishing' [5]. I recently came across an article a relative wrote in the 1950s — it could almost have been formatted with LaTeX's defaults (see Figure 1).
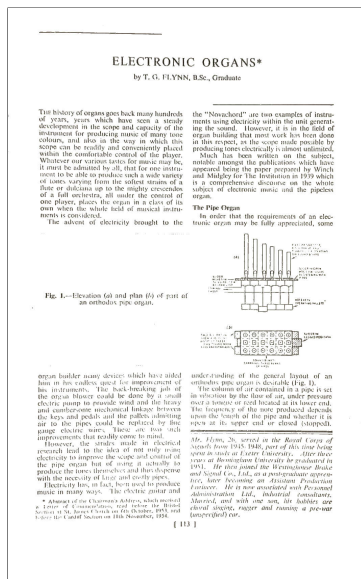

Figure 1: 1950s journal style [4]

Fashions in page layout and design change like the seasons: while many journals do still use centered titling in the body font, many do not, opting instead for anything from flush-left sans-serif bold to a shaded block rotated 90° positioned at the left-hand edge (as in Figure 2).

Figure 2: Re-envisioning some of LaTeX's defaults

Many publishers and journals have written their own document classes which can be downloaded (some are included with TeX Live), and many helpful people have written classes and packages which provide alternative layouts (the memoir and koma-script bundles are excellent examples).[1] You can of course go the whole hog and employ a designer to draw up a suitable set of (possibly corporate) designs, and then get them implemented as LaTeX classes by one of the TeX consultants listed at the back of every issue of *TUGboat*.

However, for the users who just want to create simple layouts of their own, here are some guidelines to current practice that can be used. After all, if LaTeX were to be written today, what defaults would we want?

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[1] I tried to introduce one myself (vulcan) many years ago [1], which was a compendium of packages and modifications, but it required more resources than I had available at the time.

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Titling Redefine the \maketitle command to put the title, author, date, and other metadata where you want it.

Margins Reset margins with the geometry package.

Abstract Redefine the abstract environment to control the font size and positioning.

Justification This is still the standard for books but ragged right is less formal and has been popular in wordprocessors for decades.

Spacing The parskip packages turns off indentation and uses space between paragraphs instead. This is a popular office-document format.

Sections The sectsty and titlesec packages let you change the styling of headings. In justified text, set headings to ragged right to avoid hyphenation and justification (H&J) problems.

Lists Use the enumitem package to restyle all types of lists, not just enumerated ones.

Footnotes The footmisc package (and others) provide alternative layouts for footnotes.

Tables and figures Caption styling can be changed with the ccaption package and others.

Block quotations Redefine the quotation environment to get rid of the first line indent, and to change the font size.

Typefaces Use X⅃LATEX to get a much wider and more easily-accessible choice of typefaces [3], but even with pdflatex, there is a substantial range available (see the LATEX Font Catalogue tug.dk/FontCatalogue). If you have mathematical content your selection is more limited.

I haven't mentioned the letter class. It's something of an anomaly, although it too implements what was a fashionable layout in the days of the typewriter: a vertically-centered document (that is, equal amounts of white-space above and below). I'm not aware of anywhere using this layout today, and restyling it is much harder than with the other classes. However, the koma-script bundle mentioned above provides a very adaptable alternative.

Go forth, etc. . .

Afterthought

Just after the last *Typographers' Inn* hit the streets, I spotted another example (see Figure 3) of a centered heading broken unusually [2, 3]. In the early centuries of printing, it wasn't considered 'bad'; in fact it occurs frequently on title pages.

In a narrow measure, long headings are going to cause H&J problems because they are typically set in a much larger size than the body copy.[2]

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[2] Your Editor-in-Chief, Barbara Beeton, and your Production Manager, Karl Berry, will know this only too well from *TUGboat*.
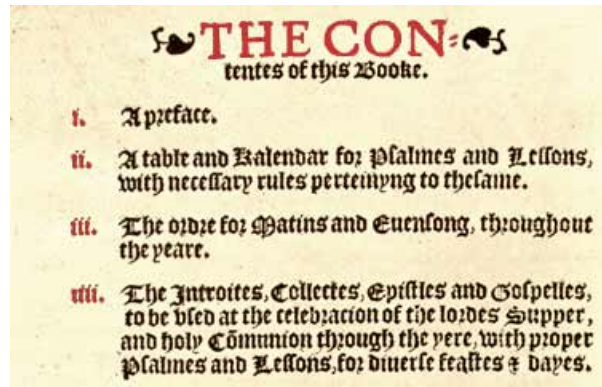

Figure 3: Unusual line-breaking in a heading (Book of Common Prayer, 1549, fragment, courtesy The Society of Archbishop Justus)

This example provides us with two insights into the minds of the 16th-century compositor and page designer (if they were two separate people):

1. that he felt it necessary to expand 'The Contentes' by adding 'of this Booke' (perhaps 'Contentes' alone was not yet established);

2. that he felt it was perfectly normal for a word which needed to be hyphenated to be continued in a different size and even a different typeface on the second line.

We do live in a different worlde.

References

[1] Peter Flynn. The vulcan Package — A Repair Patch for LATEX. *TUGboat*, 20(3):208–213, Sep 1999. http://tug.org/TUGboat/tb20-3/tb64flynn.pdf.

[2] Peter Flynn. Typographers' Inn — Formatting and centering. *TUGboat*, 33(1):8–9, Jan 2012. http://tug.org/TUGboat/tb33-1/tb103inn.pdf.

[3] Peter Flynn. Typographers' Inn. *TUGboat*, 37(3):266, Dec 2016. http://tug.org/TUGboat/tb37-3/tb117inn.pdf.

[4] Thomas George Flynn. Electronic Organs. *Institution of Electrical Engineers Students' Quarterly Journal*, 25(98):113–118, Dec 1954.

[5] musarithmia. What is the name of LATEX's default style and why was it chosen for LATEX? — (answer). *tex.stackexchange.com*, 272607(1), Oct 2015. http://tex.stackexchange.com/questions/272607.

⋄ Peter Flynn
Textual Therapy Division,
Silmaril Consultants
Cork, Ireland
Phone: +353 86 824 5333
peter (at) silmaril dot ie
http://blogs.silmaril.ie/peter