

The first step in using L^AT_EX is to install a program on your computer. There are lots of free versions, without even ads to gum things up — see the CTAN web site (Comprehensive T_EX Archive Network). I recommend MikTeX, which has been so well massaged that all you need to do is to download a zipped file and click Install. My Mac-using colleagues use TeXtures, which is a very nice program, but it isn't freeware.

L^AT_EX is a “markup language”: The user creates a plain text file, using any editing program, gives it a name ending in `.tex` — say it is `firstfile.tex` — and then opens a command window, moves to the the directory where the file was saved, and issues the command

```
$ latex firstfile
```

or

```
$ pdflatex firstfile
```

The first of these produces the file `firstfile.dvi` — `.dvi` is short of “device independent”, and this file can be printed out if you have the right commands in your system. In a Unix or Linux system, the command is

```
$ dvips firstfile
```

But I don't know of a similar command for Windows, so I use the second, which produces the file `firstfile.pdf`, which can be displayed onscreen or printed using the free program Adobe Reader, or posted as a web page.