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Understanding packages and class files

The default formatting in LaTeX documents is determined by the **class** used by that document. This default look can be changed and more functionalities can be added by means of a **package**. The class file names have the **.cls** extension, the package file names have the **.sty** extension.

Difference between classes and packages

Sometimes it's hard to make a decision when it comes to choose whether to write a package or a class. The basic rule is that if your file contains commands that control the look of the logical structure of a special type of document, then it's a class. Otherwise, if your file adds features that are independent of the document type, i.e. can be used in books, reports, articles and so on; then it's a package.

For instance, if a company needs branded reports that use a special font and have the logo of the company in the footer; you need a new class.

If the company needs a new command that makes easier to highlight important sentences within a document, a new package will work in this scenario.

Further reading

For more information see

- Writing your own package (/learn/Writing_your_own_package)
- Writing your own class (/learn/Writing_your_own_class)
- LaTeX 2_ε for class and package writers (http://www.latex-project.org/guides/clsguide.pdf)

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