Sweave User Manual

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1 Introduction

Sweave provides a flexible framework for mixing text and R code for automatic document generation. A single source file contains both documentation text and R code, which are then woven into a final document containing

- the documentation text together with
- the R code and/or
- the output of the code (text, graphs)

This allows to re-generate a report if the input data change and documents the code to reproduce the analysis in the same file that contains the report. The R code of the complete analysis is embedded into a LATEX document using the noweb syntax (Ramsey, 1998) which is usually used for literate programming Knuth (1984). Hence, the full power of LATEX (for high-quality typesetting) and R (for data analysis) can be used simultaneously. See Leisch (2002) and references therein for more general thoughts on dynamic report generation and pointers to other systems.

Sweave uses a modular concept using different drivers for the actual translations. Obviously different drivers are needed for different text markup languages (IATEX, HTML, ...). Several packages on CRAN provide support for other word processing systems (see Appendix A).

2 Noweb files

noweb (Ramsey, 1998) is a simple literate-programming tool which allows combining program source code and the corresponding documentation into a single file. A noweb file is a simple text file which consists of a sequence of code and documentation segments, called *chunks*:

Documentation chunks start with a line that has an at sign (@) as first character, followed by a space or newline character. The rest of this line is a comment and ignored. Typically documentation chunks will contain text in a markup language like LATEX. The chunk continues until a new code or documentation chunk is started: note that Sweave does not interpret the contents of documentation chunks, and so will identify chunk indicators even inside LATEX verbatim environments.

Code chunks start with <<options>>= at the beginning of a line; again the rest of the line is a comment and ignored.

The default for the first chunk is documentation.

In the simplest usage of noweb, the options (if present) of the code chunks give the names of source code files, and the tool notangle can be used to extract the code chunks from the

¹http://www.ctan.org

noweb file. Multiple code chunks can have the same name, the corresponding code chunks are the concatenated when the source code is extracted. noweb has some additional mechanisms to cross-reference code chunks (the [[...]] operator, etc.), Sweave does currently not use nor support these features, so they are not described here.

3 Sweave files

3.1 A simple example

Sweave source files are noweb files with some additional syntax that allows some additional control over the final output. Traditional noweb files have the extension .nw, which is also fine for Sweave files (and fully supported by the software). Additionally, Sweave currently recognizes files with extensions .rnw, .Rnw, .snw and .Snw to directly indicate a noweb file with Sweave extensions. We will use .Rnw throughout this document.

A minimal Sweave file is shown in Figure 1, which contains two code chunks embedded in a simple LATEX document. Running

```
> rnwfile <- system.file("Sweave", "example-1.Rnw", package = "utils")
> Sweave(rnwfile)

Writing to file example-1.tex
Processing code chunks with options ...
1 : echo term verbatim
2 : term verbatim pdf
You can now run (pdf)latex on 'example-1.tex'
```

translates this into the LATEX document shown in Figures 2 and 3. The latter can also be created directly from within R using

```
> tools::texi2dvi("example-1.tex", pdf = TRUE)
```

The first difference between example-1.Rnw and example-1.tex is that the LATEX style file Sweave.sty is automatically loaded, which provides environments for typesetting R input and output (the LATEX environments Sinput and Soutput). Otherwise, the documentation chunks are copied without any modification from example-1.Rnw to example-1.tex.

The real work of Sweave is done on the code chunks: The first code chunk has no name, hence the default behavior of Sweave is used, which transfers both the R commands and their respective output to the LATEX file, embedded in Sinput and Soutput environments, respectively.

The second code chunk shows one of the Sweave extension to the noweb syntax: Code chunk names can be used to pass options to Sweave which control the final output.

- The chunk is marked as a figure chunk (fig=TRUE) such that Sweave creates (by default) a PDF file of the plot created by the commands in the chunk. Furthermore, a \includegraphics{example-1-002} statement is inserted into the LATEX file (details on the choice of file names for figures follow later in this manual).
- Option echo=FALSE indicates that the R input should not be included in the final document (no Sinput environment).

3.2 Sweave options

Options control how code chunks and their output (text, figures) are transferred from the .Rnw file to the .tex file. All options have the form key=value, where value can be a number, string

```
\documentclass[a4paper]{article}
\title{Sweave Example 1}
\author{Friedrich Leisch}
\begin{document}
\maketitle
In this example we embed parts of the examples from the
\texttt{kruskal.test} help page into a \LaTeX{} document:
data(airquality, package="datasets")
library("stats")
kruskal.test(Ozone ~ Month, data = airquality)
which shows that the location parameter of the Ozone
distribution varies significantly from month to month. Finally we
include a boxplot of the data:
\begin{center}
<<fig=TRUE,echo=FALSE>>=
library("graphics")
boxplot(Ozone ~ Month, data = airquality)
\end{center}
\end{document}
```

Figure 1: A minimal Sweave file: example-1.Rnw.

```
\documentclass[a4paper]{article}
\title{Sweave Example 1}
\author{Friedrich Leisch}
\usepackage{Sweave}
\begin{document}
\maketitle
In this example we embed parts of the examples from the
\texttt{kruskal.test} help page into a \LaTeX{} document:
\begin{Schunk}
\begin{Sinput}
> data(airquality, package = "datasets")
> library("stats")
> kruskal.test(Ozone ~ Month, data = airquality)
\end{Sinput}
\begin{Soutput}
       Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test
data: Ozone by Month
Kruskal-Wallis chi-squared = 29.2666, df = 4, p-value = 6.901e-06
\end{Soutput}
\end{Schunk}
which shows that the location parameter of the Ozone
distribution varies significantly from month to month. Finally we
include a boxplot of the data:
\begin{center}
\includegraphics{example-1-002}
\end{center}
\end{document}
```

Figure 2: Running Sweave("example-1.Rnw") produces the file example-1.tex.

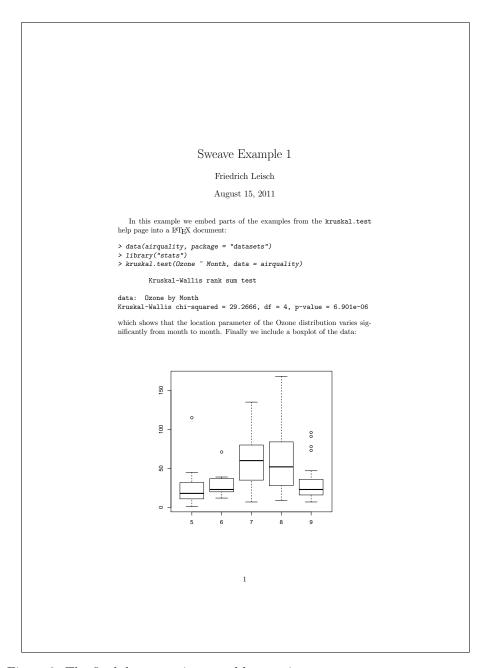


Figure 3: The final document is created by running pdflatex on example-1.tex.

or logical value. Several options can be specified at once (separated by commas), all options must take a value (which must not contain a comma or equal sign). Logical options can take the values TRUE, FALSE, T, F as well as lower-case and capitalized versions of the first two.

In the .Rnw file options can be specified either

- 1. inside the angle brackets at the beginning of a code chunk, modifying the behaviour *only* for this chunk, or
- 2. anywhere in a documentation chunk using the command

```
\SweaveOpts{opt1=value1, opt2=value2, ..., optN=valueN}
```

which modifies the defaults for the rest of the document, i.e., all code chunks after the statement. Hence, an \SweaveOpts statement in the preamble of the document sets defaults for all code chunks.

Further, global options can be specified (as a comma-separated list of key=value items) in the environment variable SWEAVE_OPTIONS.

Which options are supported depends on the driver in use. All drivers should at least support the following options (all options appear together with their default value, if any):

split=FALSE: a logical value. If TRUE, then the output is distributed over several files, if FALSE all output is written to a single file. Details depend on the driver.

label: a text label for the code chunk, which is used for file-name creation when split=TRUE. It is also used in the comments added above the chunk when the file is processed by Rtangle (provided the annotate option is true, as it is by default), and as part of the file names for files generated by figure chunks.

The first (and only the first) option in a code chunk name can be optionally without a name, then it is taken to be a label. I.e., starting a code chunk with

<<split=FALSE, hello>>

gives a syntax error. Having an unnamed first argument for labels is needed for noweb compatibility. If only \SweaveOpts is used for setting options, then Sweave files can be written to be fully compatible with noweb (as only file names appear in code chunk names).

Note that split=TRUE should not be used in package vignettes.

The help pages for RweaveLatex and Rtangle list the options supported by the default Sweave and Stangle drivers.

Now for the promised details on the file names corresponding to figures. These are of the form prefix-label.ext. Here prefix can be set by the option prefix.string, otherwise is the basename of the output file (which unless specified otherwise is the basename of the input file). label is the label of the code chunk if it has one, otherwise the number of the code chunk in the range 001 to 999. ext is the appropriate extension for the type of graphics, e.g. pdf, eps, So for the example-1.Rnw file, the PDF version of the boxplot is example-1-002.pdf, since it is the second code chunk in the document. Note that if prefix.string is used it can specify a directory as part of the prefix, so that for example if \SweaveOpts{prefix.string=figures/fig}, the auto-generated figures will be placed in sub-directory figures: the Sweave document should arrange to create this before use.

3.3 Using multiple input files

LATEX files can include others via \input{} commands. These can also be used in Sweave files, but the included files will be included by LATEX and are not processed by Sweave. The equivalent if you want the included files to be processed is the \SweaveInput{} command.

Included files should use the same Sweave syntax (see below) and encoding as the main file.

3.4 Using scalars in text

There is limited support for using the values of R objects in text chunks. Any occurrence of \Sexpr{expr} is replaced by the string resulting from coercing the value of the expression expr to a character vector; only the first element of this vector is used. E.g., 3 will be replaced by the string '3' (without any quotes).

The expression is evaluated in the same environment as the code chunks, hence one can access all objects defined in the code chunks which have appeared before the expression and were evaluated. The expression may contain any valid R code, only braces ({ }) are not allowed. (This is not really a limitation because more complicated computations can be easily done in a hidden code chunk and the result then be used inside a \Sexpr.)

3.5 Code chunk reuse

Named code chunks can be reused in other code chunks following later in the document. Consider the simple example

```
<<a>>= x <- 10 @  
<<b>= x + y @  
<<c>>= <<a>> y <- 20 <<b>><b>> </a>
```

which is equivalent to defining the last code chunk as

```
<<c>>=
x <- 10
y <- 20
x + y
@
```

The chunk reference operator <>>> takes only the name of the chunk as its argument: no additional Sweave options are allowed. It has to occur at the beginning of a line.

References to unknown chunk names are omitted, with a warning.

3.6 Syntax definition

So far we have only talked about Sweave files using noweb syntax (which is the default). However, Sweave allows the user to redefine the syntax marking documentation and code chunks, using scalars in text or reuse code chunks.

Figure 4 shows the example from Figure 1 using the SweaveSyntaxLatex definition. It can be created using

```
\documentclass[a4paper]{article}
\title{Sweave Example 1}
\author{Friedrich Leisch}
\begin{document}
\maketitle
In this example we embed parts of the examples from the
\texttt{kruskal.test} help page into a \LaTeX{} document:
\begin{Scode}{}
data(airquality, package="datasets")
library("stats")
kruskal.test(Ozone ~ Month, data = airquality)
\end{Scode}
which shows that the location parameter of the Ozone
distribution varies significantly from month to month. Finally we
include a boxplot of the data:
\begin{center}
\begin{Scode}{fig=TRUE,echo=FALSE}
library("graphics")
boxplot(Ozone ~ Month, data = airquality)
\end{Scode}
\end{center}
\end{document}
```

Figure 4: An Sweave file using LATEX syntax: example-1.Stex.

> SweaveSyntConv(rnwfile, SweaveSyntaxLatex)

Wrote file example-1.Stex

Code chunks are now enclosed in Scode environments, code chunk reuse is performed using \Scoderef{chunkname}. All other operators are the same as in the noweb-style syntax.

Which syntax is used for a document is determined by the extension of the input file, files with extension² .Rtex or .Stex are assumed to follow the LATEX-style syntax. Alternatively the syntax can be changed at any point within the document using the commands

\SweaveSyntax{SweaveSyntaxLatex}

or

\SweaveSyntax{SweaveSyntaxNoweb}

at the beginning of a line within a documentation chunk. Syntax definitions are simply lists of regular expression for several Sweave commands: see the two default definitions mentioned above for examples. (More detailed instructions will follow once the API has stabilized).

3.7 Encoding

LATEX documents are normally written entirely in ASCII, using LATEX escapes such as \'e for accented characters. This can be inconvenient when writing a non-English document, and an alternative input encoding can be selected by using a statement such as

\usepackage[latin1]{inputenc}

in the document's preamble, to tell LATEX to translate the input to its own escapes. There is a wide range of input encodings which are supported, at least partially, and the more recent LATEX package inputenx supports more. Other encodings commonly encountered in Sweave documents are latin9, utf8 (but that only covers a subset of UTF-8, larger with inputenx than inputenc) and ansinew (the CP1252 codepage on Windows).

The previous paragraph covered the documentation sections, but what of the code sections where LaTeX escapes cannot be used? The first piece of advice is to use only ASCII code sections as anything else will reduce the portability of your document. But R code can be included if in the input encoding declared in the preamble.

The next complication is inclusions: the final vignette may well include R output, \LaTeX or other Sweave files $via \in \S$ and <caption> and <caption> lines, a bibliography and figures. It is the user's responsibility that the text inclusions are covered by the declared input encoding. \LaTeX allows the input encoding to be changed by

\inputencoding{something}

statements: these may not work well in Sweave processing.

It is all too easy for BiBTeX to pick up UTF-8-encoded references for a Latin-1 document, or vice versa

R output is again to a large extent under the user's control. If a Latin-1 Sweave document is processed by R running a Latin-1 locale or a UTF-8 document is processed in a UTF-8 locale, the only problems which are likely to arise are from handling data in another encoding, but it may be necessary to declare the document's encoding to cover the R output which is generated even if the document is itself ASCII. One common problem is the quotes produced by \sQuote() and \dQuote(): these will be in UTF-8 when R is run in a UTF-8 locale,

 $^{^2\}mathrm{or}$ the lower case versions, for convenience on case-insensitive file systems.

and will be in CP1252 when Sweave is run from Rgui.exe on Windows. Two possible solutions are to suppress fancy quotes by options(useFancyQuotes=FALSE) or to force UTF-8 by options(useFancyQuotes="UTF-8").

The encoding of figures is not usually an issue as they are either bitmaps or include encoding information: it may be necessary to use the pdf.encoding Sweave option to set the pdf() device up appropriately.

Handling non-ASCII vignettes is a work in progress: they do not work well before R 2.13.0.

4 Tangling and weaving

The user front-ends of the Sweave system are the two R functions Stangle() and Sweave(), both are contained in package utils. Stangle can be used to extract only the code chunks from an .Rnw file and write to one or several files. Sweave() runs the code chunks through R and replaces them with the respective input and/or output. Stangle is actually just a wrapper function for Sweave, which uses a tangling instead of a weaving driver by default. See

> help("Sweave")

for more details and arguments of the functions.

4.1 The RweaveLatex driver

This driver transforms .Rnw files with LATEX documentation chunks and R code chunks to proper LATEX files (for typesetting both with standard latex or pdflatex), see

> help("RweaveLatex")

for details, including the supported options.

4.1.1 Writing to separate files

If split is set to TRUE, then all text corresponding to code chunks (the Sinput and Soutput environments) is written to separate files. The file names are of form prefix.string-label.tex, if several code chunks have the same label, their outputs are concatenated. If a code chunk has no label, then the number of the chunk is used instead. The same naming scheme applies to figures. You do need to ensure that the file names generated are valid and not so long that there are not regarded as the same by your OS (some file systems only recognize 13 characters).

4.1.2 LATEX style file

The driver automatically inserts a \usepackage{Sweave.sty} command as last line before the \usepackage{document} statement of the final LATEX file if no \usepackage{Sweave} is found in the Sweave source file. This style file defines the environments Sinput and Soutput for typesetting code chunks. If you do not want to include the standard style file, e.g., because you have your own definitions for Sinput and Soutput environments in a different place, simply insert a comment like

% \usepackage{Sweave}

in the preamble of your latex file, this will prevent automatic insertion of the line.

4.1.3 Figure sizes

Sweave.sty sets the default $\underline{P}T\underline{E}X$ figure width (which is independent of the size of the generated EPS or PDF files). The current default is

```
\setkeys{Gin}{width=0.8\textwidth}
```

if you want to use another width for the figures that are automatically generated and included by Sweave, simply add a line similar to the one above *after* \begin{document}. If you want no default width for figures insert a \usepackage[nogin]{Sweave} in the header of your file. Note that a new graphics device is opened for each figure chunk (one with option fig=TRUE), hence all graphical parameters of the par() command must be set in each single figure chunk and are forgotten after the respective chunk (because the device is closed when leaving the chunk).

Attention: One thing that gets easily confused are the width/height parameters of the R graphics devices and the corresponding arguments to the IATEX \includegraphics command. The Sweave options width and height are passed to the R graphics devices, and hence affect the default size of the produced EPS and PDF files. They do not affect the size of figures in the document, by default they will always be 80% of the current text width. Use \setkeys{Gin} to modify figure sizes or use explicit \includegraphics commands in combination with the Sweave option include=FALSE.

4.1.4 Prompts and text width

By default the driver gets the prompts used for input lines and continuation lines from R's options() settings. To set new prompts use something like

```
options(prompt = "MyR> ", continue = "...")
```

see help(options) for details. Similarly the output text width is controlled by option "width".

4.1.5 Graphics devices

The default graphics device for fig=TRUE chunks is pdf(): the standard options pdf, eps, png and jpg³ allow one or more of these to be selected for a particular chunk or (via \SweaveOpts) for the whole document. It can be convenient to select PNG for a particular figure chunk by something like <<figN, fig=TRUE, pdf=FALSE, png=TRUE>>: pdflatex should automatically include the PNG file for that chunk.

You can define your own graphics devices⁴ and select one of them by the option grdevice=my.Swd where the device function (here my.Swd) is defined in a hidden code chunk. For example, we could make use of the cairo_pdf device by

Specialized custom graphics devices may need a customized way to shut them down in place of graphics.off(): this can be supplied⁵ via a companion function my.Swd.off, which is called with no arguments.

³the latter two available only from R 2.13.0.

⁴in R 2.13.0 and later.

 $^{^5 \}mathrm{from} \ \mathsf{R} \ 2.13.1$

4.2 The Rtangle driver

This driver can be used to extract R code chunks from a .Rnw file. Code chunks can either be written to one large file or separate files (one for each code chunk). The options split, prefix, and prefix.string have the same defaults and interpretation as for the RweaveLatex driver. Use the standard noweb command line tool notangle if chunks other than R code should be extracted. See

> help("Rtangle")

for details.

Note that split=TRUE rarely makes much sense, as the files produced are often interdependent and need to be run in a particular order, an order which is often not the alphabetical order of the files.

5 Adding Sweave Drivers

Adding drivers is relatively simple by modelling them on 6 the existing RweaveLatex and Rtangle drivers.

An Sweave driver is a function of no arguments which should return a list of five functions:

setup(file, syntax, ...): Set up the driver, e.g. open the output file. Its return value is an object which is passed to the next three functions, and can be updated by the next two. The value should be a list, and contain a component options, a named list of the default settings for the options needed by runcode.

runcode(object, chunk, options): Process a code chunk. Returns a possibly updated object. Argument chunk is a character vector, and options is a options list for this chunk.

writedoc(object, chunk): Write out a documentation chunk. Returns a possibly updated object.

finish(object, error): Finish up, or clean up if error is true.

checkopts(options): Converts/validates options given as a named list of character strings.

Note that the setup function should have a ... argument. It will be passed additional arguments from a Sweave() call, but in future Sweave may itself set options and pass them on the setup function: one such may be the encoding used for the text to be processed.

References

Knuth DE (1984). "Literate Programming." The Computer Journal, 27(2), 97-111.

Leisch F (2002). "Sweave: Dynamic Generation of Statistical Reports Using Literate Data Analysis." In W Härdle, B Rönz (eds.), *Compstat 2002 — Proceedings in Computational Statistics*, pp. 575–580. Physica Verlag, Heidelberg. ISBN 3-7908-1517-9, URL http://www.stat.uni-muenchen.de/~leisch/Sweave.

Ramsey N (1998). *Noweb man page*. University of Virginia, USA. Version 2.9a, URL http://www.cs.virginia.edu/~nr/noweb.

 $^{^6}$ but if you copy, **do** be careful not to infringe R-core's copyright: the copyright notices in the R sources **must** also be copied.

A Frequently Asked Questions

A.1 How can I get Emacs to automatically recognize files in Sweave format?

Recent versions of ESS (Emacs speaks statistics, http://ess.R-project.org) automatically recognize files with extension .Rnw as Sweave files and turn on the correct modes. Please follow the instructions on the ESS homepage on how to install ESS on your computer.

A.2 Can I run Sweave directly from a shell?

E.g., for writing makefiles it can be useful to run Sweave directly from a shell rather than manually starting R and then running Sweave. This can easily be done using

R CMD Sweave file.Rnw

A.3 Why does LATEX not find my EPS and PDF graphic files when the file name contains a dot?

Sweave uses the standard LaTeX package graphicx to handle graphic files, which automatically chooses the type of file, provided the basename given in the \includegraphics{} statement has no extension. Hence, you may run into trouble with graphics handling if the basename of your Sweave file contains dots: 'foo.Rnw' is OK, while 'foo.bar.Rnw' is not.

A.4 Empty figure chunks give LATEX errors.

When a code chunk with fig=TRUE does not call any plotting functions invalid EPS and PDF files are created. Sweave cannot know if the code in a figure chunk actually plotted something or not, so it will try to include the graphics, which is bound to fail.

A.5 Why do R lattice graphics not work?

The commands in package lattice have different behavior than the standard plot commands in the base package: lattice commands return an object of class "trellis", the actual plotting is performed by the print method for the class. Encapsulating calls to lattice functions in print() statements should do the trick, e.g.:

```
<<fig=TRUE>>=
library(lattice)
print(bwplot(1:10))
```

should work. Future versions of Sweave may have more automated means to deal with trellis graphics.

A.6 How can I get Black & White lattice graphics?

What is the most elegant way to specify that strip panels are to have transparent backgrounds and graphs are to be in black and white when lattice is being used with Sweave? I would prefer a global option that stays in effect for multiple plots.

Answer by Deepayan Sarkar: I'd do something like this as part of the initialization:

```
<<...>>
library(lattice)
ltheme <- canonical.theme(color = FALSE) ## in-built B&W theme
```

```
ltheme$strip.background$col <- "transparent" ## change strip bg
lattice.options(default.theme = ltheme) ## set as default
@</pre>
```

A.7 Creating several figures from one figure chunk does not work

Consider that you want to create several graphs in a loop similar to

```
<<fig=TRUE>>
for (i in 1:4) plot(rnorm(100)+i)
ø
```

This will currently **not** work, because Sweave allows **only one graph** per figure chunk. The simple reason is that Sweave opens a **pdf** device before executing the code and closes it afterwards. If you need to plot in a loop, you have to program it along the lines of

```
<<results=tex,echo=FALSE>>=
for(i in 1:4){
   fnfile <- paste("myfile", i, ".pdf", sep = "")
   pdf(file = fn, width = 6, height = 6)
   plot(rnorm(100)+i)
   dev.off()
   cat("\\includegraphics{", fn, "}\n\n", sep = "")
}
@</pre>
```

A.8 How can I set default par() settings for figure chunks?

Because Sweave opens a new device for each graphics file in each figure chunk, using par() has only an effect if it is used inside a figure chunk. If you want to use the same settings for a series of figures, it is easier to use a hook function than repeating the same par() statement in each figure chunk.

```
The effect of
```

```
options(SweaveHooks = list(fig = function() par(bg = "red", fg = "blue")))
```

should be easy to spot.

A.9 How can I change the formatting of R input and output chunks?

Sweave uses the fancyvrb package for formatting all R code and text output. fancyvrb is a very powerful and flexible package that allows fine control for layouting text in verbatim environments. If you want to change the default layout, simply read the fancyvrb documentation and modify the definitions of the Sinput and Soutput environments in 'Sweave.sty', respectively.

A.10 How can I change the line length of R input and output?

Sweave respects the usual way of specifying the desired line length in R, namely options(width). E.g., after options(width = 40) lines will be formatted to have at most 40 characters (if possible).

A.11 Can I use Sweave for Word files?

Not directly, but package SWord provides similar functionality for Microsoft Word on Windows platforms.

A.12 Can I use Sweave for OpenOffice files?

Yes, package odfWeave provides functions for using Sweave in combination with OpenOffice Writer rather than LATEX.

A.13 Can I use Sweave for HTML files?

Yes, package R2HTML provides a driver for using Sweave in combination with HTML rather than LATEX.

A.14 After loading package R2HTML Sweave doesn't work properly!

Package R2HTML registers an Sweave driver for HTML files using the same file extensions as the default noweb syntax, and after that its syntax is on the search list before the default syntax. Using

```
options(SweaveSyntax = "SweaveSyntaxNoweb")
or calling Sweave like
  Sweave(..., syntax = "SweaveSyntaxNoweb")
ensures the default syntax even after loading package R2HTML.
```

A.15 Why does Sweave delete all comments from the R code? Why does it mess up line breaks for continuation lines?

Sweave runs all code through the R parser. The "input lines" you see are the result from running the code through parse() and deparse(), which by default discards all comments and reformats line breaks. If you want to keep the code as it is in the source file, use

```
\SweaveOpts{keep.source=TRUE}
```

This will become the default in R 2.14.0.

A.16 'Sweave executes figure chunks twice'

Or variations on this, as in https://stat.ethz.ch/pipermail/r-help/2011-April/275198.

Currently Sweave runs every code chunk once (unless option eval=FALSE). For figure chunks it then runs the chunk once more for each graphics device selected, so by default figure chunks are run twice, once like any other chunk and once to produce the PDF figure.

This can cause problems if figure chunks produce output or have side effects, so it is good practice to use figure chunks purely to produce the figure.

Option figs.only = TRUE changes this behaviour, so figure chunks are only run for the selected graphics device(s). This will become the default in R 2.14.0.