

Doconce: Document Once, Include Anywhere

Author: Hans Petter Langtangen

Date: August 25, 2010

If any of these questions are of interest, you should keep on reading.

The Doconce Concept

Doconce is two things:

1. Doconce is a working strategy for documenting software in a single place and avoiding duplication of information. The slogan is: “Write once, include anywhere”. This requires that what you write can be transformed to many different formats for a variety of documents (manuals, tutorials, books, doc strings, source code documentation, etc.).
2. Doconce is a simple and minimally tagged markup language that can be used for the above purpose. That is, the Doconce format look like ordinary ASCII text (much like what you would use in an email), but the text can be transformed to numerous other formats, including HTML, Wiki, LaTeX, PDF, reStructuredText (reST), Sphinx, Epytext, and also plain text (where non-obvious formatting/tags are removed for clear reading in, e.g., emails). From reStructuredText you can go to XML, HTML, LaTeX, PDF, OpenOffice, and from the latter to RTF and MS Word.

Doconce was particularly written for the following sample applications:

- Large books written in LaTeX, but where many pieces (computer demos, projects, examples) can be written in Doconce to appear in other contexts in other formats, including plain HTML, Sphinx, or MS Word.
- Software documentation, primarily Python doc strings, which one wants to appear as plain untagged text for viewing in Pydoc, as reStructuredText for use with Sphinx, as wiki text when publishing the software at googlecode.com, and as LaTeX integrated in, e.g., a master’s thesis.
- Quick memos, which start as plain text in email, then some small amount of Doconce tagging is added, before the memos can appear as MS Word documents or in wikis.

What Does Doconce Look Like?

Doconce text looks like ordinary text, but there are some almost invisible text constructions that allow you to control the forming. For example,

- bullet lists arise from lines starting with an asterisk,
- *emphasized words* are surrounded by asterisks,

- **words in boldface** are surrounded by underscores,
- words from computer code are enclosed in back quotes and then typeset verbatim,
- blocks of computer code can easily be included, also from source files,
- blocks of LaTeX mathematics can easily be included,
- there is support for both LaTeX and text-like inline mathematics,
- figures with captions, URLs with links, labels and references are supported,
- comments can be inserted throughout the text,
- a preprocessor (much like the C preprocessor) is integrated so other documents (files) can be included and large portions of text can be defined in or out of the text.

Here is an example of some simple text written in the Doconce format:

```
===== A Subsection with Sample Text =====
label{my:first:sec}
```

Ordinary text looks like ordinary text, and the tags used for `_boldface_` words, `*emphasized*` words, and `'computer'` words look natural in plain text. Lists are typeset as you would do in an email,

- * item 1
- * item 2
- * item 3

Lists can also have automatically numbered items instead of bullets,

- o item 1
- o item 2
- o item 3

URLs with a link word are possible, as in `http://folk.uio.no/hpl<hpl>`. Just a file link goes like `URL:"tutorial.do.txt"`. References to sections may use logical names as labels (e.g., a `"label"` command right after the section title), as in the reference to Chapter `ref{my:first:sec}`.

Tables are also supported, e.g.,

time	velocity	acceleration
0.0	1.4186	-5.01
2.0	1.376512	11.919
4.0	1.1E+1	14.717624

The Doconce text above results in the following little document:

A Subsection with Sample Text

Ordinary text looks like ordinary text, and the tags used for **boldface** words, *emphasized* words, and `computer` words look natural in plain text. Lists are typeset as you would do in an email,

- item 1
- item 2
- item 3

Lists can also have numbered items instead of bullets, just use an `o` (for ordered) instead of the asterisk:

1. item 1
2. item 2
3. item 3

URLs with a link word are possible, as in [hpl](#). Just a file link goes like [tutorial.do.txt](#). References to sections may use logical names as labels (e.g., a “label” command right after the section title), as in the reference to the chapter `ref{my:first:sec}`.

Tables are also supported, e.g.,

time	velocity	acceleration
0.0	1.4186	-5.01
2.0	1.376512	11.919
4.0	1.1E+1	14.717624

Mathematics and Computer Code

Inline mathematics, such as $v = \sin(x)$, allows the formula to be specified both as LaTeX and as plain text. This results in a professional LaTeX typesetting, but in other formats the text version normally looks better than raw LaTeX mathematics with backslashes. An inline formula like $v = \sin(x)$ is typeset as:

$$\nu = \sin(x) \mid v = \sin(x)$$

The pipe symbol acts as a delimiter between LaTeX code and the plain text version of the formula.

Blocks of mathematics are better typeset with raw LaTeX, inside `!bt` and `!et` (`begin tex / end tex`) instructions. The result looks like this:

```
\begin{eqnarray}
\{\partial u \over \partial t\} \&\& \nabla^2 u + f, \label{myeq1} \\
\{\partial v \over \partial t\} \&\& \nabla \cdot (q(u) \nabla v) + g
\end{eqnarray}
```

Of course, such blocks only looks nice in LaTeX. The raw LaTeX syntax appears in all other formats (but can still be useful for those who can read LaTeX syntax).

You can have blocks of computer code, starting and ending with `!bc` and `!ec` instructions, respectively. Such blocks look like:

```

from math import sin, pi
def myfunc(x):
    return sin(pi*x)

import integrate
I = integrate.trapezoidal(myfunc, 0, pi, 100)

```

One can also copy computer code directly from files, either the complete file or specified parts. Computer code is then never duplicated in the documentation (important for the principle of avoiding copying information!).

Another document can be included by writing `#include "mynote.do.txt"` on a line starting with (another) hash sign. Doconce documents have extension `do.txt`. The `do` part stands for doconce, while the trailing `.txt` denotes a text document so that editors gives you the right writing enviroment for plain text.

Macros (Newcommands), Cross-References, Index, and Bibliography

Doconce supports a type of macros via a LaTeX-style *newcommand* construction. The newcommands defined in a file with name `newcommand_replace.tex` are expanded when Doconce is filtered to other formats, except for LaTeX (since LaTeX performs the expansion itself). Newcommands in files with names `newcommands.tex` and `newcommands_keep.tex` are kept unaltered when Doconce text is filtered to other formats, except for the Sphinx format. Since Sphinx understands LaTeX math, but not newcommands if the Sphinx output is HTML, it makes most sense to expand all newcommands. Normally, a user will put all newcommands that appear in math blocks surrounded by `!bt` and `!et` in `newcommands_keep.tex` to keep them unchanged, at least if they contribute to make the raw LaTeX math text easier to read in the formats that cannot render LaTeX. Newcommands used elsewhere throughout the text will usually be placed in `newcommands_replace.tex` and expanded by Doconce. The definitions of newcommands in the `newcommands*.tex` files *must* appear on a single line (multi-line newcommands are too hard to parse with regular expressions).

Recent versions of Doconce also offer cross referencing, typically one can define labels below (sub)sections, in figure captions, or in equations, and then refer to these later. Entries in an index can be defined and result in an index at the end for the LaTeX and Sphinx formats. Citations to literature, with an accompanying bibliography in a file, are also supported. The syntax of labels, references, citations, and the bibliography closely resembles that of LaTeX, making it easy for Doconce documents to be integrated in LaTeX projects (manuals, books). For further details on functionality and syntax we refer to the `docs/manual/manual.do.txt` file (see the [demo page](#) for various formats of this document).

From Doconce to Other Formats

Transformation of a Doconce document to various other formats applies the script `doconce2format`:

```

Unix/DOS> doconce2format format mydoc.do.txt

```

The preprocess program is always used to preprocess the file first, and options to preprocess can be added after the filename. For example:

```
Unix/DOS> doconce2format LaTeX mydoc.do.txt -Dextra_sections
```

The variable `FORMAT` is always defined as the current format when running `preprocess`. That is, in the last example, `FORMAT` is defined as `LaTeX`. Inside the Doconce document one can then perform format specific actions through tests like `#if FORMAT == "LaTeX"`.

HTML

Making an HTML version of a Doconce file `mydoc.do.txt` is performed by:

```
Unix/DOS> doconce2format HTML mydoc.do.txt
```

The resulting file `mydoc.html` can be loaded into any web browser for viewing.

LaTeX

Making a LaTeX file `mydoc.tex` from `mydoc.do.txt` is done in two steps: .. Note: putting code blocks inside a list is not successful in many .. formats - the text may be messed up. A better choice is a paragraph .. environment, as used here.

Step 1. Filter the doconce text to a pre-LaTeX form `mydoc.p.tex` for `ptex2tex`:

```
Unix/DOS> doconce2format LaTeX mydoc.do.txt
```

LaTeX-specific commands (“newcommands”) in math formulas and similar can be placed in a file `newcommands.tex`. If this file is present, it is included in the LaTeX document so that your commands are defined.

Step 2. Run `ptex2tex` (if you have it) to make a standard LaTeX file:

```
Unix/DOS> ptex2tex mydoc
```

or just perform a plain copy:

```
Unix/DOS> cp mydoc.p.tex mydoc.tex
```

The `ptex2tex` tool makes it possible to easily switch between many different fancy formatings of computer or verbatim code in LaTeX documents. Finally, compile `mydoc.tex` the usual way and create the PDF file:

```
Unix/DOS> latex mydoc
Unix/DOS> latex mydoc
Unix/DOS> makeindex mydoc    # if index
Unix/DOS> bibitem mydoc      # if bibliography
Unix/DOS> latex mydoc
Unix/DOS> dvipdf mydoc
```

Plain ASCII Text

We can go from Doconce “back to” plain untagged text suitable for viewing in terminal windows, inclusion in email text, or for insertion in computer source code:

```
Unix/DOS> doconce2format plain mydoc.do.txt # results in mydoc.txt
```

reStructuredText

Going from Doconce to reStructuredText gives a lot of possibilities to go to other formats. First we filter the Doconce text to a reStructuredText file `mydoc.rst`:

```
Unix/DOS> doconce2format rst mydoc.do.txt
```

We may now produce various other formats:

```
Unix/DOS> rst2html.py mydoc.rst > mydoc.html # HTML
Unix/DOS> rst2latex.py mydoc.rst > mydoc.tex # LaTeX
Unix/DOS> rst2xml.py mydoc.rst > mydoc.xml # XML
Unix/DOS> rst2odt.py mydoc.rst > mydoc.odt # OpenOffice
```

The OpenOffice file `mydoc.odt` can be loaded into OpenOffice and saved in, among other things, the RTF format or the Microsoft Word format. That is, one can easily go from Doconce to Microsoft Word.

Sphinx

Sphinx documents can be created from a Doconce source in a few steps.

Step 1. Translate Doconce into the Sphinx dialect of the reStructuredText format:

```
Unix/DOS> doconce2format sphinx mydoc.do.txt
```

Step 2. Create a Sphinx root directory with a `conf.py` file, either manually or by using the interactive `sphinx-quickstart` program. Here is a scripted version of the steps with the latter:

```
mkdir sphinx-rootdir
sphinx-quickstart <<EOF
sphinx-rootdir
n
—
Name of My Sphinx Document
Author
version
version
.rst
index
n
Y
n
n
n
n
Y
n
n
Y
Y
Y
EOF
```

Step 3. Move the `tutorial.rst` file to the Sphinx root directory:

```
Unix/DOS> mv mydoc.rst sphinx-rootdir
```

If you have figures in your document, the relative paths to those will be invalid when you work with `mydoc.rst` in the `sphinx-rootdir` directory. Either edit `mydoc.rst` so that figure file paths are correct, or simply copy your figure directory to `sphinx-rootdir` (if all figures are located in a subdirectory).

Step 4. Edit the generated `index.rst` file so that `mydoc.rst` is included, i.e., add `mydoc` to the `toctree` section so that it becomes:

```
.. toctree::
   :maxdepth: 2

   mydoc
```

(The spaces before `mydoc` are important!)

Step 5. Generate, for instance, an HTML version of the Sphinx source:

```
make clean    # remove old versions
make html
```

Many other formats are also possible.

Step 6. View the result:

```
Unix/DOS> firefox _build/html/index.html
```

Google Code Wiki

There are several different wiki dialects, but Doconce only support the one used by [Google Code](#). The transformation to this format, called `gwiki` to explicitly mark it as the Google Code dialect, is done by:

```
Unix/DOS> doconce2format gwiki mydoc.do.txt
```

You can then open a new wiki page for your Google Code project, copy the `mydoc.gwiki` output file from `doconce2format` and paste the file contents into the wiki page. Press **Preview** or **Save Page** to see the formatted result.

Demos

The current text is generated from a Doconce format stored in the file:

```
docs/tutorial/tutorial.do.txt
```

The file `make.sh` in the `tutorial` directory of the Doconce source code contains a demo of how to produce a variety of formats. The source of this tutorial, `tutorial.do.txt` is the starting point. Running `make.sh` and studying the various generated files and comparing them with the original `tutorial.do.txt` file, gives a quick introduction to how Doconce is used in a real case. [Here](#) is a sample of how this tutorial looks in different formats.

There is another demo in the `docs/manual` directory which translates the more comprehensive documentation, `manual.do.txt`, to various formats. The `make.sh` script runs a set of translations.

Dependencies

Doconce depends on the Python package [preprocess](#). To make LaTeX documents (without going through the reStructuredText format) you also need [ptex2tex](#) and some style files that ptex2tex potentially makes use of. Going from reStructuredText to formats such as XML, OpenOffice, HTML, and LaTeX requires [docutils](#). Making Sphinx documents requires of course [sphinx](#).

The Doconce Documentation Strategy for User Manuals

Doconce was particularly made for writing tutorials or user manuals associated with computer codes. The text is written in Doconce format in separate files. LaTeX, HTML, XML, and other versions of the text is easily produced by the `doconce2format` script and standard tools. A plain text version is often wanted for the computer source code, this is easy to make, and then one can use `#include` statements in the computer source code to automatically get the manual or tutorial text in comments or doc strings. Below is a worked example.

Consider an example involving a Python module in a `basename.p.py` file. The `.p.py` extension identifies this as a file that has to be preprocessed) by the `preprocess` program. In a doc string in `basename.p.py` we do a preprocessor include in a comment line, say:

```
#      #include "docstrings/doc1.dst.txt"
```

The file `docstrings/doc1.dst.txt` is a file filtered to a specific format (typically plain text, reStructuredText, or Epytext) from an original “singleton” documentation file named `docstrings/doc1.do.txt`. The `.dst.txt` is the extension of a file filtered ready for being included in a doc string (d for doc, st for string).

For making an Epydoc manual, the `docstrings/doc1.do.txt` file is filtered to `docstrings/doc1.epytext` and renamed to `docstrings/doc1.dst.txt`. Then we run the preprocessor on the `basename.p.py` file and create a real Python file `basename.py`. Finally, we run Epydoc on this file. Alternatively, and nowadays preferably, we use Sphinx for API documentation and then the Doconce `docstrings/doc1.do.txt` file is filtered to `docstrings/doc1.rst` and renamed to `docstrings/doc1.dst.txt`. A Sphinx directory must have been made with the right `index.rst` and `conf.py` files. Going to this directory and typing `make html` makes the HTML version of the Sphinx API documentation.

The next step is to produce the final pure Python source code. For this purpose we filter `docstrings/doc1.do.txt` to plain text format (`docstrings/doc1.txt`) and rename to `docstrings/doc1.dst.txt`. The preprocessor transforms the `basename.p.py` file to a standard Python file `basename.py`. The doc strings are now in plain text and well suited for Pydoc or reading by humans. All these steps are automated by the `insertdocstr.py` script. Here are the corresponding Unix commands:

```
# make Epydoc API manual of basename module:
cd docstrings
doconce2format epytext doc1.do.txt
mv doc1.epytext doc1.dst.txt
cd ..
preprocess basename.p.py > basename.py
```



```

epydoc basename

# make Sphinx API manual of basename module:
cd doc
doconce2format sphinx doc1.do.txt
mv doc1.rst doc1.dst.txt
cd ..
preprocess basename.p.py > basename.py
cd docstrings/sphinx-rootdir # sphinx directory for API source
make clean
make html
cd ../..

# make ordinary Python module files with doc strings:
cd docstrings
doconce2format plain doc1.do.txt
mv doc1.txt doc1.dst.txt
cd ..
preprocess basename.p.py > basename.py

# can automate inserting doc strings in all .p.py files:
insertdocstr.py plain .
# (runs through all .do.txt files and filters them to plain format and
# renames to .dst.txt extension, then the script runs through all
# .p.py files and runs the preprocessor, which includes the .dst.txt
# files)

```

Warning/Disclaimer

Doconce can be viewed as a unified interface to a variety of typesetting formats. This interface is minimal in the sense that a lot of typesetting features are not supported, for example, footnotes and bibliography. For many documents the simple Doconce format is sufficient, while in other cases you need more sophisticated formats. Then you can just filter the Doconce text to a more appropriate format and continue working in this format only. For example, reStructuredText is a good alternative: it is more tagged than Doconce and cannot be filtered to plain, untagged text, or wiki, and the LaTeX output is not at all as clean, but it also has a lot more typesetting and tagging features than Doconce.