format file   **1**

format file.   A *format file* is a file that contains an image of T_EX's
memory in a form in which it can be reloaded quickly. A format file can
be created with the `\dump` command (p. '`\dump`'). The image contains a
complete record of the definitions (of fonts, macros, etc.) that were present
when the dump took place. By using `virtex`, a special "virgin" form of
T_EX, you can then reload the format file at high speed and continue in the
same state that T_EX was in at the time of the dump. The advantage of a
format file over an ordinary input file containing the same information is
that T_EX can load it much faster.

Format files can only be created by `initex`, another special form of
T_EX intended just for that purpose. Neither `virtex` nor `initex` has any
facilities other than the primitives built into the T_EX program itself.

A preloaded form of T_EX is one that has a format file already loaded
and is ready to accept user input. The form of T_EX that's called `tex` often
has the plain T_EX definitions preloaded. (Plain T_EX is ordinarily available
in two other forms as well: as a format file and as a T_EX source file. In
some environments, `tex` is equivalent to calling `virtex` and then loading
`plain`.) Creating preloaded forms of T_EX requires a special program; it
cannot be done using only the facilities of T_EX itself.