

*format file*

1

**format file.** A *format file* is a file that contains an image of T<sub>E</sub>X'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<sub>E</sub>X, you can then reload the format file at high speed and continue in the same state that T<sub>E</sub>X 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<sub>E</sub>X can load it much faster.

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

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