

*active character*

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**active character.** An *active character* is a character that has a definition, e.g., a macro definition, associated with it. You can think of an active character as a special kind of control sequence. When T<sub>E</sub>X encounters an active character, it executes the definition associated with the character. If T<sub>E</sub>X encounters an active character that does not have an associated definition, it will complain about an undefined control sequence.

An active character has a category code of 13 (the value of `\active`). To define an active character, you should first use the `\catcode` command (p. ‘`\catcode`’) to make it active and then provide the definition of the character, using a command such as `\def`, `\let`, or `\chardef`. The definition of an active character has the same form as the definition of a control sequence. If you try to define the macro for an active character before you make the character active, T<sub>E</sub>X will complain about a missing control sequence.

For example, the tilde character (~) is defined as an active character in plain T<sub>E</sub>X. It produces a space between two words but links those words so that T<sub>E</sub>X will not turn the space into a line break. Plain T<sub>E</sub>X defines ‘~’ by the commands:

```
\catcode '~ = \active \def~{\penalty10000\ }

```

(The `\penalty` inhibits a line break and the ‘`\` ’ inserts a space.)