# The `chiasm` Package
## Typesetting Chiastic Literary Structures in LaTeX

Jeremy Lloyd Conlin*

January 28, 2026

## Contents

## 1 Introduction

The `chiasm` package provides a specialized environment for typesetting chiastic structures in LaTeX. A chiasmus (plural: chiasmi) is a literary device where concepts or phrases are presented in a sequence and then repeated in reverse order, creating a mirror or symmetric structure. This pattern is common in ancient literature, rhetoric, and religious texts.

---

*This package was developed in collaboration with AI tools.

## 1.1 Features

- Automatic labeling (A, B, C, ..., C', B', A')

- Progressive "staircase" indentation

- Support for nested chiastic structures with prefixed labels (e.g., B.a, B.b)

- Replacement nesting that automatically skips intermediate labels

- Pivot markers for center elements without prime partners

- Customizable indentation step size

# 2 Basic Usage

## 2.1 Simple Chiasm

The most basic chiasm has items that descend and then ascend:

```
\begin{chiasm}
  \item First concept
  \item Second concept
  \chiasmreturn
  \item Second returns
  \item First returns
\end{chiasm}
```

This produces:

**A:** First concept
   **B:** Second concept
   **B':** Second returns
**A':** First returns

## 2.2 The \chiasmreturn Command

The **\chiasmreturn** command marks the transition from the descending phase to the ascending phase. After this command:

- Labels gain a prime mark (')

- Labels appear in reverse order

- Indentation reverses to match the descending phase

# 3 Extended Example

Here's a more complex chiasm showing progressive indentation:

```
\begin{chiasm}
  \item Outermost concept
  \item Second level
  \item Third level
  \item Fourth level (deepest)
  \chiasmreturn
  \item Fourth returns
  \item Third returns
  \item Second returns
  \item Outermost returns
\end{chiasm}
```

Result:

**A:** Outermost concept
  **B:** Second level
    **C:** Third level
      **D:** Fourth level (deepest)
      **D':** Fourth returns
    **C':** Third returns
  **B':** Second returns
**A':** Outermost returns

# 4 Nested Chiasms

## 4.1 Regular Nesting

You can nest chiasms within items. Nested labels are automatically prefixed with the parent label:

```
\begin{chiasm}
  \item Outer A
  \item Outer B
    \begin{chiasm}
      \item Inner a (labeled B.a)
      \item Inner b (labeled B.b)
      \chiasmreturn
      \item Inner b' returns
      \item Inner a' returns
    \end{chiasm}
  \chiasmreturn
  \item Outer B' returns
  \item Outer A' returns
\end{chiasm}
```

Result:

**A:** Outer A
  **B:** Outer B
    **C.a:** Inner a (labeled B.a)
      **C.b:** Inner b (labeled B.b)
      **C.b':** Inner b' returns
    **C.a':** Inner a' returns
  **B':** Outer B' returns
**A':** Outer A' returns

## 4.2 Replacement Nesting

A special feature allows you to start a nested chiasm *without* an \item before it. This automatically creates the next label level and prefixes nested items accordingly, while skipping that label on the return:

```
\begin{chiasm}
  \item A level
  \item B level
  \item C level
  % No \item here - nested chiasm "becomes" D
  \begin{chiasm}
    \item Nested a (labeled D.a)
    \item Nested b (labeled D.b)
    \chiasmreturn
    \item Nested b' returns
    \item Nested a' returns
```

```
  \end{chiasm}
  \chiasmreturn
  \item C' returns (D' is skipped)
  \item B' returns
  \item A' returns
\end{chiasm}
```

Result:
**A:**   A level
  **B:**   B level
    **C:**   C level
      **D.a:** Nested a (labeled D.a)
        **D.b:** Nested b (labeled D.b)
        **D.b':** Nested b' returns
      **D.a':** Nested a' returns
    **C':**   C' returns (D' is skipped)
  **B':**   B' returns
**A':**   A' returns

# 5   Pivot Elements

Sometimes a chiasm has a center element that serves as a pivot point without a corresponding prime element.
Use \chiasmpivot before the center item:

```
\begin{chiasm}
  \item First element
  \item Second element
  \chiasmpivot
  \item CENTER PIVOT (no prime partner)
  \chiasmreturn
  \item Second returns
  \item First returns
\end{chiasm}
```

Result:
**A:**   First element
  **B:**   Second element
    **C:**   CENTER PIVOT (no prime partner)
  **B':**   Second returns
**A':**   First returns

# 6   Package Options

Load the package with optional arguments to customize indentation:

```
\usepackage[smallindent]{chiasm}   % 0.8em per level
\usepackage{chiasm}                % 1.2em per level (default)
\usepackage[largeindent]{chiasm}   % 1.6em per level
```

# 7   Real-World Example

Here's an example from the Book of Helaman, showing a complex nested chiasm:

```
\begin{chiasm}
  \item And behold, there was peace in all the land,
  \item insomuch that the Nephites did go into whatsoever
        part of the land they would...
  \item And it came to pass that they became exceedingly
        rich, both the Lamanites and the Nephites;
  \item and they did have an exceeding plenty of gold...
    \begin{chiasm}
      \item Now the land south
      \item was called Lehi,
      \item and the land north
      \item was called Mulek,
      \item which was after the son of Zedekiah;
      \chiasmreturn
      \item for the Lord
      \item did bring Mulek
      \item into the land north,
      \item and Lehi
      \item into the land south.
    \end{chiasm}
  \chiasmreturn
  \item And behold, there was all manner of gold...
  \item and thus they did become rich.
  \item They did raise grain in abundance...
  \item And thus the sixty and fourth year did pass away
        in peace.
\end{chiasm}
```

Result:

**A:** And behold, there was peace in all the land,

  **B:** insomuch that the Nephites did go into whatsoever part of the land they would, whether among the Nephites or the Lamanites.

    **C:** And it came to pass that they became exceedingly rich, both the Lamanites and the Nephites;

      **D:** and they did have an exceeding plenty of gold, and of silver, and of all manner of precious metals, both in the land south and in the land north.

        **E.a:** Now the land south

        **E.b:** was called Lehi,

          **E.c:** and the land north

            **E.d:** was called Mulek,

              **E.e:** which was after the son of Zedekiah;

              **E.e':** for the Lord

            **E.d':** did bring Mulek

          **E.c':** into the land north,

        **E.b':** and Lehi

        **E.a':** into the land south.

      **D':** And behold, there was all manner of gold in both these lands, and of silver, and of precious ore of every kind;

    **C':** and thus they did become rich.

  **B':** They did raise grain in abundance, both in the north and in the south; and they did flourish exceedingly.

**A':** And thus the sixty and fourth year did pass away in peace.

# 8 Label Formatting

Labels are formatted according to depth:

- Depth 1: Uppercase letters (A, B, C, ...)

- Depth 2: Lowercase letters (a, b, c, ...)

- Depth 3: Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, ...)

- Depth 4+: Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, ...)

Prime marks (') are added to labels on the ascending (return) phase.

# 9 Technical Details

## 9.1 Implementation

The package uses:

- `enumitem` for the underlying list structure

- `xparse` for robust command definitions

- Depth-specific counters (chiasmi, chiasmii, chiasmiii, etc.)

- Dynamic indentation calculations based on position in the chiasm

## 9.2 Limitations

- Maximum nesting depth is 10 levels (can be extended if needed)

- Labels beyond 26 items at depth 1 or 2 will overflow alphabetic sequences

- Complex paragraph formatting within items may require manual adjustment

# 10   License

This package is distributed under the LaTeX Project Public License v1.3c or later.