

Local L^AT_EX and You!

A guide to setting up L^AT_EX on your device

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1 Introduction

L^AT_EX is a high quality typesetting environment designed for creating scientific and technical documents. It is the standard for any of our publications or official scientific communication. Perhaps the easiest and most common way to use L^AT_EX is through Overleaf, an online L^AT_EX environment that includes a bunch of useful features such as the visual editor for first-time L^AT_EX users, and real-time collaboration.

1.1 So why use a local version if Overleaf is this good?

Obviously, Overleaf is amazing and I do not intend to disparage its usage here. But one of the biggest flaws with using Overleaf exclusively is the fact that it is an *online* editor. This means that you need to be constantly connected to the internet to use Overleaf to edit your documents. This means that in cases like power/server outages, or times when you're travelling without an internet connection (say a long flight on the way to a conference), you can't use Overleaf. In such cases, it is good to have a local option to work in L^AT_EX offline. Additionally, depending on the code editor you use to write your local L^AT_EX documents, you may have some nice integrations/shortcuts to exploit.

1.2 The purpose and scope of this writeup

This writeup is mainly intended for L^AT_EX users who are comfortable with using Overleaf for preparing documents. As such, this document will assume basic understanding of the L^AT_EX environment. The remainder of this writeup is split into two sections, namely

- **Installation and Setup:** Talking about how to install and use L^AT_EX locally, and providing some personalization/workflow tips
- **Integrations:** Exploring integrating local L^AT_EX with Overleaf and looking into integrating project code with writeups

1.3 More resources

- The source code for this writeup and the examples shown can be found in the public GitHub repo accessible at [GITHUB]
- Quite a bit of information on the VSCode frontend for L^AT_EX can be found at the site for it <https://github.com/James-Yu/LaTeX-Workshop/wiki>

2 Installation and Setup

2.1 \LaTeX installation

The standard distribution of \LaTeX is TeX Live, which works on most platforms. Detailed instructions can be found here. Windows users may download TeX Live from <https://www.tug.org/texlive/windows.html#install>, Mac users may do so using the MacTeX installer from <https://www.tug.org/mactex/mactex-download.html>, and Linux users can download TeX Live from <https://www.tug.org/texlive/quickinstall.html>. This is technically the only thing you need to install to start using \LaTeX locally, since all of these will also install a front end to edit your \LaTeX documents, as well as install most commonly used packages (I have never needed to manually install packages so far).

You can also use your preferred code editing front end to edit your \LaTeX code. I prefer using VSCode for this purpose, and recommend it due to its easy to use \LaTeX extension and abundance of other useful tools. I will cover this in the following subsection

2.2 Using \LaTeX on VSCode

The first step to this is obviously, downloading VSCode itself. You can do this at <https://code.visualstudio.com/download>. Once VSCode is downloaded, the LaTeX Workshop extension must be installed. This can be done by navigating to the Extensions tab on the sidebar and typing it into the search bar. This is shown below

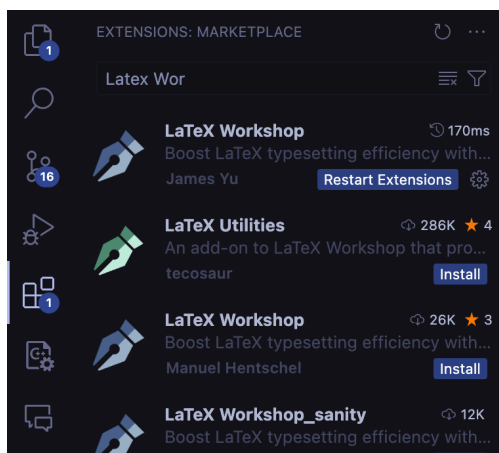


Figure 2.1: The extension you want to install is the topmost one on the search results (the one by James Yu), which I have already installed in this image.

From here, you can simply create TeX files in VSCode by ending a file with the `.tex` extension, and edit and compile them through the build button in the LaTeX Workshop sidebar tab, or the build button on top of the currently open TeX file. You can then use the LaTeX workshop sidebar once more to view the output PDF. Alternatively, you may find the output PDF in your file path and open it to the side in VSCode like you would a secondary tab of code. Nominally, this output PDF is in the same directory as your main TeX file. This is shown in Fig. 2.2

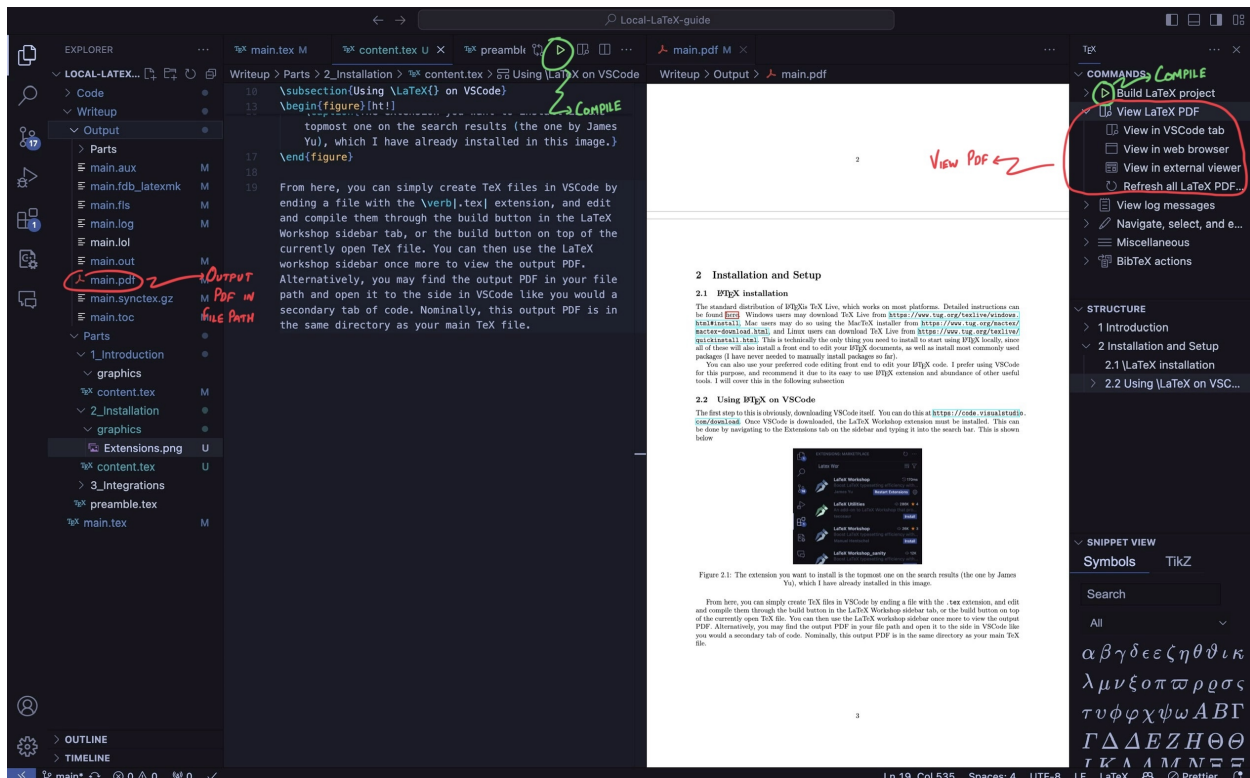


Figure 2.2: Where to find the output pdf and compile button in VSCode. Note that I moved the LaTeX workshop menu to the right sidebar in this picture, and have slightly modified the place where the output files go (more on this in a bit).

2.3 Managing \LaTeX files locally

As can be noticed in Fig. 2.2, there are a few files you probably haven't seen in your days using overleaf. These are the auxiliary files needed to compile the output PDF, and are produced on every compilation. While LaTeX workshop has a pretty tempting cleanup feature for these files, keeping them does help with compilation speed. As such, it is better to put them into some output folder to avoid clutter. The path to which the output and auxiliary files are sent can be edited through the outdir setting for LaTeX Workshop on VSCode, which can be navigated to through the gear icon on the VSCode sidebar. In Fig. 2.3 is how I have set it up, where all output files are sent to an Output folder in the same path as `main.tex`.

Note that apart from this, I have also divided my latex document into individual files, which I am then inputting into the main file using `\input{}`. Especially when dealing with local \LaTeX , this is preferred to `\subfile{}` since the latter will make its own output folder and associated files for each subfile, bloating the project.

To make sure the compiler always compiles main, a magic comment on these inputted subfiles is prudent. Such a comment simply tells the compiler to set the root file to be the main file is. This is given by `% !TeX root = <root file directory>`. The comment can also be inserted through the search bar as in Fig. 2.4 (this method also gives a nifty drop down to select the root file). However, to use this comment, you must also disable forcing recipe usage by typing `"latex-workshop.latex.build.forceRecipeUsage": false`, into the settings.json or setting it in the settings tab.

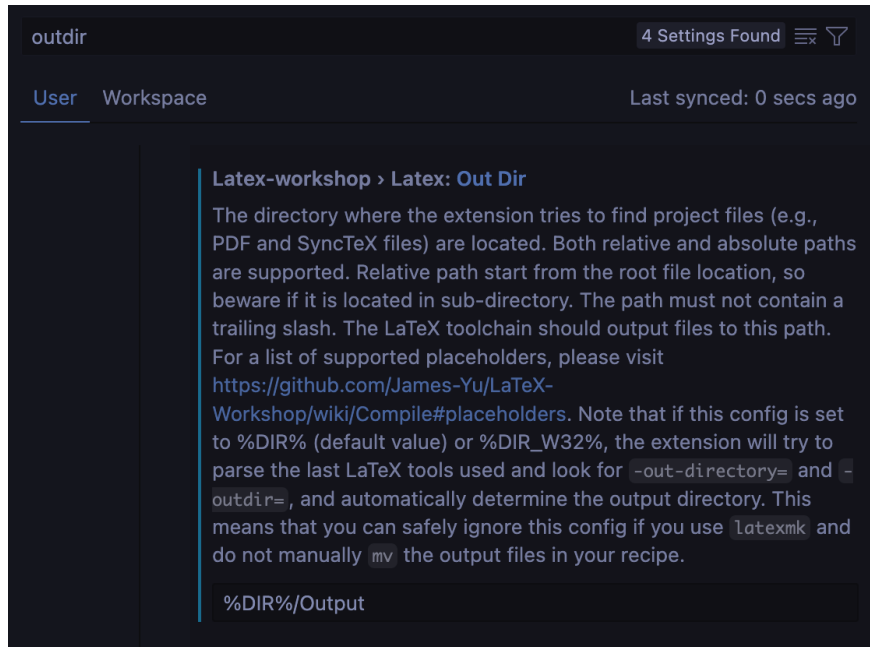


Figure 2.3: Output directory setting

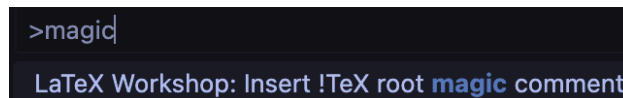


Figure 2.4: Insert a magic comment

2.4 Some useful features and tips for \LaTeX in VSCode

- Turn on word wrapping in the VSCode editor. This can be done exclusively for \LaTeX through the language specific settings as follows

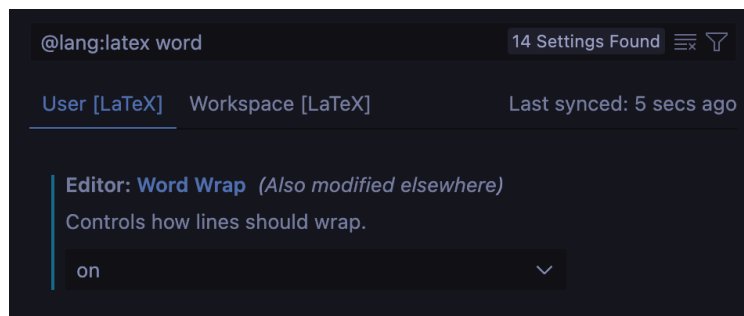


Figure 2.5: Word wrapping settings

- GitHub copilot is a useful extension for some menial typesetting tasks, and especially in my experience for building tikz diagrams. Get it for free with a student github account and download it from the VSCode extensions menu, just make sure to turn off the somewhat annoying inline suggestions. This, along with the former item can be done using the following lines in settings.json (can be accessed

through the VSCode searchbar)

```
"[latex]": {  
  "editor.inlineSuggest.enabled": false,  
  "editor.wordWrap": "on",  
},
```

Additionally, editor autocompletion using copilot AI can be turned off with `"github.copilot.editor.enableAutoCompletions": false`. This way, copilot won't interfere with your typing, but can still be easily accessed through a single shortcut to help do boring/repetitive tasks.

- LaTeX workshop supports snippets. There are several useful inbuilt ones such as `BEQ` or `BAL` to start equation or align environments, or `@a` or `@b` for greek letters like α, β . A background on snippets is found on the workshop wiki at the url <https://github.com/James-Yu/LaTeX-Workshop/wiki/Snippets>. A concise list may also be found at <https://cheatography.com/jcwinkler/cheat-sheets/latex-workshop-visual-studio-code>. You may also make custom snippets in VSCode for use by navigating to the snippets menu in the searchbar

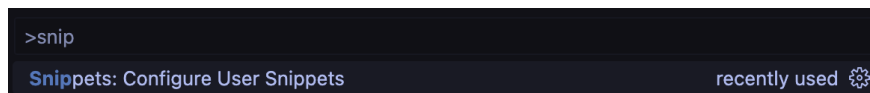


Figure 2.6: Snippets menu in the searchbar

- Intellisense is LaTeX workshop's capability to autofill citations, commands, environments, labels, and file names. Intellisense usually updates on file save, but you can make it update more aggressively by setting `latex-workshop.intellisense.update.aggressive.enabled` to `true` in the settings menu.
- Much like double clicking the PDF in Overleaf takes you to the corresponding line of TeX, Command/-Control clicking text (depending on whether the OS is Mac or Windows) in the VSCode internal PDF viewer takes you to the corresponding line of TeX. While in the TeX file, pressing `Cmd+Opt+J` on Mac or `Ctrl+Alt+J` on Windows takes you to the point in the PDF corresponding to the cursor location on the TeX file. Note that this requires the SyncTeX file to be present in the same directory as the output PDF. This file is created on each compile, and is automatically stored in the proper directory to be used.
- The smart clicks VSCode extension is pretty handy to select stuff in brackets. I highly recommend downloading it.

2.5 Keeping your project synced

The

Both my user settings json file and user generated snippets file are included in the GitHub of this project for further reference. Additionally, the entire \LaTeX file tree for this document is also on the GitHub repo.

3 Integrations

3.1 Overleaf

The best way to use local L^AT_EX is *with*, and not instead of Overleaf.