tbl.typ: a tbl-like preprocessor for Typst and tablex

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Contents

1.	Introduction	3
	Region options	
3.	Format specifications	6
	3.1. Column classifiers	6
	3.2. Column modifiers	7
4.	Data	9
5.	Differences from traditional tbl	10
6.	Known issues	11
7.	Examples	12
	References	

1. Introduction

Typst [1] is "a new markup-based typesetting system that is powerful and easy to learn." While Typst provides a built-in table() function, it does not currently support more advanced features such as row spans and column spans, fine-grain control of borders, or complex cell alignments. Pg Biel's tablex project [2] provides many of these features. However, it remains the case that writing a table using either table() or tablex() can require rather verbose syntax.

The tbl.typ project is an effort to allow the expression of rich tables in Typst using a more terse syntax. This syntax comes from a UNIX heritage: the tbl preprocessor which designed for use with the traditional TROFF typesetting system [3] [4] [5]. Important differences between the syntax of traditional tbl and tbl.typ are noted later in this document.

After importing the library using #import "tbl.typ", the basic format of a table when using tbl.typ is the following:

```
```tbl
Format specifications .
Data
```
```

The two main components of this syntax are:

• Format specifications. This describes the layout of the table in terms of the number and style of columns for each row.

The last line of the format specifications must end in a period (.). This is the separator between the two sections.

• Data. This is the content that will fill each cell of the table. Generally every line of input in this section corresponds to a row in the table, though there are exceptions noted later. Cells are separated by the tab option which defaults to a TAB character.

2. Region options

In addition to the overall table syntax itself, you may specify region options that control the parsing and styling of the table as a whole using a "show-everything" rule prior to the tables you would like to control. For example:

```
#show: tbl.template.with(
  allbox: true,
  tab: "|",
)
```

The following options are recognized:

| <pre>auto-lines, allbox</pre> | Like box, but also draw a line between every cell if true. This is the same option from tablex. |
|-------------------------------|--|
| | Default: false |
| box, | If true, draw a line around the entire table. |
| frame | Default: false |
| breakable, | If true, the table can span multiple pages if necessary. |
| nokeep | Default: false |
| center, | Aliases for a tbl-align value of center. |
| decimalpoint | The string used to separate the integral part of a number from the fractional part. Used in N-classified columns. |
| | Default: "." |
| doublebox, | Like box, but also draw a second line around the entire table if true. |
| doubleframe | Default: false |
| font | The font for the table. Can be overridden later by the f() column modifier. |
| | Default: "Times" |
| header-rows | The number of rows at the beginning of the table to consider part of the "header" for the purposes of repeat-header. This option is also controlled by .TH rows in the table data. |
| | Default: 1 |

tbl.typ 5 leading The vertical spacing / leading to apply to table cells. Can be overridden later by the $\vee(\ldots)$ column modifier. A dictionary of (name, function) pairs that can be used with column macros modifier $m(\ldots)$. Default: (:) This is the padding used for each cell, for use with the Typst pad pad element function. The left and right keys can be overridden using a numeric column modifier. Default: (left: 0.75em, right: 0.75em, top: 3pt, bottom: 3pt) repeat-header If breakable is true and this option is true, then the table header controlled by header-rows will be re-displayed on each subsequent page. This option is also controlled by .TH rows in the table data. Default: false How to draw all lines in the table. stroke, linesize Default: 1pt tab The string delimiter that separates different cells within a given row of the table data. Default: "\t" (a TAB character) tbl-align How to align the table as a whole.

Default: left

3. Format specifications

The format specifications section controls the layout and style of cells within rows and columns of the table.

Each comma or new line of format specification begins a new *row definition*. Within each row definition, encountering a *column classifier* character denotes a new column in the table. The classifier may be followed by any number of *column modifiers*, some of which may have required arguments enclosed in parentheses.

3.1. Column classifiers

The following column classifiers are recognized. They may be given as either capital or lowercase.

| L | Left align. |
|----------------|---|
| R | Right align. |
| C | Center align. |
| N | Numerically align. |
| S | This cell is column-spanned by the previous cell to the left in the current row. |
| | The corresponding table data entries should be empty. |
| • (caret) | This cell is row-spanned by the corresponding cell in the previous row above. |
| | The corresponding table data entries should be empty. |
| (underscore), | This cell contains a vertically-centered horizontal rule. |
| - (hyphen) | The corresponding table data entries should be empty. |
| (equals sign) | Same as , but draw a double horizontal rule instead. |
| | The corresponding table data entries should be empty. |
| (vertical bar) | This classifier does not actually begin a new column, but rather indicates the location of a vertical line. |
| | If placed at the beginning of a row definition, the line is drawn to the left of the first cell in that row. Otherwise, it is drawn to the right of the current cell in that row. |

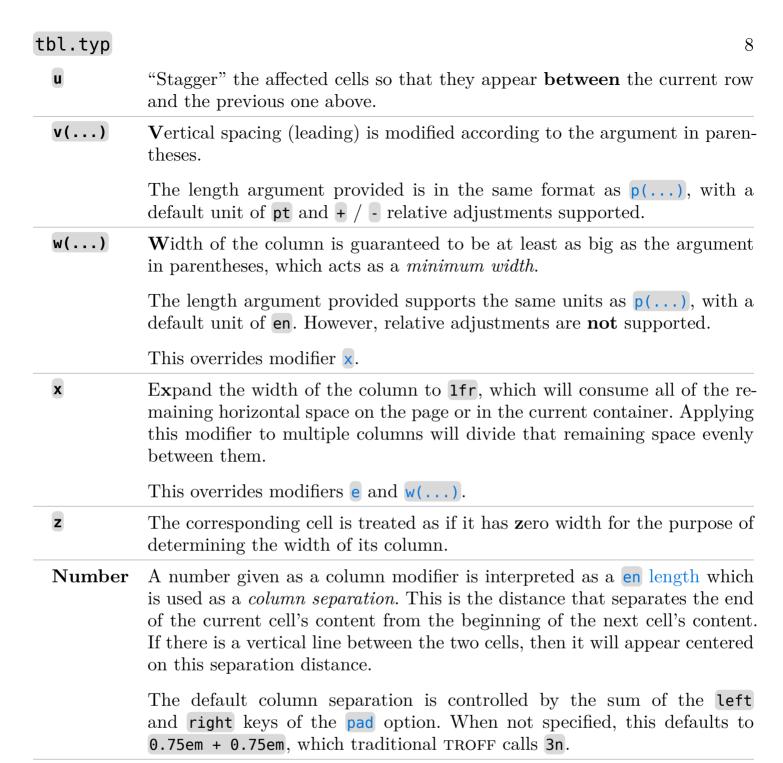
3.2. Column modifiers

t

The following column modifiers are recognized. They may be given as either capital or lowercase.

| lowercase. | |
|------------|---|
| b | Bold text using the Typst strong element function. |
| d | Down — set the vertical alignment to bottom. |
| e | E qualize the width of all columns with this modifier to the maximum width among those columns. |
| | This overrides modifier x. |
| f() | Font name to use is given in parentheses. |
| | f(B) is an alias for the b modifier. f(I) is an alias for the i modifier. f(BI) is an alias for providing both of the above modifiers. |
| i | Italicize text using the Typst emph element function. |
| m() | Macro (function) to apply to each corresponding cell. The macros must be scoped using the macros region option. |
| | The macro currently only receives a single argument: the content of the cell. A future version may also pass the position of the cell in terms of row number and column number. |
| o() | Fill color for the cell is given in parentheses. |
| p() | Point size of the font is modified according to the argument in parentheses. |
| | If the argument begins with a + or -, then the argument is added or subtracted respectively with respect to the current size. |
| | The argument may be suffixed by a unit. If no unit is specified, pt is assumed. Valid units are: |
| | pt, p: points. mm: millimeters. cm, c: centimeters. in, i: inches. em, m: lem corresponds to the current font size. en, n: one en equals half of an em. P: six picas equals one inch. M: 100 of these equals one em. |
| | |

Top — set the vertical alignment to top.



4. Data

5. Differences from traditional tbl

• Region options must be specified using a "show-everything" rule; they cannot be provided within the raw block itself.

- The tab option may be a multi-character string.
- The linesize option is expected to be a Typst color, length, or stroke; a dimensionless number does not work.
- All column modifiers that expect an argument must provide that argument in parentheses.
- The alignment point of numerically-centered cells that are in the same column as left-centered or right-centered cells is always centered with respect to the column as a whole (as if the classifier was C), rather than with respect to the widest L or R entry.
- Nothing special needs to be done to use equations within tables, though numericallyaligned columns may behave unexpectedly until the delim option is implemented.
- An empty entry in the table data must be given even if the cell is spanned or contains a horizontal line.
- \Rx table entries are not handled. Use the Typst repeat element function instead, though this does not work well at the moment without a fully-functioning w(...) column modifier (see Known issues).

6. Known issues

- The following region options are not currently supported:
 - delim (GH#1)
 - expand (GH#2)
 - nospaces
 - nowarn
- The pad region option currently requires the left and right keys to be explicitly provided. Unexpected behavior may occur if x is provided as a key. (GH#3)
- The following column classifiers are not currently supported:
 - A (alphabetic)
 - [] (double vertical line)
- The w(...) (minimum width) column modifier currently only sets the width of text blocks; it does not yet affect other table cells. (GH#5)
- .T& in the table data is not currently supported. (GH#4)
- Within text blocks, .\" comments are not removed, and other TROFF commands are not rejected. (GH#6)
- A table data row consisting of only = (double horizontal line) is not currently supported.

7. Examples

Example 1: adapted from [4]

Example 2: adapted from [5, p. 41]

```
```tbl
c c c
l l ne .
Fact|Location|Statistic
Largest state|Alaska|591,004 sq. mi.
Smallest state|Rhode Island|1,212 sq. mi.
Longest river|Mississippi-Missouri|3,710 mi.
Highest mountain|Mount McKinley, AK|20,320 ft.
Lowest point|Death Valley, CA|-- 282 ft.
```

Fact	Location	Statistic	
Largest state	Alaska	591,004 sq. mi	
Smallest state	Rhode Island	1,212 sq. mi	
Longest river	Mississippi-Missouri	3,710 mi.	
Highest mountain	Mount McKinley, AK	20,320 ft.	
Lowest point	Death Valley, CA	– 282 ft.	

#### Example 3: adapted from [4]

```
```tbl
r| l
r n.
                                                                             software
                                                                                       version
software|version
                                                                                AFL
                                                                                            2.39b
                                                                               Mutt
                                                                                          1.8.0
AFL|2.39b
                                                                               Ruby
                                                                                         1.8.7.374
Mutt|1.8.0
                                                                            TeX Live
                                                                                         2015
Ruby | 1.8.7.374
TeX Live | 2015
```

Example 4: adapted from [5, p. 43]

```
```tbl
cf(Courier New) s s s
c | cs s
c | cs s
c |c|c|c
c |c|c|c
l |n |ne |ne.
Composition of Foods
Food|Percent by Weight
\^|Protein|Fat|Carbo-
\^|\^|\^|hydrate
Apples | .4 | .5 | 13.0
Halibut|18.4|5.2|...
Lima beans | 7.5 | .8 | 22.0
Milk|3.3|4.0|5.0
Mushrooms | 3.5 | .4 | 6.0
Rye bread | 9.0 | .6 | 52.7
```

Composition of Foods			
	Per	ight	
Food	Protein	Fat	Carbo-
	Frotein	гац	hydrate
Apples	.4	.5	13.0
Halibut	18.4	5.2	
Lima beans	7.5	.8	22.0
Milk	3.3	4.0	5.0
Mushrooms	3.5	.4	6.0
Rye bread	9.0	.6	52.7

#### Example 5: adapted from [5, p. 42]

```
```tbl
C S S
c | c | c
l | l | ne .
Major New York Bridges
Bridge|Designer|Length
Brooklyn|J . A . Roebling|1595
Manhattan|G . Lindenthal|1470
Williamsburg | L . L . Buck | 1600
Queensborough|Palmer &|1182
|Hornbostel
||1380
Triborough|0 . H . Ammann|_
||383
Bronx Whitestone | 0 . H . Ammann | 2300
Throgs Neck|0 . H . Ammann|1800
George Washington|O . H . Ammann|3500
```

Major New York Bridges		
Bridge	Designer	Length
Brooklyn	J . A . Roebling	1595
Manhattan	G . Lindenthal	1470
Williamsburg	L . L . Buck	1600
Queensborough	Palmer &	1182
	Hornbostel	
		1380
Triborough	O . H . Ammann	000
		383
Bronx Whitestone	O . H . Ammann	2300
Throgs Neck	O . H . Ammann	1800
George Washington	O . H . Ammann	3500

Example 6: adapted from [4]

```
```tbl
rb c lb
r ci l.
r center l
r|center|l
ri|ce|le
right|c|left
```

r center l
ri ce le
right c left
```

Example 7: adapted from [3]

| ```tbl Cf(BI) Cf(BI) Cf(B), C C Cu. n n*#sym.times;*n difference 1 1 2 4 3 3 9 5 4 16 7 5 25 9 6 36 11 | $egin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$ |
|--|--|
| | |

Example 8: adapted from [5, p. 42]

Example 9: adapted from [5, p. 37]

| ```tbl | |
|----------|----------|
| n. | 13 |
| 13 | 4.2 |
| 4.2 | 26.4.12 |
| 26.4.12 | 26.4. 12 |
| 26.4. 12 | |
| 26.4 .12 | 26.4 .12 |
| abc | abc |
| abc\& | abc |
| 43\&3.22 | 433.22 |
| 749.12 | 749.12 |
| *** | |
| | |

Example 10: adapted from [5, p. 41]

| ```tbl |
|---------------------|
| c s s |
| ссс |
| n n ne . |
| AT&T Common Stock |
| Year Price Dividend |
| 1984 15-20 \\$1.20 |
| 5 19-25 1.20 |
| 6 21-28 1.20 |
| 7 20-36 1.20 |
| 8 24-30 1.20 |
| 9 29-37 .30* |
| · · · · |

| AT&T Common Stock | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------|--|--|--|
| Year | Price | Dividend | | | |
| 1984 | 15-20 | \$1.20 | | | |
| 5 | 19-25 | 1.20 | | | |
| 6 | 21-28 | 1.20 | | | |
| 7 | 20-36 | 1.20 | | | |
| 8 | 24-30 | 1.20 | | | |
| 9 | 29-37 | .30* | | | |

Example 11

| ```tbl | | | | |
|------------------|---|-----------------|------------|---|
| cbo(luma(85%)) | - | | | 1 |
| co(luma(95%)) c. | 1 | Grade | Points | |
| Grade Points | | A | ≥ 510 | |
| A \$ >= 510\$ | | В | ≥ 450 | |
| B \$ >= 450\$ | | $^{\mathrm{C}}$ | ≥ 390 | |
| C \$ >= 390\$ | | D | ≥ 330 | |
| D \$ >= 330\$ | - | | | |
| | | | | |

Example 12: adapted from [5, p. 44]

```
```tbl
cf(I) s s
c cw(lin) cw(lin)
ltp(9) ltp(9) ltp(9).
New York Area Rocks
Era|Formation|Age (years)
Precambrian|Reading Prong|>1 billion
Paleozoic|Manhattan Prong|400 million
Mesozoic|T{
#set text(hyphenate: true, overhang: true)
Newark Basin, incl.
Stockton, Lockatong, and Brunswick
formations; also Watchungs
and Palisades.
T}|200 million
Cenozoic|Coastal Plain|T{
#set text(hyphenate: true, overhang: true)
#set par(justify: true)
On Long Island 30,000 years;
Cretaceous sediments redeposited
by recent glaciation.
T}
```

New York Area Rocks					
Era	Formation	Age (years)			
Precambrian	Reading Prong	>1 billion			
Paleozoic	Manhattan Prong	400 million			
Mesozoic	Newark Basin, incl. Stockton, Lockatong, and Brunswick forma- tions; also Watchungs and Palisades.	200 million			
Cenozoic	Coastal Plain	On Long Island 30,000 years; Cre- taceous sediments redeposited by re- cent glaciation.			

#### Example 13: adapted from [4]

```
le le7| lw(10).
The fourth line|_|line 1
of this column|=|line 2
determines|_|line 3
the column width.|T{
This text is too wide to fit into a column of width 17.
T}|line 4
T{
No break here.
T}||line 5
...
```

The fourth line		line 1
of this column		line 2
determines		line 3
the column width.	This text is too wide to fit into a column of width 17.	line 4
No break here.		line 5

#### Example 14: adapted from [5, p. 45]

Readability of Text						
Line Width and Leading for 10-Point Type						
Line	Set	1-Point	2-Point	4-Point		
Width	Solid	Leading	Leading	Leading		
9 Pica	93	-6.0	-5.3	-7.1		
14 Pica	450	-0.6	-0.3	-1.7		
19 Pica	5	-5.1	0.0	-2.0		
31 Pica	3	-3.8	-2.4	-3.6		
43 Pica	5.1	-90000.000	-5.9	-8.8		

# 8. References

- [1] https://typst.app/
- [2] Pg Biel, "Typst-tablex." https://github.com/PgBiel/typst-tablex
- [3] https://man7.org/linux/man-pages/man1/tbl.1.html
- [4] https://man.openbsd.org/tbl.7
- [5] L. L. Cherry, and M. E. Lesk, "Tbl a program to format tables," in *Unix Res. System*, A. G. Hume, and M. D. McIlroy, Eds., vol. 2, 10th ed., Murray Hill, New Jersey 07974: Holt Rinehart & Winston, pp. 35–51. [Online]. Available: https://9p.io/10thEdMan/tbl.pdf