
Playing with paras in L^AT_EX documents

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Abstract

*Documents which are literary or conventional in style follow a simple protocol for typesetting new paragraphs. Each new para starts with an indentation. However indentation of the first line of a new para is not recommended for technical documents. This gives rise to a subtle conflict. This article demonstrates how the conflict can be resolved.*¹

1 New paras

The conventional way of typesetting running text, particularly concerning literary and non-technical subjects, has no separation between paragraphs. And, the first line of each new paragraph in a block of text is indented. This way, every new para can be recognised, in a running text.

In contrast, one common style for brutalist publications such as technical manuals, reports and officially-specified dissertation formats, is to avoid indentation for new paragraphs. Zero indentation of new paragraphs is an accepted and unavoidable practice in technical documents, articles, reports, and papers. Often, this is also a personal choice, although it is unconventional and non-traditional. Anyone can see, after no more than a moment's thought, that if the paragraph indent is zero, the paragraphs must be separated by some blank space, to make them stand out from one another. Otherwise, it is sometimes going to be impossible to see the breaks between paragraphs. This is the root of an ideological conflict.

The simple-minded approach to zero paragraph indentation is thus:

```
\setlength{\parindent}{0pt}  
\setlength{\parskip}{\baselineskip}
```

The above commands remove the usual `\parindent`. And, add a `\lineskip` at the end of each para. These two commands act globally and there would be

¹File name and version are given in the header of each page.

no need to do any extra adjustments. In the very simplest texts, it is a fine solution.

However, the non-zero `\parskip` interferes with lists and the like, and the results look pretty awful. The `parskip` package patches things up to look reasonable, but has many ugly side effects. These side effects of `parskip` require that para endings be tuned individually, rather than in a global fashion. A zero paragraph indent is an unconventional and unorthodox usage of paragraphs. This requires unconventional corrective measures, one of which, is to force a blank line at the end of each para using a `\` explicitly.

This choice makes every paragraph stand out on its own. However, \LaTeX purists often frown at the additional `\`. It is also seen that the `\` at the end of each para sometimes results in uneven vertical spacing of paragraphs. The *LaTeX user guide*, by Leslie Lamport warns against the use of `\` immediately before paragraph breaks. as it produces underfull `\hbox` warnings and extra vertical space.

A simple work-around involves creating a vertical space between paragraphs using a `\vspace` instead of giving a blank line with `\`. This vertical spacing should not be used in separating items of a bulleted or enumerated list. A new macro `\parajump` has been defined in this current document for this purpose : `\newcommand{\parajump{\vspace{1ex}}`

2 Examples

All the above paras used the conventional approach of a non-zero-length `\parindent`, and no break between paras. Each new para is recognised by the `\parindent` of the first line. We will now see the effect of a zero-length `\parindent`, and a way to handle this change. The `\parindent` was modified using `\setlength{\parindent}{0mm}`

2.1 Normal text

Here is some text containing two paras ::

Para #1. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet. Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Pellentesque auctor fringilla neque. Duis eu massa ut lorem iaculis vestibulum. Maecenas facilisis. Para #2. Nunc at velit quis lectus nonummy eleifend. Curabitur eros. Aenean ligula dolor, gravida auctor, auctor et, suscipit in, erat. Sed malesuada, enim ut congue pharetra, massa elit convallis pede, ornare scelerisque libero

neque ut neque. In at libero. Praesent id orci. Donec hendrerit. In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Aenean sit amet arcu a turpis posuere pretium.

Notice that there is no way to recognise the start of the second para. We now present the same text, with a vertical separation between paras. You can see the clarity due to the vertical separation made using a `\parajump`.

Para #1. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet. Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Pellentesque auctor fringilla neque. Duis eu massa ut lorem iaculis vestibulum. Maecenas etcetera facilisis.

Para #2. Nunc at velit quis lectus nonummy eleifend. Curabitur eros. Aenean ligula dolor, gravida auctor, auctor et, suscipit in, erat. Sed malesuada, enim ut congue pharetra, massa elit convallis pede, ornare scelerisque libero neque ut neque. In at libero. Praesent id orci. Donec hendrerit. In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Aenean sit amet arcu a turpis posuere pretium.

In fact, the `\parajump` would not even be needed, if the `\parindent` length is not set to zero. The conventional way of breaking a para and starting a new one would work fine when the `\parindent` length is not set to zero.

2.2 Lists

Here is an example of a bulleted list containing items with multiple paragraphs. The command `\parajump` was not used inside the list, to separate paras belonging to a bullet item. A simple blank line did the trick. ::

- First para of first bullet item is here. Nunc at velit quis lectus nonummy eleifend. Curabitur eros. Aenean ligula dolor, gravida auctor, auctor et, suscipit in, erat. Sed malesuada, enim ut congue pharetra, massa elit convallis pede, ornare scelerisque libero neque ut neque. In at libero. Curabitur molestie. Sed vel neque. Proin et dolor ac ipsum elementum malesuada. Praesent id orci. Donec hendrerit. In hac habitasse platea dictumst.

Second para of first bullet item is here. Omnis homines, qui sese student praestare ceteris animalibus, summa ope niti decet, ne vitam silentio transeant veluti pecora, quae natura prona atque ventri oboedientia finxit. Sed nostra omnis vis in animo et corpore sita est: animi imperio, corporis servitio magis utimur; alterum nobis cum dis, alterum cum beluis commune est.

Third para of first bullet item is here. Quo mihi rectius videtur ingeni quam virium opibus gloriam quaerere et, quoniam vita ipsa, qua fruimur, brevis est, memoriam nostri quam maxime longam efficere. Nam divitiarum et formae gloria fluxa atque fragilis est, virtus clara aeternaque habetur.

Fourth para of first bullet item is here. Sed diu magnum inter mortalis certamen fuit, vine corporis an virtute animi res militaris magis procederet. Nam et, prius quam incipias, consulto et, ubi consulueris, mature facto opus est. Ita utrumque per se indigens alterum alterius auxilio eget.

- Second bullet comes here. Cras ipsum. Vestibulum pretium, lectus nec venenatis volutpat, purus lectus ultrices risus, a condimentum risus mi et quam. Pellentesque auctor fringilla neque. Duis eu massa ut lorem iaculis vestibulum. Maecenas facilisis elit sed justo. Quisque volutpat malesuada velit.
- Third bullet item is here. Nunc at velit quis lectus nonummy eleifend. Curabitur eros. Aenean ligula dolor, gravida auctor, auctor et, suscipit in, erat. Sed malesuada, enim ut congue pharetra, massa elit convallis pede, ornare scelerisque libero neque ut neque. In at libero. Curabitur molestie. Sed vel neque. Proin et dolor ac ipsum elementum malesuada. Praesent id orci. Donec hendrerit. In hac habitasse platea dictumst.

3 Definitions and descriptions para

You have two styles of descriptions: the detailed description starts on the same line as the term being defined, or the detailed definition comes in the next line after the term being defined. The term being defined is shown in a hanging indent. An `\mbox{}` puts the details on the next line. Compare with the examples below with and without `\mbox{}`.

Latin is easy :

Cras ipsum. Vestibulum pretium, lectus nec venenatis volutpat, purus lectus ultrices risus, a condimentum risus mi et quam. Pellentesque auctor fringilla neque. Duis eu massa ut lorem iaculis vestibulum. Maecenas facilisis elit sed justo. Quisque volutpat malesuada velit.

You can choose the style you want for a description para (add or ignore the `\mbox{}`).

Latin is so easy : Cras ipsum. Vestibulum pretium, lectus nec venenatis volutpat, purus lectus ultrices risus, a condimentum risus mi et quam. Pellentesque auctor fringilla neque. Duis eu massa ut lorem iaculis vestibulum. Maecenas facilisis elit sed justo. Quisque volutpat malesuada velit.

Now you can mix both types in one description environment. And you can keep more than one para in each item.

Latin is easy : Para #1 Cras ipsum. Vestibulum pretium, lectus nec venenatis volutpat, purus lectus ultrices risus, a condimentum risus mi et quam. Pellentesque auctor fringilla neque. Duis eu massa ut lorem iaculis vestibulum. Maecenas facilisis elit sed justo. Quisque volutpat malesuada velit.

Latin is so easy :

Cras ipsum. Vestibulum pretium, lectus nec venenatis volutpat, purus lectus ultrices risus, a condimentum risus mi et quam. Pellentesque auctor fringilla neque. Duis eu massa ut lorem iaculis vestibulum. Maecenas facilisis elit sed justo. Quisque volutpat malesuada velit.

Para #2. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet. Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Pellentesque auctor fringilla neque. Duis eu massa ut lorem iaculis vestibulum. Maecenas facilisis.

Para #3. Nunc at velit quis lectus nonummy eleifend. Curabitur eros. Aenean ligula dolor, gravida auctor, auctor et, suscipit in, erat. Sed malesuada, enim ut congue pharetra, massa elit convallis pede, ornare scelerisque libero neque ut neque. In at libero. Praesent id orci. Donec hendrerit. In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Aenean sit amet arcu a turpis posuere pretium.

4 Locating paras

Paras are always left justified by default. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet.

Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Etiam vitae nisl.

4.1 Left edge

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet. Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Etiam vitae nisl. In dignissim lacus ut ante. Cras elit lectus, bibendum a, adipiscing vitae, commodo et, dui. Ut tincidunt tortor.

4.2 Right edge

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet. Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Etiam vitae nisl. In dignissim lacus ut ante. Cras elit lectus, bibendum a, adipiscing vitae, commodo et, dui. Ut tincidunt tortor.

4.3 centered

CENTERED TEXT Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet. Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Etiam vitae nisl. In dignissim lacus ut ante. Cras elit lectus, bibendum a, adipiscing vitae, commodo et, dui. Ut tincidunt tortor.

5 Make paras clash horizontally

<i>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet. Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Etiam vitae nisl. In dignissim lacus ut ante. Cras elit lectus, bibendum a, adipiscing vitae, commodo et, dui. Ut tincidunt tortor.</i>	<i>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet. Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Etiam vitae nisl. In dignissim lacus ut ante. Cras elit lectus, bibendum a, adipiscing vitae, commodo et, dui. Ut tincidunt tortor.</i>
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6 Make paras clash vertically

>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet. Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Etiam vitae nisl. In dignissim lacus ut ante. Cras elit lectus, bibendum a, adipiscing vitae, commodo et, dui. Ut tincidunt tortor. Etiam vitae nisl. In dignissim lacus ut ante. Cras elit lectus, bibendum a, adipiscing vitae, commodo et, dui. Ut tincidunt tortor.

7 Paras within a framebox

Paras are always left justified by default. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet.

Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Etiam vitae nisl.

7.1 Framebox on right edge of page

<p>..... </p> <p>>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet.</p> <p>Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Etiam vitae nisl.</p> <p>..... </p>

7.2 Left edge

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nam nibh. Nunc varius facilisis eros. Sed erat. In in velit quis arcu ornare laoreet.

Curabitur adipiscing luctus massa. Integer ut purus ac augue commodo commodo. Nunc nec mi eu justo tempor consectetur. Etiam vitae nisl.

8 Closing remarks

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9 About the author



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