Econ Journal Watch Should Accept LaTeX Submissions

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Abstract

Econ Journal Watch (EJW) currently requests authors to submit their work in Microsoft Word format. In this paper, I argue that EJW should also accept LaTeX submissions. I provide evidence that about 90% of recent working papers in economics are typeset in LaTeX. Accepting LaTeX submission will likely reduce the submission cost for the authors and increase the number of submissions. To make the publication process easier, I created the `ejw.sty` style file.

The "Submissions" section of "Instructions for Authors & Style Guide" of *Econ Journal Watch* (EJW)[1] (henceforth "EJW style guide") states "[m]anuscripts for Econ Journal Watch (EJW) should be submitted via email in Microsoft Word (`.docx` or `.doc`) or OpenDocument (`.odt`) format." I find this requirement burdensome, as I always use LaTeX for typesetting documents and do not know how to use Microsoft Word competently. However, the "Style" section of EJW style guide states "[a]rticles do not have to be in that style when submitted, but after an article is accepted, the author is expected to make the appropriate changes." Thus, when I initially submitted the drafts of my three EJW articles (Lyu and

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[1] https://econjwatch.org/call-for-papers/instructions-for-authors-style-guide

Toda 2019; Hirano and Toda 2025a,b), I prepared them in LaTeX and sent to the editor. The "Editorial Process" section of EJW style guide states:

> Compared with typical academic journals, even other online journals, the editorial process of EJW is very swift and interactive. Editors often work directly with authors by phone or email. Submissions will be actively edited for style and expression. In these respects, the EJW editorial process is like that of a carefully edited magazine, but without any sacrifice of scholarliness.

Consistent with this description, each time the editor Daniel Klein actively edited for content, style, and expression, which significantly improved the pieces. At the same time, I must confess that having to deal with Microsoft Word (after the initial submission, the editor somehow converted my LaTeX PDFs to Word documents) has been extremely painful, as it is difficult to control the style, especially equations. For instance, for typesetting Hirano and Toda (2025a), which contains multiple equations, I had to copy and paste the text into Word and retype every equation using its equation editor, which took about 12 hours.

In this commentary, I propose that EJW accepts submissions not only in Microsoft Word or OpenDocument format, but also in LaTeX. I first describe what LaTeX is and how to get started. I then discuss why EJW should accept LaTeX submissions and describe my attempt to create the `ejw.sty` style file to mimic the style of EJW using LaTeX, which is a one-time fixed cost borne by the publisher (not authors). Finally, I discuss a potential reason for the reluctance of EJW to adopt LaTeX submissions.

What is LaTeX?

LaTeX is a document system to create professional-looking typeset documents, which is commonly used in academia for research papers, scientific articles, and other technical documents. There is a good chance the reader is already familiar with it, so I will not explain further. If you do not already know how to use it, I recommend opening a (free) account at Overleaf and visiting their tutorial.[2]

[2] https://www.overleaf.com/learn/latex/Tutorials

For using any document system, the user needs to pay the fixed cost (the time it takes to learn how to use the system) and the marginal cost (the time it takes to typeset a document). In common system such as Microsoft Word, the fixed cost is low because anyone can open the application and start using intuitively as a text editor. However, the marginal cost is high, as the user does not have fine control over style and consistency (or it is not obvious how to control over style and consistency). Because typesetting a document in LaTeX is like coding in a programming language, where the user types specific commands on a text editor and compiles it to get the final output, the fixed cost of learning is high. However, the marginal cost of typesetting is low because once you learn the language, you have total control. Let me quote the Overleaf tutorial for how LaTeX works:

> LaTeX (pronounced "LAY-tek" or "LAH-tek") is a tool for typesetting professional-looking documents. However, LaTeX's mode of operation is quite different to many other document-production applications you may have used, such as Microsoft Word or LibreOffice Writer: those "WYSIWYG" [What You See Is What You Get] tools provide users with an interactive page into which they type and edit their text and apply various forms of styling. LaTeX works very differently: instead, your document is a plain text file interspersed with LaTeX *commands* used to express the desired (typeset) results. To produce a visible, typeset document, your LaTeX file is processed by a piece of software called a *TeX engine* which uses the commands embedded in your text file to guide and control the typesetting process, converting the LaTeX commands and document text into a professionally typeset PDF file. This means you only need to focus on the content of your document and the computer, via LaTeX commands and the TeX engine, will take care of the *visual appearance* (formatting).

The part "This means you only need to focus on the content of your document" is important. It does *not* imply that only content matters and style is unimportant. Of course, style is important. What this sentence implies is that when typesetting a LaTeX document, styling issues are taken care of by the style file the publisher provides (this is what "LaTeX commands [...] will take care of the *visual appearance*" mean), and the authors only need to focus on the *content* of the document, saving substantial amount of effort compared to traditional document systems.

Why should EJW accept LaTeX submissions?

Nowadays, most economics journals accept submissions in LaTeX; EJW is the only exception that I am aware of. At arXiv,[3] an open-access archive for scholarly preprints in mathematics, physics, computer science, statistics, economics, and other fields, submission in LaTeX is mandatory.

My prior is that, over 90% of working papers in economics are written in LaTeX. To test my hypothesis, here is what I did. First, I went to SSRN (Social Science Research Network, which is an open-access repository for research in social science), went to the Advanced Search feature,[4] and searched for all papers in ERN (Economic Research Network) published last month that include the keyword "economic" in the full text. (I did not find an option to search without specifying a keyword.) My intention was to sort the papers by publication dates and check the 100 most recent papers to see whether they are typeset in LaTeX or not. Among the first 10 most recent papers I checked, 4 were typeset in LaTeX. (It is not clear how to formally determine whether the paper is typeset in LaTeX or not, but I just used common sense.) But then I decided to stop because the average quality of papers seemed to be too low.

Next I came up with the following exercise. To control for quality, first go to US News ranking and select the universities with the top 50 economics PhD programs.[5] Then identify the tenure-track faculty member with the earliest last name in alphabetical order, find their top-listed working paper on their personal website, and see whether it is typeset in LaTeX or not. (If the person does not have a personal website or a working paper, go to the next person in alphabetical order.) It is not a perfect test because last name initials are not random (Chinese people tend to have last name initials W, X, Y, Z), but it is simple. The result was consistent with my prior. Among the $N = 50$ economists I checked, $n = 46$ wrote their working papers in LaTeX. Estimating a binomial distribution by maximum likelihood, the

[3] https://arxiv.org/

[4] https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/DisplayAbstractSearch.cfm

[5] https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-humanities-schools/economics-rankings

point estimate for the probability of using LaTeX is $p = n/N = 0.92$ with a standard error of $s = \sqrt{p(1-p)/N} = 0.038$.

Having demonstrated that LaTeX is commonly used among economists, let me argue why EJW should accept LaTeX submissions. "About & Contact" tab of the EJW page states

> *Econ Journal Watch* welcomes submissions of Comments on articles that appear in economics journals. [...] EJW watches the journals for inappropriate assumptions, weak chains of argument, phony claims of relevance, omissions of pertinent truths, and irreplicability—EJW welcomes replication studies.

Now that top journals are no longer eager to publish critical comments (Coelho et al. 2005), EJW is one of the few outlets that serves this purpose. In the past, critical comments published at EJW led to the retraction of a published article (Young 2018)[6] and the termination of a faculty member for "extreme negligence and incompetence" (Pickett 2020).[7] I have a tremendous respect for these authors for writing critical comments to defend science, despite risking retaliations. To protect the truth, I think it is important to make it as easy for authors as possible to submit papers to EJW; accepting LaTeX submissions is a step forward.

My attempt to create the `ejw` package

If journals have specific styles, they can simply provide a LaTeX style file to authors instead of expecting authors to conform with the journal style. Here, I describe my attempt to create a style file named `ejw.sty` to replicate the EJW style. Let me acknowledge that I am a casual user of LaTeX, not an expert, and my attempt is based on Google searches and a few hours of investment in time. There are surely more sophisticated ways.

First, we create an empty file named `ejw.sty` and start with the following text to declare that we are creating a style file named `ejw.sty`:

```
\NeedsTeXFormat{LaTeX2e}
\ProvidesPackage{ejw}
```

[6] https://doi.org/10.2308/accr-51520

[7] https://retractionwatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Final-Termination-Letter-7.13.23.pdf

Inspecting past issues of EJW, the text font is Garamond, so we write:

```
\RequirePackage[utf8]{inputenc}
\RequirePackage[T1]{fontenc}
\RequirePackage[ebgaramond]{newtx} % Garamond font
```

Here and elsewhere, the texts after % are comments and are irrelevant; I put those comments just to remind us what we are trying to achieve. The EJW style guide states the main text should be double spaced, so we write:

```
\RequirePackage{setspace} % to set space
\doublespacing % double spacing
```

The EJW style guide states "[l]ong quotations of more than three lines of text should be indented, single spaced, and separated from the rest of the text by an additional line," so we write:

```
\makeatletter
\AtBeginEnvironment{quote} % quote environment
\singlespacing % single spacing
\makeatother
```

The EJW style guide states "[n]umbers, letters, or Roman numerals should not be used to divide sections. Major sections should be divided by a bold title in all caps centered on the page. When a major section is divided into at least two subsections, subsections should be identified by a title in bold at the left side of the page." Furthermore, section titles are in mahogany. Hence, we write:

```
\RequirePackage[dvipsnames]{xcolor} % to use color
\RequirePackage{titlesec} % to format section titles
\titleformat{\section}{\normalfont\Large\bfseries
\centering\color{Mahogany}}{}{0pt}{}
\titleformat{\subsection}{\normalfont\large\bfseries}{}{0pt}{}
```

However, looking at past issues of EJW, the requirement of "all caps" seems to have been abandoned since the January 2009 issue. (Personally, all caps texts give me the impression of screaming or yelling, so I prefer normal texts.) If all caps is still desired, we can insert `\MakeUppercase` after `\color{Mahogany}`.

The EJW style guide states "[p]arenthetic documentation should be used for citations, with a complete reference list including all cited work at the end of the article. Citations should be (author year) when referring to a complete work, e.g. (Friedman 1962), or (author year, page number) when referring to a specific point, e.g. (Keynes 1936, 172)," so we write:

```
% delete comma in citations
\renewcommand{\nameyeardelim}{\addspace}
% suppress p. and pp. in citations
\DeclareFieldFormat{postnote}{#1}
\DeclareFieldFormat{multipostnote}{#1}
% change comma to semicolon in multiple citations
\renewcommand{\compcitedelim}{\multicitedelim}
```

To enable hyperlinks, DOI (digital object identifier), and set colors, we write:

```
\RequirePackage{hyperref} % enable hyperlinks
\hypersetup{colorlinks,linkcolor=black,
citecolor=black,urlcolor=cyan} % set link colors
\RequirePackage{doi} % display DOI
```

I found implementing the reference style most challenging. For this purpose, I used the `biblatex` package but omit the details.[8]

Obviously, I wrote this document using the `ejw` package I created. Although it took me several hours to do so, this one-time cost should have been borne by the publisher. Once a style file is available, users can simply load it to prepare LaTeX documents as normal.

[8] I spent most of my time figuring out how to make names bold in the reference list (but not in the main text). This link was helpful: https://stackoverflow.com/questions/67575574/biblatex-customizing-bibliography-entry

Potential reason for opposition of EJW against LaTeX

Reading articles published at EJW in the past, I get the impression that several authors are critical of formal economic analysis using mathematics. Let us quote a few examples.

> - Professional economists communicate in a language of mathematics—the "Latin" of our time—that similarly excludes ordinary people. (Nelson 2004, 476)
> - I thought [economists] too would leave the theorems and the existence proofs to the mathematicians and do everything possible to get to an answer, even cutting corners and relying on intuition as we engineers sometimes do, because there are such momentous problems awaiting their insights. But on the contrary, many of the economics papers I have looked at seem obsessed with math for its own sake, with real human problems hardly anywhere to be seen. (Gibson 2005, 153)
> - The emphasis on mathematical modeling and regression analysis imposes a toll on the profession. Adam Smith spent his early years studying literature, history, ethics, political and moral philosophy, and then teaching literature and rhetoric to college students. Today to succeed in the profession he would need to study model building and regression analysis well enough to publish in "good" journals, and he (and the rest of us) would have lost the value added from the studies displaced. (Sutter and Pjesky 2007, 238)
> - Lemmas are formulated in proofs so complex that it is useful to divide the task into intermediate steps (*Lemma 1, Lemma 2 … et cetera*), like a stopover. We use the presence of the term "lemma(s)" as an indicator of mathematical complexity. (Coelho and McClure 2008, 79)
> - Think back to your first years in graduate school. The most mathematically complex papers required a great deal of time and effort to read. The papers were written as if to a private club, and we felt proud when we successfully entered the club. (Hakes 2009, 349)

I view myself as a mathematical economist (in fact, I am a co-editor at *Journal of Mathematical Economics* and published a "Mathematics for Economics" textbook (Toda 2025)), and I do not necessarily agree with some of the authors' critical view toward mathematical analysis. However, I do admire heroes such as Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman (who did not use complex mathematics), and I also think many points raised by these authors I cited above are valid. But that is not the point.

As TeX (the precursor of LaTeX) was created by the computer scientist Donald Knuth, LaTeX is naturally designed to provide support for typesetting complex mathematical expressions. The capability of LaTeX to handle complex mathematics may tempt authors to use more mathematics than necessary. Forcing authors to use a traditional document system may alleviate this issue. However, I do not see a justification for using an inferior system to avoid the potential abuse of a superior system. The vital role of EJW in providing a forum for critical commentary in academic economics is held back by the fact that its typesetting policies make it a less appealing venue for critiques of a technical nature such as Beare (2017) and Hirano and Toda (2025a).

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