

Typesetting ellipses with L^AT_EX

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Abstract There are many situations and approaches for using ellipses in L^AT_EX. After sketching some of the myriad situations and a few of the approaches, I describe what I do.

1 Diversity of situations

This note is about the use of ellipses in American English, non-math writing. In this context, ellipses seem to have two purposes: (1) indicating where something is has been left out of quoted text; (2) to indicate a pause or something never stated — an unfinished thought or an implicit thought (“and so on”).

Here are three examples (in which I have not tried to perfect the typesetting of the ellipses):

1. “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth ... a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” The words “on this continent” have been left out.
2. My wife may think that I am fussy about little things ...
The ellipsis here might indicate that I have a lot more to say about this subject that will go unspoken.
3. “Leave me alone ... I’m too tired to talk about it,” he said.
If the quoted words are in dialog, the ellipsis might indicate a pause in the speech.

Ellipses are complicated for at least three reasons:¹ (1) they can have many different uses; (2) there are different sets of conventions for how to indicate the elision, for example, always using three dots or sometimes using three and sometimes using four dots depending on context within sentences; (3) there are different approaches for typesetting ellipses.

Here are some of the possible contexts of ellipses use:

- at the end of a sentence

1. While in this note I only discuss non-math use in American English, it provides enough variety of situations and problems to perhaps suggest things to think about when using and typesetting ellipses in another language.

- within a sentence
- at beginning of a line
- at the end of a line
- within a line
- with other punctuation after the ellipsis
- with other punctuation before the ellipsis
- without other punctuation before or after the ellipsis

Lots of combinations of those and other situations also can happen.

2 Different conventions

On pages 82–83 of his *The Elements of Typographic Style*,² Robert Bringhurst gives a sketches covering some of the conventions for using ellipses:³

Most digital fonts now include, among other things, a prefabricated *ellipsis* (row of three baseline dots). Many typographers nevertheless prefer to make their own. Some prefer to see the three dots flush ... with a normal word space before and after. Other prefer ... to add *thin* spaces between the dots. Thick spaces (M/3) are prescribe by the *Chicago Manual of Style*, In most cases the Chicago ellipsis is much too wide.

Flush set ellipses work well with some fonts and faces but not with all... At small text sizes ... it is generally best to add space ... between the dots. Extra space may also look best in the midst of light, open letterforms, ..., and less space in the company of a dark font, ..., or when setting in bold face...

In English ..., when the ellipsis occurs at the end of a sentence, a fourth dot, the period, is added and the space beginning the ellipsis disappears... When the ellipsis combines with a comma, exclamation mark or question mark, the same typographic principle applies. Otherwise a word space is required fore and aft.

However, the Bringhurst summary leaves out some common conventions. For instance, pages 292–296 of my copy of *Chicago Manual of Style*⁴ starts by giving two main conventions for the form of ellipses: (1) always only three dots, and (2) four dots at the end of sentences (or three dots and another punctuation mark, as described by Bringhurst) and three dots elsewhere. The latter is the manual’s preferred convention.

2. Version 3.1, Hartley & Marks, Publishers, Vancouver, BC, 2005

3. The first two instances and the last instance of an ellipsis in this quote are part of Bringhurst’s text. The rest of the ellipses are by me to indicate my elisions from the Bringhurst quote.

4. I’m looking at the 13th edition and not the latest 14 edition.

Ellipses in block quotes also provide additional circumstances beyond those mentioned in Bringhurst's sketch.

There are a number of useful on-line discussions of the use of ellipses, for example,

- in the Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellipsis>
- in Doc Scribe's Guide to research styles, where you can lookup the approaches recommended in five well known style guides (AMA, APA, ASA, Chicago, and MLA): <http://www.docstyles.com/>

3 Standard tools versus hand crafting

Just using `\dots` or `\ldots` in L^AT_EX is often not enough to address some of the potential needs mentioned in the previous sections.⁵

Also, naive use of `\dots` apparently has a problem that Peter Heslin's ellipsis style (<http://www.ctan.org/tex-archive/macros/latex/contrib/ellipsis/>) works on fixing. As Heslin says,

There is a problem in the way L^AT_EX handles ellipses: it always puts a tiny bit more space after `\dots` in text mode than before it, which often results in the ellipsis being off-center when set between two other things.

It is worth reading the documentation of Heslin's package,⁶ which also describes some of the issues relating to using ellipses. The package also allows one to specify the Chicago or MLA style and to specify the spacing between dots (e.g., in terms of an em) in an ellipsis.

Another package is `lips.sty` (<http://www.tex.ac.uk/ctan/macros/latex/contrib/frankenstein/lips.sty>), which Heslin suggests one use if one wants the full Chicago style.

With so many possibilities and needs, it is not surprising that, as Bringhurst says, "Many typographers nevertheless prefer to make their own." It is hard for me to imagine a package with sufficient capabilities and options for everyone.

4 My approach

My approach has been to define a few macros to handle common situations for using ellipses in the writing I do. These also implement my own preferences, such as for inter-dot spacing and spacing before and after an ellipsis. I have used a couple of versions of these.

5. Also see the appendix.

6. <http://www.ctan.org/tex-archive/macros/latex/contrib/ellipsis/ellipsis.pdf>

Version 1

The following definitions were sufficient for the *Breakthrough Management* book I co-authored and typeset. I used the Minion typeface for this book. The comments in the follow code provide the relevant explanations.

```
%dots for main text
\def\bigdotsspace{3pt}

%three dots
\def\mydots{\hbox{\hspace{\bigdotsspace}.\hspace{\bigdotsspace}.
\hspace{\bigdotsspace}.\hspace{\bigdotsspace}}}
%I like the same size space on each side of the ellipsis as
% is between the dots of the ellipsis

%period and three dots = four altogether
\def\fmydots{\hskip0pt{\hbox{.\hspace{\bigdotsspace}.
\hspace{\bigdotsspace}.\hspace{\bigdotsspace}.\hspace{\bigdotsspace}}}}
%And the same size space after a period and before 3 dots

%dots with only beginning space -- no following space
\def\mydotsnfs{\hbox{\hspace{\bigdotsspace}.\hspace{\bigdotsspace}.
\hspace{\bigdotsspace}.}}
%I used this def with an ellipsis and following comma, etc.

%dots for block quote text, which is smaller than main text
\def\smalldotsspace{2pt}

%three dots without end spaces
\def\minsmalldots{\hbox{.\hspace{\smalldotsspace}.
\hspace{\smalldotsspace}.}}

%three dots -- small my dots
\def\smydots{\hbox{\hspace{\smalldotsspace}\minsmalldots
\hspace{\smalldotsspace}}}

%period and three dots = four altogether
\def\fsmydots{\hskip0pt{\hbox{\hspace{.3pt}.\hspace{\smalldotsspace}
\minsmalldots\hspace{\smalldotsspace}}}}
```

Version 2

I am using the following set of definitions with the book I have compiled about the technology history of the company Bolt Beranek and Newman and that I am now typesetting. This book uses the Lucida Bright typeface. For this second book I had learned about doing things in terms em which varies with font size, e.g., among main, footnote, and block quote text. My decisions in the following definitions are only about what looks good to me, not about the conventions of a particular style manual. (The comments in the following code provide the relevant explanations.)

```
\def\sencespace{\unskip\spacefactor=3000 \space\ignorespaces}

%\def\fourdots{\unskip\kern\fontdimen3\font.\kern.1667em\ldots\sencespace{}}
%tried this but didn't use it

\def\fourdots{\hbox{.\hspace{.33em}.\hspace{.33em}.\hspace{.33em}.\,}}
%with an end-of-sentence ellipsis I use a thin, not word, space

\def\fourdotstightright{\hbox{.\hspace{.33em}.\hspace{.33em}.\hspace{.33em}.}}
%sometimes I don't want the trailing thinspace, e.g., at end of line

%\def\threedots{\unskip\ \ldots\unskip{}}
%tried this but didn't use it

\def\threedots{\hbox{\,\hspace{.33em}.\hspace{.33em}.\,}}
%for a non-end-of-sentence ellipsis

\def\threedotstightleft{\hbox{.\hspace{.33em}.\hspace{.33em}.\,}}
%for beginning of line, e.g., in a block quote

\def\threedotstightright{\hbox{\,\hspace{.33em}.\hspace{.33em}.}}
%for the end of line, e.g., in a block quote

\def\fnfourdots{\fourdots{}}
%for use in a footnote -- I originally thought I might need
% a different definition, but then I was happy with the
% main text ratios

\def\fnthreedots{\threedots{}}
%ditto
```

Conclusion

It is easy to see how my set of definitions could be adapted to using word or sentence spaces before and after an ellipsis while using some other appropriate inter-dot spacing, or to adapt the definitions to other traditional or personal conventions. For instance,

```
\def\fourdots{\hbox{.\hspace{.33em}.\hspace{.33em}.\hspace{.33em}}. }  
  %sentence space after four dots
```

I am also sure that there are better approaches than mine for handling a variety of ellipsis situations in L^AT_EX, or at least better ways to do what I am doing (perhaps automatically detecting whether an ellipsis is at the beginning or end of a line and thus eliminating the need for those definitions).

I am interested in hearing about other approaches and critiques about my approach, and I'd be glad to add an appropriate set of annotations here.

Appendix

In the file `latex.ltx`, I found the following definitions.

```
\DeclareTextCommandDefault{\textellipsis}{%  
  .\kern\fontdimen3\font  
  .\kern\fontdimen3\font  
  .\kern\fontdimen3\font}  
  
\DeclareRobustCommand{\dots}{%  
  \ifmmode\matheellipsis\else\textellipsis\fi}  
  
\let\ldots\dots
```