

\emph or \textit

Asked 15 years, 9 months ago Modified 5 years, 8 months ago Viewed 194k times



231

In the comments section of [Does it matter if I use \textit or \it, \bfseries or \bf, etc](#), I asked for a clarification of these points. The clarification has mostly been made, but it was requested that I turn this into a question to provide for more room for this question to be fielded.



So here it is:



Please explain the difference between `\emph` and `\textit`. When should they be used, respectively?

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edited Apr 13, 2017 at 12:35



Community Bot
1

asked Aug 18, 2010 at 18:57



BBischof
4,369 5 30 24

3 Nice explanation of the question and other DO's and DON'Ts [DO's and DON'Ts when typesetting a document](#) – user3882 Feb 28, 2011 at 5:33

2 Answers

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263

Those are very different commands even if the output happens to look the same.

- If you want to emphasize a word or some text, use `\emph`. Don't just make the text italic or bold. If needed, you may change the behaviour of `\emph` whenever you wish in the preamble and the whole document will be adjusted accordingly.
- If you want to get italic text, use `\textit`. `\emph` might have a different effect, a package like `ulem` might change it to underlining for instance.
- `\emph` may be nested: emphasized text within emphasized text may be upright. In contrary, nesting `\textit` just keeps the italic shape.
- Further, I rarely use physical font commands in my body text. I use them to define styles in the preamble and use the styles in the document afterwards, ensuring consistency and allowing changes to be easily made.





Stefan Kottwitz ♦

240k ● 88 ● 699 ● 847

14 I once got caught by 'ulem's redefinition. It took me ages to figure out why lots of things were getting underlined all of a sudden. – Andrew Stacey Aug 18, 2010 at 20:40

24 The solution to the problem Adrew pointed out is to load ulem with `\usepackage[normalem]{ulem}`. – Peter Grill Aug 11, 2011 at 23:05

3 Are there alternative forms of emphasis, one you can call for putting in italics, and one for boldface? (as opposed to explicitly using `\textit{}` and `\textbf{}` all the time) – bobobobo Jul 8, 2012 at 17:33

4 Is this analogous to the differences between `` and `<i>` tags in HTML? [For example...](#) – Fuhrmanator Mar 20, 2013 at 14:21

3 @bobobobo Actually using `\emph` inside of italic text removes the italics on the emphasized text. – Evangelos Bempelis Jul 15, 2014 at 17:01



94

The `\emph` macro is designed to be semantic markup. So while by convention it makes text italic, this is not always the case. For example, the `beamer` class makes `\emph` text red as this works better in presentations than using italic.



On the other hand, `\textit` makes text italic, with no variation. Thus it is intended for making text italic when that is exactly what you want.



I would usually favour using `\textit` in a design context, where you are deciding 'these things should be italic'. Normally, that would be in the preamble or a class file, perhaps something like:



```
\newcommand*\latin[1]{\textit{#1}}
```

In the document body, I'd favour the semantic approach and use `\emph`, as this can then be defined in the preamble to do something else entirely.



Joshua Schwartz

7 ● 3



Joseph Wright ♦

273k ● 35 ● 739 ● 1.1k

26 Actually, `beamer` leaves `\emph` unchanged, but provides an `\alert` command for red text. – lockstep Aug 23, 2010 at 19:55

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