

LyX 2.2.0 review

John R Hudson

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Twenty years ago Matthias Ettrick developed LyX as a GUI for the core L^AT_EX packages. Since then it has acquired a sophisticated outliner, advanced find and replace (for styled text and formulas), change management, version control, support for XeT_EX and LuaT_EX, a tabbed interface for working on multiple documents and a split screen option to allow documents to be edited side by side or to edit different parts of the same document (figure 1).

Unrivalled as an authoring program, it outperforms all the proprietary alternatives for typesetting books, articles and reports in ease of use and range of features, not least in its support for maths expressions and bibliographies. LyX, however, remains a very small program, relying on, among many other programs, ImageMagick to handle graphics and Hunspell, in Linux, for spell checking.

LyX 2.0, released in 2011, brought modules to load L^AT_EX packages that are not loaded by default. For example, the Initials module provides drop capitals, the Foot to End module turns footnotes into endnotes and various maths modules extend the maths typesetting options in LyX. Avoiding loading features the user is not going to use alongside the use of floats which can be closed so that LyX does not have to redraw things as the user scrolls through the document means that it can handle a 300,000 word document as easily as a 3,000 word one. LyX 2.2, released on 27 May 2016, builds on these features as well as offering further enhancements to the interface.

It has long been possible to edit a table in normal orientation and then rotate it 90° in the output; now table handling when the whole table cannot fit on the screen has been improved and an option to move rows and columns up or down, left or right has been added.

The default range of colors available in LyX has been extended and a new box dialog (figure 2) created to enable various parameters of the box including background and foreground colors, frame size and style to be edited. For those who like to view the L^AT_EX source, context highlighting has been added.

Whereas you still have to enter em and en dashes as three or two ordinary dashes, LyX now creates the em and en as you enter them; however, the one retrograde step appears to be that LyX no longer typesets LaTeX automatically but expects you to go to Insert > Special Character > Logos to insert L^AT_EX correctly typeset.

Support for Georgian, the Swiss and Austrian variants of German and Ancient Greek has come with this release (though Hunspell doesn't yet support an Ancient Greek spellchecker!).

New modules enable the use of L^AT_EX colorboxes, rotateboxes, resizeboxes and reflectboxes to be integrated into the interface (figure 3) rather than requiring the insertion of T_EX code. There are new modules to create PDF Forms and commented PDFs.

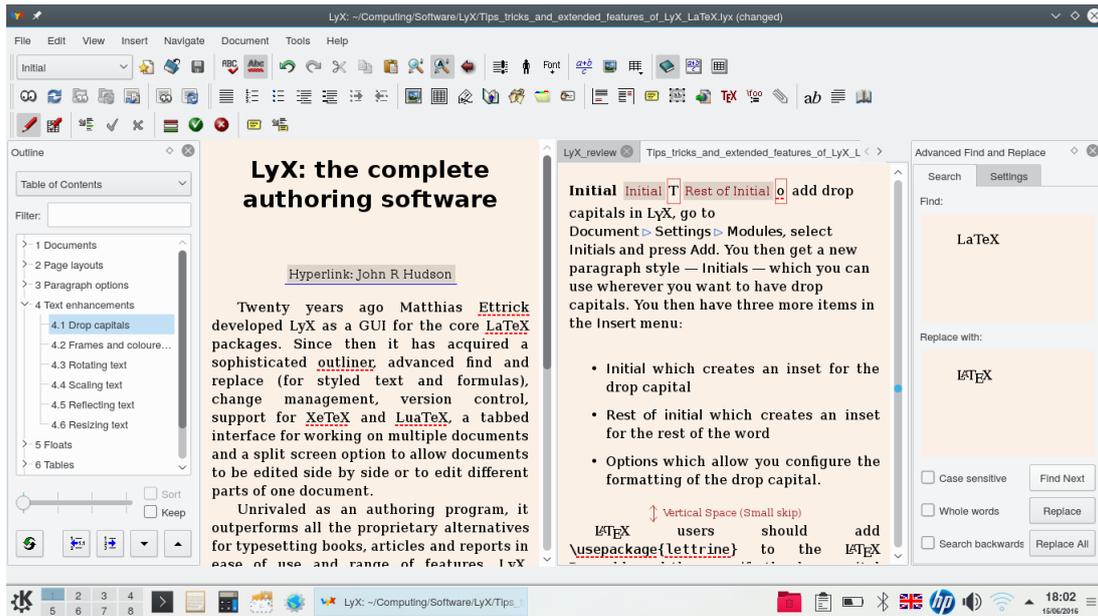


Figure 1: Classic LyX interface with two documents open, outliner showing outline of right hand document, change management enabled and advanced search and replace open

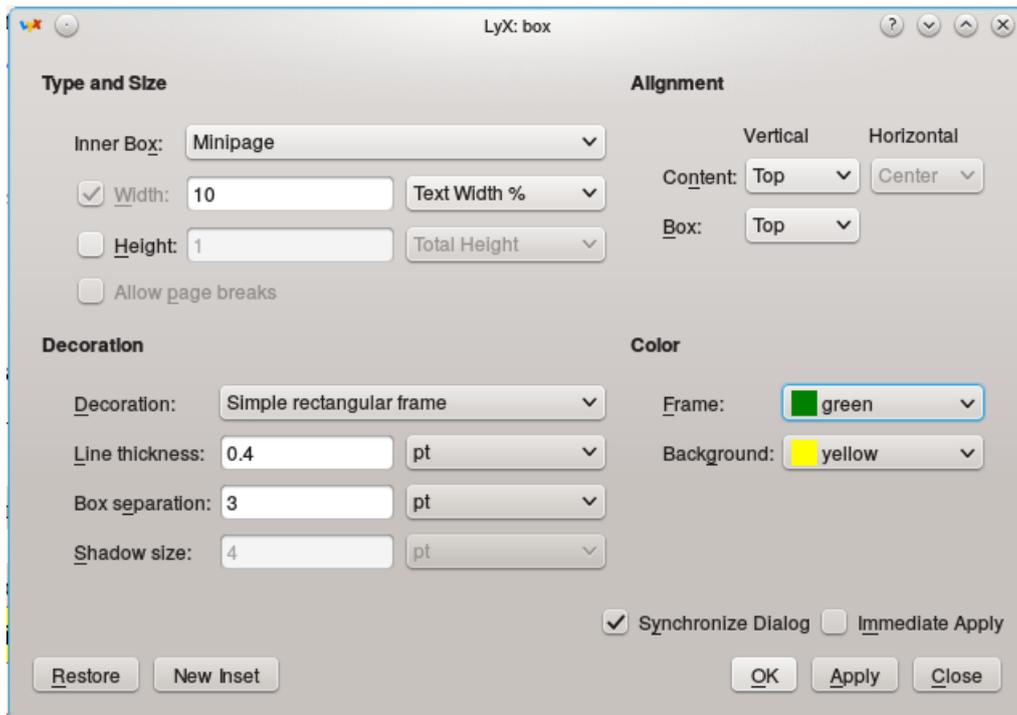


Figure 2: Box dialog

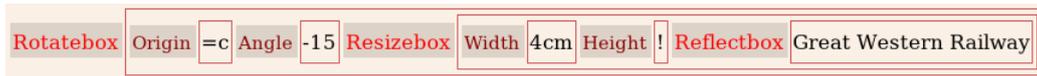


Figure 3: Rotatebox with Resizebox and Reflectbox inside

Having used LyX since 2000 as a student, an author and a typesetter, I continue to be impressed by the no-fuss approach taken to the development of this extraordinarily good program; even for simple tasks, I find it much quicker to use than a word-processor and for editing or typesetting books, journals or reports it brings a consistency and quality to the finished product which no other software can — thanks to its developers' willingness to rely on already available programs to do all the heavy lifting and to focus just on the user experience.