There are several ways to deploy ConTEXt. Most common is to let it render a document, in which case you install it on a system and use an editor to input your document and from a console or by clicking some key trigger a run. The input can be structured using TEX macros but it can also be xml, or some other format that gets converted to ConTEXt commands before processing.

Instead you can also use ConTEXt as a more hidden application, for instance in a web service or rendering component in a larger application. In that case the end user is not really aware that TEX is being used.

No matter how you use ConTEXt, you need to install it first. You can for instance use TEXlive or another distribution to pick up ConTEXt, but you can also install it using the archive (snapshot), in which case you also need to pick up the engine (for instance LuaTEX) and a basic set of fonts. In order to make installation easy we provide a so called standalone distribution that has all you need.

The standalone ConTEXt distribution has the following characteristics:

- The installation is self contained. Apart from resources like fonts, the TEX macros, Lua code and MetaPost helpers are provided in one package.
- There is only one binary involved: LuaMetaTEX. The source code of this program is integral part of the ConTEXt distribution (per end 2019). A user should be able to compile the program if needed. There is no dependency on additional libraries other than those that make up the operating system.
- The core system is able to typeset documents in an efficient way. The memory footprint is decent and performance acceptable, also on on low power devices and virtual machines. We try not to provide bloatware.
- The official user interface is stable and the implementation of core components will not change fundamentally. When something can be improved it will be. One can use a snapshot for long term stability.
- Support is provided by means of a mailing list, a wiki, documentation, meetings, etc. If needed you can consult (or hire) support. There are enough experienced users out there to get you going.

The first version of ConTEXt, now tagged MkII, has been around since 1995 and (still) runs on top of pdfTEX. The development of its successor MkIV started in 2005 as part of the LuaTEX development and still carries on. The most recent incarnation is lmtx, which is MkIV but tuned for LuaMetaTEX, the lean and mean successor of LuaTEX.

ConTEXt lmtx — factsheet