Style characterization of machine printed texts
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Chapter 0

Prelude

They all fall there so perfectly,
It all seems so well timed.
And here I sit so patiently
Waiting to find out what price
You have to pay to get out of
Going through all these things twice.

—Bob Dylan, Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again

How are you reading this dissertation?

We tend to take for granted the amount of prior knowledge we apply to the task of decoding the content of a document. Maybe you were curious about the subject of document style characterization. If you are unfamiliar with the subject of document understanding, perhaps you deliberately sought out the introduction, implicitly aware of the existence of chapters, that their beginning is styled differently.

How did you find the introduction?

Introductory chapters tend to be toward the beginning. Perhaps you found the table of contents and the exact page number, or maybe you paged through the book searching for pages that look like chapter beginnings. You might have had a mental template of beginning-of-chapter pages similar to the scheme annotating this very page. These types of mental templates are learned through experience with a document style, or genre. The existence of genres of texts establishes implicit rules. Experience with the rules yields knowledge, allowing you to navigate the structure of books, identify the purpose of chunks of text, and find information.

How did you anticipate that this would be an italicized interrogative?

Now you are reading this sentence. Focus is subconsciously attenuated to the baseline of these decorated vertical bars of ink. Without having to read anything in this paragraph, your attention is drawn to words that are **boldfaced**, SMALLCAPPED, or otherwise **emphasized**. Visual cues attenuate your focus, under the learned prior assumption that emphasized text is important. The author is exploiting this by letting style coincide with focus.

This dissertation examines elements of style in machine printed texts and proposes tools and techniques to characterize them.