Org-mode and julia: an introduction

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Contents

One of the reasons for this document was a desire for an easier method to get acquainted with `julia`. The only prerequisites are a passing familiarity with Org-mode and Emacs keybindings.

1 What you need to get started

Note: a lot of the code blocks below have the header argument `:eval no-export`. This means that the code block can be evaluated interactively by `C-c C-c` with point in the code block but will *not* be evaluated during export. That header argument is present because those blocks have settings which conflict with my current setup (or are otherwise redundant) yet are meant to be useful for other people going through this document.

1.1 Julia

You are going to need a working installation of `julia`. The homepage on GitHub has the pertinent links collected all in one place:

- **Homepage:** `http://julialang.org`
- **Binaries:** `http://code.google.com/p/julialang/downloads/list`
- **Packages:** `http://docs.julialang.org/en/latest/packages/packagelist/`
- **Mailing lists:** `http://julialang.org/community/`
- **IRC:** `http://webchat.freenode.net/?channels=julia`
- **Source code:** `https://github.com/JuliaLang/julia`
- **Git clone URL:** `git://github.com/JuliaLang/julia.git`
- **Documentation:** `http://julialang.org/manual/`

Fair warning: the initial install takes a *long time*, largely because julia has a lot of dependencies. Never fear, though; updates are brief.

1.2 ESS - Emacs Speaks Statistics

You are going to need a relavely bleeding-edge version of ESS since it is only due to recent ESS work that this document is even possible. The place to look for the latest version of ESS is here. One of the options there is to clone the ESS github repository and put the following in your `.emacs` (or whatever other initialiation file you use):

```
(add-to-list 'load-path "/path/to/ESS/lisp")
(require 'ess-site)
```

Once ESS is up and running you will need to tell it where the `julia` executable is. Edit the following and place it in your `.emacs`:

```
(setq  inferior-julia-program-name "/path/to/julia-release-basic")
```

After the above steps are complete then you should be able to start Emacs and do `M-x julia` to launch an interactive julia session. At this point you should be able to do everything in the Introduction to Julia.

1.3 Add-on packages

There is a large (and growing) list of contibuted packages which add to the base functionality of `julia`. For example, several statistics packages were recently collected in a blog post by John Myles White entitled The State of Statistics in Julia. The instructions in the blog post are (already) a bit out-of-date; the currently recommended way to install the packages is to launch an interactive `julia` session and execute the following command:

```
Pkg.add("DataFrames", "Distributions", "GLM", "MCMC", "Optim",
        "NHST", "Clustering")
```

As John notes, the `RDatasets` package takes a lot longer to download. Perhaps you would like to install it separately.

```
Pkg.add("RDatasets")
```

1.4 Org-mode

Since you have at least a passing familiarity with org-mode then you probably already have something like the following in your `.emacs`:

```
(require 'org)
```

Another handy setting to have is

```
(setq org-confirm-babel-evaluate nil)
```

The following lines (either here or in your `.emacs`) permit inline image display in the Emacs buffer.

```
(add-hook 'org-babel-after-execute-hook 'org-display-inline-images)
(add-hook 'org-mode-hook 'org-display-inline-images)
```

1.5 ob-julia.el

You are going to want a copy of `ob-julia.el` to fully integrate `julia` with Org-mode. You can find it and some other documents to get you started here. Download `ob-julia.el` into a convenient place. Edit the code block below and evaluate it by `C-c C-c` with point in the code block.

```
(load "/path/to/ob-julia.el")
```

An alternative method is to put the following in your `.emacs` (these should go below the `(require 'org)` line):

```
(add-to-list 'load-path "/path/to/ob-julia.el")
(org-babel-do-load-languages
 'org-babel-load-languages
 '((emacs-lisp . t) (julia . t)))
```

You are all set.

2 Evaluation inside the Org buffer

If you've gotten this far then everything is installed in the right place and initialized properly. Now the fun begins.

2.1 :results value

2.2 :results output

3 Graphics

The most stable and fully featured of the `julia` graphics packages at the time of this writing appears to be the Winston package, although the Gadfly package is also available and appears promising. To install the Winston package execute the following in an interactive session (if you do it here then you can't watch the download and install as it is happening).

```
Pkg.add("Winston")
```

The Winston package has lots of dependencies and many of them must be built from source (on Ubuntu).

3.1 Plotting with Winston

To get up and running with plots in `julia` check out the many example graphs (with code) on the Winston examples page. As far as Org-mode is concerned, you can do plotting

1. Interactively with a plot window,
2. In-buffer with a `png`,
3. Via export into LaTeX, HTML, Beamer...

Let's describe each in turn. All three methods require setting up the plot object as a first step, after, of course, loading the Winston package. Let's set up a simple plot object (do `C-c C-c` with point in the block):

```
using Winston
x = linspace(0, 3pi, 100)
c = cos(x)
s = sin(x)
p = FramedPlot();
setattr(p, "title", "title!")
setattr(p, "xlabel", L"\Sigma x^2_i")
setattr(p, "ylabel", L"\Theta_i")
add(p, FillBetween(x, c, x, s) )
add(p, Curve(x, c, "color", "red") )
add(p, Curve(x, s, "color", "blue") )
```

We did `:results silent` to omit the lengthy output from being inserted in the org buffer. So the hard part is finished – we've created a plot object `p` which is now available to manipulate.

To launch a plot window and look at the graph right now evaluate the following code block.

```
Winston.tk(p)
```

A plot should open in an X11 window with a pretty graph. Suppose instead we'd like to insert the graph in the org buffer right now. We need the inline-image display options described in section `Org mode`. Assuming you've done that, evaluate the following code block.

```
file(p, "example1.png")
```

The code block evaluates the command `file(p, "example1.png")`, which tells `julia` to write the graph to a `.png` file (also available are `.pdf`, `.svg`, and `.eps`, though none of those can be inserted in the org buffer). The header argument `:results graphics` tells org-mode that the results are going to be graphics (as opposed to elisp tables or STDOUT output) and the header argument `:file example1.png` tells org to insert an link to the file `example1.png` (just created by `julia`) right after the the code block. This link is evaluated by `org-display-inline-images` which results in a `.png` in the org buffer.

Notice that we had to specify the file name *twice*, once inside the code block and once as a header argument. Some languages (such as R) only require one specification: the header argument. The reason for this is simple: `ob-R.el` includes code which dynamically constructs a graphics device call behind the scenes, the call depending on the file extension in the `:file` header argument. Such a thing is more difficult with `julia` because different graphics packages have markedly different device calls (for instance, `Gadfly` uses `SVG("filename", p)`). Maybe someday the calls will stabilize and it will make sense to write wrapper code to do that automatically. In the meantime, use whatever package you like and write the filename twice.

We'll defer the export method discussion to the next section.

4 Exporting to other formats

Sonner or later you will want to share your work with others, people who have not (yet) fully come to the realization that Emacs+Org is really quite better than sliced bread and also is destined to conquer the entire observable Universe. Perhaps you'd like to make a presentation about how awesome `julia` is at a(n) (inter)national conference. Org-mode supports export to multiple formats. Here we'll describe a few. There has been work recently on a brand new exporter which hasn't yet made it to the official maintenance branch as of the time of this writing. The following instructions apply to the new exporter, which is one of the reasons why it was important in the first section to update your Org-mode.

4.1 HTML

This is the easiest. Insert the following in your `.emacs`:

```
(require 'ox-html)
```

Then open this file and execute `C-c C-e` to open the export dispatcher. From there you have three options:

1. `h H` exports as an HTML buffer (can be saved later),
2. `h h` exports as an HTML file (saved in the working directory),
3. `h o` exports as an HTML file and opens in a browser.

That's it. There are a lot of other cool things you can do; see the Org manual. If you export to HTML then you are going to want your images (if any) to be `.png` or `.svg` files.

4.2 LaTeX

This one is just as easy. Insert the following in your `.emacs`:

```
(require 'ox-latex)
```

Then open this file and do

1. `C-c C-e l L` to export as a LaTeX buffer,
2. `C-c C-e l l` to export as a LaTeX file,
3. `C-c C-e l p` to export as LaTeX and generate a PDF,
4. `C-c C-e l o` to export as LaTeX, generate PDF, and open.

There are a *ton* of other LaTeX things to do. See the Org manual. If you export to PDF then it's fine to use image formats `.png`, `.eps`, or `.pdf`, but the `.png` exports as a blurry raster image - use `.pdf` instead (or `.eps` for external plain LaTeX export).

4.3 Beamer

Beamer is a special case unto itself. The short story is that you need the following in your `.emacs`:

```
(require 'ox-beamer)
```

Then also add an entry for the beamer class in your `.emacs`. Here is a boilerplate version which you can customize to taste:

```
(add-to-list 'org-latex-classes
     '("beamer"
       "\\documentclass[presentation]{beamer}
                \[DEFAULT-PACKAGES]
                \[PACKAGES]
                \[EXTRA]"
       ("\\section{%s}" . "\\section*{%s}")
       ("\\subsection{%s}" . "\\subsection*{%s}")
       ("\\subsubsection{%s}" . "\\subsubsection*{%s}")))
```

Since beamer is such a special case I have tweaked a minimal `julia` beamer presentation in A julia beamer example. See there, see the Org manual, and see Worg too for more information.

5 Other things

- You can extract all of the `julia` source code (also known as *tangling* the Org document) with the keystrokes `C-c C-v t`. This will generate a `julia` script (with extension `.jl`) in the working directory. Note that this capability is turned off by default. You can activate it by adding the header argument `:tangle yes` to those code blocks you'd like to tangle or doing a buffer-wide header setting with the line `#+PROPERTY: tangle yes` near the top of the org file. See the Org manual for details.

- You may have noticed that those `julia` code lines with no output (for instance, lines with semicolons `;` at the end) generate an empty line in the `#+RESULTS` below the code block. Consequently, the first time you evaluate a `julia` code block without having previously initiated a `julia` session with `M-x julia` the `#+RESULTS` will have an extra mystery empty line. It is no mystery. The first statement executed by ESS when loading `julia` is an `include` command. That command has no output. If that empty line bothers you then execute the code block again; the mystery empty line will disappear.

- Be careful when executing code blocks with `:results value`. Code block evaluation in that case works by writing the `julia` commands to an external file in the `/tmp` directory, evaluating the commands with `julia`, writing the results to a comma-separated (`.csv`) file, then reading the `.csv` file and converting the result to `elisp` for insertion to the org buffer. Not all object types are supported by `julia` for writing

to `.csv` files, in particular, `1x1` matrices and arrays of ASCII characters are not supported (yet). If you try to evaluate code blocks in those cases (or any other case where output to `.csv` is not supported) then you will get an error.

6 Fitting (generalized) linear models

```
using RDatasets, DataFrames, Distributions, GLM
trees = data("datasets", "trees");
treeslm = lm(:(Girth ~ Height + Volume), trees);
coef(treeslm)
coeftable(treeslm)
```

```
3-element Float64 Array:
 10.8164
 -0.0454835
  0.19518
3x4 DataFrame:
          Estimate Std.Error  t value   Pr(>|t|)
[1,]       10.8164    1.9732  5.48165 7.44691e-6
[2,]    -0.0454835 0.0282621 -1.60935   0.118759
[3,]       0.19518 0.0109553  17.8161 8.2233e-17
```