Abstract. *The World Atlas of Language Structures* (WALS; URL: wals.info) is the first attempt to provide broad coverage of the geographical distribution of the structural diversity of the world’s languages, answering on the basis of samples of languages such questions as the distribution of languages with large, medium, and small inventories of vowels or of languages which have distinct terms for ‘hand’ and ‘arm’ versus those that do not. I will first introduce the project, including discussion of some of the problems that arose in transferring our knowledge of linguistic diversity to map form and presentation of some of the maps as illustrative material. I will then look at ways in which the atlas can be used as a research tool, both within linguistics (e.g. testing correlations between different structural parameters) and in cooperation with other disciplines (such as prehistory).