

Mac Tips & Tricks

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Macs and PCs do mostly the same things, but they do them differently. Each platform has its quirks, and since I now use a Mac I'm learning some good tips and tricks that make me more productive on it. A couple of these have been in my previous Mac articles, but most haven't. They may help other Mac users—especially those who are former PC users or who primarily support PCs—understand how to make the Mac work a little better.

Routine Maintenance

One thing that surprised me was that Macs are engineered to do certain routine maintenance tasks unattended at specific intervals. This is a carryover from Unix, the foundation of Mac OS X. Mac OS X behaves like a server because Unix is a server operating system. These maintenance routines clean up log files, caches, temporary files, histories, etc, but only if the system is not either shut down or in sleep mode.

If you leave your Mac powered on overnight, it will automatically run its routines between 3:15am and 5:30am (your local timezone), when it figures no one would be using the system. If, like me, you turn your system off overnight, those routines won't trigger. You can buy software that will run them or their equivalents, reschedule them, or just use the following commands (only the part between the quotes) in the Terminal utility:

- Daily maintenance command: “sudo periodic/daily”
- Weekly maintenance command: “sudo periodic/weekly”
- Monthly maintenance command: “sudo periodic/monthly”

After entering any of these commands into the Terminal utility (the Terminal is the Unix equivalent of a command prompt), it will likely ask for your password. You must have administrative rights on the Mac for these to work. Also, make certain you let the command complete (return to a prompt) before entering another.

Display Hidden Files

Sometimes it's helpful to see those files normally hidden by the operating system. To display hidden files in Finder (the Mac equivalent to Windows Explorer), enter the following command in Terminal: “defaults write com.apple.finder AppleShowAllFiles TRUE”. As with all Terminal commands, this is case sensitive.

Adding a Separator to the Dock

I like to organize my Doc by putting “system” icons on the left, applications in

the middle, and trash on the right. You can add a separator to the Dock and move your icons around it to help accomplish this visually with the following commands:

- To add a space to the left side of the Dock (the applications area), enter the following command in Terminal: “defaults write com.apple.dock persistent-apps -array- add '{tile-data={}; tile-type="spacer-file";}'”. Once the prompt returns, follow it by entering the following command: “killall Dock”.
- To add a space to the right side of the Dock (the trash area), enter the following command in Terminal: “defaults write com.apple.dock persistent-others -array- add '{tile-data={}; tile-type="spacer-file";}'”. Once the prompt returns, follow it by entering the following command: “killall Dock”.
- To remove them, simply drag them off the Dock as you would any other icon you'd like to remove.

Adding the Path to Finder's Title Bar

I like to see the path of the folder I'm looking in to make sure I'm where I *think* I am! To do this, enter the following command in Terminal: “defaults write com.apple.finder _FXShowPosixPathInTitle -bool YES”.

Mac Keyboard Help

PC users trying to work on a Mac might think there are some keys missing or that seem to not be functioning quite right on the Mac's keyboard! Here are some keystrokes that may help:

- The Delete key acts like a backspace key! To make it work like a PC Delete key, press the Fn key while pressing the Delete key.
- There's no Insert key! Pressing Fn while pressing the 'm' key will insert.
- In System Preferences, in the Keyboard & Mouse section, under the Keyboard tab, checking *Use all F1, F2 keys as standard function keys* will make the function keys work like they do in Windows.
- When tabbing from field to field on a website, it may skip pull-down options

like predefined month or state lists. Pressing Control + F7 will fix that!

Print Screen

There's no Print Screen key!

- Command + Shift + 3 will take a snapshot of the entire screen and place the file on your desktop.
- Command + Shift + 4 will let you use your mouse to highlight what you want to take a picture of.
- Command + Shift + 4 followed by a spacebar will let you take a picture of a whatever window the mouse is over.

Mouse Help

The Mac's one-button mouse is challenging for PC users. Here are a few tips:

- Pressing the Control key while clicking will be interpreted by the system as a right-click, which Apple calls it a *secondary* click.
- In System Preferences, in the Keyboard & Mouse section, you can tell the system to interpret two fingers on a trackpad as a right-click. You can also tell it there to interpret two fingers moving as a scroll! That's really nice.
- In the same System Preferences area, you can tell the system that two fingers moving on a track pad while the Control key is pressed will zoom the screen! That's very nice too!

While talking with one of Apple's engineers this week I shared one of these tips with him that he didn't know and he was thrilled! Though these may not necessarily 'thrill' you, if you're a new Mac user or a PC person trying to support Mac users, I hope they help.

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