

GNU Emacs Survival Card

for version 32

In the following, **C-z** means hit the ‘z’ key while holding down the *Ctrl* key. **M-z** means hit the ‘z’ key while hitting the *Meta* (labeled *Alt* on some keyboards) or after hitting *Esc* key.

Running Emacs

To enter GNU Emacs, just type its name: **emacs**. Emacs divides the frame into several areas: menu line, buffer area with the edited text, mode line describing the buffer in the window above it, and a minibuffer/echo area in the last line.

C-x C-c	quit Emacs
C-x C-f	edit file; this command uses the minibuffer to read the file name; use this to create new files by entering the name of the new file
C-x C-s	save the file
C-x k	kill a buffer
C-g	in most context: cancel, stop, abort partially typed or executing command
C-x u	undo

Moving About

C-l	scroll current line to center of window
C-x b	switch to another buffer
M-<	move to beginning of buffer
M->	move to end of buffer
M-g M-g	go to a given line number

Multiple Windows

C-x 0	remove the current window from the display
C-x 1	make active window the only window
C-x 2	split window horizontally
C-x 3	split window vertically
C-x o	move to other window

Regions

Emacs defines a ‘region’ as the space between the *mark* and the *point*. A mark is set with **C-space**. The point is at the cursor position.

M-h	mark entire paragraph
C-x h	mark entire buffer

Killing and Copying

C-w	kill region
M-w	copy region to kill-ring
C-k	kill from the cursor all the way to the end of the line
M-DEL	kill word
C-y	yank back the last kill (C-w C-y combination could be used to move text around)
M-y	replace last yank with previous kill

Searching

C-s	search for a string
C-r	search for a string backwards
RET	quit searching
M-C-s	regular expression search
M-C-r	reverse regular expression search

Use **C-s** or **C-r** again to repeat the search in either direction.

Tags

Tags tables files record locations of function and procedure definitions, global variables, data types and anything else convenient. To create a tags table file, type ‘**etags input_files**’ as a shell command.

M-.	find a definition
M-,	pop back to where M-. was last invoked
M-x tags-query-replace	run query-replace on all files recorded in tags table

Compiling

M-x compile	compile code in active window
C-c C-c	go to the next compiler error, when in the compile window or
C-x ‘	when in the window with source code

Dired, the Directory Editor

C-x d	invoke Dired
d	flag this file for deletion
~	flag all backup files for deletion
u	remove deletion flag
x	delete the files flagged for deletion
C	copy file
g	update the Dired buffer
f	visit the file described on the current line
s	switch between alphabetical date/time order

Reading and Sending Mail

M-x rmail	start reading mail
q	quit reading mail
h	show headers
d	mark the current message for deletion
x	remove all messages marked for deletion
C-x m	begin composing a message
C-c C-c	send the message and switch to another buffer
C-c C-f C-c	move to the ‘Cc’ header field, creating one if there is none

Miscellaneous

M-q	fill paragraph
M-/	expand previous word dynamically
C-z	iconify (suspend) Emacs when running it under X or shell, respectively
M-x revert-buffer	replace the text being edited with the text of the file on disk

Query Replace

M-% interactively search and replace
M-C-% using regular expressions

Valid responses in query-replace mode are

SPC replace this one, go on to next
, replace this one, don't move
DEL skip to next without replacing
! replace all remaining matches
^ back up to the previous match
RET exit query-replace
C-r enter recursive edit (M-C-c to exit)

Regular Expressions

. (dot) any single character except a newline
* zero or more repeats
+ one or more repeats
? zero or one repeat
[. . .] denotes a class of character to match
[^. . .] negates the class
\c quote characters otherwise having a special meaning in regular expressions
... \|. . . \|. . . matches one of the alternatives ("or")
\(. . .\) groups a series of pattern elements to a single element
\n same text as *n*th group
^ matches at line beginning
\$ matches at line end
\w matches word-syntax character
\W matches non-word-syntax character
\< matches at word beginning
\> matches at word end
\b matches at word break
\B matches at non-word break

Registers

C-x r s save region in register
C-x r i insert register contents into buffer
C-x r SPC save value of point in register
C-x r j jump to point saved in register

Rectangles

C-x r r copy rectangle to register
C-x r k kill rectangle
C-x r y yank rectangle
C-x r t prefix each line with a string
C-x r o open rectangle, shifting text right
C-x r c blank out rectangle

Shells

M-x shell start a shell within Emacs
M-! execute a shell command
M-| run a shell command on the region
C-u M-| filter region through a shell command

Spelling Check

M-\$ check spelling of word at the cursor
M-x ispell-region check spelling of all words in region
M-x ispell-buffer check spelling of entire buffer

International Character Sets

C-x RET C-\ select and activate input method for the current buffer
C-\ enable or disable input method
M-x list-input-methods show all input methods
M-x set-language-environment specify principal language
C-x RET c set coding system for next command
M-x find-file-literally visit file with no conversion of any kind
M-x list-coding-systems show all coding systems
M-x prefer-coding-system choose preferred coding system

Keyboard Macros

C-x (start defining a keyboard macro
C-x) end keyboard macro definition
C-x e execute last-defined keyboard macro
C-u C-x (append to last keyboard macro
M-x name-last-kbd-macro name last keyboard macro

Simple Customization

M-x customize customize variables and faces

Getting Help

Emacs does command completion for you. Typing M-x *tab* or *space* gives a list of Emacs commands.

C-h Emacs help
C-h t run the Emacs tutorial
C-h i enter Info, the documentation browser
C-h a show commands matching a string (apropos)
C-h k display documentation of the function invoked by keystroke

Emacs gets into different *modes*, each of which customizes Emacs for editing text of a particular sort. The mode line contains names of the current modes, in parentheses.

C-h m get mode-specific information

Copyright © 2026 Free Software Foundation, Inc.
For GNU Emacs version 32
Author Wlodek Bzyl (matwb@univ.gda.pl)
Released under the terms of the GNU
General Public License version 3 or later.
For more Emacs documentation, and the TeX
source for this card, see the Emacs distribution,
or <https://www.gnu.org/software/emacs>