

STOP IGNORING Your Function Keys

Are your function keys left unused at the top of your keyboard? Jonathan Parkyn explains what these overlooked keys can do and how you can start making the most of them

Get help using programs

F1 Regardless which program you're using, the F1 key almost always provides some form of help. In some Windows tools, such as Snipping Tool, pressing F1 opens a dedicated Microsoft support page for that tool.

However, for most it simply displays a Bing search for information about using that tool (bear in mind this is a generic web search, so the results won't all originate from Microsoft).

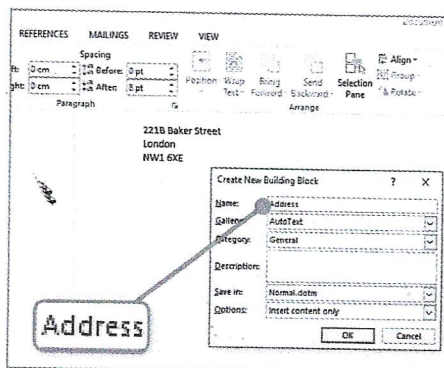
Almost all other programs (including browsers, office suites, image editors and others) also use the F1 key to display a help page - whether that's a specific website or the program's offline instruction manual.

Rename files quickly & print documents

F2 Renaming files can be a fiddly process. You need to click the file twice to edit its name, but doing this too quickly will be registered as a double-click that opens the file instead.

Avoid this by clicking the file once, then pressing F2. The filename will instantly become editable, so you can simply type your chosen name immediately and avoid the risk of double clicking. You can do the same with shortcut icons on your desktop.

If you are using Microsoft Office, pressing Ctrl+F2 acts as a quick-print shortcut by instantly opening the Print Preview window.



Press F3 in Word to save text that you can quickly re-insert when you need to

Run searches & save text

F3 When you have a File Explorer window open (Windows+E), the F3 key will take your cursor straight to the Search box, letting you type a search term instantly.

In Microsoft Word pressing F3 lets you quickly save text (such as your address) and use it again at a later date. First, highlight the text you want to save, then press Alt+F3. In the window that opens, make a note of the name (or give it a new name - see screenshot above), then click OK. You can now insert this text whenever you need it by typing the first letter of the name you gave it, then pressing F3.

Leap to the address bar & close programs

F4 In File Explorer, pressing F4 will move your cursor to the address

bar and display the full file-path name for the folder you currently have open. Press F4, then Escape and all text in the address bar will be selected, letting you type a new path or command without first having to delete what's already there. If you've recently switched to Microsoft Edge, you'll find F4 performs a similar trick - taking your cursor to the browser's address bar, ready for you to type a new web address. Additionally, pressing Alt+F4 will close any program you have open.

Refresh windows & create timestamps

F5 If you're on your Windows desktop, pressing F5 will refresh all your desktop icons and shortcuts (sometimes this is necessary to reveal a recently added shortcut). In File Explorer, pressing F5 refreshes the contents of the folder you're browsing.

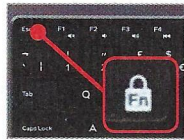
The F5 key is used to refresh many programs. For example, in any browser, you can press F5 to refresh the contents of your browser window. This can be useful if you're waiting for an update on a particular page. Sometimes, however, your browser simply reloads the web page from your cache (a copy of the page stored on your computer). To stop this happening and load an updated version of the web page, press Ctrl+F5 instead.

And if you're using Notepad, F5 will insert a time and date stamp, letting you create a simple journal of events.

Get your function keys back

If you're using a laptop, you may find Function keys don't behave as we've explained here and perform different functions.

Take a look at the function keys and you'll notice small symbols on each, indicating what they do, such as speaker symbol (mutes audio), airplane symbol (turns off Wi-Fi and Bluetooth) and a moon symbol (sends your laptop to sleep). The precise mix depends on the make and model of your laptop, but in many cases they take priority over the function keys, meaning you have to press



an Fn key (usually next to your space bar) to access their original functions.

To make the F1 to F12 keys behave normally, look for an Fn Lock key on your keyboard. Alternatively, you may see a key with a Function Lock symbol (a padlock with 'Fn' inside it - see screenshot). Pressing this key and the Fn key simultaneously will activate Function Lock, restoring your function keys. Once you've done this, you can still use your keyboard's special commands by holding down the Fn key when pressing them.

Ditch your mouse

F6

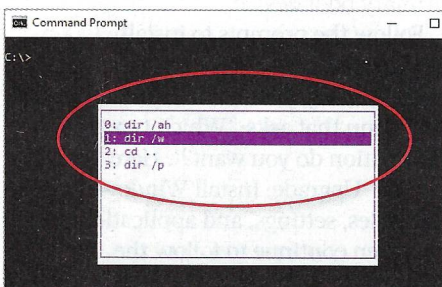
The F6 key can be a great fallback if your mouse suddenly stops working. Press it when viewing your desktop, for example, and it cycles through items such as the Start button, search box, taskbar icons and system tray. Once you've selected the item you want to control, press Enter, then use the arrow keys to navigate the various options. It performs a similar function in programs such as your web browser, letting you navigate to your address bar and bookmarks.

Check your spelling & access previous commands

F7

The F7 lacks a dedicated Windows function, so pressing it when viewing your desktop won't do anything. However, in most office programs (including online versions, such as Google Docs), it offers a quick way to check your spelling.

Microsoft Word takes things one step further, letting you combine F7 with other keys to perform additional functions. For example, selecting a word in your document and pressing Shift+F7 opens the Thesaurus pane, while Alt+F7 takes you to the next misspelt word or grammar error (assuming there



Press F7 to reveal your previous commands in Command Prompt

are any, of course).

In a Command Prompt window, F7 saves you time by showing you a list of your previous commands (see screenshot below left) - you can then simply press the number key of the command you want to re-run.

Select text quicker & cycle through commands

F8

Like F7, F8 doesn't have a dedicated Windows function, but in Microsoft Office programs, such as Word and Excel, you can use it to quickly select sections of text. Press F8 once in Word, for example, and it will select the word nearest to your cursor. Press it again and it will select the entire sentence. Press it a third time, and it will highlight the entire paragraph, and so on. Conversely, pressing Shift+F8 reverses this process.

In Command Prompt, F8 lets you cycle back through previous commands. And if you type the first letter of the command you're looking for then press F8, it will only cycle through previous commands beginning with that letter.

Recalculate spreadsheet cells

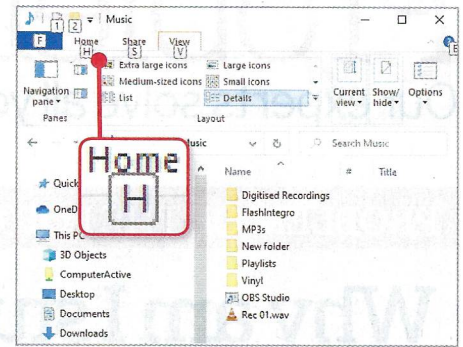
F9

The F9 key also has little to do in Windows. However, in Excel and Calc it can recalculate all cells. This is particularly useful if you've previously turned off automatic cell calculation (in Calc, click Data, Calculate, then switch off AutoCalculate; in Excel go to File, Options, Formulas, then tick Manual). You'll now be able to update formulas in all cells in one go.

Bring up right-click menu & reveal hidden shortcuts

F10

Pressing the F10 key on its own might not do anything in



Press F10 in File Explorer to reveal hidden keyboard shortcuts

Windows, but use it with the Shift key and you have the equivalent of a right-click command. Press these keys when you have a file selected in File Explorer, for example, and you'll see the usual right-click (context) menu that lets you choose which program to open the file with and other options.

F10 also reveals hidden keyboard shortcuts in many Microsoft programs, including Office and Windows tools such as Paint. Press it in File Explorer, for example, and you'll see a small 'H' below the Home menu (see screenshot above), meaning you can access that menu simply by pressing the H key.

Switch screen modes

F11

From File Explorer to image editors and more besides, pressing F11 lets you switch between window view and full-screen view. If you're reading an article in your browser, for example, pressing F11 will instantly maximise the window and remove all distracting toolbars and buttons. Pressing it a second time reverts to the normal view. If you're ever at a loss as to why you can't see a program's controls, it's always worth pressing F11 to make sure it's not in full-screen mode.

Save your work & reveal the code behind websites

F12

In Windows tools, such as Paint, and Microsoft Office programs, pressing F12 opens the 'Save as' box, letting you save whatever document or file you're working on.

In LibreOffice Writer F12 works as a list-making shortcut. Press F12 to start a numbered list, Shift+F12 to create a bulleted list, and Ctrl+F12 to insert a table. In browsers, F12 shows you the code used to create the page you're viewing. While this is gobbledegook to most of us, for those building their own website it may help diagnose problems with it, and get ideas from other sites. [ca](#)