

The Keyboard

Apple's smaller "standard"-style keyboards have 81 keys. The "extended" keyboards have 105 keys, including a numeric keypad, a bank of page-control keys (Home, End, and so on), and a row of function keys at the top. Only 62 keys actually *type* something; the remaining 40 percent of the keys are used either to modify what those 62 keys *do*, or to control the computer itself.

Apple was forced to come up with the extended keyboard in order to be taken seriously by the DOS-dominated corporate world, where keyboards of this layout were the norm. The silly thing was, however, that the Mac didn't *need* these specialized keys; then and now, most of these extra keys do absolutely nothing.

Today, the F-keys —F1, F2, and so on —*still* do nothing in most Mac programs. And it wasn't until Mac OS 8 that the Control key was put to any good use. (see the Contextual Menus Nitty Gritty)

Fortunately, most Mac programs nowadays respond to the navigation keys like PageUp and PageDown. And beginning in System 7.5.1, the F1, F2, F3, and F4 keys automatically "choose" Undo, Cut, Copy, and Paste from the Edit menu in most programs (including the Finder). Beyond these simple examples, however, only a few applications —notably Microsoft products —make use of the full suite of keys.

However, you *can* do something with these keys if you have a macro program, such as OneClick, QuicKeys, or KeyQuencer. The glory of macro software is that you can *make* these keys do things —in fact, anything you want. Make F1 type out today's date; F2 can type your name and return address; F3 can shut down the Mac; and so on.

A Few Odd Keys and What They Mean

In the programs that do respond to presses on the bank of six page-control keys, here's what they're supposed to do:

Help: Brings up the on-line help for your software, if there is any.

Home, End: Scrolls the document to the very first or very last sentence in your document. Or if you have a window open in Finder these keys will take you to the top or bottom of a list with one key stroke.

Page Up, Page Down: Actually scrolls you one *screen* up or down.

Del: Deletes the letter to the *right* of the insertion point. (The regular Delete key nukes the letter to the left.)

Fortunately, those navigation keys work in a refreshing number of today's programs—including the Mac's own dialog boxes, Finder windows, Claris programs, and so on.

An increasing number of programs have different functions for Return and Enter. For example, in Excel, FileMaker, and many word processors, Return and Enter don't do precisely the same thing. (In FileMaker, for example, Return begins a new paragraph within a record, and Enter deselects all fields.)

In general, though, Return and Enter can end a paragraph in a word processing program, and pressing them is the same as clicking the heavily outlined button in any dialog box. Whenever you spot a heavily-outlined button in a dialog box, dispense with the mouse and just press Return or Enter.



Esc: This means Escape, which really means Cancel. This key, too, originally did absolutely nothing and was included solely to soothe the psyches of IBM lovers and telecommunications nuts who were making the switch to Mac. However, today a number of programs let you press Esc instead of clicking on-screen Cancel buttons with the mouse.



All Microsoft and Apple software works this way, including the System software.

Command (⌘): This is, of course, the most frequently used modifier key of them all. It's the one most listed in menus to indicate keyboard shortcuts for menu items.

When the Mac first appeared, and even today, the glorious simplicity and mnemonics of its keyboard shortcuts made us rejoice. What can be more natural than ⌘-P for Print, ⌘-O for Open, ⌘-C for Copy? We even forgave Apple for making Paste be ⌘-V, Cut be ⌘-X, and Undo be ⌘-Z, because of the natural adjacency of the Z, X, C, and V keys on the keyboard. And you can justify X for Cut (sort of like crossing it out, or a pair of scissors). ⌘-Z is okay, too, because it is directly next to the ⌘ key itself. And ⌘-V is obviously necessary for Paste, because ⌘-P is already used for Print.