

Review – fn/Globe Key on Your Mac Keyboard

Note: This discussion is based on the latest version of macOS Sonoma, 14.1.1. Some illustrations may differ when using other versions of macOS. Most illustrations are from screenshots on my iMac or MacBook Pro. Credit for Other Images: See the credits at the end of this presentation.

Back in October, Jim Macak posted to our talk-double-click group an email about "Macintosh Function Key Shortcuts." It discussed using the **fn** key—a "mystery" key to some—as part of a keyboard shortcut to trigger a variety of actions on your Mac. This was based on a web post: <https://lifehacker.com/this-key-on-your-mac-is-full-of-hidden-shortcuts-1850941307>. Here are a few of these keyboard shortcuts:

fn + c: Opens/Closes (toggles) the Control Center

fn + e: Opens/Closes (toggles) the emoji picker

fn + Delete: Performs a **Forward Delete** to delete the characters to the right of the cursor (the opposite of the keyboard's **Delete** key). This is handy because standard keyboards like those found on laptops don't have a Forward Delete key. Only Extended Keyboards have one.

fn + f: Toggles the foreground app between full-screen view (no menu bar or Dock) and back to a regular window.

fn + a: Selects/Unselects (toggles) the Dock. Then you can use Arrow Keys to select an app and tap the Return key to launch it.

Back in June and July of 2022, I did a couple of presentations about the **fn** key. So, given Jim's recent post, I thought that a quick review about the **fn** key might be helpful. Also, my previous presentations didn't include the **fn** key keyboard shortcuts in Jim's post.

fn Key Basics

The **fn** key is also called the **Globe Key**. The **fn** key on older Mac keyboards, even a few years old, is simply labeled with the two letters **fn**. Newer Macs have that same key with **fn** and also a **Globe** symbol on it.

The **fn/Globe** key is found in a different location depending on whether you're using an Extended Keyboard or one that I'll call the Standard Mac keyboard. On the Extended Keyboard (image below), the **fn** key is located below the F13 key in the right portion of the keyboard along with the **delete**, **home**, **end**, **page up**, and **page down** keys.



Extended Mac Keyboard

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On the smaller Standard Keyboard (image below) or a laptop Mac, the **fn** key is found at the lower left corner of the keyboard. For entering keyboard shortcuts, this is probably a more convenient location than its location on an Extended Keyboard.

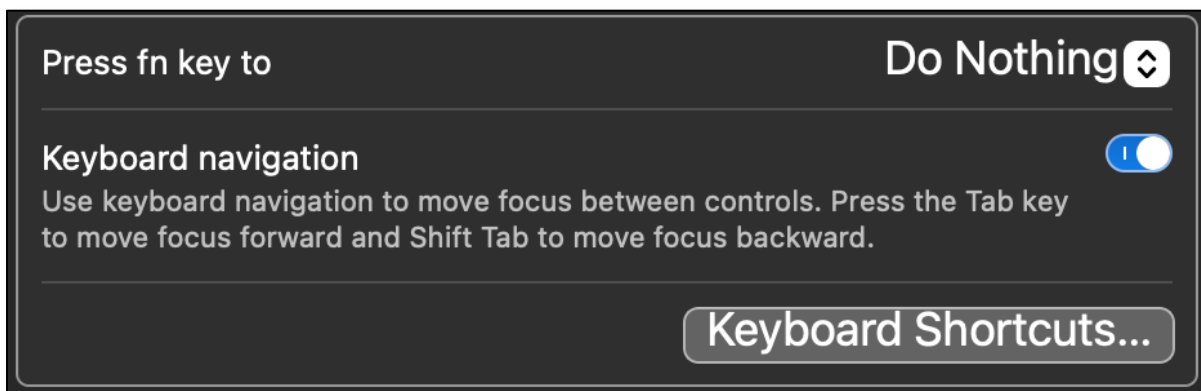


Standard Mac Keyboard

When used in combination with the **arrow keys**, it's especially handy for triggering the **home**, **end**, **page up**, **page down**, and **forward delete** actions. For example, **fn** + **up arrow** will trigger the **page up** action, and **fn** + **left arrow** will trigger the **home** action.

Use the fn Key to Trigger Actions

Go to **System Settings**, then to the **Keyboard** section, the second group is labeled **Press fn key to** in order to set the **fn** key to trigger actions all by itself:

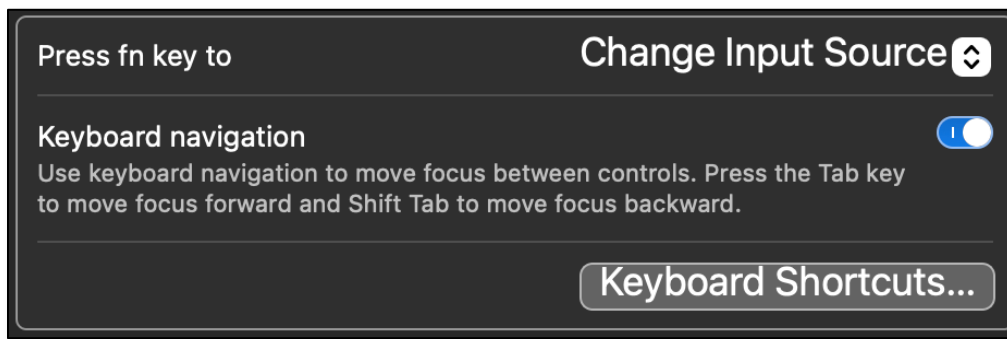


Keyboard System Preference > fn Key Settings

Instead of **Do Nothing**, you can have it set to do three other functions:

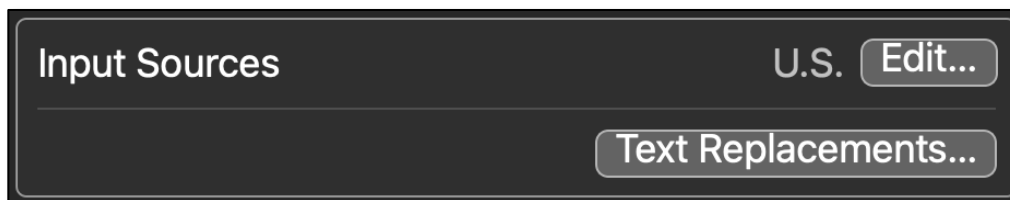
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Change the Input Source. If there are other languages that you want to access on your keyboard, you could add a new keyboard as another **Input Source**:



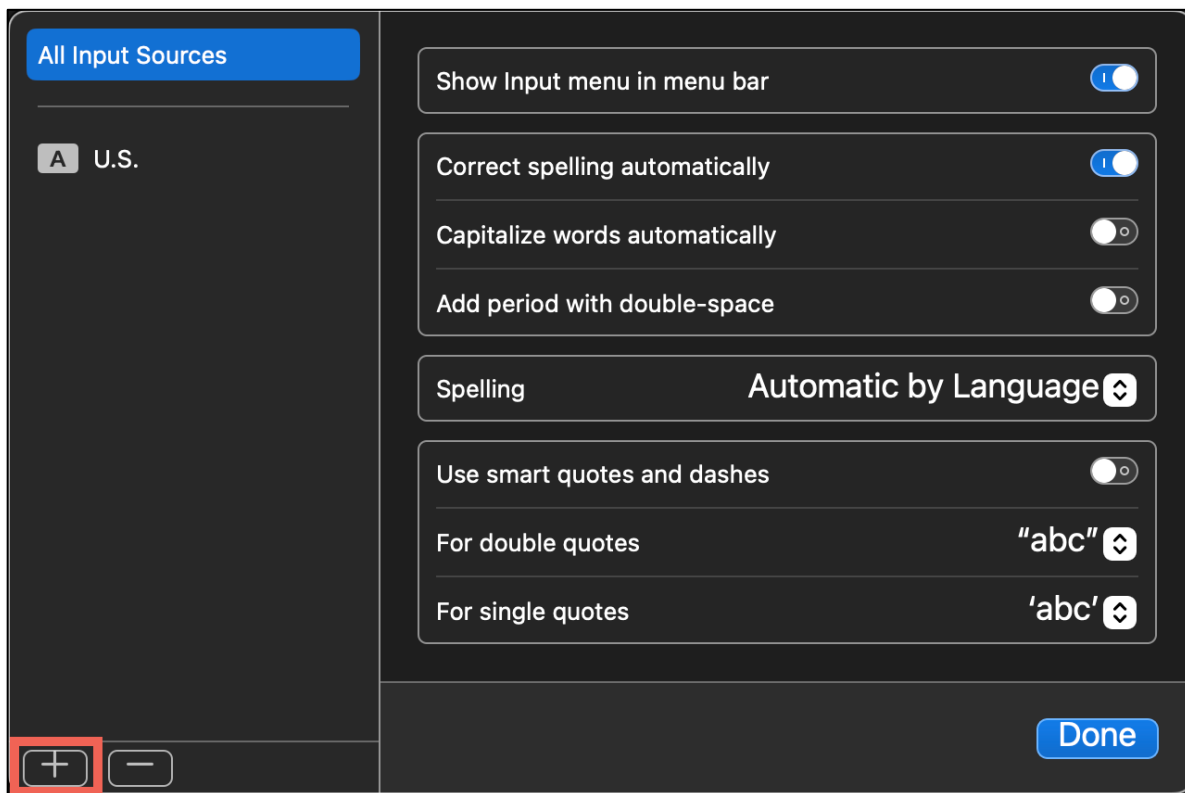
Change Input Source

For example, you might want to add a British keyboard. To do this, go to the third group, labeled **Input Sources**, under the Keyboard system setting:



Keyboard System Preference > Input Sources

Then click the **Edit...** button to bring up the All Input Sources selection window, and click on the **+** button at the bottom to choose a keyboard:



All Input Sources Window (+ Button)

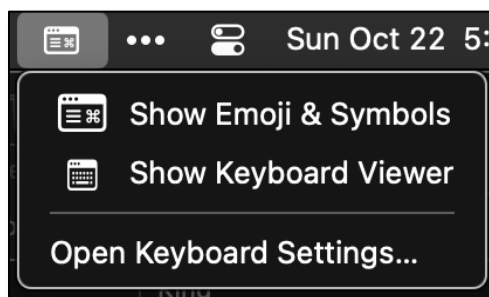
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Choose a British keyboard:

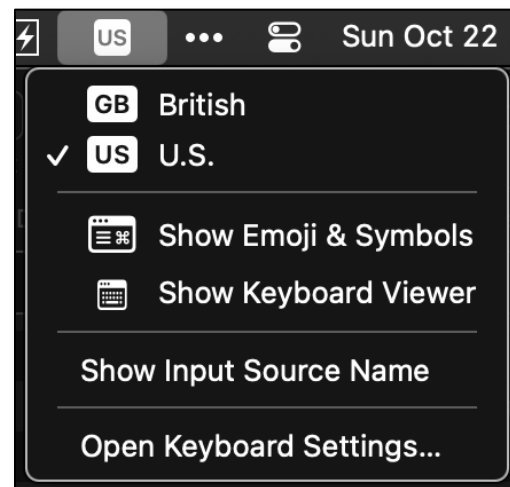


All Input Sources Window (+ Button)

Since the **fn** key has been set to change the Input Source, now you'll see that the little icon in the **Control Center** menu bar has changed, indicating your input source:



Control Center (Normal)



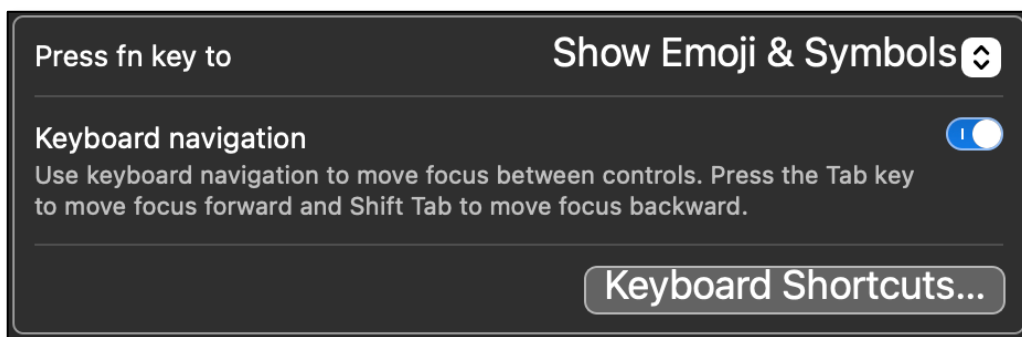
Control Center (Keyboards)

Tap the **fn** key to see how it switches keyboards, or click on the Control Center icon to switch to another keyboard.

If you only have one input source set, tapping the **fn** key won't do anything except show you the input source. So, there's no value in doing this.

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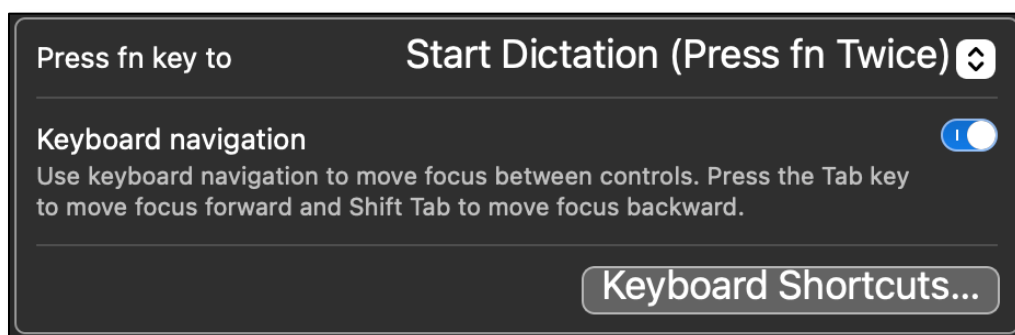
Show Emoji & Symbols. You can also use the **fn** key for [Show Emoji & Symbols](#). This might be the handiest of all the **fn** key options.



Show Emojis & Symbols

If you want to insert an emoji or symbol in some text that you're entering, you could use the keyboard shortcut, **Control+Command+Space** to bring up the **Emoji viewer**. Now, if you want, just tap the **fn/Globe** key to bring up the Emoji viewer.

Dictation. The third option is to [Start Dictation](#).



Start Dictation

In order to prevent you from accidentally starting dictation, you must tap **fn** twice.

- To start dictation, tap the **fn** key twice.
- Tap the **fn** key once to turn dictation Off.
- To use dictation again, two taps turns it On, and one tap turns it Off.

Note: Use quick taps on the **fn** key, just like you would when normally typing a letter. If you press and hold, nothing will happen.

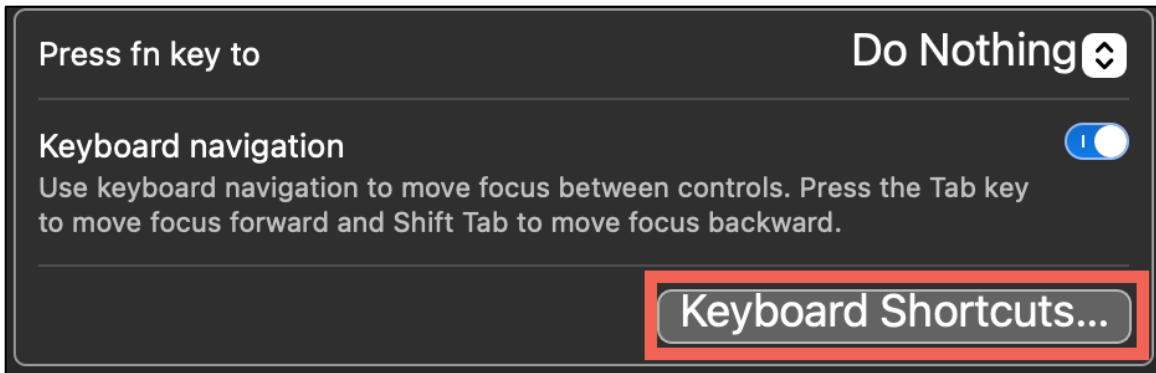
Change How The F-Keys Work

The **fn** key can also change how the F-keys (F1, F2, F3, ...) at the top of your keyboard work. The first twelve of these keys (F1 to F12 but not F5 and F6) also have special symbols on them that represent special features:

- Brightness (F1 and F2)
- Mission Control (F3)
- Launchpad (F4)
- Playback Control (F7, F8 and F9)
- Volume Controls (F10, F11 and F12)

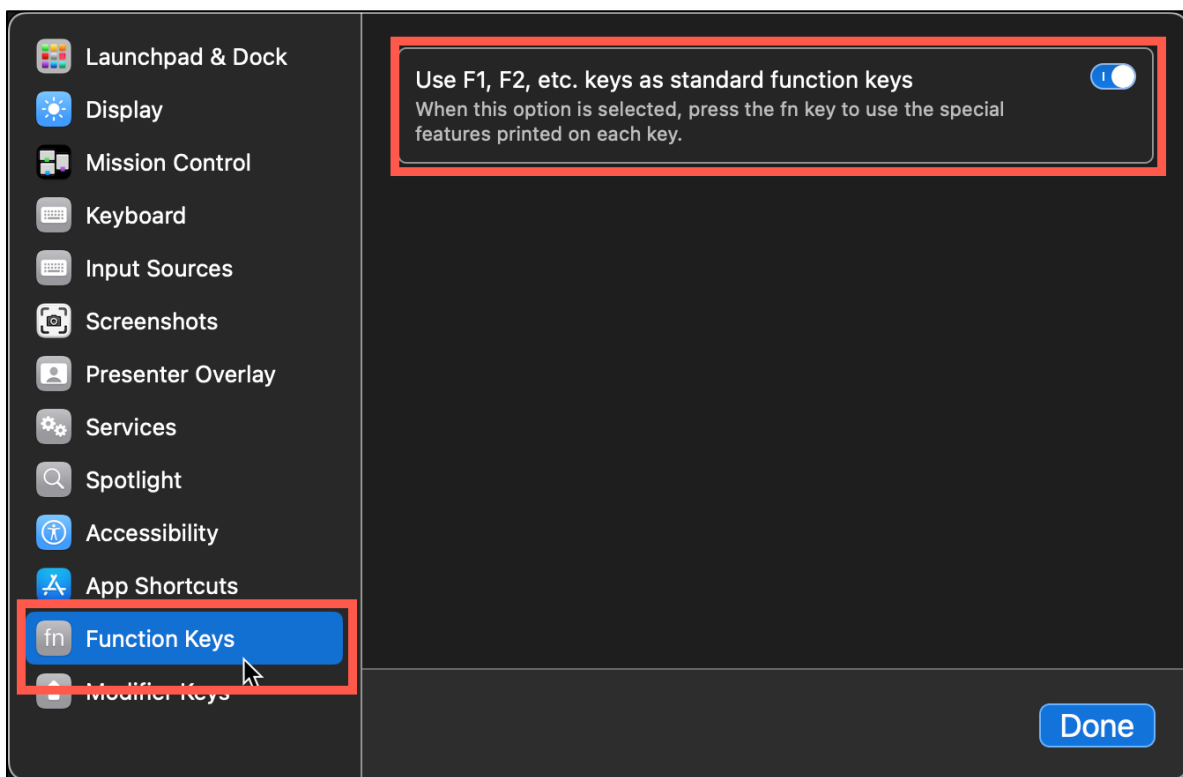
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These are the default functions for the F-keys keys. However, they can be used for other functions depending on another Keyboard system setting. Click the [Keyboard Shortcuts...](#) button to go to the Keyboard Shortcuts window.



Keyboard System Setting (Keyboard Shortcuts)

Then click on [Function Keys](#) item in the list on the left (image below) to bring up a checkbox labeled [Use F1, F2, etc. keys as standard function keys](#). When this is checked, pressing one of the F-keys triggers whatever function in the app that you're using. For example, I have F1 assigned to Make Text Bigger.



Keyboard System Setting (Keyboard Shortcuts)

If you checked the box and are using the F-keys as standard function keys but now want to use one of the special features—say, to use the Launchpad—you can do this by using the **fn** key.

Pressing and holding the **fn** key along with an F-key will now trigger the special feature assigned to that F-key. So, by pressing and holding the **fn** key and then tapping the F4 key will take you to the Launchpad.

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Other fn Keyboard Shortcuts

For reference, here are the other **fn** keyboard shortcuts that Jim Macak included in his email post:

- **fn + c**: Opens/Closes (toggles) the **Control Center** on your Mac.
- **fn + e**: Opens/Closes (toggles) the **emoji picker**.
- **fn + delete**: Lets you perform a **forward delete**.
- **fn + f**: Toggles full-screen (no menu bar or Dock) for the foreground app. If the app is already full-screen, it will change back to a regular window.
- **fn + Shift + A**: Opens **Launchpad** to display all the apps on your Mac and launch one.
- **fn + n**: Shows/Hides the **notifications** panel.
- **fn + h**: Hides/Shows all open windows and lets you see your Desktop and the Dock.
- **fn + up arrow**: An alternative way to use the **Page Up** key.
- **fn + down arrow**: An alternative way to use the **Page Down** key.
- **fn + left arrow**: An alternative way to use the **Home** key (scroll to the top of the page).
- **fn + right arrow**: An alternative way to use the **End** key (scroll to the bottom of the page).
- **fn + a**: Selects/Unselects (toggles) the **Dock**. You can then use arrow keys to select apps and hit **Return** to launch any app. It's a way to browse the Dock with the keyboard.
- **fn + d**: Lets you launch **Dictation** on your Mac (another way to start dictation).

MacBook Pro That Has a Touch Bar

If you have MacBook Pro that has a Touch Bar, you can use the **fn** key and hold it down to change the functionality in the Touch Bar. However, since I don't have one, you'll need to research this capability on your own.

Summary

To some Mac users, the **fn** key is a "mystery key," but it actually can provide a lot of function when using your Mac. While you can set it to Do Nothing, it has three useful settings. You can set it to:

- Change Input Source to enable use of alternate language keyboards.
- Show Emoji & Symbols
- Start Dictation

In addition, you may be using the F-keys on your keyboard for some purpose other than their default settings (for example, F1 to Decrease Brightness of your screen). If you want to use one of the default special settings, press and hold the **fn** key and then tap the F-key.

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Finally, as Jim Macak covered in his email posting, the **fn** key can be used to trigger a variety of keyboard shortcuts.

Next Presentation

In the December meeting, I'll finish my discussion about screen markup tips.

Have a favorite Mac Tip or utility? Please feel free to pass it along, and I'll see if I can work it into a future presentation.

If you have any suggestions for presentation topics, including macOS utilities, please contact me at slp4668@gmail.com.

-Steve Parker