

07-17-2022, Mac Basics/Beginners SIG – fn Key (Part 2)

Note: This discussion is based on macOS, 12.4 (Monterey). Some illustrations may differ when using other versions of macOS. Most illustrations are from screenshots on my iMac or MacBook Pro. Credit: See the credits at the end of this presentation.

This is a continuation of the presentation (fn Key, Part 1) from last month.

Recap of Part 1

Mac keyboards have many keys that can be used with keyboard shortcuts. These include the special modifier keys **Command** (⌘), **Option** (⌥), **Control** (⌞), and **Shift** (⇧). In addition, there are a series of **Function** keys (F1, F2, F3, etc.) at the top of the keyboard. Then there are the **Cursor Movement** arrow keys, and on extended keyboards are also found **Page Control** keys (page up, page down, home and end).

Another key that isn't discussed much, is the **fn** key which is found at the bottom left of a standard keyboard. On extended keyboards, it's found in the page control group of keys just below the F13 key.

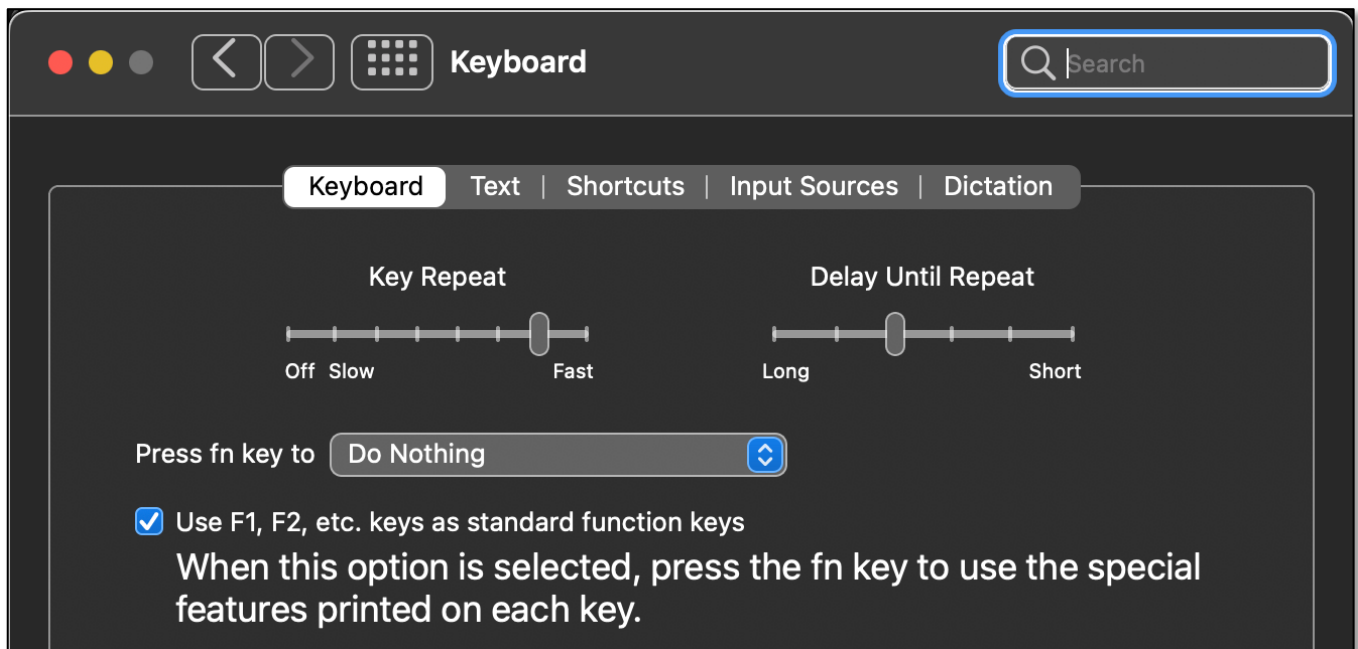
On older Mac keyboards, the key is labeled with the two letters, **fn**. On newer Mac keyboards the **fn** key also has a **Globe** symbol on it (which is why the **fn** key is now sometimes just called the **Globe** Key).

The **fn** key can be used in several ways:

1. Change How the F-Keys at the Top of Your Keyboard Work. The 12 keys at the top of the standard Mac keyboard, known as Function Keys (F-keys), also have special symbols on them (**F1/F2: Brightness Higher/Lower**, **F3: Mission Control**, etc.). Extended Mac Keyboards have additional F-keys (F13 through F19).

The F1 through F12 keys each have two possible actions (functions). Example: Press the **F1** key, and two functions/actions are possible: (1) **Turn down the Brightness** of your screen or (2) **Trigger an action** that you have assigned to it.

Which action is invoked depends on a checkbox in the **Keyboard System Preference**:



Keyboard System Preference (Partial View) – fn Key (Do Nothing)

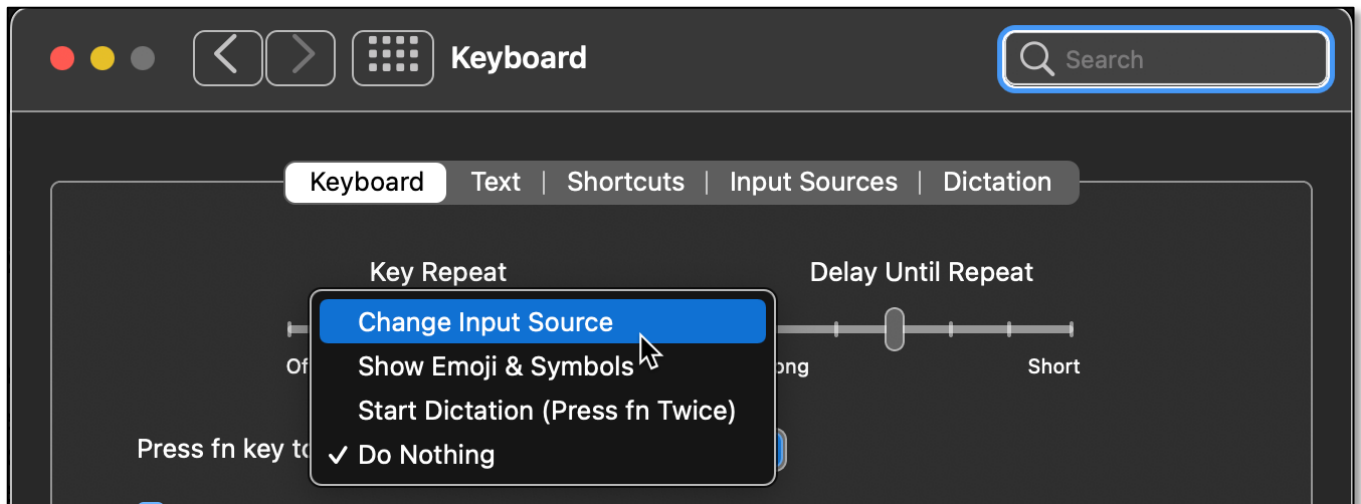
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With the box checked (previous image), the F-keys are used as standard function keys. Alternatively, for example, holding down the **fn** key and pressing F1 would lower the brightness of the screen.

Your choice: Check the checkbox to use the F-keys for special purposes, or use the default control settings (like controlling screen brightness or speaker volume).

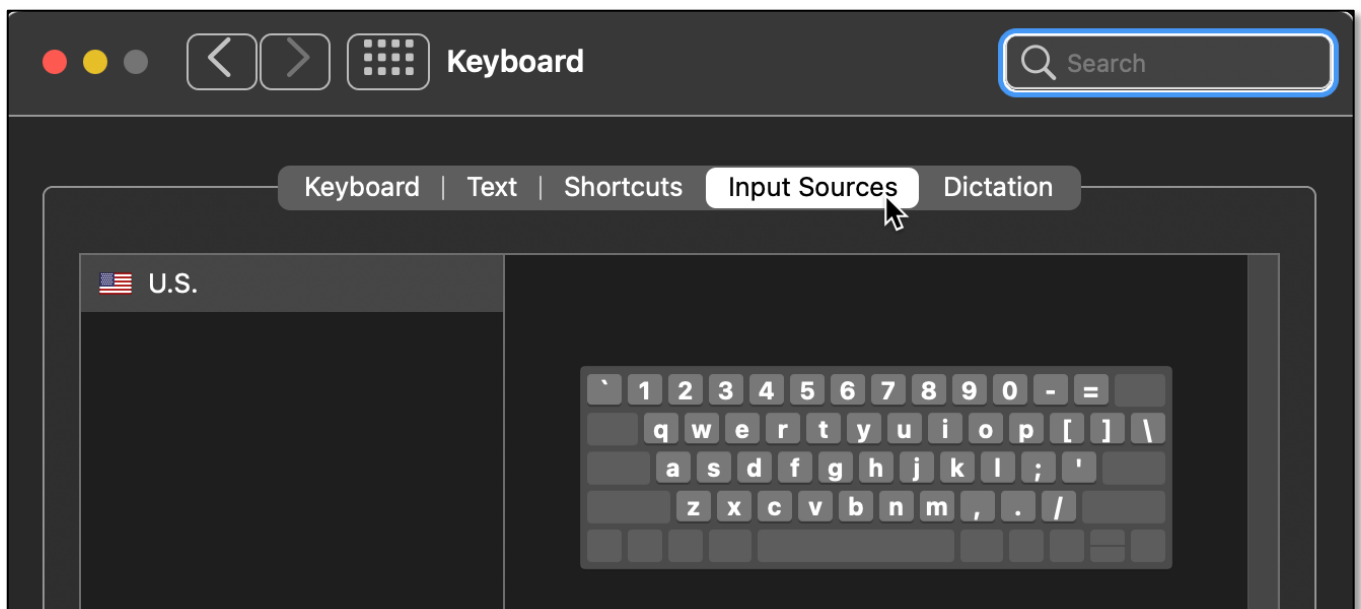
fn Key Options. The **fn** key has several options other than "do nothing." You can also use the **fn** key by itself to trigger an **Action** by changing the setting in the **Press fn key to** dropdown menu to something else.

2. Change the Input Source. One **fn** key option is **Change Input Source**:



Keyboard System Preference (Partial View) – Press fn Key (Change Input Source)

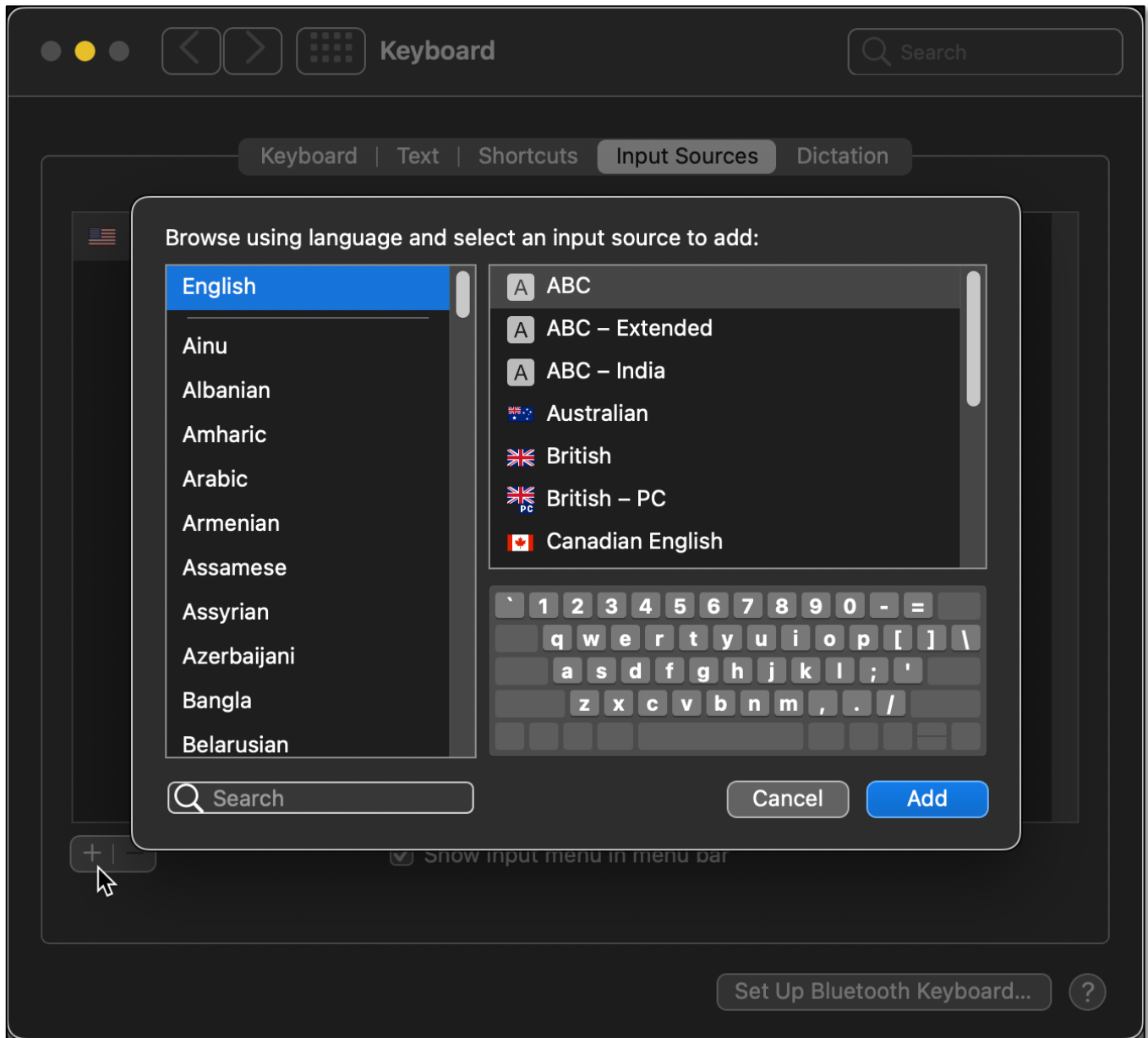
Choosing the **Input Sources** tab gives you the option of adding a new keyboard:



Keyboard System Preference (Partial View) – Input Sources Tab

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You can add additional languages to access on your keyboard by clicking the **+** button at the bottom left of the **Input Sources** tab. This will bring up a list of alternative keyboards for numerous languages. See the image below:



Keyboard System Preference – Input Sources, Choose Language & Keyboard

With some language keyboards, additional settings are available.

If the box for **Show Input menu in the menu bar** is checked, a **Flag** icon for the Input Source is displayed in the menu bar if two or more input sources (keyboards) are being used, allowing you to choose among the different input sources that you've set up. Each switch among input keyboards causes the flag icon to change.

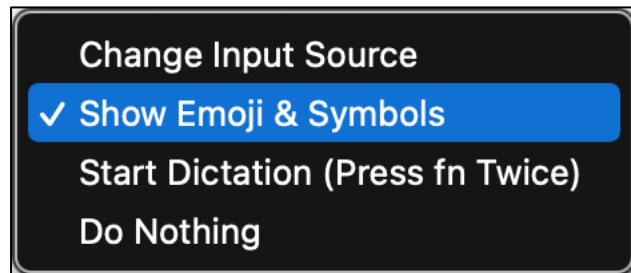
If only one Input Source (keyboard) has been selected (often the case), then no flag is displayed, and the **Character Viewer** icon is shown in the menu bar.

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If you tap the **fn** key to change the input source, a brief pop-up alert is displayed indicating that the input source (keyboard) has been switched.

Part 2 – Additional fn Key Functions

3. Show Emoji & Symbols. The **fn** key can also be used to **Show Emoji & Symbols**:



Keyboard System Preference (Partial View) – fn Key (Show Emoji & Symbols)

If you want to insert an emoji or symbol, your first thought might be to use the standard keyboard shortcut, **Control** (^), **Command** (⌘), **Space** (␣) to bring up the **Character Viewer**. It has all the various symbols, including Emojis, available to choose from:



Character Viewer (Partial View)

However, now you can simply use the **fn** key and tap it to bring up the **Character Viewer** for **Emoji & Symbols** (my choice for now).

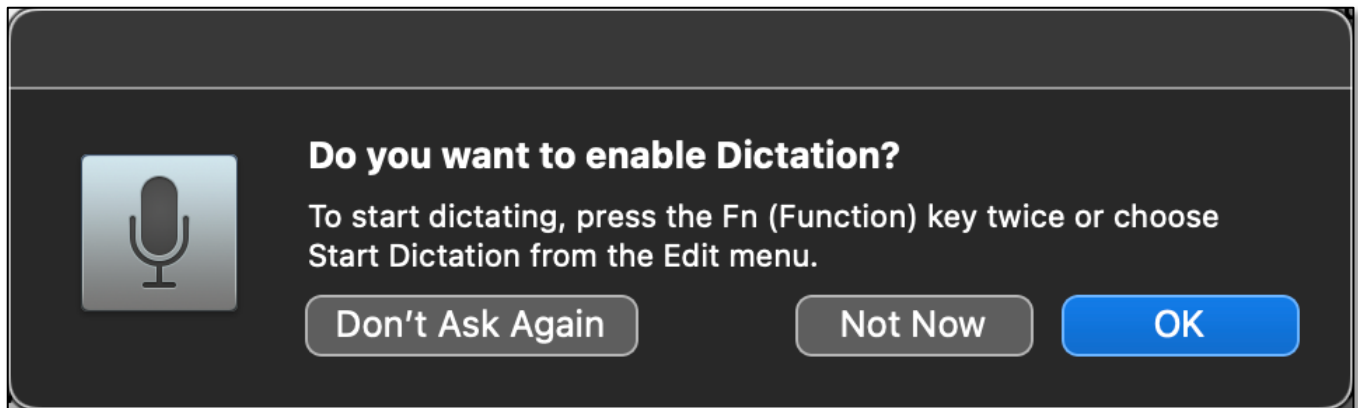
Note: A handy feature of using the **fn** key to bring up the Character Viewer is that unlike the keyboard shortcut the **fn** key will toggle the viewer on and off.

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4. Start Dictation. Another available option is to use the **fn** key **Start Dictation**. In order to keep you from doing this accidentally, you must *press the **fn** key twice*. Enable/Disable Dictation. Once this is done, Dictation will remain enabled until you disable it. Disable dictation by *pressing the **fn** key once*. In summary, press the **fn** key twice to enable dictation and once to disable it.

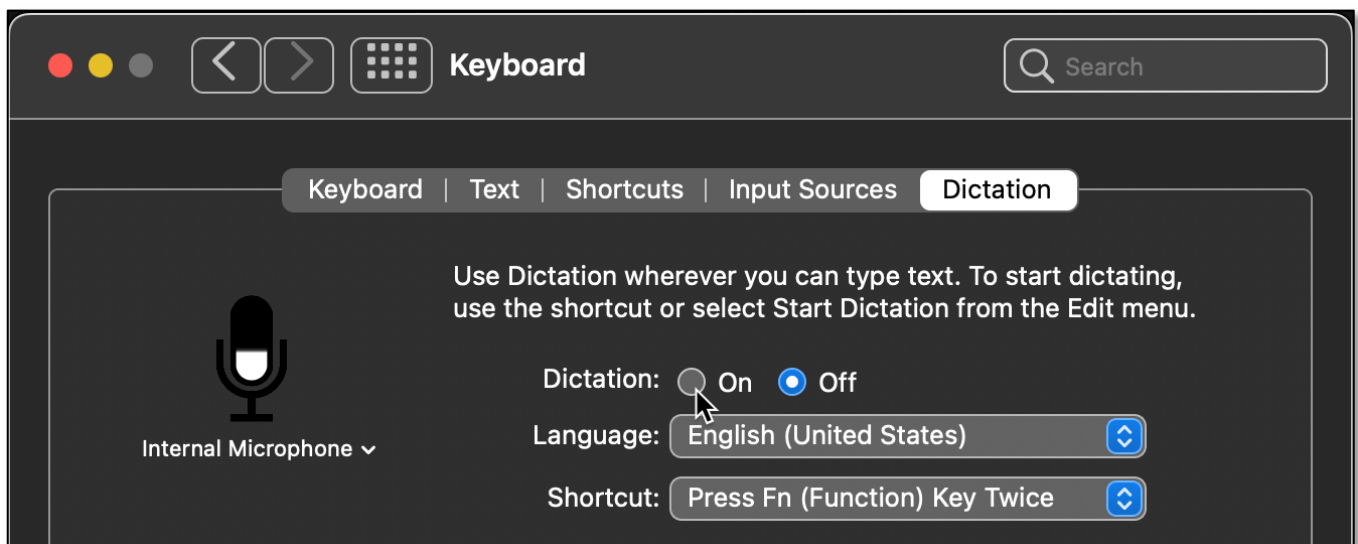
Note: To "press" the **fn** key means to quickly tap it, just like when you're typing a letter on the keyboard. If you press and hold the **fn** key, nothing will happen.

The first time that you want to use the Dictation option, you may have to first **Enable Dictation**. If so, tapping the **fn** key twice will bring up this alert:



Alert – Do You Want to Enable Dictation?

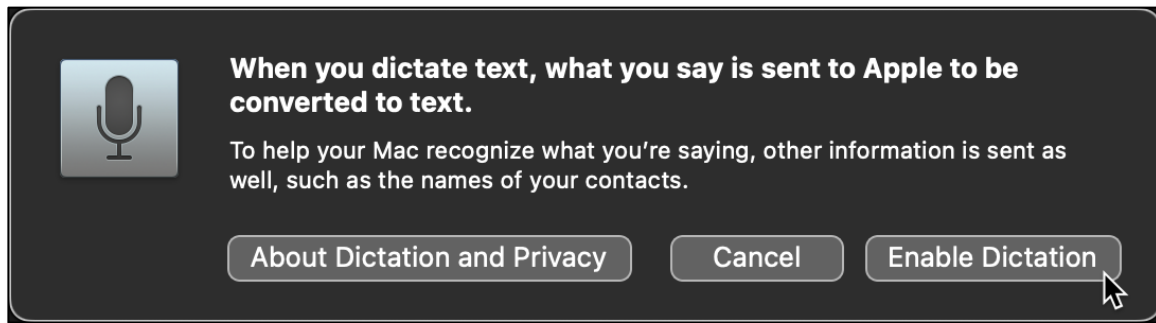
If you already know that you want to use Dictation, you can also enable it by choosing the **Dictation** tab in the Keyboard system preference:



Keyboard System Preference (Partial View) – Dictation Tab

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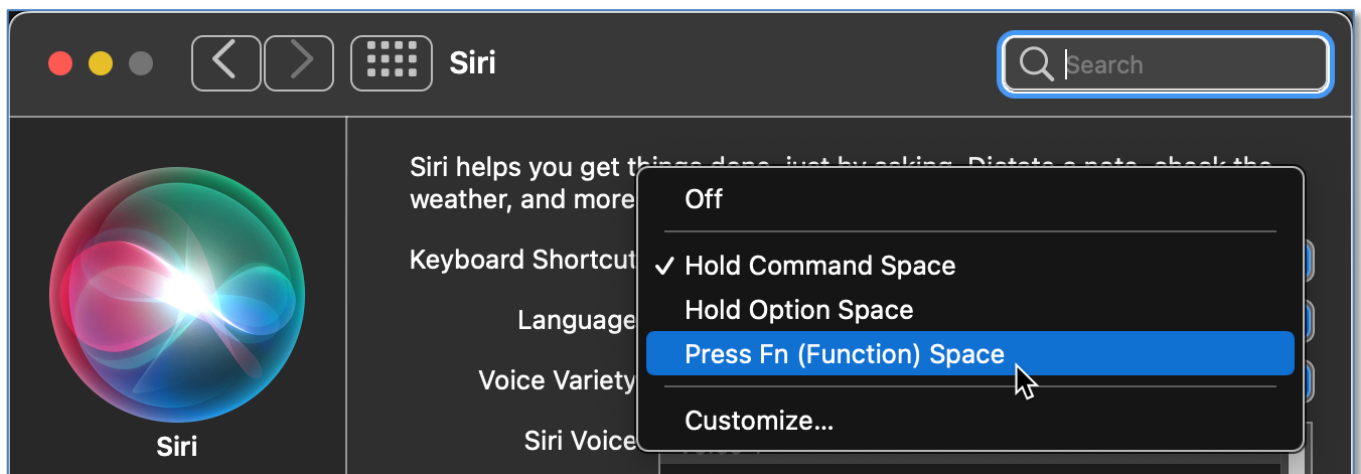
When you click "on," this alert will pop up to advise you of privacy matters:



Dictation Alert

Another Use for the fn Key (Trigger Siri)

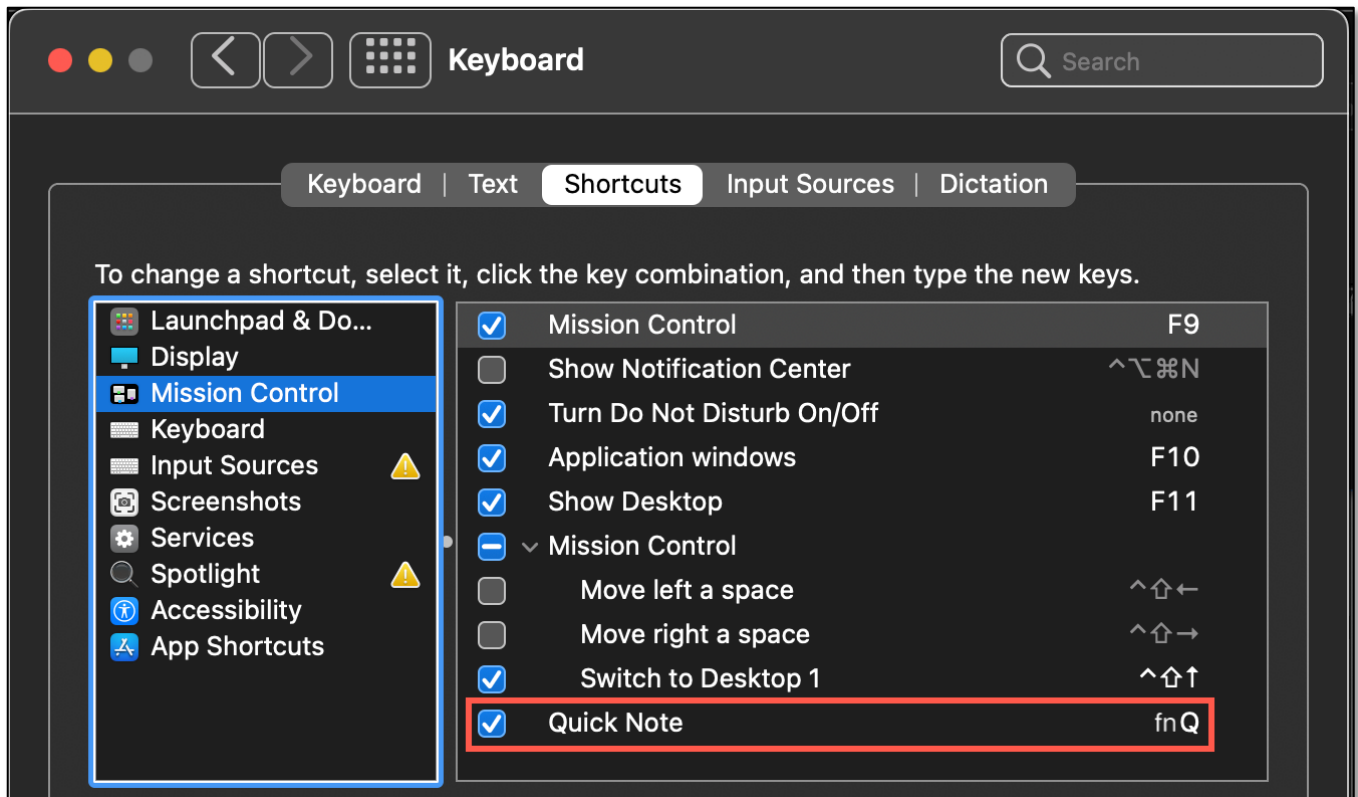
There's another way that you can use the **fn** key: **Trigger Siri**. In the [Siri system preference](#), one of the available keyboard shortcuts to trigger Siri is to press **Function (fn) + Space (␣)**:



Siri System Preference (Partial View) – Keyboard Shortcut

One More Use for the fn Key (Quick Note)

Finally, there's one more way that you can use the **fn** key (just found this one, and there might be more that I haven't discovered yet): Open a **Quick Note**. In the **Keyboard System Preference** under the **Shortcuts** tab, choose **Mission Control** from the list on the left. You should find **Quick Note** at the bottom of the list on the right with a keyboard shortcut: **Function (fn) + Q**. (See the image on the next page.)



Keyboard System Preference (Partial View)
Shortcuts Tab (Mission Control > Quick Note)

Summary

As noted in Part 1 (last month's presentation), the **fn** key might be the least known and understood on a Mac keyboard, but it has a lot of capability. Its simplest use is to change how the F-keys operate. However, you can also use it to change, add, and switch input source keyboards, bring up the character viewer (Emoji & Symbols), initiate dictation, trigger Siri, or open a Quick Note.

Next Presentation

For the next presentation, we'll take a look another macOS feature.

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

Credit: <https://macmost.com/how-to-use-the-fn-globe-key-on-your-mac-keyboard.html>
(The Mac FN /Globe Key)