HOW TO LEARN EMACS

A beginner's guide to Emacs 24 or later · http://j.mp/beginemacs

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Questions? I'd love to hear from you!

May 17 2013

If you're a developer or sysad...

Learn Vim

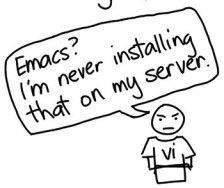
the other text editor

Seriously. Learn the basics so that you can easily work on other people's computers. If you know your way around Vim, people won't give you as much grief over Emacs.

Here's what you need to know:

- i insert mode ↔ <Esc> command mode
- :vimtutor
- :w write/save file
- :q quit
- :q! really quit

★ Are you a long-time vi user trying out Emacs? Check out Evil. (umm, search for "Evil Emacs")?



★ You can actually edit remote files in Emacs without installing Emacs on the other computer, but that's an intermediate topic. (see TRAMP)

server
✓ ssh/ftp
✗ emacs
✓ emacs

Okay. Once you know the basics of vim, you can get on with learning Emacs. ☺

why learn Emacs?
→ customizable
→ endless room for growth

Learn the terms

This will help you read documentation.

Why are Emacs terms so weird? It's because Emacs has been around for a very long time, and it's hard to change the way things are called. Don't worry, you'll get used to it.

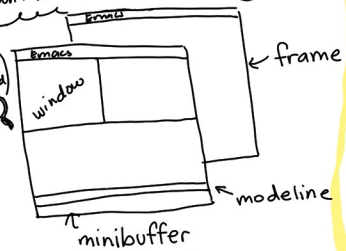
Reading keyboard shortcuts:

C-x C-s → press Ctrl+x, then Ctrl+s

Control Key, Control Key

↳ you can keep Ctrl pressed, then press X and then S

I use a mix of beginner-friendly and Emacs-standard terms in this guide.



You'll also see keyboard shortcuts like:

M-x → Press Alt+x (or ⌘x)

Meta Key (Alt / ⌘)

★ This lets you execute commands by name. (even better with M-x icomplete-mode)

★ Alternatively, you can replace M-... with <Esc>... (ex: press Esc, then press x)

RET → Return/Enter Key

★ Press <Tab> at a prompt to see options.

Windows show buffers, which could be:

- a file
- a process
- info not associated with a file

Learn how to learn more

Inside Emacs:

- C-h t Tutorial
- C-h i Info manual
- C-h K <Keyboard shortcut> Describes a shortcut (works with menus too)
- C-h a Searches commands
- C-h w <command> Shows shortcut
- C-h m Describe current modes
- C-h C-h Help on help
- C-h f Describe a function (by name)

Emacs — check out the menus

On the web:

EmacsWiki.org
planet.emacsen.org
stackoverflow.com
reddit.com/r/emacs
& more!

Like IRC? Check out #emacs on irc.freenode.net
↳ folks are wonderful and helped me put this together!

Learn Emacs basics

- C-x C-f open/visit a file
- C-x C-s save/write a file
- C-x C-c quit

★ Note: You don't need to quit Emacs after each file. Just use C-x C-f to open the next one.

How to select text:

← Go to the start and press C-SPC (Ctrl+space) to set the mark (the beginning)

← Go to the end and run your command. (Ex: C-w is "kill" which actually cuts the text.)

Text editing

- C-/ undo (need to redo? just do something unrelated, then undo the undo) ↳ even better with undo-tree
- C-w kill/cut
- C-y yank/paste → learn about the kill ring
- M-x replace-string RET

★ Learn how to use keyboard macros. They're awesome.

- C-x (start macro
- C-x) end macro
- C-x e execute macro
- e ... ...again

... and more!

Buffer & window management

- C-x b switch buffer ↳ even better with M-x ido-mode
- C-x 2 split
- C-x 3 split
- C-x o other window
- C-x 0 get rid of current window
- C-x 1 get rid of other windows

Navigation & search

- M-g M-g go to line (hold Alt/⌘ and then press g twice)
- C-s Interactive search
- C-r Interactive search backward
- M-> End of buffer
- M-< Beginning of buffer
- M-x occur RET Find lines

Extend & customize

M-x load-theme RET
Try out color themes → use tab to see the list and list-packages to add more

M-x customize-group RET
set common options

M-x customize-face RET
change background, foreground, etc.

M-x list-packages RET
install lots of modules... → want a prettier Emacs? Check out color themes! (Lots of people like color-theme-solarized)

and then...

editing your ~/.emacs file!

(...(...)) initializes your Emacs, adds new functionality, and so on.

Use M-x eval-buffer or restart Emacs to see the changes.

Broke your Emacs config? emacs -q skips ~/.emacs

} See emacswiki.org for lots of examples

Other good things to learn

Org-mode.org
organize your life in plain text

Narrowing/Widening — focus.

Calc
powerful calculator and converter

Eshell / Term
command-line in Emacs

TRAMP
remote access

Writing & debugging Emacs Lisp → edebug
(it sounds scary, but it's powerful ☺)

There's so much more!

Ask away, and discover more by exploring!

Sacha Chua