Andrew   's Blog   ◯
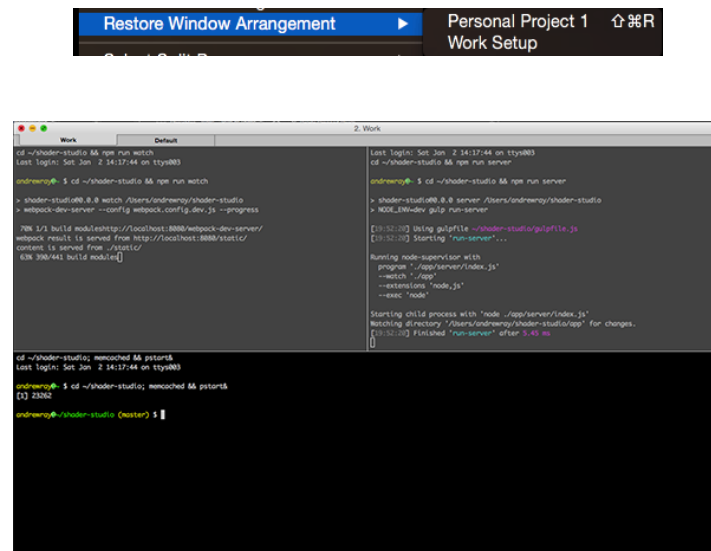
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How to Create Custom iTerm2 Window Arrangments

TL;DR Create a custom keyboard shorcut to automatically spawn a set of windows and splits with processes running.

iTerm2 is useful software, but this process is complicated. I've attempted to document known pitfalls.

How to Create a Custom Window Arrangement

1. **Close all iTerm2 windows.**
   We'll use the "Save Window Arrangement" feature which saves **all** windows. Any windows open in the background will also be saved.

2. **Open a new window and set up your tab and split layout as desired.**
   Don't run any processes, nor `cd` into any directories yet. We'll do that in the next section. Just set up the layout of splits and tabs.
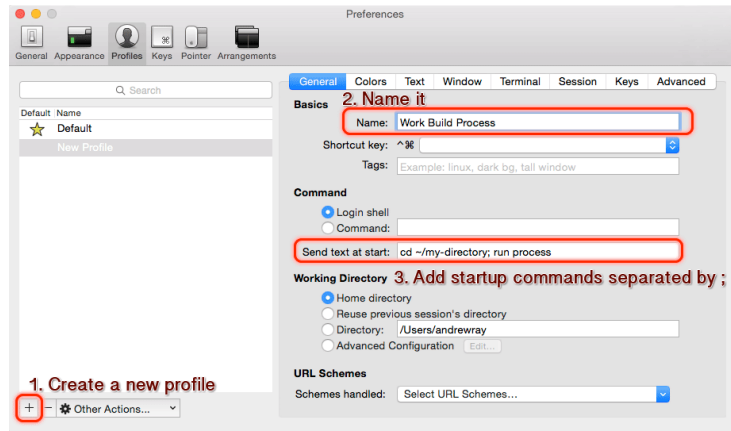
   ⌘-D and **⌘-Shift–D** are useful shortcuts for creating vertical and horizontal splits.

3. **Create a new profile for each shell.**
   This is complicated and has several steps.

   - Open preferences with **⌘-,** (Command-Comma)
   - Go to the "Profiles" tab.

○ Create a new profile and name it something specific to this arrangement and shell, like "Work Build Process"

○ Under "Send text at start" type the commands, including `cd` to the correct starting directory, for this shell to execute on startup. For example you might type `cd ~/my-work-folder; npm run watch`, which is what's executed in this shell. It's better to use `;` between commands instead of `&&` so that if any command fails, the rest still get executed.

○ You can also use the "directory" radio button, and not use the `cd A; do B;` syntax. I've found that sometimes iTerm will run the "send text at start" *before* it opens that directory though. This may have gotten better in later versions.

○ **Repeat this** for every shell you want to have a custom command or custom working directory. For example, you might name your profile "Work Main Directory" that just contains the startup command `cd ~/mywork-folder`.

4. **Assign the correct profiles to the correct shells.**

○ Right click on each shell and choose "Edit Session"
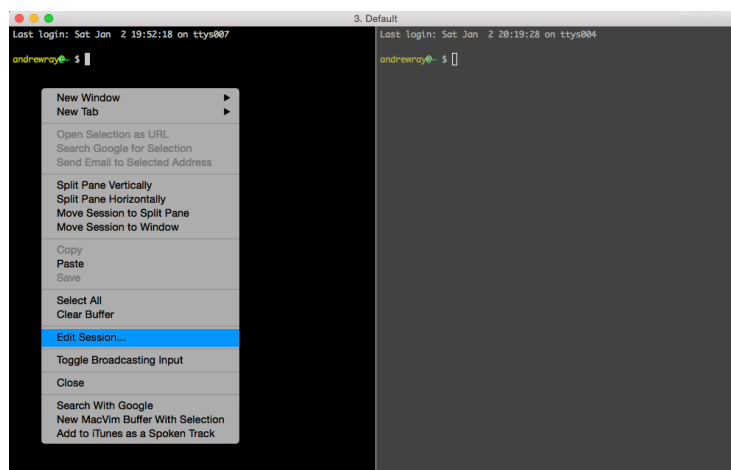
○ Choose your profile corresponding to this shell. You can also use this opportunity to give it a name, which will show up in the tab title. iTerm2 doesn't use profile names in the tabs, because why would it?!
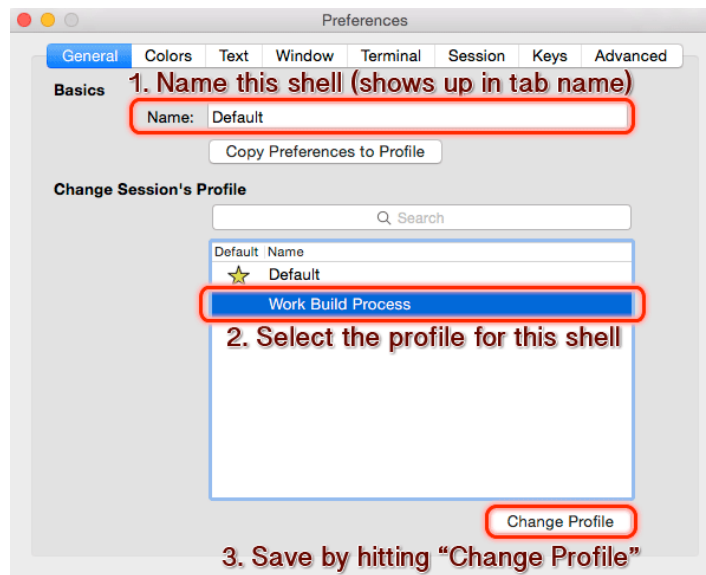
○ After you click "Change Profile" you must close the preferences window.

**Warning 1:** Hitting "Change Profile" doesn't give you any feedback that it worked.

Warning 2: Setting the session will **not** run the commands you specified. I'm not kidding. You won't know if it worked until step 7.

5. **Save the window arrangement.**
   Press ⌘ **Shift S** (Command-Shift-s) and then name your new arrangment.

6. **Assign a keyboard shortcut to open your arrangement.**

   ○ Open the preferences again with ⌘, (Command comma).
   ○ Open the "Keys" tab.
   ○ Create a new shortcut using the ⊞ icon.
   ○ Highlight "keyboard shorcut" and press the keys you want to open this workspace. I prefer something like ⌘ **Shift [First let-ter of arrangement]** such as ⌘ **Shift W** to open my "Work" win-dow arrangement.
   ○ For "Action", open the dropdown and scroll all the way to the bottom to "Select Menu Item".

   ○ Open the new "Menu Item" dropdown and scroll down to the "Window" section near the bottom, find the "Restore Window Arrangement" subsection, and select your profile.
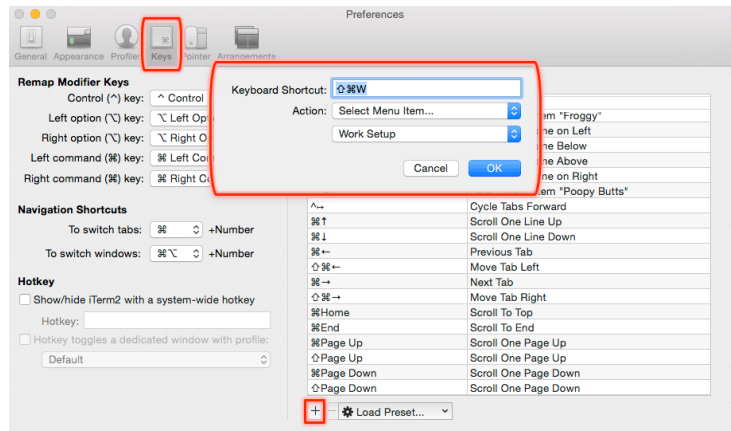
7. **Close all windows again and test your arrangement by triggering your keyboard shortcut!**

Hopefully everything worked fine and you have a shortcut you can trigger to set up a custom arrangement!

Troubleshooting

There are a few pitfalls here.

If your startup commands don't work as expected then you have to modify your session profile commands, **then you have to re-assign the profile to the shell.** The profile doesn't live update, it somehow caches an old version of your shell commands. After modifying your shell commands, repeat the "Edit Session" steps including hitting "Change Profile." Then save your arrangement again and overwrite the old one with the same name. You can only test it by re-opening a new arrangement with the keyboard shortcut you set up. This is a mini nightmare. Feel free to ping @George Nachman about any frustrations you have!

After saving an arrangement, it might not show up in the menu item dropdown when creating a new keyboard shortcut. If this is the case, after you've saved your arrangement with ⌘ **Shift S**, you must restart iTerm2.

That's It!

If this helped you improve your iTerm2 workflow, consider following me on Twitter or buying me a coffee :).

03 Jan 2016 on tech

Andy Ray
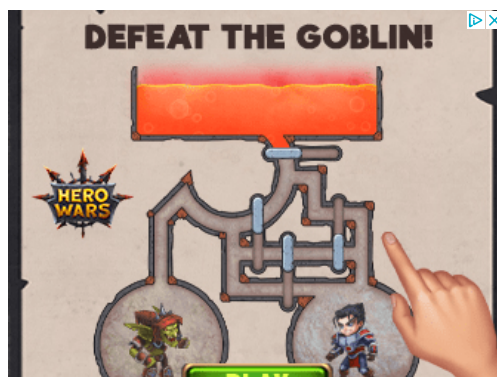
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Tim Osborn • 3 years ago • edited

Nice! An alternative that trades some of iTerm2's power for simplicity is itermocil: https://github.com/TomAntho…… just define the window layouts and commands in a yaml file and you're good to go!

6 ∧ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

　　Altons → Tim Osborn • 4 months ago

　　glad I read comments before embarking on this journey!!!!

　　∧ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

　　Jarkko Saltiola → Tim Osborn • 2 years ago

　　Should have read this comment first! Ended up using itermocil too as it's easier to config and more straightforward to run from shell script also starting work related apps (slack etc) and opening some browser tabs. Mapping multiple tabs with itermocil seemed to require having multiple layout files run individually though, that took some trial and error.

　　∧ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

　　James Jeffery → Tim Osborn • 3 years ago

　　wow! Thank you for sharing that gem Tim.

　　∧ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

　　andrewray Mod → Tim Osborn • 3 years ago

　　whaaaaat

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mcmatt11 • a year ago

I like how on that last screenshot you have what looks like a keyboard shortcut set up to type out "Poopy Butts"

1 ∧ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

　　cjromb → mcmatt11 • 11 days ago

　　Good eye! LOL

　　∧ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

François Belle • 3 years ago

Thank you so much for this config, just a little update: on step 4 it's not "Change profile" anymore, now it's "Use selected profile" that you have to press. ;)

1 ∧ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

Martin • 4 years ago

Thanks a lot for this! Giant improvement to my workflow.

1 ∧ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

Jeremy Gustafson • 6 months ago

This is great! One quick "gotcha" I ran into after getting it all working: after opening a window arrangement, hitting Command+D / Command+Shift+D to split a new pane will inherit any startup commands from the previously active one's profile. In other words, if I have 7 panes each ssh'd to a different host (based on their individual profiles as described in the article), and I split a new pane, the new pane will ssh to the same host as the previously active pane, instead of coming up as a blank terminal. This is because, strictly speaking, the menu command is "Split Horizontally with Current Profile". But almost never do I want this behavior in the case of a preset window. The workaround I found is to add two more key bindings (Preferences > Keys > Key Bindings) for Command+[Shift]+D to split vertically/[horizontally] with the "Default" profile, this will then override the default menu item, and get things working the way I wanted. May or may not be useful to anyone else. And yes, I'm aware there is a more complicated keyboard shortcut to split horizontally without a profile, but I didn't want to have to teach my fingers a new trick.

∧ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

Robert Gevorgyan · a year ago

Actually, you can change to "Command" instead of "Login Shell" in profile tab and as a command write something like "/bin/zsh --login; <your set="" of="" commands="" here="">"
This solves the frustration issue :)

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Sam Landfried · 3 years ago

Excellent! That helps a lot. Thanks for detailed walkthrough.

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CNKCQ · 3 years ago

Thank you for sharing.

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

taiwanese2001 · 3 years ago

thanks, this was getting to be annoying every time I restarted my computer

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Carlos Monti · 3 years ago

Thanks man! very useful.

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Kris Sparks · 3 years ago

Worked perfectly and looks amazing. Thanks!

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Josh Strater · 3 years ago

Thanks, Andy!

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

vikas p · 3 years ago

If you want to check if your arrangement is saved and the shortcut is assigned correctly, open iterm2 normally, click on Window menu, hover on Restore Window Arrangement. It should show your saved arrangement and the assigned shortcut.

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prashdeep · 3 years ago

This is exactly what I was looking for. You cant imagine how many keystrokes I saved after reading this blog. Very useful.

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

best writing service reviews · 3 years ago

There are more people are want to know more information about how to Custom iTerm2 Window Arrangements. So i hope they found the tips from here about this and they can learn easily from here.

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Javier Ruiz · 3 years ago

Thank you for this, second time I come to this article and it's just perfect.

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Glenn Espinosa · 4 years ago

Does this play well with Tmux?

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

> **Jarkko Saltiola** ➔ Glenn Espinosa · 2 years ago
>
> Depends on what you need. Alternative itermocil has tmux's teamocil compatible layout files, that's probably better match.
>
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About

I'm a human from San Francisco.

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