

# Midnight Commander (mc) — one-stop cheatsheet

Midnight Commander is an orthodox (two-pane) terminal file manager—think “visual shell”: navigate directories, tag groups of files, and perform copy/move/rename/delete at speed, while also having built-in viewer/editor, a configurable user menu, background jobs, and a Virtual File System (VFS) that lets you browse archives and remote hosts (for example, `sftp://` and `sh://`) as if they were local directories.

## Legend / conventions

- `C-x` = `Ctrl+x`.   `A-x` = `Alt+x`.
- No Alt/Meta? Press `Esc`, release, then type the character.
- Many terminals map `Esc+1...9,0` → `F1...F10`.
- `Esc Esc` quickly dismisses menus and popups — gist.

## Core model

- **Current panel + other panel** (destination default).
- **Menu bar** (focus with `F9`); **command line** at bottom.
- **Tagged files**: if any are tagged, most operations apply to the tagged set.

## Launch & CLI options — mc(1)

- Start: `mc` or `mc dir1 [dir2]` (set panel dirs).
- Viewer: `mc -v FILE` Editor: `mc -e [FILE]`.
- Subshell: `mc -u` (disable) `mc -U` (force).
- Color: `mc -c` (force) `mc -b` (B/W) `mc -C ARG` (palette).
- Mouse/tty: `mc -d` (no mouse) `mc -g` (oldmouse) `mc -x` (xterm).
- Keymap: `mc -K FILE` `mc --nokeymap`.
- Directory print: `mc -P FILE` (for `mc.sh` “cd after exit” wrapper).
- Info: `mc -V` (version) `mc -h` (help).

## Core function keys — File menu

Key	Action
<b>F1</b>	Help (contextual).
<b>F2</b>	User menu (custom actions and macros).
<b>F3</b>	View file ( <code>Shift-F3</code> raw view; disregard extension).
<b>F4</b>	Edit file ( <code>Shift-F4</code> create new file).
<b>F5</b>	Copy selected or tagged to other panel directory.
<b>F6</b>	Move selected or tagged ( <code>Shift-F6</code> rename under cursor).
<b>F7</b>	<code>Mkdir</code> .
<b>F8</b>	<code>Delete</code> .
<b>F9</b>	Focus top menu bar.
<b>F10</b>	Quit.

## Selection — gist

Key	Action
<b>Insert/C-t</b>	Select or deselect file.
*	Invert selection on files.
+	Selection options (including custom pattern).
-	Deselect options (pattern).

## Quick navigation — gist

Key	Action
<b>Tab/C-i</b>	Jump to other panel.
<b>A-c</b>	Quick cd dialog.
<b>A-?</b>	Search dialog.
<b>C-s</b>	Search for item.
<b>A-s</b>	Incremental search (repeat <b>A-s</b> to next occurrence).
<b>C-\</b>	Directory hotlist.

# Navigation, display, panels menu, and command prompt

## Navigation keys — gist

Key	Action
<b>C-p/Up</b>	Move selection to previous entry.
<b>C-n/Down</b>	Move selection to next entry.
<b>A-g</b>	First visible item.
<b>A-r</b>	Middle item.
<b>A-j</b>	Last visible item.
<b>A-v/PgUp</b>	One page up.
<b>A-p/PgDn</b>	One page down.
<b>A-&lt;/Home</b>	Top (first entry).
<b>A-&gt;/End</b>	Bottom (last entry).

## Directory history — gist

Key	Action
<b>A-y</b>	Previous directory in directory history.
<b>A-u</b>	Next directory in directory history.
<b>A-Shift-h</b>	Show path history.

## Display — gist

Key	Action
<b>C-r</b>	Refresh current panel.
<b>C-u</b>	Swap panels.
<b>A-,</b>	Toggle panel layout (horizontal/vertical).
<b>C-x i</b>	Toggle other panel to information mode.
<b>C-x q</b>	Toggle other panel to quick view mode.
<b>A-i</b>	Other panel shows same directory as current.
<b>A-o</b>	Show highlighted directory in the other panel.
<b>A-t</b>	Change panel view (full/brief/long).
<b>A-.</b>	Toggle "Show hidden files".

## Panels menu — via F9 then Left/Right

Key	Action
<b>(menu)</b>	Listing mode: Full / Brief / Long / User-defined.
<b>(menu)</b>	Info, Quick view, Tree, Tree view.
<b>(menu)</b>	Sort order: name/ext/time/size/inode; reverse toggle.
<b>(menu)</b>	Filter (limit visible); Select group (tag by pattern).
<b>(menu)</b>	Rescan/reread directory; Panelize (fill from command output).

## Menus at a glance — F9

Key	Action
<b>Left/Right</b>	Listing mode, sort, filter/select, quick view/info, tree, panelize, hotlist.
<b>File</b>	View/edit/copy/move/mkdir/delete, link tools, quit.
<b>Command</b>	Find file, quick cd, hotlist, compare directories, external panelize, jobs.
<b>Options</b>	Configuration, appearance/layout, key learning, confirmations (build dependent).

## File and directory operations — gist

Key	Action
<b>C-x d</b>	Compare directories.
<b>C-x c</b>	Chmod dialog.
<b>C-x o</b>	Chown dialog.
<b>C-x C-s</b>	Edit symlink.
<b>C-x s</b>	Create symlink dialog.
<b>C-x l</b>	Create hard link dialog.
<b>C-x v</b>	Relative symlink tool on selected or tagged.
<b>C-x a</b>	List active VFS directories.

## Command prompt — gist

Key	Action
<b>C-o</b>	Drop to the console (toggle panels).
<b>A-Enter</b>	Put highlighted file name on command line.
<b>C-x t</b>	Put selected or tagged item names on command line.
<b>C-Shift-Enter</b>	Put full path of highlighted file on command line.
<b>A-a/C-x p</b>	Put full path of panel directory on command line.
<b>A-h</b>	Show command history.
<b>A-n/A-p</b>	Move up or down through command history.
<b>C-x</b>	External panelize (fill panel with command output).
<b>C-x j</b>	Show background jobs.

## Quit variants — gist

Key	Action
<b>F10</b>	Quit (normal).
<b>Shift-F10</b>	Quiet exit without confirmation.

# Viewer/editor, panelize recipes, user menu macros, keymaps

## File view — gist

Key	Action
C-f	View the next file.
C-b	View the previous file.

## Viewer (mcview): practical extras

Key	Action
/	Search.
n	Next match.
Shift-n	Previous match.
A-</A->	Begin/end of file (common navigation).

## Editor (mcedit): quick survival

Key	Action
F2	Save.
F10	Exit editor.
F7	Search.
F4	Replace.
C-y	Delete line.
C-k	Delete to end of line.

## Panelize: “virtual panels” from commands

Key	Action
C-x	External panelize (fill panel with command output). Example git ls-files (repo file list). Example rg -l PATTERN (files matching a pattern). Example find -type f -size +100M -print (large files). Example ls -1   ... (pipelines that output one file per line).

## Background jobs — gist

Key	Action
C-x j	Jobs list; inspect or cancel background operations.

## User menu “@” commands — gist

Key	Action
F2-@	Run a command on the currently highlighted item. Example F2-@ unzip — unzip selected file.
Example	F2-@ zip -r foo.zip — zip current directory as foo.zip.
Example	F2-@ 7za x — extract selected file with 7zip.
Example	F2-@ 7za a foo.7z — 7zip current directory as foo.7z.
File	User menu file (common): ~/ .config/mc/menu.

## User menu macros — mc(1)

Key	Action
%f, %p	Current file (name/path).
%d, %D	Current directory / other panel directory.
%t, %T	Tagged files (this/other panel).
%v, %V	Tagged files with full paths.
%s, %S	Selected files (tagged if any else current).
%cd	Change directory (useful for VFS entrypoints).
%view[args]	Internal viewer (ascii/hex/nroff/...).
%{ prompt}	Prompt user for substitution text.
% var{	Env var substitution with default.
ENV:default}	

## Keymaps and Learn keys — mc(1)

Key	Action
Learn keys	Stores terminal sequences in ~/ .config/mc/ini under [terminal:TERM].
-K/-keymap	Load a specific keymap file.
MC_KEYMAP	Environment variable that selects a keymap.
~/ .config/mc/mc.keymap	Common user keymap location.

# VFS, configuration paths, subshell, troubleshooting, references

## VFS: browse “special paths” — mc(1)

Key	Action
<b>Concept</b>	VFS lets you <i>cd</i> into archives and remotes like directories.
<b>C-x a</b>	List active VFS directories — <b>gist</b> .

**Tip** VFS can stack (for example, an archive stored on an `sftp://` path).

## Remote VFS — mc(1)

Key	Action
<b>sh://</b>	<code>sh://[user@]machine[:port]/[remote-dir]</code>
<b>sftp://</b>	<code>sftp://[user@]machine[:port]/[remote-dir]</code>
<b>Example</b>	<code>sh://joe@somehost:2222/private</code>
<b>Example</b>	<code>sftp://joe@somehost:2222/private</code>

## Archives and EXTfs — mc(1)

Key	Action
<b>Example</b>	<code>cd documents.zip/uzip://</code> (man page example).
<b>Pattern</b>	<code>cd file.tar.gz/utar://</code> (extfs name varies).
<b>Standalone</b>	<code>cd fsname://</code> (enter an extfs “filesystem”).

## Undelete (optional ext2) — mc(1)

Key	Action
<b>undel://</b>	<code>undel://DEVICEPART</code> (for example, <code>undel://sda2</code> ) if built with support.

## Configuration paths — mc(1)

Key	Action
<b>Main config</b>	<code>~/.config/mc/ini</code>
<b>Panels</b>	<code>~/.config/mc/panels.ini</code>
<b>Extensions</b>	<code>~/.config/mc/mc.ext.ini</code>
<b>User menu</b>	<code>~/.config/mc/menu</code>
<b>Keymap</b>	<code>~/.config/mc/mc.keymap</code>
<b>Highlighting</b>	<code>~/.config/mc/filehighlight.ini</code> (if supported).

## Subshell notes — mc(1)

Key	Action
<b>-u / -U</b>	Disable / force subshell.
<b>Concept</b>	Subshell shares your shell environment and aliases while mc runs.
<b>bashrc</b>	Often <code>~/.local/share/mc/bashrc</code> (varies by install).

## Troubleshooting quick hits

Key	Action
<b>F10 stolen</b>	Quit via menu ( <b>F9 begin : math : text rightarrowend : math : text</b> or <b>Quit</b> ) or remap the terminal key.
<b>Alt combos</b>	Use <b>Esc</b> then key (Meta emulation).
<b>tmux/screen</b>	Try <b>mc -g</b> ; then re-run Learn keys.
<b>Display odd</b>	Try <b>mc -a</b> (ASCII) or adjust terminal settings.

## References (URLs)

Key	Action
<b>mc(1)</b>	<a href="https://source.midnight-commander.org/man/mc.html">https://source.midnight-commander.org/man/mc.html</a>
<b>gist</b>	<a href="https://gist.github.com/samiraguirar/9cd4264445545cf459d">https://gist.github.com/samiraguirar/9cd4264445545cf459d</a>
<b>site</b>	<a href="https://midnight-commander.org/">https://midnight-commander.org/</a>