

# 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 ( <b>Shift-F3</b> raw view; disregard extension).
<b>F4</b>	Edit file ( <b>Shift-F4</b> create new file).
<b>F5</b>	Copy selected or tagged to other panel directory.
<b>F6</b>	Move selected or tagged ( <b>Shift-F6</b> rename under cursor).
<b>F7</b>	Mkdir.
<b>F8</b>	Delete.
<b>F9</b>	Focus top menu bar.
<b>F10</b>	Quit.

## Selection — gist

Key	Action
<b>Insert/C-t</b>	Select or deselect file.
<b>*</b>	Invert selection on files.
<b>+</b>	Selection options (including custom pattern).
<b>-</b>	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-<b>&lt;</b>/Home</b>	Top (first entry).
<b>A-<b>&gt;</b>/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
<b>C-f</b>	View the next file.
<b>C-b</b>	View the previous file.

### Viewer (mcview): practical extras

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

### Editor (mcedit): quick survival

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

### Panelize: “virtual panels” from commands

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

### Background jobs — gist

Key	Action
<b>C-x j</b>	Jobs list; inspect or cancel background operations.

### User menu “@” commands — gist

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

### User menu macros — mc(1)

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

### Keymaps and Learn keys — mc(1)

Key	Action
<b>Learn keys</b>	Stores terminal sequences in ~/.config/mc/ini under [terminal:TERM].
<b>-K/-keymap</b>	Load a specific keymap file.
<b>MC_KEYMAP</b>	Environment variable that selects a keymap.
<b>~/.config/mc/mc.keymap</b>	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 into</i> archives and remotes like directories.
<b>C-x a</b>	List active VFS directories — gist.
<b>Tip</b>	VFS can stack (for example, an archive stored on an sftp:// path).

### Remote VFS — mc(1)

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

### Archives and EXTfs — mc(1)

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

### Undelete (optional ext2) — mc(1)

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

### Configuration paths — mc(1)

Key	Action
<b>Main config</b>	~/.config/mc/ini
<b>Panels</b>	~/.config/mc/panels.ini
<b>Extensions</b>	~/.config/mc/mc.ext.ini
<b>User menu</b>	~/.config/mc/menu
<b>Keymap</b>	~/.config/mc/mc.keymap
<b>Highlighting</b>	~/.config/mc/filehighlight.ini (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 ~/.local/share/mc/bashrc (varies by install).

### Troubleshooting quick hits

Key	Action
<b>F10 stolen</b>	Quit via menu ( <b>F9</b> <i>begin : math : text</i> <i>rightarrow</i> <i>end :</i> <i>math : text</i> Quit) 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/samiraguiar/9cd4264445545cfd459d">https://gist.github.com/samiraguiar/9cd4264445545cfd459d</a>
<b>site</b>	<a href="https://midnight-commander.org/">https://midnight-commander.org/</a>