

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” wrap-per`).
- Info: **mc -V** (version) **mc -h** (help).

Core function keys — File menu

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

Selection — gist

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

Quick navigation — gist

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

Navigation, display, panels menu, and command prompt

Navigation keys — gist

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

Directory history — gist

| Key | Action |
|------------------|--|
| A-y | Previous directory in directory history. |
| A-u | Next directory in directory history. |
| A-Shift-h | Show path history. |

Display — gist

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

Panels menu — via F9 then Left/Right

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

Menus at a glance — F9

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

File and directory operations — gist

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

Command prompt — gist

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

Quit variants — gist

| Key | Action |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| F10 | Quit (normal). |
| Shift-F10 | 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 | <code>git ls-files</code> (repo file list). |
| Example | <code>rg -l PATTERN</code> (files matching a pattern). |
| Example | <code>find -type f -size +100M -print</code> (large files). |
| Example | <code>ls -l ...</code> (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 <code>foo.zip</code> . |
| Example | F2-@ 7za x — extract selected file with 7zip. |
| Example | F2-@ 7za a foo.7z — 7zip current directory as <code>foo.7z</code> . |
| File | User menu file (common): <code>~/.config/mc/menu</code> . |

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 endpoints). |
| %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 <code>~/.config/mc/ini</code> under <code>[terminal:TERM]</code> . |
| -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 |
|----------------|---|
| Concept | VFS lets you <i>cd into</i> archives and remotes like directories. |
| C-x a | List active VFS directories — gist. |
| Tip | VFS can stack (for example, an archive stored on an <code>sftp://</code> path). |

Remote VFS — mc(1)

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

Archives and EXTfs — mc(1)

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

Undelete (optional ext2) — mc(1)

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

Configuration paths — mc(1)

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

Subshell notes — mc(1)

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

Troubleshooting quick hits

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

References (URLs)

| Key | Action |
|--------------|---|
| mc(1) | https://source.midnight-commander.org/man/mc.html |
| gist | https://gist.github.com/samiraguiar/9cd4264445545cfd459d |
| site | https://midnight-commander.org/ |