



Performance/Feature Comparisons of Emacs Shells/Terminals

Emacs Shell/Feature	eshell	shell	ansi-term	term	vterm	Comment
Relative speed comparison: Execute “ls -lFGO” inside /usr/local/bin/ . (Execution times in seconds for several attempts at the same command).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.448571 4.247726 2.550193 2.631693 2.510235 4.220897 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.514221 2.472229 2.514438 2.468948 2.765349 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.169079 5.431559 5.493072 5.398879 5.435839 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.586079 5.531138 5.519672 5.227298 5.526750 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.065568 0.073241 0.053149 0.048021 0.060560 0.109644 	Tested the execution time of listing a directory that has 861 entries (mostly symlinks), a /usr/local/bin on a macOS computer.
Special installation/configuration Notes					term shell-side configuration	Read configuration/installation notes for the specific shell.
Toggle terminal mode to allow editing navigation	Standard Emacs keys always available for navigation but cursor keys used by the terminal for history.	Not available: always in Emacs editing mode.	out: C-x C-j in: C-c C-k	out: C-x C-j in: C-c C-k	out: C-c C-t in: C-c C-t	It is best to have 2 modes to use applications inside the terminal and have keys to switch between the “ <i>pure terminal mode</i> ” and Emacs navigation mode.
Escape Sequences and colouring works	Implement its own, does not render everything applications support.	Partially. Escape sequences work partially but colouring does not.	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Shell prompt definition support (PS1)		Yes, but tput expressions to boldface prompt does not work.	Yes	Yes	Yes but requires code in shell configuration	Although vterm requires extra configuration that also provides extra functionalities.
clear works	Almost: clears the screen but leaves cursor at the bottom of the window.	No (problem with escape sequences)	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Support bash aliases	No but supports its own.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
F1-F12 keys available to terminal. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes: available to terminal. No: used by Emacs only. 	No	No	No	No	Yes	When the F1-F12 keys are used by terminal they can be used by applications that use them. They are, however not available to Emacs until you toggle the terminal mode off (using the keys identified in the second row above (eg. C-c C-t for vterm.)
History via cursor	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Advantage	Implemented in Emacs Lisp, available in all environments even on non- <i>*nix</i> like Windows.				Best speed I have on my system, and pure terminal control.	For fast operations on something that is close to a real terminal, vterm is the best available on <i>*nix</i> platforms as far as I can tell at the moment (April 2020). The eshell is useful to perform operations on platforms where Unix-like utilities are not available and where you want to use Emacs lisp code. It integrates with Emacs functionality, standing on its own.
Can run scripts (interpret shebang line)	No. But can run script if the interpreter is specified explicitly.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Runs other REPLs	Yes, as long that the shell is an executable on the PATH. It does not support bash alias that are sometimes used to launch shells.	Was able to use python, clisp, iex, but not LFE: it launched Erlang REPL instead. iex was coloured properly.	Yes, with colouring.	Yes, with colouring.	Yes, good speed, supports colouring. Use C-c C-c for Control-C, C-c C-g for Control-G	Again here, the best shell to run another real from the command line is vterm. However, it’s also possible to run these REPLs from within Emacs. Using them from within another shell allows using one quickly or testing.
Can run Emacs Lisp commands	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Some shells allow mapping keys to Emacs Lips command code.
Interact with Emacs from the shell	Yes, using elisp code	No	No	No	Yes, with special escape sequences for message passing .	