§ Performance/Feature Comparisons of Emacs Shells/Terminals

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Emacs Shell/Feature	<u>eshell</u>	shell (∑ shell-mode)	ansi-term (∑ term-mode)	term (∑ term-mode)	<u>emacs eat</u> (<u>∑ eat-mode</u>)	vterm (∑ vterm-mode)	Comment
Last updated on:	2025-05-02						
Relative speed comparison: Execute "Is -IFGO" inside /usr/local/bin/ on macOS. (Execution times in seconds for several attempts at the same command).	 2.448571 4.247726 2.550193 2.631693 2.510235 4.220897 	2.5142212.4722292.5144382.4689482.765349	6.1690795.4315595.4930725.3988795.435839	• 5.586079 • 5.531138 • 5.519672 • 5.227298 • 5.526750	Not measured.	0.065568 0.073241 0.053149 0.048021 0.060560 0.109644	
SEE ALSO: PEL shell/REPL invocation commands	EShell Manual Mastering EShell, from Mickey Petersen						Tested the execution time of listing a directory that has 861 entries (mostly symlinks), a /usr/ local/bin on a 2014 macOS computer.
Supports built-in serial terminal emulator?				Yes, use: <pre>M-x serial-term</pre>			
Support running GNU Screen within an Emacs internal shell in local host? One would normally start screen at the remote host to establish a context and connect to it via ssh. If the ssh link breaks you can re-connect to the screen session where it left off. Using screen inside a Emacs terminal buffer is probably not very useful unless you want to use GNU screen logging facility to record the stdout/stderr output of a long running job and want to interact with other Emacs buffer while doing so.	No, the screen command launches inside a term buffer. The eshell remains running independently.	No, the mode lacks screen clear capability.	Yes: Linux, macOS • Start term with M-x ansiterm RETURN. Inside the created shell, execute the screen command. • Start screen directly with M-x ansiterm screen RETURN.	Yes: Linux, macOS • Start term with M-x term RETURN. Inside the created shell, execute the screen command. • Start screen directly with M-x term screen RETURN.	Yes: macOS	Yes: macOS	Tested in Linux and macOS environments only. • Did not test vterm in Linux yet.
Support running <u>GNU Screen</u> within shell in remote host by issuing a ssh command within that shell and then executing screen.	No, the screen command launches inside a term buffer. The eshell remains running independently.	No, the mode lacks screen clear capability.	Yes: Linux, macOS • Within the term invoked shell, issu command in the remote host.	e the ssh command first to connect	to the remote host, then issue the screen	Yes: macOS	Tested in Linux and macOS environments only. Did not test vterm in Linux yet.
Special installation/configuration Notes						term shell-side configuration	Read configuration/installation notes for the specific shell.
Advantage	Implemented in Emacs Lisp, available in all environments even on non-*nix like Windows.	Flexible, good compromise between speed and availability of a mix of features from the shell and from Emacs since Emacs key bindings are available.					For fast operations on something that is close to a real terminal, vterm is the best available on *nix 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.
Limitations		The sub-process does not see the command until the RET key is pressed. Therefore do not use this shell for running interactive programs that wait on keyboard input.			Saw some problems briefly using eat 0.9.4 On macOS Sonoma, arm64 CPU, in both Terminal.app text mode and GUI mode Emacs 29.3 with zsh and bash configurations identified as prompt model 2 in my USRHOME project, the backspace key did not work in zsh and bash prompt failed. Setting TERM to xterm-256color inside the eat terminal shell solved the above problems. Very flexible, fast, compared to term, but still young with some bugs left (eg. cloning buffers, dir tracking not working). Worth trying!	bug: vterm-module compiles as x86_64 instead of arm64e	

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Emacs Shell/Feature	<u>eshell</u>	shell (∑ shell-mode)	ansi-term (∑ term-mode)	term (∑ term-mode)	emacs eat (∑ eat-mode)	<u>vterm</u> (<u>∑ vterm-mode</u>)	Comment
Open multiple shell of this type by renaming the buffer of the existing one with rename-buffer. • M-x rename-buffer • <f11> b R</f11>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	This method is not specific to the terminals. It also applies to other types of buffers like all REPL buffers. It's best to use a name that starts and ends with a '*' to identify these buffer as special.
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-c C-j in: C-c C-k	out: C-c C-j in: C-c C-k	It has several, depending of the input mode that is currently active (see below). • C-c C-j: → semi-char mode • C-c C-e: → emacs mode • C-c M-d: → char mode • C-c C-1: → line input mode • C-M-m or M-RET: → semi-char	out: C-c C-t in: C-c C-t	The shells differ in their way to allow key bindings. The eshell and shell buffers support all Emacs key bindings while the shell is in control. The ansi-term, term and vterm have two input modes and key sequences to switch between them.
Emacs key bindings available while shell input mode is active	Yes	Yes	Some of them, not all: in shell input mode, the C-x prefix is replaced by the C-c prefix. Type C-c C-j to switch to Emacs input mode, then use Emacs key sequences. Return to shell input mode by typing C-c C-k	Some of them, not all: in shell input mode, the C-x prefix is replaced by the C-c prefix. Type C-c C-j to switch to Emacs input mode, then use Emacs key sequences. Return to shell input mode by typing C-c C-k	eat has 4 input modes: • semi-char mode: most keys are sending to terminal except C- C-c, C-x, C-g, C-h, C-M-c, C-u, C-q, M-x, M-:, M-8. Special bindings are: • C-q: send next key to terminal • C-y: like yank, but send text to terminal • M-y: like yank-pop: but send text to terminal • C-c C-k: kill process • C-c C-c: → emacs mode • C-c M-d: → char mode • C-c M-d: → char mode • emacs mode: use it to navigate and edit: no special key binding except: • C-c C-j: → semi-char mode • C-c M-d: → char input mode • C-c M-d: → char input mode • C-c M-d: → char input mode • C-m-m or M-RET: → semi-char • line mode: similar to comint, shell-mode and term line mode: terminal inout is sent line-wise, allowing editing line with Emacs commands. Extra binding: • C-c C-e: → emacs mode • C-c C-j: → semi-char mode • C-c C-d: → char mode	Only some of them (the ones that start with Esc). Type C-c C-t to switch to Emacs input mode, then use Emacs key sequences. Return to shell input mode by typing C-c C-t	The term, ansi-term and vterm buffers operate with 2 different input modes: • shell input mode (char input) • Emacs input (line input) In term and ansi-term buffers you must put the buffer in Emacs input (line input) mode, by typing C-c C-j, to be able to access the PEL commands that use the <f12> key prefix. The <f11> key prefix is always available. In vterm you must put the buffer in Emacs input (line input) mode, by typing C-c C-t, to be able to access the PEL commands that use the <f11> or <f12> key prefix. Both are always available in the eshell and shell buffers.</f12></f11></f11></f12>
F1-F12 keys available to terminal. • Yes: available to terminal.	No	No	No	No	semi-char mode: No	Yes • Can use <a href="http://https:/</th><th>When the F1-F12 keys are used by terminal they can be used by applications that use</th></tr><tr><td>No: used by Emacs only.</td><td rowspan=2></td><td rowspan=2></td><td rowspan=2></td><td rowspan=2></td><td>emacs mode: No (but irrelevant)</td><td rowspan=2><f10></td><td>them. They are, however not available to Emacs until you toggle the terminal mode off</td></tr><tr><td></td><td> char mode: Yes. Can use <a href=" htt<="" https:="" td=""><td>(using the keys identified in the second row above (eg. C-c C-t for vterm.) Use an application like htop that use the</td>	(using the keys identified in the second row above (eg. C-c C-t for vterm.) Use an application like htop that use the
					• line mode: No		function keys with eat in char mode or vterm.
Handle backspace/delete at program prompt properly	N/A	Yes	No, escape sequences are printed and passed to the program stdin	No, escape sequences are printed and passed to the program stdin	No, escape sequences are printed and passed to the program stdin. None of the modes handle that properly.	Yes	Tested with this simple/naive Perl script: #!/usr/bin/perl use v5.10; print "Enter a number: "; chomp(\$number = <stdin>); say "The number is \$number.";</stdin>
Escape Sequences and colouring works	Implement its own, does not render everything applications support.	Partially. Escape sequences work partially but other type of colouring does not.	Yes	Yes	Yes! However on macOS, TERM must be set to xterm-256color. • See USRHOME shell config code	Yes	

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Shell prompt definition support (PS1, PS2, PS3, PS4,)		Yes, but tput expressions to boldface prompt does not work.	Yes	Yes	• semi-char mode: Yes	Yes but requires code in shell configuration. This also provides extra functionalities like current directory tracking.	
					emacs mode: Yes, but irrelevant.		
					char mode: Yes		
					• line mode: Yes		
Handle zsh RPROMPT	Irrelevant. eshell is not a POSIX shell and is controlled from within		No	No	• semi-char mode: Yes	Yes	The zsh can print information at the right-hand side of the prompt line. So the command being typed is shown to its left. The zsh RPROMPT does not work well with any of the terminal emulators I have tested except for vterm. It almost works for eat except for its line-mode.
	Emacs.				emacs mode: Yes, but irrelevant.		
					char mode: Yes		
					 line mode: Not really. The typed command appears at the right of the RPROMT. This is not what zsh intent is. 		
Interfere with Bash PROMPT_COMMAND	No	No	No	No	Yes see this bug report	No	
clear shell command works?	Almost: clears the screen but		Yes	Yes	• semi-char mode: Yes	Yes	
	leaves cursor at the bottom of the window.	clear-buffer does work. It's bound to C-C M-o. PEL adds a <f12></f12>			emacs mode: No. For editing only.		
		c key binding.			• char mode: Yes		
					• line mode: Yes		
Support bash aliases	No but supports its own.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Shell tab completion	Yes, but eshell is not a POSIX shell and is controlled within Emacs, providing a tight integration with Emacs.	Yes, but completion is done by	Yes	Yes	• semi-char mode: Yes	Yes	
		Emacs and it might get out of sync with the directory. Execute shell-			emacs mode: No, but irrelevant.		
		resync-dirs to correct. This, however, does not always work.			• char mode: Yes		
					• line mode: Yes		
History via cursor keys	Yes	Not supported by cursors (which move point) But supported by using CTRL key allowing with the cursor keys.	Yes	Yes	• semi-char mode: Yes	Yes	
					emacs mode: No, but irrelevant.		
					• char mode: Yes		
					• line mode: Yes		
Can run scripts (interpret shebang line)	No, since it's not a POSIX shell. But can run script if the interpreter is specified explicitly. It can, however, run any elisp code!	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	
Runs other REPLs inside the terminal	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.	REPL instead. iex was coloured	Yes, with colouring.	Yes, with colouring.	• semi-char mode: Yes, no colouring.	Yes, good speed, supports	The best shell to run another REPL from the
					emacs mode: No. For editing only.	colouring. Use C-c C-c for Control-C, C-	command line is vterm. However, it's also possible to run these REPLs directly from within Emacs. Using them from within another shell allows using one quickly or testing.
					char mode: Yes, no colouring.	c C-g for Control-G	
					• line mode: Yes, no colouring.		
Can run Emacs Lisp commands via key bindings	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Some shells allow mapping keys to Emacs Lisp command code.
Interact with Emacs from the shell	Yes, using elisp code	No	No	No	?****	Yes, with <u>special escape</u> sequences for message passing.	
Supports all shell prompt formatting	N/A	No, some escape sequences are not supported.	Yes, all formatting is supported.	Yes, all formatting is supported.	Yes, all formatting is supported.	Yes, all formatting is supported.	
Handle Window resizing nicely	Yes, all is fine, no bleeding, prompt repeating.	No, with some shell prompts, resizing the window may cause extra prompt printing	Yes, all is fine, no bleeding, prompt repeating.	Yes, all is fine, no bleeding, prompt repeating.	Yes, all is fine, no bleeding, prompt repeating, even in line-input mode (as used in shell-mode)	Yes, all is fine, no bleeding, prompt repeating.	

Emacs Shell/Feature	<u>eshell</u>	shell (∑ shell-mode)	ansi-term (∑ term-mode)	term (∑ term-mode)	emacs eat (E eat-mode)	vterm (∑ vterm-mode)	Comment
Handles ssh sessions nicely	N/A	This sets TERM to dumb. It's a problems on hosts that have logic to help Tramp connect and prevent their zsh or bash configuration on dumb terminals. A work-around is to create a sub-shell by setting TERM to something else, as in: TERM=xterm-256color bash It has problems with prompts that use escape codes to color it. Under USERHOME use prompt mode 1: usrhome-prompt-model-to 1	All works fine.	All works fine.	All works fine.	All works fine.	
Keyboard Macros and Shells	One of the most compelling reasons for using a terminal shell within Emacs is the ability to interact between the rest of Emacs and the shell in a semi automated way with Exemplant Macros . Using a terminal shell inside a window and a file or another REPL inside another window, it becomes possible to create keyboard macros that insert text inside a file from the result of commands executed in a shell or a REPL (like a Python or Erlang REPL). To enable this, you must be able to move across Emacs windows using key bindings as simply as possible and you must be able to copy text from one window and yank it inside another.		As the following columns show, this can be done most flexibly with two of the available terminal shell modes: • shell • eat Both of these modes are flexible enough to execute commands and use the Emacs key bindings to navigate and copy text across windows without changing mode input mode. The shell mode always works. The eat-mode runs faster and can also be used in line-mode for that. If you are willing to switch inputs mode, you can use extra keystrokes to use semi-char and char modes too.			The eshell is similar but you need to use Emacs Lisp syntax.	
Emacs Shell/Feature	eshell	shell	ansi-term	<u>term</u>	emacs eat	<u>vterm</u>	Comment
Can yank text in shell	Linux: Yes macOS: Yes	Linux: Yes macOS: Yes	Linux: No macOS: No	Linux: No macOS: No	semi-char mode: Yes: C-y: like yank, but send text to terminal M-y: like yank-pop: but send text to terminal	Linux: Yes macOS: Yes	
					emacs mode: No		
					char mode: Yes, using the OS key sequence.		
					line mode: Yes, using the OS key sequence.		
Can navigate out of window with PEL Esc cursor key sequences	Linux: Yes macOS: Yes	Linux: Yes macOS: Yes	Linux: No macOS: No	Linux: No macOS: No	semi-char mode: No	Linux: Yes macOS: Yes	This is the same as being able to execute any commands that use an Esc key prefix.
FEE ESC CUISOI REY SEQUEILES	1112000. 100				emacs mode: Yes		communication and account account and account and account account and account account account and account acco
					char mode: No		
					• line mode: Yes		
Can navigate out of window with PEL <f1> cursor key sequences</f1>	Linux: YesmacOS: Yes	Linux: Yes macOS: Yes	Linux: Yes macOS: Yes	Linux: Yes macOS: Yes	• semi-char mode: Yes	Linux: No macOS: No	This is the same as being able to execute any commands that use any function key as key
	masss. 188				emacs mode: Yes		prefix.
					char mode: No		

• line mode: Yes

Terminal Multiplexers and Emacs

Terminal multiplexer	Topic	Information & Links						
GNU Screen	References:	GNU Screen @ Wikipedia: start here if you do not know what this program is. GNU Screen home page GNU Screen Manuals GNU Screen Manual - all in 1 HTML Page (useful to search)						
	GNU Screen source code	GNU Screen Git Repository - Savannah						
	Compile GNU Screen:	<pre>git clone https://git.savannah.gnu.org/git/screen.git cd screen/src ./autogen.sh ./configureprefix=/usr/local \</pre>						
	Using Emacs within an GNU Screen Session	 By default GNU Screen uses the C-a key as the Screen command key. To pass C-a to Emacs running inside a GNU Screen session: type C-a followed by a Screen command key can be changed with the escape setting in the ~/.screenrc file. See next lines for 2 examples: To change it to C-^, write: escape ^^^ The first ^^ is the caret representation of Control-^. The last ^ is the single key to type after to pass C-^ to the program running under Screen (like Emacs). Another character could be used, 6 for example. To change it to C-z, write: escape ^zz 						
	Logging with Screen	GNU screen supports dumping the current content of the screen to a file or log the complete window session to a file. This second feature is quite useful when running long lasting commands like software builds preformed from a shell. The session can be started inside a screen window, and hidden to speed it up while logging all the details inside the log file. The log file will contain the entire output to stdout and stderr. It will also contain all the escape sequence codes printed on your shell to colonize it for example. You can view this log file inside Emacs and use the pel-screen-log-fix-rendering command (bound to <f11> ts) to filter these escape codes out of the buffer and render the colours. See also: Buffers, Text Modes</f11>						
	Multi-user screen	Use GNU screen to allow simultaneous access to a shell for several users! See: GNU Screen Manual - Multiuser Session https://aperiodic.net/screen/multiuser Unix & Linux: Sharing a terminal with multiple users (with screen or otherwise) 2012 UTOSC - Screen vs. tmux faceoff - Jon Jensen - Youtube video						
Terminal Emulators with capabilities to support more key bindings	Running Emacs in text mode restricts the key bindings that can be used with Emacs. According to Yuri Khan, on this help-gnu-emacs mailing list post it's possible to use specialized terminal emulators to extend the key binding possibilities: Terminal emulators such as Kitty and Wezterm have an advanced key encoding[1] where every key is distinguishable from every other key. You'd have to write a terminal-specific library that enables that encoding and modifies input-decode-map to decode that encoding. Also you'd have to make sure the terminal properly advertises itself in the TERM environment variable so that Emacs knows when to apply your library. (TERM=xterm or TERM=xterm=256color won't cut it.) After you do this, you basically have the same key set as a GUI frame There's an emacs package that uses the kitty protocol package: kkp.el							
	kitty	 Kitty @ Wikipedia Kitty home Kitty @ Github Comprehensive keyboard handling in terminals. Read this to use it to provide extra binding capabilities. 						

Terminal multiplexer	Topic	Information & Links
	Wezterm	WezTerm home page WezTerm @ Github WezTerm @ Gentoo