







Shells

Description	Keystroke	Function	Note
Emacs Shells	Emacs provides multiple ways of executing shell commands or running programming language specialized shells.		
Run a shell command	<ul style="list-style-type: none">M-!⌘-L	(shell-command COMMAND &optional OUTPUT-BUFFER ERROR-BUFFER)	Prompts for the command in the minibuffer, show the command output in the next window in the "Shell Command Output" buffer in Fundamental mode.
Run a command on a marked region	M-	(shell-command-on-region START END COMMAND &optional OUTPUT-BUFFER REPLACE ERROR-BUFFER DISPLAY-ERROR-BUFFER)	Execute string COMMAND in inferior shell with region as input. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Normally display output (if any) in temp buffer "Shell Command Output";Prefix arg means replace the region with it. Return the exit code of COMMAND.Mark the region first. Then type M- . Emacs prompts for the command to run. Use an argument to replace the region with the command output (ie. type C-u M-)
Run a shell command asynchronously	M-&	(async-shell-command COMMAND &optional OUTPUT-BUFFER ERROR-BUFFER)	Execute string COMMAND asynchronously in background. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Like 'shell-command', but adds '&' at the end of COMMAND to execute it asynchronously.The output appears in the buffer "Async Shell Command".That buffer is in shell mode.
Open an eshell	<f11> x e	(eshell &optional ARG)	Implementation: <ul style="list-style-type: none">eshell is implemented in Emacs Lisp and implements several Unix commands, making them available to OS that do not natively have them (like Windows). If a command is not implemented it runs the one found in PATH. Extra Features <ul style="list-style-type: none">Can redirect output into a buffer. The grep command output goes to a grep result buffer which can be used to open the various files.Support lisp commands. Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none">Cursor lateral cursor line beginning/end, kill, yank.Meta-cursor word-move keys, but going left it does not stop at the prompt.command tab expansioncommand line re-directionIs colouring (done by the eshell implementation), columns are aligned.Command history (and shows history item # in mini-buffer)Can run top, man, less (which start inside separate buffer)Can run Python scripts. Limitations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Meta-cursor word-move keys going left does not stop at the prompt.Clear screen does not workNo bash alias, however eshell can remember its own aliases and will prompt for commands often ran & unfound.  <ul style="list-style-type: none">To open another eshell instance: use the C-u prefixTo open a numbered eshell: use the C-u number prefix
Open a vterm shell	<f11> x v	(vterm &optional BUFFER-NAME)	Create a new vterm shell. A fast & full-featured *nix-compliant shell.  Requires the Emacs-libvterm (vterm) package. It requires libvterm, which, on macOS it can be installed with Homebrew.  PEL activates this when the pel-use-vterm user option is set to t.  Although vterm is relatively new it has stellar performances.
Open a shell	<f11> x s	(shell &optional BUFFER)	Implementation The oldest emacs shell. Uses the comint-mode. Emacs keys are possible, the sub-process does not see the keys until <RET> is pressed. Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none">Can run multiple shell, each inside its own buffer/nameCursor lateral cursor line beginning/end, kill, yank.Meta-cursor word-move keys.bash aliasCommand history (but with Control Up/Down)Can run Python scripts.Can run Python REPL<ul style="list-style-type: none">REPL is OK, echo is OK, no Python colouring, but each command is colored.Can run Common-Lisp (clisp) REPL Limitations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Clear screen does not workIs colouring does not work, Is columns are misaligned.Can start and stop top, but the output is incorrect and cannot be read.The shell PS1 prompt is partially applied, remnants show up on the second line. TO-INVESTIGATE?.  To open a shell instance inside another window: use the C-u prefix
Open an ANSI term shell (Preferred)	<f11> x a	(ansi-term PROGRAM &optional NEW-BUFFER-NAME)	Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none">Prompts for shell to use. Default is /bin/bash. Can use others. Opens in current window.A terminal emulator written in Emacs Lisp.Newer implementation than term.You can even run other editors within it (vi, emacs, others). But use character-mode. Specificities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">C-x is mapped to term-escape-char Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Scroll up/down with M-<up>, M-<down>Is colouring, columns are alignedbash aliasbash tab expansioncommand line redirectionclear screenCommand historyCan run Python scripts.Running Python shell:<ul style="list-style-type: none">REPL is OK, echo is OK Limitations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Natively runs in character mode, which does not allow movement nor saving.<up>, <down> cursor, C-n/C-p do not work as navigating: used as shell command history. Change to line mode (see above) to enable these. Normally operates in character mode, in which up/down navigation and kill/yank is not possible. Change to line mode to do that:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use C-x C-j to change to line mode an allow movement, mark, saving.When done use C-c C-k to switch to character mode.Have not yet found a way to control prompt (PS1 setup of .bash_profile does not seem to be used). TO-INVESTIGATE.

Description	Keystroke	Function	Note
Open a term shell	<f11> x t	(term PROGRAM)	<p>Prompts for shell to use. Default is /bin/bash. Can use others. Opens in current window.</p> <p>Implementation: Shell implemented in Emacs Lisp. The keys are sent directly to the sub-process, which means they are not interpreted by Emacs.</p> <p>Same access as normal shell: can use the bash alias, tab-autocomplete, clear screen, can use less and indirection, can execute python scripts. Can even run other terminal editors like vim, synaptic, etc...</p> <p>Supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cursor lateral cursor line beginning/end, kill, yank. Meta-cursor keys, but only in terminal Emacs, not in GUI Emacs. Is colouring, columns are aligned bash alias bash tab expansion command line redirection clear screen Command history Can run Python scripts. Running Python shell: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> REPL is OK, echo is OK <p>Limitations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In GUI Emacs: Meta-left/right cursor word move do not work. Use Esc-b and Esc-f here instead. Normal Emacs keystrokes does not always work, it depends on the programs that are executed from the shell. When it stops working, either use C-c b to switch to another buffer or exit the shell to gain control to Emacs keys in this buffer. Vertical cursor history works only with Control-Up and Control-Down Emacs keys with Meta do not work. The ones with Control do work. Can run top in the buffer, but then C-c does not stop it. To stop it split the buffer in 2, kill the buffer with C-x k, confirm, close the buffer.
Specialized REPL	You can run several read eval run loop programming shells in Emacs. The ielm and run-python are part of Emacs. PEL makes the other available when the corresponding pel-use- user option variable is set to t. It is also possible to use shells to run other REPL programs directly from an embedded terminal shell like vterm (see above).		
Elixir Shell	<f11> x x		
Emacs Lisp shell (See also: 𐀔𐀕I - Emacs Lisp)	<f11> x i	(ielm)	<p>Open the Interactive Emacs Lisp Mode buffer where you can interactively evaluate Emacs Lisp expressions, a REPL for Emacs Lisp.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Switches to the buffer *ielm*, or creates it if it does not exist.
Start Julia REPL	<f11> x j	(julia-snail)	<p>Start a Julia REPL and connect to it, or switch if one already exists.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The following buffer-local variables control it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'julia-snail-repl-buffer' (default: 'julia') 'julia-snail-port' (default: 10011) To create multiple REPLs, give these variables distinct values (e.g.: 'julia my-project-1' and 10012). <p>🔗📦 Requires the julia-snail Emacs package and the Julia programming language installed.</p> <p>🔗🔧 PEL activates this when the pel-use-julia user option is set to t.</p>
Start Python Shell (See Also: 𐀔𐀕 Python)	<f11> x p	(run-python &optional CMD DEDICATED SHOW)	<p>Run an inferior Python process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argument CMD defaults to 'python-shell-calculate-command' return value. When called interactively with 'prefix-arg', it allows the user to edit such value and choose whether the interpreter should be DEDICATED for the current buffer. When numeric prefix arg is other than 0 or 4 do not SHOW. For a given buffer and same values of DEDICATED, if a process is already running for it, it will do nothing. This means that if the current buffer is using a global process, the user is still able to switch it to use a dedicated one.
Start Erlang Shell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <f11> x r C-c C-z 	(erlang-shell)	<p>Start a new Erlang shell.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The variable 'erlang-shell-function' decides which method to use, default is to start a new Erlang host. It is possible that in the future, a new shell on an already running host will be started. C-c C-z starts the Erlang Shell from the Erlang Mode. <f11> x r starts it anytime, as long as it was installed. <p>🔗🔧 Under PEL this command is available only when the pel-use-erlang customize variable is set to t.</p>

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.
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	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Shell prompt definition support (PS1)		Yes, but tput expressions to boldface prompt does not work.	Yes	Yes	Yes but <u>requires code in shell configuration</u>	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.)

Emacs Shell/Feature	eshell	shell	ansi-term	term	vterm	Comment
History via cursor	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Advantage	Implemented in Emacs Lisp, available in all environments even on non-*nix 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 *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.
Can run scripts (interpret shebang line)	No. But can run script if the interpreter is specified explicitly.				Yes	
Runs other REPLs		Was able to use python, clisp, iex, but not LFE: it launched Erlang REPL instead. iex was coloured properly.			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 <u>special escape sequences for message passing</u> .	

Shells — References

Topic & Link	Extra Notes
GNU Emacs - Running Shell Commands	
Eshell manual	
<u>Difference between various emacs shells</u>	
<u>Difference between various emacs shells</u>	
<u>How to run multiple shells on Emacs</u>	
EmacsWiki: <u>Ansi Term</u>	Quick overview
Emacswiki: <u>Ansi Term Hints</u>	Several hints
<u>Copy/Paste in Ansi Term</u>	Quick overview of the capability for cut/paste.
<u>Launch GUI emacs from command line in OSX</u>	This describes a solution on how to start the GUI emacs in OSX, but not in the background
<u>How to launch GUI Emacs from command line in OSX?</u>	This one describes the solution for handling it in the background
<u>Run commands in background</u>	Describes the & and the disown
<u>Executing commands in background from bash scripts</u>	
<u>Pass command arguments to bash scripts</u>	