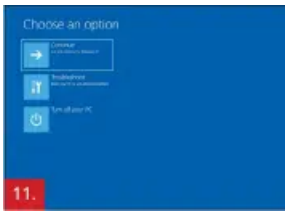
- Utilities (Computer software)

12 simple, secret Windows shortcuts you probably don't know

Nearly all of these were new to me.

Tech Advisor · 1 Jan 2024 · 38 · ALAINA YEE reports

You can be a seasoned Windows user, but you may still not know every shortcut available. For example, I recently learned a new keyboard shortcut I hadn't known before. It was so simple and obvious, yet felt like a secret until that moment.



I also discovered that there are a whole lot more I've been sleeping on.

The original tip came via Twitter (now known as X) courtesy of Jen Gentleman (fave.co/49mQBKS), a Windows engineering team member at Microsoft. But the help doesn't stop there. She very generously has an entire list of such tricks (fave.co/40tdisL) pinned to the top of her feed, too. I eagerly jumped down that rabbit hole and came away with a solid list of new shortcuts to incorporate into daily use.

To save you time, I've shared my favourites below. They work in both Windows 10 and 11. If you like them, be sure to check out Gentleman's Twitter account – not only do you get helpful Windows tips, she posts spot-on internal monologues about video games, too.

1. COPY TEXT FROM A WINDOWS DIALOG WINDOW

Running up against an error message in Windows? No need to painstakingly transcribe the error code. Instead, when the pop-up is the active window, hit Ctrl + C on your keyboard, then paste the text into a document. The whole message is copied, so you can extract whatever parts of it you want from the text dump.

2. SWITCH TO THE CORRECT APP WINDOW FAST

If you have more than one window open for an app, you can hover your mouse over the program's icon in your taskbar, then choose the correct window – provided you can make out which one it is from the tiny preview.

An alternative that's just as fast? Hold Ctrl and then click on the app's icon. You'll cycle through all its open windows. I now use this exclusively when flipping between two open windows. It's as efficient as Alt + Tab, but app-specific.

3. OPEN A NEW INSTANCE OF AN APP

Turns out if you hold Shift while clicking with your mouse on a taskbar icon, it opens a new instance of that app. That is, running the program a second time or more. It's slightly different than opening a new window – for example, a second instance of Chrome lets you load a different profile while the first one is logged in. Or having two text files open at the same time in Notepad.

You can middle-click on your mouse to execute this same command, too – that's probably your scroll wheel if you have a modern mouse.

4. MAKE WINDOWS UWP APPS FULL-SCREEN

While pressing Win + the up arrow key will maximize any window, it doesn't make the application full screen. For apps you install through the Microsoft Store app (aka Windows UWP apps), you can make them full screen by tapping three keys: Win + Shift + Enter.

5. RUN APPS WITH ELEVATED PERMISSIONS

By default, apps don't run with admin permissions, a security measure that restricts how a program can behave within

Windows. For example, the KeePassXC password manager (fave.co/47d54qS) can't access 2FA hardware keys (like a Yubikey) plugged into a PC when opened normally.

To quickly launch software with elevated permissions, just hold Ctrl + Shift while double-clicking the app to open it. No need to right-click on the program’s icon or shortcut and then choose to run as admin.

6. OPEN A NEW WINDOW FOR AN APP

Every app on your taskbar has a number assigned to its position – at least, for the first 10. You may know this and make use of the keyboard shortcut that lets you open apps (or jump to them, if already open) pinned to your taskbar: the Windows key plus a number from 0 through 9. But did you know if you hold Win + Shift, then the number you want, a new window for that app will open? This one isn’t universal (the software has to support this shortcut), but for those that do, it’s a fantastic time saver.

7. QUICK ACCESS TO EMOJI

Want to insert an emoji into whatever you’re typing? Skip the online search and instead press Win + ; or Win + . on your keyboard. It brings up Windows’ on-screen emoji keyboard, which includes a kaomoji keyboard and special characters keyboard, too. Windows 11 also gets a GIF keyboard and direct access to the clipboard. â·°(*°â–½°*)â·¯.

8. FIX A BLACK SCREEN

Did your screen suddenly go blank, even though your PC was behaving normally beforehand and still continues to run? You don’t need to hard reboot.

Instead, try pressing Win + Ctrl + Shift + B on your keyboard. Windows will know you’ve encountered a black screen and will try to fix it for you.

9. ACCESS YOUR COMMAND PROMPT HISTORY

Turns out the Command Prompt (aka cmd) keeps a history, and you can call it
up to see what commands you ran – and rerun them from that menu. All you do is tap F7 on your keyboard.

10. OPEN FILE PROPERTIES INSTANTLY

You could right-click on a file to access its properties, but why go through all that trouble? Instead, hold down Alt while double clicking on it. It’s lightning fast.

11. REBOOT STRAIGHT TO WINDOWS’ TROUBLESHOOTING MENU

Sometimes your PC acts up, and you need to use Windows’ heavy-hitting troubleshoot options like safe mode, start-up repair, and system recovery. You can access them during boot by pressing F8 during start-up – or more simply, holding Shift before choosing to restart your PC from the Windows power menu.

12. REORDER ITEMS IN A LIST

Okay, this one is a bit of a cheat – it’s a Microsoft Word shortcut, though Google Docs also supports it. But as someone who uses bulleted lists in documents often, I couldn’t resist highlighting this one from Jen Gentleman’s list, too. To reorder items in a bulleted or numerical list, just highlight it, then hold Shift + Alt while using the Up or Down arrow key.