

Function Keys

One of the biggest differences between a [typewriter](#) keyboard and the computer keyboard is the row of keys at the top of the keyboard that are labeled F1 through F12. Commonly referred to as Function Keys, these keys were frequently used in the good old days of DOS programs. In today's Windows world of computers, you can probably use your computer without ever using one of these keys. Yet, these function keys provide some interesting shortcuts for common [computer](#) functions that can be useful tools in everyday [computing](#). The function keys are frequently used in combination with other keys such as the CTRL key, the ALT key, and the Shift key. This results in a plethora of possible [keyboard shortcuts](#).



Here is a brief rundown of the function key and what they can do for you.

F1

As a throwback to DOS days, you will find that the F1 key will often bring up a help menu. If you press F1 while working in a program, help for that program will usually appear. If you press F1 while at the Windows desktop or when the Windows Explorer is open, a Windows help screen will [pop up](#). If you happen to be working in a program and would like to see the [Windows help](#) screen, simply press the Windows key (the key with the Windows logo on the bottom row of keys) on your keyboard and press F1 at the same time.

F2

You can use the F2 key to rename an item when working in Windows. Highlight any folder or file, and press F2. You will then be able to type a new name for the object. After you type the new name, just click outside the name box or press the enter key to make the name change. This works just like right-clicking a file or folder and selecting *Rename*.

F3

When you are working in Windows, the F3 key will open the *Find Files* window.

F4

The F4 key has some very useful functionality. You can press F4 to open the Address bar when working in Internet Explorer. This will allow you to type the address of a Web page for quick access.

You can also press the Alt key and the F4 key at the same time to close the open Window that you are currently working on.

F5

The F5 key is the refresh key. You can press F5 when viewing a Web page to make sure that you have the most current version of that Web page. You can also use F5 when in

Windows to refresh the screen. This can be a handy shortcut. If perhaps you are viewing the contents of a floppy disk and you insert a new floppy, your screen will still show the contents of the first floppy. Just press F5 to refresh the screen and see the contents of the floppy you just inserted.

F6

This key is often used to move the cursor around the structure of the program. Pressing it will often cycle you from window to window.

F7

The F7 key does not have any functionality in Windows. It may, however be used in some individual programs. To find out if it is available in the program you are using, bring up the program's help screen and type in the words *function key*.

F8

The F8 key can be used to access Safe Mode if pressed during the computer's boot up process. This is a trouble-shooting mode which will start the computer with minimal drivers.

F9

The F9 key does not have any functionality in Windows. It may, however be used in some individual programs. To find out if it is available in the program you are using, bring up the program's help screen and type in the words *function key*.

F10

F10 is the key that is used to activate the menu bar in many programs. You can use F10 to highlight the first menu choice, and then use the arrow keys to move around the menus. Pressing the Shift key while pressing F10 will bring up the shortcut menu. This is similar to right-clicking on an object.

F11

Press F11 when you are working in Internet Explorer and the window will open to full screen mode. This will make all the toolbars disappear and can be useful to see more information on the screen. Press F11 when you are in full screen mode will toggle you back to your normal view.

F12

The F12 key does not have any functionality in Windows. It may, however be used in some individual programs. To find out if it is available in the program you are using, bring up the program's help screen and type in the words *function key*.

Most programmers adhere to using the F1 key for help. They often also program the other function keys to perform in the manner stated above. However, you will find that each program you use may be different. For instance pressing F5 when in Internet Explorer will refresh the screen. Pressing the same key in Outlook 2000 will make the application check for new mail. Using F5 in Microsoft Word will bring up the Find and Replace

menu.

Many programs extend the usefulness of the function keys by using key combinations. The most common combinations are Shift + a function key, Alt + a function key, and Ctrl + a function key. These combinations can be very useful. For instance, in Microsoft Word, when any text is highlighted, pressing the Shift key plus the F3 key will change the case of the text from all caps, initial caps, to all lowercase. Shift + F7 will choose the Thesaurus command. These shortcuts allow you to access such functions with one keystroke rather than three or four mouse clicks.

Since functionality can defer, it is often good to look in the help menu of the program that you are using to find a list of the function keys and their uses.