

Summary

The article describes how to use the Option key to enhance your Mac experience. It highlights the Option key's ability to manage files and folders, such as moving files to the front or back of the list and duplicating files. The article also explains how the Option key can be used to customize the menu bar, such as changing the scroll bar settings or revealing hidden menu items.

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Learn about 10 of our favorite tricks to give your Mac a serious boost.

By [Alex Blake](#) Contributor NOV 19, 2025 4:15 am PST

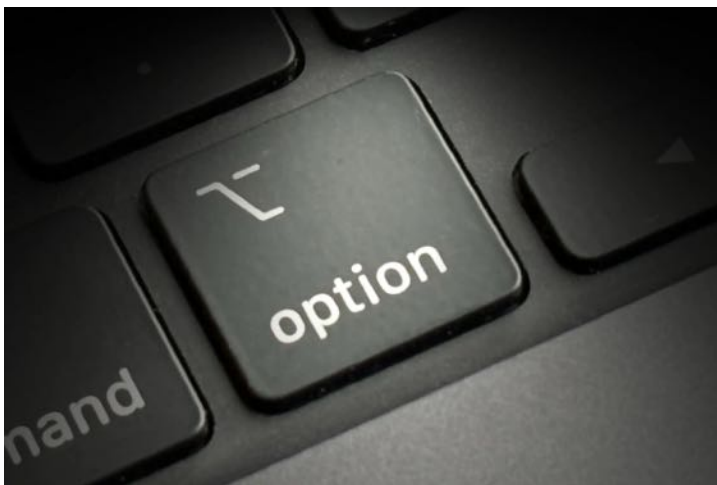


Image: Foundry

Scratch beneath the surface of macOS and you'll find all manner of clever little tricks that aren't apparent on first look. The Option key demonstrates this perfectly: it brings a host of extra functionality to your Mac every time you press it, whether you're perusing an app's menu or are typing in a document.

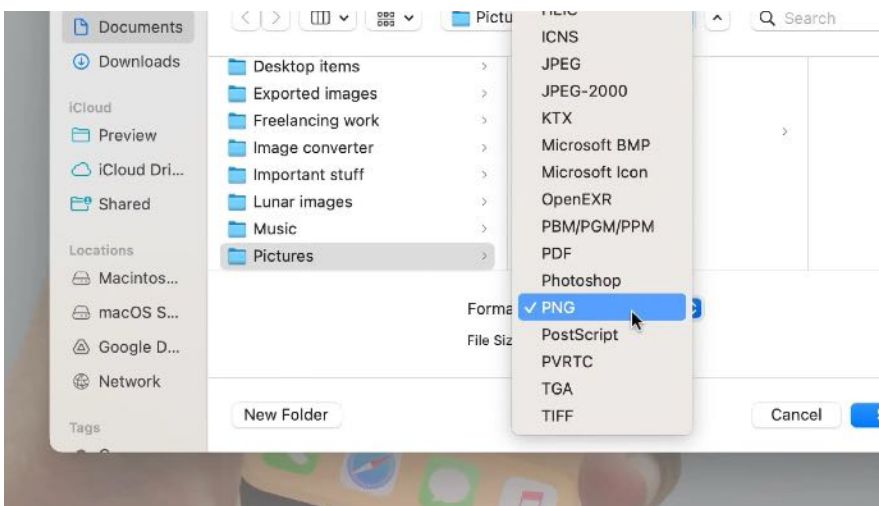
Here, we've put together 10 of our favorite ways to use the [Option key](#) (which may be listed as Alt on some keyboards) to bring more power to your Mac. But you shouldn't stop here—there are far more things that the Option key can do than what we've listed in this article. Often, the best course is to simply experiment

by pressing Option in your app of choice and seeing what it does. No doubt Apple has hidden all manner of useful tools and shortcuts that are just waiting to be discovered.

Manage files and folders

The Option key can come in handy when you want to get a better hold on files and folders on your Mac, and many of these extra features can be found in the Finder. For example, hold Option and press the up or down arrow key inside a Finder folder to move to the first or last item.

Normally, clicking the triangular arrow icon next to a folder in Finder will open it. If you hold Option while doing so, Finder will open that folder and any sub-folders inside it, saving you a little bit of time if you want to dive deep into some nested locations.



There are also things you can do with files. In the Preview app, if you click the *File* menu while pressing Option, the *Duplicate* function turns into *Save As*, in case you want to change the file format. And in the Finder, if you want to move a file rather than copying it, first copy it, then press Command-Option-V in its destination folder (rather than simply Command-V). The reverse is also true: hold Option while dragging and

To save a file in a different format in the Preview app, hold down the Option key while clicking on the *File* menu. This will make the *Save As* option appear.
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dropping a file to copy it instead of moving it.

Typing tricks

Want to type out some special characters? You could look them up and copy them online, or you could use the Option key. Hold it while typing any symbol or alphanumeric character to get a special one instead: Option-A gives you å, while Option-3 produces £. There are many more possibilities.

And just like how the Option key can send you to the top and bottom items in a Finder folder, it can also be used to swiftly move through text. Hold Option and press the left or right arrow keys to move along one word at a time in any text or word processing app. This is much faster than holding the arrow key and moving just one character at a time.



Hold Option and double-click any of its four corners of a window to make an app fill your screen without going into fullscreen mode,
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In a word-processing app, try holding Option and Shift, then moving the arrow keys left or right; this will highlight whole words at a time. You can also press Option and Delete to remove words rather than individual letters.

Window management

The Option key comes in handy when you want to resize an app window. Instead of resizing it from one edge and then another, you can shift multiple edges at once. Just hold the Option key and grab a side or corner of the window and start resizing. When you do this with a vertical or horizontal edge, the opposite side will mirror the movement of the edge you're holding. When you do it with a corner, you can resize all four sides at once.

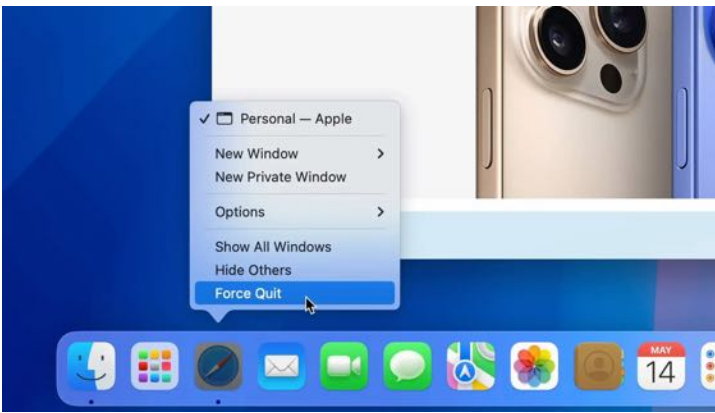
If you want to make an app window fill your screen *without* going into fullscreen mode, just hold Option and double-click any of its four corners—this will make it expand to your maximum screen dimensions. Do this on a side instead of a corner and both corresponding edges will stretch to the edges of your screen. For example, double-click a vertical window edge while holding Option and both the left and right sides will expand to the full width of your display. Doing any of these actions without holding Option will just stretch the side or corner you click on and no others.

Dock items

Got an app that's frozen and not responding? Instead of waiting for it to resume normal service, right-click its icon in your Mac's Dock, hold Option, then select *Force Quit* to close it down right away. This menu item is normally hidden, but Option reveals it.

When an app is open, right-click its Dock icon and hold Option to see other menu choices. The *Hide* menu item changes to *Hide Others*, for example, allowing you to make other windows disappear but keep the one that's currently in the foreground (you won't see this choice if the app in question is not open).

And if you want to relaunch the Finder, there's a quick trick to doing so: hold Option and left-click its Dock icon to refresh it.



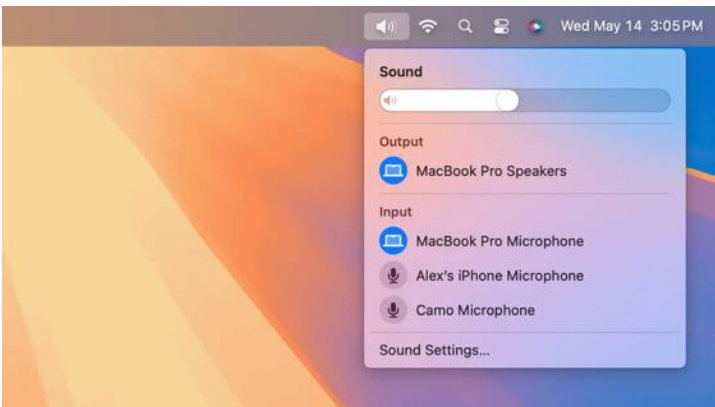
Hold down the Option key while clicking on a Dock icon to see more menu choices.
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Do Not Disturb

The Option key can help you banish notifications by enabling Do Not Disturb mode. It lets you silence the distractions with a single click, with no need to rummage around in System Settings menus.

Just hold Option and click the time and date in the top-right corner of your Mac's display to enable Do Not Disturb; hold Option and click it again to disable it. If you let Focus modes show their statuses in the menu bar, you'll see the Do Not Disturb icon appear when you switch it on.

Hidden menu bar info



Hold down Option while clicking on the Sound menu bar to see your input devices.
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While we're dealing with the top edge of your screen, the Option key adds a bunch of extra functionality to icons housed in the menu bar. For instance, Option-click the volume icon and you can change your input devices without opening System Settings (normally, you can only adjust output devices from the menu bar).

Do the same with the Wi-Fi icon and you'll see extra data like your IP address, MAC address, country code, and more. Similarly, Option-click the Bluetooth icon to see addresses and firmware versions of

your connected Bluetooth devices. And if the Stage Manager icon is in your menu bar, Option-clicking it will instantly enable and disable it.

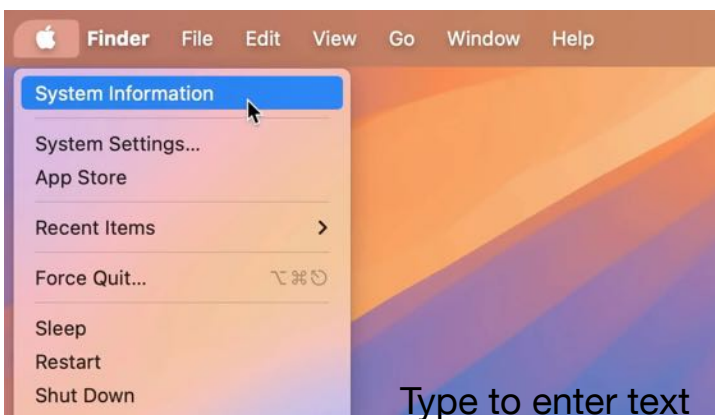
Some of these icons won't appear in your menu bar by default, and you'll need to enable them by opening System Settings and finding the Control Center section in the

sidebar. Here, select either *Show in Menu Bar* or *Show When Active* from the dropdown menu next to each item.

Menu magic

Each Mac app has its own set of menus that live, unsurprisingly, in the menu bar. When these menus are open, you can hold the Option key to see new tools and choices.

To take one example, open Finder and click the *Go* menu, then hold Option. You'll see *Library* appear, which is normally hidden from view. In other apps, clicking the *File* menu and holding Option might change *Duplicate* to *Save As*, *Close Window* to *Close All*, and more. What you see will vary from app to app, so try different ones to see what happens.



Click the Apple logo in your screen's top-left corner, then hold Option to change *About This Mac* to *System Information*. The System Information app gives you more in-depth data on your computer, such as its battery cycle count, technical firewall settings, and more.

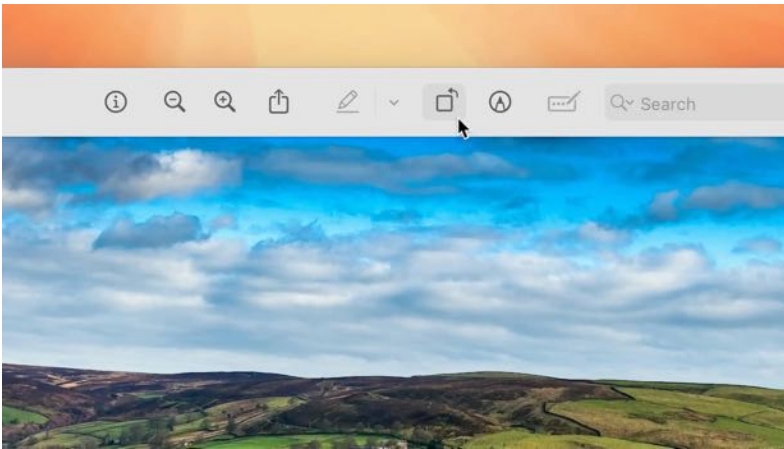
Hold down Option while clicking on the Apple menu to make System Information

The additional menu options apply to the right-click menu, too. Try right-clicking a file and holding the Option key; *Open With* changes to *Always Open With*, for example, letting you set your default apps in a few quick seconds.

Toolbars and right-click menus

We've talked about menu bars that live outside an app's main window, but what about the buttons and menus inside an app? Well, there's a lot the Option key can do here, too.

Look at the toolbar in Preview. There, holding the Option key will change the direction of the rotate button, so you can rotate an image clockwise instead of counterclockwise.



Sticking with Preview, right-clicking and dragging on an image will draw a selection box. Hold Option while you're doing this and each edge of the selection box will move in sync; dragging the box to the right will also move its left edge outwards, for example.

In the Preview app, holding down the Option key changes the rotation function to the opposite direction.

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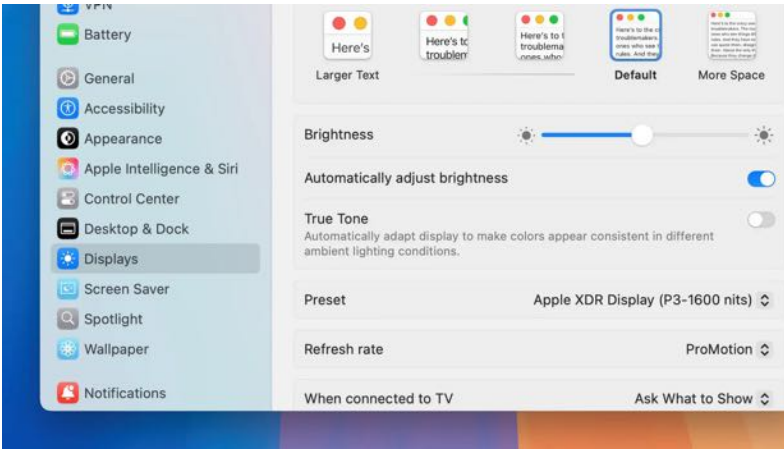
Switch scroll bar settings

If you open the System Settings app and go to *Appearance* in the sidebar, you can change how app scroll bars work. You can choose to have the scroll bar jump to the next page when you click an empty portion of it, or for the page to move down to where you clicked.

But there's no need to adjust this in the System Settings app. You can do it directly in any app you're currently using. Just hold Option and click the scroll bar to flip between these two settings. For example, if clicking an empty part of the scroll bar normally jumps to the next page, holding Option when you do it will move to where you clicked. This works if your settings are the other way around, too.

System Settings

The System Settings app is a one-stop shop for configuring your Mac, but it's not the only way to tweak things to your liking. If your Mac has a row of function keys, you can combine the Option key with your function/media keys to get a fast way to access Mac settings without needing to root around in System Settings first.



To change your Mac's brightness settings, hold Option and press the brightness up or brightness down button in the function row to go straight to the Displays section in System Settings. Likewise, holding Option and pressing the volume keys will open System Settings at the *Sound* page. Note that all of these options work whether or not System Settings is already open.

Holding down the Option key while pressing a display brightness button on the keyboard opens the Display settings.
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Now that you've mastered the Option key, learn more about the [Mac keyboard combinations that can help you](#).

We also have a round up of the [best Mac Keyboards](#).

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Alex has been dabbling in Apple tech since he first got an iPhone 3GS and promptly jailbroke it for reasons he can't quite remember. Since then, he's interviewed Apple executives, scoured the internet for the most interesting apps and games, written countless features and how-to guides, and begrudgingly convinced himself that building a Hackintosh is probably more effort than it's worth. Based in the UK, he enjoys hiking, gaming, soccer, and the occasional spot of cidermaking.