

Learn the shortcuts

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"I'm sure there are faster ways to get there, but I'm comfortable with the route I take."

To a productivity geek like me, that's blasphemy. For routine tasks like driving to work, buying groceries and household goods, or cleaning the kitchen, I want to know the fastest way to do it without sacrificing quality.

That explains my love for finding quicker ways to do almost everything on the computer, and especially in Microsoft Office programs. One of the best time management strategies I can teach is to learn the shortcuts to be able to do the same amount of work in less time than it would take otherwise.

In general, it is faster to use the keyboard to do things than with a mouse or track screen, even if you're not the quickest typist. Here are a few of my favorite keyboard shortcuts:

Ctrl+F: Find. This doesn't just work on Office products, but on the internet as well! Let's say you are on a web page listing the top 100 movies of the year. If you want to see if your favorite is on there, you can press Ctrl+F, type in a few words and it will immediately take you there (or tell you if there are no matches for what you typed in)!

Ctrl+H: Replace. Search and replace is a powerful tool in Office. If you start with a document customized for one company and you want to create a similar document for another company, start by replacing all instances of that first company's name with the second company's name, all at one time. Another way I use the replace feature is to make a count of something. Let's say I get a list of names in Microsoft Word and they are all listed Last, First. I could count them each individually, or I could paste the list into Excel to see how many names there are. But it's much faster if I just highlight that section and use Ctrl+H to search for a comma and then replace with a comma.

Ctrl+A: Select All. Here's another tip that works in Office products as well as on the internet. Need to move the contents of one whole document into another? Click anywhere in the document and press Ctrl+A to quickly select all of the contents. Then Ctrl+C to copy and Ctrl+V to paste.

Ctrl+Shift+Right Arrow. This is a magical combination that selects the whole word. So if you need to delete 6 words from a sentence, just keep your fingers on Ctrl and Shift and then right arrow your way across the 6 words. Many people find it's much easier than trying to get the mouse positioned just right at the beginning and the end of your section. It also works in Excel! And takes you to the edge of the current data set.

Ctrl+Shift+Down Arrow. This is even more magical! In Word, this key combination selects from your current point until the end of the paragraph. In Excel, it selects everything from your present cell to the bottom row of your data set. Last week a co-worker I taught this to called it life-changing.

These are just a few quick examples. Once you start thinking in terms of shortcuts, you'll want to learn more. It's a great way to get things done faster without sacrificing quality in any way. There are shortcuts for everything! Just Google "keyboard shortcuts" and the name of the program you use and you'll get great results. Here they are for [Word](#), [Excel](#), [Outlook](#), and [PowerPoint](#).

When you've maximized your use of standard keyboard shortcuts, you'll want to [create your own keyboard shortcuts](#), [customize your Quick Access Toolbar](#), [learn to use Quick Parts](#), and [automate common or repetitive tasks with Quick Steps](#). I also recommend you [customize AutoCorrect](#), not just to automatically

correct your frequently spelled words, but to allow you to program your own shorthand. (For example, at work, we program "mgr" to become "manager" and "opps" to become "opportunities." Far more impressively, "apf" now becomes "Attached please find the report for." The possibilities are endless!)

Even if you're not a shortcut geek like me, the time you invest to learn and practice these shortcuts will pay you off for years to come.