

21 Best Command Prompt Tricks

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The Windows Command Prompt tool, and many of its commands, might seem boring or even relatively useless at first glance, but as anyone who has ever used the Command Prompt very often can tell you, there's much to love!

These tricks will get you excited about many of the mundane-sounding [Command Prompt commands](#) like telnet, tree, or robocopy—okay, *robocopy* sounds pretty cool.

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Some of these Command Prompt tricks are special features or fun uses for the Command Prompt itself, while others are just neat or relatively unknown things you can do with certain CMD commands.

Use Ctrl+C to Abort a Command

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Just about any command can be stopped in its tracks with the abort command: **Ctrl+C**.

If you haven't actually executed a command, you can just backspace and erase what you've typed, but if you've already executed it, then you can do a Ctrl+C to stop it.

It isn't a magic wand, and it can't undo things that aren't undoable, like a partially complete [format command](#).

However, for things like the [dir command](#) that seem to go on forever or questions you're asked at the prompt that you don't know the answer to, the abort command is an excellent Command Prompt trick to know.

View a Command's Results One Page (or Line) at a Time

Ever run a command, like the dir command, that produces so much information on the screen that it's almost useless?

One way to manage this info dump is to execute the command in a special way so whatever information is generated is shown to you one page, or one line, at a time.

Just type the command, and then follow it with the pipe character and then the [more command](#).

For example, executing the below command will generate the thousands of lines of results that you expect from the dir command, but the more command will pause each page of results with **-- More --** at the bottom of the page, indicating that the command is not done running.

```
dir /s | more
```

Just press the spacebar to advance by page, or press **Enter** to advance one line at a time.

Run Command Prompt as an Administrator Automatically

Many commands require that you [open an elevated Command Prompt in Windows](#)—in other words, execute them from a Command Prompt that's run as an administrator.

You can always right-click any Command Prompt shortcut and choose **Run as administrator**, but creating a shortcut to do the same thing can be a huge time saver if you're a frequent Command Prompt power user.

To complete this trick, just create a Command Prompt shortcut on the desktop, enter the shortcut's properties and then select the **Run as administrator** box, located in the **Advanced** button on the **Shortcut** tab.

If you use Command Prompt via [Terminal](#) (you do by default if you're on Windows 11), setting up admin access is even easier: Open Terminal's settings to the **Defaults** page, and enable **Run this profile as Administrator**.

Become a Command Prompt Power User With Function Keys

The fact that the function keys actually do something in the Command Prompt is maybe one of the best kept secrets about the tool:

F1: Pastes the last executed command (character by character)

F2: Pastes the last executed command (up to the entered character)

F3: Pastes the last executed command

F4: Deletes current prompt text up to the entered character

F5: Pastes recently executed commands (does not cycle)

F6: Pastes ^Z to the prompt

F7: Displays a selectable list of previously executed commands

F8: Pastes recently executed commands (cycles)

F9: Asks for the number of the command from the F7 list to paste

Change the Prompt Text

Did you know the prompt itself is completely customizable thanks to the prompt command? It is, and when we say customizable, we mean *really* customizable.

Instead of **C:\>**, you can set the prompt to any text you want, have it include the time, the current drive, the Windows version number (like in this example image), you name it.

One useful example is **prompt \$m\$p\$g**, which will show the full path of a [mapped drive](#), alongside the drive letter.

You can always execute **prompt** alone, without options, to return it to its sometimes boring default.

Get Help for Any Command

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The [help command](#) does *not* provide help for every Command Prompt command.

However, any command can be suffixed with the **/?** option, usually called the [help switch in Command Prompt](#), to display detailed information about the command's [syntax](#) and often times even some examples.

The help switch may not be the coolest Command Prompt trick you've ever heard of, but it's hard to disagree that it's one of the more useful.

Neither the help command nor the help switch offers much in the way of explaining how to interpret the syntax.

[How to Read Command Syntax](#)

Save a Command's Output to a File

An incredibly useful Command Prompt trick is the use of [redirection operators](#), specifically the **>** and **>>** operators.

These little characters let you redirect the output of a command to a [text file](#), giving you a saved version of whatever data the command produced in the Command Prompt window.

For example, let's say you're about to post a computer problem to an online forum, and you want to provide really accurate information about your computer. An easy way to do that would be to use the **systeminfo** command with a redirection operator.

For example, you might execute the below command to save the information provided by the systeminfo command to that file. You could then attach the file to your forum post.

```
systeminfo > c:\mycomputerinfo.txt
```

Terminal users have it even easier. Just right-click the Command Prompt tab and choose **Export Text**.

[How to Redirect Command Output to a File](#)

View a Drive's Entire Directory Structure

One of the neatest little commands is the tree command. With tree, you can create a kind of map of the directories on any of your computer's drives.

Execute **tree** from any directory to see the folder structure under that directory.

With so much information created with this command, it's probably a good idea to export the results to a file so you can actually look through it.

Customize the Command Prompt Title Bar Text

Tired of that "Command Prompt" title bar text? No problem, just use the title command to change it to say whatever you like.

For example, let's say your name is Maria Smith, and you want to express your ownership of the Command Prompt. Execute this and the title bar will change immediately:

```
title Property of Maria Smith
```

The change won't stick, so the next time you open Command Prompt, the title bar will be back to

normal.

The title command is usually used to help give a custom appearance in script files and [batch files](#)—not that titling it with your name isn't a good idea!

Copy Text From the Command Prompt

Copying lots of text from the Command Prompt isn't as easy as copying from other programs, which is part of the reason why saving a command's output to a file, which you learned about a few tricks back, is so handy.

However, what if you do just want to copy a short section of text to the clipboard? It's not too hard, but it's not very intuitive either:

Right-click anywhere in the Command Prompt window and choose **Mark**.

Highlight with your left mouse button whatever you'd like to copy.

Press **Enter** or right-click once.

That's the menu-based method, but surprisingly, you can also use the regular **Ctrl+C** shortcut, too.

If you chose Mark but then decided you don't want to copy anything, right-click again to cancel the Mark action, or press the **Esc** key.

Now you can paste that information anywhere, just like you paste other text.

If QuickEdit Mode is turned on (or you're in Terminal), right-clicking won't show a menu. This is actually another tip in this list! See step 20 for the details.

Open the Command Prompt From Any Location

If you've ever worked in the Command Prompt for very long, you know that it can be really frustrating executing the **cd/chdir** command over and over again to get to the right directory.

In Windows, open the folder you'd like to start working from. When you're there, hold down **Shift** while you right-click anywhere in the folder.

After the menu pops up, you'll notice an entry that's not usually there: **Open in Terminal** (Windows 11) or **Open command window here**. Select that, and you'll start a new instance of the command line, ready and waiting at the right location.

If you're a Command Prompt power user, you'll immediately recognize the value in this little trick.

Drag and Drop For Easy Path Name Entry

Most Command Prompt commands require you to specify full paths to files or folders, but typing out a long path can be frustrating, especially when you miss a character and have to start over.

For example, in Windows 11 and 10, this is the path to the *Accessories* group in the Start Menu:

```
C:\ProgramData\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs\Accessories
```

Who wants to type that all in manually? We don't.

Just open the folder in Explorer. Once there, drag the folder or file to the Command Prompt window and let go. Like magic, the full path is inserted, saving you a considerable amount of typing depending on the length and complexity of the path name.

This technique doesn't work in an elevated Command Prompt.

Shut Down or Restart Another Computer

System administrators in a business environment do this all the time for lots of reasons, but you can also shut down or restart another computer on your network, all from your computer's Command Prompt.

The easiest way to shut down a computer remotely is to execute **shutdown /i** from the Command Prompt to open the Remote Shutdown Dialog, shown above.

Just enter the name of the remote computer (which you can get by running the [hostname](#) command on the other PC), choose what you want to do (restart or shutdown), select some other options, and then select **OK**.

So whether you're brushing up on your command skills or just scaring a family member, this Command Prompt trick is a fun one.

You can also shut down or restart another computer strictly from the Command Prompt with the [shutdown command](#), without using the Remote Shutdown Dialog.

Use Robocopy as a Backup Solution

Thanks to the robocopy command, you don't need to use Windows's backup software or install [a free backup software tool](#).

Just execute the following, obviously replacing the source and destination folders with whatever you'd like to back up and where it should go.

```
robocopy c:\users\ellen\documents f:\mybackup  
\documents /copyall /e /r:0 /dcopy:t /mir
```

The robocopy command with these options functions identically to an incremental backup software tool, keeping both locations in sync.

You don't have this command if you're using Windows XP or earlier. However, you do have the [xcopy command](#), which can be used to do something very similar:

```
xcopy c:\users\ellen\documents f:\mybackup
\documents /c /d /e /h /i /k /q /r /s /x /y
```

No matter which command you choose to use, just create a batch file containing the command and schedule it to run in Task Scheduler, and you'll have your own custom-made backup solution.

View Your Computer's Important Network Information

Maybe just for your own information, but certainly when you're troubleshooting a network or internet problem, you'll probably at some point need to know details about your computer's network connection.

Everything you'd want to know about your network connection is available somewhere in the [Control Panel](#) in Windows, but it's much easier to find, and much better organized, in the results from the [ipconfig command](#).

Execute this command in Command Prompt:

```
ipconfig /all
```

What displays on-screen next is everything important about your network connection: your [IP address](#), hostname, [DHCP](#) server, [DNS](#) information, and much, much more.

[How to Find Your IP Address in Windows](#)

Map a Local Folder Just Like a Network Drive

The [net use command](#) is used to assign shared drives on a network to your own computer as a drive letter, but did you know there's another command that can be used to do the same thing to any folder on any of your *local* hard drives?

There is, and it's called the subst command. Just execute the command followed by the path of the folder you wish to appear as a drive.

For example, let's say you want your **C:\Windows\Fonts** folder to appear as the **Q:** drive. Just execute this command and you're set:

```
subst q: c:\windows\fonts
```

This Command Prompt trick makes accessing a particular location from the Command Prompt much easier and the folder will appear as a drive next to all your real hard drives.

An easy way to delete the "network drive" example here is with the **subst /d q:** command. Just replace **q:** with your own drive letter.

Access Previously Used Commands With the Arrow Keys

Marcus Urbenz / Unsplash

Another great Command Prompt trick uses the keyboard arrow keys to cycle through previously executed commands.

The **up** and **down** arrow keys cycle through the commands you've entered, and the **right** arrow automatically enters, character by character, the last command you executed.

This might not sound that interesting, but there are several situations where the arrow keys become *huge* time savers.

Consider this example: You've typed out 75 characters of a command and then try to execute it, only to find that you forgot to add an option at the very end. No problem, just press the up arrow and the entire command is automatically entered in the Command Prompt window, ready for you to edit to make it work.

Automatically Complete Commands With Tab Completion

Tab completion is another Command Prompt trick that can save you lots of time, especially if your command has a file or folder name in it that you're not completely sure of.

To use tab completion, enter the command and then the portion of the path that you do know, if at all. Then press the **Tab** key over and over to cycle through all the available possibilities.

For example, let's say you want to change directories to some folder in the **Windows** directory, but you're not sure what it's named. Type **cd c:\windows** and then press **Tab** until you see the folder you're looking for.

The results cycle in order, or you can use **Shift+Tab** to step through the results in reverse.

You know how your smartphone's texting app automatically guesses what it is you want to type next? Tab completion in Command Prompt is sort of like that—only better.

Find a Website's IP Address

Want to [find the IP address of any website](#)? Use the nslookup command or the ping command, but the former is probably faster.

First, let's use the nslookup command to find the IP address of *lifewire.com*.

Just execute **nslookup lifewire.com** and view the result. Don't confuse any [private IP addresses](#) that also show up in the nslookup results alongside the [public IP address](#) of *lifewire.com*, which is what IP address we're after.

Now let's try using the [ping command](#) to find it.

Execute **ping lifewire.com** and then look at the IP address between the brackets in the first line shown. Don't worry if the ping command "times out" during execution; all we needed here was the IP address.

You can use the same procedure with any website or any hostname on your local network.

[What the NSLOOKUP Tool Can Tell You About Internet Domains](#)

Copy and Paste Easier With QuickEdit Mode

A number of these Command Prompt tricks have dealt with making copying and pasting easier. So, how about an even *easier* way to copy from the Command Prompt (and a secret way to easily paste)?

Just right-click on the Command Prompt title bar and select **Properties**. On the **Options** tab, in the **Edit Options** section, check the **QuickEdit Mode** box and then select **OK**.

Enabling QuickEdit Mode is like having *Mark* enabled all the time, so selecting text to copy is really easy.

As a bonus, this also enables a simple way to paste into the Command Prompt: just right click once and whatever you have in the clipboard is pasted in the Command Prompt window. Normally, pasting involves *right-clicking* and selecting **Paste**, so this is still a bit different than you're used to.

Using Command Prompt through Terminal? Just select text like you would anywhere else, and press **Enter** or **right-click** to copy it. No need to turn on QuickEdit Mode.

Watch Star Wars Episode IV

Yes, you read that correctly, you can watch an ASCII version of the full Star Wars Episode IV movie *right in the Command Prompt window!*

Just open Command Prompt and execute this:

```
telnet towel.blinkenlights.nl
```

The movie will start immediately. Check out the tip below if this doesn't work.

True, this isn't a terribly productive use of the Command Prompt, nor is it really a trick of the Command Prompt or any command, but it sure is fun! We can't imagine the work that went into this homage to the sci-fi masterpiece.