

Navigating Your Computer via Keyboard (for Creating Dragon Commands)

[speakeasysolutions.com/blog/2010/06/27/navigating-your-computer-via-keyboard-for-creating-dragon-](http://speakeasysolutions.com/blog/2010/06/27/navigating-your-computer-via-keyboard-for-creating-dragon-commands)

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When you are creating Dragon Step-by-Step or Advanced Scripting commands, or when your mouse fails you, understanding how to operate a computer solely with a keyboard is very useful.

Moreover, there are many instances where it is faster to use a keyboard than a mouse — experience and experimentation is needed to determine exactly when. My personal rule of thumb is that if it takes me longer to reach for one of my mice, maneuver the cursor, click, move, click and so on than it does for me to press a few keyboard keys, then the keyboard is faster.

I reiterate, however, the real power of keyboarding relates to creating Dragon commands. In such instances, efficiency is unimportant as Dragon will effectively press keys and key sequences infinitely faster than a human can.

Most current PC users, regardless of age (except perhaps the 35 to 45 year olds who were computer geeks back in the day) have never been taught how to efficiently use a computer. That is, how to use a keyboard. This was made evident to me while observing others use a computer over the past 15+ years. It was intriguing for me to watch mousing techniques when a few simple and quick keyboard strokes would suffice nicely.

One of my clients even suggested I write a booklet about using a computer efficiently. In truth, I feel that all this information is already out there, but perhaps not presented in an easily digestible manner. Hence my using this blog as a platform for more than Dragon related information, but also computer skills that were quite simply never learned by the majority of the population because there was no opportunity to do so. In the end, it is important to me to deliver this information to my clients so that it will assist them in creating extremely powerful Dragon commands, which will ultimately save them both time and money.

But I digress... onward.

Mouse Pointer and Cursor Position



Introduction

There is a difference between a computer's mouse pointer and cursor position.

Mouse Pointer

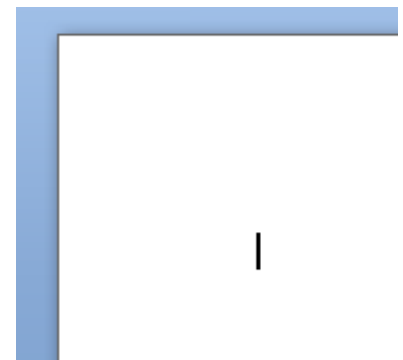
The mouse pointer is usually depicted as an arrow and may change its appearance to an hourglass or swirling circle (in Windows 7), a hand, crosshair, double arrow, notched vertical bar and so on, depending on the activity being engaged (please visit this [website with mouse pointer examples](#)). The mouse pointer is what is moved across the screen when you use your mouse input device (whether it is a traditional mouse, trackball or pen tablet).

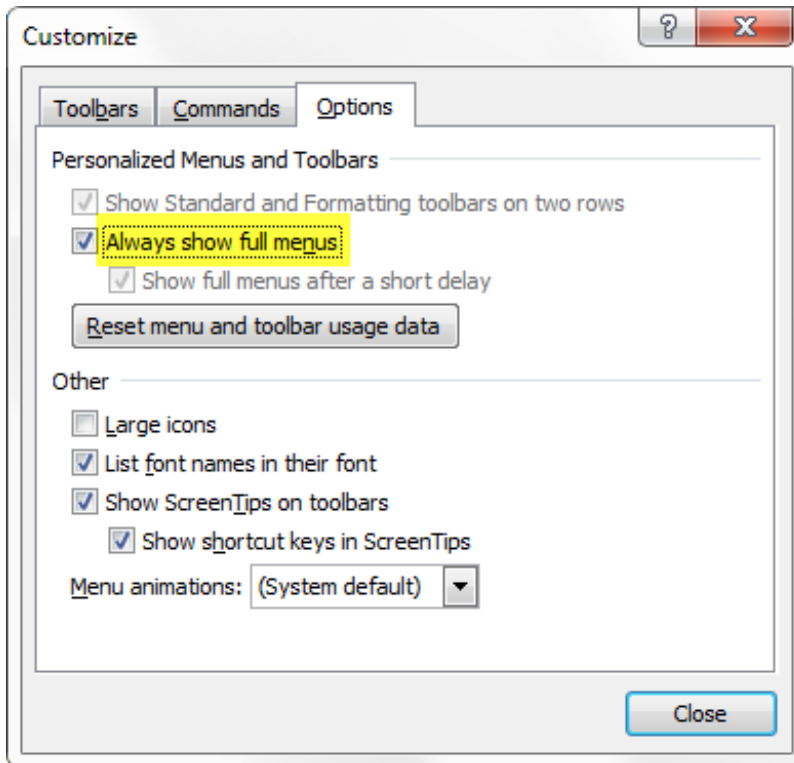


Cursor Position

The cursor position is usually the blinking vertical bar that resides where you are about to type text in a text window or document. The cursor position is the computer's current focus. It may also be a highlighted folder or file from a list, a highlighted drop down menu, a faded outline box surrounding a clickable link on a web page or a radio button option and so on.

The cursor position can be affected by moving the mouse pointer and clicking with the mouse (i.e. to a different location). The cursor position can also be affected by sundry keyboard key sequences.





But here's the annoyance — not all programs and graphic user interface elements are affected the same way by a specific keyboard function. In other words, sometimes the < Enter > key will choose a choice and other times it will choose the choice and close the dialog box. So before you come to the conclusion that you might have misunderstood these functions, fear not, welcome to computers, designed by humans, and just as fallible. In other words: that's life and there is little point in becoming aggravated.

Anatomy of a Graphic User Interface

Introduction

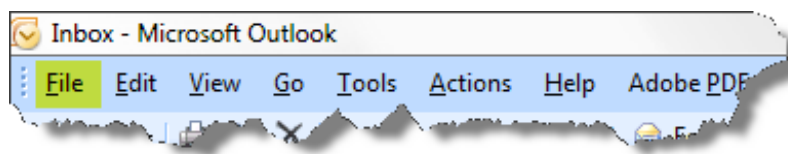
The GUI (graphic user interface) has come a long way over the last two decades. Some of us may remember DOS and shell commands, and were we ever excited about commanding the computer with various strings of alphanumeric text. GUI gave birth to the mouse and how easy it suddenly was to access a program's features (although this is debatable on many accounts). Regardless, the computer comprises of software applications, their windows, menus, controls, and more.

All of these computer elements do have names, and thankfully, are usually designed in such a way that they can be interacted with by way of a keyboard instead of or in addition to a mouse.

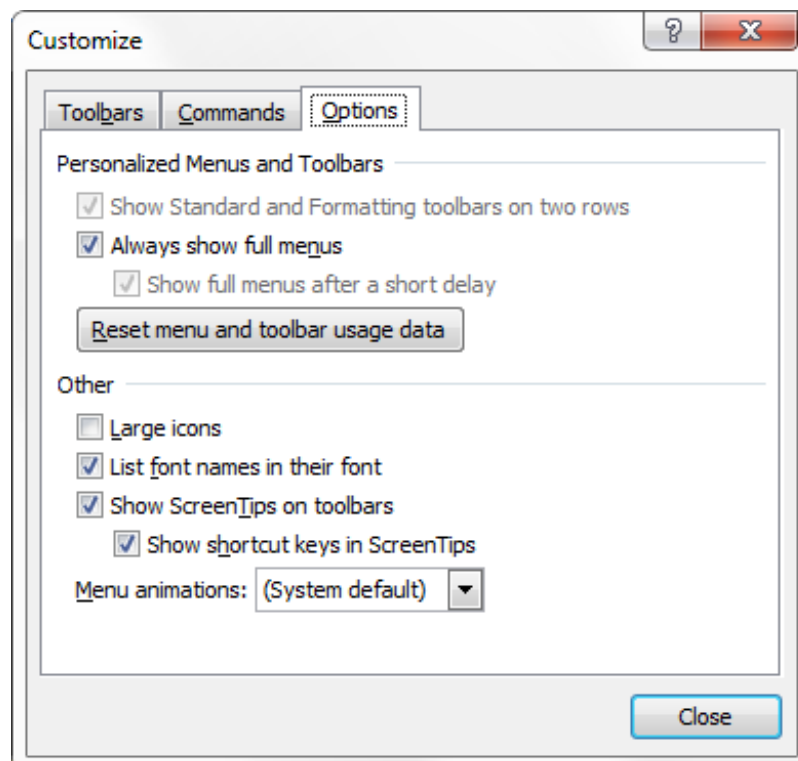
When you are creating Dragon commands, you will need to know how to navigate and interact with these various elements of a computer. Whether the command is as simple as forwarding an email to an assistant with “FYI” in the body, logging you on to a web page or as complex as applying some very detailed formatting to a table in MS Word, this is all made possible when you know what everything is and how to interact with these elements via keyboard.

Menus & Controls (or Dialog Boxes)

Menus are the options that normally reside at the top of a window (classically, some word-processing programs contain the menu headings File, Edit, View, Tools, Help and so on). There are main menu items — the topmost level. And there are submenu items — features that are found once the main menu items have been clicked, dropping down a list of features related to the main menu item.



Controls (or Dialog Boxes) are a sub window, if you will, offering you a myriad of choices and options that will affect some task or presentation in the program. Most controls are represented by text boxes, radio buttons, check boxes, drop-down lists, and more. Some controls are multi-tabbed interfaces, each tab providing a set of features/parameters.

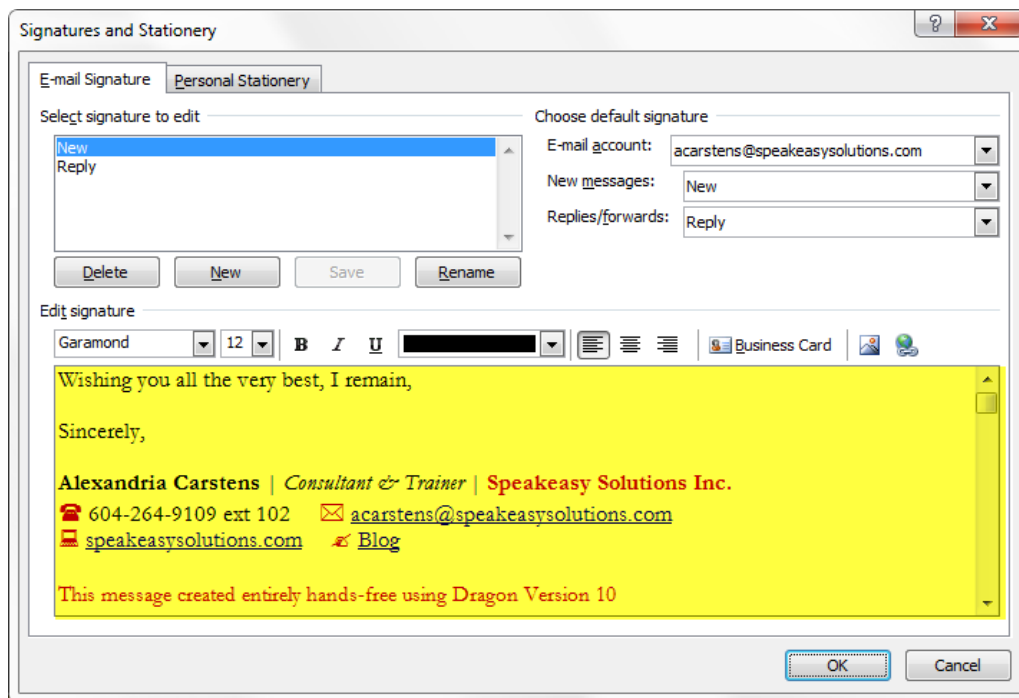


Text Boxes

Perhaps the easiest to understand, text boxes are simply a place to enter text. This might be the font size in a dialog box option, or a form you are filling out online.

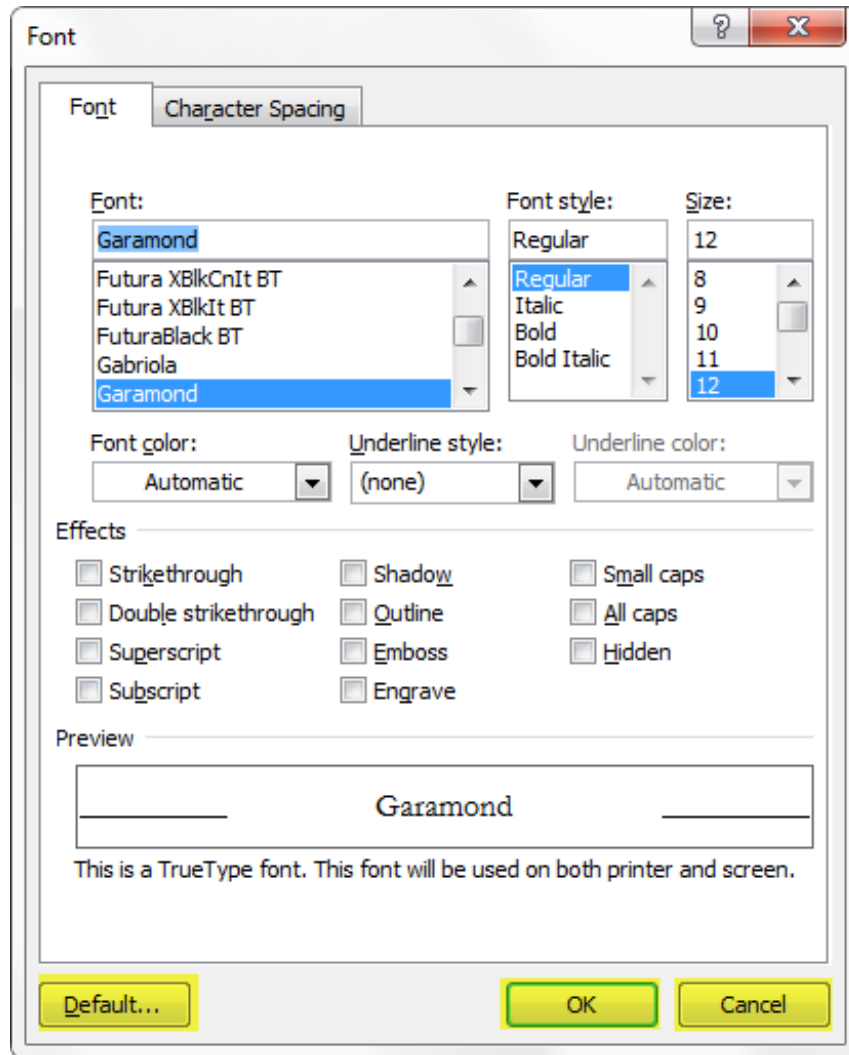
Some text boxes are restricted by the type of alphanumeric strings entered (i.e. you cannot enter alpha characters into a text field where numbers are expected). Some are restricted by a character count (i.e. you can only enter a maximum number of characters into the field).

Generally speaking, if you see a blinking vertical cursor bar in a text box, all you need do is start pressing keys to enter text.



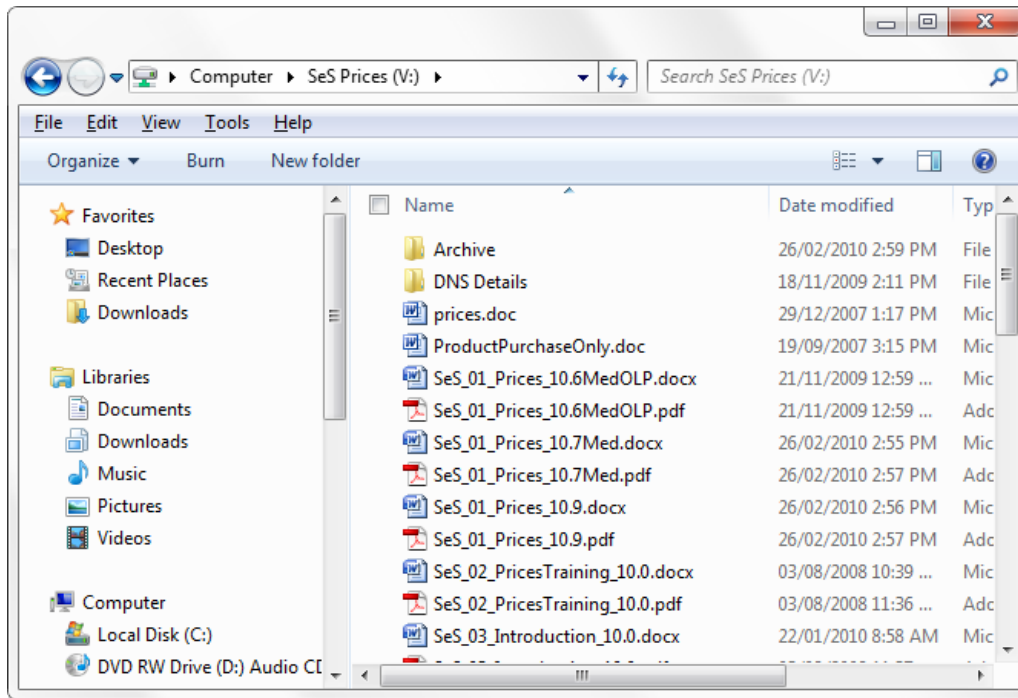
Buttons

Clicking or selecting a specific button will perform a specific function, usually logically labelled. Perhaps the most common group of buttons that we see are labelled: Yes, No, and Cancel.



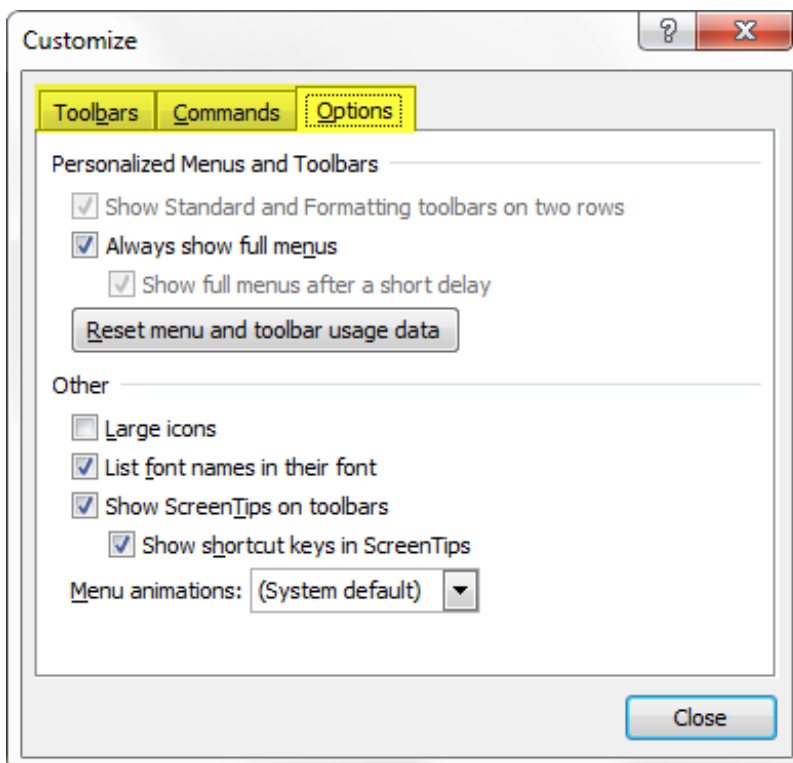
Windows

Windows usually display icons relating to specific features (i.e. a computer's control panel), or provide a list of folders and files such as Windows Explorer.



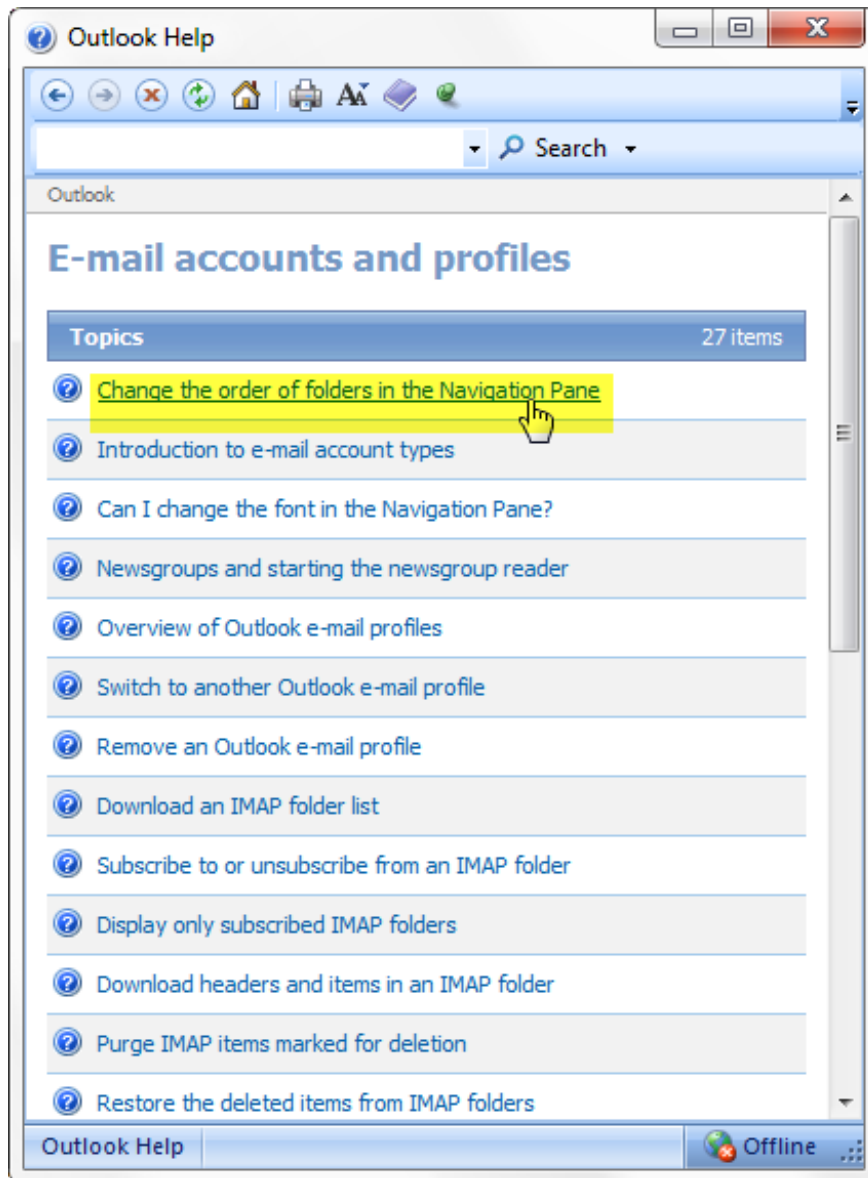
Tabs

Tabs are like a page displaying information and options. Some aspects of programs provide you with a grouping of tabs pertaining to a specific feature of the program. By way of example, in MS Word, the Font dialog box provides a tab for Font and Character Spacing parameters.



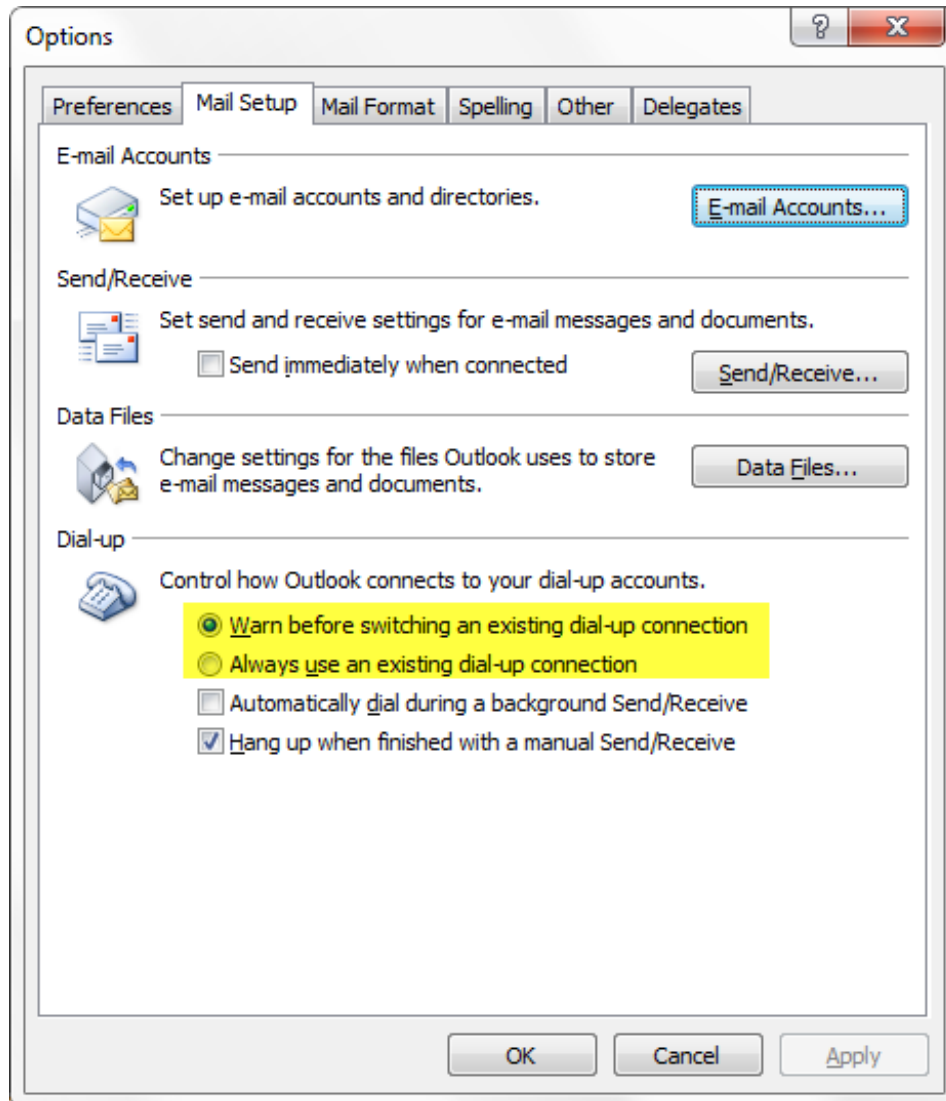
Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks are clickable text phrases that move you to another screen. These are most predominant in HTML pages, help files or help documentation.



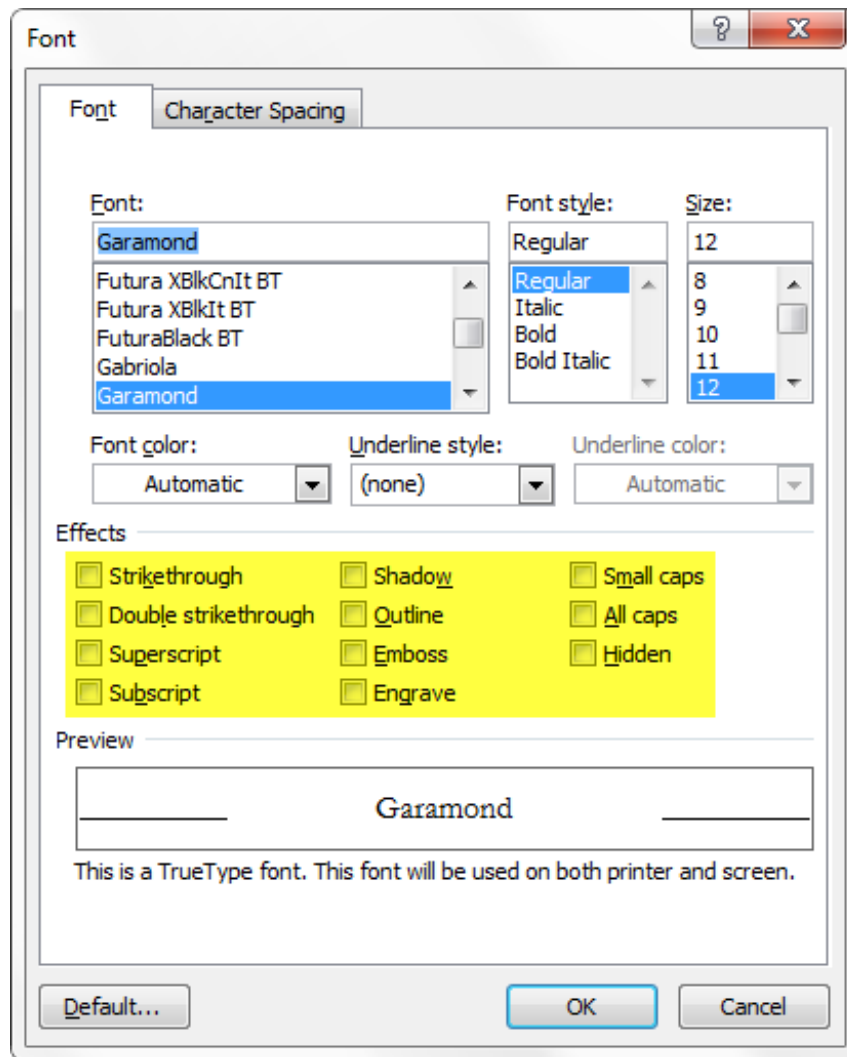
Radio Buttons

A group of options that allows only one choice is denoted by a group of radio buttons. You might be presented with a very specific group of options relating to one aspect of a program's function. You may only choose one option from the presented choices, and clicking a new choice will deselect the previously chosen choice.



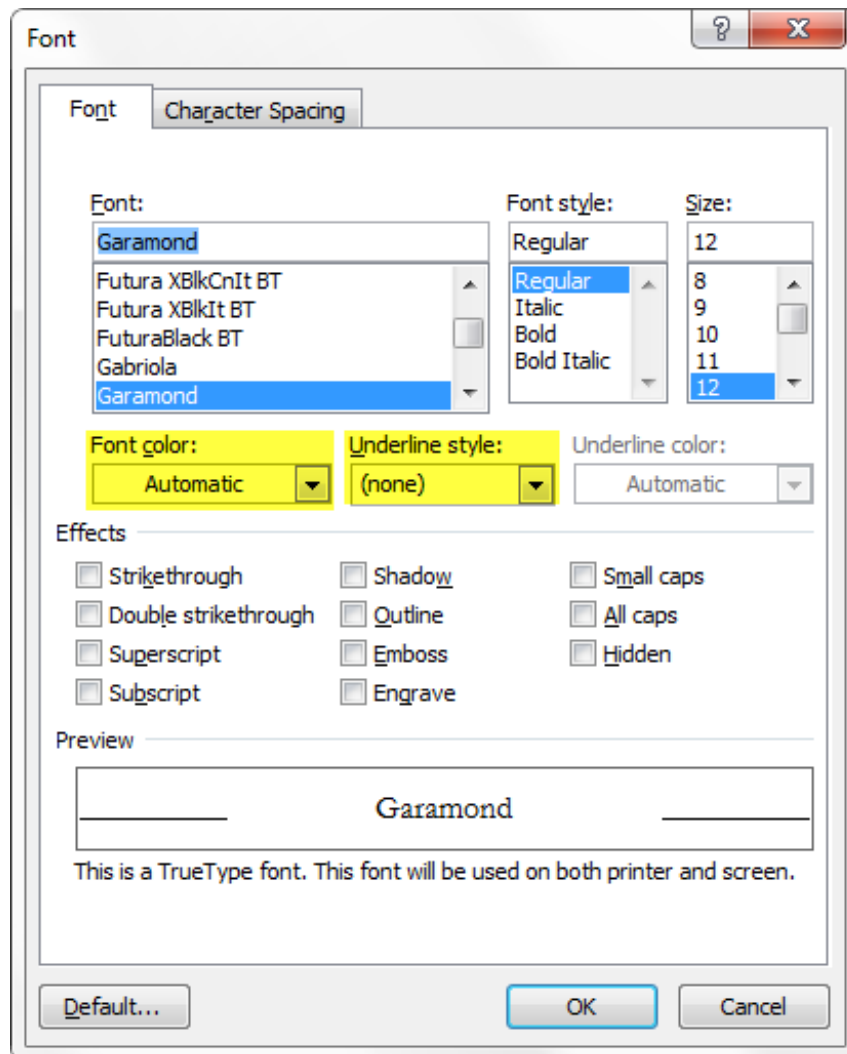
Check Boxes

A group of options that allows multiple choices is denoted by a group of check boxes. You might be presented with a very specific group of options relating to one aspect of a program's function. You may choose as many options as desired. Clicking a specific choice toggles the checkbox on and off.



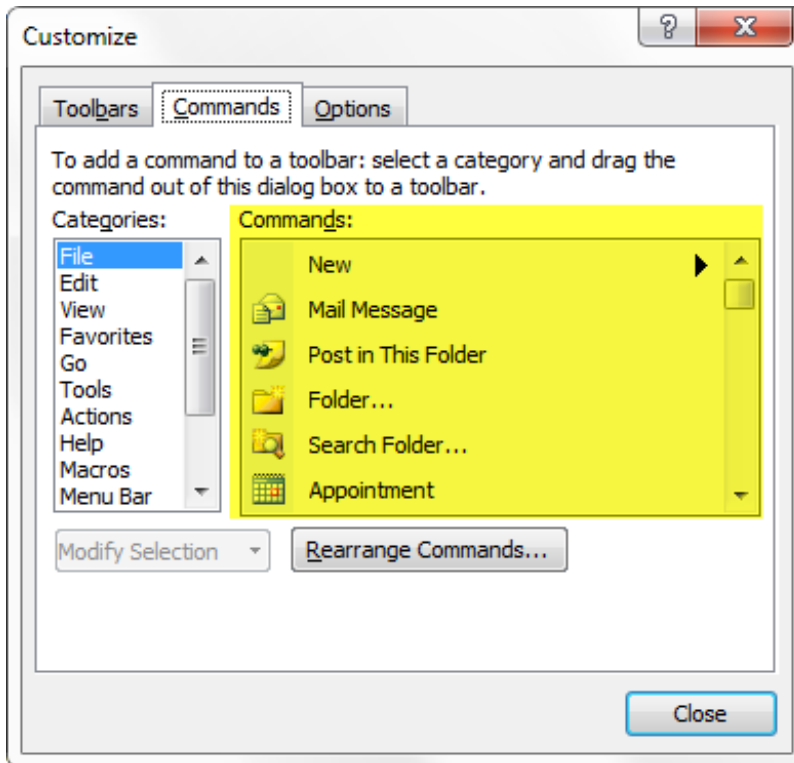
Drop-Down List

Drop-down lists provide a group of options within a single line display. Once clicked, the list is dropped down, and a choice can be made from the displayed list.



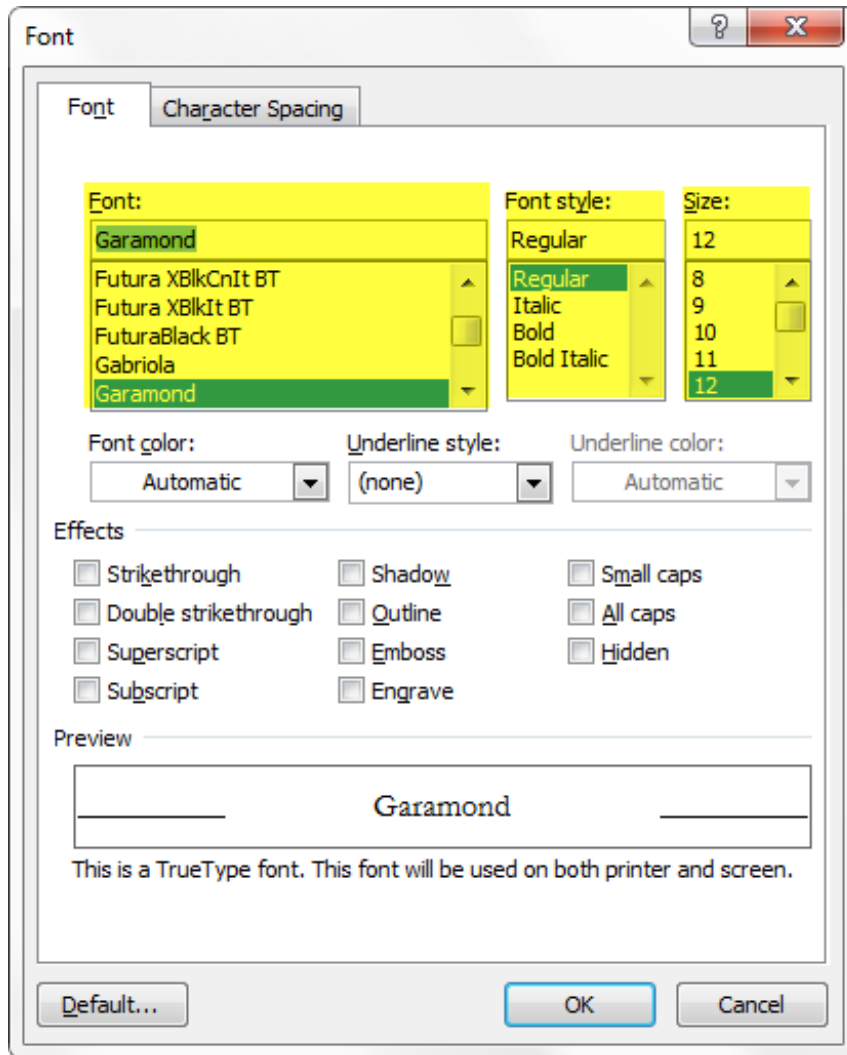
List Box

List boxes provide a group of options within a multiple line display. A choice can be made from the displayed list, which may also provide scrollbars on the side to bring more choices into view.



Combo Box

A combo box comprises of a text box and a list box. You have the option of scrolling through the list and choosing from the list, or entering in the appropriate text in the text box.



Maneuvering with Keyboard Keys

Introduction

Various keyboard keys allow you to maneuver throughout almost all elements of your computer. Most keys perform the same function across all elements, but as always, there are exceptions to the rule, and experimentation may be necessary.

When you are creating a Dragon command, always execute the keystrokes yourself using actual keystrokes (rather than relying on the mouse at any time even if you know what the keyboard shortcut equivalent is). Computers are anything but predictable, so therefore mapping out the actual sequence of keystrokes is vital to creating effective command.

< Tab >

Most important, and my clients will hear this from me many times in a training session regarding creating personalized commands in Dragon: Know Your Cursor Position! You must know where the cursor position is in order to move forwards or backwards from it. The cursor position can be denoted by a dashed line surrounding the name of the option, or the option could be highlighted.

Also be aware that not all “tab orders” are logical — these are set by the programmer. You may think that the tab should shift the cursor position from left to right but it may take you through the choices from top to bottom or even more erratically. You and Dragon are at the mercy of the programmer.

The < Tab > and < Shift > + < Tab > key sequences are perhaps the most undervalued shortcut. They could be used about one third of the time one uses keyboard shortcuts, but I am only making an educated guess.

Pressing the < Tab > key moves the cursor position forward from one option to the next. < Shift > + < Tab > moves the cursor position backward from one option to the next.

< Ctrl > + < Shift > + < Tab > moves the cursor position from one dialog box tab to the next.

< Alt > + < Tab > provides you with the previous active window. < Alt > + < Shift > + < Tab > provides you with the next active window in sequence.

If a dialog box displays several groupings of check box and radio buttons (as well as any other GUI elements), the < Tab > keys will move the cursor position from the last item of one group to the first item of the next group.

Quite often, depending on the control element, pressing the < Tab > key will actually choose the highlighted selection, and move on to the next group of choices.

Directional Arrow Keys

There are four directional arrow keys or cursor keys on your keyboard and they are denoted as follows: < ↑ >, < ↓ >, < ← >, and < → >.

Pressing these directional arrow keys will maneuver the cursor position in the same direction as the arrow that is pressed from one choice to the next within an element's group.

< Space >

Pressing the < Space > bar/key will select a highlighted choice within an element's group. For example, pressing the < Space > bar/key over top of a check box option will behave as a toggle, alternating between checking and unchecking.

< Enter >

Pressing the < Enter > key will finalize a selected choice, and sometimes close the open dialog box of options.

< Esc >

Pressing the < Esc > key will cancel out of the active window, or cancel an ongoing process. You can view this as the equivalent of a STOP button.

< Alt > + < F4 >

While pressing the < Esc > key often closes a window or cancels out of a function, pressing < Alt > + < F4 > will most certainly close the currently active window.

< Shift > + Directional Arrow Keys

Simultaneously pressing the < Shift > key plus a directional arrow key will select one item in that direction per arrow key press. For example, with respect to text, pressing < Shift > + < → > will select the character to the right of the current cursor position. With respect to a list of emails in an inbox, pressing < Shift > + < ↓ > will select the current email plus one more beneath it from the currently selected email.

Pressing < Ctrl > + < Shift > + Directional Arrow Keys will result in an extended selection by a grouping determined by what is being selected. In the example of text, this would include a word.

< Home > and < End >

Pressing the < Home > key will move the cursor position to the beginning of a horizontal line and pressing the < End > key will move the cursor position to the end of a horizontal line. With respect to text this would reposition at the start and end of a line.

Pressing the < Ctrl > + < Home > keys will move the cursor position to the absolute beginning of a region and pressing the < Ctrl > + < End > keys will move the cursor position to the absolute end of a region. With respect to text this would reposition at the start and end of a document or window.

There is a special significance attached to the < Ctrl > + < Home > keys for Dragon command creators. Sometimes when you need to choose an item from a list, there is no reliable way to choose this item. However, provided the list does not change, pressing the < Ctrl > + < Home > keys will move the cursor position to the first item in the list and thereafter you press the < ↓ > key as many times as necessary to select the desired choice and then press

the < Tab > key to select and move to the next element or the < Enter > key to finalize the choice. As a side note, in some cases, it may be more efficient to press a certain alphanumeric key sequence once the cursor position at the topmost item in the list instead of using the < ↑ > keys.

< F10 >

Pressing the < F10 > key will toggle activation of a main menu. Once made active, use various keys to select choices or navigate the menu further.

< Alt >

This is perhaps one of my favourites (until a software creator decides to revamp its Alt + Underline keyboard shortcuts). I have already [blogged the use of the < Alt > key here](#).

Bringing it All Together (a summary)

This is just a reminder that there are inconsistencies. If one method doesn't work, try another. And yes, there are contradictions below due to these inconsistencies.

The Basics

< Tab > moves the cursor position to the next option/item

< Shift > + < Tab > moves the cursor position to the next option/item

< ↑ >, < ↓ >, < ← >, and < → > moves the cursor position in the specified direction

< Home > moves the cursor position to the beginning of an area

< End > moves the cursor position to the end of an area

< Ctrl > + < Home > moves the cursor position to the absolute beginning of an area

< Ctrl > + < End > moves the cursor position to the absolute end of an area

< Space > selects a highlighted choice

< Enter > finalizes a selected choice

< Esc > cancels or closes

Menus & Controls (or Dialog Boxes)

< Alt > + < underlined letter > selects main menu items

< underlined letter > selects submenu items

< F10 > toggles activation of main menu

< Alt > + < underlined letter > selects dialog box items

Text Boxes

This one is not rocket science. Typing makes typed text appear.

Buttons

< Alt > + < underlined letter > clicks button

underlined letter clicks button

Windows

< Alt > + < F4 > closes the window

< Alt > + < Tab > switches to the previous window

< Alt > + < Shift > + < Tab > switches to the next window

< letter of the alphabet > selects the first item name beginning with that letter

< rapid pressing of several letters of the alphabet > selects the first item name beginning with that sequence

< repeated pressing of the same letter of the alphabet > selects each item in sequence where the name begins with that letter

< â†‘ >, < â†” >, < â†’ >, and < â†† > navigates through the items in the direction indicated

< Shift > + < directional arrow keys > extends the selection of items in the direction indicated

< Ctrl > + < Shift > + < directional arrow keys > selects items in the direction indicated

Tabs

< Ctrl > + < Shift > + < Tab > switches to the next tab

Hyperlinks

This one may be perceived as rocket science, but it's simply a matter of knowing how. Hyperlinks will appear on a page with text, and as such, is often searchable with the

universal < Ctrl > + < f > keystroke combination.

1. Search for unique text that precedes the hyperlink you wish to click (< Ctrl > + < f > plus the text and pressing < Enter > may be required as well).
2. Press < Esc > to cancel out of the find dialog.
3. Press the < Tab > key to select the next clickable link (your hyperlink).
4. Press the < Enter > key to commit to the selection and click through the link.

Rocket science explained!

Radio Buttons

Covered under The Basics & Controls, above.

Check Boxes

Covered under The Basics & Controls, above.

Drop-Down List

< ↑ >, < ↓ >, < ← >, and < → > navigates through the list

< letter of the alphabet > selects the first item name beginning with that letter

< rapid pressing of several letters of the alphabet > selects the first item name beginning with that sequence

< repeated pressing of the same letter of the alphabet > selects each item in sequence where the name begins with that letter

List Box

Covered under Drop-Down List, above.

Combo Box

Covered under Drop-Down List & Text Boxes, above.

Need More Assistance?

If you would like a guided Dragon training session or simply a “fill in the blanks” or “how do I...” Dragon tutorial session, please do not hesitate to [contact Speakeasy Solutions](#).

We firmly believe in using every ounce of Dragon's abilities to make computer use as productive and efficient as possible. Let us share our knowledge with you.