Getting Help in Emacs

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Overview

Emacs has an excellent internal help facility. You can specify a keystroke, and it will tell you the name of the command it executes. Or you can give it a word, and it will tell you the names of several commands that include that word. Emacs' help facility has other features, as well. Here are some of the most useful ones:

Locating a keystroke or command by keywords

If you know there's a keystroke that will let you insert another file into your present file, but can't remember what it is, you can use the "apropos" feature to find the commands that have the word "file" in them. (a is for Apropos.)
`C-h a`
`file`

Then type
`C-x o`
to go to the other half of your (now split) window, and then
`C-v`
to move down it, just like usual.
and you find:

> *insert-file C-x i*
> *Function: Insert contents of file FILENAME into buffer after point.*

Determining what a keystroke combination does

To determine what the command C-x C-s does, and its name, type this:
`C-h k`
`C-x C-s`
and then the return key. (k is for Keystroke).

This yields the command "save-buffers", and a paragraph or so explaining how to use the command. This is also useful because you can then execute the same command by typing:
`M-x the-command-name`

In this case, it would be
`M-X save-buffers`

Or, you can bind the command, possibly with another set of commands, to a function key. (See How to use the Function Keys in Emacs for more information)

Other help modes

To determine what other help Emacs has available, press the following:
`C-h ? C-h`
h is for help. So is the '?'.

This gives a list of the different kinds of help that emacs has, and how to use them.
The most expansive of these is the Info browser, invoked by the key sequence `C-h i`. See the stock answer Using the Info Browser for details.

Special commands for the current mode

To determine the special commands available for the current mode, type the following:
`C-h m`
(m is for mode)

This gives help that is specific to to the mode you're in, such as Latex or Mail. It usually gives a brief description of the mode, as well as the additional commands specific to that mode.