

Sidebar

Operating Systems · Windows 11 Window Management Cheat Sheet

Virtual desktops, moving windows between them, snapping, switching and multi-monitor tricks in Windows 11, with a section on keeping separate personal and work desktops. Written from my own knowledge of Windows 11 and not tested key by key on this machine (Windows 11 Pro, build 26300), so if a shortcut misbehaves, the Settings pages named here are the first place to look.

VIRTUAL DESKTOPS: THE BASICS

- Win+Tab** Task View: every window on this desktop, with the strip of desktops along the bottom
- Win+Ctrl+D** Create a new desktop and switch to it
- Win+Ctrl+Left / Right** Switch to the previous / next desktop (also works inside Task View)
- Win+Ctrl+F4** Close the current desktop; its windows are not closed, they move to a neighbouring desktop
- Touchpad swipe** Four fingers left / right switches desktop; three fingers up opens Task View (laptops; set under Bluetooth & devices > Touchpad)
- Right-click a desktop** In Task View: rename it, choose its own wallpaper, or move it left / right (dragging also reorders)
- Persistence** Desktops, their names and wallpapers survive a restart; the windows on them do not, unless the app restores itself

MOVING A WINDOW TO ANOTHER DESKTOP

- Drag in Task View** Win+Tab, then drag the window's thumbnail onto another desktop in the strip. Drop it on *New desktop* to create one for it
- Right-click in Task View** Right-click the window's thumbnail
 - > *Move to* > pick the desktop (or *New desktop*)
- Keyboard only** Win+Tab, arrow to the window, press the *Menu* key (or Shift+F10) > *Move to*. Not tested on this machine
- Show on all desktops** Right-click the thumbnail
 - > *Show this window on all desktops*, or *Show windows from this app on all desktops* (every window of the app, including new ones)
- No default shortcut** As far as I know Windows 11 has no built-in key to send the active window to another desktop; AutoHotkey scripts or similar third-party tools can add one

PERSONAL VS WORK DESKTOPS: SETUP

- Name them** Win+Tab, right-click each desktop > *Rename*: "Personal" and "Work"
- Different wallpapers** Right-click a desktop > *Choose background*: you can tell at a glance which one you are on
- Alt+Tab: this desktop only** Settings > System > Multitasking > *Alt+Tab shows windows from* > *This desktop only*. Work and personal windows stop mixing
- Taskbar: this desktop only** Settings > System > Multitasking > *On the taskbar, show all open windows* > *Only on the desktop I'm using*
- Taskbar clicks** With *all desktops* chosen, clicking an app's taskbar button jumps to the desktop that holds its window; with *this desktop only* it opens a new window here
- Shared apps** Use *Show windows from this app on all desktops* for things you want everywhere (music player, chat, a notes window)
- Open the settings** Win+R, then `ms-settings:multitasking`

SNAPPING: KEYBOARD

- Win+Left / Right** Snap the window to the left / right half; pressing again at the edge carries it to the next monitor
- Win+Up** Maximise (a snapped window goes to the top quarter instead)
- Win+Down** Restore a maximised window; a second press minimises it
- Win+Left, then Win+Up** Top-left quarter (Down gives bottom-left; the same on the right)
- Win+Shift+Up / Down** Stretch the window to full height / restore its height, keeping its width
- Win+Z** Open the snap layouts picker; press the number shown on a layout, then on a zone
- Win+Home** Minimise everything except the active window; press again to restore
- Win+M / Win+Shift+M** Minimise all / restore all minimised windows
- Win+D** Show the desktop; press again to bring the windows back

SNAPPING: MOUSE & SNAP LAYOUTS

- Drag to a side** Left or right edge: half of the screen. A corner: a quarter
- Drag to the top** Maximise; the snap layouts picker also drops down at the top of the screen
- Hover over Maximise** Hover the maximise button (or press Win+Z) to see the layouts, then click a zone
- Snap Assist** After snapping one window, thumbnails of your other windows offer to fill the rest of the layout
- Snap groups** Snapped windows appear as a group in the taskbar hover preview, Task View and Alt+Tab; click it to bring them all back together
- Drag a divider** Resize two snapped windows together (needs *When I resize a snapped window, simultaneously resize any adjacent snapped window*)
- Double-click the title bar** Maximise / restore. Double-click the top or bottom edge of a window to stretch it to full height
- Shake** *Title bar window shake* (off by default, Settings > System > Advanced) minimises all other windows when you shake one

MOVE, RESIZE & THE WINDOW MENU

- Alt+Space** Open the window's system menu
- Alt+Space, then M** Move: use the arrow keys, then Enter (Esc cancels)
- Alt+Space, then S** Size: use the arrow keys, then Enter
- Alt+Space, then X / N / R** Maximise / minimise / restore
- Alt+F4** Close the window
- Shift+right-click a taskbar button** The window menu for that window (Move, Size, Close)

SWITCHING BETWEEN WINDOWS

Alt+Tab Switcher: hold Alt and keep pressing Tab, or use the arrow keys and Enter. Add Shift to go backwards

Ctrl+Alt+Tab The switcher stays open after you let go of the keys

Alt+Esc Cycle windows in the order they were opened, without a switcher

Win+Tab Task View: a bigger overview, with desktops

Win+1 ... 9 Start or switch to the app in that taskbar slot; press again to cycle its windows

Win+Shift+1 ... 9 Open a new window of that app

Win+Ctrl+1 ... 9 Switch to the app's last active window

Win+T Cycle through taskbar buttons (Enter to open)

TASKBAR TRICKS

Middle-click a button Open a new window of that app

Shift+click a button Same: open a new window of that app

Ctrl+Shift+click a button Open the app as administrator

Drag buttons Reorder them; their Win+number slots change with them

Hover a button Preview the windows; hover a preview to peek at the window, click to bring it up

Far-right corner Click it to show the desktop (turn on under Personalization > Taskbar > Taskbar behaviours)

Several monitors Taskbar behaviours > *When using multiple displays, show my taskbar apps on:* all taskbars, the main one plus where the window is, or only where it is

SEVERAL MONITORS

Win+Shift+Left / Right Move the active window to the monitor on that side, keeping its size and position

Win+P Projection: PC screen only, Duplicate, Extend, Second screen only

Remember positions Settings > System > Display > Multiple displays: *Remember window locations based on monitor connection* sends windows back to their monitor when a screen is plugged in again

Minimise on disconnect Same page: *Minimize windows when a monitor is disconnected*

Desktops are shared Virtual desktops apply to all monitors together: switching desktop changes every screen

SETTINGS WORTH KNOWING (MULTITASKING PAGE)

Snap windows The master switch for everything in the snapping options below

Snap Assist suggestions *When I snap a window, suggest what I can snap next to it*

Layouts on hover / drag *Show snap layouts when I hover over a window's maximize button; when I drag a window to the top of my screen*

Edge snapping *When I drag a window, let me snap it without dragging all the way to the screen edge*

Show snapped windows *Show my snapped windows when I hover taskbar apps, in Task View, and when I press Alt+Tab*

Tabs in Alt+Tab *Show tabs from apps when snapping or pressing Alt+Tab: Edge tabs listed (or not) beside windows*

Open it Win+R, then `ms-settings:multitasking`

POWERTOYS: WHAT WINDOWS DOES NOT DO

- Install** `winget install Microsoft.PowerToys --source winget`
(not installed on this machine at the time of writing; package id from my own knowledge)
- FancyZones** Your own custom zones: hold Shift while dragging a window to drop it in a zone. Layout editor: Win+Shift+`
- Always On Top** Win+Ctrl+T keeps the active window above all others
- Workspaces** Win+Ctrl+` saves and relaunches a set of apps in chosen positions: a one-click "work layout"
- Keyboard Manager** Remap keys and shortcuts
- PowerToys Run** Alt+Space by default, which *clashes with the window menu above*; change it in PowerToys settings if you miss the menu

YOUR PERSONAL / WORK WORKFLOW

- Send this VS Code window to Work** Win+Tab, drag its thumbnail to the Work desktop (or right-click > Move to > Work)
- Jump to Work and back** Win+Ctrl+Right / Win+Ctrl+Left
- Keep chat on both** Right-click the thumbnail > Show windows from this app on all desktops
- Lay out a screen** Win+Z, pick a layout, fill each zone from Snap Assist
- Lost a window?** Win+Tab shows every window on this desktop; set Alt+Tab to all desktops to find one elsewhere

WHY CAN'T I SEND A WINDOW TO ANOTHER DESKTOP WITH A KEY?

Windows lets you *switch* desktops with the keyboard (Win+Ctrl+Left / Right) but, as far as I know, only lets you *move* a window with the mouse or the Task View context menu. If you do it often, the quickest habit is: Win+Tab, drag the window onto the other desktop, Win+Ctrl+Left / Right to follow it.

CLOSING A DESKTOP DOES NOT CLOSE ITS WINDOWS

Win+Ctrl+F4 (or the X on a desktop thumbnail) moves that desktop's windows to a neighbouring desktop. Check where they went before you carry on, especially if it was the work desktop you closed.