

The Option Key Map

There is a second layer of macOS hiding under the first one. **Hold the Option key** while you click almost anything, and a hidden set of actions appears. This is the map I keep next to my desk: every place that one key quietly does more.

How to read this map

Every row works the same way. On the left is what you press and where. Hold ⌥ as you do it, and the action on the right is what your Mac quietly switches to. You don't need to memorize the list. Just build the reflex of holding Option and glancing at what changes.

⌥ + click → More appears

01 The Menu Bar

The icons in the top-right corner are hiding their most useful details.

WI-FI ICON

⌥ + click

Full network diagnostics

Your IP and router address, the security type, channel, and live signal strength, instead of just the list of networks.

SOUND / VOLUME ICON

⌥ + click

Switch input and output devices

Pick your microphone and speakers right there, without opening Sound settings.

TIME MACHINE ICON

⌥ + click

Browse other backup disks

Reach backups on a drive that isn't your current one, plus options to verify backups.

BLUETOOTH ICON

⌥ + click

Per-device connection detail

See each device's address and connection info, with extra options the normal menu hides.

02 The Apple Menu & System

Two of these will save you a dialog box you click past every single day.

APPLE MENU

⌥ + open

"About This Mac" becomes "System Information"

Jump straight to the detailed hardware report instead of the summary window.

RESTART · SHUT DOWN · LOG OUT

⌥ + choose

Skips the confirmation dialog

The "Are you sure?" prompt disappears and the action happens immediately.

VOLUME / BRIGHTNESS KEYS

⌥ + press

Jump to Sound or Display settings

Opens the exact System Settings panel for that key, no digging through menus.

03 The Dock

Right-clicks and clicks behave differently the moment Option is down.

ANY APP ICON

⌥ + right-click

“Quit” becomes “Force Quit”

Kill a frozen app straight from its Dock icon, no Force Quit window needed.

ANOTHER APP'S ICON

⌥ + click

Switch to it and hide the current app

Jumps to the new app and tidies away the one you were just in, in a single click.

AN APP'S ICON

⌘ ⌥ + click

Show it and hide all other apps

Instantly clears your screen down to just the one app you want to focus on.

FINDER ICON

⌥ + right-click

Relaunch Finder

When the desktop or a window misbehaves, this restarts Finder cleanly without a full reboot.

04 Finder

The file manager you use most has the most Option tricks buried in it.

LIST VIEW · FOLDER TRIANGLE

⌥ + click ▸

Expand every nested subfolder at once

Opens the whole tree in one click instead of clicking your way down level by level.

FILE MENU

⌥ + open menu

“Move to Trash” becomes “Delete Immediately”

Skip the Trash entirely for files you're certain about.

EDIT MENU

⌥ + open menu

“Copy” becomes “Copy as Pathname”

Copies the full file path as text, perfect for the Terminal or a support ticket.

DRAGGING A FILE

⌥ / ⌘ ⌥ + drag

Copy instead of move, or make an alias

Hold Option to copy a file as you drag it. Add Command for an alias that points back to the original.

05 Safari & Windows

Browsing and window controls both grow a quieter, smarter option.

SAFARI MENU

⌥ + open menu

“Clear History” keeps your website data

It becomes “Clear History and Keep Website Data”, so you wipe history without being logged out of everything.

A TAB'S CLOSE BUTTON

⌥ + click ×

Close every other tab but this one

Clears the clutter and keeps you exactly where you are.

GREEN WINDOW BUTTON

⌥ + click

Zoom to fit, not Full Screen

Resizes the window neatly to its content instead of throwing it into a full-screen Space.

A WINDOW CORNER

⌥ + drag

Resize from the center

Both sides grow together, keeping the window centered while you adjust it.

06 Saving & Fine Control

The last few are the ones people are most surprised they lived without.

FILE MENU · MOST APPS

⌥ + open menu

“Duplicate” becomes “Save As…”

The classic Save As command is still there in modern apps, just hidden behind Option.

VOLUME / BRIGHTNESS KEYS

⌥ ⇧ + press

Adjust in quarter steps

Finer control than the chunky default increments, for when one notch is too much.

A DOCUMENT'S TITLE-BAR ICON

⌥ + drag

Drop a copy of the open file anywhere

Drag the small proxy icon while holding Option to copy the document without leaving the app.

The one-glance version

Pin this strip somewhere visible. Everything above, compressed to a single look.

⌥ Wi-Fi icon	Full network **diagnostics**
⌥ Volume icon	Switch **input & output** devices
⌥ Time Machine	Browse **other backup disks**
⌥ Apple menu	About This Mac → **System Information**
⌥ Restart / Shut Down	Skip the **confirmation dialog**
⌥ + right-click Dock app	Quit → **Force Quit**
⌘⌥ click Dock app	Show it, **hide all others**
⌥ List-view triangle	Expand **all nested subfolders**
⌥ Finder File menu	Move to Trash → **Delete Immediately**
⌥ Finder Edit menu	Copy → **Copy as Pathname**
⌥ Safari menu	Clear History → **and keep website data**
⌥ green button	**Zoom to fit**, not Full Screen
⌥ File menu	Duplicate → **Save As…**

FROM THE USEFUL TECH

One key down. A whole Mac to go.

The Option key is just the first reflex. Every week I send one more of these to readers of The Useful Tech: the small, buried habits that quietly make a Mac faster to live with. **No filler, no hype, just the useful stuff I actually use.**

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