

December 17, 2017, Beginners SIG Mission Control

Note: This discussion is based on MacOS, 10.12.6 (Sierra). Some illustrations may differ when using other versions of macOS or OS X.

Keyboard Function Keys and Symbols

If you use an Apple keyboard (or a third party one that follows Apple's specifications), you've probably noticed the symbols found on the top row of keys (a.k.a., the [function keys](#), or [F-keys](#)):



Mac Keyboard (Credit: Apple)

A standard keyboard has 12 F-keys (F1 to F12). If you have an Apple extended keyboard, it includes additional keys like page up, page down, home, end, a numeric keypad, and four more F-keys (F13 to F16).

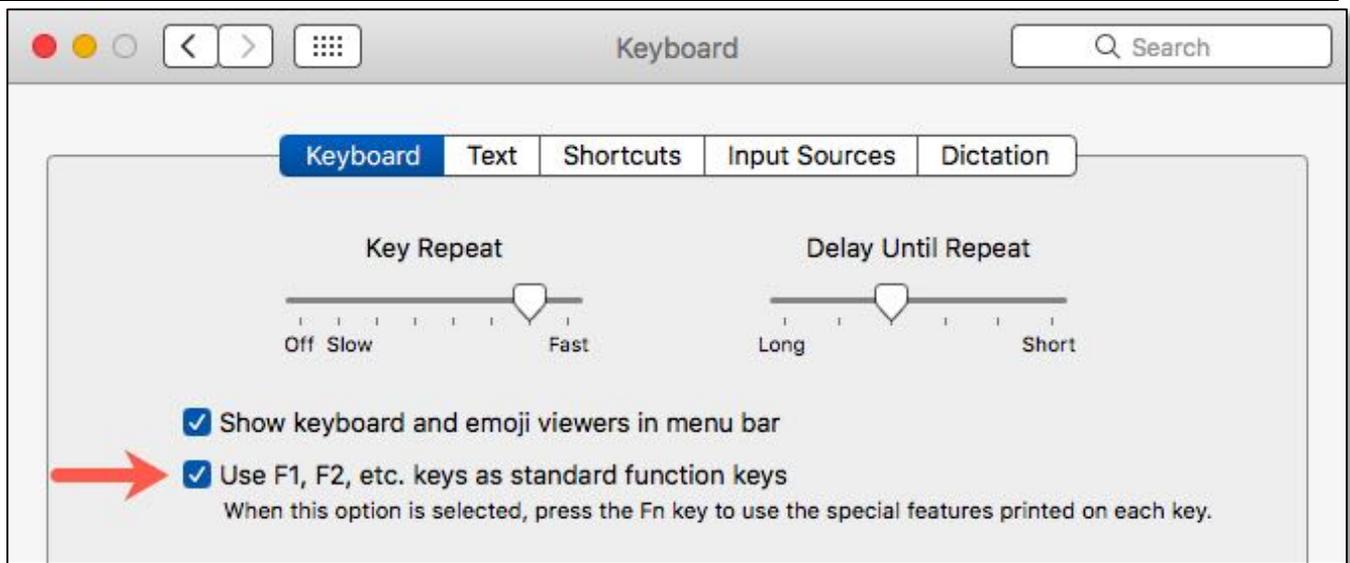
In addition to their function key designations (F1, F2, F3, and so on), all but two (depending on the keyboard design) of the F-keys, F5 and F6, also have small symbols on them:

- F1 and F2 are used to lower and raise the brightness level of the display.
- F7, F8 and F9 are used to control the playback rate for audio and video.
- F10, F11 and F12 are used to control sound level (mute, lower and higher).

That leaves F3 and F4 which will be the subject of this presentation.

Before we go there, however, let's take a look at the [Keyboard system preference](#) that controls how the F-keys are used. For this, go to the Keyboard tab. (See the illustration on the next page.)

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Keyboard System Preference (Keyboard Tab)

By clicking the “Use F1, F2, etc. keys as standard function keys” checkbox, the F-keys will no longer perform the functions according to the symbols on the keys and will instead be available for other assignments.

I use this setting because I prefer to assign other functions to the F-keys like making text larger or smaller, toggling the Reader function in Safari, and controlling paragraph spacing in Microsoft Word. To do this, I use the [Keyboard Maestro](https://www.keyboardmaestro.com/main/) utility app (<https://www.keyboardmaestro.com/main/>).

On to Mission Control

The two F-keys that we haven’t discussed are F3 and F4:



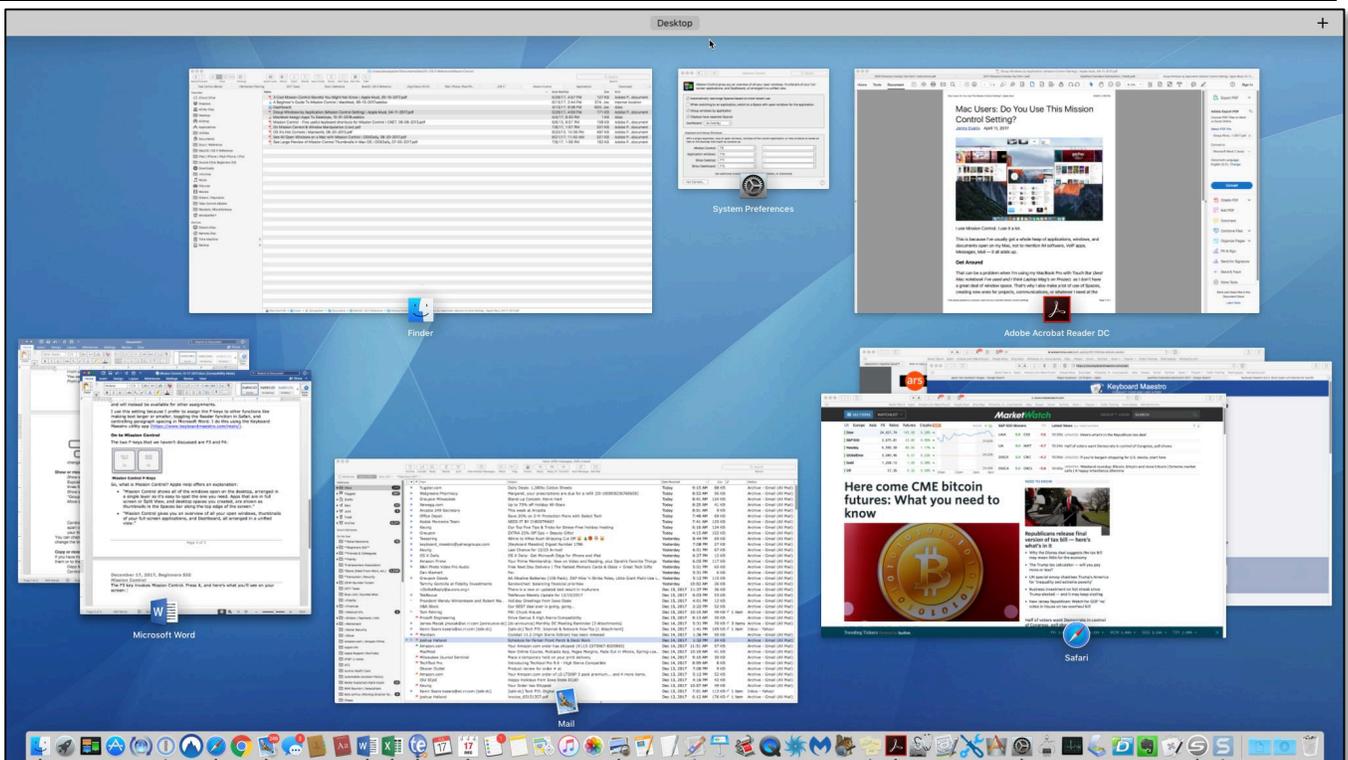
Mission Control F-Keys

So, what is [Mission Control](#)? Apple Help offers an explanation:

- “Mission Control shows all of the windows open on the desktop, arranged in a single layer so it’s easy to spot the one you need. Apps that are in full screen or Split View, and desktop spaces you created, are shown as thumbnails in the Spaces bar along the top edge of the screen.”
- “Mission Control gives you an overview of all your open windows, thumbnails of your full-screen applications, and Dashboard, all arranged in a unified view.”

The [F3 key invokes Mission Control](#). Press it, and here’s what you’ll see on your screen (next page):

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Mission Control Display (Six Apps Open and Their Windows)

If you look closely, you'll see that I have several apps and windows open when this screenshot was taken: two in Microsoft Word, one in the Finder, one in Mail, one in System Preferences, one in Acrobat Reader, and three in Safari.

Each app's window or group of windows has a tiny badge and label to indicate the name of the app.

Using Mission Control:

- When you move your cursor over a window, it becomes outlined, showing that it can be selected. Click on a selected window to open it.
- Use the Up-Arrow key to enlarge a small view of a single window or group of windows. The Down-Arrow key returns to the smaller view.
- If you hide an app (keyboard shortcut: [Command-H](#), [⌘-H](#)), Mission Control will not display it.

As you can see, Mission Control is really an application and window switcher. It's an alternative to using the keyboard shortcut, [Command-Tab](#) ([⌘-Tab](#)), to switch to another app and then using the keyboard shortcut, [Command-Tilde](#) ([⌘-~](#)), to switch to a window in that app.

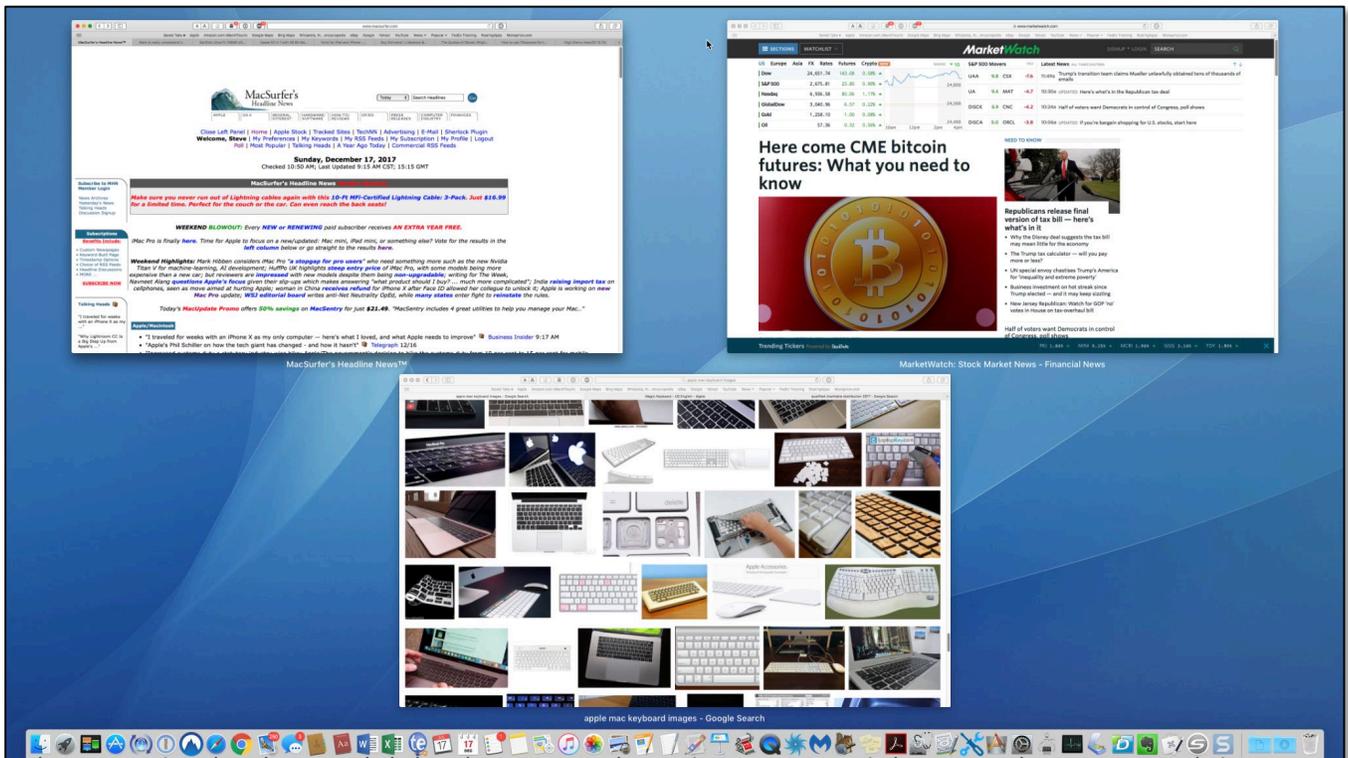
The F3 key (or any other key that you've designated; more on this later) is a toggle. Press it once to invoke Mission Control, and press it again to dismiss Mission Control if you wish. You can also dismiss Mission Control with the [esc](#) key.

So, what about that other F-key (F4)? Turns out, it's a "switcher," too, but just for app windows.

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Switching Among App Windows

The **F4** key invokes the **Application Window Switcher**. Press it, and here's what you'll see on your screen for the app that you're currently using:



App Windows Display (Three Windows Open in Safari)

The app windows display is effectively a subset of Mission Control. Only the windows for the app currently being used are displayed.

Switch among the windows using the cursor. Then click on the desired one to select it and bring it forward.

You can also press Return or Enter on the keyboard to select, something that you can't do in Mission Control.

The F4 key is a toggle. Press it once to invoke the Application Window Switcher, and press it again to dismiss it if you wish. You can also dismiss the Application Window Switcher with the **esc** key.

Mission Control System Preference

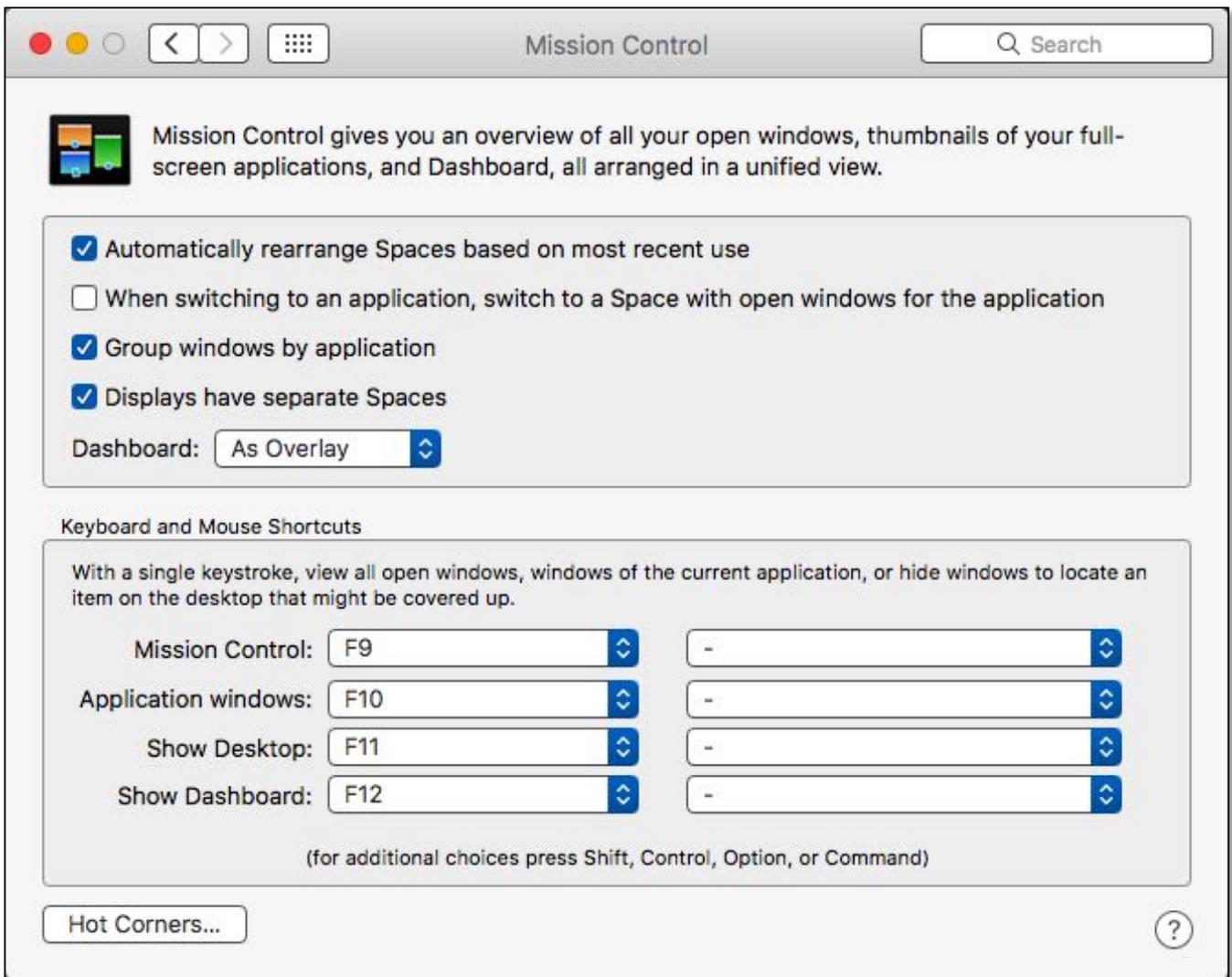
Mission Control has its own System Preference (see the next page):

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Mission Control in the System Preferences App

When you open the Mission Control system preference, here's what's displayed:

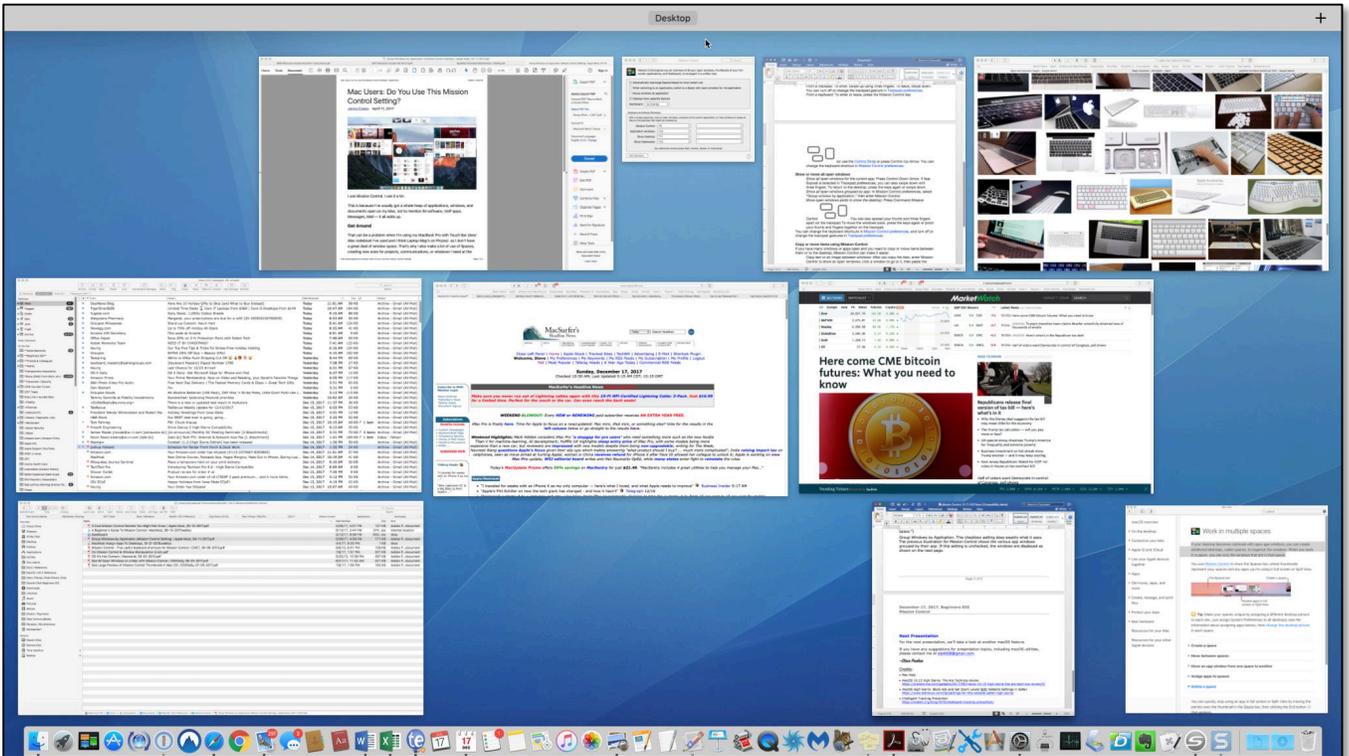


Mission Control System Preference

The top pane contains the functional settings for Mission Control. and there's a lot of adjustability available. (I'll skip the three checkbox settings for Spaces for another discussion. Apple Help describes Spaces: "If your desktop becomes cluttered with open app windows, you can create additional desktops, called spaces, to organize the windows. When you work in a space, you see only the windows that are in that space.")

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Group Windows by Application. This checkbox setting does exactly what it says. The previous illustration for Mission Control shows the various app windows grouped by their app. If this setting is unchecked, the windows are displayed as shown below:



Mission Control Display (Six Apps Open, but Their Windows Are Not Grouped by App)

The app windows are all there, and they're a little larger. The tradeoff, however, is that without grouping by app, it's more difficult to sort through them to pick the one that you're interested in.

Dashboard. Remember the Dashboard? According to Mac Help: "Dashboard is a collection of small programs, called 'widgets,' that let you quickly do a wide variety of tasks such as checking stock prices, finding weather information, and more."

The Mission Control system preference controls the use of the Dashboard:



Dashboard Control ("As Overlay" Selected)

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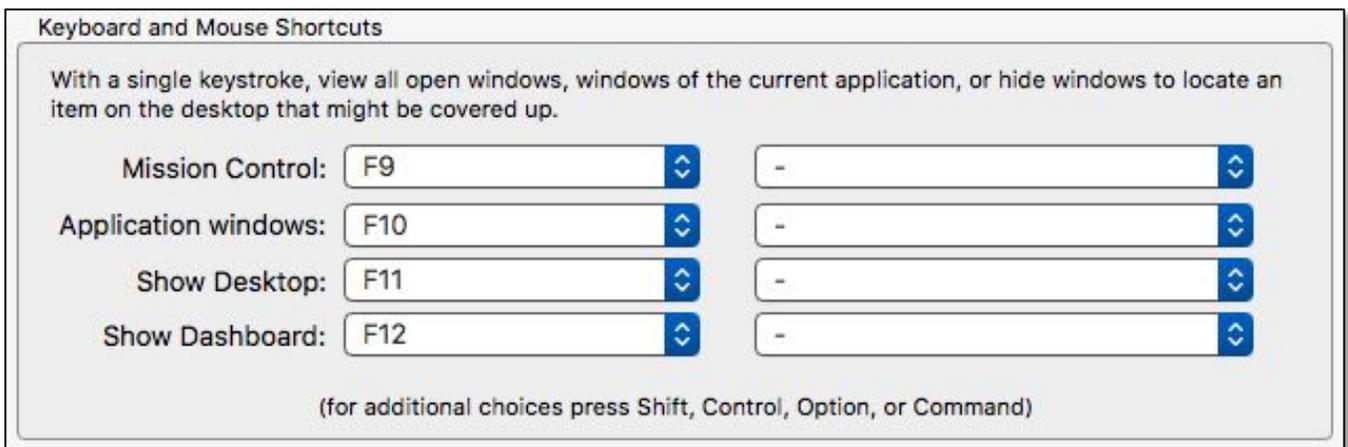
From the pop-up menu, you can choose:

- Off (Dashboard is turned off and not displayed)
- As Space
- As Overlay (see below)



Dashboard ("As Overlay" Mode)

The bottom pane in the Mission Control system preference allows you to change the F-key assigned to Mission Control and Application Windows by using pop-up menus:



Dashboard ("As Overlay" Mode)

As you can see, I chose to use the pop-up menus to assign F9 for Mission Control (instead of the default F3) and F10 for Application Windows (instead of F4).

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Mission Control

Mission Control has two more functions:

Show Desktop. With the press of a single key (default: [F11](#)), regardless of the app you may be using at the time, you can display the Desktop. This can be handy if you want to use a file or folder that you keep there, unmount a drive, pop in a flash drive and open its contents, etc.

Show Dashboard. Press another key (default: [F12](#)) to immediately show the Dashboard and quickly access a Widget (check the weather forecast, use the calculator, etc.).

The Mission Control system preference offers a plethora of keystroke options.

In addition to choosing an F-key assignment, the pop-up menus also offer additional keystroke options:

- [Right Shift](#), [Control](#), [Option](#) & [Command](#) keys
- their Left counterparts ([Left Shift](#), [Control](#), [Option](#) & [Command](#) keys)
- the [Control-Up Arrow](#) keyboard shortcut ([^↑](#))
- [fn](#) key

There are more options. When choosing among the F-key options, you can also hold down the following modifier keys: [Control](#), [Option](#), [Command](#), [Shift-Control](#), [Option-Shift](#), [Shift-Command](#), [Control-Command](#), and [Option-Command](#) keys. For example, you could set Mission Control to be triggered by pressing the Option-Shift-F9 keyboard combination.

Finally, there are even more options. Notice the larger pop-up menus to the right of those for keystroke options. These allow you to assign Mission Control functions to available buttons on your mouse. You can also hold down the same modifier keys that can be used for F-keys and assign them to the mouse buttons. For example, you could set Mission Control to be triggered by pressing the Option key and one of the mouse buttons.

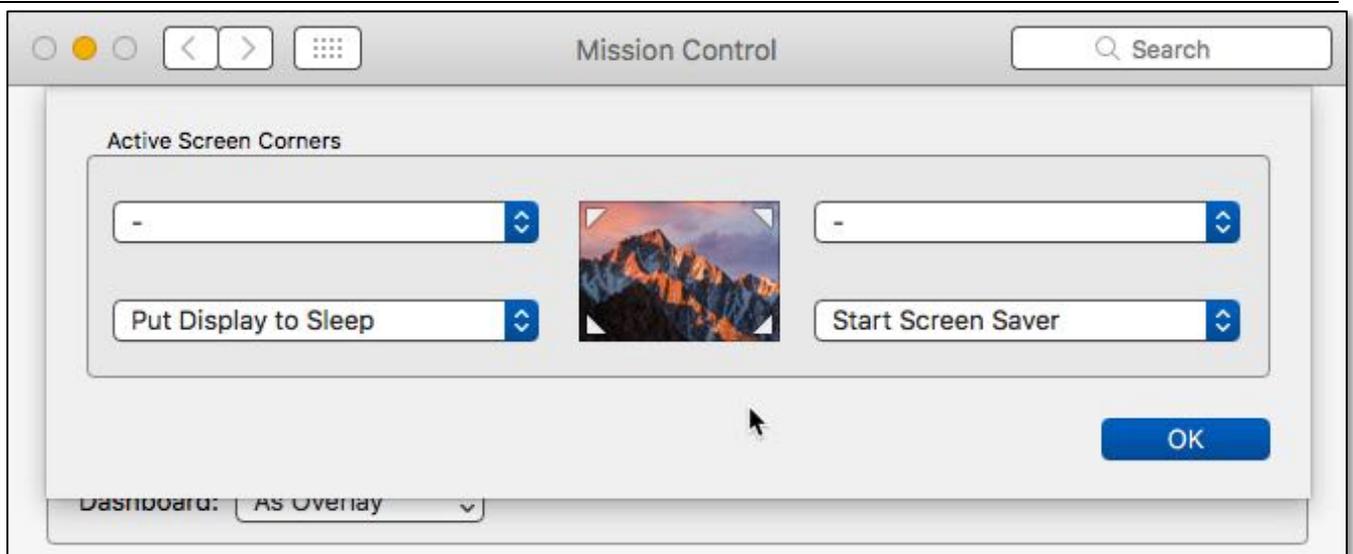
Hot Corners. This option provides the ability to trigger certain actions when the cursor to one of the corners of your Mac's display. Use the button at the bottom left corner of the Mission Control system preference:



Hot Corners Button

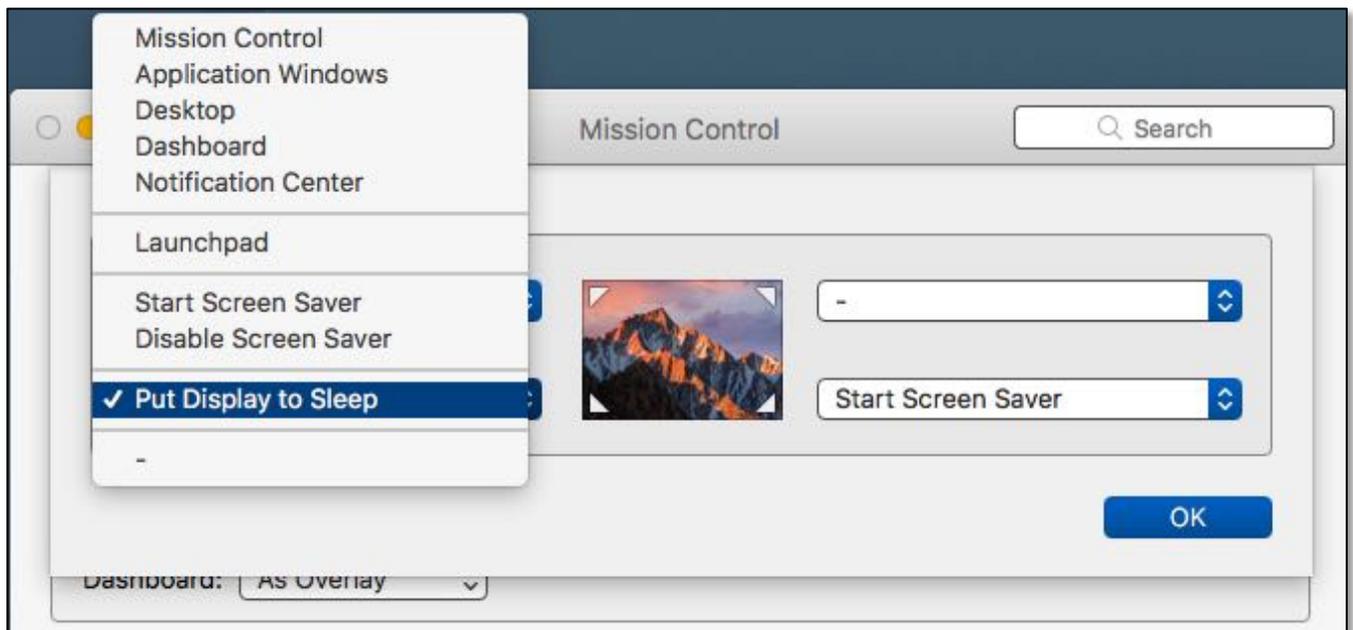
Clicking the Hot Corners button displays a pop-up settings window with numerous functions that you can assign to any of the corners. (See the illustration on the next page.)

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Hot Corners Pop-up Window

This settings window has pop-up menus for each corner. As you can see, I've set the lower left corner for Put Display to Sleep. This is one of numerous functions that can be assigned to a hot corner. All the Mission Control functions (Mission Control, Application Windows, Desktop and Dashboard) can be chosen as well as several others (see below):



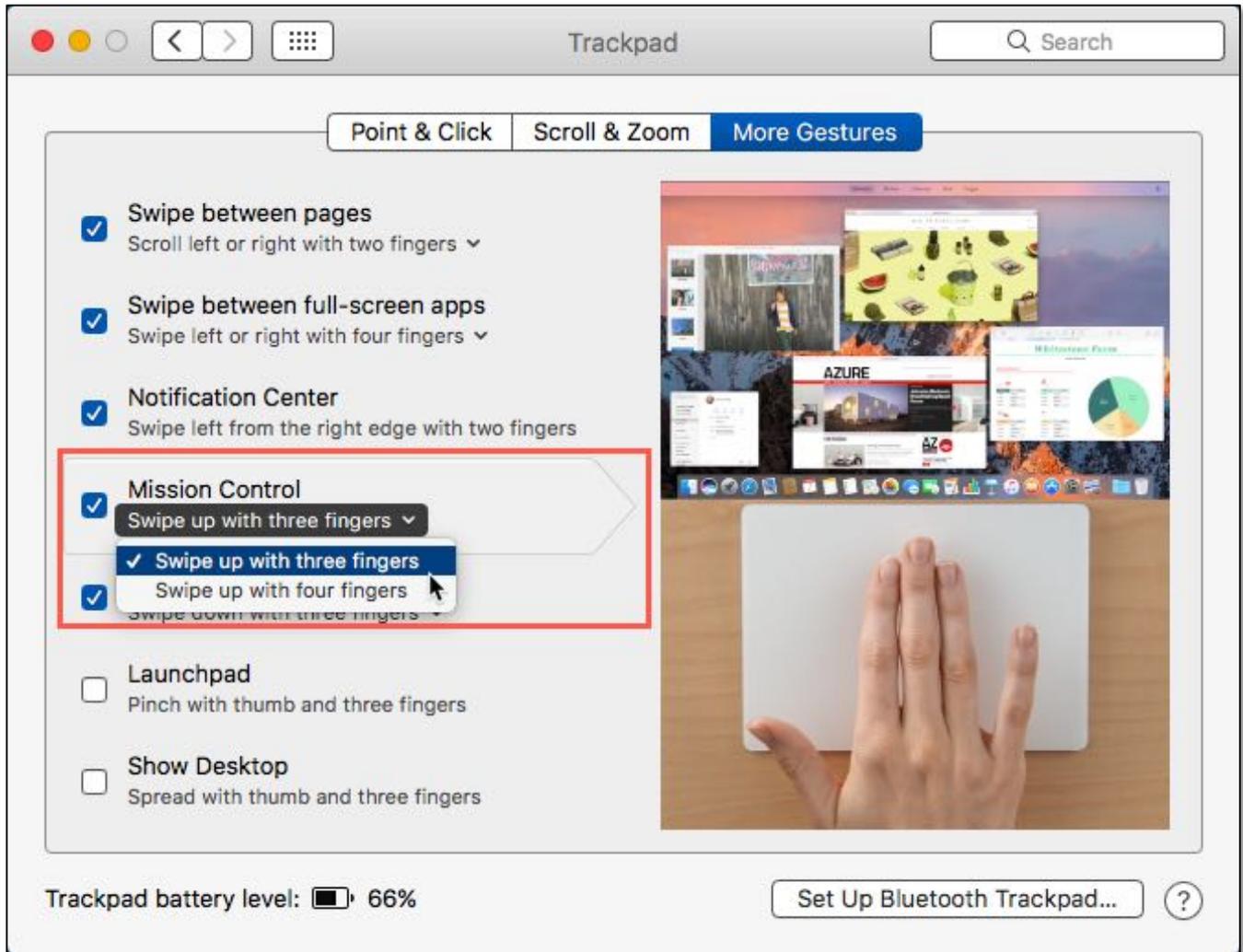
Hot Corners Pop-up Menu

In addition to the Mission Control, you can also set a hot corner to bring up the Notification Center or Launchpad, Start or Disable the Screen Saver, and Put Display to Sleep.

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Mission Control Via a Gesture

There's even a gesture (Trackpad or Apple Mouse) to bring up Mission Control:



Mission Control Gesture (via the Trackpad)

In the Trackpad system preference, you can set up a gesture (Swipe up with three fingers or Swipe up with four fingers).

Next Presentation

For the next presentation, we'll take a look at another macOS feature.

If you have any suggestions for presentation topics, including macOS utilities, please contact me at slp4668@gmail.com.

-Steve Parker

Credits: Mac Help