Note: This discussion is based on MacOS, 10.14.4 (Mojave). Some illustrations may differ when using other versions of macOS or OS X. Illustrations are from screenshots on my iMac.

In this presentation of *A Few Mac Tips*, I'll cover the **App Switcher** and some of its features that you may not be aware of and might want to try out. The material I'm covering is drawn from a recent video posting ("Mac App Switcher Tips and Tricks") on the excellent tutorial website, macmost.com, plus a little experimentation of my own. Here's the URL if you want to see the video:

https://macmost.com/mac-app-switcher-tips-and-tricks.html

App Switcher Basics

Brief Review. The **App Switcher** on your Mac has been around for a long time. Simply use the keyboard shortcut, **Command** then **Tab**, to switch between apps:

- First, hold down the **Command** key.
- Then while continuing to hold the **Command** key down, tap the **Tab** key. (See the illustration below.)

App Switcher (Move Forward in the App List):
1. Press Command then Tab (Displays the App List
2. Hold down the Command key
3. Tap the Tab key (Moves Forward to the next item in the App List)

- The first tap of the **Tab** key displays a horizontal list of open apps and selects the next app in the list. (The first app in the list is the one that you were last using.)

App Switcher – Apps List
Credit: https://www.macrumors.com/how-to/open-files-quit-hide-apps-mac-app-switcher/

- While continuing to hold down the **Command** key, each subsequent tap of the **Tab** key moves forward to the next app in the list.
- When you get to the app that you want, release the **Command** key to switch focus to that app.

Note: After the last app in the list is reached, the App Switcher loops around to the beginning of the list.

Handy as this keyboard shortcut is, there's a lot more capability available in the App Switcher.

Move Backward in the App List. To move *backward* in the App List, using the macOS default method:

- Use the **Command** then **Tab** keyboard shortcut to display the App List.
- Then while continuing to hold down the **Command** key, also hold down the **Shift** key.
- While continuing to hold down the **Command** and **Shift** keys, each subsequent tap of the **Tab** key moves *backward* to the previous app in the list. (See the illustration below.)

App Switcher (Move Backward in the App List):
1. **Press Command then Tab (Displays the App List)**
2. **Hold down the Command + Shift keys**
3. **Tap the Tab key (Moves Backward in the List)**

Note: After reaching the first item in the apps list, the App Switcher loops around the end of the list.
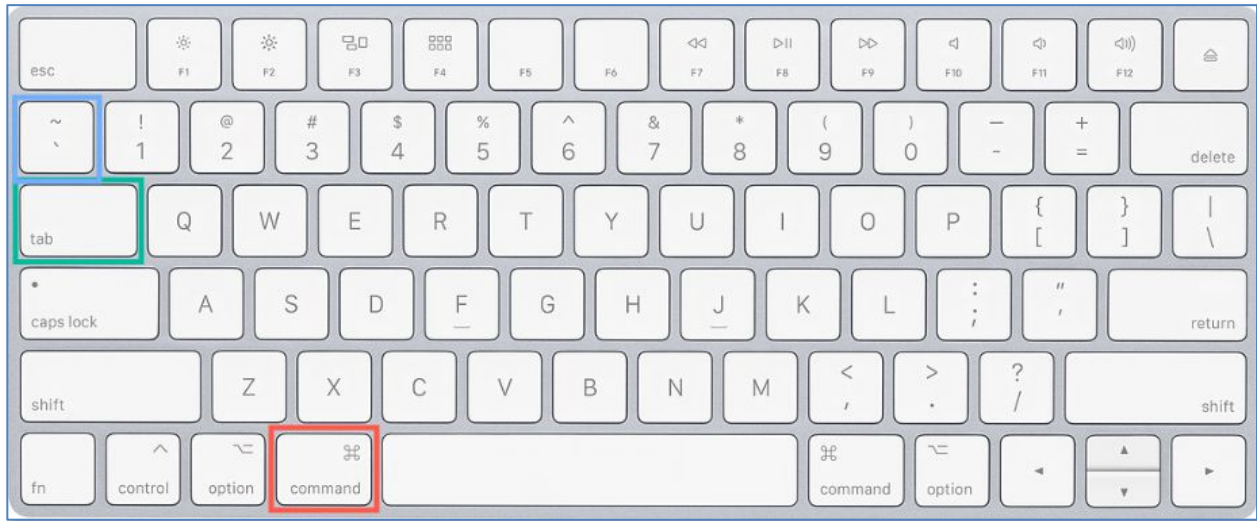
While this backward switching through the apps list works, it's a bit cumbersome since three keys (**Command**, **Shift** and **Tab**) need to be used. There's a better way (discussed on the next page).

Alternative App Switcher Options

Backward Move Alternative Method. Another, simpler, way to display and move backward though the App List is to use the **Tilde** key (**~**), the one located above the **Tab** key. (The key is marked with the Forward Single Quote mark (**`**) with the Tilde mark (**~**) above it.)

- Use the **Command** then **Tab** keyboard shortcut to display the App List.
- Then while continuing to hold down the **Command** key, tap the **Tilde** key. (See the illustration below.)

App Switcher (Move Backward *Option* in the App List):
1. Press Command then Tab (Displays the App List)
2. Hold down the Command key
3. Tap the Tilde key (Moves Backward in the List)

This option doesn't involve having to also hold down the **Shift** key, so it's simpler to use.

Move Forward and Back with the Arrow Keys. Perhaps the simplest way to move between items in the app switcher is to use the **Right (Forward)** and **Left (Back)** arrow keys.

- Use the **Command** then **Tab** keyboard shortcut to display the App List.
- Then while continuing to hold down the **Command** key, tap the **Right** arrow key to move forward through the App List.
- Tap the **Left** arrow key to move back through the App List. (See the illustration on the next page.)

App Switcher (Move with the Arrow Keys in the App List):
1. Press **Command** then **Tab** (Displays the App List)
2. Hold down the **Command** key
3. Tap the **Left** or **Right** arrow keys (Move Backward or Forward in the List)

Continued tapping of the **Left** or **Right** arrow keys when either end of the App List is reached will result in looping around to the other end of the list.

App List Looping. In summary, regardless of how you choose to move through the App List to the end (**Tab** or **Right** arrow keys) or the beginning (**Shift/Tab**, **Tilde** or **Left** arrow keys), the next tap of the same key will loop around to the other end of the list. For example, if you're at the last app in the list, using the **Tab** key will loop around to the first app in the list. Similarly, if at the beginning of the list, using the **Tilde** key for backward switching will loop around to the end of the App List.

Selecting an Item from the App List. You can also use the **Cursor** to select an item from the App List by clicking on it.

Switching Between Apps. If you switch back and forth between two apps for convenience—say, between Safari and Pages to copy some website information into Pages to save for reference—each use of the App Switcher for two apps will switch from one to the other without using any additional keystrokes (**Tab**, **Shift/Tab** or the **arrow** keys). This means that all you have to do is to bring up the App Switcher (**Command**, then **Tab** keyboard shortcut) to switch between the two desired apps.

More App Switcher Features

Hide Apps. You can use the App Switcher to **Hide** apps by using the **H** key:
- Use the **Command** then **Tab** keyboard shortcut to display the App List.
- Switch to the app that you wish to **Hide**.
- When the desired app is selected, and while continuing to hold down the **Command** key, then tap the **H** key to hide the app.

(See the illustration on the next page.)

App Switcher (Hide an App):
1. Press Command then Tab (Displays the App List)
2. Hold down the Command key. Then switch to the desired app in the list.
3. Tap the H key (Hides the selected item in the list)

The app will no longer be displayed on the screen, although it's still open.

Note: When the App Switcher is used again, the hidden app is still shown in the list. This is for good reason: To allow the app to be *unhidden* when desired.

Unhide Apps. The App Switcher will also **Unhide** (reveal) apps that have been previously hidden. Just use the **H** key again:

- Use the **Command** then **Tab** keyboard shortcut to display the App List.
- Switch to the app that you wish to **Unhide**.
- When you're on the desired app, and while continuing to hold down the **Command** key, then tap the **H** key to unhide the app and switch to it.

So, as you can see, using the **H** key in the App Switcher is a toggle. The first use hides the selected app while the next use will unhide it.

Note: I've observed that simply using the App Switcher to switch to the icon of the hidden app to select it would display the app again. If this works for you, then there's no need to use the **H** key to unhide an app.

Quit Apps. The App Switcher can also be used **Quit** apps. Do this with the **Q** key.

- Use the **Command** then **Tab** keyboard shortcut to display the App List.
- Switch to the app that you wish to **Quit**.
- When you've selected the desired app, and while continuing to hold down the **Command** key, tap the **Q** key to **Quit** the app. (See the illustration on the next page.)

App Switcher (Quit an App):
1. Press **Command** then **Tab** (Displays the App List)
2. Hold down the **Command** key. Then switch to the desired app in the list.
3. Tap the **Q** key (Quits the selected item in the list)

Note: When the App Switcher is used to **Quit** an app, it is removed from the list (which makes sense since the app is no longer active). Also, unlike using the **H** key, the **Q** key doesn't act like a toggle.

Select One of Multiple App Windows. You can use the App Switcher to select a specific document window among several that an app has open. This involves using any these keys: **Up** arrow, or **Down** arrow or the **1** key.

- Use the **Command** then **Tab** keyboard shortcut to display the App List.
- Select the app in the list that has multiple open document windows where you want to view one of them.
- Tap either the **Up** arrow, or **Down** arrow or the **1** key. (See the illustration below.)
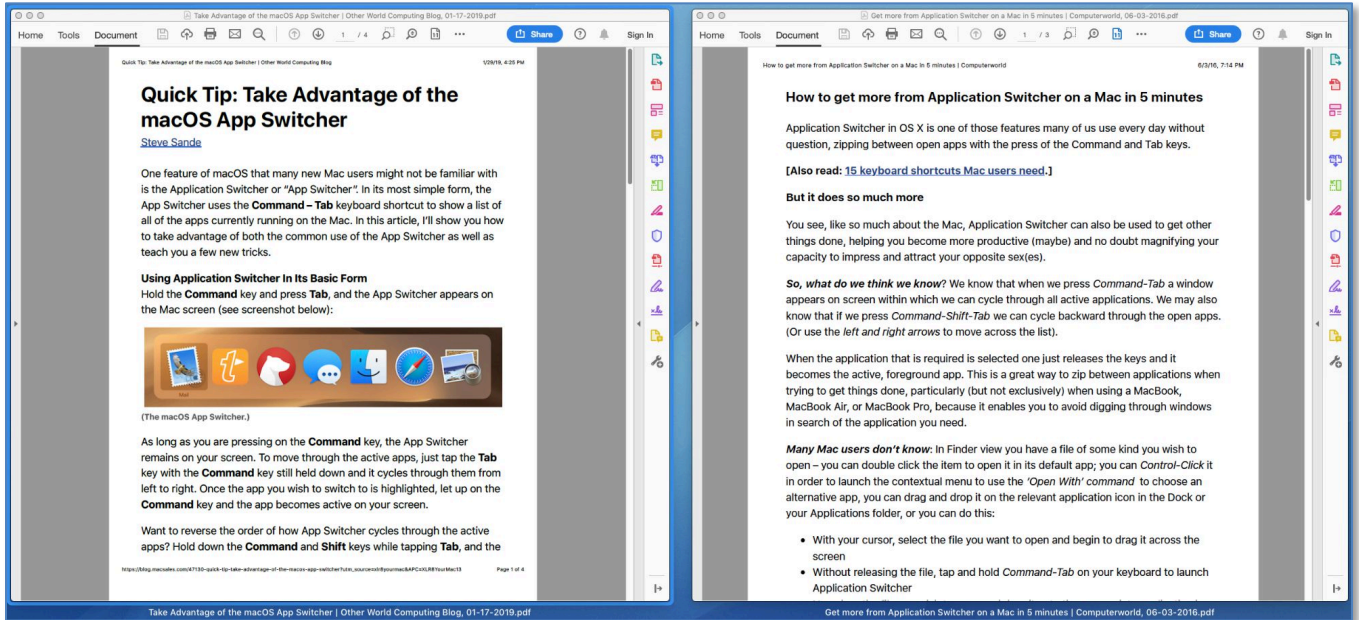

App Switcher (Select One of Multiple App Document Windows):
1. Press **Command** then **Tab** (Displays the App List)
2. Tap the **Up** arrow, **Down** arrow or the **1** key

- All open windows for the selected app are displayed, allowing you to choose among them.

Here's an example with a couple of document windows in the Preview app. (See the illustration below.)

App Switcher (Select One of Multiple App Windows)
Preview App with its Two Documents Displayed

This app window display method is actually one of the modes in the **Mission Control** feature of the macOS. Specifically, this Mission Control mode shows the windows that are currently open by the app. (Another Mission Control mode will show all open applications along with their windows. See the Mission Control system preference for all of its settings.)

- Go ahead and release the **Command** key as it's no longer needed.
- Use the **Up**, **Down**, **Left** and **Right** arrow keys to move among the open windows to select one. A blue highlight appears around each window as it's selected.
- When a window has been selected (blue highlight around it), you can use the **Spacebar** to bring up a larger view. This can be handy when many windows are open by an app (or your screen is small) such that each window is a little too small for comfortable viewing.
- With one of the windows selected, tap the **Return** key to switch to the app with the selected window at the front.
- You can also open a selected window by selecting it with the **Cursor**.

Switch to the Next App. While in this multiple open app windows mode, you can use the **Tilde** key again to switch to the next app and display the windows there, even if there is only one.

Switch to a Window Based on Its Name. Depending on the first letter of names of the documents in the open windows, it's also possible to use the keyboard to select one of them. Simply tap the key that matches the first letter of the name of the document to select that document for viewing.

Cancel With the Escape Key. The Escape (**esc**) key, found at the top left of the keyboard, has a couple of very useful functions when using the App Switcher:

- If you want to leave the app window selection mode without ever actually doing anything, just press the **esc** key.
- You can also leave the App Switcher itself at any time by using the **esc** key while the **Command** key is still held down, even after moving to an app in the list.

App Switcher (Use the Esc key to leave)

Drag and Drop with the App Switcher. You can use **Drag and Drop** with the App Switcher to open a document. This can be handy if you wish to open a document that can be opened by more than one app—say, a PDF document that can be opened by both the Preview and Adobe Reader apps. This is useful when you don't want to open it with the default app is set to normally open it (say, opening a PDF with Adobe Reader when the default app set for PDFs is Preview).

- After starting to drag a document, bring up the App Switcher (**Command** then **Tab** keyboard shortcut) to display the App List.
- Drag the document onto any of the apps in the App List. (However, the app should be one that can open this type of document. Otherwise, the app will open but not the document.)
- Since you may still have the **Command** key held down, go ahead and release it.

Summary

There's a lot more to the App Switcher than just quickly switching back and forth between the apps:

- Open with forward switching
- Backward switching with several options
- Hiding an app
- Quitting an app
- Selecting among multiple app windows
- Drag and drop

Next Presentation

For the next presentation, we'll take a look a few more Mac Tips to try out.

Have a favorite Mac Tip? Please feel free to pass it along, and I'll see if I can work it into a future presentation.

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

–Steve Parker

Credit:

- Mac App Switcher Tips and Tricks
  https://macmost.com/mac-app-switcher-tips-and-tricks.html