

FreeCommander ~ Assorted Information

Here is a small collection of information about some procedures that you may find useful. This information applies to FreeCommander version 2009-02a.

I highly recommend the use of Drive Variables, Virtual Drive Letter, and Alternate INI files --- they make my portable FC a snap to load up, ready to use for various tasks on different computers, without further tweaking.

The second section is not really a tutorial, it is only a collection of short notes, and you may be already familiar with much of this information from reading the help file, but perhaps you will find a useful tip or two.

granny _____ o-o

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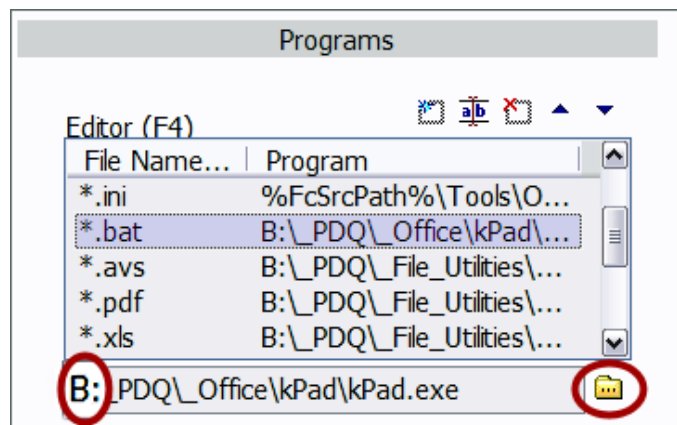
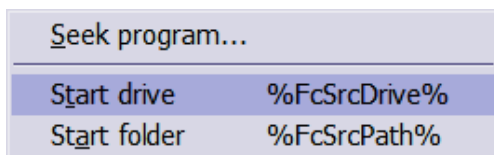
Drive Variables for portable use ---

If you run FC from a portable drive, file links are broken when drive letter changes. Using FC "variable" strings instead of a hard-coded path lets FC find your files, regardless of the actual drive letter.

You can use a variable string when you assign programs and icons to Favorite Tools custom toolbuttons, and when you configure FC to use your own external editor, viewer, and file-comparison programs; and WLX QuickViewer plugins.

- When you browse to select an item that can use a variable string, the browser menu presents the options for

Start Drive %FcSrcDrive% and **Start Folder** %FcSrcPath%



- Select desired program or file.

- To use the Drive Letter variable ---

in the Configuration Window address display, carefully delete the drive letter and the colon.

Click browser icon next to address field, then click **Start Drive** to insert %FcSrcDrive%. The variable string replaces drive letter and colon. (Or, type it in manually. You can also manually edit the INI file.)

B:_Pdq_Office\kPad\kPad.exe

Becomes ___**FcSrcDrive%**_Pdq_Office\kPad\kPad.exe

- Use %FcSrcPath% to replace all of the path including the folder where the FC executable is installed

B:_Pdq\FC\App\FreeCommander\Tools\FileSeeker\fseeker.exe

Becomes ___**FcSrcPath%**\Tools\FileSeeker\fseeker.exe

- Now FC will be able to launch the item from any drive letter.

Virtual Drive Letter for portable use ---

Some FC elements cannot use Drive Variables. So, if you want Folder Tabs that always point to your usb drive, you can make a batch file to assign the same virtual drive letter to your drive on every computer you use (if that drive letter is not already in use.) Try to pick a drive letter that will be unused on other computers. *I use **B**, computers with two floppy drives are very rare.*

If you use a virtual drive letter, you don't *have* to use Drive Variables for custom toolbuttons and External Program assignments.

Do use variables if you think your letter won't always be available.

NOTE – Administrative rights are **not** required for this procedure.

- Copy **subst.exe** (9kb) from Windows\System32 to a folder on your usb drive so the subst command can use a relative path.
- Create the batch file to assign the virtual drive letter ---
In Notepad, type the command illustrated below, using **your** chosen Drive Letter. Save to your portable drive as filetype "all files" and use extension **.bat**; such as bStart.bat

```
Code :  
Subst.exe B: \
```

- **After using a shared computer, delete the virtual drive letter**, or the "unavailable" drive will still remain, annoying future users.

Create a second batch file to delete your virtual drive letter ---

In Notepad, type the following command, and save to your portable drive as a .bat file, such as bStop.bat

```
Code :  
Subst.exe /d B:
```

- Assign the drive letter ---
Double-click the first batch file to run it. (right click if you want to Edit)
The usb drive will show under the letter that Windows assigns, and also under the virtual drive letter assigned by the batch file.
Set up tabs (and optionally, toolbuttons and External Programs) to point to the virtual drive letter.
- On the next computer, run the batch file again to assign the drive letter. Use that virtual drive letter exclusively for all activity on all computers; Tabs, History, and other elements will continue to point to the usb drive

Alternate INI Files for multiple setups ---

Custom Column Profiles can be saved for various column arrangements for files in Details mode. Custom Layouts can be saved for many different pane and tab setups. (see guides for Configuring Display Elements)

With alternate INI files, you can save multiple setups for **everything**.

You can have INI files for different toolbar setups, for different External Programs and WLX plugins, for color schemes, for anything you can find in the Settings configuration windows actually, and in endless combinations.

■ Should YOU use multiple / alternate INI files?

I have a number of reasons to do this ---

- I run FreeCommander from a portable drive on four computers, so I need setups for different screen resolutions, especially fonts.
- A few favorite programs that I configured as "external editors" won't work on Vista 64-bit, so I need to use other editors on that computer.
- Dedicated INI files for each computer preserve tab assignments and history --- no more error message "directory xxxxx not found".
- I frequently change color schemes on home computers. Work computer won't let me change color scheme from XP default.
- My video and audio projects need lots of special software, so dedicated Favorite Tools custom toolbars are important to me, but I want them out of the way when not in use.
- I like to experiment with new settings, without the work of re-creating original settings if I want them back.

If any of those ring your bell, consider setting up some more INI files.

■ Alternate SHC files

When you create custom keyboard shortcuts, the SHC file that stores the custom configurations is automatically saved with the same name as the INI currently in use.

If you use multiple INI files, save copies of the new SHC file with the corresponding names, or paste new configurations into existing SHC files.

"Alternate" SHC files automatically load along with the corresponding INI.

■ Launching FC with alternate INI files

You can use the **Run command**, a **shortcut .LNK file**, or a **batch file**, by using command-line parameter **/ini=** like this:

Enter full path and filename of the EXE file, followed by a space, then the parameter followed by the path and filename of the INI file

- If the INI is stored in the same folder as FreeCommander.exe, you don't have to enter the path for the INI, just its filename
Portable users, remember, FreeCommander**Portable**.exe is only the launcher. FreeCommander.exe is stored in \App\FreeCommander\.
- If the INI is stored in a different folder, you **must** enter its full path
- If file or folder names include spaces, you must enclose the path/filename string in double quotation marks. See third sample.

Sample strings:

```
B:\FC\FreeCommanderPortable.exe /ini=DeskGreyVid.ini
```

```
B:\FC\FreeCommanderPortable.exe /ini=B:\Test\LapBlu.ini
```

```
B:\FC\FreeCommanderPortable.exe /ini="Lap Trial.ini"
```

■ To open **Run command**, press **WIN key + R**

Enter the string, click OK to launch FreeCommander.

(in XP, you can also open Run from the Start menu.)

(in Vista, it is buried in All Programs>Accessories.

See Vista Help files for instructions to pin it to the Start menu)

■ **Shortcut file ---**

Open the folder where you want to store the shortcut,

Right-click and choose *New > Shortcut*.

When the shortcut Wizard opens, enter the string.

Click *Next*, name the shortcut, click *Finish*.

If you want a different icon, right-click the new shortcut,

click *Properties >> Change Icon*.

Browse to and choose from a DLL, EXE, or ICO icon file.

If the drive letter changes for a portable drive --- as long as you don't move the shortcut file, Windows will usually (not always) still manage to reconcile the path and launch FC successfully. (custom icons must be stored on the portable drive as well.)

■ Batch file ---

- In Notepad, type the command START, followed by a space and the string.
Save as filetype "all files" and use extension **.bat**, such as DeskGreyVid.bat
- **For a portable drive**, if a hard-coded drive letter changes, the batch file will fail. The batch file will need a "relative path".
You can try this trick, it works for me ---
Delete the drive letter and colon, as in second string shown below.
Eliminating the drive letter seems to make the path relative.
Save and run this "relative" batch file from your portable drive.
It should continue to work under different drive letters, as long as the folder structure remains the same.

Sample Batch strings:

```
START B:\FC\FreeCommanderPortable.exe /ini=DeskGrey.ini
```

```
START \FC\FreeCommanderPortable.exe /ini="Lap Trial.ini"
```

■ For what it's worth

On a previous page, I described assigning a Virtual Drive Letter for a portable drive, by copying the tiny Subst.exe tool onto the drive, and invoking it with a batch file. So this is what my batch file looks like:

```
Subst.exe B: \  
ChDir B:\  
START B:\FC\FreeCommanderPortable.exe /ini=LapBlue.ini
```

I use **Bat To Exe Converter** from www.f2ko.de/ to convert many of my batch files to exe files. This tool has the "ghost" option which hides the DOS console window. It can also compile a custom icon into the exe, so I use color-coded icons for different FC setups. ([IcoFX](#), cool tool!)

Protect your settings ---

■ Configuration armor

Before you start digging into creating new settings ----
Remember all the warnings about "no undo".

You can take steps to protect your settings from being destroyed.

- Before you start tweaking, make a backup copy of current INI file, saved to another folder, or with another name. If you are configuring Keyboard Shortcuts, back up the SHC file if one already exists.
- If you feel comfortable editing INI files, you can copy and paste just the sections you need to restore. (An INI file is just a text file, nothing to be intimidated about, I promise.)
- Do NOT manually edit the INI file while FreeCommander is running.
- If you're doing a lot of configuration, you might want to do it in stages. Periodically exit out of settings, go to menu Extras > Save Settings.

You might consider making another backup copy of the INI file right after you save settings. You can keep a separate backup for each step you saved, and that might be useful if you want to back-track.

- If you delete something by mistake, you can back out of the settings window by clicking Cancel, or clicking the top corner X close button. Unfortunately, this will lose all the work you already did in the session.

- **Most importantly, pay attention to the environment.**

You must notice which list is active, which item is highlighted and active, and which configuration icon you are going to click.

If you are careless, you will assign incorrect settings, or accidentally delete something that took so much work to set up.

For example, if you click the "Defaults" button in Keyboard Shortcuts configuration window, ALL custom shortcuts in the current SHC file are destroyed, no matter how much weeping and pleading you do.

■ Disaster Preparedness

After you have all your settings just right, you should save backup copies of your current INI and SHC files, just in case disaster strikes.

You'll spend all that time and effort tweaking, and one day, when FC opens, you will see the default settings of a new installation because your INI got corrupted somehow. I'll bet you didn't think a granny knew those words!

Prevent the pain --- Back it up.

Bits and Pieces from Granny's knitting bag

Here's a scenario to get your motor running ---

You have a folder with 10 subfolders, filled with 3,000 image files in mixed formats. You want to send all the jpegs to Aunt Jenny.

In Windows Explorer, this could be a painful task. FC makes it easy.

■ Here is one way to do it ---

Select the main folder.

CTRL + B _____ or menu **View > Flat View – files**

Flat View displays all files from folder and subfolders in a single list.

Click on any jpeg file.

ALT + Num+ _____ or menu **Edit > Select Files With Same Ext**

CTRL + S _____ or menu **View > Only View Selected Files**

With two mouse-clicks and three hotkey-presses, all your jpegs (and only the jpegs) are displayed.

■ Here's another way to do it, using Flat View again

Select the main folder.

CTRL + B _____ or menu **View > Flat View – files**

CTRL + Y _____ activates the Quick Filter Bar text field at left end of the active pane's status bar.

Type the file extension with leading asterisk into the text field: ***.jpeg**

With one mouse-click, two hotkeys, and some minimal typing, all the jpegs are displayed.

Zip them up, send them out, and wait for Aunt Jenny to send you a box of chocolate-chip cookies.

Start exploring the FC interface and commands, and learn more ways it can simplify file management, and maybe help you earn some cookies

Mouseless Mobility

Moving around the interface ---

- **ALT** activates the main Menu. Then use **RIGHT Arrow** or **LEFT Arrow** to scroll, or press the accelerator key for the menu name
F for File, **E** for Edit, **D** for Folder, **W** for View, **X** for Extras, **H** for Help.
Use arrow keys and Enter to choose a command from the drop-down.
- **TAB** toggles focus from one pane to the other (into currently active tab)
- **CTRL + TAB** cycles through tabs in sequence in the active pane.
- **SHIFT + TAB** toggles focus back and forth between the Tree and the File List in the current tab.
if you have a file or folder selected in the File List, press Shift + Tab to move the cursor focus to that item's parent folder in the Tree pane, then use arrow keys to navigate to other folders or subfolders.
Shift + Tab again to jump to the File List for the newly selected folder.

Keyboard Navigation in the Folder Tree ---

- **UP Arrow** and **DOWN Arrow** keys navigate up and down folder list
- **RIGHT Arrow** expand current folder if collapsed, else select child folder
- **LEFT Arrow** collapse current folder if expanded, else select parent folder
- **SHIFT + Num *** fully expand the tree under currently selected folder
(avoid selecting root drive, it would take a very long time to expand.)

Keyboard Navigation in the Folder Tree or File List ---

- **HOME** selects first item at top of displayed active pane
(in File List, often this will be the "double-dot" parent folder symbol).
- **END** selects the last file or folder in the active pane
- **CTRL + HOME** go to Root Folder
- **BACKSPACE** go to Parent Folder

<p>Want to use CTRL + BACKSPACE to go to Root Folder ? Enter the following line in the keyboard shortcuts SHC file. actDirRoot=Ctrl+BkSp</p>

File Window Navigation Notes

going up the path

In the Tree or File List pane, to go up ---

- **Use the small icons at right end of address bar**
"Go to root folder", "Go to upper folder"
- **Use "Hot Folder"**
Hover mouse cursor over the Address Bar, click highlighted folder.
- **Use Go-Up Strip**

menu Extras > Settings > View >
set Width of Go Up Strip 0 to 10 pixels

Go-up strips appear on outer left and right borders of FC window;
click on corresponding strip to go to upper/parent folder.

In the File List pane, to go up ---

- **Double-click the parent folder symbol** (double-dot) at top left.
(Or, press **Home** key, then **Enter**.)
- **Double-click any empty spot** in the pane

Set FC to select only Filename to ease grabbing empty space.
In the INI file [Form] section, add line **FullRowSelect=0**

Or do it the standard (boring?) way ---

- **ALT + T** or menu *View > Tree* ,
and **click your way up and down the folders in the Tree.**

Opening Folders

A folder will open in the active tab unless the tab is locked.

While in the File List, **Double-click a folder to open it in the active tab.**

to open folder with Single-Click --menu *Extras>Settings>Select*

Middle -click a folder to open it in a new tab.

Open Drive Root with Shift + <drive letter>

Such as **SHIFT + C**

Open folders from drive bar or combo-box list

Click & Pick.

OR, use **ALT + F1** to activate the left list, or **ALT + F2** for the right list, then use **Arrow** and **Enter** keys to choose a drive.

To configure how drive bar / combo-box opens folders go to menu *Settings>View>Drives>>Show With Drive Select* as **Root folder**, as **Last-Visited Folder**, or **Same as other pane**

Open folders from Folder Browser.

menu **Folder > Search** or hotkey **SHIFT + F7** opens a browser window for the entire computer directory

menu **Folder > Go To Folder** --- enter a path manually, or click browse icon for the computer directory

Open folders by editing address bar.

ALT + G or right-click address bar and choose "Edit", manually type a path. Or right-click, choose "Paste from clipboard" to paste in a copied path.

Choose "Copy to clipboard" If you want to use this address elsewhere, then Paste into the target address bar in another tab or pane.

For more copying options, right-click the small "Copy Path" icon at the right end of the address bar.

Assign folders to Favorite Folders list, or to a Favorite Tools toolbar

To assign a Favorites folder, go to menu **Folders > Favorites > Edit**,

To open a Favorite, select from the Favorites list, or use hotkey

(guide for *Display Elements > Saving Setups* has more about Favorites. *Operating Elements > Custom Toolbars* describes assigning buttons)

The Integrated Viewer

This feature lets you view supported files without having to open them in their associated program. It can display plain text, rich text, many image formats, html (using Internet Explorer), and uses Windows Media Player to play supported multimedia files.

- **F3** or menu *File > View* opens the FC Viewer in an external window and displays the selected file.
- **CTRL + Q** or menu *View > Quick View* opens the FC Viewer in the inactive pane and displays the selected file.
(Quick View will also display folder information if a folder is selected.)
TIP--- you can copy text from QuickView pane, paste into a document
- If the file is not a supported format, it is displayed in Binary code.
- To configure viewer settings, select a file, open the external viewer, go to menu *Options > Configure*
Or, in Quick View mode, right-click Quick View title bar, select *Settings*
See the FC Help file for all the details.
- If you like, you can use a third-party viewer for the External view window.
[AT / Universal Viewer](#) is recommended, and it supports WLX plugins.
Go to menu *Extras > Settings > Programs >> External Viewer* to assign your chosen viewer.
- For file formats not supported by the Viewer, try WLX “Lister” plugins (designed for Total Commander, but they can work in FreeCommander)
[totalcmd.net](#). [ghisler.com](#).

See [this wiki entry](#) for known issues with some plugins, the information applies to the FC viewer as well as the AT Universal Viewer.

My own experience with Lister plugins has been mixed.

Some work wonderfully well, some are usable but have glitches, some refuse to work for me at all. For some, success seems to depend on installed programs, even though authors don't state that in readme files.

My greatest interest is to use them in the Quick View pane, and very often they work well in the external window, but some not so well in Quick View.

You will have to experiment, I'm afraid.

Flat View

- **CTRL + B** or menu *View > Flat View - Files*
- **SHIFT + CTRL + B** or menu *View > Flat View - Folders*

Flat view shows all items from the parent and subfolders in a single list. (On slow computers, loading large numbers of files can be very slow.)

Flat View is applied only to the current folder, and is dismissed when you select a different folder or tab in the current pane.

I find it to be quite useful when used with specified Selections (such as the example in first section of this document), or in conjunction with a Defined Filter or Quick Filter.

You can, of course, locate the same list of files with Search Function, but the functions available from the search results list are limited.

With a filtered or sorted Flat View you can work with the files directly in the active tab, and all FC functions are available to move, copy, re-name, pack into archives, etc.

TIP-- It seems only Quick Filter and Defined Filters work on a Flat View list. Using Set Filter for "temporary" criteria gives me zero file names.

Filtering

- **CTRL + F** or menu *Folder > Filter > Edit* opens the Set Filter dialog.

You can filter for one or more file-types by entering file extensions
Separate multiple extensions with the leading dot,
such as `.txt .ini .log`

Or you can filter for text strings in filenames
Strings must include an asterisk wildcard at the end,
such as `glitches*` or `*glit?s*`

- For a "one-time use", enter the criteria in the top text field
- To save the criteria for re-use, you can name and define filters ---
In the Set Filter dialog, click **Define** button. Click **Add to List** icon, name the filter, and in the text fields at bottom, enter Include & Exclude criteria.
- To display your list of defined filters,
press **ALT + PageDown**, or right-click Address Bar.
Select "**All Files**" if you want to disable the active filter.

NOTE – This Filter does not include folder names in its action.
If you want to filter folder names, use the **Quick Filter bar** instead.
(see guide "*Filters and Selections*" for detailed discussion.)

Searching

- **ALT + F7** (menu *File > Search*) opens FreeCommander Search dialog.
- **CTRL + F7** opens the Windows Explorer Search dialog

Their interface is different, but features are similar:

Designate one or more folders or drives to search (multiple targets must be manually entered, separated with semicolon), select to search inside subfolders and inside compressed Archive files. You can use wildcards for filenames or for text to find inside files, Designate date ranges, attributes, size. See Help file for all the details of FC Search function.

- Unique features:

FC Search can export a list of the items it found to a text file.

Windows "Save Search" saves your parameters in a file for future re-use.
(I wish FC could do that...)

Packing & Unpacking compressed archives

FC can unpack Zip, Rar, CAB, and SFX (self-extracting) archives, pack files into Zip and CAB archives, and create SFX archives.

- **ALT + F5** pack archives
- **ALT + F6** unpack archives
- **Or** use the File menu or File # 2 Toolbar to call the functions.
 - You can drag & drop a file or folder to add it to the archive.
 - Double-click an archive to open it like a folder, and view files inside, rename, copy or delete them.

TIP— Most files can be opened for editing in their associated program, such as opening a Word document in MS Word.

Although the program will allow you to do editing work, your changes won't be saved to the archive,

BUT you can "Save As" to make another copy elsewhere, then drag that copy back into the archive to replace the original file.

- You can not drag a file out of an archive to extract it, but you can double-click to open the archive and display the contents, select the desired files, then invoke the Unpack function to extract just those files.

Please see Help file for the details of configuring and using these functions.

Copying and Moving

- **F5** Copy selected file/folder directly to current folder in the inactive pane
- **F6** Move selected file/folder directly to current folder in the inactive pane

- **CTRL + C** Copy selection (file, folder, text, image, etc) to clipboard,
CTRL + X Move selection to clipboard,
Click on target, **CTRL + V** to Paste

- Drag & Drop to another folder on the same drive by default **Moves** item
Drag & Drop to a different Drive by default **Copies** item

- Hold down **CTRL** key to force Drag & Drop to **COPY** item
Use **SHIFT** key to force it to **MOVE** item
Use **ALT** key to force creation of a **LINK** at the target
(you can use this to quickly add items to Favorite Tools custom toolbars)

- If you wish, you can disable Confirmation dialogs.
Go to menu Extras>Settings>Confirmations, and select "No Ask".

Deleting

- **F8** delete selection to Recycle Bin
(Files can be restored from Recycle Bin)

- **SHIFT + F8** delete without Recycle
(Files might possibly be recovered with third-party recovery tools)

- **SHIFT + CTRL + F8** File Wipe / Secure Deletion with over-write
(Files cannot be recovered.)

- All deletion modes request confirmation.

I can't break my Windows habits, so I manually edited the SHC file that stores custom hotkeys with this line: **actFileShred=Ctrl+Del**

So I use **DELETE** for delete to Recycler (Windows standard)

SHIFT + DELETE for delete without Recycle (Windows standard)

CTRL + DELETE for File Wipe / secure deletion

Renaming

To rename the selected file/folder,
use one of the following methods to enter editing mode :

- F2
- choose **Rename** command from File menu or right-click context menu.
- Select name to highlight it, click once gently to enter edit mode.

NOTE – If you configured FC to **Use Hot Tracking**, or to **Open files with Single Click**, you will not be able to click the name for edit mode. In these two cases, you must use F2 or the Rename command.

In the Rename dialog, enter the new name and/or file extension. Unlike Windows, FC will NOT nag you about changing file extensions, so be positive you know what you are doing. :-)

If you prefer to edit names directly in the file list, disable the Rename dialog in menu *Extras > Settings > Confirmations*.

If you have selected multiple files ---

- Right-click > Rename will edit only the focused name (unlike Windows Explorer, which renames all the selected files to the new name, adding an incrementing number to each).
- Using F2 or Rename command automatically opens Multi-Rename if you have multiple files selected.
- The "official" way to open Multi-Rename is menu *File > Multi-Rename* or **CTRL + M** (see guide "*Multi-Rename*" for details of usage.)

TIP--- Did you know? Windows Explorer won't let you name items with leading spaces or dots, but will accept them after you name them in FC or other utility.

If you use the FC Rename dialog, you cannot use a leading space, but I found that editing directly in the file list does allow that. So if you want leading spaces, disable the dialog.

In FC, if you choose "Alphabetical" sorting in menu *Extras > Settings > View*, leading spaces and leading dots will be considered in the sort sequence, and appear first.

If you choose "Natural" sorting, they are ignored.