

# Customizing vi

The Unix editor vi lets you customize its behavior in a number of ways. There are two ways to customize vi. The first way is to enter command mode by hitting Escape, then type a colon and the command as it is shown.

The second way is to create a file called .exrc in your home directory. Each command goes on its own line, and the commands are parsed as though you typed them directly in vi. There are a couple rules your .exrc needs to follow:

- No blank lines are allowed.
- Directives must be typed on a single line.
- Lines beginning with double quotes (") are marked as comments and are ignored.

## Setting options

vi has some options which take values, and other options which are either on or off. To set an option with some value, type `|set [option]=[value]|`. To turn a boolean option on, type `|set [option]|`, and to turn it off type `|set no[option]|`. Here are a few examples which will demonstrate the syntax as well as list some useful options.

- `|set tabstops=4|` – sets tabstop width to 4 spaces
- `|set autoindent|` – turns on auto-indent
- `|set ignorecase|` – ignores case for searching
- `|set showmatch|` – highlights matching parentheses and brackets when you type them
- `|set nowrapscan|` – searches will not wrap around to the beginning when they reach the end

Most options have abbreviations. You can find a full list of options, their abbreviations, and what they do at: <http://ex-vi.sourceforge.net/ex.html#11>

## Abbreviations

By setting an abbreviation, vi will replace any occurrence of the abbreviation you type with the full phrase. To set an abbreviation, type `|abbr [abbreviation] [full phrase]|`. For example: `|abbr _ssc Social Sciences Computing|` will take effect whenever you type “\_ssc”. You don’t need to type any special commands, it will be replaced as you type.

# Mappings

Mappings are just like abbreviations except they work in command mode rather than typing mode. You can set a map to perform a common task, like common replacements or insertions. You can put as many commands as you like into the mapping. The syntax for mappings is: `map`  
`[ abbreviation] [ command list]`

An example of a useful mapping would be one that spellchecks a word:

```
map teh :%s/teh/the/g
```

This executes a document-wide replacement command (teh → the) whenever you type “teh” in command mode. Note that you can use colon-prefixed commands here too. Also note that a better way to solve the above spellchecker would be to say: `abbr teh the` and vi would spellcheck as you type. ;)

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A sample .exrc file which demonstrates a lot of features can be found at:

<http://grox.net/doc/unix/exrc.php>

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Revision #1

Created Mon, Oct 16, 2006 6:21 PM by Rozett, Keith

Updated Mon, Oct 16, 2006 6:21 PM by Rozett, Keith