



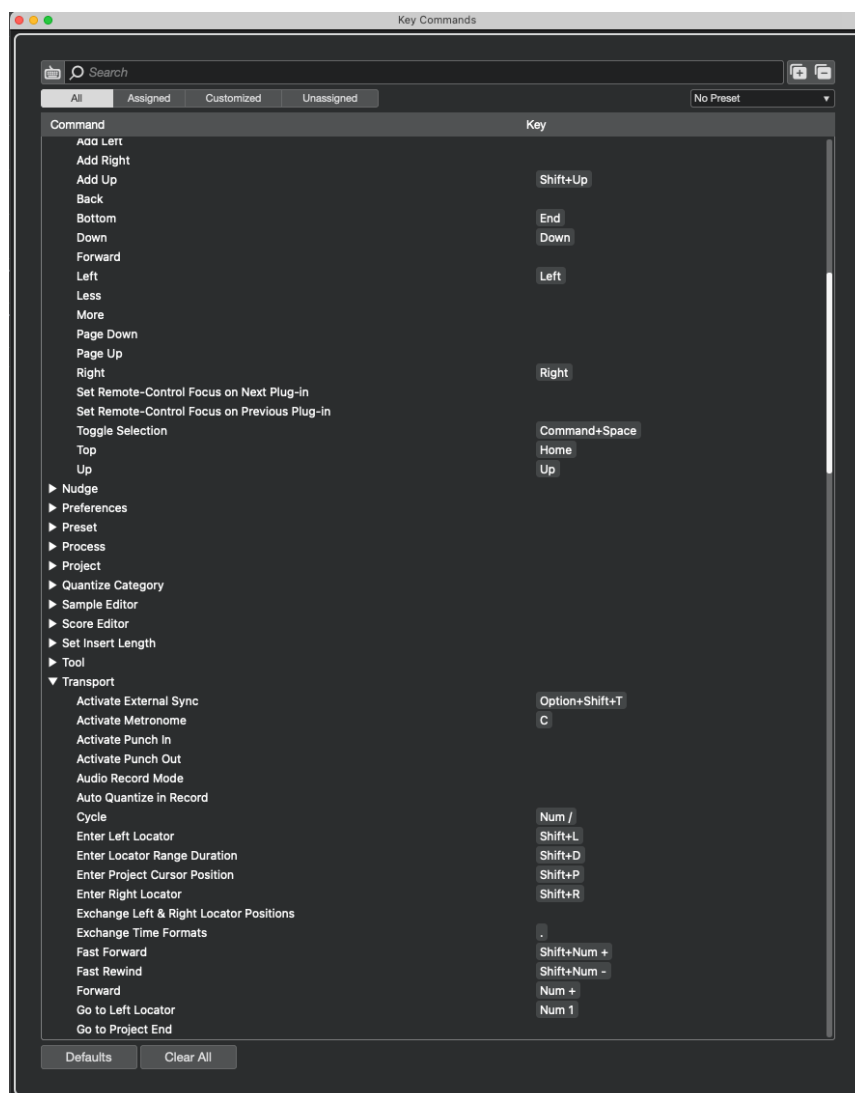
Getting started with **Cubase** **Key Commands**

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25 Cubase Key Commands And Why They Mean You Make More Music

For those just starting their own music production journey with Cubase, it's very likely that you would prefer for the technical aspects of using Cubase to be as frictionless as possible so you can focus on the creative aspects of your music projects. And, while it might seem a little unintuitive to be taking about something that sounds as technical as Key Commands (keyboard shortcuts) in order to achieve that, this is very much a case of a small investment of time now bringing a huge saving of time later. For an efficient workflow within Cubase, Key Commands are definitely your friend.

Cubase has dedicated window – the Key Commands dialog - that allows you to view the default Key Command assignments (Cubase ships with a substantial number of preset Key Command assignments), change assignments or add new ones. As you gain more experience with the software, you will soon realise which commands you use most often in a typical Cubase session and those are the commands you should seek out within the Key Commands dialog and add to your ‘must learn’ shortcut to-do list.



Available in Elements, Artist and Pro versions, the Key Commands dialog lets you browse, search and edit Key Command assignments for pretty much every command within Cubase.

However, if you want some personal suggestions to get you started, here are 25 of my own ‘most used’ Key Commands and, if you even commit just a few of these to memory, you will soon realise what a time saver they represent. These are in no absolute order but a few of the more obvious ones are listed first. Beyond that, just scan through the list and see what might catch your eye. Then, just try to break the mouse/menu habit and get some Key Commands into your muscle memory. Where required, both MacOS and Windows versions are provided.

1 Start/stop playback (spacebar)

Yes, it’s such an obvious place to begin but simply being able to trigger playback of your Cubase project via the spacebar rather than having to move your mouse over to the Transport Panel every time you want to start/stop playback will, over the course of even a single session, save you a whole bunch of time. Maybe the only thing that can beat it is if you have dedicated hardware transport controls on something like your MIDI keyboard but, even then, those controls are going to have to be sitting pretty close by your hand to make them faster than your computer’s spacebar key.

2 Undo (CMD+z or CTRL+z)

This one is something of a universal standard in almost any computer software but it’s present and works as expected within Cubase. Just the thing when you have deleted an important track or audio/MIDI clip from you project and instantly regretted it. Yes, Cubase does have a full History panel (found within the Edit menu) but the Undo Key Command lets you quickly catch your most obvious mistakes in a flash.

3 Save Project (CMD+s or CTRL+s)

No, you don’t want to lose your latest work on a project by quitting and accidentally not saving all the work you have just done, so get into the habit of hitting this particular Key Command in some mental downtime as you work. Incidentally, if you add the Shift key to this combo, then you get ‘Save As....’ And can save a new version of your project with a different name.

4 Toggle MixConsole open/closed (F3)

The Project window and the MixConsole window are where you will spend the vast majority of your time in any Cubase session – and, of course, going back and forth between the two. With the Project window open and filling most of your screen, hitting F3 lets you instantly open the MixConsole and, when done, F3 will close it again. Life is too short not to know this one.

5 Open VST Instrument (of selected track)(no preset key assigned)

Virtual instruments are a big part of my own music production workflow and, as such I regularly need to toggle open/closed the UI for these instruments to select sound presets or adjust sound parameters. There is a Key Command for just that and that applies to the currently selected track within the Project window but, by default, it doesn’t have a Key Command assigned to it. So, pick a suitable key (or key combo) in the Edit section of the Key Commands dialog (I reassigned the ‘I’ key for this as I don’t use the command that is assigned to by default very often). It works from within the MixConsole as well.

6 Open Channel Settings window (of selected track)(E)

Whether it’s just for basic EQ or compression moves, or for more detailed processing on a specific channel, being able to quickly toggle open/closed the Channel Settings

window for the currently selected track/channel is a big timesaver. This one's easy; just press the E key for instant access.

The suggestions so far represent some of the more obvious easy wins when using Key Commands. However, some of the best workflow gains are to be found (unsurprisingly!) where you do the most work and, for that, we need to focus on some of the most useful Key Command options that provide streamlined navigation around the Project window.

7 Go To Project Start (the ‘,’ (comma) key)

Want to easily move the cursor position back to the very start of bar 1? Just hit the ‘,’ – that's the comma key on your computer keyboard – and the job is done.

8 Forward/Rewind Cursor (Shift+Num+ and Shift+Num-)

Two for the price of one here but, again, the default assignments use the number pad on your computer keyboard. These two let you fast-forward or rewind the cursor position (but without scrubbing the audio), making it easy to move around along the timeline of your project.

9 Zoom In/Out Horizontally (H and G)

Two for the price of one again here but, for all the excellent design elements contained within the Project window, the zoom controls (located bottom right) are pretty tiny and on a high resolution monitor, can take some delicate mouse control. It's much easier to use are these two simple Key Commands.

10 Zoom In/Out Horizontally (Shift+H and Shift+G)

The same goes for zooming in/out vertically.... and all you have to do it add the Shift key to the previous entries in the list.

The next to suggestions also relate to speedy setting of a suitable zoom level within the Project window and can be used in combination with each other.

11 Set Locators To Selection Range (P)

If you have selected a specific audio/MIDI clip, or set of clips within the project window (yes, even if you have done this with your mouse!), hitting the P key will automatically place the left and right locators around this selection. This is great if you need to loop playback around a specific section of your project.

12 Zoom To Locators (not assigned by default – I use the O key)

If you have just used the P Key Command above, Zoom To Locators then precisely zooms in to this section of the project along the timeline. It's not defined by default, but you can find it in the Zoom section of the Key Commands dialog. I've assigned this one to the O key and I use P followed by O as a combo (next to each other on a standard keyboard layout) all the time to set the locators around the song section I want to work on and then zoom into that section.

When you are working on audio or MIDI clips within the Project window's timeline, it's very useful to be able to switch between some of the key tools contained within the toolbar without dragging your mouse up to the toolbar each time you need to switch. Your specific use of each of these tools may vary but, for me, I'd start with the following four.

14 Object Selection Tool (1)

The standard tool used for selecting – and then moving – clips around the project window; just hit the ‘1’ key on your keyboard.

15 Split Tool (3)

The standard ‘scissors’ tool used for splitting an audio or MIDI event. Switch to the tool, and then just hover over the object (or multiple objects if you have more than one currently selected), then click at the appropriate point. Just hit the ‘3’ key to switch to this tool.

16 Glue Tool (4)

The standard ‘glue stick’ tool used for joining audio or MIDI clips together. Just hit the ‘4’ key to switch to this tool.

17 Mute Tool (7)

The standard ‘X’ mute tool lets you mute an individual audio/MIDI clip (or multiple clips at the same time if you drag out across a selection. This can be really useful; if you want to simply experiment with dropping specific performances in/out of a song section but without actually deleting those clips until you have decided they are surplus to requirements. Just hit the ‘7’ key to switch to this tool.

There is a lot of functionality contained within the Project window’s Lower Zone so it makes sense to be able to access some of it in double-quick time.

18 Show/Hide Lower Zone (Cmd+Opt+E; Ctrl+Alt+E)

You can toggle the Lower Zone open using the default key combination shown above (for MacOS or Windows) but, frankly, if you use this a lot, I’d be tempted to reassign the default three key combo to a single key option even if it means sacrificing one of the other preset Key Commands that you use less often.

19 Open MixConsole in the Lower Zone (Opt+F3; Alt+F3)

If you want to force the Lower Zone to open with the MixConsole tab selected (rather than whichever tab had previously been selected when the Lower Zone was last opened), then this key combo gets you there fast.

Incidentally, there are other Key Commands available within the Editors section of the Key Commands dialog to open the Lower Zone with the Sample Editor, Key Editor or Drum Editor selected. As pretty much every Cubase user would use these on a regular basis, it makes sense to assign a suitable Key Command to speed up access.

There are, of course, dozens of further options we could add to this list but let’s wrap things up with a few of my other ‘most often used’ Key Command choices. Your mileage may vary.... ☺

20 Add Track Dialog (T)

Every new project requires you to add some new tracks and you can do that easily by popping open the Add Track dialog with a single press of the T key on your computer keyboard.

21 Open Video Player (F8)

Some of my own work involves music-to-picture so being able to quickly pop the Video Player window open/closed is always useful.

22 Place Cursor At Left Locator (Num Pad 1)

It's often useful to set the cursor position back to the Left Locator to restart playback of your cycle region; if you have a number pad on your keyboard, just press the '1' key. If you don't have a number pad, this is another good candidate to reassign (it's in the Transport section of the Key Commands dialog).

23 Enable/Disable Snapping (J)

When moving audio/MIDI clips within the timeline, sometimes you want Snapping on and sometimes you want it off; just toggle between these two states with the J key. Incidentally, this also works within the Key or Drum Editor but note it applies to whichever environment is currently in us (it doesn't change the Snapping status globally).

24 Activate Retrospective Recording (Shift+Num *)

If you find yourself noodling on a virtual instrument and realise you have just played a great idea but without record being activated, then fear not; just hit the Shift+Num * (the multiply 'star' symbol on your computer keyboard's number pad). The most recent MIDI performance will be captured into a MIDI clip to save the day. Again, those without a number pad keyboard might want to consider reassigning this one within the Transport section....

25 Open The Key Commands Dialog (not assigned; I use the K key)

Given just how useful Key Commands can be in streamlining your workflow, it kind of makes sense that you can access the Key Commands dialog swiftly to check or change an assignment. Amazingly, there is no Key Command assigned for this by default. You can do just that within the Edit section. I've done just this and simply picked the K key for the task.

Key Command Presets

Once you have invested some time into learning the most important Key Command options that suit your workflow – and particularly if you have customised any of the Key Command options (for example, by assigning a Key Command to a function you use that, by default, didn't have a key combination assigned to it), then it's a very good idea to create a Key Command preset.

Top-right of the Key Commands window is a small drop-down menu. This allows you to load an existing Key Command preset and also offers you the option to save your own preset. A small 'naming' dialog then pops open and, once you hit the OK, button, the job's done. If you open the drop-down menu again, your new Key Command preset should be preset within the selection list.

Such a preset allows you to reload your specific Key Command preferences into Cubase and is obviously useful if, for some reason, the Key Command system gets reset (perhaps if you do a fresh install of Cubase?) or if you want to take your Key Command preferences and use them on a different computer. These are saved as a .xml file – for example, MyKCPreset v1.xml – and while the location on your hard drive system depends upon your OS (Windows vs MacOS), once you know the format of the file name, you ought to be able to search using your OS file browser to find it. Make a note of the location.... you should then be able to copy the file to a flash drive and, with a bit of luck, place it in the same location on a different computer.

Start From Scratch?

When you open the Key Commands window, the buttons located towards the top-left allow you to toggle what's displayed within the window with All, Assigned, Customised and Unassigned being your options. Given just how extensive the Key Command options are (a huge number of Cubase commands can be triggered via a Key Command), the full list can be a bit intimidating at first so, being able to both 'search' for a specific Key Command, or to focus the display on just those Key Commands that you have configured, can be very useful.

The default Key Command settings have been arrived at by Steinberg over the extensive history of Cubase as a product. However, there will be a huge number of default assignments that you might never really need.... but that you find use up useful key assignments (or key combinations) that you might think make good choices for Key Commands that you *do* want to use.

Once you have been using Cubase for a little while, and perhaps built up a better idea of the key Commands that you use all the time, one slightly nuclear approach to building your own Key Command assignments is simply remove all the default assignments and start from scratch. Make a preset of your current Key Command settings first (as described above) and then simply hit the Clear All button (located bottom-left).

Don't worry too much; you can use the 'Defaults' button to restore the default Key Command assignments if you need or your own Key Command preset that you have just created. However, with a totally blank slate, you can then just add Key Command assignments to just the commands that you use most often and, because all the key and key combination options are now undefined, you can pick exactly the key options that work best for you. Yes, you will undoubtedly have to put a little effort in as you discover some basic Key Command assignments that you have removed and now realise you actually use.... but in the long run, you can end up with a much cleaner collection of assignments that really do speed up your workflow.

Even Faster Workflow With Macros

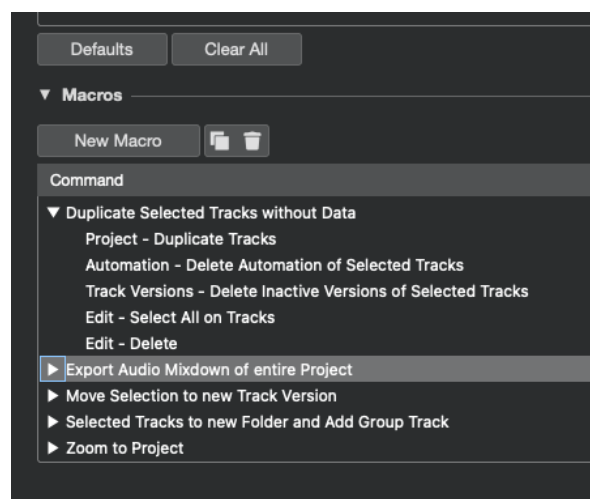
Key Commands are a true gamechanger for anyone who uses Cubase on a regular basis. However, if you are using either the Artist or Pro versions of the software, then you can actually take this workflow streamlining up a further notch using Macros.

You can think of a Macro as combining two or more Key Commands into a sequence. So, for example, if you regularly find yourself combining multiple Key Commands for a specific part of your Cubase workflow, then a Macro would be a good candidate.... And, because you can then assign a single Key Command to trigger that Macro, you can work even faster.

The Macro options are built into the bottom of the Key Commands window for Artist and Pro users. Here, you can ‘record’ a sequence of commands (Key Commands) as a new Macro and, once you have the sequence you want, you can then assign a further Key Command to trigger the Macro itself; one key Command then executes the entire sequence of (Key) commands contained within the macro. It’s not always the most intuitive process but, for the true Cubase ninja, it’s a powerful option for squeezing a little more out of your workflow efficiency.

If you want to explore an example, then take a look at the Duplicate Selected Tracks Without Data macro shown here. Imagine you have set up an audio track to record an electric guitar part and already pre-configured a set of Insert plugins (amp sim, EQ, compressor, reverb, delay, etc) but then decide you need an identical track to record a second part with the same sound. This can be done in a flash by executing the macro and, hey-presto, a duplicate track appears with all the same settings/inserts but without the audio data from the first.

You can see the contents of the macro below. It combines a number of different individual Key Commands into a sequence to achieve something really useful. And, of course, if you assign a Key Command to the macro, you can execute it instantly without opening the Key Commands window or having to visit the main Edit menu and accessing the Macros section.



For Artist/Pro users, the contents of the Duplicate Selected Tracks without Data Macro can be viewed in the Macro panel at the bottom of the Key Commands dialog....

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