

Elisp Cheat Sheet

Links

- GNU Emacs Lisp Reference Manual:
 - [GNU Emacs Lisp Coding Conventions](#)
 - [Customization Settings](#)
 - [Standard Symbol Properties](#)
 - [Window Frame Parameters](#)
 - [Window Parameters](#)
- Regular Expressions:
 - Free Software Foundation: [Emacs Lisp - Syntax of Regular Expressions](#)
 - Free Software Foundation: [Emacs Lisp - Table of Syntax Classes](#)
 - EmacsWiki: [Regular Expression](#)
 - Jan Goyvaerts: [POSIX Bracket Expressions](#)
 - IEEE and The Open Group: [The Open Group Base Specifications Issue 7 - Regular Expressions](#)

Assignment

- define a symbol as variable and assign an (possibly calculated) initial value: `(defvar sym &optional init "doc")`
- do the same as `defvar`, but define `sym` as a constant variable:¹⁾ `(defconst sym init "doc")`
- declare a symbol as a customizable variable, with a default value `init`: `(defcustom sym init "doc" &rest args)`
- assign a value to a symbol, also evaluating the symbol (not only the value): `(set 'sym val)`
- assign values to variables (dependencies allowed, does not evaluate `var`): `(setq var val ...)`
- assign default values to variables (dependencies allowed): `(setq-default var val ...)`
- call a function with `args`, one after another: `(apply fun &rest args)`

(Not) Eval

- temp. bind some variables (overwriting outer variables of same name), then evaluate body:²⁾ `let`
- do the same as `let`, but dependencies between assigned (init) values in variable bindings are allowed: `let*`
- evaluate body (multiple statements) as a single statement: `(progn ...)`
- return a (self-quoting, not evaluated) lambda expression: `(lambda ...)`

Control

- *if..else* control structure: `(if condition ...)`
- and without an *else* path: `(when condition ...)`

- an equivalent to (when (not condition) ...) is: (unless condition ...)
- try each clause until success: (cond ...)

Simple Lists

- make a list:
 - '(a b c d)
 - (quote a b c d)
 - (list a b c d)
 - (append a b '(c d))
- add element *elt* to list *lst*: (add-to-list 'lst elt)
- concatenate any number of lists: (nconc &rest lists)
- is element *elt* a member of list *lst*: (member elt lst)
- or, to get a true boolean value: (not (null (member elt lst)))
- get the first element from a list: (car lst)
- get a list starting from the second element of *lst*: (cdr lst)
- get the second element (see prev. two lines): (car (cdr lst)), or (cadr lst)
- get the n-th element: (nth n lst)
- set the first element of a list to a new value: (setcar lst val)
- number of elements in a list: (length lst)
- iterate over all list elements: (dolist ...)
- stringify and concatenate all list elements: (mapconcat ...)
- apply a function to all list elements: (mapc fun seq)
- apply a function to all elements of a sequence³⁾ and make a list from the results: (mapcar fun seq)
- find a key in *car* of list elements: (assoc key lst)

Association Lists (Alist)

Alists can be seen as simple lists with special elements (so called *cons* cells), representing an association between *key* and *val*.

- make a *cons* cell for an association between *key* and *val*: (cons key val)
- or, the same as above: '(key . val)
- get the association for *key* in *alist*: (assq key alist)
- get the (reverse) association for *val* in *alist*: (rassoc val alist)
- make a copy of an *alist* (using *cl-lib*): (copy-alist alist)

Strings

- test if object is a string: (stringp obj)
- compare two strings: (string= str1 str2)
- test if string matches a regular expression: (string-match-p regexp str)

Symbols

- test if symbols value is not void (symbol exist): `(boundp sym)`
- test if symbols function definition is not void (function exist): `(fboundp sym)`
- test if object is a function: `(functionp obj)`
- quote a function name (for byte-compile):⁴⁾ `(function fun)`, or `#'fun`
- call *fun* (this might be a variable, else quote it) with *args*: `(funcall fun args..)`
- get the symbol name as string `(symbol-name sym)`
- make/reference a symbol from a name (string): `(intern name)`
- get function definition: `(symbol-function sym)`
- set function definition: `(fset sym def)`
- get symbol property:⁵⁾ `(get sym prop)`
- set symbol property: `(put sym prop val)`
- remove property from symbol (using `cl-lib`): `(remprop sym prop)`

Files

- return directory component from name: `(file-name-directory filename)`
- return last component from path: `(directory-file-name dirname)`
- extract filename from path: `(file-name-nondirectory filename)`
- interpret filename as directory:⁶⁾ `(file-name-as-directory filename)`
- convert to canonical, absolute filename: `(expand-file-name filename)`
- convert to relative filename: `(file-relative-name filename)`
- substitute home directory path by `"~"`: `(abbreviate-file-name filename)`
- file predicates: `(file-exists-p ...)`, `(file-regular-p ...)`, `(file-readable-p ...)`, `(file-remote-p ...)`
- read directory name from input: `(read-directory-name ...)`
- variable with path to `"~/emac.d"`: `user-emacs-directory`
- variable with current directory: `default-directory`

Shell

- execute shell command: `(shell-command ...)`
- execute within modified environment

```
(let ((process-environment ...))
  (shell-command ...))
```

- execute with `sudo`

```
(let ((default-directory "/sudo::"))
  (shell-command "ls"))
```

Interactive

- call interactive command with prefix argument programmatically

```
(let ((current-prefix-arg '(4))) ; with C-u take symbol under point
  (call-interactively #'grep)) ; autoloads `grep'
```

- pass-through current-prefix-arg to interactively called command⁷⁾

```
(defun my-interactive-command ()
  (interactive)
  (call-interactively #'grep))
```

- copy/re-use the interactive specification of another command

```
(eval
  `(defun rho/ispell-change-dictionary (dict &optional arg)
     "Do the same as original (advised) function `ispell-change-dictionary',
     but (in addition) update the Flyspell mode lighter with the current
     dictionary."
     ,(interactive-form 'ispell-change-dictionary) ; (interactive
     ...))
  :
  :)
```

Major Modes

- a sample mode, derived from c-mode:

```
;; sample-mode.el -*- coding: utf-8 -*-
;;
;; Sample Mode
;; Copyright (C) 2017 Ralf Hoppe <ralf.hoppe@dfcgen.de>
;;

(defvar sample-mode-hook nil)

(defconst sample-mode-syntax-table
  (let ((table (make-syntax-table)))
    (modify-syntax-entry ?\" \"\|\" table) ; string delimiter

    (modify-syntax-entry ?/ "<124" table)
    (modify-syntax-entry ?* "<23b" table)
    (modify-syntax-entry ?\n ">b" table) ; \n is comment end for (only) C++
    style
    (modify-syntax-entry ?# "<" table)
    table))
```

```
(defconst sample-font-lock-keywords
  '(("\\(builtin1\\|builtin2\\)\\>" . font-lock-builtin-face)
    ("\\<(keyword1\\|keyword2\\)\\>" . font-lock-keyword-face)
    ("\\<(type1\\|type2\\)\\>" . font-lock-type-face)
    ("\\<Sample[0-9a-zA-Z_]*\\>" . font-lock-function-name-face)
    ("\\<(SAMPLE\\|Sample_\\)[0-9a-zA-Z_]*\\>" . font-lock-constant-face)
  ))

(define-derived-mode sample-mode c-mode "Sample" :syntax-table sample-mode-
syntax-table
  (set (make-local-variable 'font-lock-defaults) '(sample-font-lock-
keywords))
  (set (make-local-variable 'indent-line-function) 'c-indent-line)
  (setq-local comment-start "// ")
  (setq-local comment-end "")
  (font-lock-fontify-buffer)
  (run-hooks 'sample-mode-hook))

(add-to-list 'auto-mode-alist '(("\\.sample\\'" . sample-mode))

(when (featurep 'speedbar)
  (speedbar-add-supported-extension ".sample"))

(provide 'sample-mode)
```

1)

Citation from Emacs help: *This declares that neither programs nor users should ever change the value. This constancy is not actually enforced by Emacs Lisp, but the symbol is marked as a special variable so that it is never lexically bound.*

2)

For details see the article by Artur Malabarba: [Understanding letf and how it replaces flet.](#)

3)

A sequence may be a list, a vector, a bool-vector, or a string.

4)

Strictly avoid using quote for that. For details see the article by Artur Malabarba: [Get in the habit of using sharp quote.](#)

5)

For standard symbol properties (plist) see [Emacs Lisp Manual.](#)

6)

Under **NIX* appends a trailing slash, if not already present.

7)

There is nothing special todo in this case, because `current-prefix-arg` is retained during interactive command processing.

From:

<https://wiki.rho62.de/> - rho62 Wiki

Permanent link:

<https://wiki.rho62.de/doku.php?id=programming:elisp&rev=1771257584>

Last update: **2026/02/16 16:59**

