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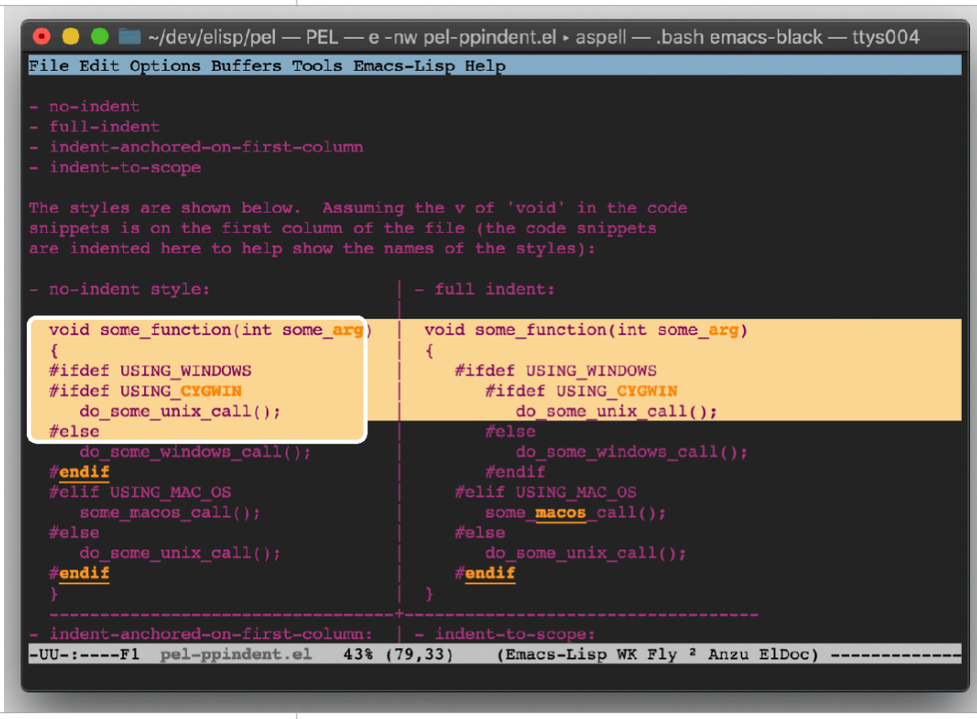
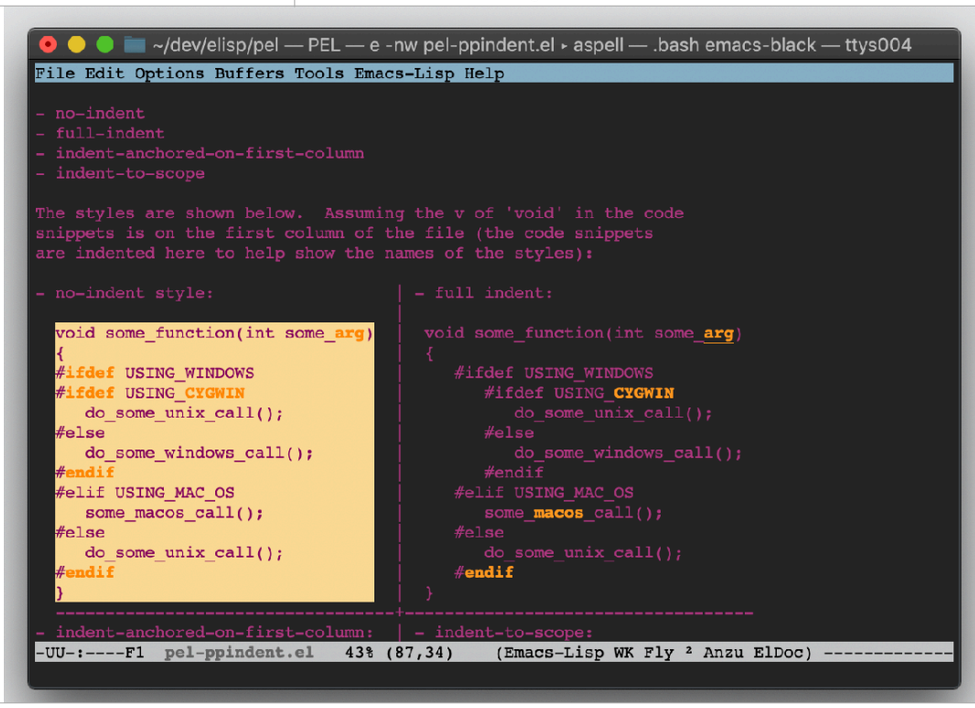
Rectangles

Operation	Keystroke	Function	Note
Rectangles ○ Set rectangle area ○ Copy/Kill/Paste/Fill/Replace rectangle text • ledit-rectangle-mode ○ Picture mode rectangle Last updated on:	Emacs provide commands that operate on rectangle areas of text. • The commands operate on the rectangle area made of the **opposite corners of the point and mark**. • You must first identify the rectangle area with the commands described in the "Setting the the rectangle area" section blow. • Once this is done you can operate on the rectangle text with the commands identified in the next section, : "Operate on rectangle text". Emacs provide other specialized modes to operate on rectangle. Listed in the following sections. 2025-09-26		
Setting the rectangle area See also: Σ **Drawing**	Define the rectangle area with: • The standard **set-mark-command** as shown in the first screen shot below. However, when you use that, the highlighted area "*bleeds*" outside what constitutes the rectangle. You must remember that the rectangle is made of the opposite corners including the corner identifying the position when you issued the command. • The **rectangle-mark-mode** command provides a *better visual feedback* as it only highlights the area that constitutes the rectangle as shown in the second screenshot below. ☝Remember that normally you cannot place your cursor in "void" space (positions that do not correspond to a character inside a buffer or file). That would prevent you from easily navigating vertically over ares where there is no text. To solve this problem simply activate a drawing mode while defining your rectangle: the **artist-mode** or **picture-mode** will both do. These modes allow you to place your cursor anywhere on window screen. • PEL binds **`<f1> D a`** to toggle artist-mode and **`<f1> D p`** to toggle picture-mode. You can also use **`M-x`** to issue the command.		
Set mark & activate/ deactivate it See also: Σ **Marking**	• **`C-SPC`** • **`C-@`** • **`<f1> . s`**	(**set-mark-command** ARG)	Set the mark where point is and toggle its activation. • If mark was not active it activates it: moving the cursor further will show the marked area (the region) if transient mode is enabled (the default in Emacs). • If the mark is active, de-activates it. ☝Issuing the command twice (**`C-SPC C-SPC`**) sets the mark location and de-activates it. You can use this command to create a rectangle: the rectangle will not show explicitly, in the example below it is defined by the top-left and bottom-right corners of the marked area that is highlighted.
☝ set-mark-command marks **more** than what constitutes the rectangle; the rectangle is what's inside the white box, graphically overlayed on the image (*not by Emacs*).			
Toggle rectangle Mark Mode See also: Σ **Marking**	**`C-x SPC`**	(**rectangle-mark-mode** &optional ARG)	Toggle the region as rectangular. • Activates the region if needed. Only lasts until the region is deactivated. • When this mode is active, the region-rectangle is highlighted and can be shrunk/grown, and the standard kill and yank commands operate on it. See the screenshot below, where the mark was activated with **`C-x SPC`** on the first letter of the word "void" and then the cursor moved down right to highlight a rectangle. Nothing "*bleeds*" outside of the rectangle.
			

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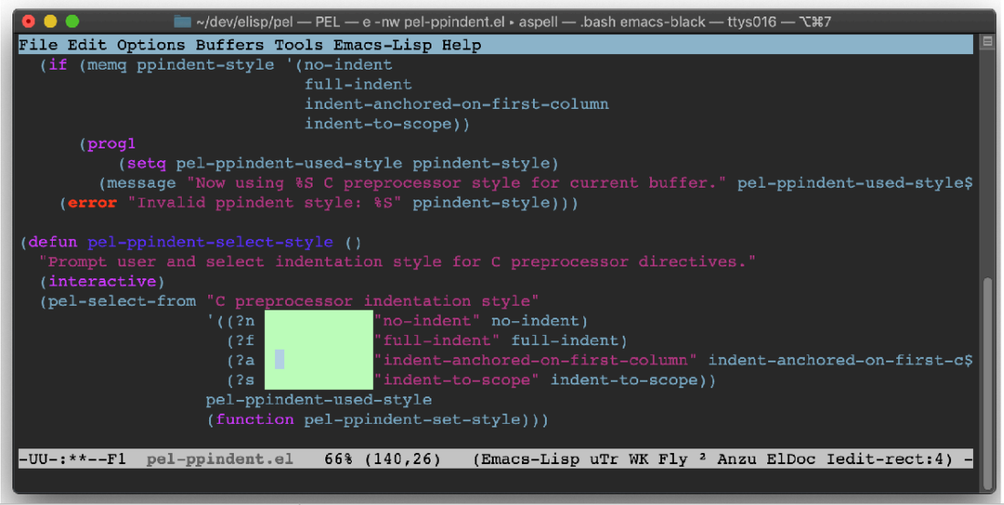
Operate on Rectangle Text	With the rectangle area defined with one of the 2 methods described above, you can issue the following commands to operate on that text.		
Copy/Save rectangle text See also: Σ **Cut & Paste**	• **C-x r M-w** • **<f11> = r**	(**copy-rectangle-as-kill** START END)	Copy the region-rectangle and save it as the last killed one.
Kill text in rectangle See also: • Σ **Cut & Paste**	• **C-x r k** • **<f11> - r**	(**kill-rectangle** START END &optional FILL)	Delete the region-rectangle and save it as the last killed one. • If the buffer is read-only, Emacs will *beep* and refrain from deleting the rectangle, but put it in 'killed-rectangle' anyway. This means that ou can use this command to copy text from a read-only buffer. (If the variable 'kill-read-only-ok' is non-nil, then this won't even beep.)
Delete rectangle text	**C-x r d**	(**delete-rectangle** START END &optional FILL)	Delete (don't save) text in the region-rectangle. • The same range of columns is deleted in each line starting with the line where the region begins and ending with the line where the region ends. • With a prefix (or a FILL) argument, also fill lines where nothing has to be deleted.
Yank last killed rectangle	**C-x r y**	(**yank-rectangle**)	Yank the last killed rectangle with upper left corner at point.
Fill rectangle with space	**C-x r o**	(**open-rectangle** START END &optional FILL)	Blank out the region-rectangle, shifting text right. • The text previously in the region is not overwritten by the blanks, but instead winds up to the right of the rectangle. • With a prefix (or a FILL) argument, fill with blanks even if there is no text on the right side of the rectangle.
Insert line numbers to left or rectangle	**C-x r N**	(**rectangle-number-lines** START END START-AT &optional FORMAT)	Insert numbers in front of the region-rectangle. • With a prefix argument, prompt for START-AT and FORMAT.
Clear rectangle - replace text with space	**C-x r c**	(**clear-rectangle** START END &optional FILL)	Blank out the region-rectangle. • The text previously in the region is overwritten with blanks. • With a prefix (or a FILL) argument, also fill with blanks the parts of the rectangle which were empty.
Replace rectangle content with specified string on each line	**C-x r t**	(**string-rectangle** START END STRING)	Replace rectangle contents with STRING on each line. • The length of STRING need not be the same as the rectangle width. • When called interactively and option 'rectangle-preview' is non-nil, display the result as the user enters the string into the minibuffer. ☝ This command can be used to draw vertical lines in tables, using | as the character with a rectangle over the specific column. See this example.
Delete whitespace in rectangle lines		(**delete-whitespace-rectangle** START END &optional FILL)	Delete all whitespace following a specified column in each line. • The left edge of the rectangle specifies the position in each line at which whitespace deletion should begin. • On each line in the rectangle, all contiguous whitespace starting at that column is deleted. • With a prefix (or a FILL) argument, also fill too short lines.
Insert string on each rectangle line		(**string-insert-rectangle** START END STRING)	Insert STRING on each line of region-rectangle, shifting text right. • This command does not delete or overwrite any existing text.
iedit-rectangle-mode See Σ **Search/Replace** for more info on **iedit** .	The **iedit-rectangle-mode** also allow editing rectangle areas of text. • Like other rectangle commands, you must first mark a rectangle area using the set-mark-command (**C-SPC**). See above. • In this mode the following commands are available. ⚠ However the other standard rectangle commands above do not always work with it. 📦 Requires the **iedit** external package. PEL downloads, installs and activates it when either **pel-use-iedit** or **pel-use-lispy** user options is set to **t**.		
Toggle the iedit-rectangle-mode First mark a rectangle (which commands described in first page), then issue the command to create the rectangle.	**C-x r RET**	(**iedit-rectangle-mode** &optional BEG END)	When Iedit-rect mode is on, a rectangle is started with visible rectangle highlighting. • Rectangle editing support is based on Iedit mechanism. • First select a region using marking. Use set-mark-command (bound to **C-SPC**) and then move point to the opposite corner of the rectangle. • ☝ Useful to insert or remove vertical spacing or editing tabular data. • PEL activates this key binding on startup when either **pel-use-iedit** or **pel-use-lispy** user options is set to **t**
		In the following example the iedit-rectangle-mode is used to delete a rectangle of whitespace inside the text to un-indent inside code. Once the rectangle is highlighted (using a color different from other rectangle commands), any key typed inside the rectangle is applied on all row of the rectangle on specific column. Use the DEL key to delete 1 rectangle column at a time. You can move the cursor inside the rectangle.	
Kill text in rectangle	**M-K**	(**iedit-kill-rectangle** &optional FILL)	Kill the rectangle: delete the region-rectangle and save it as the last killed one. • The behavior is the same as 'kill-rectangle' in rect mode.
Replace all rectangle text with space characters	**M-SPACE**	(**iedit-blank-occurrences**)	Replace the text inside the rectangle with blank spaces.
Insert line numbers in each line of rectangle	**M-N**	(**iedit-number-occurrences** START-AT &optional FORMAT-STRING)	Insert numbers in front of each line of the rectangle • START-AT, if non-nil, should be a number from which to begin counting. • When called interactively with a prefix argument, such as **C-u**, prompt for START-AT and FORMAT, a format string using printf style formatting. • FORMAT, if non-nil, should be a format string to pass to 'format-string' along with the line count. The default is "%03s".
Switch to multiple cursor mode	**M-M**	(**iedit-switch-to-mc-mode**)	Switch to **multiple-cursors-mode**, allowing you to navigate out of the occurrence and edit simultaneously with multiple cursors. See Σ **Cursor**
Quit edit-mode	**C-g**	(**iedit-quit**)	Quit edit-rectangle-mode. Must be typed inside the rectangle to take effect.



Operation	Keystroke	Function	Note
Picture Mode Rectangle Commands See also: Σ **Drawing**	• The following commands allow drawing rectangles in the buffer as well as copy and remove them. • They also allow storing the rectangles in registers and restore them from rectangles. • To use them you must activate Picture mode first. With PEL use **<f11> D p**		
Draw rectangle around region	**C-c C-r**	(**picture-draw-rectangle** START END)	Draw a rectangle around region.
Clear & save rectangle	**C-c C-k**	(**picture-clear-rectangle** START END &optional KILLP)	Clear and save rectangle delineated by point and mark. • The rectangle is saved for yanking by **C-c C-y** and replaced with whitespace. The previously saved rectangle, if any, is lost. With prefix argument, the rectangle is actually killed, shifting remaining text.
Clear reactangle	**C-c C-w**	(**picture-clear-rectangle-to-register** START END REGISTER &optional KILLP)	Clear rectangle delineated by point and mark into REGISTER. • The rectangle is saved in REGISTER and replaced with whitespace. • With prefix argument, the rectangle is actually killed, shifting remaining text.
Yank and overlay saved rectangle	**C-c C-y**	(**picture-yank-rectangle** &optional INSERTP)	Overlay rectangle saved by **C-c C-k** • The rectangle is positioned with upper left corner at point, overwriting existing text. • With prefix argument, the rectangle is inserted instead, shifting existing text. • Leaves mark at one corner of rectangle and point at the other (diagonally opposed) corner.
Overlay rectangle saved in register	**C-c C-x**	(**picture-yank-rectangle-from-register** REGISTER &optional INSERTP)	Overlay rectangle saved in REGISTER. • The rectangle is positioned with upper left corner at point, overwriting existing text. • With prefix argument, the rectangle is inserted instead, shifting existing text. • Leaves mark at one corner of rectangle and point at the other (diagonally opposed) corner.

Rectangle — References

Topic & Link	Notes
GNU Emacs Manual — Rectangles	