

How to Crop a Screenshot on Mac and Save It

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By Vipin PG | Published June 17, 2026 | Updated June 17, 2026 | Format: Guide | 3 min read

Quick answer

On a Mac, you can crop a screenshot instantly using the built-in shortcut Command + Shift + 4 - this turns your cursor into a crosshair so you can drag and select exactly the area you want to capture. The screenshot is saved automatically to your Desktop as a PNG file. If you want more control, you can also use the Screenshot app (Command + Shift + 5) or crop an existing image using Preview.

Taking a screenshot on a Mac is easy. But most people don't know that you don't have to capture the whole screen and then crop it afterward, Mac actually lets you select and capture only the area you need, right from the start. There are also a couple of other ways to do this depending on whether you're starting fresh or working with an existing image.

Here's every method that works, from quickest to most hands-on.

Cropping and Saving a Screenshot on Mac, The Fastest Ways That Actually Work

Step 1: Use Command + Shift + 4 to Capture a Specific Area

This is the fastest and most direct way. No apps to open, just a keyboard shortcut.

1. Press Command (?) + Shift + 4 on your keyboard at the same time.
2. Your cursor changes into a crosshair (+).
3. Click and drag to draw a box around the area you want to screenshot.
4. Release the mouse button. The screenshot is taken instantly.
5. The cropped screenshot saves automatically to your Desktop as a '.png' file, named with the date and time (e.g., Screenshot 2025-06-17 at 10.30.00.png).

Quote: ? Tip: While dragging, hold Space to move the selection box around without resizing it. This is handy when you've selected the right size but need to reposition it.

Step 2: Use the Screenshot App for More Control (Command + Shift + 5)

If you want options like a timer delay, a specific save location, or the ability to record your screen too, use the Screenshot app toolbar.

1. Press Command (?) + Shift + 5. A small toolbar appears at the bottom of your screen.
2. Click the third icon: "Capture Selected Portion" (it looks like a dotted rectangle).
3. Drag the selection handles to define the area you want to capture.
4. Click "Capture" on the toolbar.
5. Before capturing, click "Options" to choose where to save the file, Desktop, Documents, Clipboard, or a custom folder.

Quote: ? Tip: The "Options" menu also lets you set a 5 or 10-second timer, useful if you need to capture a dropdown menu or tooltip that disappears when you click elsewhere.

Step 3: Crop an Existing Screenshot Using Preview

Already have a screenshot saved and just want to crop it? Preview, the default Mac image viewer, has a built-in crop tool. You don't need Photoshop or any third-party app.

1. Open the screenshot image in Preview (double-click the file, or right-click -> Open With -> Preview).
2. Click the toolbox icon (Show Markup Toolbar) at the top right of the Preview window, it looks like a pencil tip in a circle.
3. Click and drag on the image to draw a selection box around the area you want to keep.
4. Go to the top menu bar: Tools -> Crop (or press Command + K).
5. The image is now cropped. Press Command + S to save it, this overwrites the original file. To save as a new file, go to File -> Export and choose a name and format.

Quote: ? Tip: To keep the original screenshot untouched, use File -> Duplicate before cropping. This creates a copy so you can crop the duplicate without affecting the original.

Step 4: Save the Screenshot Directly to Clipboard (No File Saved)

Sometimes you don't want a file on your Desktop, you just want to paste the cropped screenshot somewhere right away, like into Slack, an email, or a Google Doc.

1. Press Command (?) + Control + Shift + 4 all at once.
2. Draw a selection around the area you want to capture.
3. The screenshot is copied directly to your clipboard, no file is saved anywhere.
4. Go to where you want to paste it and press Command + V.

Quote: ? Tip: You can also change the default save behavior permanently using Command + Shift + 5 -> Options -> Save to Clipboard, so all your screenshots go to clipboard unless you say otherwise.

Which Method Should You Use?

Here's a quick breakdown to help you pick:

Situation: Quick crop and save to Desktop | Best Method: Command + Shift + 4

Situation: Choose where to save, or use a timer | Best Method: Command + Shift + 5

Situation: Crop an image you already have | Best Method: Preview App (?K)

Situation: Paste directly without saving a file | Best Method: Command + Control + Shift + 4

All four methods are built right into macOS, no downloads, no extra apps. The one you'll probably end up using 90% of the time is Command + Shift + 4. It's instant, precise, and saves the file automatically. Once you use it a couple of times, it becomes second nature.