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A lot of programs (esspecially Bash) use the GNU Readline library for command
line input. Readline allows to define each key with a custom value. This
definition is stored in the file .inputrc in the users home directory.

If you want to assign an often used command, e.g. less /var/log/message to the
key F1, you'll need to add the following line to your .inputrc:

"\e[11~": "less /var/log/messages^M"

The last char in \e[11~ is a tilde char. All characters have to be entered
exactly as given, with only one exception: the ^M at the end. The ^M means
Enter and causes a direct execution of the command. Without the ^M, the
command would be simply copied into the command line and which would wait for
the input of enter or a different char.

The way you enter the ^M depends on the editor you use. In vi you have to
press ctrl-V and Enter.
It has to be one single char (ASCII-code 13).

The character sequence \e will be interpreted as an Escape char from Readline.
The given sequence works in X11. In the console the sequence differs, but both
definitions can be in the same .inputrc file.

The change in .inputrc applies with a fresh started Shell. You can refresh the
setting with the key sequence ctrl-X and ctrl-R in the running shell. F1
should work now.

How to use the trick with other keys? First you have to know the code that the
key generates.
You can get the code when you press ctrl-V and the desired key.
You will get an Escape-sequence (the first 2 chars are ^[which is equal to
ctrl-[and equal to Escape)
If you replace ^[with \e, you got the sequence for .inputrc.

More details of the usage of readline can be found in the bash manpage (man
bash).

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