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Ultimate mechanical keyboard keycap replacement guide

Keychron K4 with Razer PBT Keycaps What better way to clean up your mechanical keyboard than get a brand new set of keycaps? By replacing your old keycaps you are able to get rid of your thin and poorly made ABS keycaps and replace them with a new keycap set with a great unique design and color. When figuring out a new keycap set, you want to look at the keycap material, thickness, profile, and overall design to figure out what will work best with your setup and application. If your keyboard has RGB lighting, you'll want to get a keycap set that's double-shot or pudding style, so the light shines through the keycaps. We'll look at the details of what material, profile, and design you should be looking for based on what you're going to use your keyboard for. Some keycaps may be better for gaming, typing, or other applications. Let's dive right in. Why buy a new Keycap Set? With the exception of very expensive mechanical keyboards, most keyboards come with very cheap and mass-produced keycaps that make the keyboard bland and bland. The keycaps are what you're going to look and type on throughout the life of your keyboard, so shouldn't they be one of the most beautiful parts of the keyboard? There are many advantages to getting new keycaps, and they can make a \$50 keyboard feel like \$150 for a pretty cheap price. The main advantages are the aesthetics if you are able to choose the color and design of the keycaps that allow the RGB lighting to flourish. The keycaps are also more durable, which means that the legends will not fade after some intensive use. In addition, by adjusting the profile design you have a keycap set that feels comfortable and efficient to type on. There are a lot of different styles of keycaps out there so let's go about some of the different options and features. What is the best Keycap material? In the world of keycaps there are really two important material types that you get: ABS (Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene) and PBT (Polybutylene Phthalate). You may be wondering, what is ABS & PBT? Well, they are two different types of plastic with different properties. Both types of plastic have a different feel, sound, and look at them. We'll talk about what the differences are, and which is better. ABS vs PBT Keycaps ABS keycaps are the cheapest and most common plastic used for keycaps. ABS keycaps are mass produced because of how easily they are sprayed. PBT plastic is less common, but is usually of higher quality than ABS. ABS keycaps feel smooth and develop a bold sheen over time, while PBT keycaps feel textured and more durable. PBT is superior to ABS, because they are more durable and wear out less over time. That being said, there are some really nice ABS keycap sets available, and at the end of the day it comes down to the user. Some people prefer the smooth feel of ABS, while others like the textured feel of PBT. If you want more details about the difference between ABS & PBT keycaps, we have a full write-up here. In the table below, we show the main differences based on the main differences between the two types of plastic. ABS Keycaps PBT Keycaps Usually Cheaper More Expensive Shiny/Greasy Matte Smooth Textured Thinner (Not Always) Thicker Quieter when typing Van Louder when typing British Wears over time More Durable ABS vs PBT Keycaps Other Keycap Materials It is worth noting that there are other keycaps styles, but they are much less common and sometimes more expensive. Keycap styles like rubber and brass can be hard to find and buy. Usually you have to order them through a buy group to get hold of them. I personally have never used it, so I can't comment on the quality or feel. If you're interested in learning more about brass keycaps, I've included a YouTube video below. Rubber keycaps are a bit more common, so you can watch them here on Amazon for a pretty cheap price. They feel and sound much different than plastic. If your keyboard doesn't have RGB lighting, you don't have to worry about purchasing double-shot or pudding keycaps, as these keycaps styles let the backlight shine. But if you have RGB, it's definitely worth considering one of these keycap designs. Without RGB, a simple single-shot keycap works perfectly for you. In fact, some keycaps with the coolest single-shot designs because they are made for hobbyist keyboards that tend to have no RGB backlighting. Doubleshot Keycaps Double shot keycaps are made from a more complicated production process where two separate plastics are cast to make the keycap. Doubleshot keycaps are produced in this way, so that lighting can shine through the legends. If your keyboard has lighting for each individual key, these styles of keycaps are used so that the backlight can illuminate the legends and make them easier to read. Double shot keycaps are available in both PBT and ABS plastics. You can use these keycaps in many different colors, such as the Pink Razer double-shot PBT keycaps. Pudding Keycaps Pudding keycaps are a way to really show off your keyboard lighting. These are also doubleshot, but instead of just illuminating the legends, the light can also shine through the sides of the keycaps as well. This allows for some great looking keyboard set-ups. Some of our favorite pudding keycaps are by HyperX, they are quite affordable and are a nice upgrade for any mechanical keyboard. Many other pudding keycaps are available in different and different brands, so you choose from the kind you really want. Choosing the right Keycap profile The keycap profile is where it gets a bit complicated. The keycap profile refers to the shape of the keycap, some keycaps are flat, some are rounded, with many different shapes as well. There are certain styles in which each row of keys has a different height to allow a hollow or oblique shape over the entire keycap set. By changing the shape of your keycaps, you're taking the style and feel of your keyboard to a whole new level. Side view of different profile types As you see in the image above, there are different profiles and shapes of keycaps to choose from. There are many more profiles as well, they are just more unusual are harder to get hold of. You can see more variations in the image below. We'll review all the differences and help you choose the best profile based on what you're using your keyboard for. Photo by u/jacobolus Uniform vs Sculpted Keycap Profile Keychron K6 with DSA Profile Keycaps One of the biggest differences between keycap profiles is whether the keycaps are sculpted or uniform. A uniform keycap has a flat surface and is not oblique at all. Sculpted keycaps on the other hand, have a slight angle to help with typing it, so you don't need to stretch your fingers that far. Sculpted is usually preferred by most people because it makes typing feel more fluid, but others may find the uniform profile feels or looks better for them. The uniform profile found it mostly on enthusiastic keycap sets with unique designs. The best keycap profile for Gaming Drop CTRL with Cherry Keycap profile If you're looking for a keycap set to enhance your gaming experience, you'll want to search for the keycap profile that feels most comfortable for you, so you don't have to spend precious milliseconds searching for the next key. In general, the best keycap style for gaming is the Cherry profile, as they are sculpted to be efficiently and comfortably pressed. In general, the keycap profile does not affect the gaming experience. If you really want to improve your competitiveness, we recommend you look at another switch instead. Low-profile or optical switches can reduce travel distance and improve response time when entering a keystroke. Keep in mind that this typing makes typing more uncomfortable in our experience, but they may be worth exploring. The keycap profile that is best for gaming is which feels most familiar and comfortable. We definitely recommend viewing a set of Cherry profile PBT keycaps, as we felt they feel best for gaming. The best Keycap profile for typing Finding the best keycap profile for typing usually comes down to getting a keycap set that is efficient to type on and reduces the distance from fingers must stretch to reach each key. This makes the Cherry profile highly recommended for typing. You also want to look at how familiar the keycap set feels. For example, a flat or uniform uniform may feel strange if you've never used one before, so it can have a negative effect on your typing speed. Use what feels familiar and what you have the muscle memory to type on. If you're looking to improve typing speed, try exploring other typing techniques or do regular speed tests to try to improve. There are many other ways to improve when typing, regardless of the keycap profile. Another option would be to look at other keyboard cards such as COLEMAK or DVORAK. At the end of the day, for the purpose of typing you can't go wrong with Cherry keycap profile or the standard OEM profile. They are both sculpted, efficient and comfortable to type on. Are Custom Keycaps worth it? In case you didn't know, it's possible to find custom or even handmade keycaps for your keyboard. The easiest way to get a custom keycap is to have it printed on a keycap, usually you find a website online to create them for you. You just upload an image and a few weeks later you'll receive a keycap with that custom image on it. If you're looking to get a little extra fancy, you buy craft keycaps through a group buy or have them individually made for your keyboard. This is the most expensive style of keycap, but it makes for the ultimate adjustment. There are some very cool and unique keycap designs out there. Most people will usually choose and ultra custom keycap for their escape key and have the rest of their set be a premade keycap set. This way you don't have to spend a ridiculous amount adjusting the whole set. Keep in mind these custom keycaps are not cheap and will set you back quite a bit. What are the best Keycap Sets? As mentioned earlier, the best keycap set is completely subjective when it comes to what you're looking for in your keyboard. A really nice higher end keycap set would be the GMK Red Samurai set. Another option if you are looking for something more affordable would be the Razer PBT keycaps. For the purchase you definitely want to take into account all the different aspects of a good keycap set, such as the material, thickness, profile, color, etc. If you're something like me, eventually you want to get more than one set just because of how much fun it can be to exchange them or mix the different sets in a unique way. Is your keyboard compatible with new Keycaps? Some important things to consider to make sure your new keycap set fits well on your keyboard. Check the keyboard size Before you create your keycap set, it's important to make sure it's compatible with the layout and design of your keyboard. If you have a full-size keyboard, make sure you have a keycap set that keys for your entire layout, including the number pad. Some keycap sets are only for 65% or tenkeyless layouts because the larger layouts usually require more keys, so they cost more. If you're confused about the different keyboard sizes, we have a guide here. Make sure your keycaps are for the size of the keyboard. ANSI vs ISO Layout Another thing to watch out for is whether your keycap set is compatible with ANSI and ISO layouts. The main difference is the size and shape of the enter key. Most keycap sets have the right keycap sizes for both layout types, but stay on the size of caution and fix before you buy. It can be incredibly frustrating to order a keycap set and not carry the right hand key properly. Is your keyboard a default format? Some older keyboards, especially from companies like Razer and Corsair, will have non-standard layouts, so the keycap formats will be different from what comes with a new keycap set, unless it's made specifically for that keyboard model. Make sure your keyboard has a default layout to make sure the keycaps are fully compatible. There's one more thing you should watch out for that is common sense, but you want to make sure that the new keycaps you order are for your desired language and country layout. With many countries speaking different languages, it is important that the legends are correct (duh). Certain keycap sets come with two languages on them for simple translation which is pretty cool. Conclusion Getting a new keycap set for your keyboard is a very exciting first step and for many people the push they need to fall down the rabbit hole of the mechanical keyboard hobby. Next thing you know, you're hiding a box of keycaps for a rainy day. We hope we were able to help you figure out the differences between different keycap types and guide you in figuring out your first keycap set. If you're interested in other mechanical keyboard content, make sure to check out the rest of the blog and our great YouTube channel that does weekly reviews of various mechanical keyboards. Keyboards.