

Surtitles-in-a-box

User Manual

Version 1.2.0

by Operactive Arts

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1. Introduction

What is Surtitles-in-a-box?

Suritles-in-a-box is a professional desktop application for displaying live surtitles (supertitles) during opera and theatre performances. It allows an operator to manually advance through prepared text cues, displaying them on a fullscreen output connected to the audience-facing display.

Key Features

- **Manual cue-by-cue navigation** - You control when each title appears
- **Background virtual screens** - Display images, videos, or solid colors behind titles
- **Multi-display support** - Operator screen and audience screen on separate monitors
- **Show-safe controls** - Blackout and freeze buttons, plus panic keyboard shortcut for emergencies
- **Automatic session recovery** - Never lose your place if the app closes unexpectedly
- **Project system** - Save and load complete show configurations
- **Remote control** - Control the show from a phone or tablet via WiFi
- **Multi-language output** - Display two languages simultaneously
- **Cue annotations** - Add operator notes to any cue

What's New in Version 1.2.0

- **Remote Control** - Control your show from any phone or tablet on the same WiFi network
- **Multi-Language Support** - Display primary and secondary languages together (stacked or side-by-side)
- **Cue Annotations** - Add operator notes to cues for timing hints and reminders
- **Project Management** - New Project menu in top bar replaces the old Presets section

- **Background Management** - Rename backgrounds with double-click and reorder by drag-and-drop

System Requirements

- Windows 10 or later
- Two displays recommended (operator + audience output)
- 4GB RAM minimum
- 500MB disk space
- WiFi connection (for remote control feature)

2. Getting Started

First Launch

When you first open Surtitles-in-a-box, you'll see the **Entry Code Screen**.

Entering Your License Key

1. Enter your license key exactly as shown in your purchase confirmation email from Lemon Squeezy
2. Check "**Remember this device**" if you want to skip this step next time
3. Click **Unlock**

Note: An internet connection is required for first-time activation. After activation, the software works offline. Your Device ID is displayed at the bottom of this screen - provide this to Operative Arts if you need support.

Restoring a Previous Session

If the application finds a previous session, you'll see a prompt:

- Click "**Restore Session**" to continue where you left off
- Click "**Start Fresh**" to begin with a clean workspace

3. The Operator Interface

The main interface is divided into several areas:

| | | | |
|---------|---|-----------------|------------------------------|
| +-----+ | | | |
| | TOP BAR | | |
| | [Project v] [Load File] [Reload] Mode: [v] [ProjectName] file.txt Cue 1/42 [Remote] | | |
| | LIVE | | |
| +-----+ | | | |
| | CUE PANEL | PREVIEW PANEL | CONTROL PANEL |
| | | | |
| | 1. Text... | [Live Preview] | Output Display: [v] |
| | Note:... | | [Start Output] |
| | > 2. Current | [Backgrounds] | |
| | Note:... | [+Add] [thumb] | Show Controls: |
| | 3. Text... | [thumb] [thumb] | [Titles] [Blackout] [Freeze] |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|---------|------------------|-------------------|--|
| | NEXT: Preview... | Layout & Style... | |
| | Note: Next note | Languages... | |
| +-----+ | | | |

Top Bar

- **Project** - Dropdown menu for project management (New, Save, Open, Delete)
- **Load File** - Open a surtitles text file
- **Reload** - Reload the current file (turns orange when file has changed)
- **Mode** - Switch between "Line by Line" and "Paragraph" parsing
- **Project Name** - Shows the current project name (if saved)
- **Cue Counter** - Shows current position (click to jump to a specific cue)
- **Remote** - Toggle the remote control panel
- **LIVE/OFFLINE** - Indicates if the output window is active

Cue Panel (Left)

Displays your surtitles as a scrollable list:

- The current cue is highlighted in cyan
- Blank cues show "(blank)" tag
- Annotations appear below cue text with a memo icon
- Click any cue to jump to it
- Press **N** to add/edit an annotation on the selected cue

Preview Panel (Center)

Shows exactly what the audience will see:

- Live preview updates as you navigate
- Current annotation displayed prominently below the preview
- Next cue preview with its annotation
- Background thumbnails at the bottom (drag to reorder, double-click to rename)
- Click "+ Add" to add new backgrounds

Control Panel (Right)

All the controls for your show:

- Display selection and output control
- Show-safe buttons (Titles, Blackout, Freeze, Calibration)
- Layout settings (position, size, alignment)
- Style settings (color, fonts, legibility)
- Languages section (secondary language loading and display mode)

4. Preparing Your Show

Step 1: Create Your Surtitles File

Create a plain text file (.txt) with your surtitles. Save it in UTF-8 encoding.

Line-by-Line Mode

Each line becomes one cue. Empty lines create blank (clear screen) cues.

```
Welcome to tonight's performance.  
Please silence your mobile phones.
```

```
Act One  
Scene One: The Garden
```

```
JULIET: O Romeo, Romeo!  
Wherefore art thou Romeo?
```

Paragraph Mode

Consecutive lines are grouped together. Empty lines separate cues.

```
Welcome to tonight's performance.  
Please silence your mobile phones.
```

```
Act One  
Scene One: The Garden
```

```
JULIET: O Romeo, Romeo!  
Wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name.
```

Comments

Lines starting with `#` are ignored:

```
# Act 1 - Introduction  
Welcome to the performance.  
# Pause for applause  
(blank line here for clear screen)
```

Step 2: Load Your File

1. Click "**Load File**" in the top bar
2. Select your .txt file
3. Choose your parsing mode (Line by Line or Paragraph)

Step 3: Add Backgrounds (Optional)

Backgrounds appear behind your titles. You can use:

- **Images** - PNG, JPG, GIF, WebP
- **Videos** - MP4 only (H.264 codec, will loop)
- **Solid Colors** - Any color you choose

To add a background:

1. Click "+ **Add**" in the Preview Panel

2. Enter an optional label (e.g., "Act 1", "Intermission")
3. Either:
 - Click "**Select File**" for an image or video
 - Choose a color and click "**Add Blank**" for a solid color

Managing Backgrounds

- **Rename:** Double-click a background label to edit it
- **Reorder:** Drag and drop backgrounds to rearrange them
- **Delete:** Hover over a background and click the X button

Step 4: Configure Layout

In the Control Panel, adjust:

- **Alignment** - Left, Center, or Right
- **Vertical Position** - Where titles appear (0% = top, 100% = bottom)
- **Font Size** - Size of the title text
- **Safe Margins** - Padding from screen edges

Step 5: Configure Style

- **Primary Text Color** - Color for primary language text
- **Secondary Text Color** - Color for secondary language text
- **Primary Font** - Font family for primary language
- **Secondary Font** - Font family for secondary language
- **Legibility Mode:**
 - **Text Shadow** - Subtle shadow behind text
 - **Background Box** - Semi-transparent box behind text
 - **None** - Plain text only
- **Box Opacity** - Adjust transparency of background box

Step 6: Connect Your Output Display

1. Connect your projector or secondary monitor
2. Select it from the "**Output Display**" dropdown
3. Click "**Start Output**"

The output window will open fullscreen on the selected display.

Step 7: Use Calibration (Optional)

Click the **Calibration** button to show:

- Safe area boundaries (yellow dashed lines)
- Center crosshair
- Corner markers

Use this to verify your output is properly positioned on the projection surface.

Step 8: Save Your Project

Once everything is configured:

1. Click the **Project** dropdown in the top bar
 2. Click "**Save Project**" (or "**Save Project As...**" for a new name)
 3. Enter a project name (e.g., "Carmen Opening Night")
-

5. Running a Performance

Before the Show

1. Load your project or configure manually
2. Start the output window
3. Navigate to cue 1
4. Verify titles are hidden (Titles OFF) for audience entry

During the Performance

Advancing Cues

- Press → (Right Arrow) or **Space** to go to the next cue
- Press ← (Left Arrow) or **Backspace** for the previous cue
- Click any cue in the Cue Panel to jump directly

Show Controls

| Button | Keyboard | Purpose |
|-----------------|----------|--|
| Titles | T or H | Show/hide titles |
| Blackout | B | Black screen (emergency or scene change) |
| Freeze | F | Pause output (changes won't show until unfrozen) |

Understanding Freeze

The **Freeze** button is a powerful safety feature. When activated:

- The audience screen **stays exactly as it is**
- You can navigate cues, change settings, and prepare changes on the operator side
- **Nothing updates on the audience screen** until you unfreeze

When to use Freeze:

1. **Recovering from a mistake** - If you accidentally skip ahead, press F to freeze, navigate back to the correct cue, then unfreeze. The audience sees nothing.
2. **Preparing the next section** - Load a different background for the next act without it flashing on screen while you set it up.
3. **Handling stage delays** - If the performance pauses unexpectedly (actor issue, technical problem), freeze the current title while you wait.
4. **Checking ahead** - Need to preview a future cue? Freeze, jump ahead to check it, jump back, unfreeze - the audience never knows.

Emergency: Panic Shortcut

There is no visible panic button - instead, press the **Escape** key to immediately:

- Activate blackout
- Hide titles

Use this keyboard shortcut if something goes wrong and you need to clear the screen instantly.

Jumping to a Specific Cue

1. Press **G** or click the cue counter in the top bar
2. Enter the cue number
3. Press Enter or click **Go**

If the File Changes

If someone edits the surtitles file during the show:

- An orange banner appears: "File has changed on disk"
- Click **"Reload Now"** when safe to do so
- Your current cue position is preserved

After the Show

- Press **B** to blackout for audience exit
 - Close the output window via the Control Panel
 - Your session is automatically saved
-

6. Remote Control

The Remote Control feature lets you control the show from any phone or tablet connected to the same WiFi network.

Starting Remote Control

1. Click the **Remote** button in the top bar
2. The Remote Control panel opens on the right side
3. Click **"Start Remote Server"**
4. A QR code and URL will appear

Connecting a Device

Option A: QR Code

1. Open your phone's camera
2. Scan the QR code
3. Tap the notification to open the link

Option B: Manual URL

1. Open a web browser on your phone/tablet
2. Type the displayed URL (e.g., `http://192.168.1.50:8080`)
3. Press Enter

Security (Optional)

- Enable the PIN option before starting the server
- Set a 4-digit PIN that users must enter to connect
- Connected devices are shown in the Remote panel
- Click "Disconnect" next to any device to remove it

Remote Interface

The remote interface adapts to screen size:

Phone (Simplified)

- Large PREV / NEXT buttons for one-handed operation
- Current cue display and number
- Next cue preview
- Titles and Blackout toggles
- Background tiles for quick switching

Tablet (Enhanced)

- All phone features plus:
- Scrollable cue list (tap to jump)
- Freeze toggle
- Current annotation display

Remote Control Best Practices

- Test the connection before the show
- Keep your phone charged
- Consider a backup operator on the main computer
- The remote shows connection status - watch for disconnections
- Background tiles show colors/labels to help identify backgrounds

7. Multi-Language Output

Display surtitles in two languages simultaneously for international audiences.

Loading a Secondary Language

1. Load your primary surtitles file first
2. In the Control Panel, go to the **Languages** section
3. Click "**Load Secondary File**"
4. Select your secondary language file

Important: Both files should have the same number of cues. A warning appears if cue counts don't match.

Display Modes

Choose how languages are displayed:

| Mode | Description |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Primary only | Show only the primary language |

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Secondary only | Show only the secondary language |
| Stacked | Both languages stacked vertically |
| Side by side | Languages displayed next to each other |

Configuration Options

When using Stacked or Side-by-side modes:

- **Secondary Position** (Stacked only): Choose if secondary appears above or below primary
- **Size Ratio**: Adjust relative size of primary vs secondary text (30%-70%)

Styling Languages

In the Style section:

- **Primary Text Color**: Color for primary language
- **Secondary Text Color**: Color for secondary language
- **Primary Font**: Font for primary language
- **Secondary Font**: Font for secondary language

Tips for Multi-Language Shows

- Use distinct colors for each language to help audiences identify them
 - Consider using different fonts (e.g., serif vs sans-serif)
 - Test readability from the back of the venue
 - The Preview Panel shows exactly how both languages will appear
-

8. Cue Annotations

Add operator notes to any cue - perfect for timing hints, conductor cues, or stage directions.

Adding an Annotation

Method 1: Keyboard

1. Navigate to the cue
2. Press **N**
3. Type your note
4. Press **Enter** to save (or **Escape** to cancel)

Method 2: Mouse

1. Hover over a cue in the Cue Panel
2. Click the note icon or **[+ Add note]** link
3. Type your note
4. Click away or press Enter to save

Viewing Annotations

Annotations appear in multiple places:

- **Cue Panel:** Below each cue's text with a memo icon
- **Preview Panel:** Current cue's annotation prominently displayed
- **Preview Panel:** Next cue's annotation shown in the "NEXT" preview
- **Remote Control:** Visible on tablet view

Editing Annotations

1. Click on an existing annotation
2. Edit the text
3. Press Enter to save
4. To delete, clear all text and save

Annotation Tips

- Keep notes brief - they should be glanceable
- Use consistent abbreviations (e.g., "Cond." for conductor)
- Include timing cues: "Wait for aria to finish"
- Note stage positions: "After Juliet reaches balcony"
- Mark tricky transitions: "Quick - 2 sec gap"

Annotations and Projects

Annotations are saved with your project. When you:

- **Save Project:** All annotations are included
 - **Open Project:** Annotations are restored
 - **Reload File:** Annotations are preserved (warning if cue count changes)
-

9. Projects

Projects save your complete show configuration and replace the old Presets system.

What's Saved in a Project

- Surtitles file path (primary)
- Secondary surtitles file path (if loaded)
- Parsing mode
- All backgrounds
- Layout settings
- Style settings
- Language display settings
- All cue annotations
- Selected output display

Project Menu

Access project functions via the **Project** dropdown in the top bar:

| Option | Description |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| New Project | Clear everything and start fresh |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Save Project | Save to current project (prompts for name if new) |
| Save Project As... | Save with a new name |
| Open Project... | Open the project browser |
| Delete Project... | Delete a saved project |

Creating a New Project

1. Click **Project** → **New Project**
2. If you have unsaved work, confirm you want to clear it
3. All settings, cues, and annotations are reset

Saving Your Work

First Time Save

1. Click **Project** → **Save Project**
2. Enter a project name
3. Click OK

Subsequent Saves

1. Click **Project** → **Save Project**
2. Project saves immediately to the same name

Save As New Project

1. Click **Project** → **Save Project As...**
2. Enter a new name
3. Click OK

Opening a Project

1. Click **Project** → **Open Project...**
2. A modal shows all saved projects
3. Current project (if any) is highlighted
4. Click a project to open it
5. All settings, files, and annotations are restored

Note: *If surtitles files have been moved or deleted, a warning appears.*

Deleting a Project

1. Click **Project** → **Delete Project...**
2. Enter the project name to delete
3. Confirm deletion
4. Project is permanently removed

Project Tips

- Save projects with descriptive names: "Carmen_2026_MainStage"
- Create separate projects for different venues
- Save a new project after significant changes

- The current project name appears in the top bar
-

10. Keyboard Shortcuts

| Key | Action |
|-----------------------|--|
| → or Space | Next cue |
| ← or Backspace | Previous cue |
| T or H | Toggle titles on/off |
| B | Toggle blackout |
| F | Toggle freeze |
| Escape | Panic (immediate blackout + hide titles) |
| G | Jump to cue dialog |
| N | Add/edit annotation on current cue |

Note: Shortcuts only work when you're not typing in a text field.

11. Troubleshooting

License Key Issues

"Invalid license key"

- Verify you entered the key exactly as shown in your purchase confirmation email
- Copy and paste the key to avoid typos
- Check you're using the key for the correct product

"Unable to connect to license server"

- Check your internet connection
- Try again in a few minutes
- Contact Operative Arts if the problem persists

"This license is already activated on another device"

- Each license key works on one device only
- Contact support@operative.co.uk to transfer your license to a new device

"This license expired"

- Your license period has ended
- Purchase a new license to continue using the software

Titles Not Appearing

1. Check that **Titles** is ON (green button)
2. Verify **Blackout** is OFF

3. Ensure the current cue is not blank
4. Check that output window is open (**LIVE** indicator)

Output on Wrong Display

1. Close the output window
2. Select the correct display from the dropdown
3. Start output again

Video Not Playing

- Video plays when the background becomes active
- Videos must finish loading before playback is smooth
- Try smaller file sizes for faster loading

Remote Control Issues

Can't connect to remote

- Ensure phone/tablet is on the same WiFi network
- Check the URL is typed correctly
- Try refreshing the browser
- Restart the remote server

Remote disconnects frequently

- WiFi signal may be weak
- Move closer to the router
- Consider a dedicated WiFi network for the show

Commands not working from remote

- Check connection status indicator
- Refresh the remote page
- Restart the remote server if needed

Multi-Language Issues

Secondary file won't load

- Ensure primary file is loaded first
- Check file is plain text (.txt)
- Verify file uses UTF-8 encoding

Cue count mismatch warning

- Both files should have equal cue counts
- Check for extra blank lines
- Review file parsing mode

App Won't Start

1. Check Windows Firewall isn't blocking it
2. Run as Administrator
3. Reinstall if necessary

File Changes Not Detected

- Ensure the file is saved (not just open in editor)
 - The orange banner should appear within a few seconds
 - Click **Reload** manually if needed
-

12. Quick Reference Card

Show Day Checklist

- ☐ Open project (or load files manually)
- ☐ Verify all backgrounds are present
- ☐ Check secondary language file (if using)
- ☐ Review annotations for timing cues
- ☐ Connect output display
- ☐ Start output
- ☐ Test calibration
- ☐ Set up remote control (if using)
- ☐ Test remote connection
- ☐ Navigate to cue 1
- ☐ Hide titles (T)
- ☐ Save project

Key Shortcuts

```
NEXT CUE ..... → or Space
PREV CUE ..... ← or Backspace
TITLES ..... T or H
BLACKOUT ..... B
FREEZE ..... F
PANIC ..... Escape
JUMP TO CUE ..... G
ADD/EDIT NOTE ..... N
```

Status Indicators

- **LIVE** (green, pulsing) = Output window active
- **OFFLINE** (gray) = No output
- **Titles ON** = Green button
- **Titles OFF** = Gray button
- **BLACKOUT** = Red border on button
- **FROZEN** = Yellow button
- **Project Name** = Shown in top bar when project is saved

Remote Control

1. Click **Remote** button

2. Start server
3. Scan QR or type URL
4. Control show from phone/tablet

Multi-Language Quick Setup

1. Load primary file
 2. Go to Languages section
 3. Load secondary file
 4. Choose display mode (Stacked/Side-by-side)
 5. Adjust colors and fonts
-

Support

For technical support, please contact:

Operative Arts Email: support@operative.co.uk

When contacting support, please provide:

- Your Device ID (shown on Entry Code screen)
 - Software version (1.2.0)
 - Description of the problem
 - Screenshots if possible
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