Surtitles-in-a-box

User Manual

Version 1.1.0

by Operactive Arts

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

What is Surtitles-in-a-box?

Surtitles-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
- **Preset system** - Save and load complete show configurations

System Requirements

- Windows 10 or later
- Two displays recommended (operator + audience output)
- 4GB RAM minimum
- 500MB disk space

2. Getting Started

First Launch

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

Entering Your Access Code

1. Enter your 22-character access code in the format: `XXXX-YYMMDD-SSSS-SSSS-SSSS`
2. Check **"Remember this device"** if you want to skip this step next time
3. Click **Unlock**

> **Note:** *Your Device ID is displayed at the bottom of this screen. If you need support, please provide this ID to Operactive Arts.*
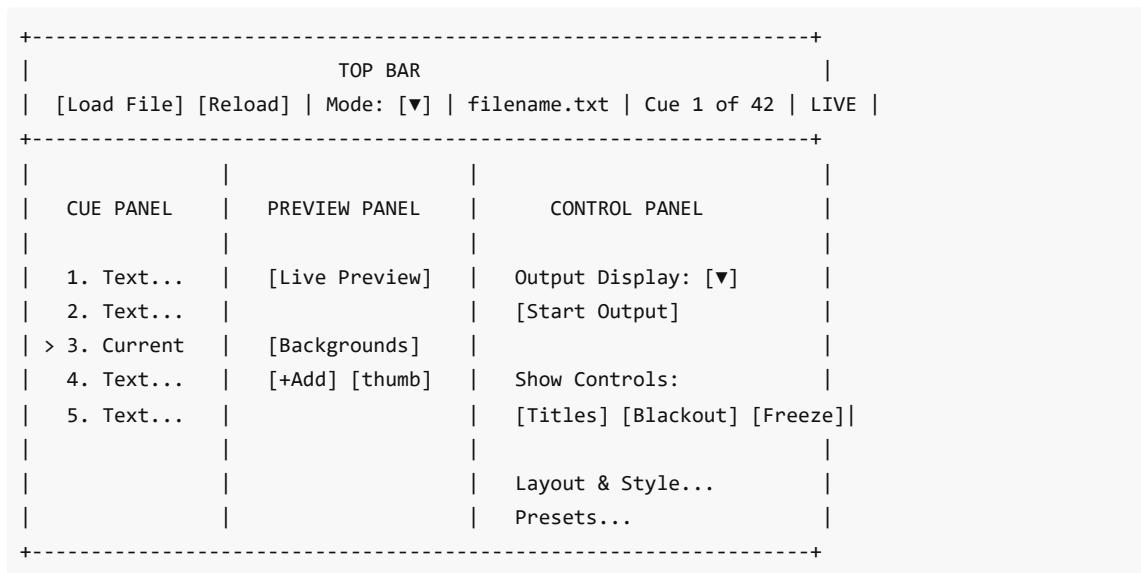
Restoring a Previous Session

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                                   |
|  [Load File] [Reload] | Mode: [▼] | filename.txt | Cue 1 of 42 | LIVE |
+----------------------------------------------------------------+
|               |                 |                     |
|   CUE PANEL   |  PREVIEW PANEL  |    CONTROL PANEL     |
|               |                 |                     |
|   1. Text...  |  [Live Preview] |  Output Display: [▼] |
|   2. Text...  |                 |  [Start Output]      |
| > 3. Current  |  [Backgrounds]  |                     |
|   4. Text...  |  [+Add] [thumb] |  Show Controls:      |
|   5. Text...  |                 |  [Titles] [Blackout] [Freeze]|
|               |                 |                     |
|               |                 |  Layout & Style...   |
|               |                 |  Presets...          |
+----------------------------------------------------------------+
```

Top Bar

- **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
- **Cue Counter** - Shows current position (click to jump to a specific cue)
- **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
- Click any cue to jump to it

Preview Panel (Center)

Shows exactly what the audience will see:

- Live preview updates as you navigate
- Background thumbnails at the bottom
- 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, legibility)
- Preset save/load

---

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

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

- **Text Color** - Click the color picker
- **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 Preset

Once everything is configured:

1. Scroll to the **Presets** section
2. Click **"Save Current as Preset"**
3. Enter a name (e.g., "Carmen Opening Night")
4. Click **Save**

---

5. Running a Performance

Before the Show

1. Load your preset 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. 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

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

7. Presets

Presets save your complete show configuration:

- Surtitles file path
- Parsing mode
- All backgrounds
- Layout settings
- Style settings

Saving a Preset

1. Configure your show
2. Go to **Presets** section in Control Panel
3. Click **"Save Current as Preset"**
4. Enter a name and click **Save**

Loading a Preset

1. Select from the dropdown
2. Click **Load**
3. If the surtitles file is missing, you'll see a warning

Preset Tips

- Create separate presets for different shows
- Include the date in preset names for revivals
- Re-save presets after making changes

8. Troubleshooting

"Invalid Code" on Entry Screen

- Verify you entered the code correctly (including dashes)
- Codes are case-insensitive

- Contact Operactive Arts if your code doesn't work

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

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

---

9. Quick Reference Card

Show Day Checklist

- ☐ Load surtitles file
- ☐ Add/verify backgrounds
- ☐ Configure layout and style
- ☐ Connect output display
- ☐ Start output
- ☐ Test calibration
- ☐ Navigate to cue 1
- ☐ Hide titles (T)
- ☐ Save preset

Key Shortcuts

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

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

Support

For technical support, please contact:

Operactive Arts

When contacting support, please provide:

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

Surtitles-in-a-box User Manual v2.0 Copyright 2026 Operactive Arts All rights reserved.