

EVENT FILING SYSTEM (EFS): A BINARY SEISMIC DATA FORMAT FOR FAST I/O ON DEMAND ON MULTIPLE PLATFORMS

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Fri 27th Aug, 2021, 14:22

ABSTRACT

We describe a seismic data format called EFS (Event Filing System), which groups seismograms for common events or times into a single binary file that includes the waveform records, event, and trace header information (metadata). The format is designed for fast input/output (I/O) operations with efficient access to individual traces. The data format is highly scalable and in principle can store traces for an arbitrarily large number of stations. For large waveform databases, use of EFS greatly reduces the number of individual files, which reduces indexing and backup issues for typical UNIX systems, and speeds data processing by minimizing the opening and closing of files. The binary format of EFS files allows seismic data to be read and written flexibly in most programming languages. The core EFS subroutines are written in C and Fortran 90. We also present Python and MATLAB codes to work with the EFS files, including subroutines to convert common seismic data formats into EFS files. The Python and MATLAB codes can be used independently without the Fortran subroutines. An example is provided as a case study.

INTRODUCTION

Seismology research has made major advances with rapidly growing seismic data volumes. Efficient storage and retrieval of digital seismograms is a key requirement for seismology research. Over the years, many different formats have been developed to serve the purpose. For example, miniSEED has become the standard for archiving and distributing data (Mariotti and Utheim, 2006). Additionally, there are a variety of standards for storing seismograms locally for research purposes (e.g., Nickerson et al., 1999; Beyreuther et al., 2010). Many of the most commonly used formats (e.g., SAC) require one file per seismogram (Goldstein and Snoke, 2005; Helffrich et al., 2013). While this provides flexibility in manipulating the traces, it is less feasible for large datasets. When the number of files becomes too large, simple tasks such as input/output (I/O) or traversing the entire file tree can end up consuming substantial computing resources. As an example, a dataset of 10,000 earthquakes recorded by a 333-station network of 3-component sensors would result in 10 million individual files, with each file consuming a small portion disk space. In this case, the overhead of indexing, copying, or backing up the data can be prohibitive for most local computer systems and can pose significant challenges for computing on remote systems.

For efficient I/O, a small number of large files is better than a large number of small files. For example, Hierarchical Data Format (HDF) is a type of data format designed for such purposes, storing and organizing large volumes of data in a single file (Koranne, 2011). The newest version of HDF5 includes two major types of object: multidimensional datasets and metadata. In seismology, HDF5 has been customized as Adaptable Seismic Data Format (ASDF), which can store a large number of waveforms with metadata and earthquake catalogs (Krischer et al., 2016). For large scale analysis, e.g., array processing, there are direct organizational benefits in grouping data from common events (or common times) and including metadata in the same file as the seismograms. The EFS (Event Filing System) format shares the same motivation to group waveforms and metadata in a single file, but is constructed in a simple sequential fashion without an explicit hierarchical structure.

Before describing the format in detail, some history may be of interest. During the 1980s, Prof. Guy Masters at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego developed a format called GFS

(“Guy’s Filing System”) in which a GFS file was actually a directory containing individual binary files (one file per trace) and an additional file containing indexing and event information. Guy provided a set of Fortran subroutines to open GFS directories and read or write data and/or header information from individual files. The actual I/O was done using C subroutines, which provided greater flexibility than Fortran at the time and avoided the extra bytes that Fortran includes at the beginning and end of binary read/write calls. Fast I/O was achieved by reading entire arrays with single calls. For header information, this requires grouping mixed-format variables (strings, integers, reals) into a single binary array, which can be done conveniently in C using structures. Fortran at the time did not include structures, but Guy was able to mimic them with the crafty use of equivalence statements to align Fortran arrays with common blocks. GFS was used by many of Guy’s students and colleagues and facilitated considerable and impactful research in global seismology (e.g., Houser et al., 2008; Laske et al., 2013; Ma et al., 2014), but never achieved common acceptance.

The EFS format was designed to preserve many of the advantages of GFS while reducing the number of files required to store large data sets. Low-level I/O operations continue to use C to read and write binary blocks, but the key Fortran subroutines now use Fortran 90 user-defined types to replace the GFS equivalence statements to create data structures for header information. Another improvement is that byte-swapping is performed automatically in cases where the computer reading the file uses a different byte order than the computer writing the file. The header area is also larger than in GFS in order to accommodate 8-character station names and other fields, including space set aside for future expansion or user customization. Although significant effort was made to include the most commonly required parameters for seismic data analysis, the format can be easily modified by the user. The EFS data format has been widely used in studying a variety of problems, including both earthquakes and seismic structures (Lin et al., 2007, 2010; Matoza et al., 2013; Chen and Shearer, 2013; Matoza et al., 2014; Trugman and Shearer, 2017a; Trugman et al., 2017; Wang and Shearer, 2017; Trugman and Shearer, 2018; Shearer and Buehler, 2019; Wei et al., 2020; Tian et al., 2020; Matoza et al., 2021; Liu and Shearer, 2021).

The core Fortran and C subroutines and some example programs are available at: Github (<https://github.com/wenyfan/EFS.git>). There is a *readme* file that provides a detailed binary description

of the format, instructions for compiling the code, and a list of the subroutines and their functionalities. Further, we provide sets of codes in Python and MATLAB to facilitate seismic data processing across multiple programming languages and operation platforms.

DATA FORMAT DESCRIPTION

The EFS file format contains multiple records for an event, e.g., earthquake or explosion, and the associated metadata of both the records and the event in a single file. It is a binary format and stores all the information in a sequential order (Figure 1). Each file consists of a file header (*fhead*), an event header (*ehhead*), followed by a byte position array (*bytepos*) that gives the byte locations of the time series, a time series header (*tshead*), a time series (*ts*), another pair of time series header and time series, and more pairs of time series header and time series until the end of the file. In principle, the EFS file can contain as many records as desired and the records can have arbitrary lengths that can be different from record to record.

The file header of an EFS file defines the *ehhead* and *tshead* attributes, including their types and the number of bytes of these metadata in the EFS file. The event header lists the event location, type, time, magnitudes (e.g., mb, Ms, and Mw), moment, and focal mechanism information. All of these fields are optional, as the relevant event metadata can differ markedly between datasets. The *bytepos* array stores the starting byte positions of the time series headers. Each *tshead* documents the length of the time series, station information (location, sensor type, gain, units, etc.), low and high frequency limits of any band-pass filter, time of the starting point of the time series, source-station information (distance, azimuth, time difference between the event origin time and the time series starting time), and up to four phase picks. The time series (*ts*) are strings of 4-byte binary numbers with the lengths defined in the time series headers. The time series header can be read without reading its accompanying time series, which can save time in cases where only data from particular stations, channels, source-receiver distances, etc., are to be analyzed.

Although the event header was designed to store earthquake information, the EFS format can also be used simply to group and store traces sharing the same time period, as, for example, might be used in ambient noise cross-correlation analysis or detection analysis through continuous records

(Fan et al., 2019, 2020). In this case, the event information can be left out of the header, although for convenience we generally set the event time to the common targeted start time of all the individual time series. Just as in earthquake studies, EFS provides advantages in analysis of continuous data by greatly reducing the total number of files and providing rapid binary read/write operations.

FILES AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The EFS format is designed for efficient storage and fast retrieval of seismograms. The Fortran 90 package performs the basic I/O operations in C by calling routines from disk.c, which must be compiled separately. The Python and MATLAB routines read and write EFS files following the same data structure as defined in Fortran 90, but do not need to be compiled.

3.1 Fortran Package

This includes the C I/O routines, disk.c, and the C byteswapping routines, swapsubs.c. These may be compiled using (assuming gcc compiler):

```
gcc -c disk.c -o disk.o
```

```
gcc -c swapsubs.c -o swapsubs.o
```

The main Fortran subroutine library is efs_subs.f90 and includes the subroutines described below. To compile the efs_subs.f90 source code, enter (assuming gfortran compiler):

```
gfortran -c efs_subs.f90 -o efs_subs.o
```

An example Makefile for the program testefs.f90 is as follows:

```
OBJS2 = disk.o \
```

```
        swapsubs.o \
```

```
        efs_subs.o
```

```
testefs: Makefile testefs.f90 $(OBJS2)
```

```
        gfortran $(OBJS2) testefs.f90 -o testefs      #use tab before gfortran!
```

The header formats take advantage of the 'type' construct in Fortran 90, which provides something

120 similar to structures in C. These structures are defined in a module at the beginning of the `efs_subs.f90`
121 source code. Thus the first line of any program that uses these routines should be:

```
122     use EFS_MODULE
```

123 The EFS Fortran subroutines are as follows:

124 `EFS_OPEN_NEW` creates new EFS file

125 `EFS_OPEN_OLD` opens existing EFS file

126 `EFS_CLOSE` closes EFS file

127 `EFS_INIT_EHEAD` sets event header to default values

128 `EFS_WRITE_EHEAD` writes event header

129 `EFS_UPDATE_EHEAD` updates event header

130 `EFS_READ_EHEAD` reads event header

131 `EFS_LIST_EHEAD` lists contents of event header

132 `EFS_WRITE_TSHEAD` writes time series header

133 `EFS_READ_TSHEAD` reads time series header

134 `EFS_INIT_TSHEAD` sets time series header to default values

135 `EFS_WRITE_TS` write times series to EFS file

136 `EFS_READ_HEADTS` reads time series header AND time series

137 `EFS_READ_TS` reads time series

138 Argument lists for these subroutines are explained in an `efs.readme.txt` file. Some simple example
139 programs are also included:

140 `listefs.f90` -- lists the contents of an EFS file

141 `copyefs.f90` -- reads an EFS file and copies the contents to a new EFS file

142 `sac2efs.f90` -- reads from a list of SAC files and write the contents to a single EFS file

143 *3.1.1 Speed comparison*

144 We performed a test using a Mac laptop with solid state storage using a directory containing 721 SAC
145 files for a southern California earthquake, comparing the time to open, read, and close all the SAC

146 files versus opening, reading, and closing the corresponding single EFS file.

147 Run times (s)

148 SAC 0.32

149 EFS 0.03

150 Thus, reading all of the data for this earthquake can be performed about 10 times faster using a
151 single EFS file compared to using individual SAC files.

152 **3.2 Python Package**

153 The Python programming language is widely used by the seismology community due to its public, open
154 source framework and the availability of seismology-tailored packages such as ObsPy (Beyreuther
155 et al., 2010). Currently, ObsPy supports a wide range of seismological data formats, including
156 MiniSEED, SAC, SEGY, and WAV, though does not at present provide direct integration with EFS.
157 Here we provide Python software tools to process and analyze EFS files as well as convert EFS data
158 into Stream objects for direct manipulation using ObsPy. Specifically, we construct a Python module
159 (*EFSpy_module.py*) to contain definitions and functions to work with EFS files. The Python package
160 has been tested using version 3.8.

161 By calling *EFS*, an EFS file can be read into Python as a structure array. The structure contains
162 dictionaries to store information from *fhead*, *ehhead*, *tshead*, and *ts*. The time series (*ts*) and its time
163 series header are combined together as one list *waveforms*. Here *EFS* can read EFS files that
164 have values in *bytepos* saved as 32-bit signed integers and values in *ts* saved as single-precision
165 floating-point numbers. Users can customize the data (*ts*) and *bytepos* precisions, although the data
166 precisions in the Fortran package are set as single-precision floating-point numbers *ts* and 32-bit
167 signed integers for *bytepos*. For example, *EFS(filename,ts_type,bp_type)* can read EFS files with
168 *bp_type* and *ts_type* specifying the precisions for the *bytepos* and *ts* arrays.

```
169 1 import obspy
170 2 import numpy as np
171 3 from EFSpy_module import *
172 4 efsname = 'EFS_Example.efs';
```



```

173 5 # Read EFS into a Python structure with the time series written in float32 and the
174     bytupos written in 32-bit integer
175 6 efs_data = EFS(filename,np.float32,np.int32)
176 7 # Write EFS to file converting the time series format to 32-bit integer and the
177     bytupos remain as 32-bit integer
178 8 filename_export = 'EFS_Example_export.efs'
179 9 export_efs('.', filename_export, efs_data,np.int32,'i')
180 10 # Convert EFS to obspy
181 11 st = efs_data.to_obspy()

```

Listing 1: Python example of processing EFS files

182 3.3 MATLAB Package

183 MATLAB is a programming language and numeric computing environment, specializing in matrix
184 manipulations and digital signal processing (DSP). We provide MATLAB codes to read and write EFS
185 files. The EFS data will be converted into a nested structure array in MATLAB, and standard DSP
186 packages in MATLAB can be directly applied to the seismic data.

187 We provide three MATLAB functions to work with EFS files, including *load_efs.m*, *write_structure2efs.m*,
188 and *write_iris2efs.m*. Function *load_efs.m* can read EFS files into MATLAB structures, and function
189 *write_structure2efs.m* can write MATLAB structures into binary EFS files. Additionally, we also provide
190 function *write_iris2efs.m* to combine with using *irisFetch* (Trabant et al., 2012; Hutko et al., 2017) to
191 download data from IRIS DMC in MATLAB and then convert the data into EFS files. The MATLAB
192 package has been tested using version 2020a.

193 Similar to a Python structure, a structure array in MATLAB groups data in data containers,
194 which are called fields. For a EFS structure, there are four fields, including the file name, *fhead*,
195 *ehhead*, and *waveforms*. The *fhead* and *ehhead* fields contain the same information as those in the
196 EFS file. The *waveforms* field contains both the station information (*tshead*) and the time series
197 (ts). These data, e.g. a station name of the *i*th station, can be accessed using dot notation as
198 *efsStructure.waveforms(i).sname*.

```

199 1 % EFS file names
200 2 efsname = 'EFS_Example.efs';

```

```

201 3  efsname_export = 'EFS_Example_export.efs';
202 4  % itype specifies the bytupos value format and the ts value format, e.g., 32-bit signed
203      integers (int32) or single-precision floating-point values (single)
204 5  itype = 1;
205 6  % Read in the example EFS file
206 7  efsStructure=load_efs(efsname,itype);
207 8  % Write the MATLAB structure into an EFS file
208 9  iosuc =write_structure2efs(' ./ ',efsname_export,...
209 10      efsStructure ,itype);

```

Listing 2: MATLAB example of processing EFS files

210 **EXAMPLE: 2019 MW 7.1 RIDGECREST EARTHQUAKE**

211 Here we take processing seismic data of the 2019 Mw 7.1 Ridgecrest earthquake in Python as an
 212 example to showcase using EFS files. The data are from HHZ component records of broadband
 213 seismic stations in southern California, CI network. We first obtain the event, station, and waveform
 214 data in ObsPy format and then create an EFS file from this information, and demonstrate file export
 215 and conversion.

```

216 1  # Import statements
217 2  import numpy as np
218 3  import struct
219 4  import obspy
220 5  from obspy import UTCDateTime, geodetics
221 6  from EFSpy_module import *
222 7  from obspy.clients.fdsn import Client
223 8  import os
224 9
225 10 # Specify file paths
226 11 EFSPATH = "../EX_DATA/"
227 12 miniSEED_PATH = '../EX_DATA/CI/'
228 13
229 14 # Download event information for Ridgecrest using ObsPy
230 15 print("\nDownloading Ridgecrest event information...")

```

```

231 16 origin_time = obspy.UTCDateTime(2019, 7, 6, 3, 19, 53)
232 17 clntnm = 'IRIS'
233 18 client = Client(clntnm)
234 19 cat = client.get_events(starttime = origin_time - 20, endtime = origin_time + 20,
235     minmagnitude = 7)
236 20 print("Done\n")
237 21
238 22 # Read waveforms into obspy Stream and Inventory
239 23 iPATH = miniSEED_PATH + 'waveforms/'
240 24 iPATH_inv = miniSEED_PATH + 'stations/'
241 25 try:
242 26     st1 = obspy.read(iPATH + '*')
243 27     inv1 = obspy.read_inventory(iPATH_inv + '*')
244 28     print("Reading data from:", iPATH)
245 29     print(st1)
246 30     print("First trace:")
247 31     print(st1[0].data)
248 32 except:
249 33     print('Oops, no data')
250 34
251 35 # Initialize an event header for the EFS file
252 36 ehead = cat2ehead(st1, cat)
253 37 npts_max = 100000 # set max points per trace in file
254 38 ntr_max = 1000 # set max number of traces in file
255 39
256 40 # Create EFS file from Obspy
257 41 print("\nCreating EFS object.")
258 42 efs_data = EFS.from_obsipy(st1, ehead, inv1)
259 43 efs_data.ehead['bytepos'] = 248 + ntr_max * 4 + 1 + np.arange(0, ntr_max) * npts_max * 4
260 44 print("Done.")
261 45
262 46 # Write EFS to file
263 47 print("\nTesting EFS export.")
264 48 filename = 'EFS_Example.efs'
265 49 # save arrays as default f32 precision, bytepos as i32

```

```

266 50 export_efs(EFSPATH, filename , efs_data ,np.float32 , "i")
267 51 filename2 = 'EFS_Example2.efs'
268 52 # save arrays as i32 precision , bytupos as i32
269 53 export_efs(EFSPATH, filename2 , efs_data ,np.int32 , "i")
270 54 print("Done.")
271 55
272 56 # Read EFS with customized precision as they were stored
273 57 efs_data_2 = EFS(EFSPATH + filename ,np.float32 ,np.int32)
274 58 efs_data_3 = EFS(EFSPATH + filename2 ,np.int32 ,np.int32)
275 59 # Convert EFS to obspy
276 60 print("\nConverting EFS object back to a stream.")
277 61 st2 = efs_data_2.to_obspy()
278 62 st3 = efs_data_3.to_obspy()

```

Listing 3: Example of the 2019 Mw 7.1 Ridgecrest earthquake

DISCUSSIONS AND SUMMARY

The EFS file format offers great flexibility for processing seismic records. For example, depending on the data volume, the *bytupos* and the *ts* arrays can be saved in different data types with the desired precision, e.g., 4-byte integer or 8-byte integer. Another advantage is that EFS files can be processed in multiple programming languages across different operating systems. Our Fortran subroutines can handle large volumes of datasets efficiently, while the Python and MATLAB scripts can bridge the binary data format with ObsPy and other tools seamlessly. Additionally, it is easy to modify the codes to customize the EFS data formats to accommodate individual research on different topics. For instance, we built one of the largest databases of SS precursors using a data format that derived from EFS (Wei et al., 2020; Tian et al., 2020). Further, EFS files can be integrated as a part of multiple open-source research software, including the GrowClust earthquake relocation algorithm (Trugman and Shearer, 2017b; Lin, 2018). In the future, we plan to continue developing and publishing algorithms, including waveform cross-correlation codes, to build an ecosystem to efficiently work with the EFS data format for seismological research.

In summary, we propose a new seismic data format, the EFS file format, which groups multiple

294 seismic records for an event in a single file. The file contains metadata of both the event and the
295 records, and we leave additional space for future purposes. We also publish a suite of codes in
296 Fortran, Python, and MATLAB to work with EFS files on multiple platforms. The EFS files are binary
297 and they are constructed in a simple sequential fashion. The EFS system is efficient for frequent I/O
298 operations, which is ideal for managing large volume seismic datasets.

299 **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

300 S.S.W. wants to thank the Cecil H. and Ida M. Green Foundation. R.S.M. acknowledges NSF grant
301 EAR-1446543.

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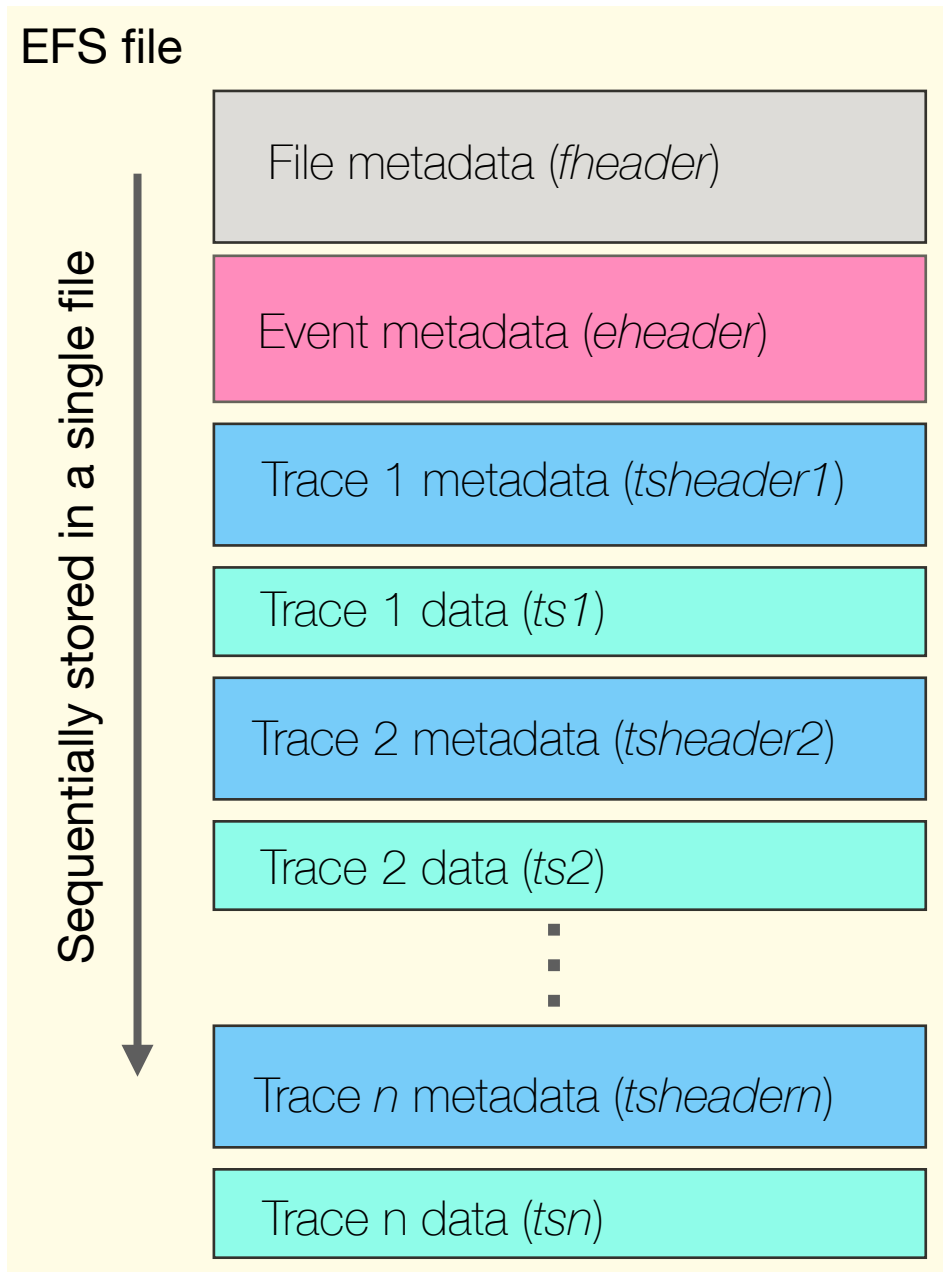


Figure 1: EFS data structure.