

# Surtitles-in-a-box

## User Manual

Version 1.1.0

by Operactive Arts

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## Table of Contents

1. [Introduction](#)
  2. [Getting Started](#)
  3. [The Operator Interface](#)
  4. [Preparing Your Show](#)
  5. [Running a Performance](#)
  6. [Keyboard Shortcuts](#)
  7. [Presets](#)
  8. [Troubleshooting](#)
  9. [Quick Reference Card](#)
- 

## 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
- **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 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     [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
<b>Titles</b>	T or H	Show/hide titles
<b>Blackout</b>	B	Black screen (emergency or scene change)
<b>Freeze</b>	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

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# 6. Keyboard Shortcuts

Key	Action
-----	--------

→ or <b>Space</b>	Next cue
← or <b>Backspace</b>	Previous cue
<b>T</b> or <b>H</b>	Toggle titles on/off
<b>B</b>	Toggle blackout
<b>F</b>	Toggle freeze
<b>Escape</b>	Panic (immediate blackout + hide titles)
<b>G</b>	Jump to cue dialog

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

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## 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

### 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](mailto: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

## 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

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# 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:

### Operative Arts

When contacting support, please provide:

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

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