

SortStar 4.0



User Guide

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For Dr. Ed Ross.

SORTSTAR 4.0 USER GUIDE.

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SortStar and Memory

Key point: As we age in a computerized world, it is increasingly impossible to remember important information.

Scientists say that our brains create new neural pathways, new memories, as we repeatedly perform new tasks. They can trace the newly-formed electrochemical connections from axons to dendrites. But it turns out that we are constantly re-arranging our gray matter. As new memories form, other, less-used memories, fade away. You can't remember everything.

From 1994 through 2009, I worked as a technical writer, then as a multimedia designer, at two high-tech Fortune 500 corporations. My last two jobs before retirement. As computerization spread, the amount of data you had to keep track of just exploded. So many new logins and passwords, as client-server systems multiplied, and use of the company intranet expanded.

But early on, in 1995, I dusted off an old DOS program that I'd made while self-employed. SortStar, which we first used to search for hidden high-ASCII information in huge Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheets. Realized that, with a little bit of work, I could re-write it in Delphi for Windows 3.1... with help from a colleague, Dr. Ed Ross, a physics expert in angstrom-level instrumentation.

Began using SortStar 2.0, the first Windows version, in the summer of 1995, and I've used it ever since.

SortStar gave me an important edge, an advantage, in the competitive high-tech workplace. I could recall -- instantly -- key data. Not just about system passwords, but all sorts of information. Anything, in fact, that I could enter into SortStar... confident that even though my own memory was so-so, I could always retrieve what I needed to know without delays or problems.

The years went by. And, little by little, my data file... the text file where I stored my information... got larger and larger... and more and more valuable.

Then, in 2005, Jef Raskin died. A hero in my high-tech world, he had designed the original Macintosh user interface, before a falling-out with Steve Jobs. Reading his obituary, I learned that around 1990, he came up with a very interesting idea. Why not build a computer with a single data file -- just one -- that would hold all the information of a business? Correspondence, billing, inventory, marketing. Everything!



Jef Raskin with Canon Cat model

Raskin's idea came to market as the Canon Cat, which didn't sell against the waves of PCs and Macs that were flooding the market. But reading his story, it struck me that a SortStar user could get along just along just fine with a single lifelong data file -- One Big File.

The problem was organization. Raskin's data file on the Canon Cat was hard-coded with different categories, different sections, for storing company information. But I knew that SortStar had to

be far more flexible, as the high-tech world was evolving so rapidly. I wanted very much to keep the ability to just toss unstructured textual data into an ever-growing line list, with the ability to organize that list defined by the user. And, unlike a fixed-field database, I wanted the user to be able to change the organizational structure at any time.

And so, by 2007, SortStar 4.0. Which I've used unchanged ever since. Set up for One Big File (OBF.TXT)... but still able to search and sort other files.

Memories

Time goes by, and the synapses between our neurons don't quite work like they used to. What was that little bit of Javascript that plays an audio file? I can't recall, but it's in SortStar. When I put `Java` in the SortStar search box, it finds:

```
d14 javascript examples jslib.chm JAVAS~35
```

And now I remember -- the 'd14' means my backup CD #14, which has an HTMLHelp file called JSLIB.CHM, with hundreds of Javascript examples. When I wrote that text line into SortStar, I also put keywords -- like 'javascript' and 'examples' -- so that I would have more possibilities to search on in future.

The mind forgets: when I entered 'JAVAS~35', I knew what it meant... today, I just can't remember. But adding several other keywords lets me still find the desired information. If I recall that it was in a HTMLhelp file, I can search on CHM, the help file-name extension. Or 'JS', which could bring up Javascript-related data, like this text entry line. Or 'examples'... you get the idea. When you add a text line, load it up with lots of keywords.

And, here's a DOS note, from back when:

```
wx DOS dir /s c:\*.jpg > jpglist.txt
```

Remember that code? Never. This SortStar line starts with `wx`, my own code for a work-related note. Then, `DOS`, so if I search for `DOS`, this line and any other lines with the word 'DOS' will be listed in the results window. Lastly, the code itself, a `DIR` statement that looks for all `JPG` images in drive `C:` and then makes a text list of their filenames.

And not just work. Personal info, too:

```
fx parking ticket 6-21-2006 Del Mar ticket  
#247442 court 8-30-2006 Vista 760 806-2444 tix  
(main: 760 726-9595)
```

I've forgotten this one completely, but SortStar never will. Because you just add data to the One Big File, but you never have to remove it. As time goes by, your OBF just gets bigger and bigger, but the information is never lost.



SortStar Overview

Key point: You can hold a lifetime of data in a single file.

SortStar 4.0 is a powerful personal data manager. It lets you save and retrieve a lifetime of information from a single plaintext data file.

SortStar is also a line-sorter... designed to search document text lines with a maximum 255-character line length. Your lifetime data file, which we call OBF.TXT, is a collection of 255-character text lines. SortStar instantly finds any information stored in OBF.TXT. SortStar also lets you search for information in other plaintext files.

Sortstar is portable. Everything is in the C:\SORTSTAR folder. SortStar also useful when run from a flash drive.

How SortStar works

After you enter a search term in a search box, SortStar will find and display reports all instances of the search word(s) in a popup RESULTS.TXT file. The RESULTS.TXT file shows all text lines in OBF.TXT that contain the search word. The RESULTS.TXT file can be sorted on any character position, with the sorted lines output as SORTRES.TXT.

RESULTS.TXT and SORTRES.TXT are rewritten -- made new -
- after each search and/or sort. SortStar will also find data (in text
format) contained in Word, Excel, or other filetypes.

Sortstar is very fast. You can search a Bible-size 5 MB plaintext
file in less than three seconds.

Compatibility

SortStar is a Windows program. It runs under most versions of
Windows -- Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows XP, Windows
2000 and NT, Windows ME, Windows 98, and Windows 95. It
does not run on Windows CE devices.

SortStar will run on the slowest PC, or on the fastest. As long as
you are running Windows, there are no other requirements.

You can also run SortStar on a Mac, using any of the Windows
emulators.



Installing SortStar

Key point: Everything goes in one folder that can be moved anywhere.

SortStar does not use the Windows Registry during installation. Because of this, you can copy the \SORTSTAR folder to any other Windows computer and use SortStar immediately, without having to go through a formal installation procedure. You can also run SortStar from a flash drive for added security.

All the SortStar files are in the \SORTSTAR folder. The SortStar program, SORTSTAR.EXE, runs on PCs only, or on Macs using Windows emulators. SORTSTAR.EXE is always kept in the \SORTSTAR folder, which (for this user guide) we are calling C:\SORTSTAR.

On your PC: Copy the \SORTSTAR folder to Drive C: ... which makes it C:\SORTSTAR. Once there, you can move and rename the folder if desired. But it's easiest to just leave it as C:\SORTSTAR.

The first time you run SortStar

To run SortStar, click the file SORTSTAR.EXE... the SortStar program file. Even better, right-click on SORTSTAR.EXE, then click Create Shortcut... then copy the SortStar shortcut to your

Windows Desktop... and run SortStar by clicking the shortcut icon.

Do this first

First thing to do: Select a Data File. The filename box to the right of SortStar's Select File button should say

"C:\SortStar\OBF.TXT".

But the first time you start SortStar, it will be blank. Click the Select File button, and use the file dialog box to go to C:\SORT-STAR (your SortStar folder) and select 'OBF.TXT'.

OBF.TXT is your personal data file. It can hold a lifetime's worth of personal information... the One Big File concept (more about this later).

SortStar 'remembers' that you are working with this file. It stores the Select File information in a small two-line reminder file, MAPFINDF.INI, which is kept in your computer's C:\WINDOWS folder.

Here's what MAPFINDF.INI looks like, after you select the OBF.TXT file:

```
[FILE]
```

```
Name=C:\SortStar\OBF.TXT
```

There may be a point in the future when Windows will no longer let SortStar automatically put MAPFINDF.INI into C:\WINDOWS. If this happens, just copy the two lines above in a text editor, save them as MAPFINDF.INI, and copy your new MAPFINDF.INI to C:\WINDOWS yourself. SortStar will then 'remember' where your personal data file is located.



One Big File -- OBF.TXT

Key point -- the unstructured personal data file lets you enter anything you want, in any order you want.

OBF.TXT is your personal data file. As time goes by, it will contain more and more useful information. In fact, since it is a plain-text file, you can never 'fill it up', even with a lifetimes' worth of notes. 'Plaintext,' in computer-speak, means 'plain ASCII text' -- just letters and numbers. Text files are small -- even with a lifetime of information. For example, the whole King James Bible is only 4 MB, and SortStar can search a text file of that size in less than three seconds.

You cannot store images, video, or audio in OBF.TXT, although you can make text hyperlinks to these files both on the internet or elsewhere on your PC, or on your company's intranet servers.

Caution -- while SortStar is 'bulletproof' (never crashes), you can lose all your data in an instant if your hard drive fails. Copy the C:\SortStar folder to a flash drive once a month, and you'll be in pretty good shape if your PC stops working.

For added security, store the flash drive in a different room from the computer, in case of fire.

Editing OBF.TXT

The SortStar ‘One Big File’ button is linked to OBF.TXT, your personal data file. Whenever you click the One Big File button, OBF.TXT pops up in an Editpad text editor window so you can enter new information, or make changes to existing data.

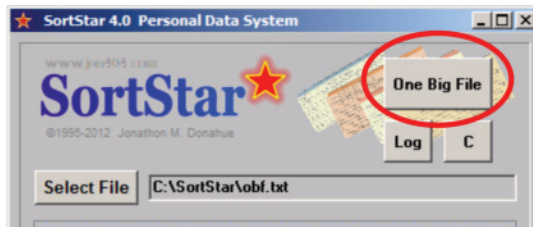


As delivered, OBF.TXT includes some ‘test’ text... that you can use to follow examples in this user guide. Of course, whenever you want, go ahead and delete this stuff -- after all, it’s YOUR personal data file. The Editpad text editor is very easy to use... with controls the same as most other editors and word processors.

The 255-character search limit

The simplest way to use SortStar is to enter personal information in OBF.TXT. SortStar can search on the first 255 characters of any paragraph you enter. If you write a paragraph longer than 255 characters (letters, numbers and spaces), SortStar will store all your information forever, but won't be able to 'see' past the 255th character in the paragraph.

Click the 'One Big File' button to open the Editpad text editor:



Then, enter something like this:

```
fx Frank Johnson, 2257 Avenida Caballero, San
Diego, CA 92121 858 755-8721 cell 775 651-1833
Software programmer at General Atomic 858 251-9964
fjohnson@ga.com met 2-25-2010 at VSAC Conference
in Houston.
```

That's 205 characters, less than SortStar's 255-character line limit for searchable text. Not bad! You can enter a lot of very useful information in a single 255-character-max line, before hitting your Enter key to start a new line.

The fx at the start of the line is my code for 'friends'. If I put it at the start of a line with a friend's info, SortStar will display a list of all my friends if I search for fx. You can use any code you want to represent anything you want. I use consonants, like f, b, m... with the letter x because a code like fx or bx or mx will never

show up anywhere else, unlike ax or ex, which could. For lines with passwords, I use pw.

There is no limit to the number of lines that you can enter. If you were entering 100 lines a day (each with 200 characters), that's 20,000 characters/day x 365, or 7,300,000 characters a year... times 50 years = 365,000,000 characters, or 365 MB. At most, only half a gigabyte... for a lifetime of personal information that can be searched in seconds!

Entering metadata

You can put hyperlinks in OBF.TXT -- live links that you can use to jump to external websites, corporate intranet addresses, or to files on your own computer. The Editpad text editor will make an active link from text like:

```
www.yahoo.com
http://yahoo.com
http://www.yahoo.com
but not just yahoo.com
```

FTP links also work, like:

```
ftp://ftp.adobe.com/pub/adobe/reader/win/10.x/10.0.0/
```

And, to go to a file on your computer, use file:/// ...like this:

```
file:///C:/Sortstar/portfolio/portX1.ppsx
```

...which I use to open a PowerPoint presentation that I keep in my C:/SortStar folder.

Entering large blocks of text

You can type or copy any amount of text into OBF.TXT. Sometimes, you may want to copy in short blocks of text. For example, the three-paragraph Gettysburg Address:

tx Gettysburg Address Lincoln November 19, 1863

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

To SortStar, each paragraph is a 'line'. SortStar is a line-sorter, and will search the first 255 characters in a paragraph -- which is what SortStar thinks is the maximum line-length.

The first line helps you find the text block. The 'tx' is my own code for large articles. Adding a header line like this at the start of your material is very helpful. As OBF.TXT grows in size, the 'tx' will let you go to the start of the article using the Find control in the Editpad text editor.

The Address's first paragraph has 175 characters -- no problem, everything is within the 255-character search limit. But the second paragraph has 380, and the third, 897. So, for paragraph two, SortStar will only 'see':

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place

And, for paragraph three, only:

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long re

What this means, is that SortStar will find 'world will liittle note' in the third paragraph, but not 'of the people'. Try it, you'll see. The Gettysburg Address is in your starting-out OBF.TXT file.

Structure? Whatever you want

I use codes like fx for friends/family, bx for banks, mx for medical, and so on. You can also start a line with a date, like so:

2012-08-22 fx Mom at 619 352-9945

And, later, have SortStar sort and output found lines in date order.



Searching with SortStar

Key point: It's easy to find information in any text file.

Case: SortStar is NOT case-sensitive... you can use CAPS, Mixed Case, or lowercase, it doesn't matter. Type your search word into the blue-bordered box, and either double-click or press the Run button to start the search.

Using a single search box

Blue Search Box: Most of the time, you'll only use the leftmost (blue-bordered) top search box... to search for a single word... or maybe for a short phrase.



Warning! If the leftmost (blue) search box is **empty**, SortStar WILL NOT WORK, no matter what you put in the other boxes. So always start a search with something in that top blue box.

To see the whole data file: to look at OBF.TXT, click on the One Big File button. For other files: if you want to have SortStar show you the first 255 characters of all the text paragraphs in the selected data file, just enter a single space in the top blue box, and click Run.

Using multiple search boxes

Using two search boxes: in this example, I put password in the top box, and pw in the second box. Why? because sometimes a line might just have pw ... other times, just password... and, maybe both... like pw password.



Here's how it works. SortStar does a sequential search, starting with the leftmost blue-bordered Search Box, then the middle box, then the bottom box. For example, imagine that you were searching a large file that had 20 lines with BANKS IN XXX, (where

XXX is the name of a county) and that a few (but not all) of these lines also had the word SAT to indicate that the bank is open on Saturday.

Then, to find a bank in San Diego county that's open Saturday, you could put BANK in the leftmost top blue box, SAN DIEGO in the middle box, and SAT in the bottom box. After you click Run, SortStar would first find all lines that had the word BANK... then, out of those lines, it would find any lines that also had SAN DIEGO... and, from any lines that had both BANK and SAN DIEGO, it would look for lines with the word SAT... like this:

```
bx bank sat Wells Fargo 6th Ave San Diego 619 458-2231
```

This sequential sorting is quite useful when you need to work on very large text files.

Try this one yourself

Another example: imagine that you have selected a large text file, that lists the names of all scholarly journals in print. You want to find information about experimental psychology and neurology.

If you enter PSYCH NEURO CLIN into the leftmost (blue) top searchbox, SortStar will find nothing... because there is no professional journal with PSYCH NEURO CLIN as its exact name. You will want to use multiple search boxes instead.

This time, enter PSYCH in the leftmost (blue) search box, then NEURO in the middle box, and CLIN in the bottom box.

When you click the Run button, SortStar would quickly show you the all magazine titles that have the three search words somewhere on its text line in the large file:

```
Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology
```

```
Clinical Neuropsychiatry: Journal of Treatment Evaluation
```

European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience
Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology
Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences
The Clinical Neuropsychologist



You can combine phrases and single word searches... put the phrase INTERNATONAL JOURNAL in the first box, and REHAB in the second box, to yield the desired textfile line:

International Journal of Rehabilitation and Health

SortStar was first developed for business, to process VERY large text files... files more than 10 MB in size (huge back in 1995!). Files with thousands of data lines. SortStar uses a very efficient hash table sorting algorithm that, unlike binary sorts, is unaffected by file size. This opens the door for a One Big File -- your personal data file -- of unlimited size, gigabytes if needed, without significant performance issues.

Most large-size commercial data files impose a structure on the data. For example, here are several lines from the U.S. Standard Industrial Classification index:

```
505141 Ball Screws & Splines (Wholesale) 3
505142 Steel Alloy (Wholesale) 2
505144 Steel Products (Wholesale) 17
505145 Steel Processing/Fabricating Eqpt-Whol 3
```

...and you can see how the developer of this list created a six-digit 'data field' for the entry number, followed by a space, and then by the text description field. Since EVERY line in the huge SIC file follows this pattern, the common data structure makes it easy for SortStar users to FIND information ... like all '505' entries ... and then SORT the search results on the 8th character in from the left, like the 'B' in Ball Screws, as shown above.

How SortStar searches

SortStar will look in the selected file for any text lines that contain whatever you put in the search box. SortStar looks in the first 255 characters of any paragraph. A paragraph is any block of text ended by an 'Enter' key line return.

You don't have to enter the whole word.

For example, entering the letters PAC will find any lines that contain the words PACE and/or PACING.

When you use a phrase in a search box, SortStar will look for an exact match. Example: if you put CALIF BAN in the leftmost search box, it would find a line that had CALIF BANKS or CALIF BANNER COMPANY but would NOT report a line that had BANKS IN CALIF or BANNED IN CALIFORNIA.

Remember this!

After you click the RUN button, SortStar pops up the search results in a text file called RESULTS.TXT. You can copy text from this file to use elsewhere, or Save the result file UNDER A DIFFERENT NAME to use later. Why? Because **each time you Run a search, SortStar makes a new Results.txt file... and overwrites the previous one.** Also, remember that the Results.txt file is DIFFERENT from the OBF.TXT Edit file... the one that holds all your personal information, that you edit with the One Big File button.

Caution: It's easy to start making changes to the Results file by mistake... when you really want to edit your master file. Always use the One Big File button to edit your master file, OBF.TXT, since this is the file that the temporary output RESULTS.TXT is compiled from.



Searching Large Files

Key point: You can work with text files of any size.

SortStar can work with large-size plaintext files, easily up to a gigabyte (1,000 megabytes). This lets us use OBF.TXT as a 'lifetime' file... for records, contacts, personal information... without ever having to worry about filesize. For example, the average novel is approximately 500 KB in size... or two novels to a megabyte. A personal file the size of the Bible would only be 4 MB. That's a LOT of personal information.

The **Select File button** opens a Select Data File dialog box. Pick the file you want, and click Open. The selected filename appears in the Select File name box, indicating that it is ready to use. If you turn SortStar off, it will remember the last-used file.

SortStar is VERY fast. For example, way back in 1995, on an old HP Pentium II 200MHz PC, you could search the complete King James Bible in less than three seconds.

Structured text files

But speed alone doesn't make a good search tool. Fast as SortStar is, it works best on structured data files, which the Bible is not.

For example, if you enter `Jezebel` for a Bible search, you'll find all the text lines that contain 'Jezebel', but they won't mean anything, because the Bible is written in paragraphs. If a paragraph contains a search word somewhere in its first 255 characters, SortStar will report those first 255 characters -- but nothing further from that paragraph.

The business connection

SortStar was written for business, where structured text files are common. A file can have thousands of lines. Each line contains data organized in data fields, like:

```
Donahue, Jonathon, jon404@yahoo.com, multimedia designer
Bush, George, president@whitehouse.gov, politician
```

In this simple example, the data fields could be called Lastname, Firstname, E-mail, and Description.

Let's look at a typical real-life data file. Use the Select File control to choose **SicCodes.txt** (in your `c:\SortStar` folder). This is a data file of all the industrial classifications used in the USA.

Let's pretend you want the SIC number for manufacturers of road oil, the black stuff people put on highways to keep the dust down. In the blue-bordered search box, enter the phrase `road oil` and click the Run button. SortStar comes up with:

```
"29110506", "Road oils"
"37110407", "Road oilers (motor vehicles),
assembly of"
```

If you enter too broad a search term, like `farm` -- you'll get long list of results. Too long. So use the second box to thin in down. Put `corn` in the second box, and SortStar reports:

```
"01199901","Popcorn farm"  
"01399901","Broomcorn farm"  
"01619902","Corn farm, sweet"
```

By splitting your search into two boxes, one for each of your search words, you now know all the SIC numbers for corn farms. As a rule, put the widest-use word in the top box, and the narrowest-use words in the lower boxes... here, `farm` is the whole category, so it goes first, and `corn` is a sub-category, so it goes second.

Unlike the Bible file, The SIC Number file is structured... made of text lines with each piece of data separated by commas. When the search words are found somewhere in the first 255 characters of a line (a paragraph), SortStar will report the first 255 characters of that line.

Note: If you want SortStar to show you the whole 'SicCodes.txt' file... every line... just enter a single space in the first text box, and nothing in the others. If it's a large file, you'll have to wait a few seconds for the SortStar report, which will show the whole file from top to bottom. Try it!

Remember-- when you are finished looking at a business data file, don't forget to use the Select File control to reset SortStar to C:\SortStar\obf.txt, your personal data file.



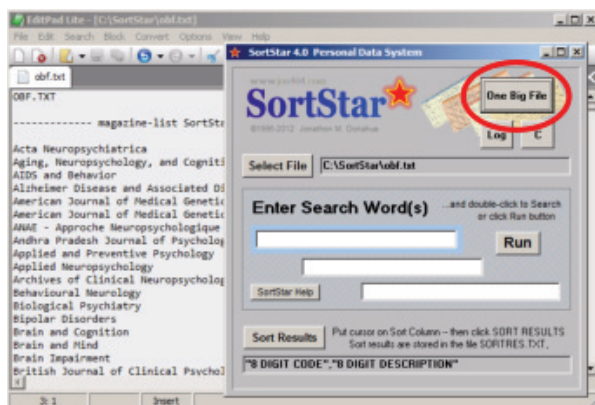
SortStar Controls

Key point: SortStar controls make finding data simple.

SortStar is a small program with only one 'screen', which presents seven control buttons to the user.

One Big File button

This button shows your master text file, OBF.TXT. OBF.TXT is displayed in a freeware text editor which can recognize hyperlinks in a plaintext file -- which lets you use SortStar as a gateway to the internet.



Log button

The Log button starts Windows Notepad, with a very special feature. Notepad is set to start typing at the bottom of the file, not the top. This feature automatically sets up a new log entry with date and time already entered.

Your Notepad log file will do this only as long as the word '.LOG' is at the very top of the file... so don't erase it!

A date/time Log file can be very useful... for keeping track of a sequence of events, for customer billing accounts, or for legal recordkeeping.

C button

The C button starts Microsoft Calc, a free calculator found on all PCs with Windows.

When you run the calculator, go to View on its toolbar and click 'Scientific' for a full-featured display. Windows Calculator has a really good Help file, if you want to understand its advanced features.

Select File button

The Select File button opens a standard Windows file selection box. Pick the file you want, and click Open. The selected file-name appears in the Select File name box, indicating that it is ready to use.

To reset SortStar to your personal data file, use the Select File button, and choose C:\SortStar\obf.txt. Run a search on anything. After you run a search, SortStar always 'remembers' the last search file used.

Run button

The Run button searches the selected file for all text lines (paragraphs) containing the search words entered in the three search boxes. You can also run a search by entering a search word or phrase, then double-clicking in any search box.

SortStar Help button

Clicking the SortStar Help button displays SORTSTAR.TXT (you're reading it right now) which covers both program operation and the One Big File concept.

Sort Results button

After a search is run, the Sort Results button will sort RESULTS.TXT for you. Click Sort Results to sort on the leftmost character position (the first letter in a text line). Or, put the cursor in front of the letter-column you want to sort on, and click the Sort Results button. This is useful for re-sorting data found in large files with fixed columnar formats:

```
505141 Ball Screws & Splines (Wholesale)
505142 Steel Alloy (Wholesale)
505144 Steel Products (Wholesale)
```

In this example, you would put the cursor in front of the eighth character, like the B in Ball on the first line, and then click Sort Results to sort the RESULTS.TXT file on that character position. The sorted data will be output as SORTRES.TXT. If you want to store the sort results, save SORTRES.TXT under a different name. -- like RESULTS.TXT, it is re-written each time.

Note: the Sort Results process erases the last letter on each re-sorted textline. This is SortStar's only bug. Fix: add a space after the last character on the text line. Sortstar will then drop the space, without affecting the actual line entry text.



SortStar Security

Key point: Run SortStar from a flash drive for security.

If the information contained in your OBF.TXT file is extremely sensitive, you can run SortStar from a flash drive (thumb drive, jump drive) or other removable media that is both readable and writable.

Data loss: in seventeen years, the only data loss suffered occurred once, in 1998, when a PC was accidentally turned off just as SortStar was editing the OBF.TXT file. To be safe, back up -- make a copy -- of your OBF.TXT file once a month, and store the copy-file on a different hard drive, on a CD, or on a flash drive in a different location.



More about the One Big File

Computer operating systems and programs are becoming more complex as computer hardware becomes more powerful. Hard drive capacity is now practically unlimited. There is an endless amount of space for folders, still images, and documents. Time goes by, and the folders and their files soon number in the thousands, and the data becomes harder and harder to quickly locate and retrieve.

How can we make our computers easier and faster to use?

The first part of the problem is rapid access to information. How to avoid drilling down through folder after folder, or trying to search a whole 80GB hard drive for a folder, a file, or a fragment of text.

The second problem is portability. It should be possible to immediately copy our critical information onto removable media, take it to a completely different computer, PC or Mac, and begin work again without delay.

To make the modern computer easier and faster to use, we will have to work with the material at hand -- computers using Windows and Mac operating systems. SortStar uses existing programs found on both PCs and Macs to make both creating -- and retrieving -- information a very simple and intuitive process.

As program designers add new features to take advantage of the new power and mass storage, users have more and more difficulty performing simple tasks as the various program interfaces present more and more choices. As a result the workplace increasingly rewards those who are best at remembering command sequences, rather than those who are best at the actual task itself.

Example: technical writing. The 'best' writers become those who have mastered the intricacies of programs like Framemaker, rather than the writing itself. More and more time is spent on layout and formatting -- design issues -- rather than on the actual writing.

Steve Wozniak, co-inventor of the Apple, once said "the only good computer is one that you can throw out a window." Because it really shouldn't be about the computer, but about the information, the data. For Windows and Mac users, the data is a prisoner of increasingly complex operating systems and programs. The start of system simplification is to liberate the data.

Jef Raskin (the original Mac interface designer), set forth in "The Humane Interface" that it is preferable to use 'content-based organization, rather than arranging the information in files and folders'. In this approach, the ultimate solution would be to have only one file containing all information, with included meta-data so that you could find any information within the single file itself. And, you would want this One Big File to run on any PC or Mac without problems.

Given the above, the One Big File (OBF) must be in plain-text format, which can be read on different platforms without special programs or interpreters. As long as all our information is in plaintext, it can all go in one file, which can be as large as we

please, since there is no practical size-limit thanks to large hard drives.

An 80 GB (gigabyte) drive can hold the plaintext equivalent of 2000 Bibles (at 4MB (megabytes) per Bible). A 1 GB flash drive can hold the equivalent of 25 Bibles. That's a lot of text, considering how unlikely it is that any of us would ever generate even a single Bible's worth amount of plaintext information in a lifetime.

Large OBFs can be easily and rapidly searched, to recall data. Within itself, the OBF can contain a usable structure, to help organize the its growing amount of material. This structure is very important -- it lets a simple text file become a very powerful information bank, with data rapidly accessed and retrieved.

The portability of plaintext has its limits. You can't put pictures in a plaintext file, or Powerpoint presentations, or Word documents, Final Cut Pro movies, MP3 audio tracks, or all of the other 'proprietary format' files we use on our PCs and Macs.

However, the large OBF plaintext file can contain links -- hyperlinks -- to the other files you use. Examples:

```
http://www.yahoo.com
file:///C:/Windows/Explorer.exe
```

Note -- with Windows 7, a link to a local file (on your hard drive, flash drive, or intranet) can have either a specific 'absolute' drive address to work... like file:///C:/SortStar/images/bridge.jpg (absolute) or file:///images/bridge.jpg (relative).

And, if you put all the other files you use into the same folder as the OBF, you now have One Big Folder that can easily be moved from PC to Mac to tablet -- assuming you have the same programs on the different machines to run the special files, like Powerpoint.

Success in computer simplification comes from using the OBF for more and more of our text-based work. Simplification comes from keeping more and more of our working files in the single OBF folder, using links from the OBF text file to find the information. This reduces and eliminates the time taken to navigate to different folders... the time taken opening different documents... and the time taken opening different programs to do simple tasks, like finding a name quickly.



One Big File structure

Key point: The OBF can contain both structured and unstructured data.

Computer data structure is always a matter of imagination.

We can imagine that our data is in 'folders', or in 'drawers', or in any other imaginary container-type construct. It's all imaginary. The data itself is actually trillions of 1s and 0s, in bit patterns like 11001010 01110001 spread all over the magnetic surface of the hard drive. The computer's operating system keeps track of all these patterns, which are actually written to random locations when you save a file. For example, your Powerpoint presentation will be written in thousands of bit patterns to different locations all over the hard drive, and, when you reopen the file, the operating system goes out, finds all the pieces, puts them back in order, and presents them to you onscreen as something you can recognize.

The key point is that it's all **imaginary**. In the early '80s, the Xerox Star PC used a graphical operating system that -- for the first time -- imagined information as 'folders'. Each folder, of course, could contain 'files'. This imaginary construct was copied

by Digital Research (Gem OS), Microsoft (Windows OS), and by Apple (Mac OS).

In the early '80s, a disk could hold, at most, about one novel's worth of data. But today, with huge hard drives, the folder construct no longer works very well. The folder approach to data is failing, because, in real life, there just aren't any file cabinets with 4000 or 5000 folders. Unlike a modern disk-drive, no real-life folder or file cabinet can hold 20,000 novels.

We are in a data explosion that is spinning out of control. To regain ease of use, speed, and simplicity, we need to use a different imaginary data construct, and to purposely limit how we store our key data, forswearing complex RTFs and DOCs for simple TXT plaintext. We may not be able to control the proliferation of files in the workplace, but we can do a lot to reduce the complexity of information needed for our personal lives.

Our new construct will be called OBF... which can stand for either One Big Folder or One Big File. In short, we will try to keep all our personal information in One Big File, OBF.TXT, that is stored in One Big Folder, C:/SortStar.

OBF 'rules'

Let's set out some proposed rules for OBF usage:

a. We will have One Big Folder, called SortStar.

On PCs, this folder will be C:\SORTSTAR. Why SortStar? Because we can integrate our OBF concept with a separate program called SortStar, that greatly assists searching large text files for specific data.

The SortStar folder will hold all our personal information that can be kept in plaintext format.

A single folder is portable. It can be moved between hard drives, between PCs, without invalidating OBF.TXT hyperlinks to the data in sub-folders.

b. The C:\SortStar folder can have sub-folders.

Other personal files -- other documents, images, spreadsheets, resumes, presentations, etc. that are referenced by links from the OBF text file will be contained in sub-folders within the C:\SortStar folder, along with the OBF.TXT text file itself.

For instance, you could have a sub-folder called 'images', and a typical OBF.TXT filelink could be: "file:///C:/SORTSTAR/images/bridge.jpg"... which will launch the image file in your default image viewer or editor. For simplicity and sanity, have as few sub-folders as possible, and do your content-organizing in the OBF text file.

With Windows 7, 'relative' links, like "file:///images/alison.jpg" will also work.

c. The plaintext OBF file will be called OBF.TXT, and will contain both structured and unstructured data.

Some, but not all, of our information will be 'structured'... e.g., set up in maximum 255-character text lines. Each line is a unique data entry, ended with an Enter key paragraph return.

Johnson, Fred, 201 843-7741, family friend

Smith, Mary, 561 775-8123, marys@pixilis.com

And, each line of searchable structured data can be up to 255 characters long... gives plenty of room to create a detailed data record for almost any purpose.

```
Smith, Mary, 561 775-8123, marys@pixilis.com,
call her on 8/20 re contract work for rigid-
rotor development.
```

Searching structured data is an easy task. Put "Mary" in the first SortStar search box, and click Run. The line entry for Mary Smith will immediately appear in the results file.

Non-structured data

But what happens when you want to record unstructured data in your OBF.TXT personal data file? Since SortStar is a textline searcher, how can it find and display paragraphs, or even whole documents saved in text format inside the OBF file?

Well, it can't. But you CAN use code letters, like dx, to start a 'header line' just above a complete text document that you've copied in.

```
dx 2012 03 25 VF-22 Osprey Reliability Report draft 6
follows
```

But, it would be better to store the document in a C:/SortStar subfolder, and then link to the document from your OBF:

```
dx 2012 03 25 VF-22 Osprey Reliability Report draft 6
at file:///osprey/vf-22a-draft6.docx
```

...keeping in mind the overall concept of One Big File stored in One Big Folder, with the One Big File containing links to its own information, as well as to more information contained in subfolders always kept within the One Big Folder.

Give it a try!