

SearchKeyLite 1.5 for High Sierra, Mojave, Catalina, Big Sur, Monterey & Ventura
Release Notes

Howard Oakley <https://eclecticlight.co>

These release notes describe the features of **SearchKeyLite**, a simple GUI tool for adding keywords and other metadata to files, to improve Spotlight local search results. This is a sister app to **SearchKey**, which provides more extensive features for the same purpose; SearchKey includes batch mode, the ability to remove metadata, and works with hidden folders and files too.

Spotlight compiles indexes of metadata for use in local searches. For most files, the information used for those indexes is the (data) contents of the file. For text and PDF files, for example, that consists of the words contained within each file. If you search for files containing the word *macOS*, then Spotlight won't find any which refer only to *OS X*. If you search for files containing the word *auto*, then Spotlight won't find any which only use the European term of *car*.

One way to address this is to add keywords and other metadata which ensure that documents about macOS or autos, or whatever, can be found regardless of the words within them. Such metadata are also the only effective way of searching non-verbal content such as images, audio, and video.

Some file formats, particularly those used for non-verbal content, already provide for metadata, which Spotlight uses. macOS also provides a universal system through extended attributes, or xattrs, which can be attached to any file (or folder), and remain attached to the file wherever it goes. The problem with extended attributes is that, with a few exceptions, that cannot ordinarily be seen by the user, nor are they easy to edit.

SearchKeyLite changes that, making it simple for you to add metadata in the form of extended attributes to any document or other file.

Not all extended attributes are preserved at all times. There are some file systems which strip them, NFS being one, but few users are likely to store their files on them. Those selected for use in SearchKeyLite currently appear to be those which are most suitable for containing this type of metadata, are indexed and used for Spotlight local search, and are preserved in iCloud Drive.

What you need

- A Mac running High Sierra or later.
- A copy of the latest release of SearchKeyLite from <https://eclecticlight.co/downloads/> (This is delivered by secure HTTPS download.)

SearchKeyLite comes compressed as a Zip file, which you should decompress, and move the app to your preferred folder, such as /Applications. It is not fussy where it is run from, though.

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Use

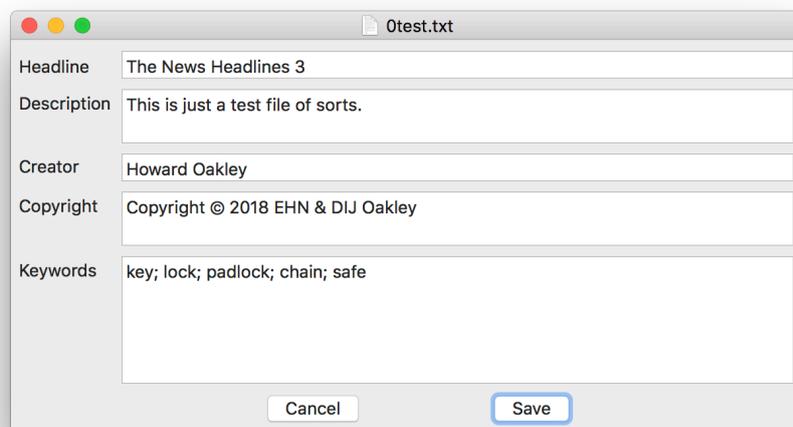
SearchKeyLite currently lets you open any regular file (but *not* folders or bundles, such as Photos Libraries) and add or change the following extended attributes:

- **Headline** is stored in the xattr com.apple.metadata:kMDItemHeadline.
- **Description** in com.apple.metadata:kMDItemDescription.
- **Creator** in com.apple.metadata:kMDItemCreator.
- **Copyright** in com.apple.metadata:kMDItemCopyright.
- **Keywords** in com.apple.metadata:kMDItemKeywords.

TL;DR: Use the **Open** menu command or drag and drop file(s) onto the app icon to open one or more files. Edit the text boxes. To copy a complete set of contents, use **Copy All**; to paste a complete set, use **Paste All**. Those boxes left empty will *not* be saved to the file as extended attributes. Break lines in text with Opt-Enter. Save the metadata using the menu command or by clicking on the **Save** button. To abandon changes before saving, close the window or click on the **Cancel** button.

Details

When you open SearchKeyLite, it doesn't open a new window, but waits for you to open a document using the **Open...** menu command. Alternatively, you can drag and drop one or more documents (but not folders) onto the app icon in a Finder window or the Dock.



When you open an item, any metadata already contained in those five extended attributes will be displayed in their respective text boxes. You can then edit those metadata until you are happy with them. **⚠ If you leave a text box empty, that extended attribute will not be written to the file when you save changes.**

These extended attributes are best with short text content, although they will work with more than 100 KB of text in each. To break lines in the text boxes, press **Option-Enter**. You can

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cut, copy, and paste text in the text boxes as you would expect, but styling is not supported: the attributes only store plain not styled text.

To save you from having to copy and paste each attribute individually, you can use the **Copy All** and **Paste All** menu commands, with shortcuts $\text{⌘} \text{⇧} \text{C}$ and $\text{⌘} \text{⇧} \text{V}$ respectively. These copy and paste the complete contents of all five boxes in one action.

Because an empty text box is not written out to that extended attribute, use this as a way to change only certain attributes. For example, to write out just a Copyright extended attribute to a file, edit one window to contain all blank boxes *except* the Copyright box. In that box, enter your copyright statement. Then **Copy All** from that window, and **Paste All** into the window for the destination file. You will see that only the Copyright box has changed.

⚠ When you **Save** changes, the text which you have entered is converted into XML format before being written out to each extended attribute. Unlike in xattred (which works in raw XML), you should *not* enter the XML ‘escape’ forms for characters, such as `&` for `&` (ampersand). SearchKeyLite works with plain Unicode UTF-8 characters, and should handle any conversions automatically.

Once you are happy with the metadata, use the Save command ($\text{⌘} \text{S}$) or click on the **Save** button to write them out to the extended attributes for that file. To leave the attributes unchanged from the last time that they were saved, use the **Close** menu command, close the window in the normal way, or click on the **Cancel** button. **⚠** You will not be warned, though, that any changes have not been saved.

Easy access to attributes in search

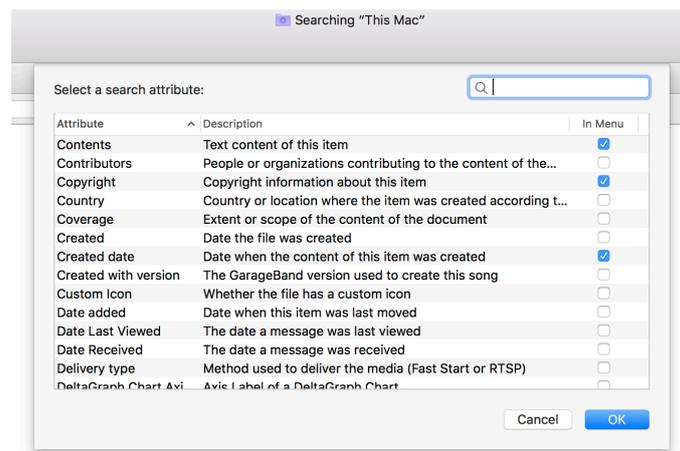
When you perform a normal Spotlight search through the  icon in the menubar, Spotlight uses its metadata indexes which include all the text in these five extended attributes. However, there is a more powerful way of harnessing them, in Finder’s **Find** command.

Before you can use this, you should add the four accessible extended attributes to the search criteria. Open a new window in the Finder, and select the **Find** command in the **File** menu. This changes the window from a normal Finder view to a Find window, in which the lowest row in the top part of the window contains search criteria, by default set to **Kind is Any**. Open the popup menu containing the first part of that, **Kind**, and at the foot of that menu you will see the option **Other...** Choose that option to open the search attributes, and in that list tick the checkboxes next to **Headline**, **Descriptions**, **Keywords**, and **Copyright**. This adds them to that popup menu.

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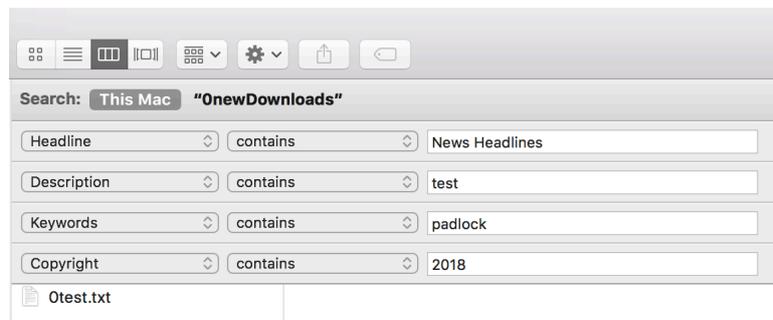
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Now, you can perform Finder searches using the contents of those four extended attributes.

⚠ There doesn't appear to be any way to add **Creator** to the search attributes used here, but the other four extended attributes are fully supported.



Applications which support Spotlight-based search may also offer these extended attributes in their search criteria; that varies according to the app.

Obtaining updates

Use the **Browse updates** command in the **Help** menu to open a page in your default browser which lists current versions of apps, and makes it easy to download updates.

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Change list

1.5:

- updated xattr code for future compatibility.

1.4:

- Universal App.

1.3:

- ported to Swift 5 and Xcode 10.3
- added code integrity check
- added Support Page link
- improved saving of window size and location.

1.2:

- ported to Swift 4.2.1 and Xcode 10.1
- notarized for Mojave.

1.1:

- fixed potential clash of data access in xattr code
- added Browse updates command in Help menu
- tweaked for full compatibility with Dark Mode
- ported to Swift 4.2
- built with Xcode 10B.

1.0:

- final code checks
- added Tooltips
- added Help book.

1.0b9:

- initial release, without function as a Service.

5 June 2023.