



HoudahSpot 5

User Guide

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1. Introduction

HoudahSpot is a powerful file search utility. It builds upon the existing [Spotlight engine](#). This allows for fast searches without the need for another index. HoudahSpot works both as an everyday replacement to the default Spotlight interface and as a power search tool.

HoudahSpot makes it easy to create queries and narrow down the search to get to the files you are looking for: Find files by name, text, kind, date, tags, pixel count, author, recipient, etc. There is a myriad of criteria, which can be combined into groups (“NONE/ALL/ANY of the following are true”). You can search several locations at once, as well as exclude others.

HoudahSpot works at your pace: Set up your search. Click the start button. Only then will HoudahSpot get busy gathering results.

Exploring results is easy: You can add any number of columns to the results list. Sort by these columns. Examine the result files by previewing text content, file metadata or by using the Quick Look feature.

With HoudahSpot, you can find files you forgot you had: pictures that pre-date Apple Photos and iPhoto, MP3 files you never put into iTunes, data you carried over from your previous Mac and never bothered to sort into your new folder structure. By combining modification date, file type, and location criteria, such files are finally within reach.

2. What’s new in HoudahSpot 5

With the HoudahSpot 5 upgrade, we refined just about every aspect of the file search experience. Lots of small improvements will have you find files faster. Many operations now need fewer clicks. HoudahSpot has more customization options so it can adapt to your workflow.

It is now easier than ever to personalize your default search setup. To customize the way new HoudahSpot windows are set up, you just need to set up a search with its criteria, locations, and result display option and then select File > Save as Default. New in HoudahSpot 5, you can now make incremental adjustments to the default set up. For example, when you manage search locations, you will have the option to apply your changes to the default setup.

HoudahSpot 5 adds support for modern macOS features like dark mode, Touch Bar, Finder extensions, and Quick Actions.

2.1. Folding Text Preview

Quick Look and [Text Preview](#) let you peek inside found files without having to open them. HoudahSpot's Text Preview has the unique ability to highlight text you searched for.

You can now “fold” the preview to show only text close to highlighted matches. This makes it easier to see the context in which the text was found. You may even be able to pick up the information you are looking for right from the preview.

2.2. Recent search attributes & values, locations, and columns

HoudahSpot now remembers which search criteria and columns you recently used. It will include these in the respective menus without you having to explicitly customize your search setup.

HoudahSpot also considers it likely that you will want to use the same attributes in search criteria and result columns. E.g. when you search for photos by “ISO Speed”, you will probably want to see the ISO speed values in search results. HoudahSpot thus automatically includes “ISO Speed” in the menu of available search result columns.

Similarly, HoudahSpot remembers which locations (folder and drives) you have recently searched and includes these in the search and exclusion location menus.

For search criteria where HoudahSpot can offer a list of possible values, it now lists recently used values first.

2.3. Quicker criteria setup

While entering criteria values in the Refine pane, you can press Command-Option-Return to add another criterion for the same attribute. For example, when searching for file names that contain both “Houdah” and “Software”: Fill in the “Name” criterion by typing “Houdah”. Then press command-option-Return to get a new row. Then type “Software”.

Hold the Shift key to duplicate the current criterion and keep its value. This is useful when searching for the same text in different attributes. To search for a mail message where either the “Authors” or the “Recipients” contain “Houdah”, create an “Any of the following is true” group with an “Authors” criterion. Fill it in by typing “Houdah”. Then press Command-Option-Shift-Return to duplicate the row. Change the attribute of the new criterion to “Recipients”.

2.4. Arrange search results by kind, date, file size, or application

HoudahSpot can now arrange search results in groups by kind, date, file size, or application. For example: files that will open in Microsoft Word in one group, and files that will open in Apple Pages in another.

The “Arrange By” option is available from the View menu. Like the column configuration and sort options, this setting is saved when creating a default setup or search template.

2.5. Compact Mode

When dragging files from HoudahSpot to other applications, the HoudahSpot window may get in the way and obscure the location where you want to use the files. [Compact Mode](#) shrinks the HoudahSpot window to show just the search results and free up as much screen space as possible.

Compact mode can be activated from the View menu or using the “Compact Mode” button in the window toolbar. HoudahSpot automatically exits compact mode when you open the Search or Details panes.

2.6. Vertical layout

HoudahSpot uses a three-pane layout: Search, Results, and Details. By default, these show next to each other. If you need to save horizontal screen space, you can have HoudahSpot show Details below Results. This vertical layout is particularly useful when using the macOS split screen feature to show two applications side-by-side.

The layout can be adjusted from the View > Details menu.

2.7. Enhanced grid view

Grid view not only looks nicer, it can also show pertinent file information alongside file icons or previews. Two lines of text below the file names show the most relevant properties of the file. What information is shown depends on the file type. E.g. for mail messages, this will be the sender and recipient.

The “File Info” option can be enabled from the View > Grid menu.

2.8. Faster file tagging

The file tagging window now lists favorite and recently used tags.

In HoudahSpot > Preferences > Tags you can now set up keyboard shortcuts to add or remove tags from selected search results.

2.9. Fewer windows

When you start a new search, you may want to close earlier searches that you no longer need. The new File > Revert lets you start over with a fresh search within the same window. The new search will use the same search template as the original search.

3. HoudahSpot and the Spotlight Index

HoudahSpot builds upon Spotlight, which comes preinstalled with macOS. With HoudahSpot, there is no need to build an additional index.

The Spotlight index gets its information from Spotlight importer plug-ins. For standard file formats, these plug-ins are provided by Apple. Third-party developers need to provide their own Spotlight plug-ins if they want their proprietary file formats to be read by Spotlight. Developers are free to decide what information to share with Spotlight and how to label it; e.g. one mail client may store the sender's name as "author" while the other labels it "sender".

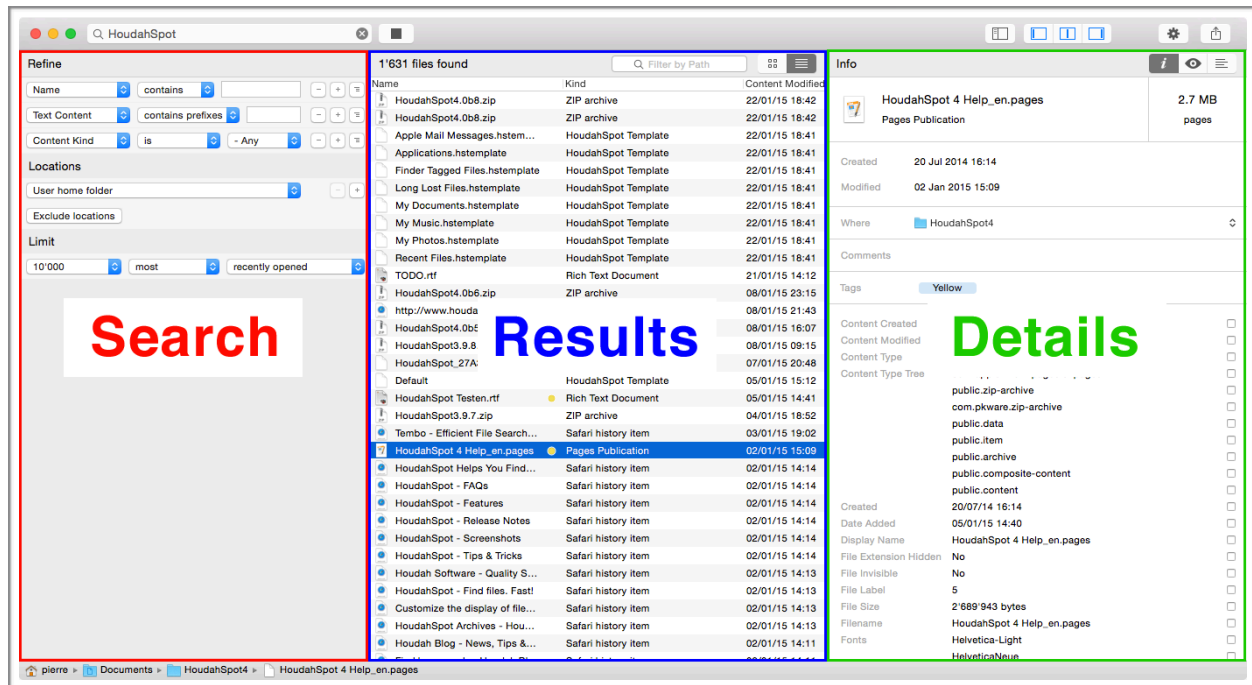
Therefore, which files HoudahSpot can find and the information that it can display depends on the applications you have installed and their respective Spotlight plug-ins.

You can use the [Info pane](#) in HoudahSpot to see which metadata has been recorded for a given file, e.g. what information is available for messages from your mail client.

4. Workflow

The descriptions and instructions in this chapter assume that you have not made any adjustments to the default setup.

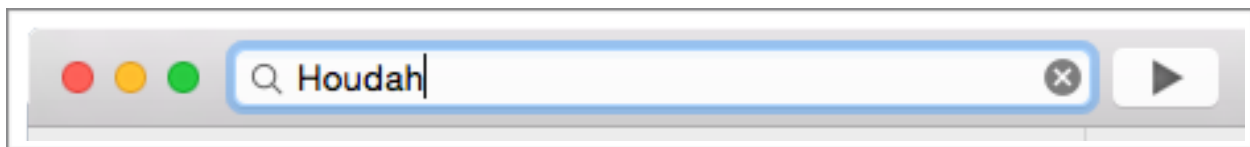
HoudahSpot opens to a new search document consisting of three panes: Search, Results, and Details.



The Search and the Details panes can be hidden using commands from the [View](#) menu. Also, the panes can be rearranged so that the Details show below the Results.

4.1. The Search Field

You can start a search by entering search terms into the search field in the window's toolbar.



HoudahSpot will search for files where all the search terms entered can be found anywhere in name, text content, or other metadata. The menu on the loupe icon lets you decide if HoudahSpot should search by “Any Text” (the default behavior), “Name”, or “Text Content”.

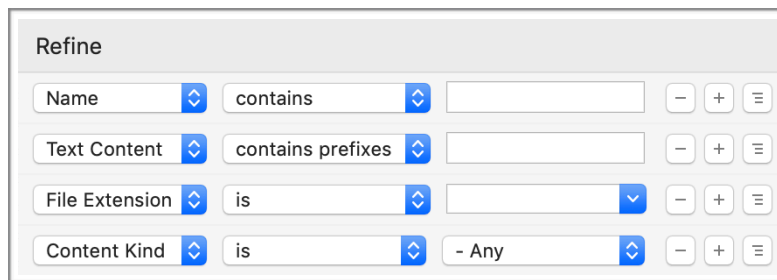
You can start the search by clicking the start button to the right. Alternatively, you may continue to [refine your search](#) by adding criteria in the Search pane and by specifying [search locations](#) before you hit the start button.

The search field can also be used to formulate [more complex searches](#).

4.2. Refine Search

Below the search field, you will find the “refine search” area with criteria rows. This section allows you to narrow down the search. Criteria rows are typically made of three items:

- To the left is the **criterion attribute** pop-up menu (e.g. Name, Text Content)
- This is usually followed by an **operator** pop-up menu (e.g. contains, is)
- Last is the **criterion value**. This may show as text field, pop-up menu, or date picker



The screenshot shows a 'Refine' search pane with four criteria rows. Each row consists of a criterion attribute (Name, Text Content, File Extension, Content Kind), an operator (contains, contains prefixes, is, is), and a criterion value (empty text field, empty text field, dropdown menu, and '- Any' dropdown menu). To the right of each row are three buttons: a minus sign, a plus sign, and a menu icon.

The “-” and “+” buttons to the right will add or delete criteria rows. The last button creates a [criteria group](#). Criteria rows can be rearranged by drag-and-drop. Hold the Option key while you click to grab the criteria rows more easily.



The Search pane may be hidden by clicking the respective view selector button in the toolbar or by using commands from the [View](#) menu. There, you can also opt for the Search pane to hide automatically after clicking the start button and to show automatically after clicking the stop button.

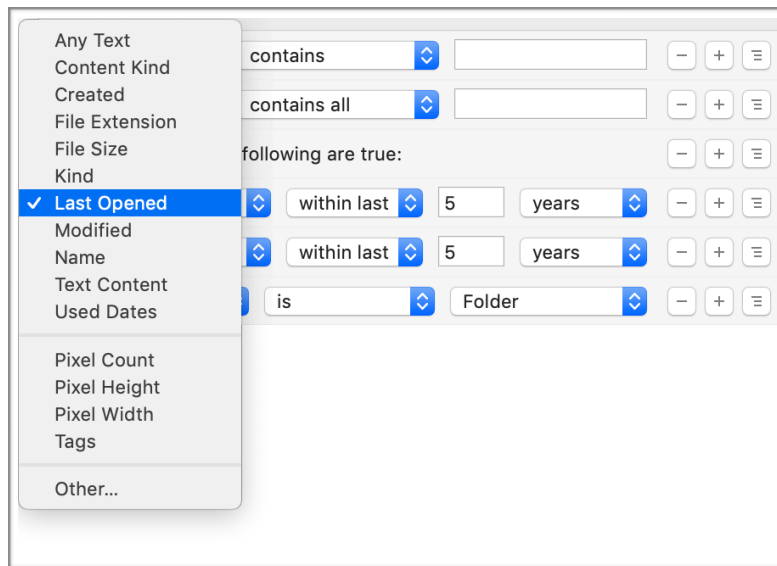


Click and hold on the Results or Details buttons to see a menu with options for the respective panes.

4.2.1. Criteria Attributes

The Refine section is preconfigured with the following criteria attributes:

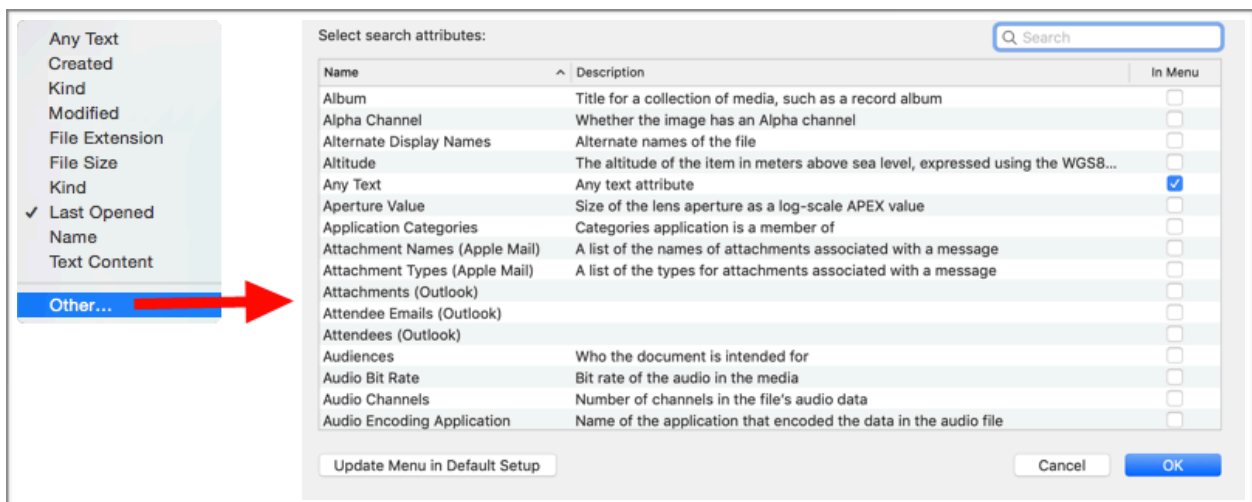
- Name: Matches files by Display Names and Alternate Display Names
- Text Content: Matches files by indexed text content
- File Extension: Matches the file name extension
- Content Kind: Matches files by kind category



Use the pop-up menu to get access to additional attributes.

You can configure HoudahSpot to list your preferred attributes. HoudahSpot will automatically list recently used attributes.

Choose “Other ...” to get a list of all criteria attributes available.



To add an attribute from the list to the pop-up menu, double click the row. Or check the “In Menu” option to add an attribute without immediately using it. The attribute will be added to every pop-up menu of your current search document. To delete the attribute from the list, untick the checkbox.

If you want your selection of menu items to apply to every new search window, click the “Update Menu in Default Setup”. To further customize the default setup, use the “[Save as Default](#)” command from the File menu.

HoudahSpot relies on Spotlight to find files by properties and metadata. The values of these attributes are provided by the file system and by third-party [Spotlight plug-ins](#).

Criteria are active only when they have been given a value. Thus, you may safely do a search on file name by only filling in the matching field. Other criteria are ignored. There is no harm in leaving blank criteria in place.

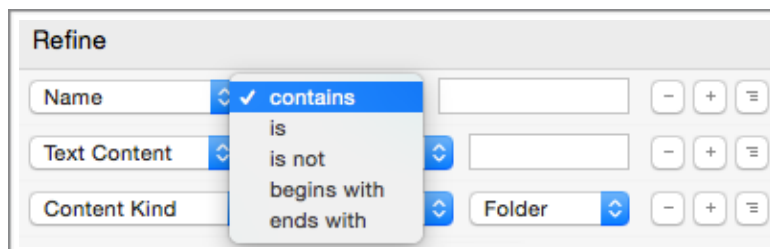
4.2.1.1. “Name”

HoudahSpot's “Name” attribute is a combination of two Spotlight attributes: It searches both “Display Name” and “Alternate Display Names”.

The “Display Name” is typically the same as the file's name or name without extension.

But: “Display Names” may differ from actual file names. One notable example is Apple Mail. It saves messages in numbered .eml files. The message subject is stored as “Display Name” with Spotlight. E.g. the file name of a specific mail message file is “396936.emlx”, while its “Display Name” will be the mail subject string (e.g. “Re: Try HoudahSpot to find files”).

The “Name” criterion can have different operators, of which **is** / **is not** will only find exact matches of the search terms entered. It will ignore case differences and umlauts. E.g. a search for “Name is tree house” will return files like “tree house.jpg”, “tree house.pdf” etc., but NOT “**my** tree house.jpg”.

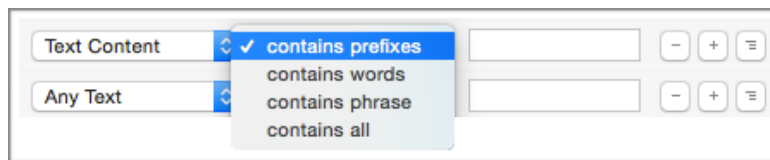


When the search operator is set to **contains**, it will return all files which include the exact search term entered. It will ignore case differences and umlauts. E.g. a search for “Name contains tree house” will return files like “tree house.jpg”, “my tree house.pdf” or “tree houses.jpg”, but NOT “tree.jpg” or “house.pdf” (because ALL of the search terms — both “tree” and “house” have to be present in the file name for it to be included in the results list.)

4.2.1.2. “Text Content” and “Any Text”

The “Text Content” attribute allows you to search files by indexed text content. As such, it applies only to files that contain text. E.g. word processing documents, presentations etc.

The “Any Text” attribute matches any attribute containing text. E.g. author, location, tags, comments, etc. This also includes “text content.”



The available operators apply as follows to a search string of “tree house”:

- **“contains prefixes”** searches for starts of words. The example matches “tree house”, “TreeHouse” and also “treetop house”
- **“contains words”** searches for words in the text content. The example matches “tree house”, “TreeHouse”, but not “treetop house”
- **“contains phrase”** searches for the exact string. The example matches only “tree house”
- **“contains all”** searches for individual string elements anywhere in the text. The example matches files that contain both the words “tree” and “house”, including word combinations such as “houseboat” and “appletree”

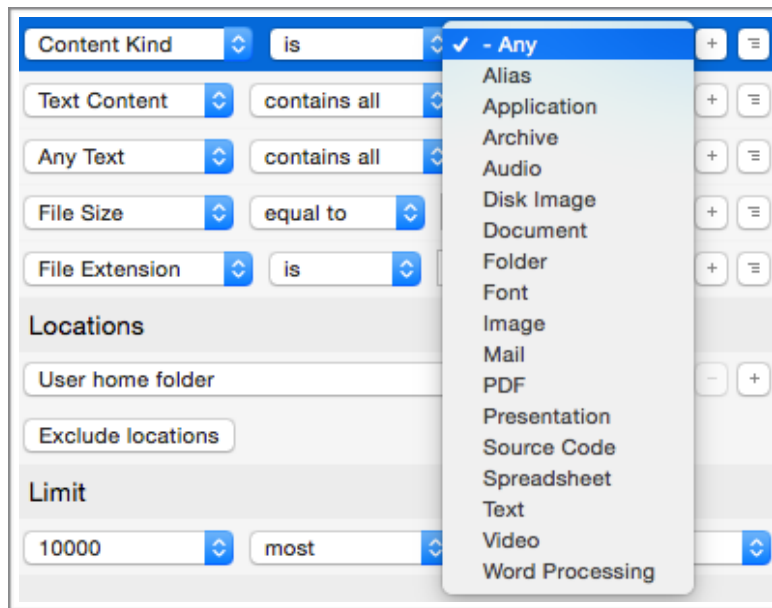
4.2.1.3. “Content Kind” and “Content Type”

The “Content Kind” attribute matches files by general kind. HoudahSpot provides a list of pre-defined types.

Switch to “Kind” or “Content Type” (via “Other ...” in the attribute pop-up menu) for finer control.

“Kind” is a plain language description of the file type (e.g. “Microsoft Word document”)

“Content Type” matches files by Uniform Type Identifier UTI (e.g. “com.apple.mail.emlx”)



Find UTIs hard to remember? Try [“Find by Example”](#):
 Drag a file of the content type desired from the Finder or from the HoudahSpot results list and drop it onto the “Content Kind” criterion. It will adapt to match the file.

4.2.1.4. “File Extension”

The “File Extension” searches file names for the specified extension. E.g. “.txt”, “.docx” etc. It is a convenience criterion equivalent to searching for file names ending with a dot followed by the specified extension.

4.2.1.5. “Keywords & Tags”

The “Keywords & Tags” attribute is a combination of existing attributes. It searches Finder Tags, OpenMeta Tags, and Keywords.

4.2.1.6. “Created”, “Modified”, and “Last Opened”

These attributes match files created, modified, or last opened “before”, “on”, or “after” a given date. Using the “within last” operator, it searches for files where the date on the file falls during a period of time ending today. You can also search by dates that fall in a specific year or month.

4.2.1.7. “File Size”

This attribute allows you to search for files of a size equal to, larger, or smaller than a value you specify in KB, MB, or GB.

To the Spotlight index, folders have no file size. I.e. Spotlight does not keep track of the compound size of all files within a folder. Thus, it is not possible e.g. to search for large folders.

HoudahSpot can, however, compute the “Total Size” of folders and show that in the list of results. Since HoudahSpot has to explore the contents of each folder and its sub-folders, these values may take a moment to appear. You can then sort search results by “Total Size” to find the larger folders.

4.2.2. Using the Asterisk (*) Wildcard

You can use the asterisk symbol * as a wildcard. The asterisk * matches any number of characters.

Examples:

- A search for the name criterion “*houdah” matches all files beginning with any number of unspecified characters followed by “houdah”.
- A search for the name criterion “houdah*” matches all files beginning with houdah followed by any number of unspecified characters.
- A search for the name criterion “*.txt” will find all files ending in .txt

The use of the asterisk symbol as a wildcard means that you can not search directly for it, therefore:

- If you want to search for *, type *
- If you want to search for *, type *
- If you want to search for \, type \

4.2.3. Combining Criteria: ALL / ANY / NONE Groups

The last button in each criterion row creates a criteria group. Groups combine several criteria using boolean operators: “ALL / ANY / NONE of the following are true”.



By default, files have to match all criteria listed to show up in the results list. The same is true for criteria wrapped in an **ALL** group. Within an **ANY** group, a file will be found if any of the listed criteria match. The criteria nested within a **NONE** group will be excluded from the search.

Criteria rows can be dragged and dropped into a group. Hold the option key while you click to grab the criteria rows more easily.

Examples:

If you want to find files that contain “house” in the name,

- that have been modified within the last 3 days **AND** are word processor files, wrap “Modified within last 3 days” and “Content Kind is Word Processing” in an **ALL group** (default).

The 'Refine' dialog box shows a search criteria list. The first criterion is 'Name contains house'. Below it, a blue bar indicates 'All of the following are true:'. Under this bar, two more criteria are listed: 'Modified within last 3 days' and 'Content Kind is Word Processing'. Each criterion has a dropdown arrow on its left and a set of control buttons (minus, plus, and a menu icon) on its right.

- and are either image **OR** video files, wrap “Content Kind is Image” and “Content Kind is Video” in an **ANY group**.

The 'Refine' dialog box shows the same first criterion 'Name contains house'. The blue bar now indicates 'Any of the following are true:'. Below this bar, two criteria are listed: 'Content Kind is Image' and 'Content Kind is Video'. Each criterion has a dropdown arrow on its left and a set of control buttons on its right.

- but you want to **EXCLUDE** folders from the results list, wrap “Content Kind is folder” in a **NONE group**. (For this example, you would get the same result if you simply set “Content Kind” to “IS NOT folder” instead of using a group.)

The 'Refine' dialog box shows the same first criterion 'Name contains house'. The blue bar now indicates 'None of the following are true:'. Below this bar, one criterion is listed: 'Content Kind is Folder'. Each criterion has a dropdown arrow on its left and a set of control buttons on its right.

4.2.4. Find by Example

You can drag files from the HoudahSpot results list or from the Finder onto criteria in order to set them to match the file's properties. This comes in handy when looking for files that in one way or another resemble a file you have at hand.

Alternatively, you can use the “Match Selected Result” option from the context menu on a criterion.

Example:

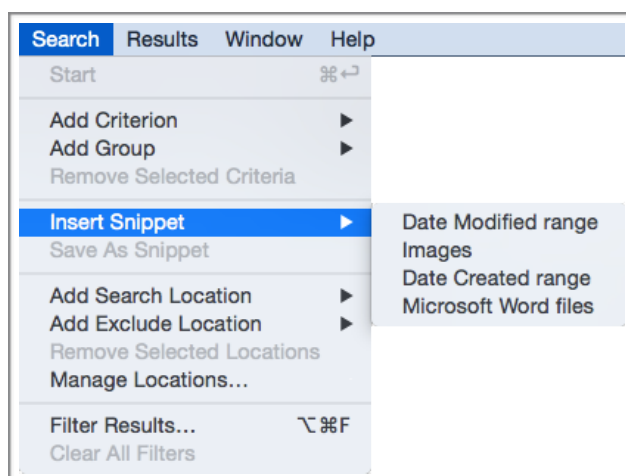
To find Microsoft Word files, drag a Word file onto a “Content type” criterion. The query will update to match all files of the Microsoft Word type.

HoudahSpot relies on the Spotlight index to get file properties. For files not indexed by Spotlight, it can extract basic attributes only: name, date created, etc.

4.2.5. Snippets

Snippets hold either a single search criterion or a group of criteria that serve a certain purpose. A set of useful sample snippets is pre-installed.

Insert a snippet by selecting it from the “Insert Snippet” item in the Search menu. You may also use the context menu (Control-click or right-click) in the Search pane. Alternatively, you can drag a Snippet from the [Sidebar](#) or from the [Snippet preferences tab](#) and drop it onto the criteria area of the Search pane.

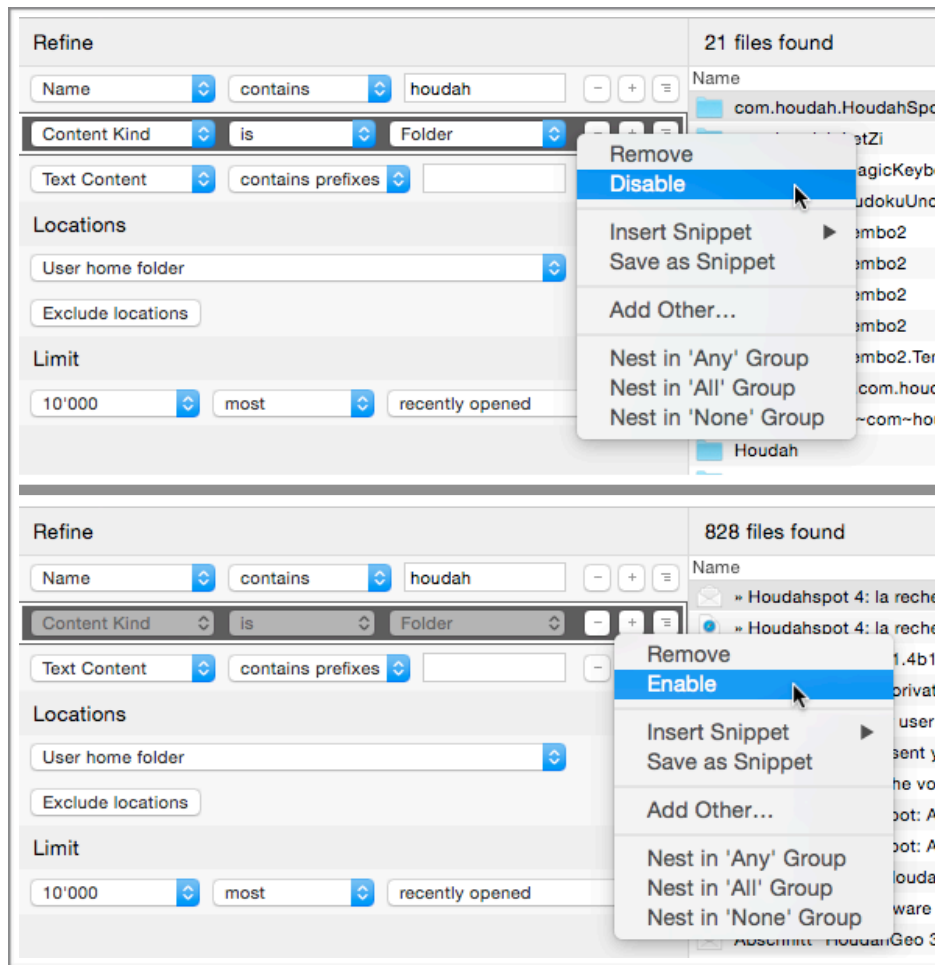


To create a new snippet, select the criteria rows that make up your snippet in the Search pane, then either use the “Save as Snippet” command from the Search menu or make use of the context menu. To select the criteria rows more easily, hold the option key while you click.

The [preferences tab](#) allows for creating, deleting, exporting or importing snippets.

4.2.6. Temporarily Disable Criteria Rows

To disable criteria rows, select them, then either choose Search > “Disable Selected Criteria” from the menu or select “Disable” from the row’s context menu. To enable, select the respective rows and choose “Enable” from the context menu or from HoudahSpot’s Search menu.

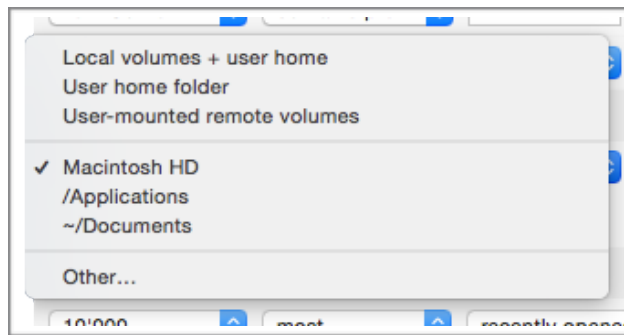


4.3. Search Locations

In this section, you can configure the locations - folders or volumes - HoudahSpot is to search. By default, this will be your home directory.



Use the pop-up menu to choose from a selection of locations. Go to “Other...” to choose any other location.

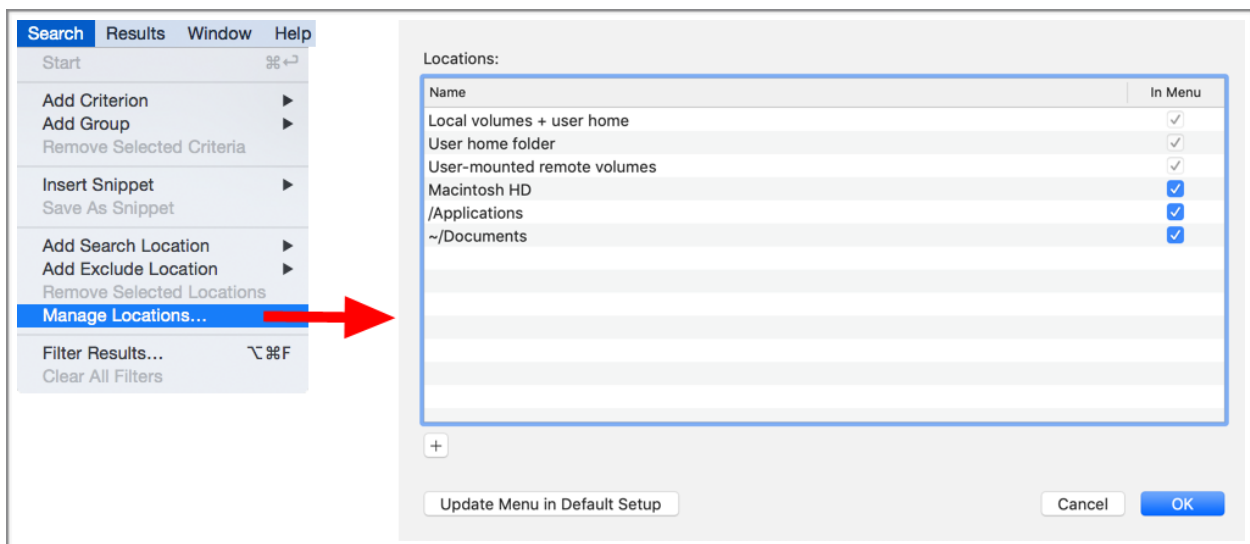


The search scope can also be configured by dragging files or folders onto rows in the locations section.

HoudahSpot relies on the Spotlight index to find files and show file properties. As a rule of thumb, HoudahSpot can only find files in locations indexed by Spotlight.

In some cases, HoudahSpot may be able to find files in folders excluded from Spotlight if you point HoudahSpot directly to such a folder. E.g. searching the folder ~/Library/Preferences may find files that are not found when searching the parent folder ~/Library. In these directories, only searches by basic file properties (e.g. name) will work.

To organize the “Locations” and “Exclude Locations” pop-up menus, choose “Manage Locations...” from the Search Menu. In addition to your preferred locations, HoudahSpot will automatically list connected volumes and recently used locations.



To add a new location to the list, click the “+” button. The location will be added to “Locations” and “Exclude Locations” pop-up menus of your current search document. To remove a location from the menus, untick the “in Menu” checkbox.

If you want locations to show up in the pop-up menu of every new search document, click the “Update Menu in Default Setup”. To further customize the default setup, use the “[Save as Default](#)” command from the File menu.

4.3.1. Exclude Locations

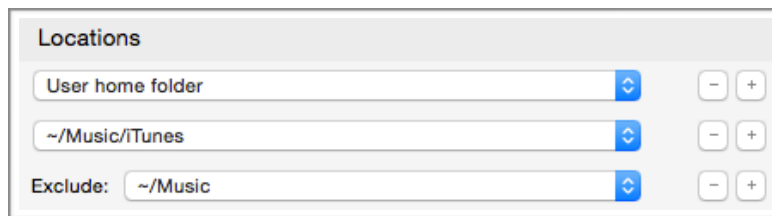
You can exclude certain locations from the search. For instance, you may want to search all of your home folder, except for the Library folder. The setup would look like this:



HoudahSpot respects the most specific location listed.

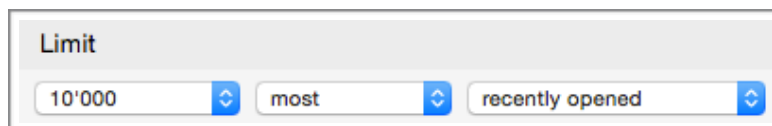
Example:

A search within the User home folder and the folder ~/.Music/iTunes with the whole Music folder excluded will search in the home folder and exclude the Music folder except for the iTunes folder within. Because ~/.Music/iTunes is more specific than ~/.Music, ~/.Music/iTunes takes priority over ~/.Music.



4.4. Limit

You can choose to have HoudahSpot show only a limited number of results, e.g. the 10'000 most recently opened or the 1'000 most recently modified files. Setting a limit keeps the results manageable and relevant.



Files may disappear from the list as the Spotlight engine finds “better matches”.

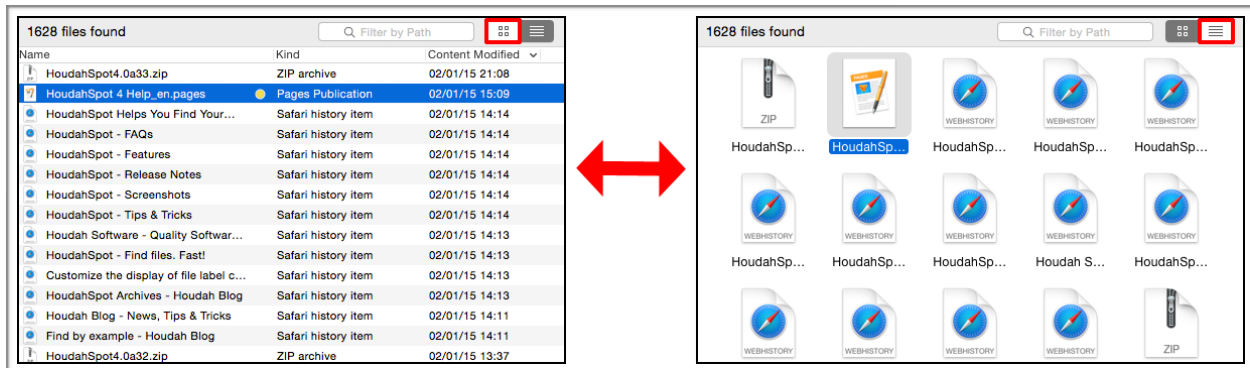
4.5. Start / Stop Button

With HoudahSpot, searches start only when you are ready. Set up your query, then click the start button in the toolbar. Only now will HoudahSpot get busy gathering results.

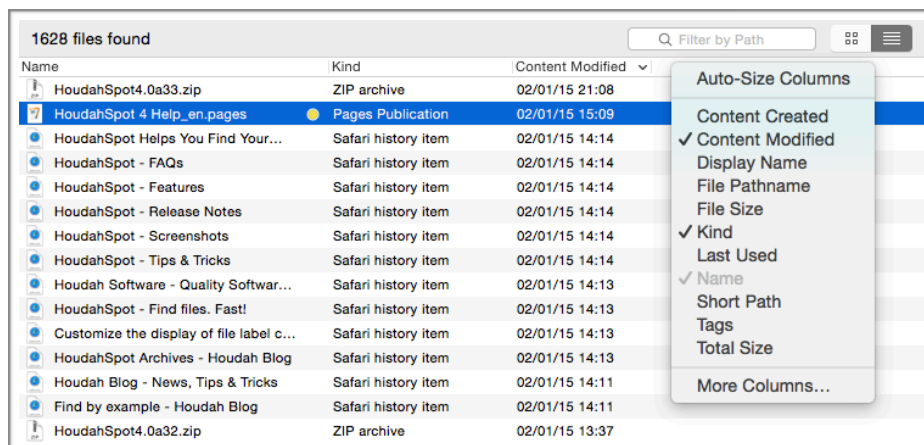
Once a HoudahSpot search has been started, it remains live even after gathering is completed. The results are updated as files are changed, added or removed from the system. You can still change the criteria to refine your search. As new files match the criteria, they are added to the results list.

4.6. Results

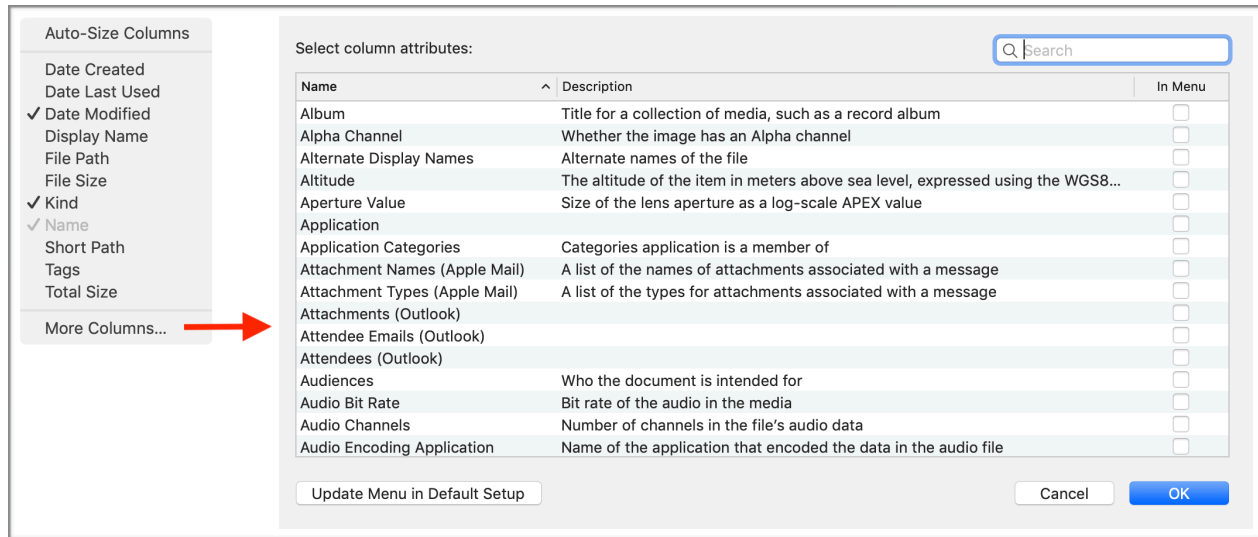
While the search is active, HoudahSpot shows found files on the right hand side of the window. Results can be displayed as a list or as a grid.



Control-click or right-click on the title row or use the Columns item in the View menu to add columns for other metadata attributes. You may sort results by any of these columns.



Choose “More Columns ...” to get the list of all column attributes available. Double click the row to add a column. Check the "In Menu" option to add a column without immediately using it.



If you want your selection for menu items to apply to every new search window, click the “Update Menu in Default Setup”. To further customize the default setup, use the “[Save as Default](#)” command from the File menu.

You can also arrange search results in **groups** by kind, date, file size, or application. For example: files that will open in Microsoft Word in one group, and files that will open in Apple Pages in another. The “Arrange By” option is available from the View menu. Like the column configuration and sort options, this setting is saved when creating a default setup or search template.

Select a file to see the **path** to its location at the bottom of the window. Command-clicking a folder in the path narrows down your search to focus on the selected folder location. Command-Option clicking a folder adds its location to the excluded section. Double-clicking a folder in the path will open it in the Finder.

To see a **file preview**, select the file, then use the Quick Look menu item from the Results menu. To see a **slideshow** of previews from several result files, select these files and use the Slideshow menu item from the Results menu.

4.6.1. Filter

You may also further narrow down your search results using the filter text field on the top of the Results pane. This allows you to **filter** – show or exclude – files where the name, path, file name, parent folder or any folder in the path matches text or a [regular expression](#) you enter in the filter field.

Filters help narrowing down search results. Use filters to see only a subset of the found files. Use filters to apply conditions that are not as easy to express as search criteria.

For example, when you want to find all photos in folders named “vacation”, it is quicker to use filters than to list all of these folders as search locations. Just run a search for photos in your home folder. Then filter the results to see only photos where a parent folder is named “vacation”.

Regular expressions can be especially handy when filtering search results. Such filters allow, for example, to see only files whose name begins with IMG_ and is followed by a four-digit number and then the file extension: `^IMG_ \d{4}\.w*` . For case-insensitive matching use: `(?i)^IMG_ \d{4}\.w*` .

4.6.2. File Actions

Once you have located the files you are looking for, you can:

- **Double-click to open**

HoudahSpot will pass the first “text content” or “any text” search strings on to the next application. In many applications, you can then proceed to find the text in the document by hitting command-G.

- **Drag files to a Finder window to move or copy**

This can be a powerful technique for housekeeping.

Examples:

- You want to search for music files that are somewhere on your computer but not in the Music Folder. Set up a search for Music files and exclude the Music Folder location. Drag the files from the results list to your Music folder.
- Should you want to organize your files by date, e.g. one folder for each month: create a search to match the files from a given month. In the Finder, locate or create the folder. Then drag all files from the results to that folder.

- **Drag files onto the Trash icon** to delete them.
- **Drag files to an application in the Dock** to open them with the application selected.
- **Rename files or assign Finder file tags** by calling up the respective commands in the Results menu, from the Actions toolbar button or in the context menu (Control-click or right-click).

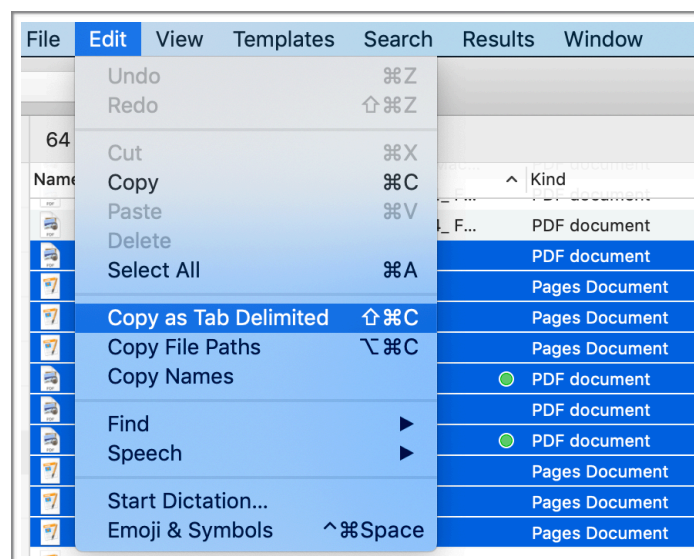
Tagging behavior: Tags you add are added to all selected files. Tags you remove are removed where present. Tags you don't touch are left unchanged. Files which had the tag keep it, files which didn't have the tag still don't have it. If you check the "Replace existing tags" option, all selected files will get the exact set of tags shown.

- **Apply actions** from the Actions and from the Share toolbar buttons.



- **Copy the list of results as text** to use in another application.

You can copy a list of selected files as text by selecting the "**Copy as Tab Delimited**" command from the Edit Menu. The copied text includes all columns currently displayed in HoudahSpot. You may also choose to copy **File Names** or **File Paths** only. The copied information can be pasted into text editors or spreadsheets.

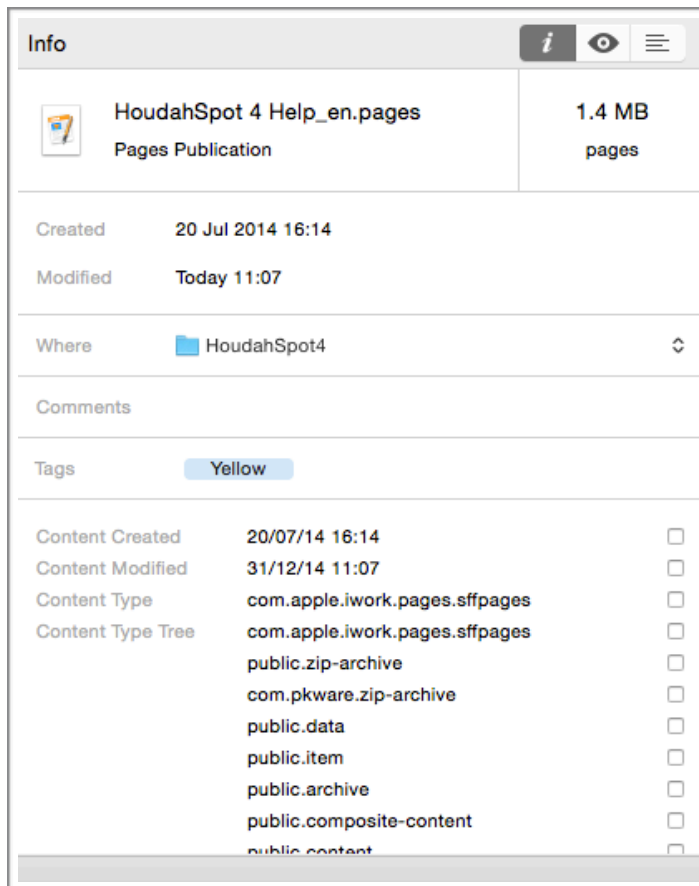
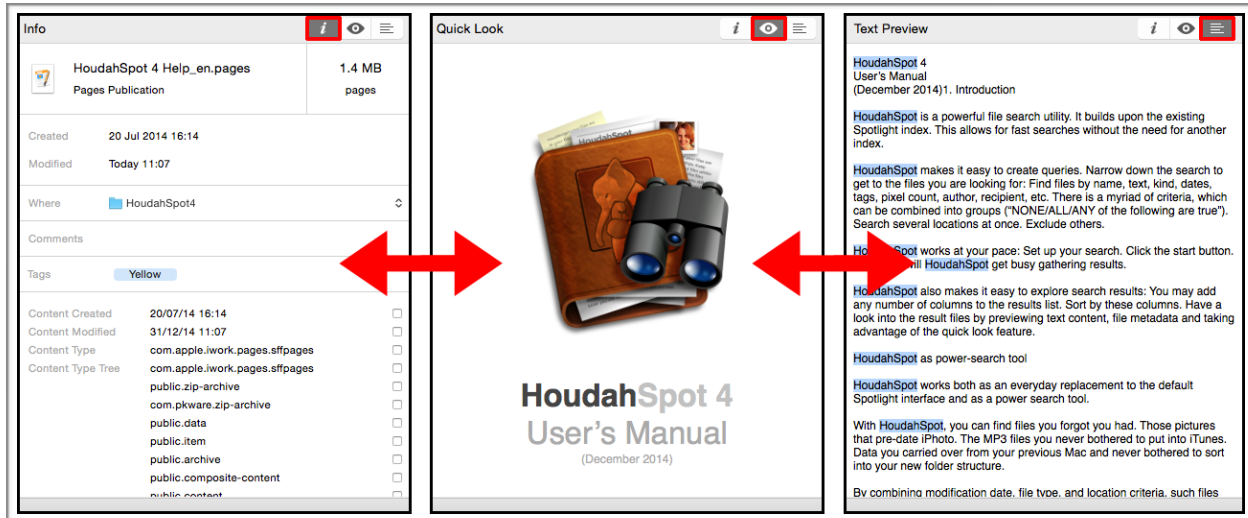


Example:

You may want to create a list of all your music titles. Create a search to match audio files from the "Music" folder. Enable the columns as desired: Title, Composer, Length, Size, etc. Now select rows from the results list and hit Command-Shift-C to copy. Paste to a text editor or spreadsheet.

4.6.3. Details: File Info, Quick Look, Text Preview

To the right of the Results pane, you will find the Details pane. Use the buttons on the top right of this pane to switch between Info, Quick Look, and Text Preview.



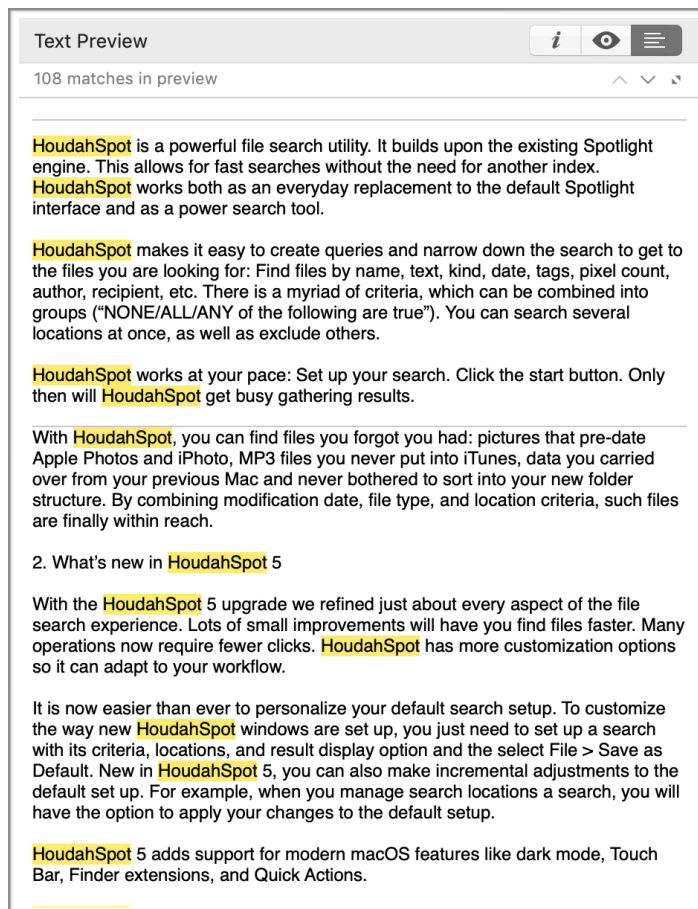
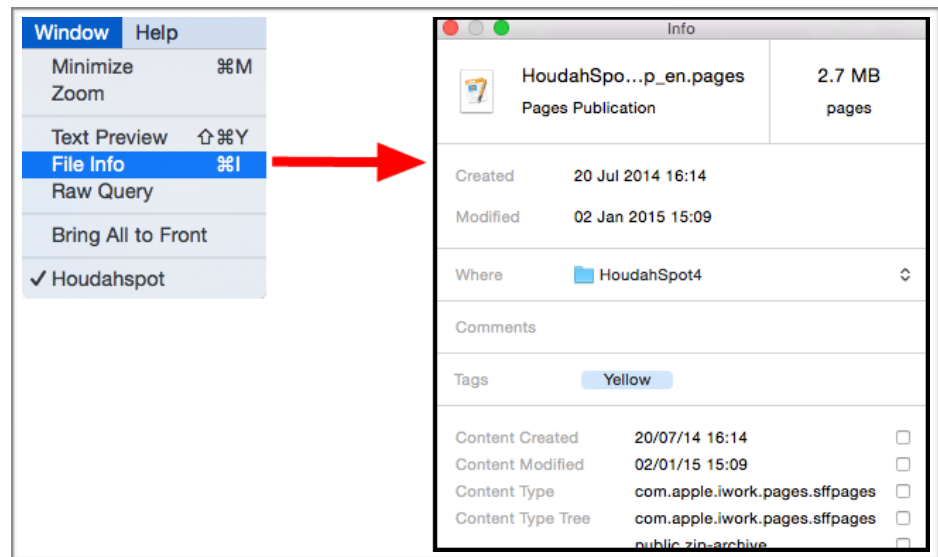
The Info window shows all the metadata registered with the [Spotlight index](#). These are the attributes you can use for searching.

Tick the checkbox next to an attribute to **filter** your search results by this attribute.



The Info window is **copy-paste enabled**. Select a single attribute and hit Command-C to copy its value to the pasteboard. Select a range of attributes by holding the shift-key while clicking or select several attributes by Command-clicking, then copy them using Command-C. A tab-separated list of the attributes selected will be created in the pasteboard.

If you choose “File Info” from the Window menu, the File Info will open in a separate window.

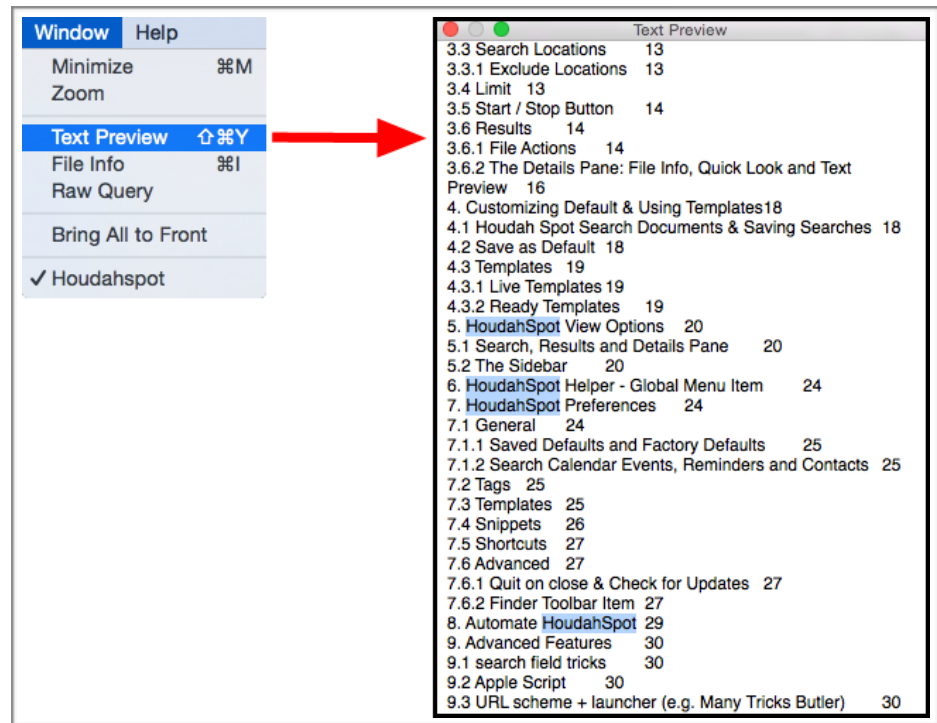


Text Preview shows the file’s text content as submitted to the Spotlight index. Search terms are highlighted.

Arrows in the small toolbar above the text let you navigate between matches.

The **fold / unfold** button in the top right corner toggles between showing the full text and only showing text close to matched search terms.

If you choose “Text Preview” from the Window menu, the Text Preview will open in a separate window.



The Details pane may be hidden by clicking the respective view selector button in the toolbar or by using commands from the [View](#) menu.



4.6.4. Saving Search Results as Text Files

You may save the search results list as tab delimited text file to be used in other applications like spreadsheets etc. Go to File > “Save Results to Text File”.

5. Customizing Default & Using Templates

5.1. Saving Searches

HoudahSpot searches are documents. You can create or open as many documents as you like. You can run several searches at the same time. You can open a new document in a new window or in a tab within the same window.

You can save HoudahSpot search documents for later use or for sharing with coworkers and friends.

HoudahSpot will **not** suggest to save untitled searches nor will it automatically save documents when you quit the application. It assumes that searches are disposable unless you tell it otherwise.

HoudahSpot documents save every piece of information you entered: search criteria, search terms, view options, result columns, sort order, etc. HoudahSpot also remembers whether your search was active when you saved the document. If it was, the search will start immediately upon opening the document.

When a saved search document has been edited, HoudahSpot will ask on quit if you would like to save the changes or discard them.

5.2. Save as Default

“Save as Default” allows you to configure HoudahSpot to match your personal preferences regarding the setup of search criteria, locations, sort order, column, etc.

You can change the HoudahSpot default window layout by saving the current layout using the “Save as Default” command from the File menu. Your new default layout will then be used as the starting point for all new documents.

To switch between your saved default and the factory default, go to the [General tab](#) in the Preferences pane.

5.3. Templates

Templates serve as starting points. Opening a template creates a new search. The actual template will not be affected by any changes you make to that document. A search created from a template is – just like a normal search – considered to be disposable.

Templates are available from both the “Templates” menu or the [Sidebar](#). HoudahSpot comes preconfigured with a set of sample templates.

To save the setup of your current search window as a template, use the “Save as Template” command in the file menu. When a template was saved while the search was active, the search starts immediately when you select the template.

5.4. Export as Finder Smart Folder

You can save HoudahSpot searches as Finder smart folders. Set up your query, then go to File > Export as Smart Folder. HoudahSpot saves your search criteria and locations as a smart folder. However, Finder does not support some of HoudahSpot’s options. Therefore, values for locations exclusion, filters, custom columns etc. are dropped. If you want to retain these values, you may choose HoudahSpot’s [“Save as Template”](#) option.

6. View Options

6.1. Search, Results & Details Pane

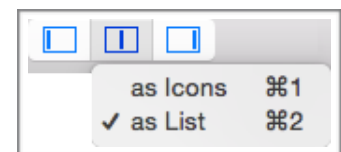
A HoudahSpot window can show one or more search documents. When multiple documents are open in a single window, the window shows a tab bar.

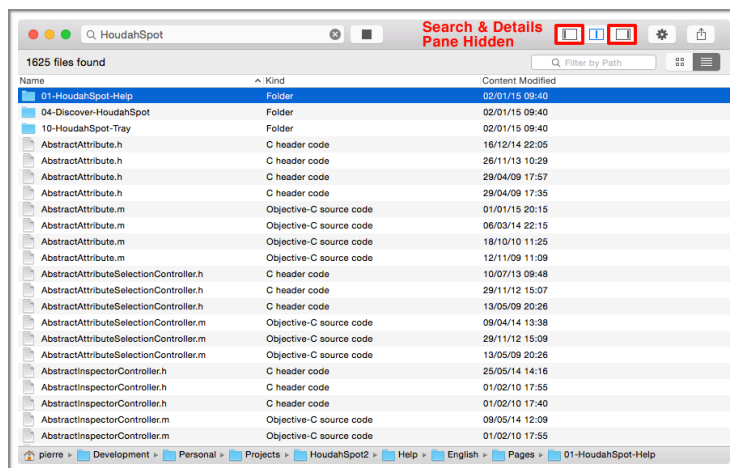
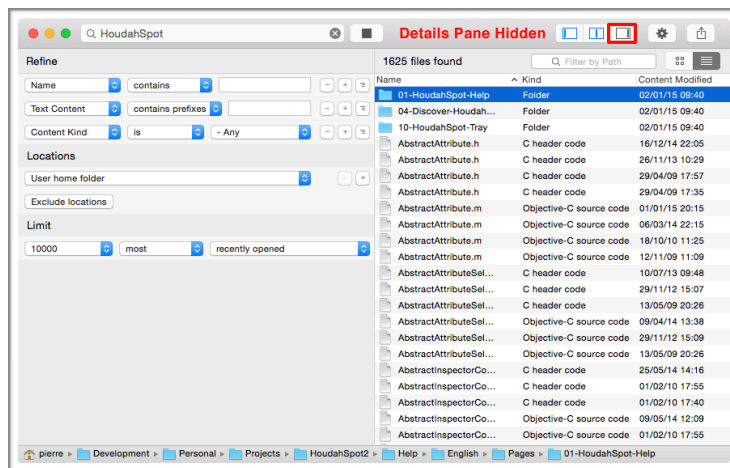
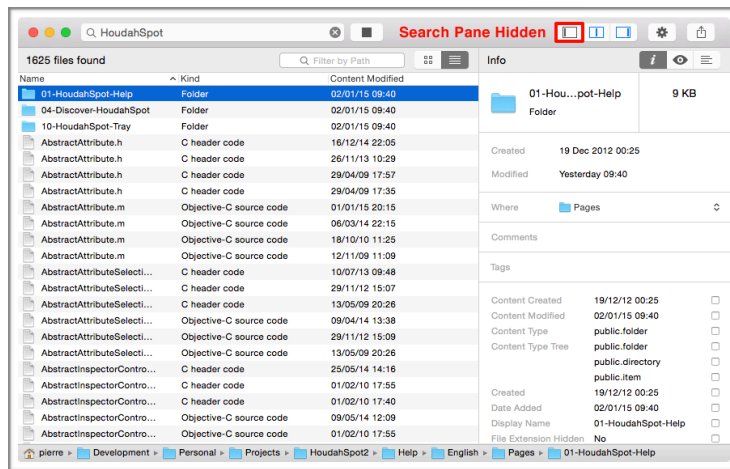
The HoudahSpot window has a toolbar with the following items:
search field, start/stop button, view selector, action button and share button.



The view selector contains the following buttons:

- Hide/Show Search
- Show Results as List / as Grid
- Show/Hide Details

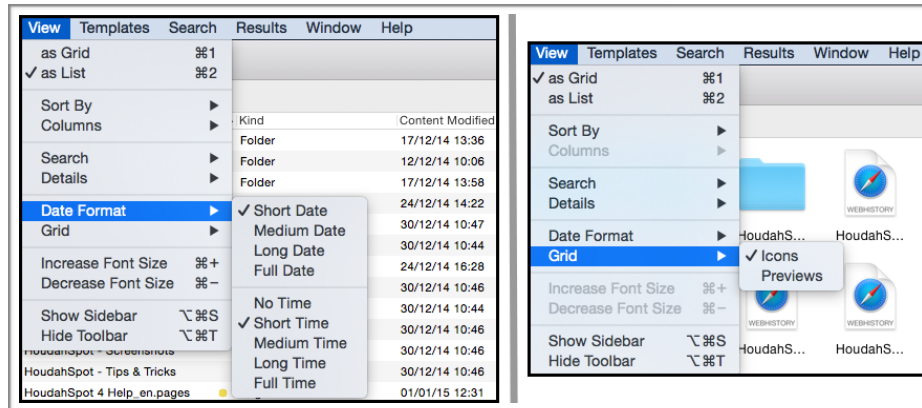




The View options can also be found in the View menu. You will also find some additional options there:

- Search > **Show Automatically**: Search pane automatically appears when the stop button is clicked.
- Search > **Hide Automatically**: Search pane automatically disappears when the start button is clicked.

- **Date format:** choose between different date and time formats for the list view.
- **Grid:** Switch between **Icons** and **Previews** (where available) in Grid view.



The grid can also show relevant file information below the names. What information is shown depends on the file type. For mail messages, for example, HoudahSpot will show the sender and recipient. For photos, it will show resolution and EXIF info. The “File Info” option can be enabled from the View > Grid menu.

The Toolbar can be hidden using the “Hide Toolbar” command in the View menu.

6.2. The Sidebar

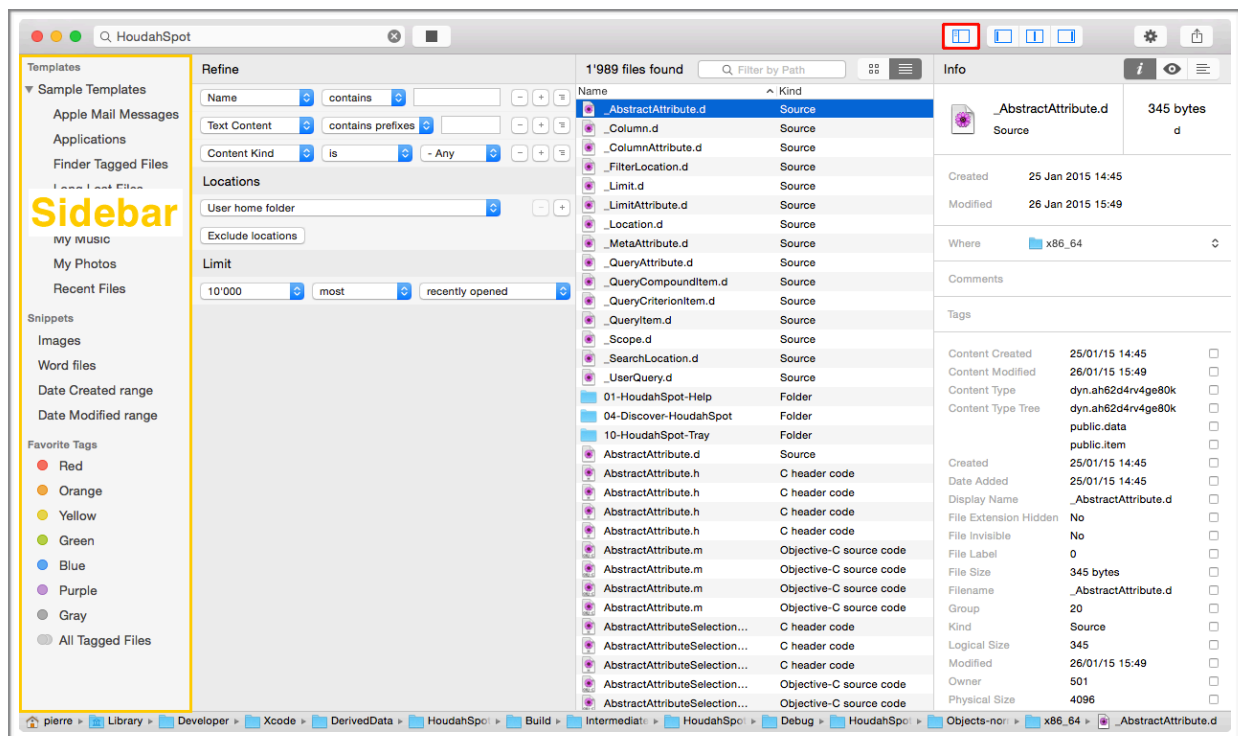
Along the left edge of the window, you can choose to have a sidebar displayed. This sidebar lists your search templates, snippets, and favorite tags. The sidebar is hidden by default and can be revealed using the “Show Sidebar” item from the View menu.



If you click on a template in the sidebar, a new search tab will open, set up as defined in the template chosen.

You can drag snippets or tags from the sidebar into the Refine section. If you click on a snippet or on a tag in the sidebar, a new search tab will open, containing the default search layout plus a search criterion for the tag selected or the snippet search criteria respectively.

You can tag a file by dragging it onto the respective tag. Drag it onto “All Tagged Files” to tag it manually.



6.3. Compact Mode

Compact Mode shrinks the window to show just the search results. This frees up screen space and makes it easier to drag files from HoudahSpot to other applications.

To enter Compact Mode, click the icon in the toolbar. To exit, click the button again or reveal the Search or Details pane.



While in Compact Mode, you can resize and reposition the HoudahSpot window. Next time you return to Compact Mode, the window will be positioned as you left it.

7. HoudahSpot Preferences

The HoudahSpot Preferences can be accessed from the HoudahSpot menu.

7.1. General

The top set of radio buttons allow you to switch between **Factory Default** and [Saved Default](#). This option is grayed out as long as no default has been saved.

The next set of radio buttons lets you define where the insertion point should appear when opening a new search window.

Enable “Quit HoudahSpot when last window closes” if you want the application to close when you close its last window.

When “Check for updates on startup” is enabled, HoudahSpot will check for a new version when it is launched. Press “Check for Updates” to check manually for a new version of HoudahSpot.

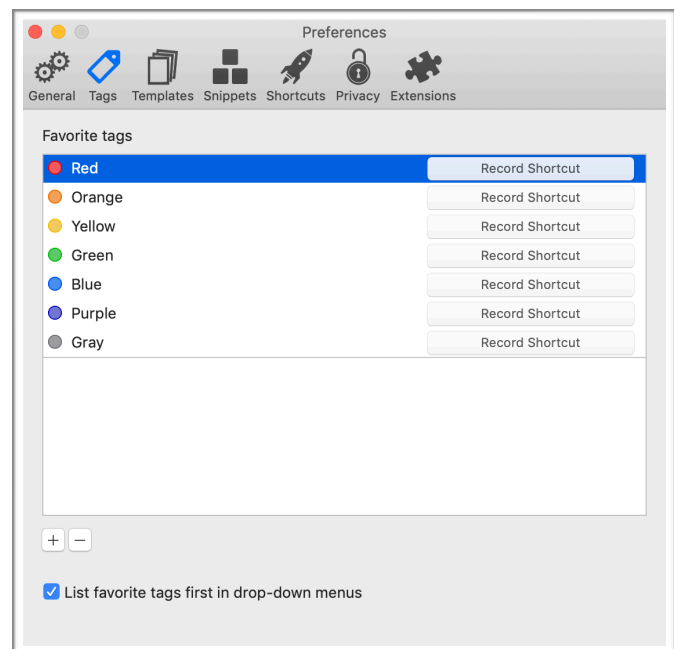
7.2. Tags

Define a list of favorite tags which will show up in the sidebar. Use the “+” and “–” buttons to add or remove tags. Drag and drop to reorder.

The first 7 tags will be available for quick file tagging from the context menu on search results.

If you want to create a keyboard shortcut to a tag, press “Record Shortcut” and type the key combination you would like to associate with this tag. The keyboard shortcut can be used to quickly assign or remove the tag from selected search results.

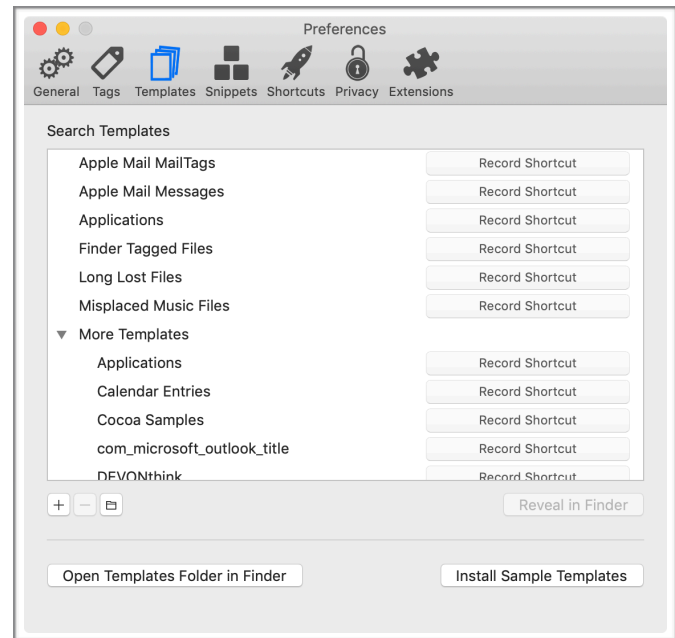
Click the box if you want these favorite tags to show up first in all tag drop-down menus.



7.3. Templates

All installed [templates](#) are listed here. If you want to create a keyboard shortcut to open a specific template, select the template, press “Record Shortcut” and type the key combination you would like to associate with this template. The Keyboard Shortcut will then show up next to the template.

To locate a template file on your hard drive, select the template and press “Reveal in Finder”. “Open Templates Folder in Finder” takes you to the Templates folder in Finder. If not already installed, “Install Sample Templates” will copy a set of sample templates to your templates folder.



To delete the selected template, click the “-” button.

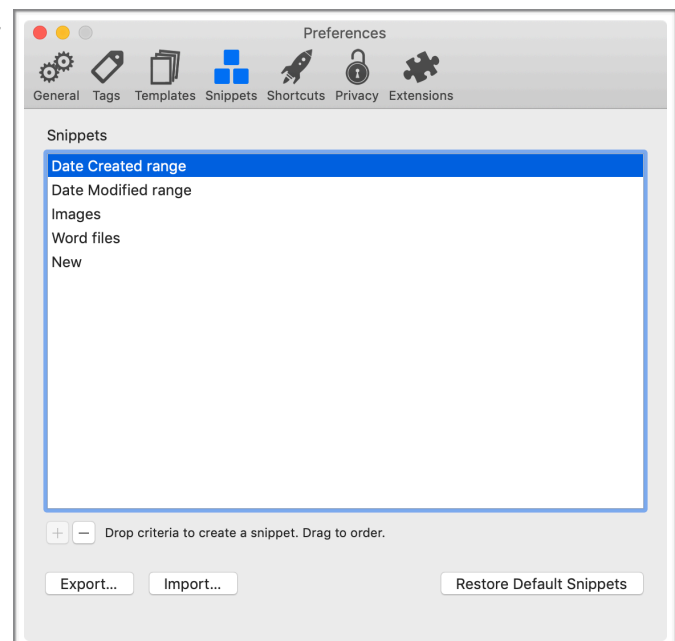
You can reorganize templates by dragging these to the desired position in the list. You can add folders by clicking the “folder” button below the list. Folders show as sub-menus in the Templates menu.

7.4. Snippets

[Snippets](#) are a single search criterion or a group of criteria that serve a certain purpose. A set of default snippets is pre-installed. If they are missing or have been deleted, you can reinstall them by pressing “Restore Default Snippets”.

To use a snippet, simply drag it from this snippet list to the Search pane.

To create a new snippet, select the criteria rows that make up your snippet in the Search pane, then either press the “+” button or drag the criteria rows onto the snippets list. Name or re-name snippets by double clicking them.



You can discard snippets using the “–” button (beware: cannot be undone!).

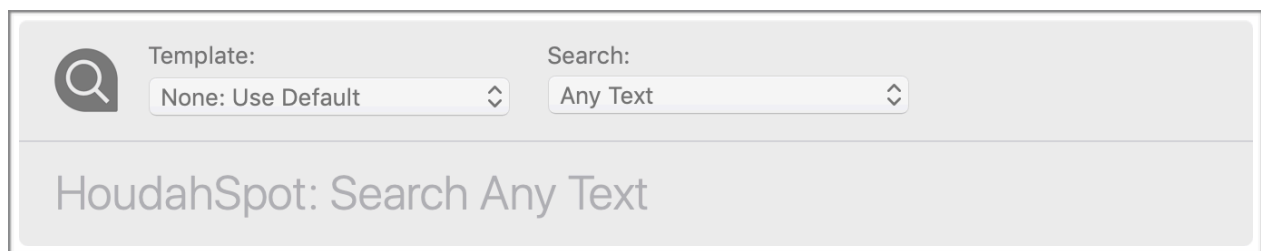
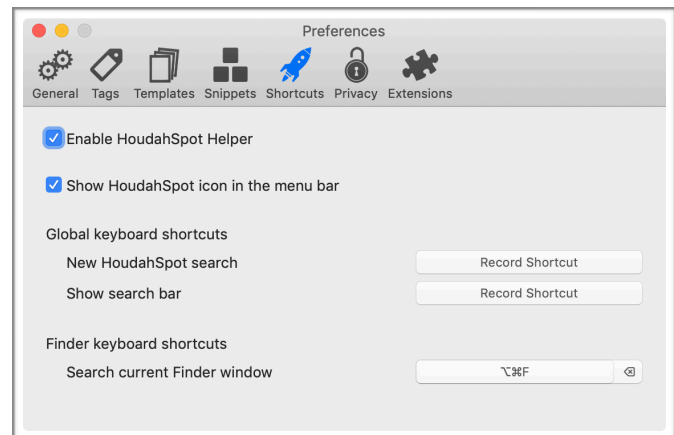
You may export or import snippets in order to share them with others. Double-clicking a snippet file will automatically add it to your snippets list.

7.5. Shortcuts

You can configure HoudahSpot to show an icon in the menu bar or to open at the press of a hot key.



These features are provided by the “HoudahSpot Helper” application. When you enable the “HoudahSpot Helper”, it will keep running even after you quit HoudahSpot.



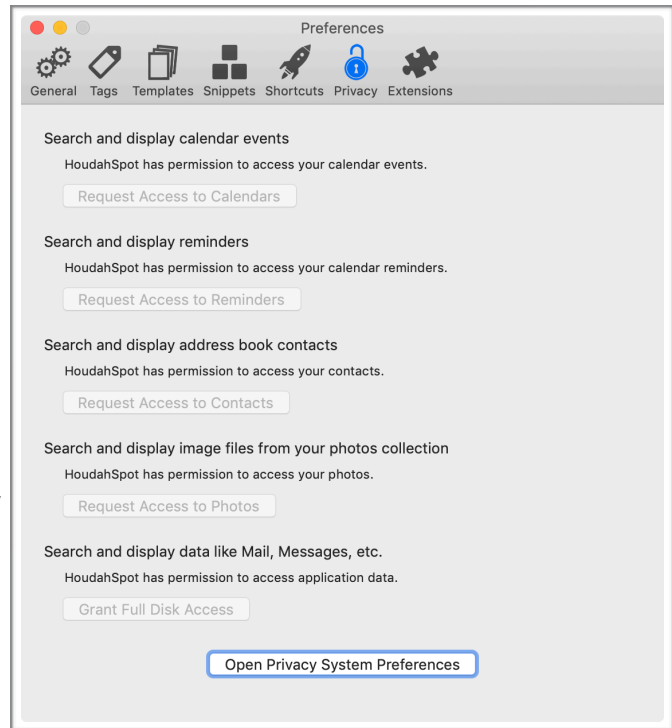
The HoudahSpot Search Bar lets you quickly start a new search. Click the HoudahSpot menu bar icon or press the assigned keyboard shortcut to open the Search Bar. Type your query and press Return to open HoudahSpot. Optionally, you can select a search template and specify if HoudahSpot should search Names, Text Content, or Any Text. This latest option matches the configuration of your default setup or the selected search template.

7.6. Privacy

In order for HoudahSpot to be able to find and display search results from Apple’s **Calendar**, **Reminders**, **Contacts**, applications or your **Photos**, you will need to grant HoudahSpot access. To do so, click the respective “Request Access” button.

HoudahSpot will need “Full Disk Access” to search certain folders that may contain private data. This includes the folder where Apple Mail keeps you messages. To grant HoudahSpot access, click the “Grant Full Disk Access” button and follow the instructions.

The “Open Privacy System Preferences” button takes you to the Security & Privacy pane within System Preferences. Here, you can grant or revoke permissions.



7.7. Extensions

Enable the Finder Extension to add a HoudahSpot button to Finder windows. This allows you to open a HoudahSpot window to search the current Finder window.

Enable the Quick Action to add a “Search with HoudahSpot” option to the context menu on folders in Finder.

Install plug-ins for third-party applications. These allow you to start HoudahSpot searches from these applications.

8. Automate HoudahSpot

HoudahSpot integrates nicely with your automated workflows.

Use the custom URL scheme to start HoudahSpot searches from third-party tools like Butler, LaunchBar, or Alfred. Use AppleScript to access search results and build more advanced workflows.

8.1. URL scheme and third-party tools

The URL for starting a new search has the following format:

[houdahspot4://search?q=QUERY&location=PATH&template=PATH](#)

Spaces and special characters in the URL parameters need to be encoded (see w3schools.com). The URL encoding for the space character is %20.

The parameters are:

1. q (or query): The search string. For example: "Houdah%20Software", "name:*.txt" or "tag:orange". This parameter is optional.
2. l (or location): The path of the folder to search. This parameter is optional and may be repeated
3. t (or template). The path of the template to use. This parameter is optional. The path to the template must include the .hstemplate extension. You may use a path relative to your home directory by prefixing with a tilde: "~/Library/Application%20Support/com.houdah.HoudahSpot4/Templates/Sample%20Templates/Apple%20Mail%20Messages.hstemplate"

You may use this to start HoudahSpot searches from third-party tools like Butler, LaunchBar or Alfred.

Butler:

1. Open "Butler: Search Engines" preferences
2. Create and name a new "Search Engine"
3. Set the URL Prefix to "[houdahspot4://search?q=](#)" (without the quotes)

Note: No URL encoding needed for Butler 4.1 and newer.

LaunchBar:

1. In LaunchBar, select "Index" > "Show Index"
2. Create and name a new "Search Template (UTF-8)"
3. Set the Template URL to "[houdahspot4://search?q=](#)" (without the quotes)

Alfred:

1. In Alfred, go to "Features" > "Web Search"
2. Create and name a new "Custom Search" (UTF-8)
3. Set the "Search URL" to "houdahspot4://search?q={query}" (without the quotes)

8.2. AppleScript

HoudahSpot implements the following AppleScript commands:

search – start a new search

finder search – start a new search for the frontmost Finder window

You can access HoudahSpot search results after a search has completed. Please refer to the AppleScript dictionary for details on available commands and properties.

Example:

```
tell application id "com.houdah.HoudahSpot4"
    set myLocations to {"/Applications"}
    set myDocument to search "HoudahSpot" locations myLocations

    repeat until search completed of myDocument
        end repeat

    set myResults to results of myDocument
    set myCount to count of myResults

    display dialog "Found " & myCount & " files"

    set mySelection to selection of myDocument

    if mySelection is not {} then
        set myPath to path of first item of mySelection

        display dialog myPath
    end if
end tell
```

8.3. MacOS Service

HoudahSpot provides three system wide services. These show – where applicable – in the Services submenu of all applications on your Mac.

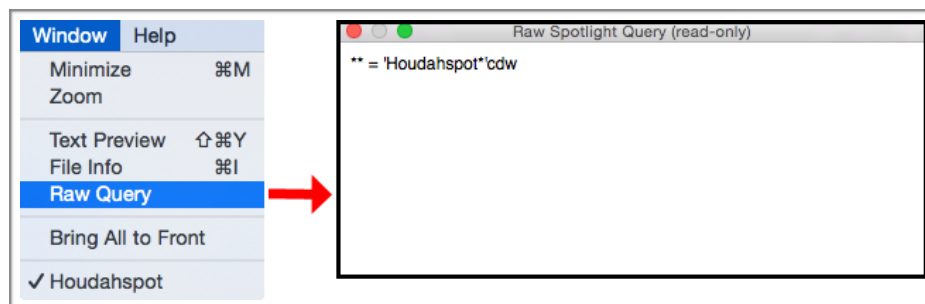
- New HoudahSpot Search: Launches HoudahSpot and/or opens a new window
- Search in HoudahSpot: Starts a HoudahSpot search for the selected text
- Search Folders in HoudahSpot: Creates a new HoudahSpot search of the selected folder

Services can be enabled and assigned keyboard shortcuts in System Preferences > Keyboard > Shortcuts > Services.

9. Advanced Features

9.1. Raw Query

Select “Raw Query” from the Window menu to see the query created by HoudahSpot and passed on to the Spotlight engine in a separate window.



9.2. Advanced Uses of the Search Field

The search field at the top of a HoudahSpot window makes it easy to quickly start a simple search. If needed, you can then use additional criteria to refine your search. Typically, you will use the Refine pane below the search field to assemble criteria to find the exact files you are looking for.

The search field, however, can also be used to build more complex queries. It understands a simple yet powerful syntax. The basic expression has the following format:

attributeName:value

This will search for files where the named attribute contains words prefixed with the provided value. You can add more expressions to refine the query. If you omit the attribute name, HoudahSpot will search all text attributes.

Examples:

- Houdah – Searches for files where any text attribute contains the prefix Houdah
- name:Houdah – Searches for files where any of the display names contains Houdah
- Houdah Software – Searches for files that contain both Houdah and Software

By default, HoudahSpot searches text attributes for **word prefixes**. You can do other searches by using the “*” **wildcard** in the value.

Example:

- filename:*.txt – Searches for file names ending with .txt

By default, HoudahSpot searches are case insensitive and diacritics insensitive. You can append the following modifiers to your search to change this:

- c = case insensitive
- d = diacritics insensitive
- w = search for words

Example:

- name:"houdah"cdw - Case & diacritics insensitive search for words starting with “houdah” (= Default)

If at least one modifier is set, the default value (cdw) will be ignored.

Examples:

- name:"houdah"cw - Case insensitive (BUT diacritics sensitive) search for words starting with “houdah”
- name:"houdah"dw - Diacritics insensitive (BUT case sensitive) search for words starting with “houdah”

Different criteria can be combined using the **boolean operators AND, OR, NOT**. If no operator is specified, an AND operator is assumed: each criterion further restricts the query.

Examples:

- name:Houdah OR filename:Houdah – Searches both display names and file name
- name:Houdah NOT filename:Houdah – Files where the display name contains Houdah, but the file name does not
- filename:*.txt AND (Houdah NOT text:Houdah) – .txt files where any text attribute contains Houdah, but the actual text content does not

When using **numeric attributes**, you can specify a **comparison operator** or a **range of values**:

- pixelwidth:1000 – Searches for images exactly 1000 pixels wide
- pixelcount:>=7000000 – Searches for images with at least 7000000 pixels
- duration:60-240 – Searches for files with a duration in the range of 60 to 240 seconds. Typically audio or video files

When working with **date attributes**, you can specify **dates**, **date ranges** or one of the **predefined ranges**:

- dateadded:yesterday
- datemodified:"last month"

Possible values are:

lastmonth	"last week"	"next week"	"this week"
today	"last month"	"next month"	"this month"
tomorrow	lastyear	nextyear	thisyear
yesterday	"last year"	"next year"	"this year"
lastweek	nextweek	thisweek	

Possible **attribute names** are:

- one of the short names [listed below](#)
- kind – a special short name with preset values [listed below](#)
- native Spotlight attribute names like kMDItemDisplayName, kMDItemContentType, kMDItemKind, etc.

Short names: HoudahSpot defines 150+ short names so you don't have to remember native Spotlight attribute names. The most commonly used ones are:

- name – Searches display names
- filename – Searches file names
- date – Searches common date attributes: date created, date modified, date added, date due, etc.
- * – matches any text attribute except for text content
- ** or anytext – matches any text attribute. E.g. author, recipient, ...
- tag – Searches both Finder and Open Meta tags

The full [list of short names](#) can be found in the Appendix.

HoudahSpot defines a number of **kind values** that help you search documents by kind without having to know about Uniform Type Identifiers.

The most commonly used ones are:

- kind:application – Searches for applications
- kind:folder – Searches for folders, volumes and mount points
- kind:spreadsheet – Searches for common spreadsheet file formats
- kind:wordprocessing – Searches for common word processing file formats

The full [list of kind values](#) can be found in the Appendix.

Trying to memorize all of the above commands and shorthands is futile. Most often, it is easier to set up and refine a search by configuring criteria in the Refine pane. If you find yourself repeatedly doing similar searches, you may want to remember the shorthand for that (e.g. "name:Houdah date:thisWeek"). While learning the ropes of the search field, you may find it useful to observe the [raw query](#) HoudahSpot builds.

10. Appendix: List of short search field attributes

*	coverage	instrumentname	pixelwidth
**	created	intext	platform
added	creator	invisible	producer
album	date	isjunk	profile
alpha	dateadded	ismidi	province
altitude	delivery	iso	publisher
anytext	description	key	purchasedate
aperture	displayname	keysignature	recipient
appmanaged	dpi	keyword	recordingdate
architectures	duedate	keywords	redeye
audience	duration	kind	rights
audiobitrate	editor	language	samplerate
audioencodingappli	email	lastused	security
cation	encodedby	latitude	securitymethod
audiosamplerate	encoder	layer	size
author	encodingapplicatio	location	source
bitrate	n	longitude	spotlightcomment
bitspersample	exifversion	lyricist	starrating
bps	exposure	mail	state
by	exposuremode	make	stationery
categories	exposureprogram	maxaperture	streamable
category	exposuretime	media	subject
channels	filename	mediatype	tag
chat	flash	metering	tags
city	fnumber	meteringmode	tempo
codec	focallength	model	text
colorspace	font	modified	theme
comment	from	musicalgenre	time
composer	fstop	name	timesignature
contact	genre	organization	title
contactkeyword	group	orientation	to
container	headline	owner	totalbitrate
contains	height	pageheight	tracknumber
content	heightdpi	pages	url
contentcreated	id	pagewidth	used
contentmodified	imname	phone	version
contributor	instructions	phonenummer	videobitrate
copyright	instrument	pixelcount	wherefrom
country	instrumentcategory	pixelheight	whitebalance

11. Appendix: List of search field kinds

alias	directory	mail	text
application	diskImage	message	todo
archive	"disk image"	movie	vcard
audio	document	music	video
bookmark	email	pdf	webArchive
businessCard	event	presentation	"web archive"
"business card"	folder	sourceCode	wordProcessing
contact	font	"source code"	"word processing"
compressed	image	spreadsheet	

12. Further Information

For more information, check the HoudahSpot [web site](#) and sign up for our [newsletter](#).

For tips & tricks, watch the Houdah Software blog at <https://blog.houdah.com>.