

INTRODUCTION TO TAPS

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1 INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to help introduce new UK Topsy owners to the wonderful world of Topfield Application Programs (TAPs). The TAPs are a unique feature of the Topsy in that they allow significant enhancement and personalisation. Though they are somewhat limited in scope, they can do things like help with timers, provide alternative display presentations (particularly for EPG data) , display JPEG images, or do things like add bookmarks automatically when you press Stop. Due to the ingenuity of the Topsy community the range of TAPs is increasing all the time, often with several TAPs addressing similar perceived limitations of the native (alias vanilla) Topsy.

However before we start, a few words of warning:

- Many TAPs are rapidly evolving and only have alpha or beta status.
- Most TAPs have been written by enthusiastic amateurs rather than professionals.

so bug free operation cannot be guaranteed. We are not aware of any instance of large scale data loss (never mind damage to the machine!), but these remain remote possibilities, particularly when trying new TAPs or new combinations of TAPs. On the other hand, where bugs are reported on this site's forum, fix time is often much shorter than that of commercial organisations.

A few TAPs (notably Improbox) are "shareware", that is free to use for an initial evaluation period with a small payment needed for long-term use. However the majority are free, though some authors do request a small donation from long-term users.

2 YOUR FIRST TAPS

It is strongly recommended that you do not rush into installing TAPs until you are familiar with the native Topsy, and understand what features you really want to improve or add.

The next stage is to look to see what TAPs are available, find out what they do, and what their problems/limitations are. There are several TAP libraries around, but the one on this site has a number of advantages, including:

- If you register your interest, you will receive e-mail notifications of updates.
- There are links for downloading the TAP, for associated documentation, and to the forum thread where problems and enhancements are discussed.
- TAPs recommended for beginners are identified as "Tip-Top".
- It is clear whether the TAP is suitable for the UK terrestrial version of the Topsy – some TAPS will run on many models, and some on just one.

We then recommend that you try adding one TAP at a time until you find the combination that suits you. Don't rush into rejecting a TAP on the basis of first impressions, but do make sure you read all the available information including discussions in the TAP section of this site's Forum. Consider the effects of changes on any other Topsy users in your household – will they be happy if the behaviour changes very other day?

To help you get started, here are just some of the things that TAPs can do, and just some of the TAPs which do them:

- Improved EPG & associated timer setting: See “Beginner’s Guide to EPG TAPs”
- Search for programmes by keyword: JAG’s EPG, MeiSearch, UK Auto Scheduler, MyStuff
- Search for programmes by genre: MeiSearch
- Skip Adverts etc during replay: QuickJump, ImproBox, My Keys, MyStuff
- Restart replay when recording finishes¹: ImproBox, mcgCYRResume
- Improved display and control of timers: UK Timers, MyStuff
- Back-up & restore timers: UK Timers, Jag’s EPG, Backup Settings
- Additional information display: HDD Info, ImproBox, Channel Monitor
- Improved data on recordings: MyStuff, UK/Oz Archive, DirLister (V8)
- Display photos: Media Manager, Photo Manager, ImageViewer
- MP3 facilities: MP3 Jukebox, Media Manager
- Games: Sudoku, MiniMax Chess, Snake, Lords of Midnight, Boulderdash
- Remove duplicated/unwanted channels: ChannelRemover
- Automatic switch to Standby (e.g. at bedtime): Power Manager
- Birthday reminders: Birthday Reminder
- “Re-cycle Bin” facility: Improbox, Media Manager
- Single key press instead of frequently used string: Macro

but you need to browse through the TAP library to get a fuller and up to date picture. New users often posts requests along the lines of “Which TAPs are best?”, but rarely get any clear guidance as usage of the Tappy varies enormously and personal tastes often play a major part in the choice. However you may find the “Top Twenty” list at <http://www.tappy.org.uk/downloads/latest.php> useful, but bear in mind that there is a tendency for old TAPs to only gradually slide down the list when people have stopped using them.

¹ When a recording finishes while a previous recording is being played, the latter is stopped. For more details see the Bug Database, item 12.

You can find more information on TAPs which appear to be of interest from one or more of:

- The “Details” on the “More info” page of each TAP in this site’s library.
- Text, PDF, or htm files in the download “.zip” file, accessible via the “More info” page.
- The author’s website “Home” page, again accessible via the “More info” page.
- The associated manual, linked from the “More info” page when one is available.
- The relevant thread in the TAP section of this site’s forum, again accessible via the “More info” page.

Once you become familiar with TAPs, you may wish to try some of the overseas TAP libraries, but be aware that the TAPs designed for other Topfield models may crash your Toppy, may depend on keys not present on the UK model, may do nothing on the UK TF5800, or they may just be optimised for a different environment (e.g. many fewer TV channels, better broadcast EPG, etc). In addition the on-screen information and instructions may not be available in English. Where they depend on a non-UK key, it may be possible to use the Macro Tap to effectively rename a key.

3 TOPPY FILE & DIRECTORY NAMES

Two points should be noted:

- Unlike Windows, all names are case-sensitive i.e. “ProgramFiles” is not the same as “programfiles”.
- TAP names must not include spaces, or they will not run.

Spaces are permitted in recording names, however.

4 MAXIMUM NUMBER OF TAPS

You can run up to 16 taps at once.

5 NEW FIRMWARE VERSIONS

The early UK Toppy firmware (pre- May 2005) had a different key-press interface to the TAPs compared with the later firmware, so TAPs written for this firmware cannot be used with later firmware and TAPs for the early firmware cannot be used with the later firmware. The TAP library on this site indicates those TAPs suitable for the early firmware with a “Thumbs Up” + “52” icon, whereas the TAPS for the later software have a “Thumbs Up” + “UK” icon.

“Legitimate” TAPs use a formal interface (known as the Application Program Interface, API) to the firmware, so new firmware should not adversely affect the operation of these TAPs. However a new version of the firmware may:

- Make features of some TAPs redundant, by improving the native Toppy functionality.

and/or

- Extend the API, and thus enable TAPs to be written with additional functionality that will not work on the earlier firmware.

The early versions of the UK firmware used API 1.21, but from August 2005 version 1.22 has been used.

Some TAPs “hack” the firmware. The authors attempt to make these hacks version independent but this is not always possible, so it may be prudent to defer non-essential upgrades to new firmware for a few days to await any problem reports in the TAP section of the Forum, and for TAP updates to be produced as necessary.

6 AUTOMATIC OR MANUAL START?

You have the choice between starting TAPs manually whenever you want to use them, or automatically whenever the Topsy is switched from standby. In the former case they should be loaded into the Topsy “\ProgramFiles” directory, and the latter into the “\ProgramFiles\Auto Start” directory. The loading procedures are described in a separate guide, “Beginner’s Guide to EPG TAPs”.

Some TAPs are intended to be run infrequently, and thus should be in the “\ProgramFiles” directory (or some subdirectory other than “Auto Start”). For example the RemoveChannel TAP removes unwanted channels after a channel scan, and so may only be run once every few months. Other such as EPG displays are normally run automatically, but we recommend that initially you use the manual start approach until you are sure that you like the TAP concerned. In that way if you get into problems all you have to do is switch to standby and back. To run a TAP manually, following the following sequence:

- Press “Archive” to bring up the native Topsy archive.
- Press “<<” or “>>” to get “ProgramFiles”.
- Use up/down arrows to select the TAP concerned.
- Press “OK”.

Some TAPs have an exit option on the configuration menu, but with many the only exit route is to set the Topsy to Standby.

If you have problems with a TAP in the Auto Start folder, holding the zero key down while the Topsy boots will prevent all TAPs from loading. You can then delete the TAP using the Archive facility or from a PC etc using Altair etc.

7 CONFIGURATION MENUS

Most TAPs with a direct user interface have a configuration menu which enables the operation of the TAP to be tweaked. Typical contents include:

- Activation key(s) – see below.
- Ability to inhibit different parts of a multi-function TAP.
- Parameters used by the TAP, such as source of EPG data to be used.
- Display options such as font size, colours, positions on screen.
- PVR model numbers for multi-national TAPs.
- Facility to exit from the TAP.

depending on the TAP functionality. The configuration menu is often accessed by pressing “Menu” when the TAP is active, via Tap Commander (see below), or pressing Exit when viewing the normal TV picture.

8 SOME BASIC TAPS

8.1 Introduction

There are three TAPs which enhance other TAPs, or which ease their use as follows:

- TAP Commander, which allows you to monitor memory usage and control other TAPs to help resolve any problems.
- Remote Extender, which allows TAPs to distinguish between certain pairs of keys such as Radio/TV and List, which are otherwise seen as identical by TAPs (but not the firmware!).
- Description Extender, which allows other TAPs to access extended EPG data, including longer descriptions and genre data.

The last two are “install & forget”, in that they have no options menus, activation keys, or other user interaction after loading into Auto Start. Remote Extender is recommended for all TAP users (unless you are sure it is not supported by any of your other TAPs), and Description Extender by anyone using a TAP which uses the Topsy EPG data.

8.2 TAP Commander

This TAP is designed to help you control the operation of other TAPs, and it is recommended that you install it when you feel ready to start using TAPs. It can either be installed in Auto Start, or elsewhere in Program Files for manual starting when required.

On its own it merely displays free memory, which will be ~15 MByte with no other TAPs running. If this falls to 2 MByte or less you probably have too many TAPs running (and are likely to experience problems), or a problem with one of those TAPs.

However when other TAPs are loaded, TAP Commander also has:

- The ability to disable and re-enable any other TAP.
- A facility to permanently change the load order of TAPs.
- Direct access to the configuration menu of co-operating TAPs.

It is activated by pressing “Menu” twice, at which stage you will be presented with a list of running TAPs, showing whether they have been enabled or disabled. After selecting a TAP with the up/down keys, “Ok” will take you to a co-operating TAP’s configuration menu and “Red” will toggle the Enabled/Disabled states. Note that the enabled/disabled state is not remembered when you switch the Topsy Standby.

Pressing “Archive” takes you to an alternative screen where the load order can be changed as follows:

- Select the TAP you wish to move using Up/Down
- Press Left/Right to move the selected TAP up or down the load order.
- Repeat Up/Down & Left/Right for any other TAPs you wish to move.
- Press ? to implement the changes, which will apply next time the Topsy is brought out of standby.
- Press exit to return to the main screen.

Pressing Exit at the main screen closes the TAP window and takes you back to normal operation.

Many TAPs are quiescent during normal Topy use, but are invoked by the use of one of the Topy remote control keys. For example an EPG TAP might do nothing until the user presses the "Guide" key. In these cases, the "Exit" key normally puts the TAP back into its quiescent state ready to be called up again when required.

However there is a basic problem in that there are not enough keys for all the TAP functions, some of which were probably never envisaged by the Topy designers. Several ways to address this problem have evolved as follows:

- "Hijacking" the key used by an equivalent Topy native function so that the latter is no longer available. For example "Guide" would bring up the TAP EPG rather than the native Topy EPG.
- A variation of the above, where, for the above example, the first press gives you the TAP EPG, and a second press gives you the native Topy EPG. You could also have EPG TAP 1, EPG TAP 2, Native EPG on consecutive presses if both TAPs supported this mode of operation.
- Use of keys that are not used by the majority of users, such as Recall, Satellite/TV, and even Radio/TV. As the TAPs get keypresses before the native functions, in theory any key can be used if the TAP programmer allowed it.
- Some TAPs or TAP functions are only relevant in specific modes such as replay, and can then use keys such as the numeric or coloured buttons which have specific meaning in normal viewing. The TAPs that enable advert skipping during replay are typical users of this approach.

Some TAPs may be thought of as several TAPs rolled into one, and thus require two or more keys to call up different parts of their functionality.

Many TAPs have a configuration menu in which the relevant key(s) can be changed, but often the choice is very limited. However when you first load the TAP it will have default settings, and if this is already in use you can use TAP Commander to:

- Directly access the configuration menu of any co-operating TAP
- or
- Temporarily disable the other TAP(s) which use the configuration key you wish to change, change the activation key on the TAP of interest, and then re-enable the other TAP.

If you do not have TAP Commander loaded, you will need to:

- Exit from the previous TAP that uses that key, via the previous TAP's configuration menu.
- Use the default key of the new to call up the new TAP.
- Amend the activation key for the new TAP.
- Restart the original TAP, either by going to Standby & back, or using the manual start process above (except that it will presumably be in "\ProgramFiles\Auto Start" directory).

A few TAPs come in different versions according to the activation key used. If you want to change the activation key you have to load a different version of the TAP.

As a result of the restricted number of suitable keys available, the number of TAPs or TAP functions requiring activation keys may be limited to around 6-8. However there are many TAPs which run entirely in a background mode or run once when started (e.g. games) and require no activation keys.

10 AUTO START LOAD SEQUENCE

The order in which TAPs load affects their behaviour. The primary impact is that the first to load receives each keypress first, and if it "wants" the keypress it will not pass it on to the subsequent TAPs. Thus if you allocate the same call-up key to two TAPs (and the first does not pass it on at the second press) you will never be able to use the second TAP.

There seem to be other effects that are not understood, so if you experience crashes it may be worth changing the position in the load order of any newly installed TAPs.

The load order may be changed using TAP Commander as described above, or the following (much more laborious) procedure:

- Delete all the TAPS from the Auto Start folder.
- Record something for a few minutes to re-use the freed disc space.
- Transfer the TAPs from a PC or Mac ONE AT A TIME in the desired order.
- Delete the recording, if not otherwise required.

11 SKINS

Some TAPs support the concept of "Skins", by which the TAP colour scheme may be varied to suit the user's tastes. The author may provide a selection of skins on his website, and/or may provide a computer utility to allow the users to generate their own skins.

12 DATED TAPS

A few TAPs have expiry dates after which they cannot be used. This enables the author to stop support requests on old versions, but makes them less suitable for those who cannot readily update their TAPs.

13 GOT PROBLEMS?

The most serious problem is repeated crashing as soon as the Topy boots. It may seem that there is nothing you can do as you cannot use Altair, the archive facility, or TAP Commander to remove an offending TAP. However if you hold down the Zero key while the Topy boots, no TAPs will be loaded and you can move all TAPs from Auto Start using either Altair or the Topy Archive to show whether or not it is a TAP problem, and if so load the TAPs manually one at a time until you find the offending item.

If you are satisfied that your problem is associated with one or more TAPs, the following sequence is recommended:

1. Check that you have the latest version of the offending TAP.
2. Look in the relevant thread of the TAP section of the Forum so see if others have reported similar problems.
3. Only post details of your problem in the relevant thread for the TAP in question.

It is preferable not to start a new thread, or post in other parts of the forum, as the TAP author may only monitor "his" thread(s).

14 OTHER GUIDES

The following entries in the “User Contributed Guides” list in the Guides section of this site may be of interest to new owners:

- “Beginners guide to installing TAPs (Windows)”,
[http://www.topy.org.uk/documents/Installing%20TAPs%20 Windows _%20V2.pdf](http://www.topy.org.uk/documents/Installing%20TAPs%20Windows_%20V2.pdf)
- “Beginner's Introduction to Topy EPG TAPs”,
<http://www.topy.org.uk/documents/Intro%20to%20EPG%20TAPS%20V7.pdf>