

**Yet, One More
Reason to Use
AutoHotkey
Free Software!**

A Cool Little App for Inputting Common Phrases

“PhraseOMatic for When Hotstrings and Hotkeys Just Aren't Good Enough” by Jack Dunning

PhraseOMatic is an AutoHotkey script that makes it easier to enter key phrases into any document or text editing field for work and personal use. No more memorizing hotstrings or hotkey combinations.

One of the problems with using AutoHotkey hotstring replacements and/or hotkeys for common phrases, titles, and e-mail addresses is it's difficult to remember them all. That's why I try to come up with standard ways to activate certain hotstrings making them easier to remember. For example, I'll use an asterisk at the end of a hotstring to turn a word into a symbol (as shown in this [AutoHotkey column](#) and Chapter four of the free AutoHotkey e-book, [AutoHotkey Tricks You Ought To Do With Windows](#)). The typed word "cent" immediately becomes the ¢ character when I add the * (cent*). The word "pound" becomes £ when the * is added (pound*). However, there are times when there is just no easy way to remember certain types of phrases. There are just too many. That's when it's time for PhraseOMatic.

(New to AutoHotkey? See our [Introduction to AutoHotkey!](#))

PhraseOMatic is an AutoHotkey script written by Douglas Abernathy which puts all of your important phrases into a pop-up menu. (Douglas can be reached at douglasa@wans.net if you have any questions about PhraseOMatic or unreasonable demands for new features.) To insert one of your key phrases into any document or Web editing field, you hit the hotkey (in this case F6) and pick the one you want (see Figure 1). That phrase is automatically inserted into the document or editing field at the the cursor's location. It's remarkably easy and intuitive. Naturally, it does need a little set up for your specific phrases. PhraseOMatic is so cool that I'm adding the app to my active AutoHotkey scripts.

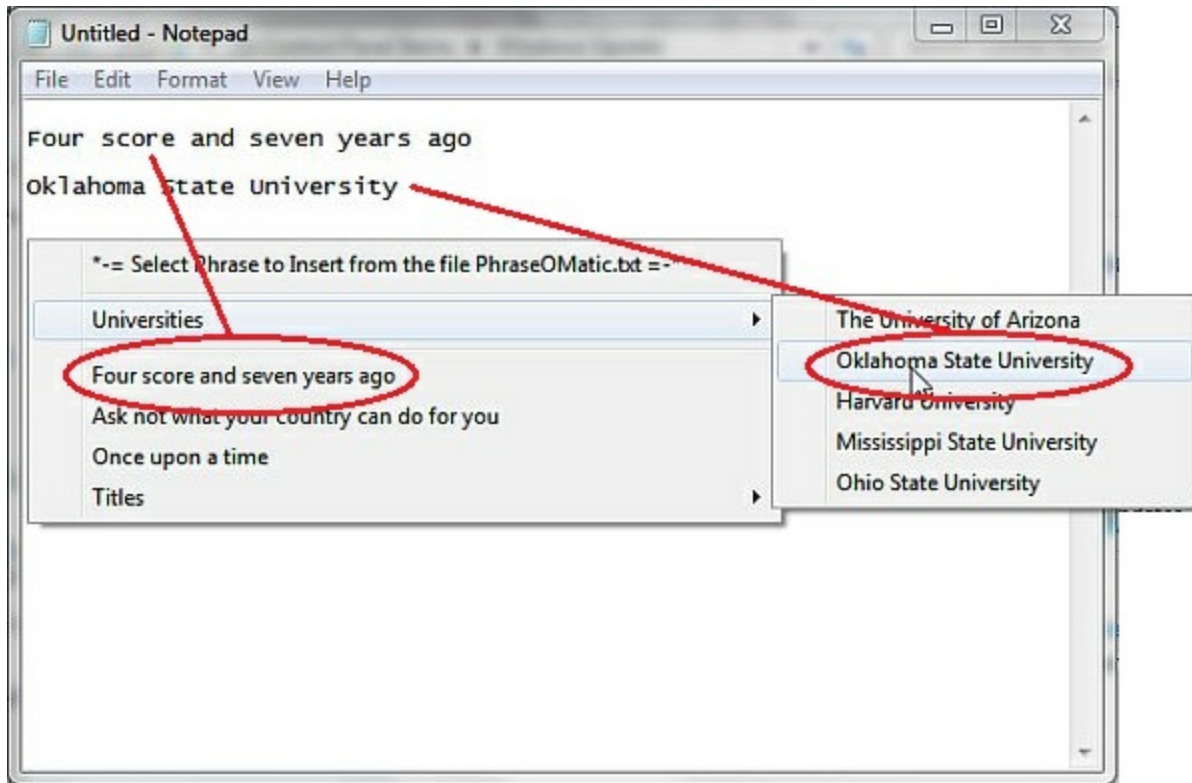


Figure 1. Press F6 then pick the phrase you need from the pop-up menu. It's inserted into the text.

I originally started working with an older version of the script. Douglas has since sent me the current version (now posted at the ComputerEdge [AutoHotkey download site](#)) which has a number of enhancements. These initial comments apply equally to either version.

While you don't need to do anything with the AHK file which runs the app, there is a text file which holds the phrases. This file initially called *PhraseOMatic.txt* can be edited with Notepad or any other text editor, but a right-click on the PhraseOMatic icon in the System Tray offers an Edit Phrases option which will open the file with your default text editor. The phrase file uses simple formatting, but does require you to understand a tiny amount of special coding (see Figure 2). The first few lines of the data file (*PhraseOMatic.txt*) are header information which does not need to be changed. The header information may look slightly different in the newer version of PhraseOMatic, but it serves the same purpose.

```

MenuTitle:*== Select Phrase to Insert from the file PhraseOMatic.txt ==*
ToolTip:PhraseOMatic (F6)
Shell32.dll Icon:47
Certain first characters on a line have special meaning:
/ Ends a submenu Block
- Inserts a Separator Line
; Comment (non-displaying)
> Comment (displays but does nothing if clicked)
<---- Add / Edit Text Items Below This Line ---->
[Universities]
The University of Arizona
Oklahoma State University
Harvard University
Mississippi State University
Ohio State University
/ Comment at the end of a submenu block

; Comment on a line by itself
- Comment on a Separator Line
Four score and seven years ago
Ask not what your country can do for you
Once upon a time

[Titles]
> Company Titles
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Vice-President of Legal Affairs
Vice-President of Finance
Director of Research and Engineering
Director of Marketing
/

[Jack's Phrases]
You lookin' at me?
what's it to you?
First and ten! Do it again!
We have to talk.
It wasn't me!
I don't get it.
/

```

Figure 2. Phrases can either be added to the PhraseOMatic.ahk file as individual lines or as submenus by using the square brackets ([...]).

If you enter a plain line of text on an individual line, it will appear in the top level menu as a phrase option. But if you only used this method of adding phrases, you can see how the list might become too long. To shorten (and organize the list) submenus with additional phrases can be added. This is done by enclosing a menu header in square brackets (i.e. *[Jack's Phrases]*), adding the phrases, then terminating the submenu with a forward slash (/), as shown above in Figure 2.

Note that at the top of the file there is a list of the special characters used to modify how the pop-up menu will look. (There is an additional character (@) in the current version of PhraseOMatic which allows extra long phrases to be condensed to a short menu item.)

After adding the submenu of Jack's Phrases to the text file and reloading the script, the new set of phrases appears in the menu (see Figure 3). (If you use the Edit option in the right-click menu for the PhraseOMatic icon in the System Tray, then save any changes and quit the text

editor, PhraseOMatic will automatically update.)

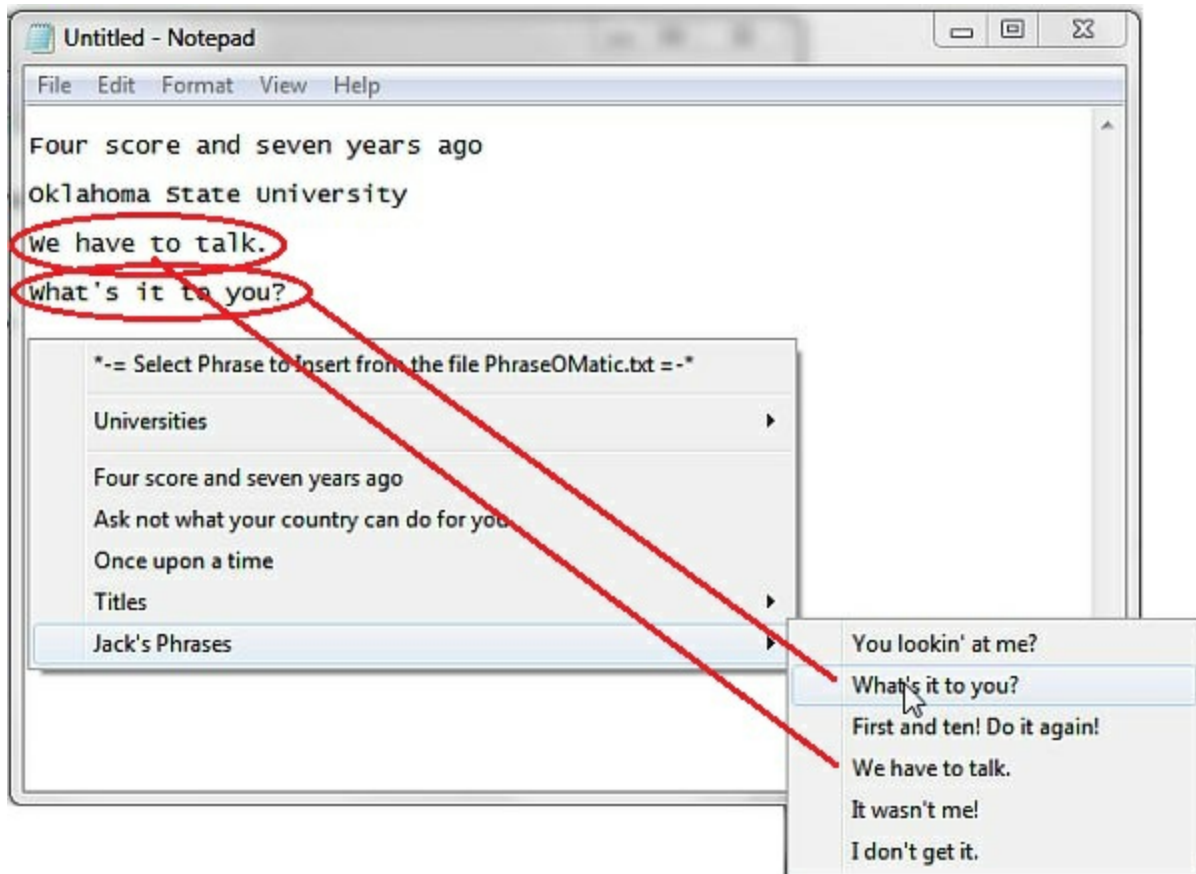


Figure 3. A new submenu is added to PhraseOMatic after the PhraseOMatic.txt file is edited.

It's easy to see how the menus—even when using submenus—can still get quite long. To deal with this problem, the latest version of PhraseOMatic allows you to keep and use multiple phrase files which are selected through the right-click menu in the System Tray. Plus, the phrase shortening technique (@) mentioned above helps to prevent bloated menus.

Changing the Hotkey

For me using F6 as a hotkey interferes with one of my most used AutoHotkey line formatting hotkeys. I was planning to change the hotkey in any case, but another observation that I've made about pop-up menus is that it's a little awkward to access the keyboard each time you need the menu. I prefer to open the menu with the mouse (especially when I have extra mouse buttons), then select an item with that same mouse—no keyboard needed. This saves me the effort of reaching over the keyboard to hit F6. (Admittedly, this may seem pretty silly, but, if possible, I like to open menus with mouse clicks.) The line of code that assigns the hotkey is:

```
~F6::
    Menu, PhraseMenu, Show
Return
```

Since there is only one command in the assignment, it can be shortened to one line:

```
~F6:: Menu, PhraseMenu, Show
```

There are two ways to use extra mouse keys (usually located on opposite sides of the mouse). The first is to use the *xbutton1* and *xbutton2* assignments. Since I've already used the *xbutton1* with my QuickLinks script (discussed in a previous [AutoHotkey column](#) and Chapter Twenty in the [Digging Deeper Into AutoHotkey](#) e-book, plus notes on using *xbutton1* in this [column](#)), I opted to use my last remaining button, *xbutton2*:

```
xbutton2::Menu, PhraseMenu, Show
```

This worked fine for the mouse on the Windows 7 computer, but wasn't recognized by the mouse on the Windows 8 laptop. I could have gone through some gymnastics trying to figure out the name assignment for the mouse button, but I found it easier to use the utility software which came with the mouse to assign a hotkey directly to the button. I used ALT+P which didn't seem to interfere with anything else. Since the mouse button now sends ALT+P, I was able to use the following line to activate the PhraseOMatic menu:

```
!p::Menu, PhraseMenu, Show
```

You can add as many of these types of code lines as you like without any interference with the script. It merely activates a new hotkey combination for each line. You may find it necessary if you are using the same script on multiple computers with different mice.

(If you want to learn about using AutoHotkey scripts, see "[Installing AutoHotkey and Writing Your First Script](#)")

Now I can use the extra buttons on a mouse to pop up the QuickLinks menu with the fourth button and PhraseOMatic with the fifth button. Of course you do need at least one keyboard combination for those computers with a plain vanilla mouse (no extra buttons). (These lines of code have not been added to the posted script. You must do it yourself.)

The Latest Version of PhraseOMatic

The first notable new feature added by Douglas to the current version of PhraseOMatic is the ability to create, use, and switch to different phrase files. This is a great help when you have different phrases for different purposes. By keeping them in independent text files, the pop-up menu is prevented from becoming unwieldy. The second is the addition of a macro character (@) which allows you to shorten huge phrases into relatively short items on the menu. It is worthwhile to read the *Readme.txt* file since it gives a number of instructions on how these features work. (I did not encounter the Web page bug mentioned in the *Readme.txt* file. It worked fine for me, but the added Saving to Clipboard feature could be useful in a number of situations.)

When you first activate the current version of PhraseOMatic (F6), the standard menu will open (see Figure 4). This menu offers basic instructions for getting started.

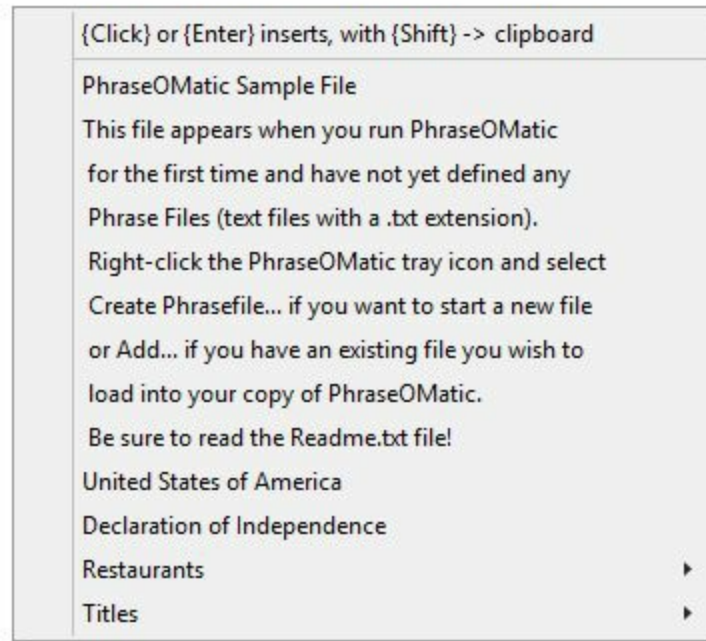


Figure 4. The default phrase file is loaded providing basic instructions when the script runs the first time.

When you right-click on the PhraseOMatic icon in the system tray, a menu opens with all the options you need to create, use, and modify your phrase files (see Figure 5). Selecting the active phrase file is as simple as clicking one from the list. (The active file is shown with a check mark.)

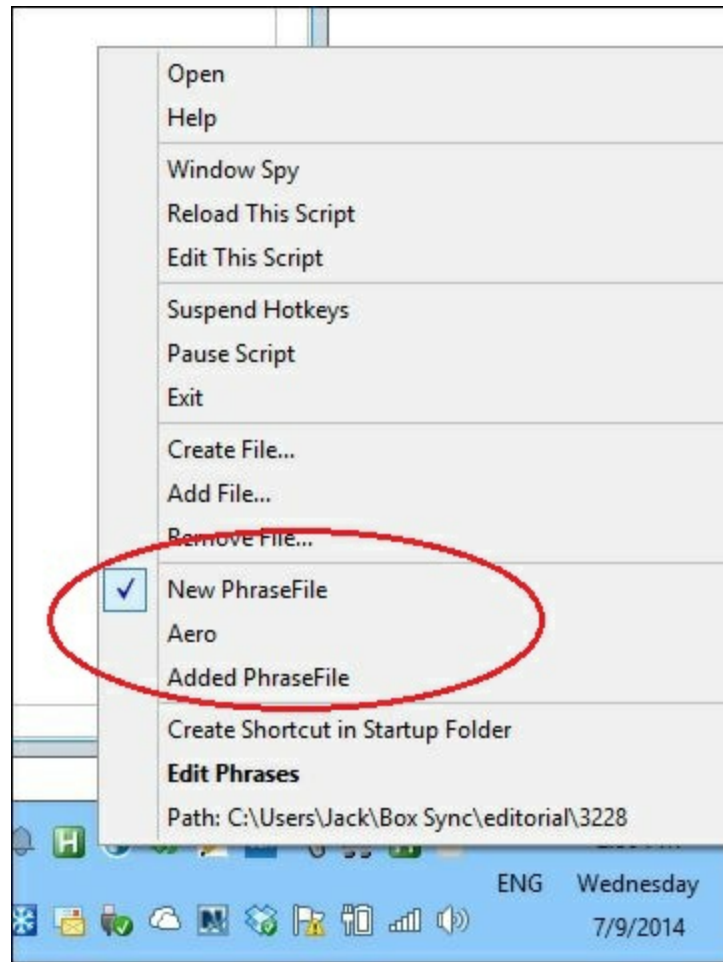


Figure 5. The PhraseOMatic right-click menu has all the functions needed to Create, Add, and Remove phrases files. The current available phrases files are circled in red.

There is even a Create Shortcut in Startup Folder option for automatic loading every time you log in.

The PhraseOMatic Script

Working on the code in the PhraseOMatic script is not for a beginner. Other than changing the hotkey combinations, I would resist the urge to tinker with it. From my perspective, the most important learning point from Douglas' work is his use of the Windows Registry to save information about the multiple phrase files. By using the Registry for this setup information, there is no need for a separate file to save the data. Many people might have used an INI file structure to do the same thing, but that would have required the extra file on the computer.

If someone is looking for a way to take advantage of the Windows Registry to support an AutoHotkey script, then studying the PhraseOMatic script would be worthwhile. (I may even explore this myself in a future column.) I've only glanced over it, but it looks like there are a number of useful techniques involved. It's a clever way to hide and use data that changes from

time to time.

The PhraseOMatic script is posted at the *ComputerEdge* [AutoHotkey download site](#) in the file *PhraseOMatic.zip*. It includes the script, *PhraseOMatic.ahk*, the default phrase file, *PhraseOMatic.txt*, an extra sample phrase file, *aerospace.txt*, the *Readme.txt* file, and a compiled version, *PhraseOMatic.exe*, for people who want to run the app without needing AutoHotkey installed on their Windows computer. (I compiled *PhraseOMatic.exe* myself, so you know it's safe—well, I know it's safe.)

* * *

Just released! [AutoHotkey Tricks You Ought To Do With Windows!](#) This e-book includes both those tips and the reference material (Table of Contents and indexes) from the other three AutoHotkey books. Pick up a copy free and share it with your friends.

Jack is the publisher of ComputerEdge Magazine. He's been with the magazine since first issue on May 16, 1983. Back then, it was called The Byte Buyer. His Web site is www.computoredge.com. He can be reached at ceeditor@computoredge.com. Jack is now in the process of updating and compiling his hundreds of articles and columns into e-books. Currently available:

Recently released is Jack's FREE AutoHotkey book, [AutoHotkey Tricks You Ought to Do with Window](#), available exclusively at ComputerEdge E-Books in the EPUB for e-readers and tablets, MOBI for Kindle, and PDF for printing formats.

ComputerEdge E-books offering is his [AutoHotkey Applications](#), an idea-generating intermediate level e-book about using the AutoHotkey Graphical User Interface (GUI) command to write practical pop-up apps for your Windows computer. (It's not as hard as it sounds.)

[Hidden Windows Tools for Protecting, Problem Solving and Troubleshooting Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, and Windows XP Computers.](#)

Jack's [A Beginner's Guide to AutoHotkey, Absolutely the Best Free Windows Utility Software Ever!: Create Power Tools for Windows XP, Windows Vista, Windows 7 and Windows 8](#) and [Digging Deeper Into AutoHotkey.](#)

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