

Pearl creates documents called archives. Each archive contains a series of items. Each item is a chunk of text (which may be styled, up to 32K bytes in length), a description and a date-time stamp. Any number of archives may be created by the user. Archives can be browsed in a window that shows you a scrolling list of all the archived items and their descriptions and shows the text of one item at a time. New items can be entered via a New Item window that lets you edit the item's text and description before saving it to an archive.

Pearl can accept text from the Mac clipboard, text files, clippings files and user input. The user has the option of editing text as Pearl archives it or (by setting the proper preferences) Pearl can act as a "droplet" and automatically archive the given text and quit. Each item of text has a description which Pearl displays when an archive is browsed. As with the text, the user has the option of editing a description or of letting Pearl deduce a description automatically. Text can optionally be reformatted as it is archived, removing linefeeds, hard carriage returns and so on.

Each copy of Pearl can be closely associated with up to eight archives, any one of which is the default archive for new items. Each copy of Pearl can actually work with any archive, but it will work faster and easier with the archives that it is associated with. It works the fastest with the associated archive that is marked as the default archive for new items. Of course, multiple copies of Pearl can be made, each associated with a particular set of archives (this seems confusing, but it's easy when you start actually using it). Pearl uses the Mac's alias mechanism for this association process, which means that archives associated with a given copy of Pearl can be moved or renamed and Pearl can still find them. Even better, archives on unmounted remote volumes will prompt for the volumes to be mounted when they are used. It's important to realize that an archive need not be open in a window on the computer for text to be archived to it.

Pearl is extremely flexible in its operation. Each copy of Pearl uses an extensive set of preferences which give that copy its rules of operation. This allows Pearl to be configured for novice users, power users, users who want a lot of control or users who want everything to just work in the background and not be bothered. This has a price, however. It means that Pearl cannot be used from a Read-Only volume such as a CD-ROM or locked floppy, nor may you set the "Locked" checkbox in the Finder for the application.

Pearl makes use of a computer technology called "fuzzy logic" in two ways. First, it uses fuzzy logic and some built-in rule sets to deduce a description for a given chunk of text as it is archived. While the user can always override the description it comes up with, the default description is helpful if a user has Pearl in automatic mode, with no user interface. Second, Pearl uses fuzzy logic when reformatting text. For example, Pearl contains several rules that each make a line more likely or less likely to be "unwrapped" (ie, have hard carriage returns removed), depending on the contents of the line. All of the various rules "vote" on whether to unwrap the line or not. Because fuzzy logic rules are fuzzy, they don't have "either/or", set-in-stone outcomes. For this reason, some of the preferences set in Pearl are not check boxes or radio buttons, instead they are sliders that, for example, tell Pearl to "normalize" text never, sometimes or always. While this may seem a little odd, to have a program that will "sometimes" take a certain action, it does allow for maximum flexibility and adjustment to your own preferences.

Pearl has two main types of windows. Archive Browser windows let you browse the contents of

an archive. New Item windows let you prepare a new item to be saved into an archive. The text in a New Item window is not archived until you save it into an archive. At any time you may have more than one of each type of window open at once.