



Pulsar Data Reduction

2021 Winter Observer Training
Workshop



Overview

- PSRFITS format used for all standard pulsar observing modes
 - Slightly different data structure depending on online processing mode (“search” vs “fold” vs “cal” modes)
 - Baseband recording modes available upon special request and coordination; we will not cover these here
- GBO does not maintain an independent pulsar data reduction package
- All GBO pulsar data can be analyzed using community-supported packages
 - PRESTO (especially good for searching for pulsars)
 - PSRCHIVE (especially good for fold-mode data)
 - PSRFITS UTILS (useful for search mode → fold mode)
 - DSPSR (useful for search mode → fold mode; also for processing baseband data)

Getting Set Up

- To access pulsar data analysis tools, run the following command

```
source /home/pulsar_rhel7/pulsar.presto3.bash
```

- You can wrap this in a function in your `.bash_profile`. Just add the following lines

```
psrenv() {  
    source /home/pulsar_rhel7/pulsar.presto3.bash  
}
```

- Then just type 'psrenv' when you open a new terminal
 - Must be done every time you open a new Linux terminal
- Wrapping in a function is necessary to prevent problems with VNC (remote desktop viewer)

PSRFITS Overview

- Conforms to FITS standard; compatible with astropy (though other packages provide more functionality)
- “Search” mode, aka filterbank mode
 - High time resolution spectra
 - Can record 1 (summed) or 4 (self/cross product) polarizations
 - Organized into “sub-integrations”
- “Fold” mode
 - Use a pulsar ephemeris to calculate precise rotational phase for each sample
 - Results in data cube of pulse phase vs freq. vs time
 - Must record 4 polarization products
- “Cal” mode
 - Specialized fold-mode for observing pulsed noise diode

PRESTO

- C and Python-based data reduction package
- Lots of functionality for searching for, finding, folding, and timing pulsars
 - Limited flux calibration routines
 - No polarization calibration
- Lots of additional Python utilities for pulsar astronomy
- <https://www.cv.nrao.edu/~sransom/presto/>
- Help menus for tools are fairly complete
- Tutorial available from Scott Ransom
- https://www.cv.nrao.edu/~sransom/PRESTO_search_tutorial.pdf
- Another tutorial available from Ryan Lynch
 - Just ask!

Common PRESTO Commands

- `rfifind` - Identify and “mask” RFI based on statistical outliers
- `prepdata` - Dedisperse, sum frequencies, and create time series
- `prepsubband` - Similar to `prepdata`; make lots of time series at once
- `accelsearch` - Find pulsars (including binaries)
- `single_pulse_search.py` - Find pulsars, RRATs, FRBs through single pulses
- `prepfold` - Fold a candidate or known pulsar
- `get_TOAs.py` - Get pulse times of arrival

PSRCHIVE

- C++ tools for working with fold-mode data
- Tools for viewing, editing, RFI-zapping, flux/polarization calibration, extracting TOAs
- <http://psrchive.sourceforge.net/>
- Online documentation is only partially complete
- Help menus for each program can answer common questions
- Some user-generated recipes for things like calibration
- Python wrapper available for some basic analysis
 - http://ipta.phys.wvu.edu/files/student-week-2018/demorest_ipta_psrchivepython_20180613.pdf

Common PSRCHIVE Commands

- pav – Lots of different ways to plot data
- paz and pazi – Automatic and interactive RFI removal
- pam – Lots of ways to manipulate data (e.g. downsample)
- psredit – View/edit header information
- vap – Another way to view header information
- fluxcal – Make flux calibration solutions
- pac – Flux/polarization calibration
- pat – Extract TOAs
- pas – Work with standard timing templates
- psrsmooth – De-noise standard timing templates
- psrplot – Advanced plotting

PSRFITS UTILS

- Mostly used to fold or reduce search-mode data
- https://github.com/demorest/psrfits_utils
- Two main useful commands
 - `fold_psrfits` – Folding search-mode data (then it can be analyzed with PSRCHIVE)
 - `psrfits_subband` – Reduce time/frequency/polarization resolution (useful for decreasing data volume)

DSPSR

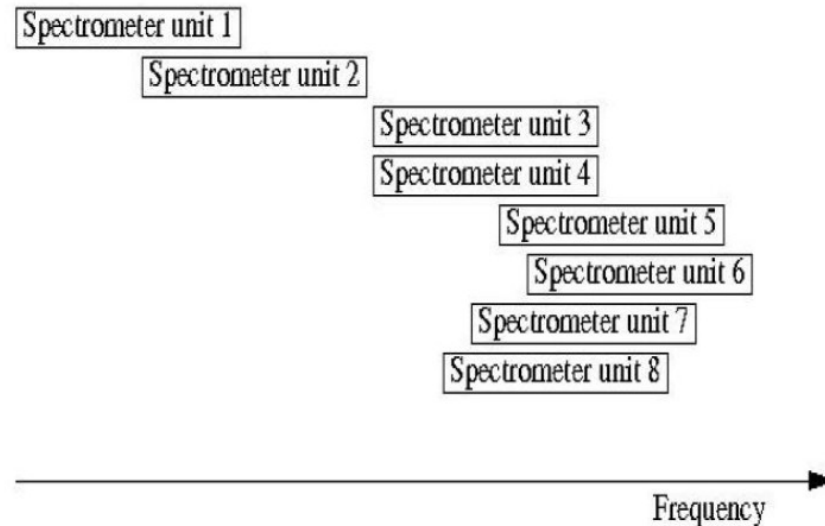
- Useful for folding search-mode data and working with baseband data
 - Can also make search-mode data in PSRFITS and SIGPROC filterbank format from baseband data
 - Can also connect to data buffer for online observing (e.g. VLA)
- <http://dspsr.sourceforge.net/>
- Help menu is pretty descriptive
- After folding, use PSRCHIVE

GBO Pulsar Data

- All data are written to a mass file store (/lustre/gbtdata)
- Data further organized by project code and session number
 - e.g. /lustre/gbtdata/TGT21A_501_05
- Data further organized by mode (VEGAS for incoherent dedispersion, VEGAS_CODD for coherent dedispersion)
 - e.g. /lustre/gbtdata/TGBT21A_501_05/VEGAS_CODD
- Please do not analyze your data in these directories!!
 - These areas are archived
 - Create symlinks *to files* in /home/scratch/<username> or /lustre/pulsar/<username>

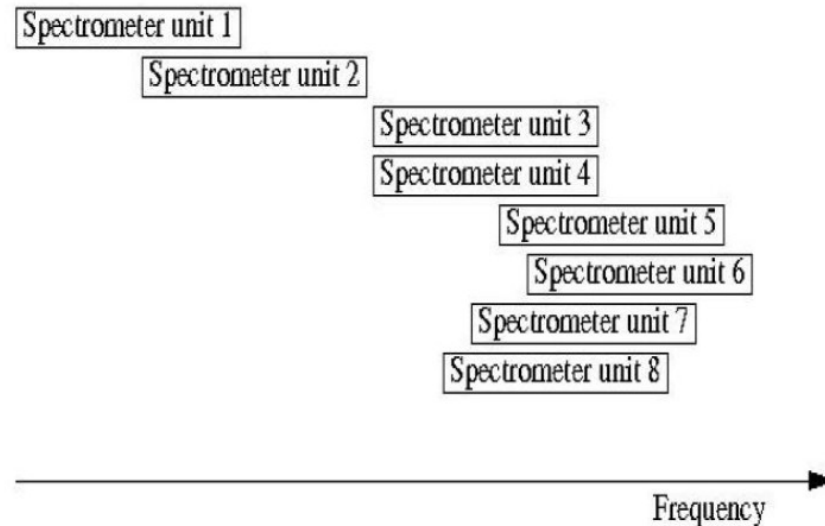
Merging VEGAS Data

- Depending on observing mode, data from VEGAS may need to be “merged”
- In coherent dedispersion modes, one sampler is connected to 1, 2, or 8 processing computers (depending on bandwidth)
 - Each computer processes full, $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{8}$ th total bandwidth
 - Data written to subdirectories by bank (A, B, C, D, E, F, G H)



Merging VEGAS Data

- Depending on observing mode, data from VEGAS may need to be “merged”
- In incoherent dedispersion mode, multiple samplers can be used to cover up to 6 GHz (depends on receiver and IF system limits)
 - Data still written to sub-directories by bank



Merging VEGAS Data

- Depending on observing mode, data from VEGAS may need to be “merged”
- Data will be merged for you within ~24 hours
 - You can still do spot-checks of data from each bank (they are all valid PSRFITS files in and of themselves, just with a fraction of the total bandwidth)
- Search-mode data merged manually
 - Data volumes are large, so per-bank data needs to be deleted after manual checks for data integrity
 - Only fully merged data will be left
 - If you don't see it within 24 hours, email your project friend

Support

- GBT pulsar support scientists have many years of experience working with pulsar data
- We can answer most questions about data reduction, and the third-party packages
- Can answer **some** questions about installing on your own computer
- Package-maintainers are also very helpful and responsive



GREEN BANK OBSERVATORY

greenbankobservatory.org

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