Dick,
I appreciate it! It is certainly what I looked for, and I was looking for
READS yesterday before I wrote a question. But, apparently quite dumb by the
end of the day, I typed "READ" in the search string, naively thinking that
all READ-related functions will be there. READ/READF surely are, but READS
happened to be separate. And, after using IGOR and IDL at the same time, I
thought I rememberd seeing READS among IGOR's functions.
However, after I tried READS, it is even slower than "execute" (by 0.02 s but
still)! That is strange. I guess compiling a string takes less time than
string conversion. READS might appear more efficient if a string to pass to
"execute" was more complicated.

Dick Jackson wrote:

> You've got it, using ReadS (read from string). It looks like you have five
> bytes so you need a very long integer to store this, giving me the first
> chance I've had to use IDL 5.2's new data types:

Well, in fact I have 8 bytes (in the real data) but I am checking only on
bits 12 and 13, so even INT will do. If I need to check on higher level
bits, I can cut the string apart.
Thanks again,
Pavel