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Subject: Re: Read large ascii file quickly

Posted by [David Fanning](#) on Fri, 07 Jan 2011 23:19:47 GMT

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Kenneth P. Bowman writes:

- > But reading ASCII will always be noticeably slower than
- > reading the equivalent binary because of the overhead involved
- > in converting from ASCII to the internal binary representation.
- > Binary formats, on the other hand, basically just move bytes
- > from the file to memory.

No argument from me here. But "slower" doesn't mean minutes slower for well-formatted ASCII files. Possibly some number of seconds slower. But, as someone pointed out, I don't have a lot of experience with extremely large ASCII files, as people with big data sets generally use binary formats.

- > ASCII files are quite portable, but they are usually inefficient
- > in terms of storage size. They also rarely carry adequate metadata
- > within the file itself, but that is a failing of the file's
- > author rather than the format, per se.

Well, binary files force good documentation practices because without it you are utterly and totally without hope. :-)

- > Ah, remember the good old days when you had to try to read
- > a binary file written on a 60-bit CDC machine on a byte-
- > oriented machine. :-)

Before my time, Ken. ;-)

Cheers,

David

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Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming: <http://www.dfanning.com/>

Sepore ma de ni thui. ("Perhaps thou speakest truth.")

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