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## How can I display the contents of a text file on the command line?

I would like to display the contents of a text file on the command line. The file only contains 5-6 characters. Is there an easy way to do this?

/ [command-line](#) / [files](#) / [cat](#)

edited Oct 11 '16 at 18:18



Jeff Schaller

16k 7 27 55

asked Aug 11 '13 at 3:41



Sam Weinberg

468 1 4 5

### 8 Answers

#### Using `cat`

Since your file is short, you can use `cat`.

```
cat filename
```

#### Using `less`

If you have to view the contents of a longer file, you can use a pager such as `less`.

```
less filename
```

You can make `less` behave like `cat` when invoked on small files and behave normally otherwise by passing it the `-F` and `-x` flags.

```
less -FX filename
```

I have an alias for `less -FX`. You can make one yourself like so:

```
alias aliasname='less -FX'
```

If you add the alias to your [shell configuration](#), you can use it forever.

#### Using `od`

If your file contains strange or unprintable characters, you can use `od` to examine the characters. For example,

```
$ cat file
(0Z4 ?o=+ji
$ od -c test
0000000 202 233 ( 320 K j 357 024 J 017 h Z 4 240 ? o
0000020 = 367 \n
0000023
```

edited Aug 11 '13 at 13:30

answered Aug 11 '13 at 4:03



Evan Teitelman

15.3k 4 48 64

+1, also `sed -n l file` could be useful. – [enzotib](#) Aug 11 '13 at 6:42

1 Does `less` have any clear advantages over other pager programs like `pg`, or does it just boil down to personal preference? – [Sam Weinberg](#) Aug 11 '13 at 19:22

@SamWeinberg: `less` has more features than `pg`. Take a look at the [less\(1\)](#) and [pg\(1\)](#) manpages. There are other pagers as well. Take a look at [unix.stackexchange.com/questions/81129/....](#) `less` is probably the most widely-used pager but which one you use comes down to personal preference. – [Evan Teitelman](#) Aug 11 '13 at 19:23