

Read a Whole File in One Line: The IOUtils Cookbook (1/2)

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Here's a line of Delphi almost every one of us has typed:

```
if FileExists(FileName) then
  // ...
```

It works. It has worked since the last century. There is nothing wrong with it. But somewhere along the way — quietly, without a fanfare that reached most of us — the RTL grew a *second* way to ask that question:

```
if TFile.Exists(FileName) then
  // ...
```

Same answer. Different unit. And that second unit — `System.IOUtils` — is one of the most quietly useful corners of the modern Delphi RTL that a great many working Delphi developers have simply never opened. It has been there since **Delphi 2010**. It reads a whole text file in *one line*. It lists a directory in *one call*. It builds paths that behave correctly on Windows, macOS, Linux, iOS, and Android without you touching a single backslash. And — a detail I want to make a real point of in this series — the things you call it through are **records, not classes**. There is no `Create`, no `Free`, no `try/finally`.

This is a two-part, show-me-the-code cookbook. Every recipe is the plain old `SysUtils` way you already know, set side by side with the `IOUtils` way — so you can decide, task by task, which one fits. Part 1 is about the design (why records?) and about **files**: reading, writing, copying, moving, deleting, and inspecting them. [Part 2](#) takes on directories and paths. By the end of this part you'll be reaching for `TFile` without thinking about it.

First, the thing nobody told you: these are records

Open `System.IOUtils` and look at the three names that matter. Here is how the RTL actually declares them — copied from the interface section of `System.IOUtils.pas` (© Embarcadero, shipped with RAD Studio):

```
TDirectory = record
  // ...
end;

TPath = record
  // ...
end;

TFile = record
  // ...
end;
```

Not `class`. `record`. That one keyword changes everything about how you use them, so it's worth pausing on.

A [Delphi record](#) (`#Records`) is a value type. Unlike a class, you never allocate it on the heap and you never free it. And since [Delphi 2009 gave records the ability to hold methods](#), a record can carry a whole toolbox of functions. `IOUtils` takes that idea to its logical end: every single method on `TFile`, `TDirectory`, and `TPath` is declared `class ... static` — meaning it belongs to the *type*, not to any instance. Here's a representative slice, again straight from the source:

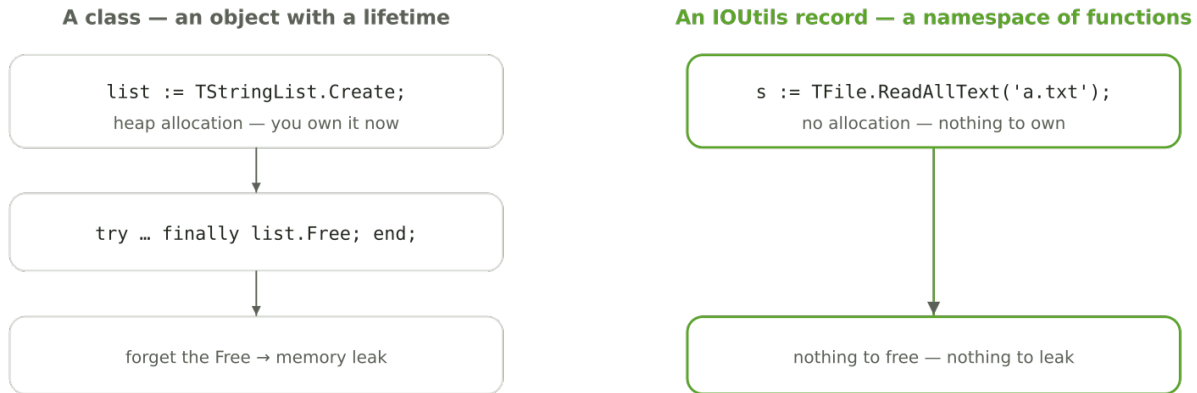
```
TFile = record
public
  class function Exists(const Path: string; FollowLink: Boolean = True): Boolean; inline; static;
  class function ReadAllText(const Path: string): string; overload; inline; static;
  class procedure WriteAllText(const Path, Contents: string); overload; static;
  class procedure Copy(const SourceFileName, DestFileName: string); overload; inline; static;
  // ... dozens more, all class ... static
end;
```

The practical upshot: **you never create a `TFile`**. You call methods *on the type name itself*, exactly like a namespace of free functions.

```
// You do NOT do this — there is nothing to instantiate:
// var F := TFile.Create; // this is something else entirely (see the warning below)
// F.Exists(...);

// You just call through the type:
if TFile.Exists('data.json') then
  Writeln('found it');
```

Let me draw the contrast that makes this click, because it's the whole reason the design is pleasant to use.



A class you instantiate and must free; an IOUtils record you just call through

The left column is the familiar object dance: allocate, guard with `try/finally`, free. The right column is what `IOUtils` gives you for the common cases — a call that returns a value and leaves nothing behind for you to clean up. That's the ergonomic payoff of the record design, and it's why the rest of this cookbook reads so cleanly.

One genuinely confusing exception: `TFile.Create`

`TFile` *does* have a method named `Create` — but it does **not** create a `TFile`. It's a factory that returns a brand-new, empty `TFileStream` on disk (class function `Create(const Path: string): TFileStream; static`). That returned stream **is** an object you own and must `Free`. So the rule holds — you never instantiate the record — but don't let the name fool you: `TFile.Create('new.bin')` makes a file, not a file-helper.

The honest version of the headline

I opened with `FileExists` vs. `TFile.Exists`, and I owe you the truth about what's really going on under the hood, because the flix house rule is that we don't oversell. If you read the implementation of `TFile.Exists` in the RTL source, here is the entire body:

```
class function TFile.Exists(const Path: string; FollowLink: Boolean = True): Boolean;
begin
  Result := FileExists(Path, FollowLink);
end;
```

It calls `FileExists`. `TFile.Exists` is not a smarter, faster, or more capable existence check — it's a thin, uniform façade over the same RTL primitive. So if all you ever do is check whether a file exists, `FileExists` is perfectly fine and there is no reason to feel behind for using it.

The value of `IOUtils` is not any single method beating its `SysUtils` cousin. It's **coherence**: one unit, one naming convention, one mental model that spans files, directories, and paths across every platform Delphi targets — modeled deliberately on .NET's `System.IO` so the shapes feel familiar. That's the real reason to learn it. Now let's earn that claim recipe by recipe.

Recipe: read an entire text file

This is the one that converts people. Reading a text file the classic way means picking a container, creating it, loading into it, and freeing it:

```
var
  Lines: TStringList;
  Text: string;
begin
  Lines := TStringList.Create;
  try
    Lines.LoadFromFile('config.ini');
    Text := Lines.Text;
  finally
    Lines.Free;
  end;
end;
```

The `IOUtils` way is a single expression that returns the file's contents as a string — no container, no `try/finally`:

```
var
  Text: string;
begin
  Text := TFile.ReadAllText('config.ini');
end;
```

`ReadAllText` has an overload that takes a `TEncoding` if you need to force one; with no encoding argument it detects a byte-order mark and falls back to the default. Two sibling methods round out the reading family:

- `TFile.ReadAllLines('log.txt')` returns a `TArray<string>` — one element per line, ideal for `for ... in`.
- `TFile.ReadAllBytes('image.png')` returns a `TBytes` — the whole file as raw bytes, perfect for binary content.

When *not* to read it all at once

`ReadAllText/ReadAllBytes` load the entire file into memory. That's exactly what you want for a config file or a small document, and exactly what you *don't* want for a multi-gigabyte log. For large or streaming reads,

`TFile.OpenText` returns a `TStreamReader` and `TFile.OpenRead` returns a `TFileStream` — both objects you own and free, letting you process the file a chunk or a line at a time.

Recipe: write, append, and create a text file

Writing mirrors reading. The classic approach again borrows a `TStringList`:

```
var
  Lines: TStringList;
begin
  Lines := TStringList.Create;
  try
    Lines.Text := 'Hello, world!';
    Lines.SaveToFile('greeting.txt');
  finally
    Lines.Free;
  end;
end;
```

With `IOUtils` it's one call, and it creates the file (or overwrites it) for you:

```
TFile.WriteAllText('greeting.txt', 'Hello, world!');
```

The whole write/append family is symmetric with the read family, which is the point — once you know one, you know them all:

```
TFile.WriteAllText('out.txt', SomeString);           // create/overwrite from a string
TFile.WriteAllLines('out.txt', ArrayOfStrings);      // create/overwrite from TArray<string>
TFile.WriteAllBytes('out.bin', SomeBytes);           // create/overwrite from TBytes
TFile.AppendAllText('log.txt', 'another line'#13#10); // add to the end, creating if absent
```

If you'd rather stream text out yourself, `TFile.CreateText` returns a fresh `TStreamWriter` (an object you free), and `TFile.AppendText` returns one positioned at the end of an existing file.

Recipe: copy, move, and delete a file

Here the `IOUtils` names are simply clearer than the `SysUtils` ones — and clarity is worth something when a colleague reads your code six months from now. Compare:

Task	SysUtils	IOUtils
Copy a file	<code>CopyFile(PChar(Src), PChar(Dst), False)</code> (<i>Windows API</i>)	<code>TFile.Copy(Src, Dst)</code>
Move / rename	<code>RenameFile(Src, Dst)</code>	<code>TFile.Move(Src, Dst)</code>
Delete	<code>DeleteFile(FileName)</code>	<code>TFile.Delete(FileName)</code>

The `IOUtils` versions read like the sentence you'd say out loud. `TFile.Copy` has an overload with an `Overwrite: Boolean` flag; by default it refuses to clobber an existing destination, which is a safer default than the raw Windows `CopyFile`. Note one deliberate difference in temperament, though.

They fail loudly — and that's usually what you want

`SysUtils.DeleteFile` returns a `Boolean` you can quietly ignore; `TFile.Delete` raises an exception if it can't do the job. That's not a flaw, it's a philosophy: `IOUtils` follows the .NET model of *throwing on failure* rather than returning a status code, so a problem surfaces immediately instead of hiding behind an unchecked result. Wrap file operations in `try/except` where failure is expected (a locked file, a missing path) and let the exception propagate where it isn't.

Recipe: inspect a file — size, timestamps, attributes

This is where `IOUtils` genuinely saves you from fiddly platform code. Getting a file's size the old way means either opening a stream or calling Windows APIs; `TFile.GetSize` returns an `Int64` directly:

```
var
  Bytes: Int64;
begin
  Bytes := TFile.GetSize('bigfile.dat');  // -1 if the file can't be read
end;
```

Timestamps come in a matched set of getters and setters, each with a local-time and a UTC variant — no `FileAge`, no `FindFirst` record to pick apart:

```
Created := TFile.GetCreationTime('report.pdf');
Written := TFile.GetLastWriteTime('report.pdf');
Accessed := TFile.GetLastAccessTime('report.pdf');
// UTC siblings: GetCreationTimeUtc, GetLastWriteTimeUtc, GetLastAccessTimeUtc
// and the matching SetXxx / SetXxxUtc procedures
```

Attributes come back as a `TFileAttributes` set, which is far more pleasant than bit-twiddling an integer of flags:

```
if TFileAttribute.faReadOnly in TFile.GetAttributes('locked.txt') then
  Writeln('read-only');
```

There's a cross-platform subtlety worth knowing here, and it's a good example of the whole unit's design showing through.

TFileAttribute is platform-specific by design

The `TFileAttribute` enum is **not the same set on every OS** — the RTL declares two different versions.

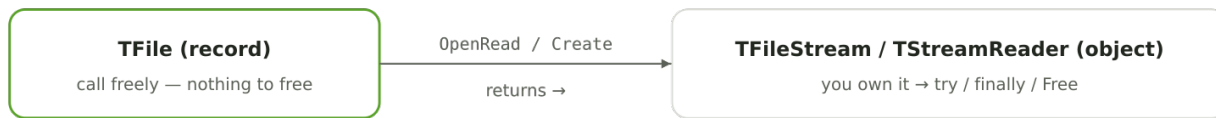
On Windows you get the familiar `faReadOnly`, `faHidden`, `faSystem`, `faArchive`, ...; on POSIX (macOS, Linux, mobile) you instead get Unix-style entries like `faOwnerRead`, `faGroupWrite`, `faOthersExecute`, `faSymLink`, The type is even marked `platform` in the source, so the compiler will hint if you use it in cross-platform code. This is honest engineering: the RTL doesn't pretend Windows ACLs and Unix permission bits are the same thing. If your code must compile everywhere, gate attribute logic behind `{IFDEF MSWINDOWS}` / `{IFDEF POSIX}` and use the entries that exist on each side.

Recipe: open a file as a stream, the modern way

Sometimes you do need a real stream — to hand to a parser, a JSON reader, or a network component. `TFile` gives you clean factories for that, and this is the one place the object rules come back, so let's be explicit about ownership.

```
var
  Stream: TFileStream;
begin
  Stream := TFile.OpenRead('data.bin'); // returns an object YOU own
  try
    // ... read from Stream ...
  finally
    Stream.Free; // your responsibility now
  end;
end;
```

`TFile.OpenRead`, `TFile.OpenWrite`, and the flexible `TFile.Open(Path, Mode, Access, Share)` all return a `TFileStream` you must free — because a stream, unlike the record, genuinely has a lifetime. The mental model stays consistent with everything in this blog: *records are value-typed helpers you never free; the objects they hand back are yours*. If you want the deep treatment of object and stream ownership, [my interfaces post](#) and Dalija Prasnikar's [Delphi Memory Management](#) both go further than I can here.



The rule of thumb: the record is free to call; the objects it returns are yours to free

The picture is the entire ownership story in one glance: everything left of the arrow is call-and-forget; everything right of it is yours to clean up.

A fair word on the alternatives

Because this is a Delphi-centric post, house rules say I name the wider landscape honestly. If you work across ecosystems, the shape of `IOUtils` will feel familiar for a reason: it was modeled on .NET's `System.IO`, whose `File`, `Directory`, and `Path` classes it mirrors almost method-for-method. Node.js developers reach for `node:fs` (`fs.readFileSync`, `fs.promises`), Python developers for the elegant object-oriented `pathlib` and the venerable `os/shutil` pair. Each of these is excellent in its own home. What `IOUtils` gives the Delphi developer is that same one-liner convenience *natively compiled*, in the language you already ship — no runtime, no interpreter, the same binary on five platforms. Reach for whichever lives where your code lives; if your code is Delphi, this is the tool that was hiding in your RTL all along.

Where Part 1 leaves you

We set out to show that modern Delphi has a cleaner, cross-platform vocabulary for file work than many of us ever learned — and to be honest about exactly how far that claim reaches. Here's what actually holds:

- `System.IOUtils` gives you `TFile`, `TDirectory`, and `TPath` — **records, not classes**. You call methods on the type name; you never `Create` or `Free` them. (The one trap: `TFile.Create` returns a *stream* you do own.)
- For files, `TFile` turns multi-line ceremonies into single expressions: `ReadAllText`, `WriteAllText`, `Copy`, `Move`, `Delete`, `GetSize`, `GetLastWriteTime`, `GetAttributes`.
- The convenience is real, but the magic is *coherence*, not raw power — `TFile.Exists` literally calls `FileExists`. Use `IOUtils` for a uniform, cross-platform API, not because the old functions are broken.
- When a method hands back a `TFileStream` or `TStreamReader`, that object is yours to free. The record isn't.

Modern Delphi didn't replace `FileExists`. It gave `FileExists` a whole family — one coherent, cross-platform record API for everything you do with the file system.

[Part 2](#) takes the same recipe-driven approach to **directories** (`TDirectory` — create, list, walk, copy trees) and **paths** (`TPath` — combining, splitting, and the genuinely indispensable cross-platform folder locations like `GetDocumentsPath`), and closes with a complete, one-page reference to every record and method in the unit. If you write files, you'll want the directory and path tools that go with them. See you there.

The series: the `IOUtils` cookbook

Two parts, recipe by recipe: 1. [Files: read, write, copy, inspect](#) — **you are here** 2. [Directories, paths, and the full reference](#) — listing folders, building paths, and every method in one place

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