57

Since Python 2.6, a good practice is to use `io.open()`, which also takes an `encoding` argument, like the now obsolete `codecs.open()`. In Python 3, `io.open` is an alias for the `open()` built-in. So `io.open()` works in Python 2.6 and all later versions, including Python 3.4. See docs: http://docs.python.org/3.4/library/io.html

Now, for the original question: when reading **text** (including "plain text", HTML, XML and JSON) in Python 2 you should **always** use `io.open()` with an explicit encoding, or `open()` with an explicit encoding in Python 3. Doing so means you get correctly decoded Unicode, or get an error right off the bat, making it much easier to debug.

Pure ASCII "plain text" is a myth from the distant past. Proper English text uses curly quotes, em-dashes, bullets, € (euro signs) and even diaeresis (¨). Don't be naïve! (And let's not forget the Façade design pattern!)

Because pure ASCII is not a real option, `open()` without an explicit encoding is **only** useful to read **binary** files.

share improve this answer

edited May 1 '17 at 1:25

community wiki

3 revs
Luciano Ramalho

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6   How does this answer have 43 upvotes? It doesn't even address the question. – ForeverWintr Mar 23 '17 at 22:14

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4   @ForeverWintr The answer is pretty clearly in there: use `io.open()` for text, and `open()` only for binary. The implication is that `codecs.open()` is not preferred at all. – Bdoserror Apr 4 '17 at 18:11 🖉

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1   @Bdoserror, There is *an* answer in there, clearly, but it's not an answer to the question that was asked. The question was about the difference between `open` and `codecs.open`, and specifically when the latter is preferable to the former. An answer that doesn't so much as mention `codecs.open` can't answer that question. – ForeverWintr Apr 4 '17 at 18:30

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2   @ForeverWintr If the the OP asked the *wrong* question (i.e. with the assumption that `codecs.open()` was correct to use) then there is no "correct" answer about when to use it. The answer is to use `io.open()` instead. It's like if I ask "when should I use a wrench to drive a nail into a wall?". The right answer is "use a hammer". – Bdoserror Apr 5 '17 at 17:47

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2   @Bdoserror, I'm glad you agree that the answer addresses an imaginary 'correct' question, rather than the question that was asked. But your analogy is flawed. A better one would be "What is the difference between a wrench and a hammer?" Although answering "Use a nailgun" may be useful for people who came here looking for what tool to use, it doesn't address the question, and isn't helpful for people who came here looking for the difference between hammers and wrenches. – ForeverWintr Apr 5 '17 at 18:30