

Using the contents of a file to define an MSBuild property

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Say you want to define a property in your MSBuild project file (vcxproj, csproj, etc.) and have the property value come from a file. You might try using the `ReadLinesFromFile` task to get the contents:

```
<Target Name="DefineMagic">
  <ReadLinesFromFile File=".\\magic.txt">
    <Output TaskParameter="Lines" PropertyName="Magic" />
  </ReadLinesFromFile>
</Target>
<ItemDefinitionGroup>
  <ClCompile>
    <PreprocessorDefinitions>MAGIC="$$(Magic)";%(PreprocessorDefinitions)
</PreprocessorDefinitions>
  </ClCompile>
</ItemDefinitionGroup>
```

This doesn't work because the `Target` doesn't run until after the `ItemDefinitionGroup` is already defined. MSBuild evaluates `PropertyGroup` and `ItemGroup` elements before running any `Target` s, By the time you execute the `ReadLinesFromFile` task, it's too late.

Instead, you can use the `ReadAllText` [MSBuild property function](#) to read the text into a property.

```
<PropertyGroup>
  <Magic>$([System.IO.File]::ReadAllText('.\\magic.txt').TrimEnd())</Magic>
</PropertyGroup>
<ItemDefinitionGroup>
  <ClCompile>
    <PreprocessorDefinitions>MAGIC="$$(Magic)";%(PreprocessorDefinitions)
</PreprocessorDefinitions>
  </ClCompile>
</ItemDefinitionGroup>
```

You can see an example of this trick in the [WindowsAppSDK build properties](#).

