# Streams

In the Java API, an object from which we can read a sequence of bytes is called an input stream. An object to which we can write a sequence of bytes is called an output stream. These sources and destinations of byte sequences can be—and often are—files, but they can also be network connections and even blocks of memory. The abstract classes InputStream and OutputStream form the basis for a hierarchy of input/output (I/O) classes.

Because byte-oriented streams are inconvenient for processing information stored in Unicode (recall that Unicode uses multiple bytes per character), there is a separate hierarchy of classes for processing Unicode characters that inherit from the abstract Reader and Writer classes. These classes have read and write operations that are based on two-byte Unicode code units rather than on single-byte characters.