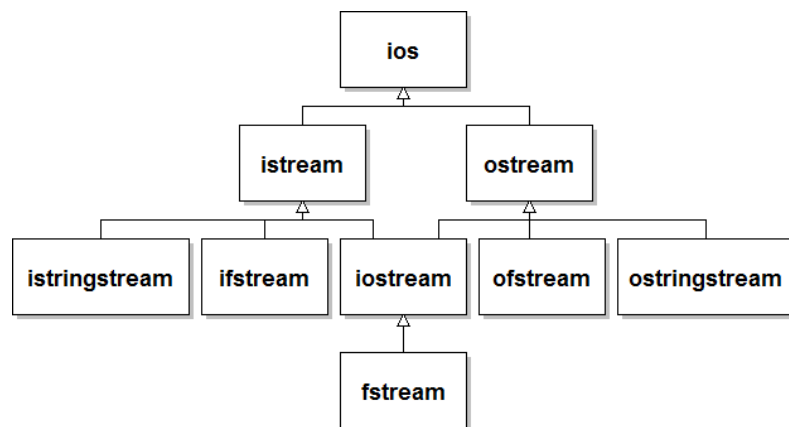# Class Hierarchy

You first met a class hierarchy when we looked at the related stream classes.
The class `ios` represents a **general** stream type, used for any kind of I/O. The classes
`istream` and `ostream` generalize the notions of input and output streams. The C++ file
and string-stream classes fall naturally into their appropriate position.

Each class shown here is a **derived class** (subclass) of the class that appears above it in
the hierarchy. `istream` and `ostream` are both derived classes of `ios`, while `ios` is a **base
class** (superclass) of both `istream` and `ostream`. Similar relationships exist at all
different levels of this diagram. For example, `ifstream` is **derived from** `istream`, and
`ostream` is the base class of `ofstream`.