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Node.js main purpose in life is to handle input and output of data between users and servers on the internet. This is usually referred to as asynchronous I/O (Input/Output) which simply means that a program can continue running while other tasks are taking place. Most programming languages have a built in way of dealing with this. Javascript does not have an I/O protocol built in so it worked well with Node.js. It is described in the textbook as a "straightforward system that lets us run Javascript in a non browser context".