Stream Encyclopedia Article

Stream

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The term stream has two meanings in the context of computing and computer science, both of which refer to the flow of **data**.

First, in **programming**, stream refers to an order flow of programming entry and execution. It is an ordered set of records or elements in which information is added to the end of sequence of data and execution of data occurs at the beginning. Streams can be used to produce an ordered **access** to data.

In the programming language known as **C**, data can be read to a stream without knowledge concerning the destination of the information. A **library** routine that is part of the program acts to receive the information and then to route the information onward.

The second meaning of stream relates to electronic communication. Here, stream refers to any flow of data from a source, such as the sender, through an established electronic connection to a single destination. As its name implies, a stream of data is usually sent in a continuous and connected way. This contrasts to the transfer of data via so-called packets, where portions of the data can be addressed and routed to their destination separate from other portions.