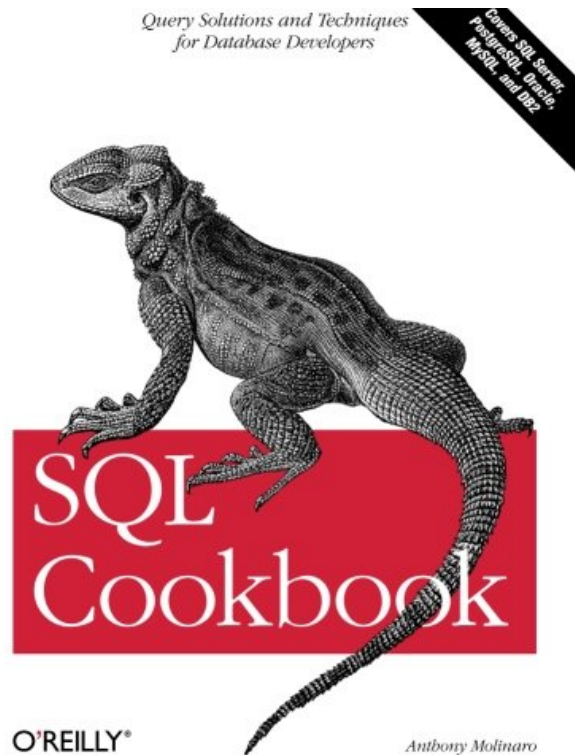# SQL COOKBOOK (COOKBOOKS (O'REILLY)) BY ANTHONY MOLINARO

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About the Author

Anthony Molinaro is a SQL developer and database administrator with many years experience in helping developers improve their SQL queries. SQL is particular passion of Anthony's, and he's become known as the go-to guy among his clients when it comes to solving difficult SQL query problems. He's well-read, understands relational theory well, and has nine years of hands-on experience solving tough, SQL problems. Anthony is particularly well-acquainted with new and powerful SQL features such as the windowing function syntax that was added to the most recent SQL standard.

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You know the rudiments of the SQL query language, yet you feel you aren't taking full advantage of SQL's expressive power. You'd like to learn how to do more work with SQL inside the database before pushing data across the network to your applications. You'd like to take your SQL skills to the next level.

Let's face it, SQL is a deceptively simple language to learn, and many database developers never go far beyond the simple statement: SELECT columns FROM table WHERE conditions. But there is so much more you can do with the language. In the SQL Cookbook, experienced SQL developer Anthony Molinaro shares his favorite SQL techniques and features. You'll learn about:

- Window functions, arguably the most significant enhancement to SQL in the past decade. If you're not using these, you're missing out

- Powerful, database-specific features such as SQL Server's PIVOT and UNPIVOT operators, Oracle's MODEL clause, and PostgreSQL's very useful GENERATE_SERIES function

- Pivoting rows into columns, reverse-pivoting columns into rows, using pivoting to facilitate inter-row calculations, and double-pivoting a result set

- Bucketization, and why you should never use that term in Brooklyn.

- How to create histograms, summarize data into buckets, perform aggregations over a moving range of values, generate running-totals and subtotals, and other advanced, data warehousing techniques

- The technique of walking a string, which allows you to use SQL to parse through the characters, words, or delimited elements of a string

Written in O'Reilly's popular Problem/Solution/Discussion style, the SQL Cookbook is sure to please. Anthony's credo is: "When it comes down to it, we all go to work, we all have bills to pay, and we all want to go home at a reasonable time and enjoy what's still available of our days." The SQL Cookbook moves quickly from problem to solution, saving you time each step of the way.

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Most helpful customer reviews

61 of 62 people found the following review helpful.
Good tutorial on and selection of recipes solving problems with SQL
By calvinnme
Ultimately, the goal of this book is to give you a glimpse of what can be done using SQL outside of what is considered the typical SQL problem domain. This text is unique in that the target audience is wide, incorporating all levels of SQL programmers as well as those who are completely unfamiliar with SQL.

Both complex and simple solutions are provided, and solutions for five different vendors are available when a common solution does not exist. These five databases are DB2 v.8, Oracle Database 10g (with the exception of a handful of recipes, the solutions will work for Oracle8i Database and Oracle9i Database as well), PostgreSQL 8, SQL Server 2005 and MySQL 5. All of the examples are built around a small set of tables containing employee data. This helps the reader get familiar with the example data, so that, having become familiar with the data, you can focus on the technique that each recipe illustrates.

Chapter 1, Retrieving Records, introduces very simple queries. Examples include how to use a WHERE clause to restrict rows from your result set, providing aliases for columns in your result set, using an inline view to reference aliased columns, using simple conditional logic, limiting the number of rows returned by a query, returning random records, and finding NULL values. Most of the examples are very simple, but some of them appear in later more complex recipes, so it's a good idea to read this chapter if you're relatively new to SQL or aren't familiar with any of the examples listed for this chapter.

Chapter 2, Sorting Query Results, introduces recipes for sorting query results. The ORDER BY clause is introduced and is used to sort query results. Examples increase in complexity ranging from simple, single-column ordering, to ordering by substrings, to ordering based on conditional expressions.

Chapter 3, Working with Multiple Tables, introduces recipes for combining data from multiple tables. If you are new to SQL or are a bit rusty on joins, this is a good chapter to read before going on to Chapter 5 and later. Joining tables is what SQL is all about; you must understand joins to be successful. Examples in this chapter include performing both inner and outer joins, identifying Cartesian productions, basic set operations (set difference, union, intersection), and the effects of joins on aggregate functions.

Chapter 4, Inserting, Updating, Deleting, introduces recipes for inserting, updating, and deleting data, respectively. Most of the examples are very straightforward, perhaps even pedestrian. Nevertheless, operations such as inserting rows into one table from another table, the use of correlated subqueries in

updates, an understanding of the effects of NULLs, and knowledge of new features such as multi-table inserts and the MERGE command are extremely useful for your toolbox.

Chapter 5, Metadata Queries, introduces recipes for getting at your database metadata. It's often very useful to find the indexes, constraints, and tables in your schema. The simple recipes here allow you to gain information about your schema. Additionally, "dynamic" SQL examples are shown here as well, i.e., SQL generated by SQL.

Chapter 6, Working with Strings, introduces recipes for manipulating strings. SQL is not known for its string parsing capabilities, but with a little creativity, usually involving Cartesian products, along with the vast array of vendor-specific functions, you can accomplish quite a bit. Some of the more interesting examples include counting the occurrences of a character in a string, creating delimited lists from table rows, converting delimited lists and strings into rows, and separating numeric and character data from a string of alphanumeric characters.

Chapter 7, Working with Numbers, introduces recipes for common number crunching. You'll learn how easily window functions solve problems involving moving calculations and aggregations. Examples include creating running totals; finding mean, median, and mode; calculating percentiles; and accounting for NULL while performing aggregations.

Chapter 8, Date Arithmetic, is the first of two chapters dealing with dates. Being able to perform simple date arithmetic is crucial to everyday tasks. Examples include determining the number of business days between two dates, calculating the difference between two dates in different units of time (day, month, year, etc.), and counting occurrences of days in a month.

Chapter 9, Date Manipulation, is the second of the two chapters dealing with dates. In this chapter you will find recipes for some of the most common date operations you will encounter in a typical work day. Examples include returning all days in a year, finding leap years, finding first and last days of a month, creating a calendar, and filling in missing dates for a range of dates.

Chapter 10, Working with Ranges, introduces recipes for identifying values in ranges, and for creating ranges of values. Examples include automatically generating a sequence of rows, filling in missing numeric values for a range of values, locating the beginning and end of a range of values, and locating consecutive values.

Chapter 11, Advanced Searching, introduces recipes that are crucial for everyday development and yet sometimes slip through the cracks. These recipes are not any more difficult than others, yet many developers make very inefficient attempts at solving the problems these recipes solve. Examples from this chapter include finding knight values, paginating through a result set, skipping rows from a table, finding reciprocals, selecting the top n records, and ranking results.

Chapter 12, Reporting and Warehousing, introduces queries typically used in warehousing or generating complex reports. Examples include converting rows into columns and vice versa (cross-tab reports), creating buckets or groups of data, creating histograms, calculating simple and complete subtotals, performing aggregations over a moving window of rows, and grouping rows based on given units of time.

Chapter 13, Hierarchical Queries, introduces hierarchical recipes. Regardless of how your data is modeled, at some point you will be asked to format data such that it represents a tree or parent-child relationship. This chapter provides recipes accomplishing these tasks. Creating tree-structured result sets can be cumbersome

with traditional SQL, so vendor-supplied functions are particularly useful in this chapter. Examples include expressing a parent-child relationship, traversing a hierarchy from root to leaf, and rolling up a hierarchy.

Chapter 14, Odds 'n' Ends, is a collection of miscellaneous recipes that didn't fit into any other problem domain, but that nevertheless are interesting and useful. This chapter is different from the rest in that it focuses on vendor-specific solutions only. This is the only chapter of the book where each recipe highlights only one vendor. In some cases, though, you'll be able to easily tweak a solution provided in this chapter to work for a platform not covered in the recipe.

Appendix A, Window Function Refresher, is a window function refresher along with a solid discussion of groups in SQL. Window functions are new to most, so it is appropriate that this appendix serves as a brief tutorial. Additionally, the use of GROUP BY in queries is a source of confusion for many developers. This chapter defines exactly what a SQL group is, and then proceeds to use various queries as proofs to validate that definition. The chapter then goes into the effects of NULLs on groups, aggregates, and partitions. Lastly, you'll find discussion on the more obscure and yet extremely powerful syntax of the window function's OVER clause (i.e., the "framing" or "windowing" clause).

Appendix B, Rozenshtein Revisited, is a tribute to David Rozenshtein, author of "The Essence of SQL". Appendix B focuses on some of the queries presented in "The Essence of SQL", and provides alternative solutions using window functions (which weren't available when The Essence of SQL was written) for those queries.

I highly recommend this book for anyone working with or interested in working with SQL. However, you should already be familiar with the theory behind database management or you will have trouble with this book.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.
Helped Me (a SQL Newbie) Deliver Cmplex SQL Reports
By John R. Spencer
I was tasked with deliverying 6 key-performance-indicator (KPI) using SQL and Crystal Reports and an Oracle database. And for three disparate areas in the world (USA, Singapore, and The Netherlands).
Sure, I could write a 'SELECT' statement or perform and 'UPDATE'.
But, I did not know how to approach SQL as being a 'complete' solution for record selection.
The Crystal Reports portion was not too much trouble.
I was using the PL/SQL environment for creating the SQL. Oracle 10g.

Mr. Molinaro's book was instrumental in having me develop what turned out to be some rather complex SQL.
It took awhile to get to use SQL's window functions. But, the author's presentation/explanation made them more than approachable---and quite useful.
I liked the explanations that covered the multiple vendors' database engines.
I will make no pretense of having reached SQL knowledge 'nirvana'--However, there was more than one time where I was out of ideas on how to get/count certain data----The SQL Cookbook did its job by showinge 'yet another way' to approach a pressing problem with a solution.
And one can gain a deep understanding of how SQL works. Always a plus for anyone that is new to an environment.
If there was something like a SQL University, this book seems to be text that would work very well for giving students more than enough 'footing' to face the 'real' world. It did for me.
I am more than pleased to have this book as part of my SQL 'library.'

Other uses for this book
By F. Riaz
Majority of the cookbooks cater to seasoned programmers so they can quickly lookup a solution without having to reinvent the wheel. However, this particular cookbook can also be used by less experienced programmers as part of "learning by example" methodology.

After learning the sql basics, I had decided to purchase this text. I would read the problem statement and then try to implement the solution by myself. I would compare my solution to that of the author's. Or in certain cases, cheat by copying the given solution. It took me 3+ months to try each and every problem in the text, but in the end, it definitely helped to improve my sql code reading, designing, and coding skills.

I would recommend this book to anybody who is interested in mastering any flavor of sql.

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