

# Triggers

COSC 304 – Introduction to Database Systems



# Triggers

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General enterprise constraints are often too complicated to be enforced using foreign keys and CHECK.

**Triggers** are used to perform actions when a defined event occurs. They are standardized, but also have been present in various database systems for some time.

Triggers allow general constraints to be enforced in response to database events.

# Event-Condition-Action Rules

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Triggers are also called *event-condition-action (ECA) rules*.

When an *event* occurs (such as inserting a tuple) that satisfies a given *condition* (any SQL boolean-valued expression) an *action* is performed (which is any sequence of SQL statements).

Triggers provide a general way for detecting events and responding to them.

# Triggers Example

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Consider this situation where triggers are useful.

The `workson` relation has a foreign key to `emp` (`eno`). If a user inserts a record in `workson` and the employee does not exist, the insert fails.

However with triggers, we can accept the insertion into `workson` and then create a new record in `emp` so that the foreign key constraint is not violated.

# Example Trigger

```
CREATE TRIGGER insertWorksOn
```

```
BEFORE INSERT ON WorksOn
```

← Event

```
REFERENCING NEW ROW AS NewWO
```

```
FOR EACH ROW
```

← Condition

```
WHEN (NewWO.eno NOT IN
      (SELECT eno FROM emp))
```

```
INSERT INTO Emp (eno)
VALUES (NewWO.eno);
```

← Action



# Triggers Standard Syntax

```
CREATE TRIGGER <name>
  BEFORE | AFTER | INSTEAD OF <events>
  [<referencing clause>]
  [FOR EACH ROW]
  [WHEN (<condition>)]
  <action>
```

## Notes:

- BEFORE, AFTER, INSTEAD OF indicate *when* a trigger is executed.
- <events> is the events that the trigger will be executed for. It will be one of these events:
  - INSERT ON R
  - DELETE ON R
  - UPDATE [OF A1, A2, ..., An] on R

# Triggers Syntax - FOR EACH ROW

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There are two types of triggers:

- **row-level triggers** that are executed for each row that is updated, deleted, or inserted.
- **statement-level triggers** that are only executed once per statement regardless of how many tuples are affected.

Inserting the clause `FOR EACH ROW` indicates a row-level trigger (the default is a statement-level trigger).



# Triggers Syntax - Referencing

The referencing clause allows you to assign names to the row or table being affected by the triggered event:

- INSERT statements imply a new tuple (for row-level) or new set of tuples (for statement-level).
- DELETE implies an old tuple or table.
- UPDATE implies both.

These tuples or tables can be referred to using the syntax:

```
[NEW OLD] [TUPLE TABLE] AS <name>
```

Example: Statement-level trigger on an update:

```
REFERENCING OLD TABLE AS oldTbl  
             NEW TABLE AS newTbl
```



# Triggers Syntax - Condition

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The condition is used to decide when the trigger action is performed.

- For example, even though an insert event may occur, you may only want to execute the trigger if a certain condition holds.

Any SQL boolean-valued condition can be used. The condition clause is evaluated before or after the triggering event, depending on whether `BEFORE` or `AFTER` is used in the event.

# Triggers Syntax - Action

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The action is performed when the event occurs and the condition is satisfied.

The action is one or more SQL statements.

If more than one SQL statement is executed, they should be in a `BEGIN .. END` block.

## Triggers Example #2

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Consider a trigger that is used to monitor employee salary increases.

If an employee's salary is increased by more than 10%, we want to add that employee to a relation

`auditEmp (eno, newSalary, oldSalary)` that is used by the accounting department to verify that the employee is not stealing from the company.

# Example Trigger #2

```
CREATE TRIGGER cheatingEmployee
```

```
  AFTER UPDATE OF salary ON emp
```

← Event - only fired  
when salary updated

```
  REFERENCING
```

```
    OLD ROW AS oldr
```

← UPDATE - have old  
and new tuples

```
    NEW ROW AS newr
```

```
  FOR EACH ROW
```

← One row at a time

```
  WHEN (newr.salary > oldr.salary * 1.1)
```

← Condition

```
    INSERT INTO auditEmp
```

```
    VALUES (newr.eno, newr.salary, oldr.salary);
```



Action - add new row to auditEmp

# Triggers and Views

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One interesting use of triggers is to allow updates on views that are not normally updatable.

This is done by using the `INSTEAD OF` clause. When an update is executed, instead of executing the update command given by the user, the trigger executes its own SQL statements.

For instance, this may allow it to perform inserts on many tables that were combined to form a single view.

# Triggers Question

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**Question: True or False:** A standard trigger can be used to perform an action in response to a SELECT query.

**A)** true

**B)** false

# Triggers In Practice

The syntax presented is for the SQL standard. Each database has its own syntax and level of support for triggers.

| Feature                  | MySQL                          | SQL Server                        | PostgreSQL                     |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Statement-level triggers | No                             | Yes                               | Yes                            |
| Row-level triggers       | Yes                            | No                                | Yes                            |
| OLD/NEW Table            | No                             | Yes. Inserted and deleted tables. | No                             |
| OLD/NEW Row              | Yes. Use New and Old as names. | No                                | Yes. Use New and Old as names. |
| INSTEAD OF trigger       | No                             | Yes, with limits                  | Yes, only on views             |
| WHEN clause              | No                             |                                   | Yes                            |



# Example Trigger in MySQL Syntax

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```
CREATE TRIGGER cheatingEmployee
AFTER UPDATE ON Emp
FOR EACH ROW
BEGIN
    IF NEW.salary > OLD.salary*1.1 THEN
        INSERT INTO auditEmp
            VALUES (NEW.eno,NEW.salary,OLD.salary);
    END IF;
END;
```

# Example Trigger in SQL Server Syntax

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```
CREATE TRIGGER cheatingEmployee ON Emp
AFTER UPDATE AS
BEGIN
    INSERT INTO auditEmp
        SELECT d.eno, newsal, oldsal FROM
            deleted d JOIN inserted i ON d.eno = i.eno
            WHERE i.salary > d.salary*1.1
END;
```

# Triggers Practice Questions

Write triggers for these cases:

- 1) When an employee is added to the `emp` table in department 'D1' with no supervisor make their supervisor 'E8'.
- 2) Write the same trigger as a statement-level trigger.
- 3) Write a trigger that deletes all tuples in the `workson` relation for an employee when the employee is deleted from the `Emp` relation.

```
emp (eno, ename, bdate, title, salary, supereno, dno)
proj (pno, pname, budget, dno)
dept (dno, dname, mgreno)
workson (eno, pno, resp, hours)
```

# Conclusion

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More complicated constraints can be enforced in the database using triggers.

Triggers allow for efficient enforcement of general constraints by specifying specific events to monitor and actions to take.

# Objectives

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- Create triggers from high-level descriptions
- Explain the difference between row level and statement level triggers
- List the events that triggers are used for
- Explain how triggers can be used for views



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