What is Normalization? 1NF, 2NF, 3NF & BCNF with Examples

What is Normalization?

Normalization is a database design technique which organizes tables in a manner that reduces redundancy and dependency of data.

It divides larger tables to smaller tables and links them using relationships.

In this tutorial, you will learn-

- Database Normal Forms
- 1NF Rules
- What is a KEY?
- What is Composite Key
- 2NF Rules
- Database - Foreign Key
- What are transitive functional dependencies?
- 3NF Rules
- Boyce-Codd Normal Form (BCNF)

The inventor of the relational model Edgar Codd proposed the theory of normalization with the introduction of First Normal Form, and he continued to extend theory with Second and Third Normal Form. Later he joined with Raymond F. Boyce to develop the theory of Boyce-Codd Normal Form.

Theory of Data Normalization in SQL is still being developed further. For example, there are discussions even on 6th Normal Form. **However, in most practical applications, normalization achieves its best in 3rd Normal Form**. The evolution of Normalization theories is illustrated below-
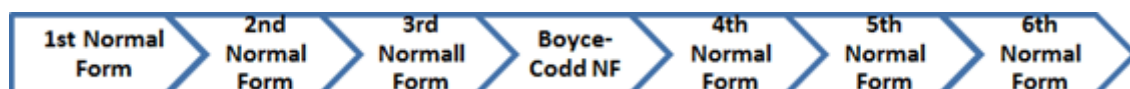
(/images/NormalizationProcess(1).png)

Database Normalization Examples -

Assume a video library maintains a database of movies rented out. Without any normalization, all information is stored in one table as shown below.

Full Names	Physical Address	Movies rented	Salutation	Category
Janet Jones	First Street Plot No 4	Pirates of the Caribbean, Clash of the Titans	Ms.	Action, Action
Robert Phil	3rd Street 34	Forgetting Sarah Marshal, Daddy's Little Girls	Mr.	Romance, Romance
Robert Phil	5th Avenue	Clash of the Titans	Mr.	Action

Table 1

(/images/NormalizationTable1.png)

Here you see **Movies Rented column has multiple values**.

Database Normal Forms

Now let's move into 1st Normal Forms

1NF (First Normal Form) Rules

- Each table cell should contain a single value.
- Each record needs to be unique.

The above table in 1NF-

1NF Example

FULL NAMES	PHYSICAL ADDRESS	MOVIES RENTED	SALUTATION
Janet Jones	First Street Plot No 4	Pirates of the Caribbean	Ms.
Janet Jones	First Street Plot No 4	Clash of the Titans	Ms.
Robert Phil	3rd Street 34	Forgetting Sarah Marshal	Mr.
Robert Phil	3rd Street 34	Daddy's Little Girls	Mr.
Robert Phil	5th Avenue	Clash of the Titans	Mr.

Table 1: In 1NF Form

(/images/1NF.png)

Before we proceed let's understand a few things --

What is a KEY?

A KEY is a value used to identify a record in a table uniquely. A KEY could be a single column or combination of multiple columns

Note: Columns in a table that are NOT used to identify a record uniquely are called non-key columns.

What is a Primary Key?

Primary Key

(/images/PrimaryKey.png)

A primary is a single column value used to identify a database record uniquely.

It has following attributes

- A primary key cannot be NULL
- A primary key value must be unique
- The primary key values cannot be changed
- The primary key must be given a value when a new record is inserted.

What is Composite Key?

A composite key is a primary key composed of multiple columns used to identify a record uniquely

In our database, we have two people with the same name Robert Phil, but they live in different places.

Composite Key

| Robert Phil | 3rd Street 34 | Daddy's Little Girls | Mr. |
| Robert Phil | 5th Avenue | Clash of the Titans | Mr. |

Names are common. Hence you need name as well Address to uniquely identify a record.

(/images/CompositeKey.png)

Hence, we require both Full Name and Address to identify a record uniquely. That is a composite key.

Let's move into second normal form 2NF

2NF (Second Normal Form) Rules

- Rule 1- Be in 1NF
- Rule 2- Single Column Primary Key

It is clear that we can't move forward to make our simple database in 2nd Normalization form unless we partition the table above.

MEMBERSHIP ID	FULL NAMES	PHYSICAL ADDRESS	SALUTATION
1	Janet Jones	First Street Plot No 4	Ms.
2	Robert Phil	3rd Street 34	Mr.
3	Robert Phil	5th Avenue	Mr.

Table 1

(/images/Table2.png)

MEMBERSHIP ID	MOVIES RENTED
1	Pirates of the Caribbean
1	Clash of the Titans
2	Forgetting Sarah Marshal
2	Daddy's Little Girls
3	Clash of the Titans

Table 2

(/images/Table1.png)

We have divided our 1NF table into two tables viz. Table 1 and Table2. Table 1 contains member information. Table 2 contains information on movies rented.

We have introduced a new column called Membership_id which is the primary key for table 1. Records can be uniquely identified in Table 1 using membership id

Database - Foreign Key

In Table 2, Membership_ID is the Foreign Key

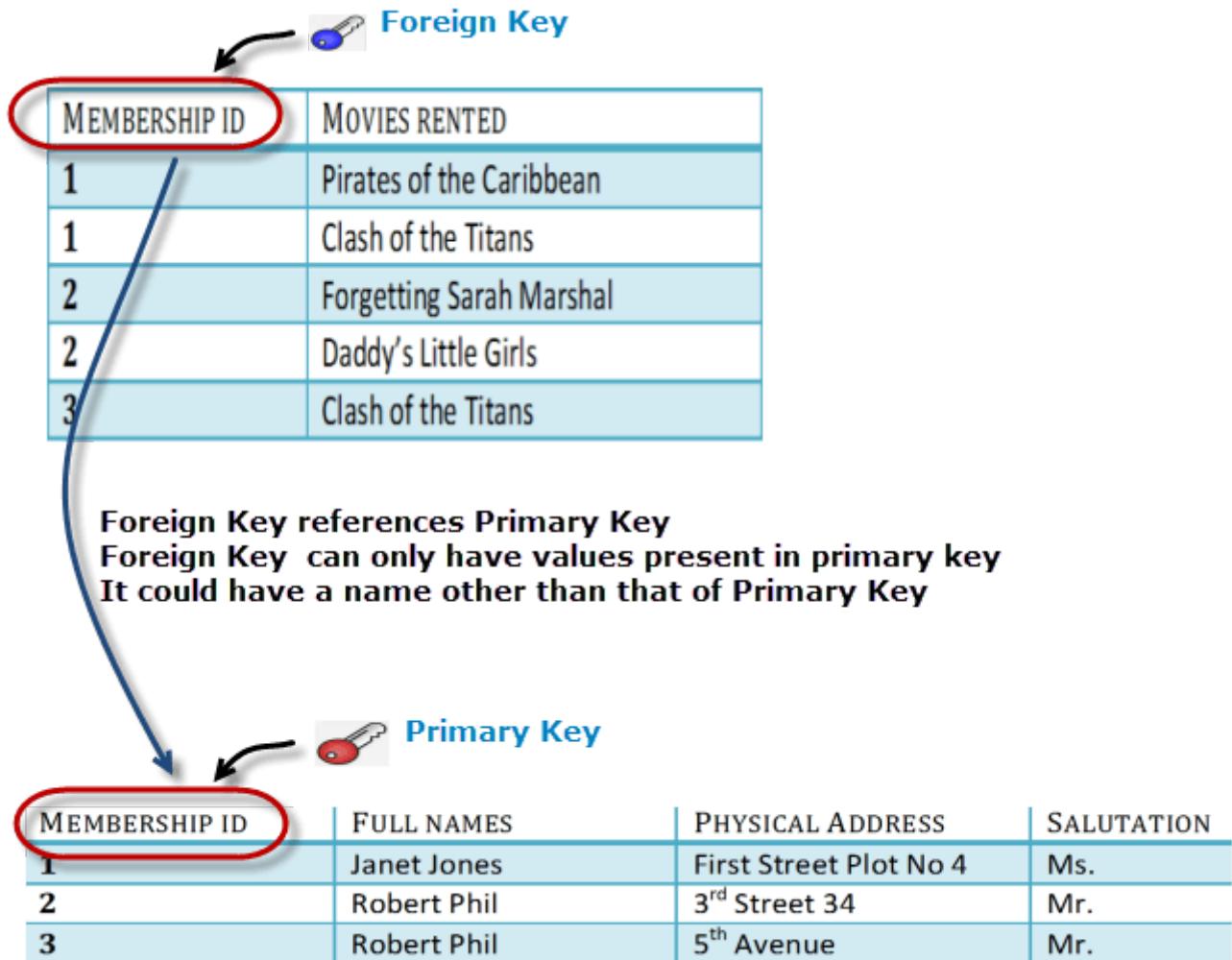| MEMBERSHIP ID	MOVIES RENTED
1	Pirates of the Caribbean
1	Clash of the Titans
2	Forgetting Sarah Marshal
2	Daddy's Little Girls
3	Clash of the Titans

(/images/foreign_key_table.png)
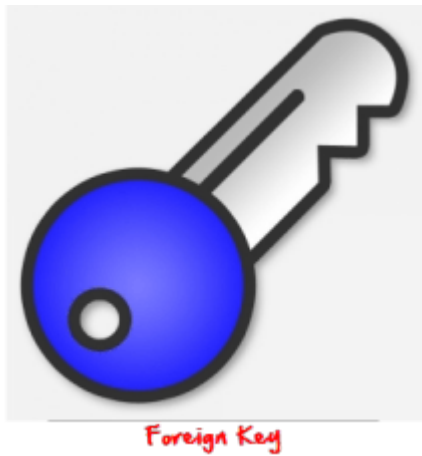
Foreign Key
(/images/ForeignKey.png)

Foreign Key references the primary key of another Table! It helps connect your Tables

- A foreign key can have a different name from its primary key
- It ensures rows in one table have corresponding rows in another
- Unlike the Primary key, they do not have to be unique. Most often they aren't
- Foreign keys can be null even though primary keys can not

Foreign Key

MEMBERSHIP ID	MOVIES RENTED
1	Pirates of the Caribbean
1	Clash of the Titans
2	Forgetting Sarah Marshal
2	Daddy's Little Girls
3	Clash of the Titans

Foreign Key references Primary Key
Foreign Key can only have values present in primary key
It could have a name other than that of Primary Key

Primary Key

MEMBERSHIP ID	FULL NAMES	PHYSICAL ADDRESS	SALUTATION
1	Janet Jones	First Street Plot No 4	Ms.
2	Robert Phil	3rd Street 34	Mr.
3	Robert Phil	5th Avenue	Mr.

(/images/ForeignKeyRelationWithPrimary.png)

Why do you need a foreign key?

Suppose an idiot inserts a record in Table B such as

You will only be able to insert values into your foreign key that exist in the unique key in the parent table. This helps in referential integrity.

Insert a record in Table 2 where Member ID =101

MEMBERSHIP ID	MOVIES RENTED
101	Mission Impossible

But Membership ID 101 is not present in Table 1

MEMBERSHIP ID	FULL NAMES	PHYSICAL ADDRESS	SALUTATION
1	Janet Jones	First Street Plot No 4	Ms.
2	Robert Phil	3rd Street 34	Mr.
3	Robert Phil	5th Avenue	Mr.

Database will throw an ERROR. This helps in referential integrity

(/images/WhyDataBaseIsImportant.png)

The above problem can be overcome by declaring membership id from Table2 as foreign key of membership id from Table1

Now, if somebody tries to insert a value in the membership id field that does not exist in the parent table, an error will be shown!

What are transitive functional dependencies?

A transitive functional dependency is when changing a non-key column, might cause any of the other non-key columns to change

Consider the table 1. Changing the non-key column Full Name may change Salutation.

MEMBERSHIP ID	FULL NAMES	PHYSICAL ADDRESS	SALUTATION
1	Janet Jones	First Street Plot No 4	Ms.
2	Robert Phil	3rd Street 34	Mr.
3	Robert Phil	5th Avenue	Mr. May Change

Change in Name — May Change Salutation

(/images/transitive_functional_dependencies.png)

Let's move into 3NF

3NF (Third Normal Form) Rules

- Rule 1- Be in 2NF

- Rule 2- Has no transitive functional dependencies

To move our 2NF table into 3NF, we again need to again divide our table.

3NF Example

MEMBERSHIP ID	FULL NAMES	PHYSICAL ADDRESS	SALUTATION ID
1	Janet Jones	First Street Plot No 4	2
2	Robert Phil	3rd Street 34	1
3	Robert Phil	5th Avenue	1

TABLE 1

(/images/2NFTable1.png)

MEMBERSHIP ID	MOVIES RENTED
1	Pirates of the Caribbean
1	Clash of the Titans
2	Forgetting Sarah Marshal
2	Daddy's Little Girls
3	Clash of the Titans

Table 2

(/images/2NFTable2.png)

SALUTATION ID	SALUTATION
1	Mr.
2	Ms.
3	Mrs.
4	Dr.

Table 3

(/images/2NFTable3.png)

We have again divided our tables and created a new table which stores Salutations.

There are no transitive functional dependencies, and hence our table is in 3NF

In Table 3 Salutation ID is primary key, and in Table 1 Salutation ID is foreign to primary key in Table 3

Now our little example is at a level that cannot further be decomposed to attain higher forms of normalization. In fact, it is already in higher normalization forms. Separate efforts for moving into next levels of normalizing data are normally needed in complex databases. However, we will be discussing next levels of normalizations in brief in the following.

Boyce-Codd Normal Form (BCNF)

Even when a database is in 3rd Normal Form, still there would be anomalies resulted if it has more than one **Candidate** Key.

Sometimes is BCNF is also referred as **3.5 Normal Form.**

4NF (Fourth Normal Form) Rules

If no database table instance contains two or more, independent and multivalued data describing the relevant entity, then it is in 4th Normal Form.

5NF (Fifth Normal Form) Rules

A table is in 5th Normal Form only if it is in 4NF and it cannot be decomposed into any number of smaller tables without loss of data.

6NF (Sixth Normal Form) Proposed

6th Normal Form is not standardized, yet however, it is being discussed by database experts for some time. Hopefully, we would have a clear & standardized definition for 6th Normal Form in the near future...

That's all to Normalization!!!

Summary

- Database designing is critical to the successful implementation of a database management system that meets the data requirements of an enterprise system.
- Normalization helps produce database systems that are cost-effective and have better security models.
- Functional dependencies are a very important component of the normalize data process
- Most database systems are normalized database up to the third normal forms.
- A primary key uniquely identifies are record in a Table and cannot be null
- A foreign key helps connect table and references a primary key

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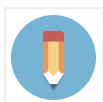
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