

ER Model - Basic Concepts

The ER model defines the conceptual view of a database. It works around real-world entities and the associations among them. At view level, the ER model is considered a good option for designing databases.

Entity

An entity can be a real-world object, either animate or inanimate, that can be easily identifiable. For example, in a school database, students, teachers, classes, and courses offered can be considered as entities. All these entities have some attributes or properties that give them their identity.

An entity set is a collection of similar types of entities. An entity set may contain entities with attribute sharing similar values. For example, a Students set may contain all the students of a school; likewise a Teachers set may contain all the teachers of a school from all faculties. Entity sets need not be disjoint.

Attributes

Entities are represented by means of their properties, called **attributes**. All attributes have values. For example, a student entity may have name, class, and age as attributes.

There exists a domain or range of values that can be assigned to attributes. For example, a student's name cannot be a numeric value. It has to be alphabetic. A student's age cannot be negative, etc.

Types of Attributes

- **Simple attribute** – Simple attributes are atomic values, which cannot be divided further. For example, a student's phone number is an atomic value of 10 digits.
- **Composite attribute** – Composite attributes are made of more than one simple attribute. For example, a student's complete name may have first_name and last_name.
- **Derived attribute** – Derived attributes are the attributes that do not exist in the physical database, but their values are derived from other attributes present in the database. For example, average_salary in a department should not be saved directly in the database, instead it can be derived. For another example, age can be derived from data_of_birth.
- **Single-value attribute** – Single-value attributes contain single value. For example – Social_Security_Number.
- **Multi-value attribute** – Multi-value attributes may contain more than one values. For example, a person can have more than one phone number, email_address, etc.

These attribute types can come together in a way like –

- simple single-valued attributes
- simple multi-valued attributes
- composite single-valued attributes
- composite multi-valued attributes

Entity-Set and Keys

Key is an attribute or collection of attributes that uniquely identifies an entity among entity set.

For example, the roll_number of a student makes him/her identifiable among students.

- **Super Key** – A set of attributes (one or more) that collectively identifies an entity in an entity set.
- **Candidate Key** – A minimal super key is called a candidate key. An entity set may have more than one candidate key.
- **Primary Key** – A primary key is one of the candidate keys chosen by the database designer to uniquely identify the entity set.

Relationship

The association among entities is called a relationship. For example, an employee **works_at** a department, a student **enrolls** in a course. Here, Works_at and Enrolls are called relationships.

Relationship Set

A set of relationships of similar type is called a relationship set. Like entities, a relationship too can have attributes. These attributes are called **descriptive attributes**.

Degree of Relationship

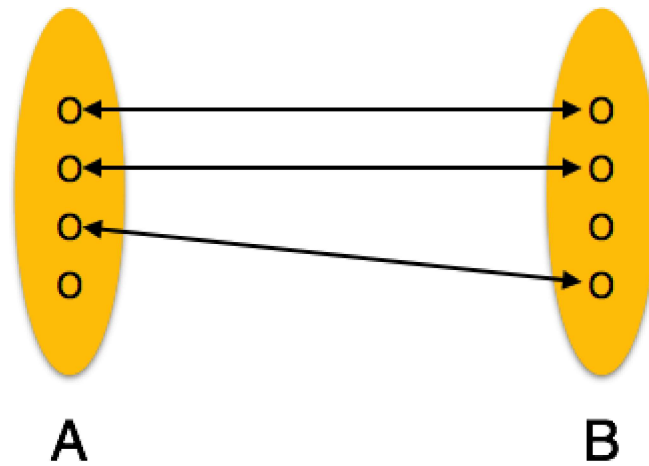
The number of participating entities in a relationship defines the degree of the relationship.

- Binary = degree 2
- Ternary = degree 3
- n-ary = degree

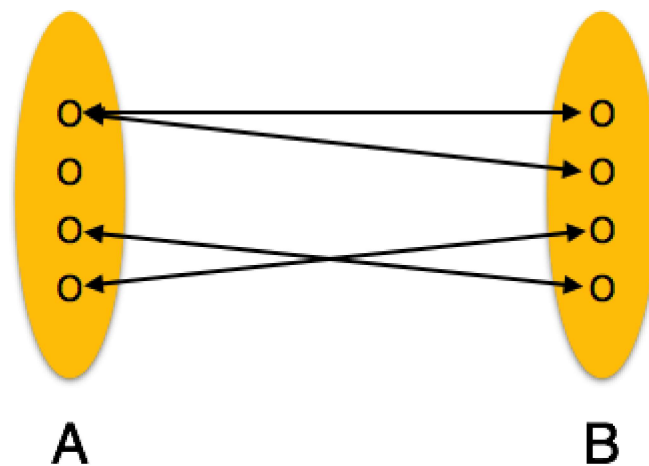
Mapping Cardinalities

Cardinality defines the number of entities in one entity set, which can be associated with the number of entities of other set via relationship set.

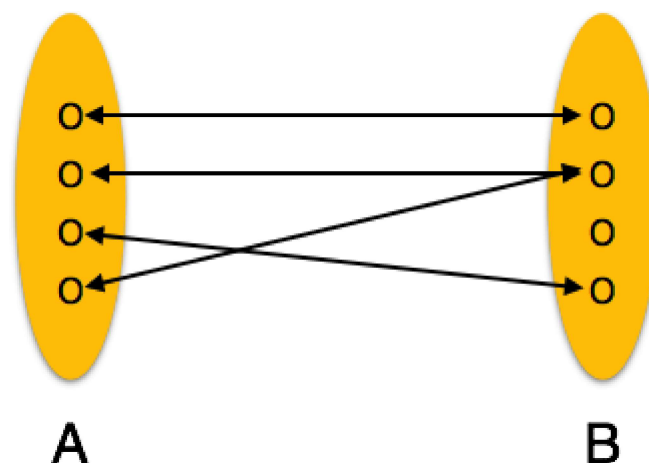
- **One-to-one** – One entity from entity set A can be associated with at most one entity of entity set B and vice versa.



- **One-to-many** – One entity from entity set A can be associated with more than one entities of entity set B however an entity from entity set B, can be associated with at most one entity.



- **Many-to-one** – More than one entities from entity set A can be associated with at most one entity of entity set B, however an entity from entity set B can be associated with more than one entity from entity set A.



- **Many-to-many** – One entity from A can be associated with more than one entity from B and vice versa.

