# Unify data with target tables

As you have been learning, target tables are predetermined locations where pipeline data is sent in order to be acted on in a database system. Essentially, a source table is where data comes from, and a target table is where it's going. This reading provides more information about the data-extraction process and how target tables fit into the greater logic of business intelligence processes.

## Data extraction

Data extraction is the process of taking data from a source system, such as a database or a SaaS, so that it can be delivered to a destination system for analysis. You might recognize this as the first step in an ETL (extract, transform, and load) pipeline. There are three primary ways that pipelines can extract data from a source in order to deliver it to a target table:

- **Update notification:** The source system issues a notification when a record has been updated, which triggers the extraction.
- **Incremental extraction:** The BI system checks for any data that has changed at the source and ingests these updates.
- **Full extraction:** The BI system extracts a whole table into the target database system.

Once data is extracted, it must be loaded into target tables for use. In order to drive intelligent business decisions, users need access to data that is current, clean, and usable. This is why it is important for BI professionals to design target tables that can hold all of the information required to answer business questions.

## The importance of target tables

As a BI professional, you will want to take advantage of target tables as a way to unify your data and make it accessible to users. In order to draw insights from a variety of different sources, having a place that contains all of the data from those sources is essential.