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*SQL Scripts vs SSIS Packages for the ETL Process*

Over this quarter I’ve learned an exceptional amount about the ins and outs of designing an ETL process. One of the really eye opening things for me was seeing just how many functional ways there are to get data from one form/place and put it into another. I’ve found myself using the knowledge gained about writing scripts for ETL on almost a daily basis in my professional life, so to say this class has been helpful would be an understatement.

As a programmer and data analyst, I am in my comfort zone when it comes to reading, writing, and working with code. Figuring out how to write and use SQLs scripts has generally come easily to me, so it’s been a safety zone I’ve tended to stick to. Learning about the functionality of SSIS packages, and then subsequently learning how to set one up was initially extremely overwhelming for me since it forced me out of my comfort zone. Over the course of this class, that has been slowly changing since I’ve learned having a visual aid and incremental package you don’t have to programmatically tie into different interfaces that trigger the action is a great asset.

With an SSIS package, having that visual aid as to what the workflow looks like is an extremely useful feature. Being able to conceptualize at a glance and have in plain English what is going to happen is great if you don’t want to spend a large amount of time dissecting code. If you’re not comfortable with code, there are a lot of tools built in that will write it for you or let you use processes that don’t rely on scripts such as data flows, that said SSIS is still best used when you understand SQL scripts since there is a lot it can accomplish by executing SQL tasks directly.

When it comes to SQL code, the advantage is in the ability to customize things exactly the way you want, and tie it into other programs exactly the way you want. For someone that isn’t an expert, SQL code can get complex very quickly when it comes to some more advanced features, such as error logging, lookups, and data transformations. With SSIS, these advanced tasks are a little bit buried and require some additional learning to understand how to put together, but ultimately make it a whole lot easier to setup these types of features.

I’ve come to think of SSIS kind of like a combo of Visio and SQL Server, or as a secondary layer on top of SQL Scripts that has steep learning curve, but ultimately serves to make designing and implementing ETL processes quicker and easier. Both systems have pros and cons, though I believe I’ve learned with big or complicated ETL jobs that they’re best used together.