Final Exam: Written Questions

W4111 – Introduction to Databases: 20231COMS4111W002

# Guidance and Submission Instructions

# Foundation

## F1 – Benefits of DBMS

Before DBMS, organizations managed data by writing application programs that manipulated data in files. List 5 problems with the application-file approach and succinctly state of DBMS solve the problem.

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

Problems with the application-file approach

1. **Data Redundancy** (data is usually stored across multiple files and has duplicates, leading to inconsistency or large storage size requirement):

DBMS solves the problem by centralising the data and allowing data to be shared between different files.

1. **Simultaneous Access Problem** (simultaneous access and manipulation to those files may cause data inconsistencies):

DBMS has concurrency control features that guarantee data integrity and consistency.

1. **Data Access Difficulty** (complex codes are required to retrieve and manipulate data in files, leading to data access difficulty).

DBMS offers a standardised query language (SQL) that simplifies data access and manipulation for all applications, making everything more accessible and consistent.

1. **Data Security** (those files can be accessed or manipulated easily, leading to data security concerns).

DBMS offers various security features, including access control, encryption and auditing, to protect the database and make sure that only authorised users can manipulate the data.

1. **Data Isolation** (data is stored in different files and/or formats. This makes it challenging to combine and analyse the data for users):

DBMS uses schema to well-define the data format, making it easier for users to integrate and/or retrieve data from various sources.

## F2 – Types of Data

Briefly explain structured data, semi-structured data and unstructured data. Give an example of each type of data.

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

1. **Structured Data**: structured data should have a well-defined structure. That is, individual data of the same type contains the same attribute set AND fields. So it can be easily stored AND/OR searched. Examples can be a Google Sheet or an Excel file.
2. **Unstructured Data**: unstructured data does NOT show any structure. It contains data items that may have an entirely different format stored in their original formats. Examples can be a collection of images or a collection of videos.
3. **Semi-structured Data**: for semi-structured data, data items of the same type may have different attribute sets. Examples can be JSON or Extensible Markup Language (XML).

## F3 – Physical Data Independence

What is physical data independence? What is a benefit?

**Definition:** Physical data independence means that the system can be modified at a physical level without leading to application programs being rewritten.

**Benefit:** We can optimise physical performance, upgrade storage or change the physical storage solutionswithout impacting the application layer, which minimises the maintenance cost and disruptions of a system and makes it easier for hardware upgrades.

## F4 – Concepts

Explain the following concepts and give an example of each:

1. Data manipulation language (DML)
2. Data definition language (DDL)
3. Procedure DML
4. Declarative DML

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Data manipulation language (DML)**: Users can use a data manipulation language (DML) to access or manipulate a database as organised by the corresponding data model. An example can be:

Text, letter

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**Data definition language (DDL)**: Users define a database schema by a series of codes expressed by a data-definition language (DDL). It is also used to specify specific properties of the data model. An example can be:

**Text

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**Procedure DML**: This specific type of DML requires users to what data are needed and the approach to get the desired data. Examples can be FORTRAN, C or BASIC.

**Declarative DML**: This specific type of DML does not require users to specify how to get the data. Users only need to specify what data are needed. Examples can be SQL, PROLOG or LISP.

*Reference: The DB book P13-16 and https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/difference-between-procedural-and-non-procedural-language/.*

## F5 – Modeling

Briefly explain the following concepts and the role for each concept in data modeling. Give an example of the benefit of each level:

1. Conceptual model
2. Logical model
3. Physical model

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Conceptual model**:

1. Explanation: it only contains entity names and relationships.
2. Role: it is a high-level overview of a database system for audiences with limited data modelling knowledge, such as stakeholders.
3. Benefit Example: the conceptual model can give the stakeholders a high-level intuition about the database system, making it easier for decision-making and efficient system development.

**Logical model**:

1. Explanation: it includes entity names, entity relationships, attributes, primary keys, and foreign keys.
2. Role: it is for clarification and more detailed relationships between database entities.
3. Benefit Example: the logical model guarantees integrity and consistency of database design. Therefore, the mapping processes from the conceptual model to the actual implementation becomes smoother.

**Physical model**:

1. Explanation: a physical model has primary keys, foreign keys, table names, column names, and column datatypes. It is for technical implementation purposes.
2. Role: the major audiences are database administrators and database developers. It has all the detailed implementation information, such as data type.
3. Benefit Example: The physical model allows for more efficient data storage, access and management, enabling performance optimisation or resource utilisation optimisation for an existing database system.

## F6 – Application Architectures

Briefly explain:

1. Two-tier database application architecture
2. Three-tier application architecture

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Two-tier**: the application is located on the client machine and utilises the database system's features on the server machine by executing query language statements.

**Three-tier**: the client machine serves solely as a front-end interface, without making any direct database interactions. Web browsers and mobile apps are the most prevalent types of application clients.

*Reference: The DB book P23.*

## F7 – Database Administrators (DBA)

List 5 tasks/functions that a DBA performs. Do DBAs typically use DDLs or DMLs?

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Schema definition**: they execute data definition statements in the DDL to create the original database schema.

**Storage structure and access-method definition:** parameters that are relevant to the physical organisation of the data and the indices to be created may be specified by them.

**Schema and physical-organisation modification**: they modify the schema and physical organisation to reflect the changing needs of the organisation, OR they alter the physical organisation to improve the performance of the database.

**Granting of authorisation for data access**: They manage access levels of the database. That is, they regulate which part of the database can be accessed by various users.

**Routine maintenance:** They should be responsible for routine maintenance such as backup management, available disk space check and performance/user monitoring.

**DBAs may use both DDLs and DMLs, *but DBAs typically use DDLs much more frequently than DMLs.*** DDLs are used for creating, altering or deleting database structures (**these are their main tasks**), while DMLs are used for data manipulation tasks like insertion, retrieval or modification.

*Reference: P24-25 of the DB book.*

# Relational Model

## R1 – Domain

Explain the importance of atomicity of domains. *float* is a type. An example of a *domain* might be a person’s *weight*. The type for *weight* might be a float, but give an example of how *float* is not the *domain.*

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Importance**: it ensures all domains represent a single, indivisible value, which maintains data consistency and integrity. This simplifies data manipulation and querying.

We know that a person usually has a weight between 5.0 kg to 200.0 kg, so we can use the float type to represent a person’s weight, and the range of 5.0-200.0 is the domain of a person’s weight. But it is not very possible that a person can have a weight of 800.0 kg, which is also of float type. So, float is not the domain (not all values of float are within the range), say it is also possible can a float can be negative but this is not realistic for a person’s weight.

## R2 – Keys

Briefly define and explain the following concepts:

1. Superkey
2. Candidate key
3. Primary key
4. Foreign key

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

Here we will use examples for the explanation. Please refers to P43-45 of the DB book.

**Super key**: a super key is a set containing one or more attributes that allow us to identify a unique tuple in the relation. For example, in the instructor table (Figure 2.4), the set of ID AND name is enough to identify a unique instructor in the relation.

**Candidate key**: minimal super keys are called candidate keys. That is, no smaller subsets of a candidate key can be super key. From the previous example, we may use ID as a candidate key since this attribute is enough to identify a unique instructor, and NO smaller subset can do the same job.

**Primary key**: a primary key is a candidate key chosen by the database designer to identify unique tuples within the relation. Again, for the same instructor table, we see that in Figure 2.8, ID is underlined, and it is the chosen primary key by the designer to identify unique instructors.

**Foreign key**: a foreign key is a key in a table referencing the primary key in another table so that they are linked together. See Figure 2.8 for the student table, dept\_name is a foreign key in the student relation referencing to the department relation.

*Reference: The DB book P43-45.*

## R3 – Operators

The slides associated with the recommended text book list six basic relational operators

* select: 𝞼
* project: 𝝅
* union: U
* set difference: –
* Cartesian product: x
* rename: ⍴

Surprisingly, the list does not include *join: ⋈.* This is because join it is possible to derive join from a relational expression using more basic operators.

Briefly explain how to derive join from basic operators.

What is the importance of the relational algebra being *closed under the operators* for the derivation?

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Derivation**: Now let us assume we have two relations, R and S, where attribute A exists in both relations.

The operation R ⋈ S, where R.A = S.A can be re-written as the following:

𝝅(desired attributes)𝞼(R.A = S.A) (R X S).

The “R X S” produces all combinations of R and S, and “𝞼(R.A = S.A)” selects those results with R.A = S.A. Then, the projection, “𝝅(desired attributes)”, removes any undesired attributes if necessary.

**Importance**: if we apply relational algebra to some relations, it never returns something that is out of the scope, i.e., it never produces things other than valid relations that can be used as input for the next relational algebra operation. Therefore, join is equivalent to consecutive relational algebra operations.

## R4 – Equivalent Queries

Briefly explain the concept of equivalent queries. Later lectures explained an important use of the concept. What is that use?

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Explanation**: when two or more different query expressions produce the same results under a given database, they are called equivalent queries.

Later in the lectures (lecture 10), equivalent queries were introduced to optimise query complications. See the figure from the lecture slide:

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They produce the same results but they may have different computational complexity when we specify an evaluation-plan

# SQL

## S1 – Foundation

Codd’s Rule 0 states

**Rule 0:** The *foundation rule*:

For any system that is advertised as, or claimed to be, a relational database management system, that system must be able to manage databases entirely through its relational capabilities.

Briefly explain and give examples of how the rule applies to:

1. Metadata
2. Security

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Metadata**: metadata of the database management system, including table schemas, column data types and constraints, should be accessible via relational queries.

**Security**: security features, including user permissions and access controls, should be able to be managed by the relational database's capabilities, such as SQL statements.

## S2 – NULL

Codd’s Rule 3 states

**Rule 3:** *Systematic treatment of null values*:

Null values (distinct from the empty character string or a string of blank characters and distinct from zero or any other number) are supported in fully relational DBMS for representing missing information and inapplicable information in a systematic way, independent of data type.

Briefly explain the importance of the rule for:

1. Using different database schemas defined by multiple people.
2. SQL aggregation (group by) queries.

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Using different database schemas defined by multiple people**: The rule ensures consistent handling of missing and/or incompatible data over schemas defined by different people, maintaining data integrity and simplifying data integration or comparison between those schemas.

**SQL aggregation (group by) queries**: the rule ensures aggregation queries can handle missing values in a systematic way by treating NULLs consistently. Therefore, aggregation queries can group data with missing or inappropriate information.

## S3 – Atomic Domains

The Columbia University directory of courses uses 20231COMS4111W002 for this section’s “key.” This is not atomic and is composed of:

* Year: 2023
* Semester: 1
* Department: COMS
* Course number: 4111
* Faculty code: W

Explain why having the non-atomic key creates problems for:

1. Integrity constraints.
2. Indexes

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Integrity Constraints**: Such a non-atomic key makes it very complicated to maintain data integrity by setting constraints. Individual components of those values must be checked independently, which may lead to consistency.

**Indexes**: More resources are required to manage multi-element keys. Therefore, non-atomic keys create inefficiencies in database indexing.

## S4 – JOINs

Briefly explain the following concepts:

* Natural join
* Equi-join
* Theta join
* Left join
* Right join
* Outer join

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Natural join** merges two tables based on columns with the same name and data type/domain. They match them and remove any duplication.  
**Equi-join** merges two tables by matching the same value of a specific column or specific columns specified by the user.  
**Theta join** merges two tables in a manner that is similar to Equi-join, but it allows not only same value conditions, but it also supports comparison operators (>, <, =, etc.) for one or more columns, which is called a theta condition.

**Left join** returns all the rows from the left table and the matching rows from the right table.

**Right join** returns all the rows from the right table and the matching rows from the left table. **Outer join** returns all the rows from both tables, even though some are unmatched or have null values.

*Reference: https://www.guru99.com/joins-sql-left-right.html#5 (https://www.guru99.com/joins-sql-left-right.html#5)*

## S5 – Natural Join

Briefly explain how using the natural join might produce an incorrect answer.

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

Assume we have two relations as follows

*Person(ID, last\_name, first name)*

*Phone(ID, device\_name, phone\_number, person\_ID)*

Natural join uses the column with the same name to merge two tables. In this case, it uses the column ID. However, they do not refer to the same thing. The ID in the Person relation is the person\_ID in the Phone. So natural join will produce an incorrect answer. Furthermore, if those two IDs have different types, the natural join will not work at all.

## S6 – Views

List three benefits/use cases for defining views.

------------------------------Answer------------------------------

**Simplification**: views make it easier for naive users to do complicated queries. This is because view converts those complicated query statements into views so that users without comprehensive knowledge of SQL can access the results of such queries via pre-defined views.  
**Privacy**: We often do not want users to get access to the entire logical model (e.g. salary column of a people table can be confidential). A view can prevent users from accessing that information by not including them in the view.  
**Safety**: using views may protect the application from schema changes. Definitions of views and schema are isolated. Therefore, changing the schema definition will not change views. Also, views can be set to read-only so that users may not modify the underlying relation of the dataset by using views.

Reference: Lecture and lecture slides.

## S7 – Materialized View

What is a *materialized view?* List one advantage and disadvantage of a materialized view.

## S8 – View Updates

Explain two scenarios in view definition for which it is not possible to update the underlying tables?

## S9 – Primary/Unique

What is the main difference between a primary key constraint and a unique constraint?

## S10 – Cascade

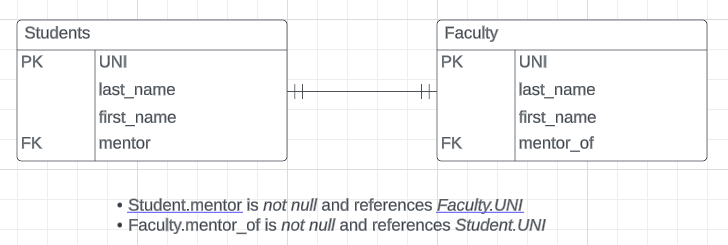
The *Classic Models* databases have several foreign key constraints. Two examples are:

1. *orders.customerNumber → customers.customerNumber*
2. *orderdetails.orderNumber → orders.orderNumber*

Briefly explain the concept of *cascading actions* relative to foreign keys. For which of the two examples above might cascading make sense?

## S11 – Foreign Keys and Transactions

Consider the logical data model below.



Some DBMS support deferring enforcing foreign key constraints until transaction commit. How would that capability help with the above model?

## S12 – Complex Check Constraints

Some databases do not support complex check constraints. Consider the following constraint:

check (time\_slot\_id in (select time\_slot\_id from time\_slot))

Assume the DBMS does not support subqueries in check constraints. What database capability would you use to implement equivalent functionality?

## S13 – Asset

What is the difference between an *Assert* constraint and a *Check* constraint?

## S14 – Types, Domains

Some relational DBMS support *user defined types* and *user defined domains.* Briefly explain the concepts and benefits.

## S15 – SQL Injection

Poorly written web applications can suffer from SQL Injection (Attacks). Briefly explain the concept.

## S16 – Functions, Procedures, Triggers

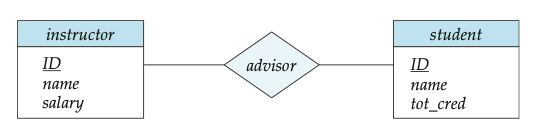
Briefly lists two differences between:

* Functions and Procedures
* Functions and Triggers
* Triggers and Procedures

# Entity – Relationship Modeling

## E1 – Implementing Relationships

The book’s entity-relationship modeling notation explicitly represents relationships. For example,



Crow’s Foot notation, which we used in class examples, does not support relationships. What type of entity did we use instead? Give two examples/reasons that require using the entity type.

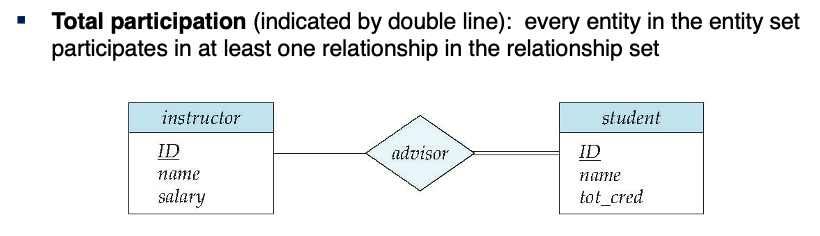
## E2 – Types of Relationships

Briefly explain the following concepts:

* Binary and Non-Binary Relationships
* Relationship Cardinality

## E3 – Participation

An important concept in ER modeling is *relationship participation.*



Use Lucidchart to draw an equivalent diagram in Crow’s Foot notation. What capability of SQL database definition would you use to enforce total participation?

## E4 – Weak Entity

Briefly explain the concept of a *weak entity.* Give an example from the Classic Models database.

## E5 – Specialization

Briefly explain the following concepts relative to implementing inheritance/specialization in an SQL schema.

* incomplete/complete
* disjoint/overlapping

# Normalization

## N1 – Duplicate/Redundant Data

A primary reason for schema normalization is to eliminate duplicate/redundant data. What are two problems that redundant/duplicate data can cause?

## N2 – Decomposition

Briefly explain the concept of *lossless decomposition* in normalization.

## N3 – Functional Dependency

Briefly explain the following concepts:

1. Functional Dependency
2. Closure of Functional Dependencies

## N4 – BCNF

Consider the sample university database that comes with the recommended textbook.

Consider a hypothetical relation:

*in\_dep (ID, name, salary, dept\_name, building, budget )*

Why is the relation not in BCNF?

## N5 – Third Normal Form

Briefly explain the difference between BCNF and 3rd Normal Form.

## N6 – Armstrong’s Axioms

Briefly list Armstrong’s Axioms for Functional Dependencies.

# Big Data

## B1 – MapReduce

Briefly define the following concepts in MapReduce:

1. Map
2. Reduce
3. Shuffle

## B2 – Algebraic Operation

Modern big data processing systems introduce the concepts of:

1. Directed acyclic graphs.
2. Algebraic operations.

Briefly the concepts.

Prof. Ferguson suggested in lectures some hypothetical algebraic operators for IMDB namebasics. An excerpt of the data is below. Suggest a couple of hypothetical operators to transform the data.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **nconst** | **name** | **dob** | **dod** | **primaryProfessions** | **knownFor** |
| nm0000001 | Fred Astaire | 1899 | 1987 | soundtrack,actor,miscellaneous | tt0053137,tt0050419,tt0045537,tt0072308 |
| nm0000002 | Lauren Bacall | 1924 | 2014 | actress,soundtrack | tt0117057,tt0071877,tt0038355,tt0037382 |
| nm0000003 | Brigitte Bardot | 1934 |  | actress,soundtrack,music\_department | tt0056404,tt0049189,tt0057345,tt0054452 |
| nm0000004 | John Belushi | 1949 | 1982 | actor,soundtrack,writer | tt0077975,tt0078723,tt0072562,tt0080455 |
| nm0000005 | Ingmar Bergman | 1918 | 2007 | writer,director,actor | tt0050976,tt0060827,tt0083922,tt0050986 |
| nm0000006 | Ingrid Bergman | 1915 | 1982 | actress,soundtrack,producer | tt0036855,tt0038787,tt0034583,tt0038109 |
| nm0000007 | Humphrey Bogart | 1899 | 1957 | actor,soundtrack,producer | tt0042593,tt0037382,tt0034583,tt0043265 |
| nm0000008 | Marlon Brando | 1924 | 2004 | actor,soundtrack,director | tt0070849,tt0078788,tt0068646,tt0047296 |
| nm0000009 | Richard Burton | 1925 | 1984 | actor,soundtrack,producer | tt0061184,tt0059749,tt0057877,tt0087803 |
| nm0000010 | James Cagney | 1899 | 1986 | actor,soundtrack,director | tt0029870,tt0042041,tt0035575,tt0031867 |

## B3 – Concepts

Briefly explain the following concepts:

* Data Warehouse
* Data Lake
* Extract-Transform-Load

# Database Management System Implementation

## D1 – Storage Types

Briefly explain and list some differences between:

* RAM
* Solid State Drives
* Hard Drives

## D2 – Addressing

Briefly explain the concepts of:

* Logical block addressing
* Cylinder-Head-Sector addressing

## D3 – Elevator Algorithm

What is the elevator algorithm for disk arm scheduling and what is its benefit?

## D4 – Fixed Length Records versus Variable Length Records

Briefly define and list benefits of fixed length records and variable length records.

## D5 – BLOBs

Most application scenarios no longer use database BLOBs. What technology do applications typically use in place of BLOBs?

## D6 – File Organization

Give scenarios where:

* Sequential record organization is better than heap file organization.
* Multi-table clustering is better than sequential record organization.
* You would use table partitioning.

## D7 – Buffer Replacement Algorithm

For which type of query is most-recently-used a much better replacement algorithm than least-recently-used?

## D8 – Row Oriented versus Column Oriented

Explain why column oriented storage may be beneficial for scenarios in which:

1. Tables are large.
2. The only query operations are projection and aggregation.

## D8 – Index Types

Briefly explain the following concepts:

* Clustering index
* Dense index
* Sparse index

Can there be more than one clustering index on a table?

Must a sparse index be a clustering index?

## D9 – Hash versus B+ Tree

What is the primary benefit of a hash index relative to a B+ tree index? What are two disadvantages?

## D10 – Degree

Explain the relationship between key size, block size and B+ tree degree.

## D11 – Covering Index

What is a covering index and what is the benefit?

## D12 – Number of Indexes

What are two disadvantages of adding many indexes to a table?

## D13 – Buffering and Logging

Briefly explain:

* Force/No-Force policy
* Steal/No-steal policy
* The relationship between the policies and redo/undo logging.

## D14 – Access Path

Briefly explain the role of access path selection in query processing/optimization.

What is the “most selective index?”

## D15 – JOIN Optimization

Consider two tables L and R. Neither table is ordered and there are no indexes.

Consider the query *select \* from L join R using(c).*

If the tables were large, give a scenario for creating an index for optimization and the type of index.

What optimization might the query processor make if L was much, much smaller than R?

## D16 – JOIN Algorithms

Briefly explain the following concepts:

* Nested-loop join
* Block nested-loop join
* Indexed nested-loop join
* Merge-join
* Hash-join

## D17 – Optimization

Consider the following query on a very large table *people.*

*select last\_name, first\_name from people*

What single word/modification added to the query might motivate creating a has index for optimization?

## D18 – Optimization Techniques

Briefly explain the following concepts relative to query optimization:

* Operator selection
* Equivalent queries

## D19 – Equivalent Query Selection

Assume the tables in Classic Models were very, very large.

What is an equivalent query that a query optimizer might use in place of

SELECT

\*

FROM

customers JOIN orders USING(customerNumber)

WHERE

country = ‘France’ and status = ‘Shipped’;

## D20 – Locking

Briefly explain 2 Phase Locking and Strict 2 Phase Locking. What is the benefit of Strict 2 Phase Locking?

## D22 – Phantom

What is a “phantom” relative to database transactions/query processing?

## D25 – Serializable

Briefly explain serializability and conflict serializability.

## D26 – CAP

Briefly explain the CAP theorem.

## D27 – Consistency

Briefly explain *eventual consistency.*

## D28 – Sharing

Briefly explain database sharding and its benefits.

## D29 – Scaling

Briefly explain:

* Scale up versus scale out.
* Shared disk/data versus shared nothing/sharding.