

T-SQL supports two “not equal to” operators: <> and !=. The former is standard and the latter is not. T-SQL supports multiple functions that convert a source value to a target type. Among them are the CAST and CONVERT functions. The former is standard

and the latter isn’t. The nonstandard CONVERT function has a style argument that CAST doesn’t support. Because CAST is standard, you should consider it your default choice for conversions. You should consider using CONVERT only when you need to rely on the style

argument. Yet another example of choosing the standard form is in the termination of T-SQL statements. According to standard SQL, you should terminate your statements with a semicolon. T-SQL currently doesn’t make this a requirement for all statements, only in cases where there would otherwise be ambiguity of code elements, such as in the WITH clause of a common table expression (CTE). You should still follow the standard and terminate all of your statements even where it is currently not required.

A relation in the relational model is what SQL calls a table. The two are not synonymous. A predicate is an expression that when attributed to some object, makes a proposition either true or false. For example, “salary greater than $50,000” is a predicate. You can evaluate

this predicate for a specific employee, in which case you have a proposition. For example, suppose that for a particular employee, the salary is $60,000. When you evaluate the proposition for that employee, you get a true proposition. In other words, a predicate is a parameterized proposition.

Remember that a relation has a heading and a body. The heading is a set of attributes and the body is a set of tuples. Remember from the definition of a set that a set is supposed to be considered as a whole. What this translates to in T-SQL is that you’re supposed to write queries that interact with the tables as a whole. You should try to avoid using iterative constructs like cursors and loops that iterate through the rows one at a time. You should also try to avoid thinking in iterative terms because this kind of thinking is what leads to iterative solutions. For people with a procedural programming background, the natural way to interact with data (in a file, record set, or data reader) is with iterations. So using cursors and other iterative constructs in T-SQL is, in a way, an extension to what they already know. However, the correct way from the relational model’s perspective is not to interact with the rows one at a time; rather, use relational operations and return a relational result. This, in T-SQL, translates to writing queries.

When you issue a query with SELECT \*, you are guaranteed to get the columns in the result based on definition order. Also, T-SQL allows referring to ordinal positions of columns from the result in the ORDER BY clause, as follows.

SELECT empid, lastname

FROM HR.Employees

ORDER BY 1;

Tatt: the order of rows is not guaranteed but order of columns is.

T-SQL has another deviation from the relational model in that it allows defining result columns based on an expression without assigning a name to the target column. For example, the following query is valid in T-SQL.

SELECT empid, firstname + ' ' + lastname

FROM HR.Employees;

T-SQL allows a SELECT list that looks like the following.

SELECT T1.keycol, T2.keycol ...

For the result to be relational, all attributes must have unique names, so you would need to use different aliases for the result attributes, as in the following.

SELECT T1.keycol AS key1, T2.keycol AS key2 ...

T-SQL attempts to represent a relation with a table, a tuple with a row, and an attribute with a column;

Can you identify what the nonrelational aspects of the query are? Answer: The query doesn’t alias the expression YEAR(orderdate), so there’s no name for the result attribute. The query can return duplicates(but set should not have duplicates). The query forces certain presentation ordering to the result and uses ordinal positions in the ORDER BY clause( but set should not have any ordering).

SELECT custid, YEAR(orderdate)

FROM Sales.Orders

ORDER BY 1, 2;

Removing the non-relational aspects from the query you get:

SELECT distinct custid, YEAR(orderdate) AS ORderYear

FROM Sales.Orders;

Following are the main query clauses specified in the order that you are supposed to type them (known as “keyed-in order”):

1. SELECT

2. FROM

3. WHERE

4. GROUP BY

5. HAVING

6. ORDER BY

Here is the logical query processing

order of the six main query clauses:

1. FROM

2. WHERE

3. GROUP BY

4. HAVING

5. SELECT

6. ORDER BY

Consider the following query as an example.

SELECT country, YEAR(hiredate) AS yearhired, COUNT(\*) AS numemployees

FROM HR.Employees

WHERE hiredate >= '20030101'

GROUP BY country, YEAR(hiredate)

HAVING COUNT(\*) > 1

ORDER BY country , yearhired DESC;

This query is issued against the HR.Employees table. It filters only employees that were hired in or after the year 2003. It groups the remaining employees by country and the hire year. It keeps only groups with more than one employee. For each qualifying group, the

query returns the hire year and count of employees, sorted by country and hire year, in descending order.

Attempting to refer in the WHERE clause to a column alias defined in the SELECT clause:

SELECT country, YEAR(hiredate) AS yearhired

FROM HR.Employees WHERE yearhired >= 2003;

This query fails with the following error.

Msg 207, Level 16, State 1, Line 3

Invalid column name 'yearhired'.

Group Phase: All expressions processed in subsequent phases must guarantee a single value per group. If you refer to an element from the GROUP BY list (for example, country), you already have such a guarantee, so such a reference is allowed. However, if you want to

refer to an element that is not part of your GROUP BY list (for example, empid), it must be contained within an aggregate function like MAX or SUM or COUNT etc.

The WHERE clause is evaluated before rows are grouped, and therefore is evaluated per row. The HAVING clause is evaluated after rows are grouped, and therefore is evaluated per group.

According to the relational theory, a set should be unordered, the rows distinct (no duplicates in result set), every column has distinct name.

Select Alias is only available in order by phase (which comes last after select).Alias created by the SELECT phase isn’t even visible to other expressions that appear in the same SELECT list. For example, the following query isn’t valid.

SELECT empid, country, YEAR(hiredate) AS yearhired, yearhired - 1 AS prevyear

FROM HR.Employees;

This query generates the following error.

Msg 207, Level 16, State 1, Line 1

Invalid column name 'yearhired'.

The reason that this isn’t allowed is that, conceptually, T-SQL evaluates all expressions that appear in the same logical query processing phase in an all-at-once manner. Note the use of the word conceptually. SQL Server won’t necessarily physically process all expressions at the same point in time, but it has to produce a result as if it did. This behavior is different than many other programming languages where expressions usually get evaluated in a left-toright order, making a result produced in one expression visible to the one that appears to its

right. But T-SQL is different.

A query may specify the TOP or OFFSET-FETCH filtering options. If it does, the same ORDER BY clause that is normally used to define presentation ordering also defines which rows to filter for these options. Tatt: TOP or OFFSET-FETCH need not necessarily be used with ORDER BY??? Even though they only make sense when used with ORDER BY as otherwise the order of rows in result set is not guaranteed. So doing a TOP 10 might result different result sets each time.

Tatt: DISTINCT clause has to appear before the first column is referred to in a SELECT list. So you can’t do SELECT E.Name, DISTINCT E.Age…; ????

Tatt: predicate is the condition and proposition is the instantiation of the condition. Means, proposition refers to the rows which satisfy that predicate.

In the FROM clause, you can alias the queried tables with your chosen names. You can use the form <table> <alias>, as in HR.Employees E, or <table> AS <alias>, as in HR.Employees AS E. The latter form is more readable.

Note that if you assign an alias to a table, you basically rename the table for the duration of the query. The original table name isn’t visible anymore; only the alias is. So the following won’t work:

SELECT H.firstname, HR.Employees.lastname

FROM HR.Employees AS H

But this will work:

SELECT H.firstname, lastname

FROM HR.Employees AS H

Normally, you can prefix a column name you refer to in a query with the table name, as in Employees.empid.However, if you aliased the Employees table as E, the reference Employees.empid is invalid; you have to use E.empid or just empid.

Using an \* is just a matter of laziness. You send more data than is needed over the network, and this can have a negative impact on the system’s performance.

In the SELECT clause, you can assign your own aliases to the expressions that define the result attributes. There are a number of supported forms of aliasing: <expression> AS <alias> as in empid AS employeeid, <expression> <alias> as in empid employeeid, and <alias> = <expression> as in employeeid = empid. Use the first form with the AS clause because it’s both standard and we find it to be the most readable.

A result with duplicates is considered nonrelational because relations—being sets—are not supposed to have duplicates. Therefore,

if duplicates are possible in the result, and you want to eliminate them in order to return a relational result, you can do so by adding a DISTINCT clause, as in the following.

SELECT DISTINCT country, region, city FROM HR.Employees;

There’s an interesting difference between standard SQL and T-SQL in terms of minimalSELECT query requirements. According to standard SQL, a SELECT query must have at minimum FROM and SELECT clauses. Conversely, T-SQL supports a SELECT query with only a SELECT clause and without a FROM clause. Such a query is as if issued against an imaginary table that has only one row. For example, the following query is invalid according to standard SQL but is valid according to T-SQL.

SELECT 10 AS col1, 'ABC' AS col2;

The output of this query is a single row with attributes resulting from the expressions with

names assigned using the aliases.

col1 col2

----------- ----

10 ABC

Tatt: Remember SELECT 1 can be used to ping SQL server to test network performance. So that is non-standard SQL.

T-SQL supports both a standard form to delimit identifiers using double quotation marks, as in "Sales"."Orders", as well as a proprietary form using square brackets, as in [Sales].[Orders]. For example, an attribute called 2006 is considered an irregular identifier because it starts with a digit, and therefore must be delimited as "2006" or [2006].

When defining columns in tables, parameters in procedures and functions, and variables in T-SQL batches, you need to choose a data type for those. Much like a type is a constraint, NOT NULL is a constraint as well. If an attribute isn’t supposed to allow NULLs, it’s important to enforce a NOT NULL constraint as part of its definition.

Suppose you have an attribute representing test scores, which are integers in the range 0 to 100. Using an INT data type for this purpose is overkill. It would use 4 bytes per value, whereas a TINYINT would use only 1 byte, and is therefore the more appropriate type in this case. If the value is supposed to represent both date and time, you should consider DATETIME2 or SMALLDATETIME. The former requires storage between 6 to 8 bytes (depending on precision), and as an added value, provides a wider range of dates and improved, controllable precision. Be very careful with the imprecise types FLOAT and REAL.

Another important aspect in choosing a type has to do with choosing fixed types (CHAR, NCHAR, BINARY) vs. dynamic ones (VARCHAR, NVARCHAR, VARBINARY). Fixed types use the storage for the indicated size; for example, CHAR(30) uses storage for 30 characters, whether you actually specify 30 characters or less. This means that updates will not require the row to physically expand, and therefore no data shifting is required. So for attributes that get updated frequently, where the update performance is a priority, you should consider fixed types. Note that when compression is used—specifically row compression—SQL Server stores fixed types like variable ones, but with less overhead.

Variable types use the storage for what you enter, plus a couple of bytes for offset information (or 4 bits with row compression). So for widely varying sizes of strings, if you use variable types you can save a lot of storage. As already mentioned, the less storage used, the less there is for a query to read, and the faster the query can perform. So variable length types are usually preferable in such cases when read performance is a priority.

With character strings, there’s also the question of using regular character types (CHAR, VARCHAR) vs. Unicode types (NCHAR, NVARCHAR). The former use 1 byte of storage per character and support only one language (based on collation properties) besides English. The latter use 2 bytes of storage per character (unless compressed) and support multiple languages. When using types that can have a length associated with them, such as CHAR and VARCHAR, T-SQL supports omitting the length and then uses a default length. However, in different contexts, the defaults can be different. It is considered a best practice to always be explicit about the length, as in CHAR(1) or VARCHAR(30).

literals of regular character strings are delimited with single quotation marks, as in 'abc', whereas literals of Unicode character strings are delimited with a capital N and then single quotation marks, as in N'abc'. When an expression involves elements with different types, SQL Server needs to apply implicit conversion when possible, and this may result in performance penalties. In order to force a literal to be of a certain type, you may need to apply explicit conversion with functions like CAST, CONVERT, PARSE, or TRY\_CAST, TRY\_CONVERT, and TRY\_PARSE. As an example, the literal 1 is considered an INT by SQL Server in any context. If you need the literal 1 to be considered, for example, a BIT, you need to convert the literal’s type explicitly, as in CAST(1 AS BIT). Similarly, the literal 4000000000 is considered NUMERIC and not BIGINT. If you need the literal to be the latter, use CAST(4000000000 AS BIGINT). The difference between the functions without the TRY and their counterparts with the TRY is that those without the TRY fail if the value isn’t convertible, whereas those with the TRY return a NULL in such a case. For example, the following code fails.

SELECT CAST('abc' AS INT);

Conversely, the following code returns a NULL.

SELECT TRY\_CAST('abc' AS INT);

As for the difference between CAST, CONVERT, and PARSE, with CAST, you indicate the expression and the target type; with CONVERT, there’s a third argument representing the style for the conversion, which is supported for some conversions, like between character strings and date and time values. For example, CONVERT(DATE, '1/2/2012', 101) converts the literal character string to DATE using style 101 representing the United States standard. With PARSE, you can indicate the culture by using any culture supported by the Microsoft .NET Framework. For example, PARSE('1/2/2012' AS DATE USING 'en-US') parses the input literal as a DATE by using a United States English culture.

Tatt: cast is the standard not convert.

When using expressions that involve operands of different types, SQL Server usually converts the one that has the lower data type precedence to the one with the higher. Consider the expression 1 + '1' as an example. One operand is INT and the other is VARCHAR. If you look in Books Online for SQL Server 2012, under “Data Type Precedence (Transact-SQL),” at *http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ms190309.aspx*, you will find that INT precedes VARCHAR; hence, SQL Server implicitly converts the VARCHAR value '1' to the INT value 1, and the result of the expression is therefore 2 and not the string '11'. Of course, you can always take control by using explicit conversion. If all operands of the expression are of the same type, that’s also going to be the type of the result, and you might not want it to be the case. For example, the result of the expression 5 / 2 in T-SQL is the INT value 2 and not the NUMERIC value 2.5, because both operands are integers, and therefore the result is an integer. If you were dealing with two integer columns, like col1 / col2, and wanted the division to be NUMERIC, you would need to convert the columns explicitly, as in CAST(col1 AS NUMERIC(12, 2)) / CAST(col2 AS NUMERIC(12, 2)).

The typical options people use to generate surrogate keys are:

■■ **The identity column property** A property that automatically generates keys in an attribute of a numeric type with a scale of 0; namely, any integer type (TINYINT, SMALLINT, INT, BIGINT) or NUMERIC/DECIMAL with a scale of 0.

■■ **The sequence object** An independent object in the database from which you can obtain new sequence values. Like identity, it supports any numeric type with a scale of 0. Unlike identity, it’s not tied to a particular column; instead, as mentioned, it is an independent object in the database. You can also request a new value from a sequence object before using it. There are a number of other advantages over identity that will be covered in Chapter 11.

■■ **Nonsequential GUI Ds** You can generate nonsequential global unique identifiers to be stored in an attribute of a UNIQUEIDENTIFIER type. You can use the T-SQL function NEWID to generate a new GUID, possibly invoking it with a default expression attached to the column. You can also generate one from anywhere—for example, the client— by using an application programming interface (API) that generates a new GUID. The GUIDs are guaranteed to be unique across space and time.

■■ **Sequential GUI Ds** You can generate sequential GUIDs within the machine by using the T-SQL function NEWSEQUENTIALID.

■■ **Custom solutions** If you do not want to use the built-in tools that SQL Server provides to generate keys, you need to develop your own custom solution. The data type for the key then depends on your solution

TODO: chapter 2, starting around page 40, it goes into effects of types of keys on indexing details which need to be reread.

One important category of functions is the category that returns the current date and time. The functions in this category are GETDATE, CURRENT\_TIMESTAMP, GETUTCDATE, SYSDATETIME, SYSUTCDATETIME, and SYSDATETIMEOFFSET.

GETDATE is T-SQL–specific, returning the current date and time in the SQL Server instance you’re connected to as a DATETIME data type**. CURRENT\_TIMESTAMP is the same, only it’s standard, and hence the recommended one to use**. SYSDATETIME and SYSDATETIMEOFFSET are similar, only returning the values as the more precise DATETIME2 and DATETIMEOFFSET types (including offset), respectively. Note that there are no built-in functions to return the current date or the current time; to get such information, simply cast the SYSDATETIME function to DATE or TIME, respectively. For example, to get the current date, use CAST(SYSDATETIME() AS DATE). The GETUTCDATE function returns the current date and time in UTC terms as a DATETIME type, and SYSUTCDATE does the same, only returning the result as the more precise DATETIME2 type.

Using the DATEPART function, you can extract from an input date and time value a desired part, such as a year, minute, or nanosecond, and return the extracted part as an integer. For example, the expression DATEPART(month, '20120212') returns 2. T-SQL provides the functions YEAR, MONTH, and DAY as abbreviations to DATEPART, not requiring you to specify the part. The DATENAME function is similar to DATEPART, only it returns the name of the part as a character string, as opposed to the integer value. Note that the function is languagedependent. That is, if the effective language in your session is us\_english, the expression DATENAME(month, '20120212') returns 'February', but for Italian, it returns 'febbraio'.

T-SQL provides a set of functions that construct a desired date and time value from its numeric parts. You have such a function for each of the six available date and time types: DATEFROMPARTS, DATETIME2FROMPARTS, DATETIMEFROMPARTS, DATETIMEOFFSETFROMPARTS, SMALLDATETIMEFROMPARTS, and TIMEFROMPARTS. For example, to build a DATE value from

its parts, you would use an expression such as DATEFROMPARTS(2012, 02, 12). Finally, the EOMONTH function computes the respective end of month date for the input date and time value. For example, suppose that today was February 12, 2012. The expression

EOMONTH(SYSDATETIME()) would then return the date '2012-02-29'. This function supports a second optional input indicating how many months to add to the result.

DATEADD is a very commonly used function. With it, you can add a requested number of units of a specified part to a specified date and time value. For example, the expression DATEADD(year, 1, '20120212') adds one year to the input date February 12, 2012. DATEDIFF is another commonly used function; it returns the difference in terms of a requested part between two date and time values. For example, the expression DATEDIFF(day,'20110212', '20120212') computes the difference in days between February 12, 2011 and February 12, 2012, returning the value 365. Note that this function looks only at the parts from the requested one and above in the date and time hierarchy—not below. For example, the expression DATEDIFF(year, '20111231', '20120101') looks only at the year part, and hence returns 1. It doesn’t look at the month and day parts of the values.

T-SQL supports two functions related to date and time values with an offset: SWITCHOFFSET and TODATETIMEOFFSET.

With the SWITCHOFFSET function, you can return an input DATETIMEOFFSET value in a requested offset term. For example, consider the expression SWITCHOFFSET(SYSDATETIMEOF FSET(), '-08:00'). Regardless of the offset of the instance you are connected to, you request to present the current date and time value in terms of offset '-08:00'. If the system’s offset is, say, '-05:00', the function will compensate for this by subtracting three hours from the input value. The TODATETIMEOFFSET function is used for a different purpose. You use it to construct a DATETIMEOFFSET value from two inputs: the first is a date and time value that is not offsetaware, and the second is the offset. You can use this function when migrating from data that is not offset-aware, where you keep the local date and time value in one attribute, and the offset in another, to offset-aware data. Say you have the local date and time in an attribute called dt, and the offset in an attribute called theoffset. You add an attribute called dto of a DATETIMEOFFSET type to the table. You then update the new attribute to the expression TODATETIMEOFFSET(dt, theoffset), and then drop the original attributes dt and theoffset from the table.

The following code demonstrates using both functions.

SELECT

SWITCHOFFSET('20130212 14:00:00.0000000 -08:00', '-05:00') AS [SWITCHOFFSET],

TODATETIMEOFFSET('20130212 14:00:00.0000000', '-08:00') AS [TODATETIMEOFFSET];

Here’s the output of this code.

SWITCHOFFSET TODATETIMEOFFSET

---------------------------------- ----------------------------------

2013-02-12 17:00:00.0000000 -05:00 2013-02-12 14:00:00.0000000 -08:00

T-SQL supports two ways to concatenate strings—one with the plus (+) operator, and another with the CONCAT function. Here’s an example for concatenating strings in a query by using the + operator.

SELECT empid, country, region, city,

country + N',' + region + N',' + city AS location

FROM HR.Employees;

Observe that when any of the inputs is NULL, the + operator returns a NULL. That’s standard behavior that can be changed by turning off a session option called CONCAT\_NULL\_YIELDS\_NULL\_INPUT, though it’s not recommended to rely on nonstandard behavior. If you

want to substitute a NULL with an empty string, there are a number of ways for you to do this programmatically. One option is to use COALESCE(<expression>, ''). For example, in this data, only region can be NULL, so you can use the following query to replace a comma plus region with an empty string when region is NULL.

SELECT empid, country, region, city,

country + COALESCE( N',' + region, N'') + N',' + city AS location

FROM HR.Employees;

Another option is to use the CONCAT function which, unlike the + operator, substitutes a NULL input with an empty string. Here’s how the query looks.

SELECT empid, country, region, city,

CONCAT(country, N',' + region, N',' + city) AS location

FROM HR.Employees;

the expression SUBSTRING('abcde', 1, 3) returns 'abc'. LEFT('abcde', 3) returns 'abc' and RIGHT('abcde', 3) returns 'cde'. CHARINDEX(' ','Itzik Ben-Gan') looks for the first occurrence of a space in the second input, returning 6 in this example. LEFT(fullname, CHARINDEX(' ', fullname) - 1)

But whereas with CHARINDEX you’re looking for a constant string, with PATINDEX you’re looking for a pattern. expression PATINDEX('%[0-9]%', 'abcd123efgh') looks for the first occurrence of a digit (a character in the range 0–9) in the second input, returning the position 6 in this case. Tatt: I think it should have been 5

T-SQL provides two functions that you can use to measure the length of an input value— LEN and DATALENGTH.The LEN function returns the length of an input string in terms of the number of characters. Note that it returns the number of characters, not bytes, whether the input is a regular character or Unicode character string. For example, the expression LEN(N'xyz') returns 3. If there are any trailing spaces, LEN removes them. The DATALENGTH function returns the length of the input in terms of number of bytes. This means, for example, that if the input is a Unicode character string, it will count 2 bytes per character. For example, the expression DATALENGTH(N'xyz') returns 6. Note also that, unlike LEN, the DATALENGTH function doesn’t remove trailing spaces

T-SQL supports a number of functions that you can use to apply alterations to an input string. Those are REPLACE, REPLICATE, and STUFF. the expression REPLACE('.1.2.3.', '.', '/') substitutes all occurrences of a dot (.) with a slash (/), returning the string '/1/2/3/'. the expression REPLICATE('0', 10) replicates the string '0' ten times, returning '0000000000'. the expression STUFF(',x,y,z', 1, 1, '') removes the first character from the input string, returning 'x,y,z'.

Apply formatting options to an input string using UPPER, LOWER, LTRIM, RTRIM, and FORMAT functions. The expression FORMAT(

1759, '000000000') formats the input number as a character string with a fixed size of 10 characters with leading zeros, returning '0000001759'.

The CASE expression has two forms—the *simple* form and the *searched* form. Here’s an example of the simple CASE form issued against the sample database TSQL2012.

SELECT productid, productname, unitprice, discontinued,

CASE discontinued

WHEN 0 THEN 'No'

WHEN 1 THEN 'Yes'

ELSE 'Unknown'

END AS discontinued\_desc

FROM Production.Products;

The simple form compares an *input expression* (in this case the attribute discontinued) to multiple possible scalar *when expressions* (in this case, 0 and 1), and returns the *result expression* (in this case, 'No' and 'Yes', respectively) associated with the first match. If there’s no match and an ELSE clause is specified, the *else expression* (in this case, 'Unknown') is returned. If there’s no ELSE clause, the default is ELSE NULL.

The searched form of the CASE expression is more flexible. Instead of comparing an input expression to multiple possible expressions, it uses predicates in the WHEN clauses, and the first predicate that evaluates to true determines which when expression is returned. If none is true, the CASE expression returns the else expression. Here’s an example.

SELECT productid, productname, unitprice,

CASE

WHEN unitprice < 20.00 THEN 'Low'

WHEN unitprice < 40.00 THEN 'Medium'

WHEN unitprice >= 40.00 THEN 'High'

ELSE 'Unknown'

END AS pricerange

FROM Production.Products;

T-SQL supports a number of functions that can be considered as abbreviates of the CASE expression. **Those are the standard COALESCE and NULLIF functions, and the nonstandard ISNULL, IIF, and CHOOSE**.

The COALESCE function accepts a list of expressions as input and returns the first that is not NULL, or NULL if all are NULLs. For example, the expression COALESCE(NULL, 'x', 'y') returns 'x'. More generally, the expression:

COALESCE(<exp1>, <exp2>, …, <expn>)

is similar to the following.

CASE

WHEN <exp1> IS NOT NULL THEN <exp1>

WHEN <exp2> IS NOT NULL THEN <exp2>

…

WHEN <expn> IS NOT NULL THEN <expn>

ELSE NULL

END

A typical use of COALESCE is to substitute a NULL with something else. For example, the expression COALESCE(region, '') returns region if it’s not NULL and returns an empty string if it is NULL. T-SQL supports a nonstandard function called ISNULL that is similar to the standard COALESCE, but it’s a bit more limited in the sense that it supports only two inputs. Like COALESCE, it returns the first input that is not NULL. So, instead of COALESCE(region, ''), you could use ISNULL(region, ''). **But we should stick to COALESCE as ISNULL is nonstandard while** **COALESCE is standard**.

There are a couple of subtle differences between COALESCE and ISNULL that you might be interested in. One difference is in which input determines the type of the output. Consider the following code.

DECLARE

@x AS VARCHAR(3) = NULL,

@y AS VARCHAR(10) = '1234567890';

SELECT COALESCE(@x, @y) AS [COALESCE], ISNULL(@x, @y) AS [ISNULL];

Here’s the output of this code.

COALESCE ISNULL

---------- ------

1234567890 123

Observe that the type of the COALESCE expression is determined by the returned element, whereas the type of the ISNULL expression is determined by the first input. Tatt: this is not very logical behaviour. Should stick to coalesce.

The other difference between COALESCE and ISNULL is when you are using SELECT INTO, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 11. Suppose the SELECT list of a SELECT INTO statement contains the expressions COALESCE(col1, 0) AS newcol1 vs. ISNULL(col1, 0) AS newcol1. If the source attribute col1 is defined as NOT NULL, both expressions will produce an attribute in the result table defined as NOT NULL. However, if the source attribute col1 is defined as allowing NULLs, COALESCE will create a result attribute allowing NULLs, whereas ISNULL will create one that disallows NULLs.

COALESCE and ISNULL can impact performance when you are combining sets; for example, with joins or when you are filtering data. Consider an example where you have two tables T1 and T2 and you need to join them based on a match between T1.col1 and T2.col1. The attributes do allow NULLs. Normally, a comparison between two NULLs yields unknown, and this causes the row to be discarded. You want to treat two NULLs as equal. What some do in such a case is use COALESCE or ISNULL to substitute a NULL with a value that they know cannot appear in the data. For example, if the attributes are integers, and you know that you have only positive integers in your data (you can even have constraints that

ensure this), you might try to use the predicate COALESCE(T1.col1, -1) = COALESCE(T2. col1, -1), or ISNULL(T1.col1, -1) = ISNULL(T2.col1, -1). The problem with this form is that, because you apply manipulation to the attributes you’re comparing, SQL Server will not rely on index ordering. This can result in not using available indexes efficiently. Instead, it is recommended to use the longer form: T1.col1 = T2.col1 OR (T1.col1 IS NULL AND T2.col1 IS NULL), which SQL Server understands as just a comparison that considers NULLs as equal. With this form, SQL Server can efficiently use indexing.

**T-SQL also supports the standard NULLIF function**. Expression NULLIF(col1, col2): If col1 is equal to col2, the function returns a

NULL; otherwise, it returns the col1 value. As for IIF and CHOOSE, these are nonstandard T-SQL functions that were added to simplify

migrations from Microsoft Access platforms. Because these functions aren’t standard and there are simple standard alternatives with CASE expressions, it is not usually recommended that you use them.

With the IIF function, you can return one value if an input predicate is true and another value otherwise. The function has the following form.

IIF(<predicate>, <true\_result>, <false\_or\_unknown\_result>)

This expression is equivalent to the following.

CASE WHEN <predicate> THEN <true\_result> ELSE <false\_or\_unknown\_result> END

The expression IIF(orderyear = 2012, qty, 0) returns the value in the qty attribute when the orderyear attribute is equal to 2012, and zero otherwise.

CHOOSE function allows you to provide a position and a list of expressions, and returns the expression in the indicated position. The function takes the following form.

CHOOSE(<pos>, <exp1>, <exp2>, …, <expn>)

For example, the expression CHOOSE(2, 'x', 'y', 'z') returns 'y'.

The NEWID function generates GUID values in random order, whereas the NEWSEQUENTIAL ID function generates GUIDs that increase in a sequential order.

The + operator by default yields a NULL result on NULL input, whereas the CONCAT function treats NULLs as empty strings. Tatt**: Use CONCAT most of the times**. **USE SYSDATETIME most of the times as it returns as DATETIME2**.

Tatt: The NEWID function creates GUIDs in random order. You would consider it when the size overhead is not a major issue and the ability to generate a unique value across time and space, from anywhere, in random order is a higher priority. The NEWSEQUENTIALID function generates GUIDs in increasing order within the machine. It helps reduce fragmentation and works well when a single

session loads the data, and the number of drives is small. However, you should carefully consider an alternative using another key generator, like a sequence object, with a smaller type when possible.

We have our own custom table partitioning solution because we’re using the Standard edition of SQL Server. We use a surrogate key of a UNIQUEIDENTIFIER type with the NEWID function invoked by a default constraint expression as the primary key for the tables. We chose this approach because we do not want keys to conflict across the different tables. This primary key is also our clustered index key. Do you have any recommendations concerning our choice of a key?

UNIQUEIDENTIFIER type is large—16 bytes. And because it’s also the clustered index key, it is copied to all nonclustered indexes. Also, due to the random order in which the NEWID function generates values, there’s probably a high level of fragmentation in the index. A different approach to consider (and test!) is switching to an integer type and using the sequence object to generate keys that do not

conflict across tables. Due to the reduced size of the type, with the multiplied effect on nonclustered indexes, performance of reads will likely improve. The values will be increasing, and as a result, there will be less fragmentation, which will also likely have a positive effect on reads.

Tatt: **use COALESCE and not ISNULL, use CURRENT\_TIMESTAMP and not GETDATE, and use CASE and not IIF.**

Tatt: a predicate with a null will always be false. More specifically the result will be unknown and both false and unknown cases are excluded from the results of the query (unless the predicate is testing for nulls like ‘IS NULL’). The following query, intuitively, should have returned those regions as well which have region as ‘NULL’.

SELECT empid, firstname, lastname, country, region, city

FROM HR.Employees

WHERE region <> N'WA';

Fix it by:

SELECT empid, firstname, lastname, country, region, city

FROM HR.Employees

WHERE region <> N'WA'

OR region IS NOT NULL;

Based on the query filters that appear in the query, SQL Server can evaluate the option to use indexes to get to the data efficiently without requiring a full scan of the table. It’s important to note, though, that the predicate needs to be of a form known as a *search argument* (SARG) to allow efficient use of the index. A predicate in the form *column operator value* or *value operator column* can be a search argument. For example, predicates like col1 = 10, and col1 > 10 are search arguments. Applying manipulation to the filtered column in most cases prevents the predicate from being a search argument. An example for manipulation of the filtered column is applying a function

to it, as in F(col1) = 10, where F is some function. There are some exceptions to this rule, but they are very uncommon.

Tatt: so using the functions in predicates makes the query slower as index can’t be used in that case. (I think also making function calls are more expensive as compared to inline code).

Suppose you have a stored procedure that accepts an input parameter @dt representing an input shipped date.

SELECT orderid, orderdate, empid

FROM Sales.Orders

WHERE shippeddate = @dt;

It does not handle nulls. So you might do this:

SELECT orderid, orderdate, empid

FROM Sales.Orders

WHERE COALESCE(shippeddate, '19000101') = COALESCE(@dt, '19000101');

Now the predicate is not in the form of a search argument as we are using functions. So the index on the ‘shippeddate’ column can’t be efficiently used. So we should get the predicate in the ‘search argument’ form by **avoiding manipulation of filtered column**:

SELECT orderid, orderdate, empid

FROM Sales.Orders

WHERE shippeddate = @dt

OR (shippeddate IS NULL AND @dt IS NULL);

Another **example for manipulation involves the filtered column** in an expression; for example, col1 - 1 <= @n. Sometimes, you can rewrite the predicate to a form that is a search argument, and then allow efficient use of indexing. The last predicate, for example, can be rewritten using simple math as col1 <= @n + 1.