ER Design Issues

In the previous sections of the data modeling, we learned to design an ER diagram. We also discussed different ways of defining entity sets and relationships among them. We also understood the various designing shapes that represent a relationship, an entity, and its attributes. However, users often mislead the concept of the elements and the design process of the ER diagram. Thus, it leads to a complex structure of the ER diagram and certain issues that does not meet the characteristics of the real-world enterprise model.

Here, we will discuss the basic design issues of an ER database schema in the following points:

1) Use of Entity Set vs Attributes

The use of an entity set or attribute depends on the structure of the real-world enterprise that is being modelled and the semantics associated with its attributes. It leads to a mistake when the user use the primary key of an entity set as an attribute of another entity set. Instead, he should use the relationship to do so. Also, the primary key attributes are implicit in the relationship set, but we designate it in the relationship sets.

2) Use of Entity Set vs. Relationship Sets

It is difficult to examine if an object can be best expressed by an entity set or relationship set. To understand and determine the right use, the user need to designate a relationship set for describing an action that occurs in-between the entities. If there is a requirement of

representing the object as a relationship set, then its better not to mix it with the entity set.

3) Use of Binary vs n-ary Relationship Sets

Generally, the relationships described in the databases are binary relationships. However, non-binary relationships can be represented by several binary relationships. For example, we can create and represent a ternary relationship 'parent' that may relate to a child, his father, as well as his mother. Such relationship can also be represented by two binary relationships i.e, mother and father, that may relate to their child. Thus, it is possible to represent a non-binary relationship by a set of distinct binary relationships.

4) Placing Relationship Attributes

The cardinality ratios can become an affective measure in the placement of the relationship attributes. So, it is better to associate the attributes of one-to-one or one-to-many relationship sets with any participating entity sets, instead of any relationship set. The decision of placing the specified attribute as a relationship or entity attribute should possess the charactestics of the real world enterprise that is being modelled.

For example, if there is an entity which can be determined by the combination of participating entity sets, instead of determing it as a separate entity. Such type of attribute must be associated with the many-to-many relationship sets.

Thus, it requires the overall knowledge of each part that is involved inb desgining and modelling an ER diagram. The

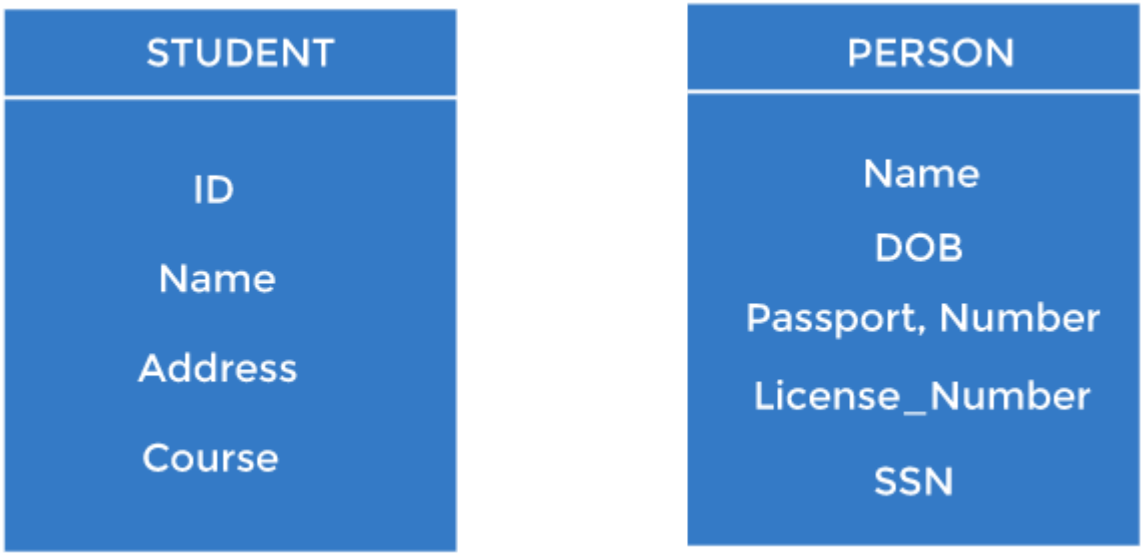
basic requirement is to analyse the real-world enterprise and the connectivity of one entity or attribute with other.

Keys

Keys play an important role in the relational database.

It is used to uniquely identify any record or row of data from the table. It is also used to establish and identify relationships between tables.

For example, ID is used as a key in the Student table because it is unique for each student. In the PERSON table, passport_number, license_number, SSN are keys since they are unique for each person.



1. Primary key

It is the first key used to identify one and only one instance of an entity uniquely. An entity can contain multiple keys, as we

saw in the PERSON table. The key which is most suitable from those lists becomes a primary key.

In the EMPLOYEE table, ID can be the primary key since it is unique for each employee. In the EMPLOYEE table, we can even select License_Number and Passport_Number as primary keys since they are also unique.

For each entity, the primary key selection is based on requirements and developers.

DBMS Keys

2. Candidate key

A candidate key is an attribute or set of attributes that can uniquely identify a tuple.

Except for the primary key, the remaining attributes are considered a candidate key. The candidate keys are as strong as the primary key.

For example: In the EMPLOYEE table, id is best suited for the primary key. The rest of the attributes, like SSN, Passport_Number, License_Number, etc., are considered a candidate key.

DBMS Keys

3. Super Key

Super key is an attribute set that can uniquely identify a tuple. A super key is a superset of a candidate key.

DBMS Keys

For example: In the above EMPLOYEE table, for(EMPLOEE_ID, EMPLOYEE_NAME), the name of two employees can be the same, but their EMPLYEE_ID can't be the same. Hence, this combination can also be a key.

The super key would be EMPLOYEE-ID (EMPLOYEE_ID, EMPLOYEE-NAME), etc.

4. Foreign key

- Foreign keys are the column of the table used to point to the primary key of another table.
- Every employee works in a specific department in a company, and employee and department are two different entities. So we can't store the department's information in the employee table. That's why we link these two tables through the primary key of one table.
- We add the primary key of the DEPARTMENT table, Department_Id, as a new attribute in the EMPLOYEE table.
- In the EMPLOYEE table, Department_Id is the foreign key, and both the tables are related.

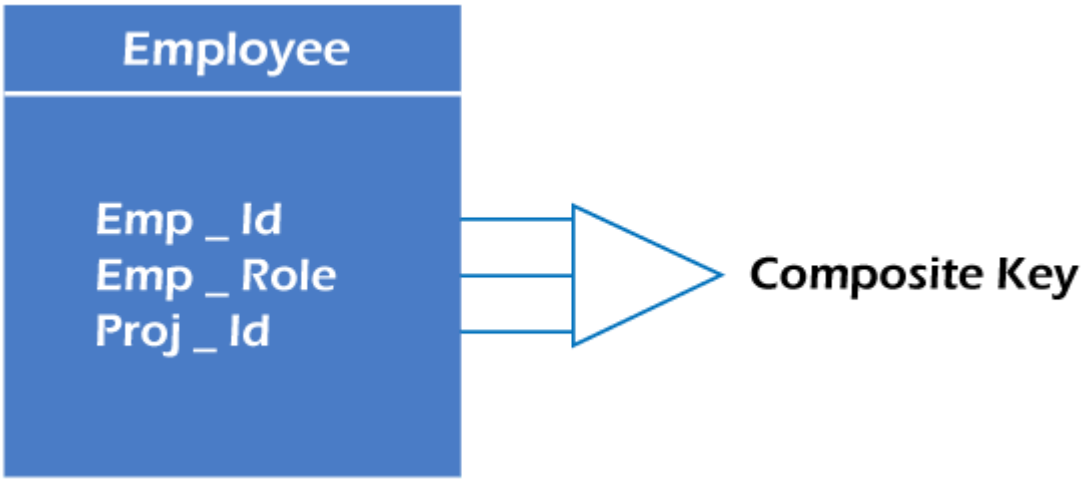
4. Foreign key
Foreign keys are the column of the table used to point to the primary key of another table.
Every employee works in a specific department in a company, and employee and department are two different entities. So we can't store the department's information in the employee table. That's why we link these two tables through the primary key of one table.
We add the primary key of the DEPARTMENT table, Department_Id, as a new attribute in the EMPLOYEE table.
In the EMPLOYEE table, Department_Id is the foreign key, and both the tables are related.
DBMS Keys
5. Alternate key
6. Composite key

Whenever a primary key consists of more than one attribute, it is known as a composite key. This key is also known as Concatenated Key.

DBMS Keys
For example, in employee relations, we assume that an employee may be assigned multiple roles, and an employee may work on multiple projects simultaneously. So the primary key will be composed of all three attributes, namely Emp_ID, Emp_role, and Proj_ID in combination. So these attributes act as a composite key since the primary key comprises more than one attribute.

6. Composite key

Whenever a primary key consists of more than one attribute, it is known as a composite key. This key is also known as Concatenated Key.



For example, in employee relations, we assume that an employee may be assigned multiple roles, and an employee may work on multiple projects simultaneously. So the primary key will be composed of all three attributes, namely Emp_ID, Emp_role, and Proj_ID in combination. So these attributes act as a composite key since the primary key comprises more than one attribute.

Composite key

Whenever a primary key consists of more than one attribute, it is known as a composite key. This key is also known as Concatenated Key.