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THIRD EDITION

# SQL Server 2012 Query Performance Tuning

*TROUBLESHOOT AND OPTIMIZE QUERY  
PERFORMANCE IN SQL SERVER 2012*

Grant Fritchey

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# **SQL Server 2012 Query Performance Tuning**



**Grant Fritchey**

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# Introduction

Performance is frequently one of the last things on peoples' minds when they're developing a system. Unfortunately, that means it usually becomes the biggest problem after that system goes to production. You can't simply rely on getting a phone call that tells you that procedure X on database Y that runs on server Z is running slow. You have to have a mechanism in place to find this information for yourself. You also can't work off the general word *slow*. Slow compared to what? Last week? Last month? The way it ran in development? And once you've identified something as running slow, you need to identify why. Does it need an index? Does it have an index that it isn't using? Is it the CPU, the disk, the memory, the number of users, the amount of data? And now you've identified what and why, you have to do something about it. How? Rewrite the query? Change the WHERE clause? The questions that will come your way when you start performance tuning are endless.

This book provides you with the tools you need to answer those questions. I'll show you how to set up mechanisms for collecting performance metrics on your server for the SQL Server instances and databases living there. I'll go over the more tactical methods of collecting data on individual T-SQL calls. Along the way, I'll be discussing index structure, choice, and maintenance; how best to write your T-SQL code; how to test that code; and a whole slew of other topics. One of my goals when writing this book was to deliver all these things using examples that resemble the types of queries you'll see in the real world. The tools and methods presented are mostly available with SQL Server Standard Edition, although some are available only with SQL Server Enterprise Edition. These are called out whenever you might encounter them. Almost all the tuning advice in the book is directly applicable to SQL Azure, as well as to the more earthbound SQL Server 2012.

The main point is to learn how to answer all those questions that are going to be presented to you. This book gives you the tools to do that and to answer those questions in a methodical manner that eliminates much of the guesswork that is so common in performance optimization today. Performance problems aren't something to be feared. With the right tools, you can tackle performance problems with a calmness and reliability that will earn the respect of your peers and your clients and that will contribute directly to their success.

## Who This Book Is For

This book is for just about anyone responsible for the performance of the system. Database administrators, certainly, are targeted because they're responsible for setting up the systems, creating the infrastructure, and monitoring it over time. Developers are, too, because who else is going to generate all the well-formed and highly performant T-SQL code? Database developers, more than anyone, are the target audience, if only because that's what I do for work. Anyone who has the capability to write T-SQL, design tables, implement indexes, or manipulate server settings on the SQL Server system is going to need this information to one degree or another.

## How This Book Is Structured

The purpose of this book was to use as many "real-looking" queries as possible. To do this, I needed a "real" database. I could have created one and forced everyone to track down the download. Instead, I chose to use the sample database created by Microsoft, called AdventureWorks2008R2. This is available through CodePlex (<http://www.codeplex.com/MSFTDBProdSamples>). I suggest keeping a copy of the restore handy and resetting

your sample database after you have read a couple of topics from the book. Microsoft updates these databases over time, so you might see different sets of data or different behavior with some of the queries than what is listed in this book. But, I stuck with the older version because it's likely to be a little more stable. To a degree, this book builds on the knowledge presented from previous chapters. However, most of the chapters present information unique within that topic, so it is possible for you to jump in and out of particular chapters. You will still receive the most benefit by a sequential reading of [Chapter 1](#) through [Chapter 17](#).

- [Chapter 1](#): “SQL Query Performance Tuning” introduces the iterative process of performance tuning. You’ll get a first glimpse at establishing a performance baseline, identifying bottlenecks, resolving the problems, and quantifying the improvements.
- [Chapter 2](#): “System Performance Analysis” starts you off with monitoring the Windows system on which SQL Server runs. Performance Monitor and Dynamic Management Objects are shown as a mechanism for collecting data.
- [Chapter 3](#): “SQL Query Performance Analysis” defines the best ways to look “under the hood” and see what kinds of queries are being run on your system. It provides a detailed look at the new Extended Events tools. Several of the most useful dynamic management views and functions used to monitor queries are first identified in this chapter.
- [Chapter 4](#): “Index Analysis” explains indexes and index architecture. It defines the differences between clustered and nonclustered indexes. It shows which types of indexes work best with different types of querying. Basic index maintenance is also introduced.
- [Chapter 5](#): “Database Engine Tuning Advisor” covers the Microsoft tool Database Engine Tuning Advisor. The chapter goes over in detail how to use the Database Engine Tuning Advisor; you’re introduced to the various mechanisms for calling the tool and shown how it works under real loads.
- [Chapter 6](#): “Lookup Analysis” takes on the classic performance problem, the key lookup, which is also known as the bookmark lookup. This chapter explores various solutions to the lookup operation.
- [Chapter 7](#): “Statistics Analysis” introduces the concept of statistics. The optimizer uses statistics to make decisions regarding the execution of the query. Maintaining statistics, understanding how they’re stored, learning how they work, and learning how they affect your queries are all topics covered within this chapter.
- [Chapter 8](#): “Fragmentation Analysis” shows how indexes fragment over time. You’ll learn how to identify when an index is fragmented. You’ll also see what happens to your queries as indexes fragment, and you’ll learn mechanisms to eliminate index fragmentation.
- [Chapter 9](#): “Execution Plan Cache Analysis” presents the mechanisms that SQL Server uses to store execution plans. Plan reuse is an important concept within SQL Server. You’ll learn how to identify whether plans are being reused. You’ll get various mechanisms for looking at the cache. This chapter also introduces dynamic management views that allow excellent access to the cache.
- [Chapter 10](#): “Query Recompilation” displays how and when SQL Server will recompile plans that were stored in cache. You’ll learn how plan recompiles can hurt or help the performance of your system. You’ll pick up mechanisms for forcing a recompile and for preventing one.

- [Chapter 11](#): “Query Design Analysis” reveals how to write queries that perform well within your system. Common mistakes are explored, and solutions are provided. You’ll learn several best practices to avoid common bottlenecks.
- [Chapter 12](#): “Blocking Analysis” teaches the best ways to recognize when various sessions on your server are in contention for resources. You’ll learn how to monitor for blocking along with methods and techniques to avoid blocked sessions.
- [Chapter 13](#): “Deadlock Analysis” shows how deadlocks occur on your system. You’ll get methods for identifying sessions involved with deadlocks. The chapter also presents best practices for avoiding deadlocks or fixing your code if deadlocks are already occurring.
- [Chapter 14](#): “Cursor Cost Analysis” diagrams the inherent costs that cursors present to set-oriented T-SQL code. However, when cursors are unavoidable, you need to understand how they work, what they do, and how best to tune them within your environment if eliminating them outright is not an option.
- [Chapter 15](#): “Database Performance Testing” provides you with mechanisms to replicate the performance of your production system onto test systems in order to help you validate that the changes you’ve introduced to your queries really are helpful. You’ll be using the Distributed Replay utility, introduced in SQL Server 2012, along with all the other tools you’ve been using throughout the book.
- [Chapter 16](#): “Database Workload Optimization” demonstrates how to take the information presented in all the previous chapters and put it to work on a real database workload. You’ll identify the worst-performing procedures and put them through various tuning methods to arrive at better performance.
- [Chapter 17](#): “SQL Server Optimization Checklist” summarizes all the preceding chapters into a set of checklists and best practices. The goal of the chapter is to enable you to have a place for quickly reviewing all you have learned from the rest of the book.

## Downloading the code

You can download the code examples used in this book from the Source Code section of the Apress website (<http://www.apress.co>). Most of the code is straight T-SQL stored in a .sql file, which can be opened and used in any SQL Server T-SQL editing tool. There are a couple of PowerShell scripts that will have to be run through a PowerShell command line.

## Contacting the Author

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## CHAPTER 1



# SQL Query Performance Tuning

Query performance tuning remains an important part of today's database applications. Yes, hardware performance is constantly improving. Upgrades to SQL Server—especially to the optimizer, which helps determine how a query is executed, and the query engine, which executes the query—lead to better performance all on their own. Many systems are moving into the cloud where certain aspects of the systems are managed for you. Despite all this, query performance tuning remains a vital mechanism for improving the performance of your database management systems. The beauty of query performance tuning is that, in many cases, a small change to an index or a SQL query can result in a far more efficient application at a very low cost. In those cases, the increase in performance can be orders of magnitude better than that offered by an incrementally faster CPU or a slightly better optimizer.

There are, however, many pitfalls for the unwary. As a result, a proven process is required to ensure that you correctly identify and resolve performance bottlenecks. To whet your appetite for the types of topics essential to honing your query optimization skills, the following is a quick list of the query optimization aspects I cover in this book:

- Identifying problematic SQL queries
- Analyzing a query execution plan
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the current indexes
- Avoiding bookmark lookups
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the current statistics
- Analyzing and resolving fragmentation
- Optimizing execution plan caching
- Analyzing and avoiding stored procedure recompilation
- Minimizing blocking and deadlocks
- Analyzing the effectiveness of cursor use
- Applying performance-tuning processes, tools, and optimization techniques to optimize SQL workload

Before jumping straight into these topics, let's first examine why we go about performance tuning the way we do. In this chapter, I discuss the basic concepts of performance tuning for a SQL Server database system. It's important to have a process you follow in order to be able to find and identify performance problems, fix those

problems, and document the improvements that you've made. Without a well-structured process, you're going to be stabbing the dark, hoping to hit a target. I detail the main performance bottlenecks and show just how important it is to design a database-friendly application, which is the consumer of the data, as well as how to optimize the database. Specifically, I cover the following topics:

- The performance tuning process
- Performance vs. price
- The performance baseline
- Where to focus efforts in tuning
- The top 13 SQL Server performance killers

What I don't cover within these pages could fill a number of other books. The focus of this book is on TSQL query performance tuning, as the title says. But, just so we're clear, there will be no coverage of the following:

- Hardware choices
- Application coding methodologies
- Server configuration (except where it impacts query tuning)
- SQL Server Integration Services
- SQL Server Analysis Services
- SQL Server Reporting Services
- PowerShell

## The Performance Tuning Process

The performance tuning process consists of identifying performance bottlenecks, prioritizing the issues, troubleshooting their causes, applying different resolutions, and quantifying performance improvements—and then repeating the whole process again and again. It is necessary to be a little creative, since most of the time there is no one silver bullet to improve performance. The challenge is to narrow down the list of possible causes and evaluate the effects of different resolutions. You can even undo modifications as you iterate through the tuning process.

## The Core Process

During the tuning process, you must examine various hardware and software factors that can affect the performance of a SQL Server-based application. You should be asking yourself the following general questions during the performance analysis:

- Is any other resource-intensive application running on the same server?
- Is the capacity of the hardware subsystem capable of withstanding the maximum workload?
- Is SQL Server configured properly?
- Is the database connection between SQL Server and the database application efficient?

- Does the database design support the fastest data retrieval (and modification for an updatable database)?
- Is the user workload, consisting of SQL queries, optimized to reduce the load on SQL Server?
- What processes are causing the system to slow down as reflected in the measurement of various wait states, performance counters, and dynamic management objects?
- Does the workload support the required level of concurrency?

If any of these factors is not configured properly, then the overall system performance may suffer. Let's briefly examine these factors.

Having another resource-intensive application on the same server can limit the resources available to SQL Server. Even an application running as a service can consume a good part of the system resources and limit the resources available to SQL Server. For example, applications may be configured to work with the processor at a higher priority than SQL Server. *Priority* is the weight given to a resource that pushes the processor to give it greater preference when executing. To determine the priority of a process, follow these steps:

1. Launch Windows Task Manager.
2. Select View ► Select Columns.
3. Select the Base Priority check box.
4. Click the OK button.

These steps will add the `Base Priority` column to the list of processes. Subsequently, you will be able to determine that the SQL Server process (`sqlservr.exe`) by default runs at Normal priority, whereas the Windows Task Manager process (`taskmgr.exe`) runs at High priority. Therefore, to allow SQL Server to maximize the use of available resources, you should look for all the nonessential applications/services running on the SQL Server machine and ensure that they are not acting as resource hogs.

Improperly configuring the hardware can prevent SQL Server from gaining the maximum benefit from the available resources. The main hardware resources to be considered are processor, memory, disk, and network. For example, in a 32-bit server with more than 3GB of memory, an improper memory configuration will prevent 32-bit SQL Server from using the memory beyond 2GB. Furthermore, if the capacity of a particular hardware resource is small, then it can soon become a performance bottleneck for SQL Server. [Chapter 2](#) covers these hardware bottlenecks in detail.

You should also look at the configuration of SQL Server, since proper configuration is essential for an optimized application. There is a long list of SQL Server configurations that defines the generic behavior of a SQL Server installation. These configurations can be viewed and modified using a system stored procedure, `sp_configure`. Many of these configurations can be managed interactively through SQL Server Management Studio.

Since the SQL Server configurations are applicable for the complete SQL Server installation, a standard configuration is usually preferred. The good news is that, generally, you need not modify the majority of these configurations; the default settings work best for most situations. In fact, the general recommendation is to keep the SQL Server configurations at the default values. I discuss the configuration parameters in detail throughout this book. The same thing applies to database options. The default settings on the model database are adequate for most systems. You might want to adjust autogrowth settings from the defaults, but many of the other properties, such as autoclose or autoshrink, should be left off, while others, such as auto create statistics, should be left on in most circumstances.

Poor connectivity between SQL Server and the database application can hurt application performance. One of the questions you should ask yourself is, How good is the database connection? For example, the query executed by the application may be highly optimized, but the database connection used to submit this query may

add considerable overhead to the query performance. Ensuring that you have an optimal network configuration with appropriate bandwidth will be a fundamental part of your system setup.

The design of the database should also be analyzed while troubleshooting performance. This helps you understand not only the entity-relationship model of the database but also why a query may be written in a certain way. Although it may not always be possible to modify a database design because of wider implications on the database application, a good understanding of the database design helps you focus in the right direction and understand the impact of a resolution. This is especially true of the primary and foreign keys and the clustered indexes used in the tables.

The application may be slow because of poorly built queries, the queries might not be able to use the indexes, or perhaps even the indexes themselves are inefficient or missing. If any of the queries are not optimized sufficiently, they can seriously impact other queries' performance. I cover index optimization in depth in [Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6](#). The next question at this stage should be, Is a query slow because of its resource intensiveness or because of concurrency issues with other queries? You can find in-depth information on blocking analysis in [Chapter 12](#).

When processes run on a server, even one with multiple processors, at times one process will be waiting on another to complete. You can get a fundamental understanding of the root cause of slowdowns by identifying what is waiting and what is causing it to wait. You can realize this through operating system counters that you access through dynamic management views within SQL Server. I cover this information in [Chapter 2](#) and in [Chapter 12](#).

The challenge is to find out which factor is causing the performance bottleneck. For example, with slow-running SQL queries and high pressure on the hardware resources, you may find that both poor database design and a nonoptimized query workload are to blame. In such a case, you must diagnose the symptoms further and correlate the findings with possible causes. Because performance tuning can be time-consuming and costly, you should ideally take a preventive approach by designing the system for optimum performance from the outset.

To strengthen the preventive approach, every lesson that you learn during the optimization of poor performance should be considered an optimization guideline when implementing new database applications. There are also proven best practices that you should consider while implementing database applications. I present these best practices in detail throughout the book, and Chapter 18 is dedicated to outlining many of the optimization best practices.

Please ensure that you take the performance optimization techniques into consideration at the early stages of your database application development. Doing so will help you roll out your database projects without big surprises later.

Unfortunately, we rarely live up to this ideal and often find database applications needing performance tuning. Therefore, it is important to understand not only how to improve the performance of a SQL Server-based application but also how to diagnose the causes of poor performance.

## Iterating the Process

Performance tuning is an iterative process where you identify major bottlenecks, attempt to resolve them, measure the impact of your changes, and return to the first step until performance is acceptable. When applying your solutions, you should follow the golden rule of making only one change at a time where possible. Any change usually affects other parts of the system, so you must reevaluate the effect of each change on the performance of the overall system.

As an example, adding an index may fix the performance of a specific query, but it could cause other queries to run more slowly, as explained in [Chapter 4](#). Consequently, it is preferable to conduct a performance analysis in a test environment to shield users from your diagnosis attempts and intermediate optimization steps. In such a case, evaluating one change at a time also helps in prioritizing the implementation order of the changes on

the production server based on their relative contributions. [Chapter 15](#) explains how to automate testing your database and query performance.

You can keep on chipping away at the performance bottlenecks you've determined are the most painful and thus improve the system performance gradually. Initially, you will be able to resolve big performance bottlenecks and achieve significant performance improvements, but as you proceed through the iterations, your returns will gradually diminish. Therefore, to use your time efficiently, it is worthwhile to quantify the performance objectives first (for example, an 80 percent reduction in the time taken for a certain query, with no adverse effect anywhere else on the server) and then work toward them.

The performance of a SQL Server application is highly dependent on the amount and distribution of user activity (or workload) and data. Both the amount and distribution of workload and data usually change over time, and differing data can cause SQL Server to execute SQL queries differently. The performance resolution applicable for a certain workload and data may lose its effectiveness over a period of time. Therefore, to ensure an optimum system performance on a continuing basis, you need to analyze system and application performance at regular intervals. Performance tuning is a never-ending process, as shown in Figure 1-1.

You can see that the steps to optimize the costliest query make for a complex process, which also requires multiple iterations to troubleshoot the performance issues within the query and apply one change at a time. Figure 1-2 shows the steps involved in the optimization of the costliest query.

As you can see from this process, there is quite a lot to do to ensure that you correctly tune the performance of a given query. It is important to use a solid process like this in performance tuning to focus on the main identified issues.

Having said this, it also helps to keep a broader perspective about the problem as a whole, since you may believe one aspect is causing the performance bottleneck when in reality something else is causing the problem.

## Performance vs. Price

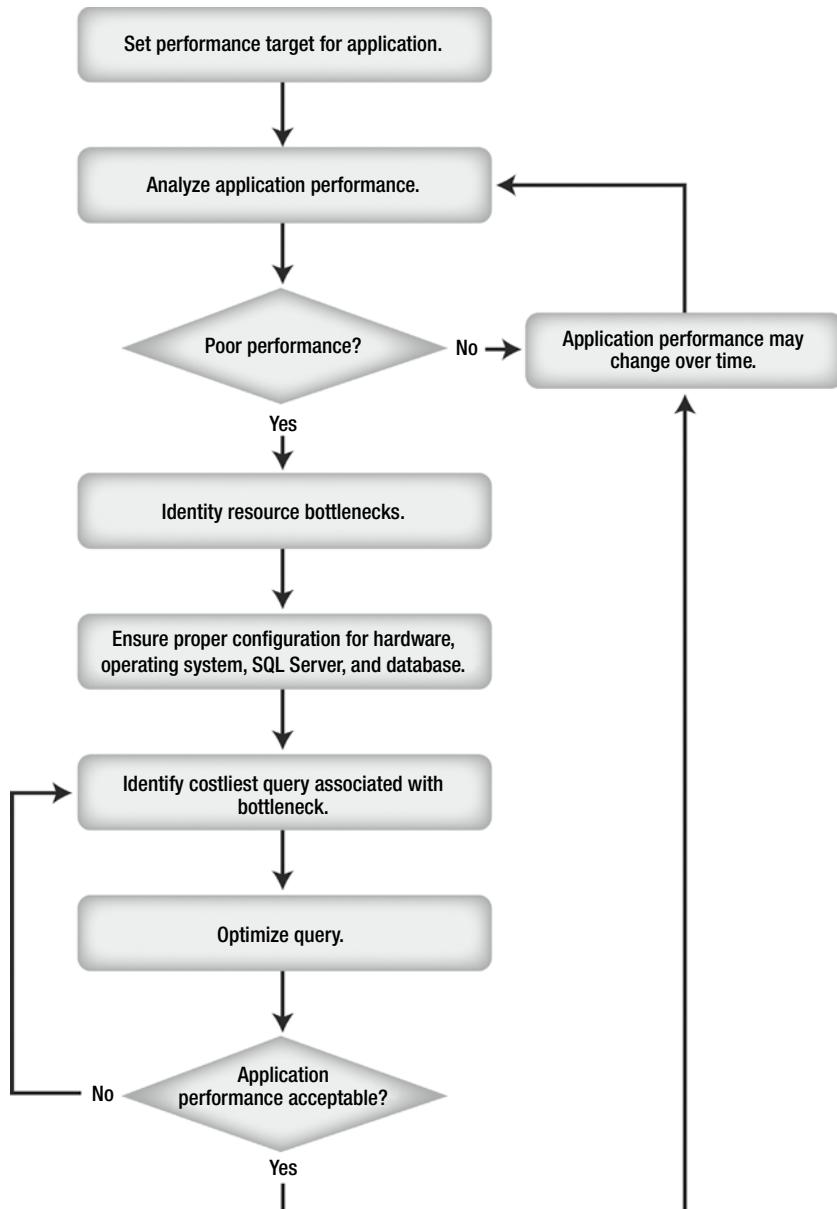
One of the points I touched on earlier is that to gain increasingly small performance increments, you need to spend increasingly large amounts of time and money. Therefore, to ensure the best return on your investment, you should be very objective while optimizing performance. Always consider the following two aspects:

- What is the acceptable performance for your application?
- Is the investment worth the performance gain?

## Performance Targets

To derive maximum efficiency, you must realistically estimate your performance requirements. You can follow many best practices to improve performance. For example, you can have your database files on the most high performance disk subsystem. However, before applying a best practice, you should consider how much you may gain from it and whether the gain will be worth the investment.

Sometimes it is really difficult to estimate the performance gain without actually making the enhancement. That makes properly identifying the source of your performance bottlenecks even more important. Are you CPU, memory, or disk bound? Is the cause code, data structure, or indexing, or are you simply at the limit of your hardware? Do you have a bad router or an improperly applied patch causing the network to perform slowly? Be sure you can make these possibly costly decisions from a known point rather than guessing. One practical approach is to increase a resource in increments and analyze the application's scalability with the added resource. A scalable application will proportionately benefit from an incremental increase of the resource, if the resource was truly causing the scalability bottleneck. If the results appear to be satisfactory, then you can commit to the full enhancement. Experience also plays a very important role here.



**Figure 1-1.** Performance tuning process

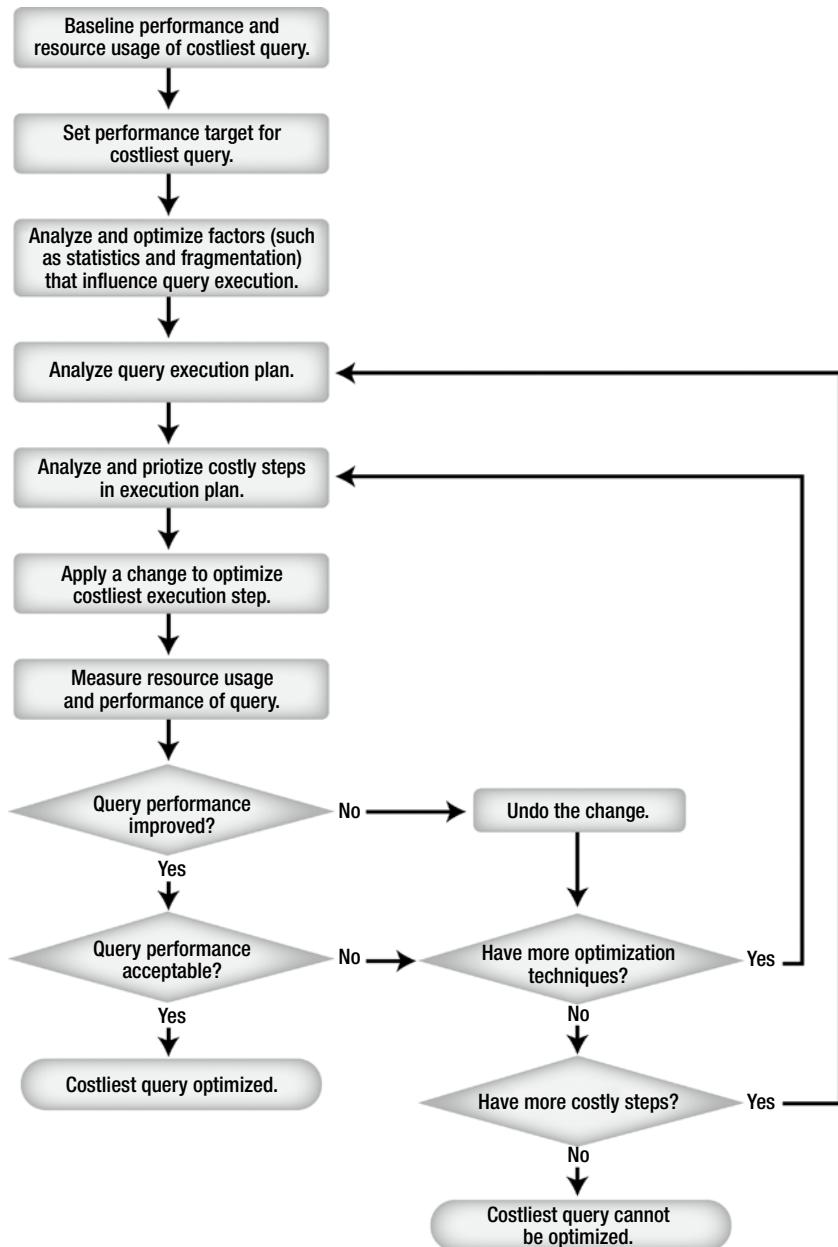


Figure 1-2. Optimization of the costliest query

## “Good Enough” Tuning

Instead of tuning a system to the theoretical maximum performance, the goal should be to tune until the system performance is “good enough.” This is a commonly adopted performance tuning approach. The cost investment after such a point usually increases exponentially in comparison to the performance gain. The 80:20 rule works very well: by investing 20 percent of your resources, you may get 80 percent of the possible performance enhancement, but for the remaining 20 percent possible performance gain, you may have to invest an additional 80 percent of resources. It is therefore important to be realistic when setting your performance objectives. Just remember that “good enough” is defined by you, your customers, and the business people you’re working with. There is no standard to which everyone adheres.

A business benefits not by considering pure performance but by considering price performance. However, if the target is to find the scalability limit of your application (for various reasons, including marketing the product against its competitors), then it may be worthwhile investing as much as you can. Even in such cases, using a third-party stress test lab may be a better investment decision.

## Performance Baseline

One of the main objectives of performance analysis is to understand the underlying level of system use or pressure on different hardware and software subsystems. This knowledge helps you in the following ways:

- Allows you to analyze resource bottlenecks.
- Enables you to troubleshoot by comparing system utilization patterns with a preestablished baseline.
- Assists you in making accurate estimates in capacity planning and scheduling hardware upgrades.
- Aids you in identifying low-utilization periods when the database administrative activities can best be executed.
- Helps you estimate the nature of possible hardware downsizing or server consolidation. Why would a company downsize? Well, the company may have leased a very high-end system expecting strong growth, but because of poor growth, they now want to downsize their system setups. And consolidation? Companies sometimes buy too many servers or realize that the maintenance and licensing costs are too high. This would make using fewer servers very attractive.
- Some metrics only make sense when compared to previously recorded values. Without that previous measure you won’t be able to make sense of the information.

Therefore, to better understand your application’s resource requirements, you should create a baseline for your application’s hardware and software usage. A *baseline* serves as a statistic of your system’s current usage pattern and as a reference with which to compare future statistics. Baseline analysis helps you understand your application’s behavior during a stable period, how hardware resources are used during such periods, and the characteristics of the software. With a baseline in place, you can do the following:

- Measure current performance and express your application’s performance goals.
- Compare other hardware or software combinations against the baseline.
- Measure how the workload and/or data changes over time.

- Evaluate the peak and nonpeak usage pattern of the application. This information can be used to effectively distribute database administration activities, such as full database backup and database defragmentation during nonpeak hours.

You can use the Performance Monitor that is built into Windows to create a baseline for SQL Server's hardware and software resource utilization. You can also get snapshots of this information by using dynamic management views and dynamic management functions. Similarly, you may baseline the SQL Server query workload using Extended Events, which can help you understand the average resource utilization and execution time of SQL queries when conditions are stable. You will learn in detail how to use these tools and queries in [Chapters 2 and 3](#).

Another option is to take advantage of one of the many tools that can generate an artificial load on a given server or database. Numerous third-party tools are available. Microsoft offers SQLIO (available at <http://microsoft.com/download/en/details.aspx?displaylang=en&id=20163>), which measures the I/O capacity of your system. Microsoft also has SQLIOSim, a tool for generating SQL Server-specific calls and simulated loads (available at <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/231619>). These tools primarily focus on the disk subsystem and not on the queries you're running. To do that, you can use the new testing tool added to the latest version, SQL Server Distributed Replay, which is covered at length in [Chapter 15](#).

## Where to Focus Efforts

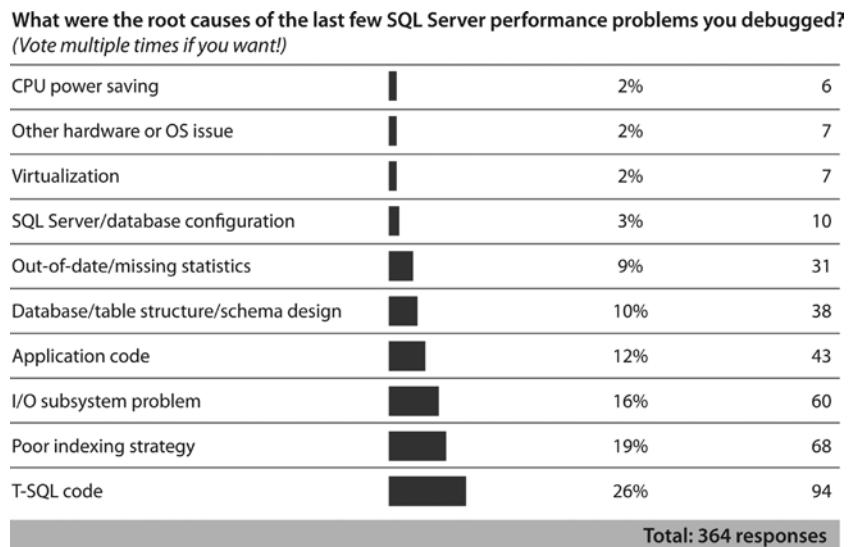
When you tune a particular system, pay special attention to the data access layer (the database queries and stored procedures executed by your code or through your object relational mapping engine or otherwise that are used to access the database). You will usually find that you can positively affect performance in the data access layer far more than if you spend an equal amount of time figuring out how to tune the hardware, operating system, or SQL Server configuration. Although a proper configuration of the hardware, operating system, and SQL Server instance is essential for the best performance of a database application, these fields have standardized so much that you usually need to spend only a limited amount of time configuring them properly for performance. Application design issues such as query design and indexing strategies, on the other hand, are application dependent. Consequently, there is usually more to optimize in the data access layer than in the hardware, operating system, or SQL Server configuration. Figure 1-3 shows the results of a survey of 346 data professionals (with permission from Paul Randal: <http://sqlskills.com/BLOGS/PAUL/post/Survey-results-Common-causes-of-performance-problems.aspx>).

As you can see, the first two issues are T-SQL code and poor indexing. Four of the top six issues are all directly related to the T-SQL, indexes, code, and data structure. My experience matches that of the other respondents. You can obtain the greatest improvement in database application performance by looking first at the area of data access, including logical/physical database design, query design, and index design.

Sure, if you concentrate on hardware configuration and upgrades, you may obtain a satisfactory performance gain. However, a bad SQL query sent by the application can consume all the hardware resources available, no matter how much you have. Therefore, a poor application design can make the hardware upgrade requirements very high, even beyond your limits. In the presence of a heavy SQL workload, concentrating on hardware configurations and upgrades usually produces a poor return on investment.

You should analyze the stress created by an application on a SQL Server database at two levels:

- *High level:* Analyze how much stress the database application is creating on individual hardware resources and the overall behavior of the SQL Server installation. The best measures for this are the various wait states. This information can help you in two ways. First, it helps you identify the area to concentrate on within a SQL Server application where there is poor performance. Second, it helps you identify any lack of proper configuration at the higher levels. You can then decide which hardware resource may be upgraded if you are not able to tune the application using the Performance Monitor tool, as explained in [Chapter 2](#).



**Figure 1-3.** Root causes of performance problems

- *Low level:* Identify the exact culprits within the application—in other words, the SQL queries that are creating most of the pressure visible at the overall higher level. This can be done using the Extended Events tool and various dynamic management views, as explained in [Chapter 3](#).

## SQL Server Performance Killers

Let's now consider the major problem areas that can degrade SQL Server performance. By being aware of the main performance killers in SQL Server in advance, you will be able to focus your tuning efforts on the likely causes.

Once you have optimized the hardware, operating system, and SQL Server settings, the main performance killers in SQL Server are as follows, in a rough order (with the worst appearing first):

- Poor indexing
- Inaccurate statistics
- Poor query design
- Poor execution plans, usually caused by bad parameter sniffing
- Excessive blocking and deadlocks
- Non-set-based operations, usually T-SQL cursors
- Poor database design
- Excessive fragmentation
- Nonreusable execution plans

- Frequent recompilation of queries
- Improper use of cursors
- Improper configuration of the database log
- Excessive use or improper configuration of tempdb

Let's take a quick look at each of these issues.

## Poor Indexing

Poor indexing is usually one of the biggest performance killers in SQL Server. In the absence of proper indexing for a query, SQL Server has to retrieve and process much more data while executing the query. This causes high amounts of stress on the disk, memory, and CPU, increasing the query execution time significantly. Increased query execution time then can lead to excessive blocking and deadlocks in SQL Server. You will learn how to determine indexing strategies and resolve indexing problems in [Chapters 4, 5, and 6](#).

Generally, indexes are considered to be the responsibility of the database administrator (DBA). However, the DBA can't define how to use the indexes, since the use of indexes is determined by the database queries and stored procedures written by the developers. Therefore, defining the indexes must be a shared responsibility since the developers usually have more knowledge of the data to be retrieved and the DBAs have a better understanding of how indexes work. Indexes created without the knowledge of the queries serve little purpose.

**Note** Because indexes created without the knowledge of the queries serve little purpose, database developers need to understand indexes at least as well as they know T-SQL.

## Inaccurate Statistics

SQL Server relies heavily on cost-based optimization, so accurate data distribution statistics are extremely important for the effective use of indexes. Without accurate statistics, SQL Server's built-in query optimizer can't accurately estimate the number of rows affected by a query. Because the amount of data to be retrieved from a table is highly important in deciding how to optimize the query execution, the query optimizer is much less effective if the data distribution statistics are not maintained accurately. You will look at how to analyze statistics in [Chapter 7](#).

## Poor Query Design

The effectiveness of indexes depends in large part on the way you write SQL queries. Retrieving excessively large numbers of rows from a table or specifying a filter criterion that returns a larger result set from a table than is required renders the indexes ineffective. To improve performance, you must ensure that the SQL queries are written to make the best use of new or existing indexes. Failing to write cost-effective SQL queries may prevent SQL Server from choosing proper indexes, which increases query execution time and database blocking.

[Chapter 11](#) covers how to write effective queries.

Query design covers not only single queries but also sets of queries often used to implement database functionalities such as a queue management among queue readers and writers. Even when the performance of individual queries used in the design is fine, the overall performance of the database can be very poor. Resolving this kind of bottleneck requires a broad understanding of different characteristics of SQL Server, which can affect the performance of database functionalities. You will see how to design effective database functionality using SQL queries throughout the book.

## Poor Execution Plans

The same mechanisms that allow SQL Server to establish an efficient stored procedure and reuse that procedure again and again instead of recompiling can, in some cases, work against you. A bad execution plan can be a real performance killer. Bad plans are frequently caused by a process called *parameter sniffing*, which comes from the mechanisms that the query optimizer uses to determine the best plan based on statistics. It's important to understand how statistics and parameters combine to create execution plans and what you can do to control them. Statistics are covered in [Chapter 7](#) and execution plan analysis in [Chapter 9](#).

## Excessive Blocking and Deadlocks

Because SQL Server is fully atomicity, consistency, isolation, and durability (ACID) compliant, the database engine ensures that modifications made by concurrent transactions are properly isolated from one another. By default, a transaction sees the data either in the state before another concurrent transaction modified the data or after the other transaction completed—it does not see an intermediate state.

Because of this isolation, when multiple transactions try to access a common resource concurrently in a noncompatible way, *blocking* occurs in the database. A *deadlock* occurs when two resources attempt to escalate or expand locked resources and conflict with one another. The query engine determines which process is the least costly to roll back and chooses it as the *deadlock victim*. This requires that the database request be resubmitted for successful execution. The execution time of a query is adversely affected by the amount of blocking and deadlock it faces.

For scalable performance of a multiuser database application, properly controlling the isolation levels and transaction scopes of the queries to minimize blocking and deadlock is critical; otherwise, the execution time of the queries will increase significantly, even though the hardware resources may be highly underutilized. I cover this problem in depth in [Chapters 12](#) and [13](#).

## Non-Set-Based Operations

Transact-SQL is a set-based scripting language, which means it operates on sets of data. This forces you to think in terms of columns rather than in terms of rows. Non-set-based thinking leads to excessive use of cursors and loops rather than exploring more efficient joins and subqueries. The T-SQL language offers rich mechanisms for manipulating sets of data. For performance to shine, you need to take advantage of these mechanisms rather than force a row-by-row approach to your code, which will kill performance. Examples of how to do this are available throughout the book; also, I address T-SQL best practices in [Chapter 11](#) and cursors in [Chapter 14](#).

## Poor Database Design

A database should be adequately normalized to increase the performance of data retrieval and reduce blocking. For example, if you have an undernormalized database with customer and order information in the same table, then the customer information will be repeated in all the order rows of the customer. This repetition of information in every row will increase the I/Os required to fetch all the orders placed by a customer. At the same time, a data writer working on a customer's order will reserve all the rows that include the customer information and thus could block all other data writers/data readers trying to access the customer profile.

Overnormalization of a database can be as bad as undernormalization. Overnormalization increases the number and complexity of joins required to retrieve data. An overnormalized database contains a large number of tables with a very small number of columns.

Having too many joins in a query may also be because database entities have not been partitioned very distinctly or the query is serving a very complex set of requirements that could perhaps be better served by creating a new view or stored procedure.

Database design is a large subject. I will provide a few pointers in [Chapter 18](#) and throughout the rest of the book. Because of the size of the topic, I won't be able to treat it in the complete manner it requires. However, if you want to read a book on database design with an emphasis on introducing the subject, I recommend reading *Pro SQL Server 2008 Relational Database Design and Implementation* by Louis Davidson et al (Apress, 2008).

## Excessive Fragmentation

While analyzing data retrieval operations, you can usually assume that the data is organized in an orderly way, as indicated by the index used by the data retrieval operation. However, if the pages containing the data are fragmented in a nonorderly fashion or if they contain a small amount of data because of frequent page splits, then the number of read operations required by the data retrieval operation will be much higher than might otherwise be required. The increase in the number of read operations caused by fragmentation hurts query performance. In [Chapter 8](#), you will learn how to analyze and remove fragmentation.

## Nonreusable Execution Plans

To execute a query in an efficient way, SQL Server's query optimizer spends a fair amount of CPU cycles creating a cost-effective execution plan. The good news is that the plan is cached in memory, so you can reuse it once created. However, if the plan is designed so that you can't plug variable values into it, SQL Server creates a new execution plan every time the same query is resubmitted with different variable values. So, for better performance, it is extremely important to submit SQL queries in forms that help SQL Server cache and reuse the execution plans. I will also address topics such as plan freezing, forcing query plans, using "optimize for ad hoc workloads," and the problems associated with bad parameter sniffing. You will see in detail how to improve the reusability of execution plans in [Chapter 9](#).

## Frequent Recompilation of Queries

One of the standard ways of ensuring a reusable execution plan, independent of variable values used in a query, is to use a stored procedure or a parameterized query. Using a stored procedure to execute a set of SQL queries allows SQL Server to create a parameterized execution plan.

A *parameterized execution plan* is independent of the parameter values supplied during the execution of the stored procedure or parameterized query, and it is consequently highly reusable. However, the execution plan of the stored procedure can be reused only if SQL Server does not have to recompile the individual statements within it every time the stored procedure is run. Frequent recompilation of queries increases pressure on the CPU and the query execution time. I will discuss in detail the various causes and resolutions of stored procedure, and statement, recompilation in [Chapter 10](#).

## Improper Use of Cursors

By preferring a cursor-based (row-at-a-time) result set—or as Jeff Moden has so aptly termed it, Row By Agonizing Row (RBAR; pronounced “ree-bar”—instead of a regular set-based SQL query, you add a large amount of overhead to SQL Server. Use set-based queries whenever possible, but if you are forced to deal with cursors, be sure to use efficient cursor types such as fast-forward only. Excessive use of inefficient cursors increases stress on SQL Server resources, slowing down system performance. I discuss how to work with cursors properly, if you must, in [Chapter 14](#).

## Improper Configuration of the Database Log

By failing to follow the general recommendations in configuring a database log, you can adversely affect the performance of an online transaction processing (OLTP)-based SQL Server database. For optimal performance, SQL Server heavily relies on accessing the database logs effectively. [Chapter 2](#) covers how to configure the database log properly.

## Excessive Use or Improper Configuration of tempdb

There is only one tempdb for any SQL Server instance. Since temporary storage (such as operations involving user objects like temporary tables and table variables), system objects such as cursors or hash tables for joins), and operations including sorts and row versioning all use the tempdb database, tempdb can become quite a bottleneck. All these options and others lead to space, I/O, and contention issues within tempdb. I cover some configuration options to help with this in [Chapter 2](#) and other options in other chapters appropriate to the issues addressed by that chapter.

## Summary

In this introductory chapter, you have seen that SQL Server performance tuning is an iterative process, consisting of identifying performance bottlenecks, troubleshooting their cause, applying different resolutions, quantifying performance improvements, and then repeating these steps until your required performance level is reached. To assist in this process, you should create a system baseline to compare with your modifications. Throughout the performance tuning process, you need to be very objective about the amount of tuning you want to perform—you can always make a query run a little bit faster, but is the effort worth the cost? Finally, since performance depends on the pattern of user activity and data, you must reevaluate the database server performance on a regular basis.

To derive the optimal performance from a SQL Server database system, it is extremely important that you understand the stresses on the server created by the database application. In the next two chapters, I discuss how to analyze these stresses, both at a higher system level and at a lower SQL Server activities level. Then I show how to combine the two.

In the rest of the book, you will examine in depth the biggest SQL Server performance killers, as mentioned earlier in the chapter. You will learn how these individual factors can affect performance if used incorrectly and how to resolve or avoid these traps.

## CHAPTER 2



# System Performance Analysis

In the first chapter, I stressed the importance of having a performance baseline that you can use to measure performance changes. In fact, this is one of the first things you should do when starting the performance tuning process, since without a baseline you will not be able to quantify improvements. In this chapter, you will learn how to use the Performance Monitor tool to accomplish this and how to use the different performance counters that are required to create a baseline. Other tools necessary for establishing baseline performance metrics for the system will also be addressed when they can help you above and beyond what the Performance Monitor tool can do.

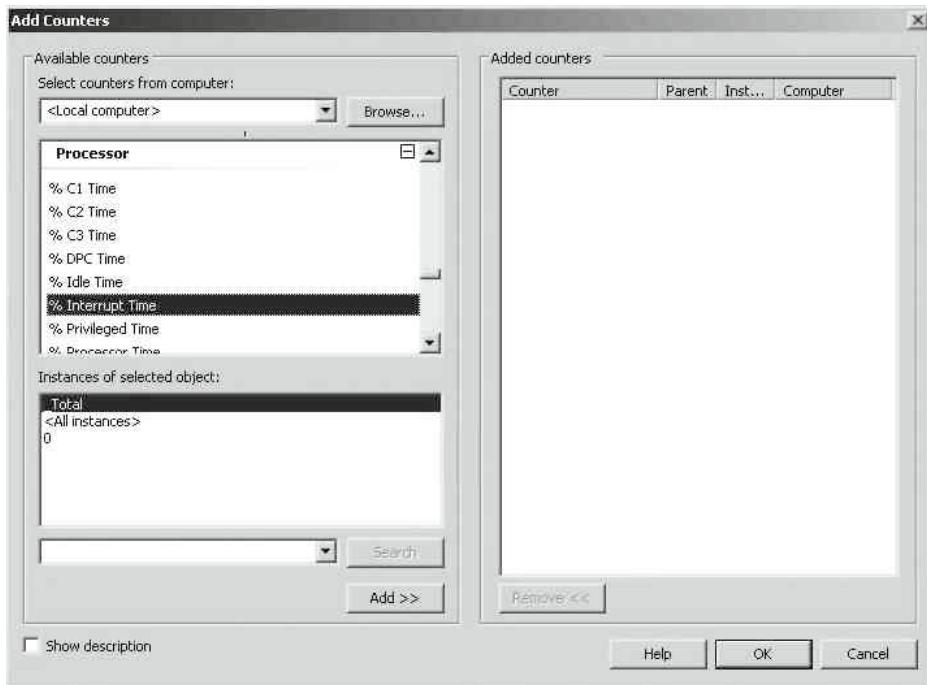
Specifically, I cover the following topics:

- The basics of the Performance Monitor tool
- How to analyze hardware resource bottlenecks using Performance Monitor
- How to retrieve Performance Monitor data within SQL Server using dynamic management views
- How to resolve hardware resource bottlenecks
- How to analyze the overall performance of SQL Server
- Considerations for monitoring virtual machines
- How to create a baseline for the system

## Performance Monitor Tool

Windows Server 2008 provides a tool called Performance Monitor. Performance Monitor collects detailed information about the utilization of operating system resources. It allows you to track nearly every aspect of system performance, including memory, disk, processor, and the network. In addition, SQL Server 2012 provides extensions to the Performance Monitor tool to track a variety of functional areas within SQL Server.

Performance Monitor tracks resource behavior by capturing performance data generated by hardware and software components of the system, such as a processor, a process, a thread, and so on. The performance data generated by a system component is represented by a performance object. A performance object provides counters that represent specific aspects of a component, such as **% Processor Time** for a Processor object. Just remember, when running these counters within a virtual machine (VM), the performance measured for the counters in most instances is for the VM, not the physical server.



**Figure 2-1.** Adding a Performance Monitor counter

There can be multiple instances of a system component. For instance, the Processor object in a computer with two processors will have two instances represented as instances 0 and 1. Performance objects with multiple instances may also have an instance called **Total** to represent the total value for all the instances. For example, the processor usage of a computer with four processors can be determined using the following performance object, counter, and instance (as shown in Figure 2-1):

- **Performance object: Processor**
- **Counter: % Processor Time**
- **Instance: \_Total**

System behavior can be either tracked in real time in the form of graphs or captured as a log (called a *data collector set*) for offline analysis. The preferred mechanism on production servers is to use the log.

To run the Performance Monitor tool, execute `perfmon` from a command prompt, which will open the Performance Monitor suite. You can also right-click the Computer icon on the desktop or the Start menu, expand Diagnostics, and then expand the Performance Monitor. Both will allow you to open the Performance Monitor utility.

You will learn how to set up the individual counters in the “Creating a Baseline” section later in this chapter. First, let’s examine which counters you should choose in order to identify system bottlenecks and how to resolve some of these bottlenecks.

# Dynamic Management Objects

To get an immediate snapshot of a large amount of data that was formerly available only in Performance Monitor, SQL Server now offers the same data internally through a set of dynamic management views (DMVs) and dynamic management functions (DMFs) collectively referred to as dynamic management objects (DMOs). These are extremely useful mechanisms for capturing a snapshot of the current performance of your system. I'll introduce several throughout the book, but for now I'll focus on a few that are the most important for monitoring performance and for establishing a baseline.

The **sys.dm\_os\_performance\_counters** view displays the SQL Server counters within a query, allowing you to apply the full strength of T-SQL to the data immediately. For example, this simple query will return the current value for **Logins/sec**:

```
SELECT    dopc.cntr_value,
          dopc.cntr_type
FROM      sys.dm_os_performance_counters AS dopc
WHERE     dopc.object_name = 'MSSQL$RANDORI:General Statistics'
AND       dopc.counter_name = 'Logins/sec';
```

This returns the value of 15 for my server. For your server, you'll need to substitute the appropriate server name in the **object\_name** comparison. Worth noting is the **cntr\_type** column. This column tells you what type of counter you're reading (documented by Microsoft at [http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/aa394569\(VS.85\).aspx](http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/aa394569(VS.85).aspx)). For example, the counter above returns the value 272696576, which means that this counter is an average value. There are values that are moments-in-time snapshots, accumulations since the server started, and others. Knowing what the measure represents is an important part of understanding these metrics.

There are a large number of DMOs that can be used to gather information about the server. I'll be covering many of these throughout the book. I'll introduce one more here that you will find yourself accessing on a regular basis, **sys.dm\_os\_wait\_stats**. This DMV shows an aggregated view of the threads within SQL Server that are waiting on various resources, collected since the last time SQL Server was started or the counters were reset. Identifying the types of waits that are occurring within your system is one of the easiest mechanisms to begin identifying the source of your bottlenecks. You can sort the data in various ways; this first example looks at the waits that have the longest current count using this simple query:

```
SELECT TOP    (10) dows.*
FROM      sys.dm_os_wait_stats AS dows
ORDER BY  dows.wait_time_ms DESC;
```

Figure 2-2 displays the output.

	wait_type	waiting_tasks_count	wait_time_ms	max_wait_time_ms	signal_wait_time_ms
1	CLR_AUTO_EVENT	8	1584662397	792331118	1
2	SQLTRACE_INCREMENTAL_FLUSH_SLEEP	201907	810277078	5571	842
3	HADR_FILESTREAM_IOMGR_IOCOMPLETION	1579508	810274205	3397	101665
4	XE_TIMER_EVENT	27324	810272500	61166	810272091
5	XE_DISPATCHER_WAIT	6753	810269705	121190	0
6	LOGMGR_QUEUE	5760250	810256571	2492	22843
7	REQUEST_FOR_DEADLOCK_SEARCH	162063	810255869	6912	810255869
8	DIRTY_PAGE_POLL	7404426	810249818	2492	33171
9	LAZYWRITER_SLEEP	798559	810203457	4208	108814
10	CHECKPOINT_QUEUE	236	807496809	45492364	311

**Figure 2-2.** Output from **sys.dm\_os\_wait\_stats**

You can see not only the cumulative time that particular waits have accumulated but also a count of how often they have occurred and the maximum time that something had to wait. From here, you can identify the wait type and begin troubleshooting. One of the most common types of waits is I/O. If you see **ASYNCH\_IO\_COMPLETION**, **IO\_COMPLETION**, **LOGMGR**, **WRITELOG**, or **PAGEIOLATCH** in your top ten wait types, you may be experiencing I/O contention, and you now know where to start working. For a more detailed analysis of wait types and how to use them as a monitoring tool within SQL Server, read the Microsoft white paper “SQL Server 2005 Waits and Queues” ([http://download.microsoft.com/download/4/7/a/47a548b9-249e-484c-abd7-29f31282b04d/Performance\\_Tuning\\_Waits\\_Queues.doc](http://download.microsoft.com/download/4/7/a/47a548b9-249e-484c-abd7-29f31282b04d/Performance_Tuning_Waits_Queues.doc)). Although it was written for SQL Server 2005, it is still largely applicable to newer versions of SQL Server. You can always find information about more obscure wait types by going directly to Microsoft at support.microsoft.com. Finally, when it comes to wait types, Bob Ward’s repository (collected at <http://blogs.msdn.com/b/psssql/archive/2009/11/03/the-sql-server-wait-type-repository.aspx>) is a must read.

## Hardware Resource Bottlenecks

Typically, SQL Server database performance is affected by stress on the following hardware resources:

- Memory
- Disk I/O
- Processor
- Network

Stress beyond the capacity of a hardware resource forms a bottleneck. To address the overall performance of a system, you need to identify these bottlenecks because they form the limit on overall system performance.

### Identifying Bottlenecks

There is usually a relationship between resource bottlenecks. For example, a processor bottleneck may be a symptom of excessive paging (memory bottleneck) or a slow disk (disk bottleneck). If a system is low on memory, causing excessive paging, and has a slow disk, then one of the end results will be a processor with high utilization since the processor has to spend a significant number of CPU cycles to swap pages in and out of the memory and to manage the resultant high number of I/O requests. Replacing the processors with faster ones may help a little, but it is not be the best overall solution. In a case like this, increasing memory is a more appropriate solution because it will decrease pressure on the disk and processor as well. In fact, upgrading the disk is probably a better solution than upgrading the processor.

---

**Note** The most common performance problem is usually I/O, either from memory or from the disk.

---

One of the best ways of locating a bottleneck is to identify resources that are waiting for some other resource to complete its operation. You can use Performance Monitor counters or DMOs such as **sys.dm\_os\_wait\_stats** to gather that information. The response time of a request served by a resource includes the time the request had to wait in the resource queue as well as the time taken to execute the request, so end user response time is directly proportional to the amount of queuing in a system.

Another way to identify a bottleneck is to reference the response time and capacity of the system. The amount of throughput, for example, to your disks should normally be something approaching what the vendor

suggests that the disk is capable of. So measuring information from your performance monitor such as **disk sec/transfer** will give you an indication of when disks are slowing down due to excessive load.

Not all resources have specific counters that show queuing levels, but most resources have some counters that represent an overcommittal of that resource. For example, memory has no such counter, but a large number of hard page faults represents the overcommittal of physical memory (hard page faults are explained later in the chapter in the section “Pages/sec and Page Faults/sec Counters”). Other resources, such as the processor and disk, have specific counters to indicate the level of queuing. For example, the counter **Page Life Expectancy** indicates how long a page will stay in the buffer pool without being referenced. This is an indicator of how well SQL Server is able to manage its memory, since a longer life means that a piece of data in the buffer will be there, available, waiting for the next reference. However, a shorter life means that SQL Server is moving pages in and out of the buffer quickly, possibly suggesting a memory bottleneck.

You will see which counters to use in analyzing each type of bottleneck shortly.

## Bottleneck Resolution

Once you have identified bottlenecks, you can resolve them in two ways.

- You can increase resource capacity.
- You can decrease the arrival rate of requests to the resource.

Increasing the throughput usually requires extra resources such as memory, disks, processors, or network adapters. You can decrease the arrival rate by being more selective about the requests to a resource. For example, when you have a disk subsystem bottleneck, you can either increase the capacity of the disk subsystem or decrease the amount of I/O requests.

Increasing the capacity means adding more disks or upgrading to faster disks. Decreasing the arrival rate means identifying the cause of high I/O requests to the disk subsystem and applying resolutions to decrease their number. You may be able to decrease the I/O requests, for example, by adding appropriate indexes on a table to limit the amount of data accessed or by partitioning a table between multiple disks.

## Memory Bottleneck Analysis

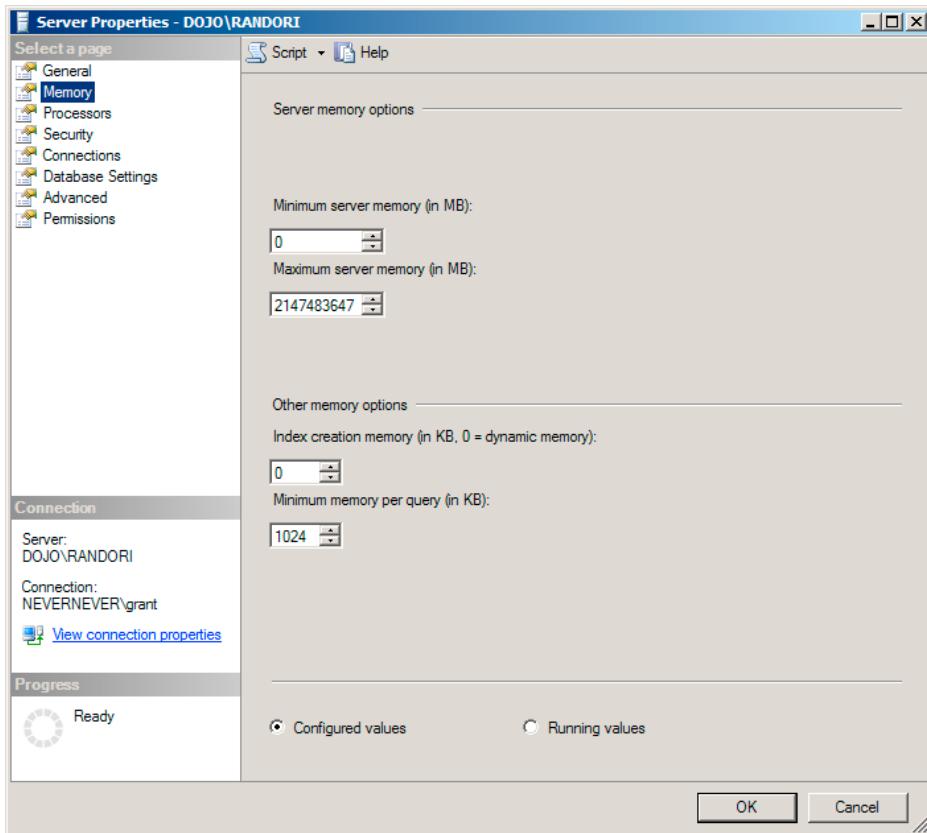
Memory can be a problematic bottleneck because a bottleneck in memory will manifest on other resources, too. This is particularly true for a system running SQL Server. When SQL Server runs out of cache (or memory), a process within SQL Server (called lazy writer) has to work extensively to maintain enough free internal memory pages within SQL Server. This consumes extra CPU cycles and performs additional physical disk I/O to write memory pages back to disk.

The good news is that SQL Server 2012 has changed memory management. A single process now manages all memory within SQL Server; this can help to avoid some of the bottlenecks previously encountered because max server memory will be applied to all processes, not just those smaller than 8k in size.

## SQL Server Memory Management

SQL Server manages memory for databases, including memory requirements for data and query execution plans, in a large pool of memory called the *buffer pool*. The memory pool used to consist of a collection of 8KB buffers to manage memory. Now there are multiple page allocations for data pages and plan cache pages, free pages, and so forth. The buffer pool is usually the largest portion of SQL Server memory. SQL Server manages memory by growing or shrinking its memory pool size dynamically.

You can configure SQL Server for dynamic memory management in SQL Server Management Studio (SSMS). Go to the Memory folder of the Server Properties dialog box, as shown in Figure 2-3.



**Figure 2-3.** SQL Server memory configuration

The dynamic memory range is controlled through two configuration properties: **Minimum(MB)** and **Maximum(MB)**.

- **Minimum(MB)**, also known as **min server memory**, works as a floor value for the memory pool. Once the memory pool reaches the same size as the floor value, SQL Server can continue committing pages in the memory pool, but it can't be shrunk to less than the floor value. Note that SQL Server does not start with the **min server memory** configuration value but commits memory dynamically, as needed.
- **Maximum(MB)**, also known as **max server memory**, serves as a ceiling value to limit the maximum growth of the memory pool. These configuration settings take effect immediately and do not require a restart. In SQL Server 2012 the lowest maximum memory is now 64MB for a 32-bit system and 128MB for a 64-bit system.

Microsoft recommends that you use dynamic memory configuration for SQL Server, where **min server memory** is 0 and **max server memory** is set to allow some memory for the operating system, assuming a single instance on the machine. The amount of memory for the operating system depends on the system itself. For most systems with 8-16GB of memory, you should leave about 2GB for the OS. You'll need to adjust this depending on your own system's needs and memory allocations. You should not run other memory-intensive applications on

	name	minimum	maximum	config_value	run_value
1	min server memory (MB)	0	2147483647	0	16

	name	minimum	maximum	config_value	run_value
1	max server memory (MB)	128	2147483647	2147483647	2147483647

**Figure 2-4.** SQL Server memory configuration properties

the same server as SQL Server, but if you must, I recommend you first get estimates on how much memory is needed by other applications and then configure SQL Server with a **max server memory** value set to prevent the other applications from starving SQL Server of memory. On a system where SQL Server is running on its own, I prefer to set the minimum server memory equal to the max value and simply dispatch with dynamic management. On a server with multiple SQL Server instances, you'll need to adjust these memory settings to ensure each instance has an adequate value. Just make sure you've left enough memory for the operating system and external processes.

Memory within SQL Server can be roughly divided into buffer pool memory, which represents data pages and free pages, and nonbuffer memory, which consists of threads, DLLs, linked servers, and others. Most of the memory used by SQL Server goes into the buffer pool. But you can get allocations beyond the buffer pool, known as private bytes, which can cause memory pressure not evident in the normal process of monitoring the buffer pool. Check **Process: sqlservr: Private Bytes** in comparison to **SQL Server: Buffer Manager: Total pages** if you suspect this issue on your system.

You can also manage the configuration values for **min server memory** and **max server memory** by using the **sp\_configure** system stored procedure. To see the configuration values for these parameters, execute the **sp\_configure** stored procedure as follows:

```
EXEC sp_configure 'show advanced options', 1;
GO
RECONFIGURE;
GO
EXEC sp_configure 'min server memory';
EXEC sp_configure 'max server memory';
```

Figure 2-4 shows the result of running these commands.

Note that the default value for the **min server memory** setting is 0MB and for the **max server memory** setting is 2147483647MB. Also, **max server memory** can't be set to less than 64MB on a 32-bit machine and 128MB on a 64-bit machine.

You can also modify these configuration values using the **spconfigure** stored procedure. For example, to set **max server memory** to 200MB and **min server memory** to 100MB, execute the following set of statements (*setmemory.sql* in the download):

```
USE master;
EXEC sp_configure 'show advanced option', 1;
RECONFIGURE;
exec sp_configure 'min server memory (MB)', 128;
exec sp_configure 'max server memory (MB)', 200;
RECONFIGURE WITH OVERRIDE;
```

The **min server memory** and **max server memory** configurations are classified as advanced options. By default, the **sp\_configure** stored procedure does not affect/display the advanced options. Setting **show advanced option to 1** as shown previously enables the **sp\_configure** stored procedure to affect/display the advanced options.

The **RECONFIGURE** statement updates the memory configuration values set by **sp\_configure**. Since ad hoc updates to the system catalog containing the memory configuration values are not recommended, the **OVERRIDE** flag is used with the **RECONFIGURE** statement to force the memory configuration. If you do the memory configuration through Management Studio, Management Studio automatically executes the **RECONFIGURE WITH OVERRIDE** statement after the configuration setting.

You may need to allow for SQL Server sharing a system's memory. To elaborate, consider a computer with SQL Server and SharePoint running on it. Both servers are heavy users of memory and thus keep pushing each other for memory. The dynamic memory behavior of SQL Server allows it to release memory to SharePoint at one instance and grab it back as SharePoint releases it. You can avoid this dynamic memory management overhead by configuring SQL Server for a fixed memory size. However, please keep in mind that since SQL Server is an extremely resource-intensive process, it is highly recommended that you have a dedicated SQL Server production machine.

Now that you understand SQL Server memory management at a very high level, let's consider the performance counters you can use to analyze stress on memory, as shown in Table 2-1.

I'll now walk you through these counters to get a better idea of possible uses.

**Table 2-1. Performance Monitor Counters to Analyze Memory Pressure**

Object[Instance[,InstanceN]]	Counter	Description	Values
Memory	<b>Available Bytes</b>	Free physical memory	System dependent
	<b>Pages/sec</b>	Rate of hard page faults	Average Value < 50
	<b>Page Faults/sec</b>	Rate of total page faults	Compare with its baseline value for trend analysis
	<b>Pages Input/sec</b>	Rate of input page faults	
	<b>Pages Output/sec</b>	Rate of output page faults	
	<b>Paging File %Usage</b>	Peak values in the memory paging file	
	<b>Peak</b>	memory paging file	
	<b>Paging File: %Usage</b>	Rate of usage of the memory paging file	
	<b>Buffer cache hit ratio</b>	Percentage of requests served out of buffer cache	Average Value ≥ 90% in an OLTP system
	<b>Page Life Expectancy</b>	Time page spends in buffer cache	Compare with its baseline value for trend analysis
SQLServer:Buffer Manager	<b>Checkpoint</b>	Pages written to disk by checkpoint	Average Value < 30
	<b>Pages/sec</b>		
	<b>Lazy writes/sec</b>	Dirty aged pages flushed from buffer	Average Value < 20
SQLServer:Memory Manager	<b>Memory Grants</b>	Number of processes waiting for memory grant	Average value = 0
	<b>Pending</b>		
	<b>Target Server</b>	Maximum physical memory SQL Server can on the box	Close to size of physical Memory
	<b>Memory (KB)</b>		
	<b>Total Server Memory (KB)</b>	Physical memory currently assigned to SQL	Close to Target server Memory (KB)
Process	<b>Private Bytes</b>	Size, in bytes, of memory that this process has allocated that can't be shared with other processes	

## Available Bytes

The **Available Bytes** counter represents free physical memory in the system. You can also look at Available Kbytes and Available Mbytes for the same data but with less granularity. For good performance, this counter value should not be too low. If SQL Server is configured for dynamic memory usage, then this value will be controlled by calls to a Windows API that determines when and how much memory to release. Extended periods of time with this value very low and SQL Server memory not changing indicates that the server is under severe memory stress.

## Pages/sec and Page Faults/sec

To understand the importance of the **Pages/sec** and **Page Faults/sec** counters, you first need to learn about page faults. A *page fault* occurs when a process requires code or data that is not in its *working set* (its space in physical memory). It may lead to a soft page fault or a hard page fault. If the faulted page is found elsewhere in physical memory, then it is called a *soft page fault*. A *hard page fault* occurs when a process requires code or data that is not in its working set or elsewhere in physical memory and must be retrieved from disk.

The speed of a disk access is in the order of milliseconds, whereas a memory access is in the order of nanoseconds. This huge difference in the speed between a disk access and a memory access makes the effect of hard page faults significant compared to that of soft page faults.

The **Pages/sec** counter represents the number of pages read from or written to disk per second to resolve hard page faults. The **Page Faults/sec** performance counter indicates the total page faults per second—soft page faults plus hard page faults—handled by the system. These are primarily measures of load and are not direct indicators of performance issues.

Hard page faults, indicated by **Pages/sec**, should not be consistently higher than normal. There are no hard and fast numbers for what indicates a problem because these numbers will vary widely between systems based on the amount and type of memory as well as the speed of disk access on the system.

If the **Pages/sec** counter is very high, you can break it up into **Pages Input/sec** and **Pages Output/sec**.

- **Pages Input/sec:** An application will wait only on an input page, not on an output page.
- **Pages Output/sec:** Page output will stress the system, but an application usually does not see this stress. Pages output are usually represented by the application's dirty pages that need to be backed out to the disk. **Pages Output/sec** is an issue only when disk load become an issue.

Also, check **Process:Page Faults/sec** to find out which process is causing excessive paging in case of high **Pages/sec**. The **Process** object is the system component that provides performance data for the processes running on the system, which are individually represented by their corresponding instance name.

For example, the SQL Server process is represented by the **sqlservr** instance of the **Process** object. High numbers for this counter usually do not mean much unless **Pages/sec** is high. **Page Faults/sec** can range all over the spectrum with normal application behavior, with values from 0 to 1,000 per second being acceptable. This entire data set means a baseline is essential to determine the expected normal behavior.

## Paging File %Usage and Page File %Usage

All memory in the Windows system is not the physical memory of the physical machine. Windows will swap memory that isn't immediately active in and out of the physical memory space to a paging file. These counters are used to understand how often this is occurring on your system. As a general measure of system performance, these counters are only applicable to the Windows OS and not to SQL Server. However, the impact of not enough

virtual memory will affect SQL Server. These counters are collected in order to understand whether the memory pressures on SQL Server are internal or external. If they are external memory pressures, you will need to go into the Windows OS to determine what the problems might be.

## Buffer Cache Hit Ratio

The *buffer cache* is the pool of buffer pages into which data pages are read, and it is often the biggest part of the SQL Server memory pool. This counter value should be as high as possible, especially for OLTP systems that should have fairly regimented data access, unlike a warehouse or reporting system. It is extremely common to find this counter value as 99 percent or more for most production servers. A low **Buffer cache hit ratio** value indicates that few requests could be served out of the buffer cache, with the rest of the requests being served from disk.

When this happens, either SQL Server is still warming up or the memory requirement of the buffer cache is more than the maximum memory available for its growth. If the cache hit ratio is consistently low, you should consider getting more memory for the system or reducing memory requirements through the use of good indexes and other query tuning mechanism. That is, unless you're dealing with a reporting systems with lots of ad hoc queries. It's possible with reporting systems to consistently see the cache hit ratio become extremely low.

## Page Life Expectancy

Page Life Expectancy indicates how long a page will stay in the buffer pool without being referenced. Generally, a low number for this counter means that pages are being removed from the buffer, lowering the efficiency of the cache and indicating the possibility of memory pressure. On reporting systems, as opposed to OLTP systems, this number may remain at a lower value since more data is accessed from reporting systems. Since this is very dependent on the amount of memory you have available and the types of queries running on your system, there are no hard and fast numbers that will satisfy a wide audience. Therefore, you will need to establish a baseline for your system and monitor it over time.

## Checkpoint Pages/sec

The **Checkpoint Pages/sec** counter represents the number of pages that are moved to disk by a checkpoint operation. These numbers should be relatively low, for example, less than 30 per second for most systems. A higher number means more pages are being marked as dirty in the cache. A *dirty page* is one that is modified while in the buffer. When it's modified, it's marked as dirty and will get written back to the disk during the next checkpoint. Higher values on this counter indicate a larger number of writes occurring within the system, possibly indicative of I/O problems. But, if you are taking advantage of the new indirect checkpoints, which allow you to control when checkpoints occur in order to reduce recovery intervals, you might see different numbers here. Take that into account when monitoring databases with the indirect checkpoint configured.

## Lazy writes/sec

The **Lazy writes/sec** counter records the number of buffers written each second by the buffer manager's lazy write process. This process is where the dirty, aged buffers are removed from the buffer by a system process that frees the memory up for other uses. A dirty, aged buffer is one that has changes and needs to be written to the disk. Higher values on this counter possibly indicate I/O issues or even memory problems. The **Lazy writes/sec** values should consistently be less than 20 for the average system.

## Memory Grants Pending

The **Memory Grants Pending** counter represents the number of processes pending for a memory grant within SQL Server memory. If this counter value is high, then SQL Server is short of memory. Under normal conditions, this counter value should consistently be 0 for most production servers.

Another way to retrieve this value, on the fly, is to run queries against the DMV `sys.dm_exec_query_memory_grants`. A null value in the column **grant\_time** indicates that the process is still waiting for a memory grant. This is one method you can use to troubleshoot query timeouts by identifying that a query (or queries) is waiting on memory in order to execute.

## Target Server Memory (KB) and Total Server Memory (KB)

Target Server Memory (KB) indicates the total amount of dynamic memory SQL Server is willing to consume. Total Server Memory (KB) indicates the amount of memory currently assigned to SQL Server. The Total Server Memory (KB) counter value can be very high if the system is dedicated to SQL Server. If Total Server Memory (KB) is much less than Target Server Memory (KB), then either the SQL Server memory requirement is low, the max server memory configuration parameter of SQL Server is set at too low a value, or the system is in warm-up phase. The *warm-up phase* is the period after SQL Server is started when the database server is in the process of expanding its memory allocation dynamically as more data sets are accessed, bringing more data pages into memory.

You can confirm a low memory requirement from SQL Server by the presence of a large number of free pages, usually 5,000 or more. Also you can directly check the status of memory by querying the DMO `sys.dm_os_ring_buffers`, which returns information about memory allocation within SQL Server.

## Additional Memory Monitoring Tools

While you can get the basis for the behavior of memory within SQL Server from the Performance Monitor counters, once you know that you need to spend time looking at your memory usage, you'll need to take advantage of other tools and tools sets. The following are some of the commonly used reference points for identifying memory issues on a SQL Server system. Some of these tools, while actively used by large numbers of the SQL Server community, are not documented within SQL Server Books Online. This means they are absolutely subject to change or removal.

## DBCC Memorystatus

This command goes into the SQL Server memory and reads out the current allocations. It's a moment-in-time measurement, a snapshot. It gives you a set of measures of where memory is currently allocated. The results from running the command come back as two basic result sets, as you can see in Figure 2-5.

The first data set shows basic allocations of memory and counts of occurrences. For example, the Available Physical Memory is a measure of the memory available on the system where as the Page Faults is just a count of the number of page faults that have occurred.

The second data set shows different memory managers within SQL Server and the amount of memory that they have consumed at the moment that the `MEMORYSTATUS` command was called.

Each of these can be used to understand where memory allocation is occurring within the system. For example, in most systems, most of the time the primary consumer of memory is the buffer cache. You can compare the **Target Committed** value to the **Current Committed** value to understand if you're seeing pressure on the buffer cache. When the Target is higher than the Current, you might be seeing buffer cache problems and need to figure out which process within your currently executing SQL Server processes is using the most memory. This can be done using a Dynamic Management Object.

	Process/System Counts	Value
1	Available Physical Memory	789815296
2	Available Virtual Memory	8789555306496
3	Available Paging File	2682425344
4	Working Set	207495168
5	Percent of Committed Memory in WS	100
6	Page Faults	70197
7	System physical memory high	1
8	System physical memory low	0

	Memory Manager	KB	
1	VM Reserved	6079236	
2	VM Committed	175988	
3	Locked Pages Allocated	0	
4	Large Pages Allocated	0	
5	Emergency Memory	1024	
6	Emergency Memory In ...	16	
7	Target Committed	204800	

**Figure 2-5.** Output of DBCC MEMORYSTATUS

## Dynamic Management Objects

There are a large number of memory-related DMOs within SQL Server. Several of them have been updated with SQL Server 2012. Reviewing all of them is outside the scope of this book. The following four are the most frequently used when determining if you have memory bottlenecks within SQL Server.

### Sys.dm\_os\_memory\_brokers

While most of the memory within SQL Server is allocated to the buffer cache, there are a number of processes within SQL Server that also can, and will, consume memory. These processes expose their memory allocations through this DMO. You can use this to see what processes might be taking resources away from the buffer cache in the event you have other indications of a memory bottleneck.

### Sys.dm\_os\_memory\_clerks

A memory clerk is the process that allocates memory within SQL Server. Looking at what these processes are up to allows you to understand if there are internal memory allocation issues going on within SQL Server that might rob the procedure cache of needed memory. If the Performance Monitor counter for Private Bytes is high, you can determine which parts of the system are being consumed through the DMV.

### Sys.dm\_os\_ring\_buffers

This DMV is not documented within the Books Online, so it is subject to change or removal. This DMV outputs as XML. You can usually read the output by eye, but you may need to implement XQuery to get really sophisticated reads from the ring buffers.

**Table 2-2.** Main Ring Buffers Associated with Memory

Ring Buffer	Ring_buffer_type	Use
Resource Monitor	RING_BUFFER_RESOURCE_MONITOR	As memory allocation changes, notifications of this change are recorded here. This information can be very useful for identifying external memory pressure.
Out Of Memory	RING_BUFFER_OOM	When you get out-of-memory issues, they are recorded here so you can tell what kind of memory action failed.
Memory Broker	RING_BUFFER_MEMORY_BROKER	As the memory internal to SQL Server drops, a low memory notification will force processes to release memory for the buffer. These notifications are recorded here, making this a useful measure for when internal memory pressure occurs.
Buffer Pool	RING_BUFFER_BUFFER_POOL	Notifications of when the buffer pool itself is running out of memory are recorded here. This is just a general indication of memory pressure.

A ring buffer is nothing more than a recorded response to a notification. These are kept within this DMV and accessing it allows you to see things changing within your memory. The main ring buffers associated with memory are listed in Table 2-2.

There are other ring buffers available, but they are not applicable to memory allocation issues.

## Memory Bottleneck Resolutions

When there is high stress on memory, indicated by a large number of hard page faults, you can resolve memory bottleneck using the flowchart shown in Figure 2-6.

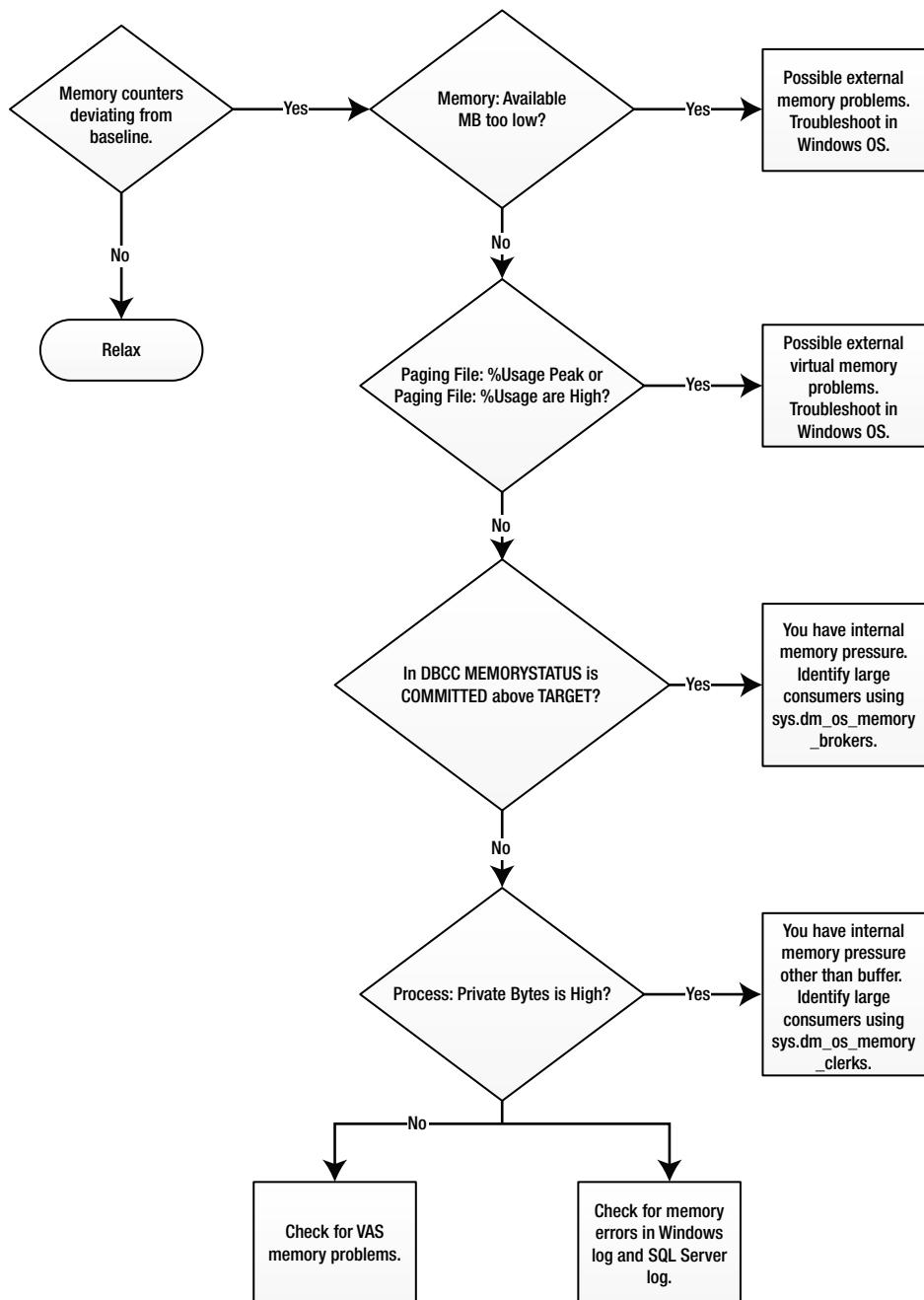
A few of the common resolutions for memory bottlenecks are as follows:

- Optimizing application workload
- Allocating more memory to SQL Server
- Increasing system memory
- Changing from a 32-bit to a 64-bit processor
- Enabling 3GB of process space
- Data Compression

Let's take a look at each of these in turn.

### Optimizing Application Workload

Optimizing application workload is the most effective resolution most of the time, but because of the complexity and challenges involved in this process, it is usually considered last. To identify the memory-intensive queries, capture all the SQL queries using Extended Events (which you will learn how to use in Chapter 3), and then group the trace output on the Reads column. The queries with the highest number of logical reads contribute most often to memory stress, but there is not a linear correlation between the two. You will see how to optimize those queries in more detail throughout this book.

**Figure 2-6.** Memory bottleneck resolution chart

## Allocating More Memory to SQL Server

As you learned in the “SQL Server Memory Management” section, the **max server memory** configuration can limit the maximum size of the SQL Server memory pool. If the memory requirement of SQL Server is more than the max server memory value, which you can tell through the number of hard page faults, then increasing the value will allow the memory pool to grow. To benefit from increasing the max server memory value, ensure that enough physical memory is available in the system.

## Increasing System Memory

The memory requirement of SQL Server depends on the total amount of data processed by SQL activities. It is not directly correlated to the size of the database or the number of incoming SQL queries. For example, if a memory-intensive query performs a cross join between two small tables without any filter criteria to narrow down the result set, it can cause high stress on the system memory.

One of the easiest and quickest resolutions is to simply increase system memory by purchasing and installing more. However, it is still important to find out what is consuming the physical memory because if the application workload is extremely memory intensive, you will soon be limited by the maximum amount of memory a system can access. To identify which queries are using more memory, query the **sys.dm\_exec\_query\_memory\_grants** DMV. Just be careful when running queries against this DMV using a **JOIN** or an **ORDER BY** statement; if your system is already under memory stress, these actions can lead to your query needing its own memory grant.

## Changing from a 32-bit to a 64-bit Processor

Switching the physical server from a 32-bit processor to a 64-bit processor (and the attendant Windows Server software upgrade) radically changes the memory management capabilities of SQL Server. The limitations on SQL Server for memory go from 3GB to a limit of up to 8TB depending on the version of the operating system and the specific processor type.

Prior to SQL Server 2012, it was possible to add up to 64GB of data cache to a SQL Server instance through the use of Address Windowing Extensions. These have now been removed from SQL Server 2012, so a 32-bit instance of SQL Server is limited to accessing only 3GB of memory. Only very small systems should be running 32-bit versions of SQL Server 2012 because of this limitation.

## Data Compression

Data compression has a number of excellent benefits for storage and retrieval of information. It has an added benefit that many people aren’t aware of: while compressed information is stored in memory, it remains compressed. This means more information can be moved while using less system memory, increasing your overall memory throughput. All this does come at some cost to the CPU, so you’ll need to keep an eye on that to be sure you’re not just transferring stress.

## Enabling 3GB of Process Address Space

Standard 32-bit addresses can map a maximum of 4GB of memory. The standard address spaces of 32-bit Windows operating systems processes are therefore limited to 4GB. Out of this 4GB process space, by default the upper 2GB is reserved for the operating system, and the lower 2GB is made available to the application. If you specify a /3GB switch in the boot.ini file of the 32-bit OS, the operating system reserves only 1GB of the address space and the application can access up to 3GB. This is also called *4-gig tuning* (4GT). No new APIs are required for this purpose.

Therefore, on a machine with 4GB of physical memory and the default Windows configuration, you will find available memory of about 2GB or more. To let SQL Server use up to 3GB of the available memory, you can add the **/3GB** switch in the **boot.ini** file as follows:

```
[boot loader]
timeout=30
default=multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(0)partition(1)\WINNT
[operating systems]
multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(0)partition(1)\WINNT=
"Microsoft Windows Server 2008 Advanced Server"
/fastdetect /3GB
```

The **/3GB** switch should not be used for systems with more than 16GB of physical memory, as explained in the following section, or for systems that require a higher amount of kernel memory.

SQL Server 2012 on 64-bit systems can support up to 8TB on an x64 platform. As more memory is available from the OS, the limits imposed by SQL Server are reached. This is without having to use any other switches or extended memory schemes.

## Disk Bottleneck Analysis

SQL Server can have demanding I/O requirements, and since disk speeds are comparatively much slower than memory and processor speeds, a contention in disk resources can significantly degrade SQL Server performance. Analysis and resolution of any disk resource bottleneck can improve SQL Server performance significantly.

### Disk Counters

To analyze disk performance, you can use the counters shown in Table 2-3.

The **PhysicalDisk** counters represent the activities on a physical disk. **LogicalDisk** counters represent logical subunits (or partitions) created on a physical disk. If you create two partitions, say **R:** and **S:** on a physical disk,

**Table 2-3.** Performance Monitor Counters to Analyze I/O Pressure

Object[Instance[,InstanceN]]	Counter	Description	Value
PhysicalDisk (Data-disk, Log-disk)	% Disk Time	Percentage of time disk was busy	Average value < 85%
	Current Disk Queue Length	Number of outstanding disk requests at the time performance data is collected	Average value < 2 per disk
	Avg. Disk Queue Length	Average number of queued disk requests during the sample interval	Average value < 2 per disk
	Disk Transfers/sec	Rate of read/write operations on disk	Maximum value < 400 per disk
	Disk Bytes/sec	Amount of data transfer to/from per disk per second	Maximum value < 800MB per second
	Avg. Disk Sec/Read	Average time in ms to read from disk	Average value < 10 ms
	Avg. Disk Sec/Write	Average time in ms to write to disk	Average value < 10 ms

then you can monitor the disk activities of the individual logical disks using logical disk counters. However, because a disk bottleneck ultimately occurs on the physical disk, not on the logical disk, it is usually preferable to use the **PhysicalDisk** counters.

Note that for a hardware redundant array of independent disks (RAID) subsystem (see the “Using a RAID Array” section for more on RAID), the counters treat the array as a single physical disk. For example, even if you have ten disks in a RAID configuration, they will all be represented as one physical disk to the operating system, and subsequently you will have only one set of **PhysicalDisk** counters for that RAID subsystem. The same point applies to storage area network (SAN) disks (see the “Using a SAN System” section for specifics). Because of this, some of the numbers represented in the previous tables may be radically lower (or higher) than what your system can support.

Take all these numbers as general guidelines for monitoring your disks and adjust the numbers to take into account the fact that technology is constantly shifting and you may see very different performance as the hardware improves. We’re moving into more and more solid state drives (SSD) and even SSD arrays that make disk I/O operator orders of magnitude faster. Where we’re not moving in SSD, we’re taking advantage of iSCSI interfaces. As you introduce or work with these types of hardware, keep in mind that these numbers are more in line with platter style disk drives.

## % Disk Time

The **% Disk Time** counter monitors the percentage of time the disk is busy with read/write activities. This is a good indicator of load, but not a specific indicator of issues with performance. Record this information as part of the basic base line in order to compare values to understand when disk access is radically changing.

## Current Disk Queue Length

Current Disk Queue Length is the number of requests outstanding on the disk subsystem at the time the performance data is collected. It includes requests in service at the time of the snapshot. A disk subsystem will have only one disk queue. With modern systems including RAID, SAN, and other types of arrays, there can be a very large number of disks and controllers facilitating the transfer of information to and from the disk. All this hardware makes measuring the disk queue length less important than it was previously, but this measure is still extremely useful as a measure of load on the system. You’ll want to know when the queue length varies dramatically because it will be an indication then of I/O issues. But, unlike the old days, there is no way to provide a value that you can compare your system against. Instead, you need to plan on capturing this information and using it as a comparison point over time.

## Disk Transfers/sec

Disk Transfers/sec monitors the rate of read and write operations on the disk. A typical hard disk drive today can do about 180 disk transfers per second for sequential I/O (IOPS) and 100 disk transfers per second for random I/O. In the case of random I/O, Disk Transfers/sec is lower because more disk arm and head movements are involved. OLTP workloads, which are workloads for doing mainly singleton operations, small operations, and random access, are typically constrained by disk transfers per second. So, in the case of an OLTP workload, you are more constrained by the fact that a disk can do only 100 disk transfers per second than by its throughput specification of 1000MB per second.

**Note** An SSD disk can be anywhere from around 5,000 IOPS to as much as 500,000 IOPS for some over the very high end SSD systems. Your monitoring of Disk Transfers/sec will need to scale accordingly.

Because of the inherent slowness of a disk, it is recommended that you keep disk transfers per second as low as possible. You will see how to do this next.

## Disk Bytes/sec

The **Disk Bytes/sec** counter monitors the rate at which bytes are transferred to or from the disk during read or write operations. A typical disk can transfer about 1000MB per second. Generally, OLTP applications are not constrained by the disk transfer capacity of the disk subsystem since the OLTP applications access small amounts of data in individual database requests. If the amount of data transfer exceeds the capacity of the disk subsystem, then a backlog starts developing on the disk subsystem, as reflected by the **Disk Queue Length** counters.

Again, these numbers may be much higher for SSD access since it's largely limited by the latency caused by the drive to host interface.

## Avg. Disk Sec/Read and Avg. Disk Sec/Write

Avg. Disk Sec/Read and Avg. Disk Sec/Write track the average amount of time it takes in milliseconds to read from or write to a disk. Having an understanding of just how well the disks are handling the writes and reads that they receive can be a very strong indicator of where problems lie. If it's taking more than about 10 ms to move the data from or to your disk, you may need to take a look at the hardware and configuration to be sure everything is working correctly. You'll need to get even better response times for the transaction log to perform well.

## Additional I/O Monitoring Tools

Just like with all the other tools, you'll need to supplement the information you gather from Performance Monitor with data available in other sources. The really good information for I/O and disk issues are all in DMOs.

### Sys.dm\_io\_virtual\_file\_stats

This is a function that returns information about the files that make up a database. You call it something like the following:

```
SELECT *
FROM sys.dm_io_virtual_file_stats(DB_ID('AdventureWorks2008R2'), 2) AS divfs ;
```

It returns several interesting columns of information about the file. The most interesting things are the stall data, time that users are waiting on different I/O operations. First, **io\_stall\_read\_ms** represents the amount of time in milliseconds that users waiting for reads. Then there is **io\_stall\_write\_ms**, which shows you the amount of time that write operations have had to wait on this file within the database. You can also look at the general number, **io\_stall**, which represents all waits on I/O for the file. To make these numbers meaningful, you get one more value, **sample\_ms**, which shows the amount of time measured. You can compare this value to the others to get a sense of the degree that I/O issues are holding up your system. Further, you can narrow this down to a particular file so you know what's slowing things down in the log or in a particular data file. This is an extremely useful measure for determining the existence of an I/O bottleneck. It doesn't help that much to identify the particular bottleneck.

## Sys.dm\_os\_wait\_stats

This is a generally useful DMO that shows aggregate information about waits on the system. To determine if you have an I/O bottleneck you can take advantage of this DMO by querying it like this:

```
SELECT *
FROM    sys.dm_os_wait_stats AS dows
WHERE   wait_type LIKE 'PAGEIOLATCH%' ;
```

What you're looking at are the various I/O latch operations that are causing waits to occur. Like the **sys.dm\_io\_virtual\_status**, you don't get a specific query from this DMO, but it does identify whether or not you have a bottleneck in I/O. Like many of the performance counters, you can't simply look for a value here. You need to compare the current values to a baseline value in order to arrive at your current situation.

When you run this query, you get a count of the waits that have occurred as well as an aggregation of the total wait time. You also get a max value for these waits so you know what the longest one was since it's possible that a single wait could have caused the majority of the wait time.

## Disk Bottleneck Resolutions

A few of the common disk bottleneck resolutions are as follows:

- Optimizing application workload
- Using a faster disk drive
- Using a RAID array
- Using a SAN system
- Using SSD disks
- Aligning disks properly
- Using a battery-backed controller cache
- Adding system memory
- Creating multiple files and filegroups
- Isolating high I/O files from one another
- Moving the log file to a separate physical drive
- Using partitioned tables

I'll now walk you through each of these resolutions in turn.

## Optimizing Application Workload

I cannot stress enough how important it is to optimize an application's workload in resolving a performance issue. The queries with the highest number of reads will be the ones that cause a great deal of disk I/O. I'll cover the strategies for optimizing those queries in more detail throughout the rest of this book.

## Using a Faster I/O Path

One of the easiest resolutions, and one that you will adopt most of the time, is to use drives, controllers, and other architecture with faster disk transfers per second. However, you should not just upgrade disk drives without further investigation; you need to find out what is causing the stress on the disk.

## Using a RAID Array

One way of obtaining disk I/O parallelism is to create a single pool of drives to serve all SQL Server database files, excluding transaction log files. The pool can be a single RAID array, which is represented in Windows Server 2008 as a single physical disk drive. The effectiveness of a drive pool depends on the configuration of the RAID disks.

Out of all available RAID configurations, the most commonly used RAID configurations are the following (also shown in Figure 2-7):

- *RAID 0*: Striping with no fault tolerance
- *RAID 1*: Mirroring
- *RAID 5*: Striping with parity
- *RAID 1+0*: Striping with mirroring

### Raid 0

Since this RAID configuration has no fault tolerance, you can use it only in situations where the reliability of data is not a concern. The failure of any disk in the array will cause complete data loss in the disk subsystem. Therefore, you can't use it for any data file or transaction log file that constitutes a database, except for the system temporary database called `tempdb`. The number of I/Os per disk in RAID 0 is represented by the following equation:

$$\text{I/Os per disk} = (\text{Reads} + \text{Writes}) / \text{Number of disks in the array}$$

In this equation, **Reads** is the number of read requests to the disk subsystem and **Writes** is the number of write requests to the disk subsystem.

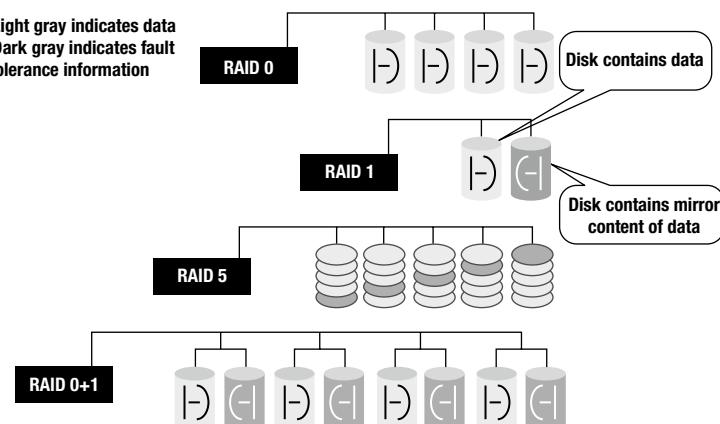


Figure 2-7. RAID configurations

## Raid 1

RAID 1 provides high fault tolerance for critical data by mirroring the data disk onto a separate disk. It can be used where the complete data can be accommodated in one disk only. Database transaction log files for user databases, operating system files, and SQL Server system databases (`master` and `msdb`) are usually small enough to use RAID 1.

The number of I/Os per disk in RAID 1 is represented by the following equation:

$$\text{I/Os per disk} = (\text{Reads} + 2 \times \text{Writes}) / 2$$

## Raid 5

RAID 5 is an acceptable option in many cases. It provides reasonable fault tolerance by effectively using only one extra disk to save the computed parity of the data in other disks, as shown in Figure 2-7. When there is a disk failure in RAID 5 configuration, I/O performance becomes terrible, although the system does remain usable while operating with the failed drive.

Any data where writes make up more than 10 percent of the total disk requests is not a good candidate for RAID 5. Thus, use RAID 5 on read-only volumes or volumes with a low percentage of disk writes.

The number of I/Os per disk in RAID 5 is represented by the following equation:

$$\text{I/Os per disk} = (\text{Reads} + 4 \times \text{Writes}) / \text{Number of disks in the array}$$

As shown in this equation, the write operations on the RAID 5 disk subsystem are magnified four times. For each incoming write request, the following are the four corresponding I/O requests on the disk subsystem:

- One read I/O to read existing data from the data disk whose content is to be modified.
- One read I/O to read existing parity information from the corresponding parity disk.
- One write I/O to write the new data to the data disk whose content is to be modified.
- One write I/O to write the new parity information to the corresponding parity disk.

Therefore, the four I/Os for each write request consist of two read I/Os and two write I/Os.

In an OLTP database, all the data modifications are immediately written to the transaction log file as part of the database transaction, but the data in the data file itself is synchronized with the transaction log file content asynchronously in batch operations. This operation is managed by the internal process of SQL Server called the *checkpoint process*. The frequency of this operation can be controlled by using the recovery interval (min) configuration parameter of SQL Server. Just remember that the timing of checkpoints can be controlled through the use of indirect check points introduced in SQL Server 2012.

Because of the continuous write operation in the transaction log file for a highly transactional OLTP database, placing transaction log files on a RAID 5 array will significantly degrade the array's performance. Although you should not place the transactional log files on a RAID 5 array, the data files may be placed on RAID 5 since the write operations to the data files are intermittent and batched together to improve the efficiency of the write operation.

## Raid 6

RAID 6 is an added layer on top of RAID 5. An extra parity block is added to the storage of RAID 5. This doesn't negatively affect reads in any way. This means that, for reads, performance is the same as RAID 5. There is an added overhead for the additional write, but it's not that large. This extra parity block was added because RAID arrays are becoming so large these days that data loss is inevitable. The extra parity block acts as a check against this in order to better ensure that your data is safe.

## RAID 1+0 (RAID 10)

RAID 1+0 (also referred to as 0+1 and 10) configuration offers a high degree of fault tolerance by mirroring every data disk in the array. It is a much more expensive solution than RAID 5, since double the number of data disks are required to provide fault tolerance. This RAID configuration should be used where a large volume is required to save data and more than 10 percent of disk requests are writes. Since RAID 1+0 supports *split seeks* (the ability to distribute the read operations onto the data disk and the mirror disk and then converge the two data streams), read performance is also very good. Thus, use RAID 1+0 wherever performance is critical.

The number of I/Os per disk in RAID 1+0 is represented by the following equation:

$$\text{I/Os per disk} = (\text{Reads} + 2 \times \text{Writes}) / \text{Number of disks in the array}$$

## Using a SAN System

SANs remain largely the domain of large-scale enterprise systems, although the cost is coming down. A SAN can be used to increase performance of a storage subsystem by simply providing more spindles and disk drives to read from and write to. A “drive” as seen by the operating system is striped across multiple redundant drives in a SAN in a manner similar to that of RAID 5 but without the overhead of RAID 5 or the performance loss caused by disk failures. Because of their size, complexity, and cost, SANs are not necessarily a good solution in all cases. Also, depending on the amount of data, direct attached storage (DAS) can be configured to run faster. The principal strength of SAN systems is not reflected in performance but rather in the areas of scalability, availability, and maintenance.

Another area where SANs are growing are SAN devices that use iSCSI (internet Small Computing System Interface) to connect a device to the network. Because of how the iSCSI interface works, you can make a network device appear to be locally attached storage. In fact, it can work nearly as fast as locally attached storage, but you get to consolidate your storage systems.

## Using SSD Disks

Solid State Drives (SSD) are taking the disk performance world by storm. These drives use memory instead of spinning disks to store information. They’re quiet, lower power, and supremely fast. However, they’re also quite expensive when compared to hard disk drives (HDD). At this writing, it costs approximately \$.04/GB for a HDD and \$1.44/GB for an SSD. But that cost is offset by an increase in speed from approximately 100 operations per second to 5,000 operations per second and up. You can also put SSDs into arrays through a SAN or RAID, further increasing the performance benefits. There are a limited number of write operations possible on an SSD drive, but the failure rate is no higher than that from HDDs so far. For a hardware only solution, implementing SSDs is probably the best operation you can do for a system that is I/O bound.

## Aligning Disks Properly

Windows Server 2008 aligns disks as part of the install process, so modern servers should not be running into this issue. However, if you have an older server, this can still be a concern. You’ll also need to worry about this if you’re moving volumes from a pre-Windows Server 2008 system. You will need to reformat these in order to get the alignment set appropriately. The way data is stored on a disk is in a series of *sectors* (also referred to as *blocks*) that are stored on tracks. A disk is out of alignment when the size of the track, determined by the vendor, consists of a number of sectors different from the default size that you’re writing to. This will mean that one sector will be written correctly, but the next one will have to cross two tracks. This can more than double the amount of I/O required to write or read from the disk. The key is to align the partition so that you’re storing the correct number of sectors for the track.

## Adding System Memory

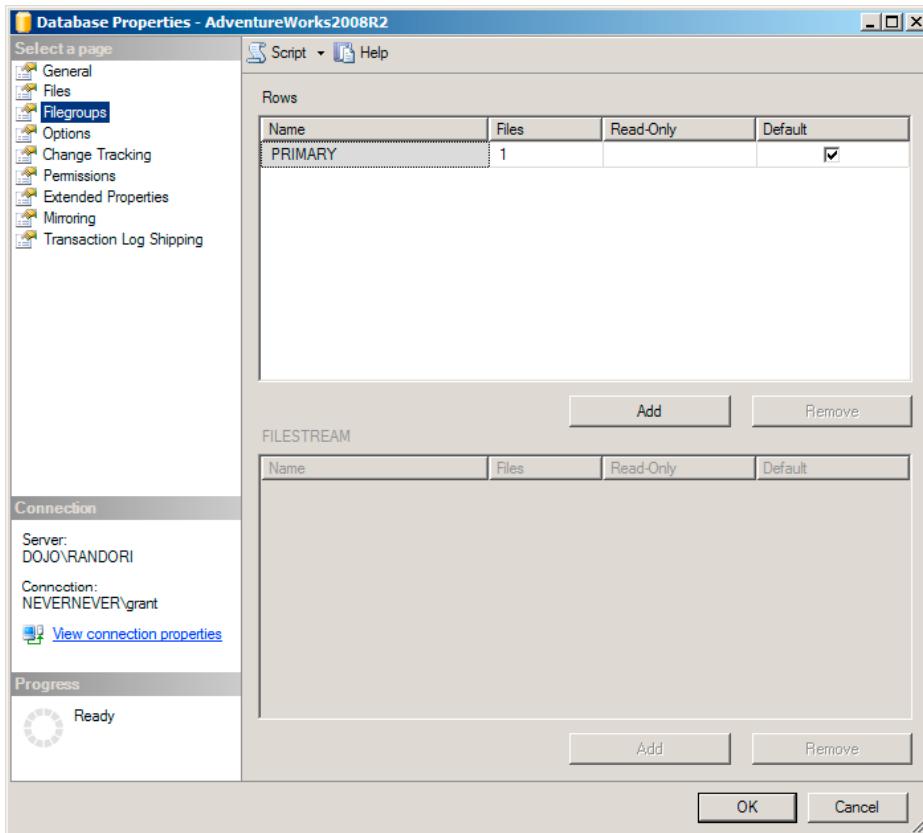
When physical memory is scarce, the system starts writing the contents of memory back to disk and reading smaller blocks of data more frequently, causing a lot of paging. The less memory the system has, the more the disk subsystem is used. This can be resolved using the memory bottleneck resolutions enumerated in the previous section.

## Creating Multiple Files and Filegroups

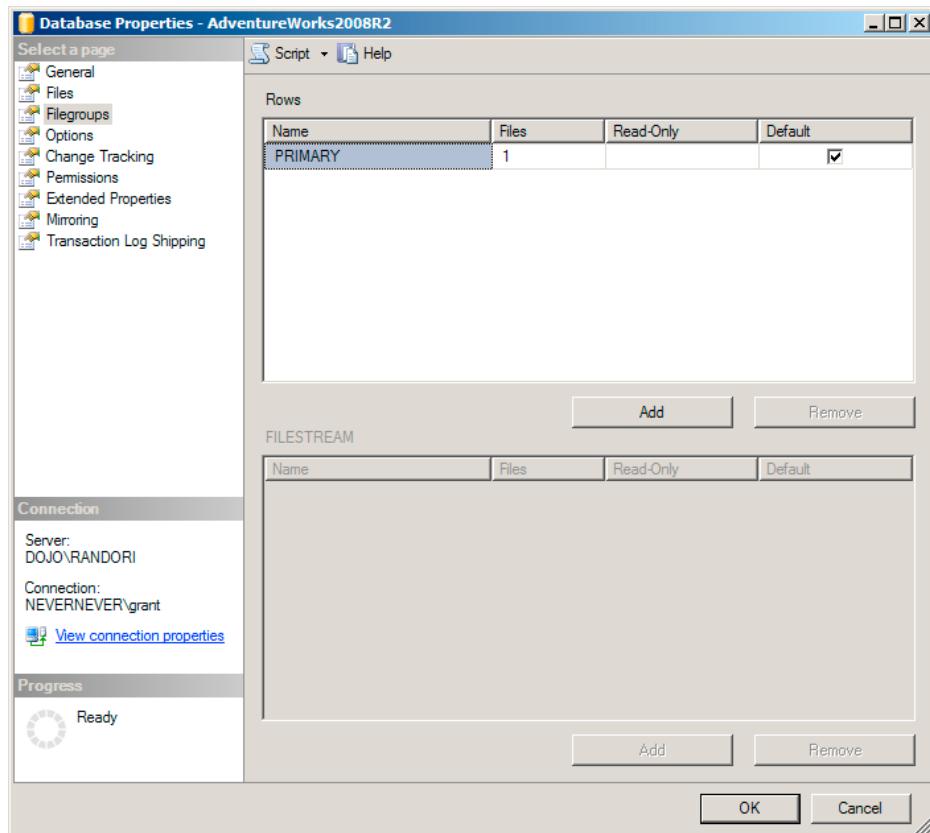
In SQL Server, each user database consists of one or more data files and usually one transaction log file. The data files belonging to a database can be grouped together in one or more filegroups for administrative and data allocation/placement purposes. For example, if a data file is placed in a separate filegroup, then write access to all the tables in the filegroup can be controlled collectively by making the filegroup read-only (transaction log files do not belong to any filegroup).

You can create a filegroup for a database from SQL Server Management Studio, as shown in Figure 2-8. The filegroups of a database are presented in the Filegroups pane of the Database Properties dialog box.

In Figure 2-8, you can see that a single filegroup is created by default with AdventureWorks2008. You can add multiple files to multiple filegroups distributed across drives so that work can be done in parallel across the groups and files.



**Figure 2-8.** Filegroups configuration

**Figure 2-9.** Data files configuration

You can add a data file to a filegroup in the Database Properties dialog box in the Files window by selecting from the drop-down list, as shown in Figure 2-9.

You can also do this programmatically, as follows:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 ADD FILEGROUP Indexes ;
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 ADD FILE (NAME = AdventureWorks2008_Data2j,
    FILENAME = 'C:\DATA\AdventureWorks2008_2.ndf',
    SIZE = 1mb,
    FILEGROWTH = 10%) TO FILEGROUP Indexes;
```

Using multiple files and filegroups can help improve the performance of join operations. By separating tables that are frequently joined into separate filegroups and then putting files within the filegroups on separate disks or LUNs, the separated I/O paths can result in improved performance. For example, consider the following query:

```
SELECT jc.JobCandidateID,
    e.ModifiedDate
FROM HumanResources.JobCandidate AS jc
INNER JOIN HumanResources.Employee AS e
ON jc.BusinessEntityID = e.BusinessEntityID;
```

If the tables `HumanResources.JobCandidate` and `Person.BusinessEntity` are placed in separate filegroups containing one file each, the disks can be read from multiple I/O paths, increasing performance.

It is recommended for performance and recovery purposes that, if multiple filegroups are to be used, the primary filegroup should be used only for system objects and secondary filegroups should be used only for user objects. This approach improves the ability to recover from corruption. The recoverability of a database is higher if the primary data file and the log files are intact. Use the primary filegroup for system objects only, and store all user-related objects on a secondary filegroup.

Spreading a database into multiple files, even on the same drive, makes it easy to move the database files onto separate drives, making future disk upgrades easier. For example, to move a user database file (`AdventureWorks2008_2.ndf`) to a new disk subsystem (F:), you can follow these steps.

1. Detach the user database as follows :

```
USE master;
GO
sp_detach_db 'AdventureWorks2008R2';
GO
```

2. Copy the data file `AdventureWorks2008_2.ndf` to a folder F:\Data\ on the new disk subsystem.
3. Reattach the user database by referring files at appropriate locations, as shown here:

```
USE master;
GO
sp_attach_db 'AdventureWorks2008R2'
, 'R:\DATA\AdventureWorks2008.mdf'
, 'R:\DATA\AdventureWorks2008_2.ndf'
, 'S:\LOG\AdventureWorks2008.ldf ';
GO
```

4. To verify the files belonging to a database, execute the following commands:

```
USE Adventureworks2008R2
GO
SELECT * FROM sys.database_files
GO
```

## Placing the Table and Index on Separate Disks

SQL Server can take advantage of multiple filegroups by accessing tables and corresponding nonclustered indexes using separate I/O paths. A nonclustered index can be created on a specific filegroup as follows:

```
CREATE INDEX IndexBirthDate
ON HumanResources.Employee (BirthDate)
ON Indexes;
```

This new index on the `HumanResources.Employee` table would be created on a filegroup named `Indexes`.

**Tip** The nonclustered index and other types of indexes are explained in [Chapter 4](#).

## Moving the Log Files to a Separate Physical Disk

SQL Server log files should always, when possible, be located on a separate hard disk drive from all other SQL Server database files. Transaction log activity primarily consists of sequential write I/O, unlike the nonsequential (or random) I/O required for the data files. Separating transaction log activity from other nonsequential disk I/O activity can result in I/O performance improvements because it allows the hard disk drives containing log files to concentrate on sequential I/O. But, remember, there are random transaction log reads and the data reads and writes can be sequential as much as the transaction log. There is just a strong tendency of transaction log writes to be sequential.

The major portion of time required to access data from a hard disk is spent on the physical movement of the disk spindle head to locate the data. Once the data is located, the data is read electronically, which is much faster than the physical movement of the head. With only sequential I/O operations on the log disk, the spindle head of the log disk can write to the log disk with a minimum of physical movement. If the same disk is used for data files, however, the spindle head has to move to the correct location before writing to the log file. This increases the time required to write to the log file and thereby hurts performance.

Even with an SSD disk, separating the storage means the work will be distributed to multiple locations, improving the performance.

Furthermore, for SQL Server with multiple OLTP databases, the transaction log files should be physically separated from each other on different physical drives to improve performance. An exception to this requirement is a read-only database or a database with very few database changes. Since no online changes are made to the read-only database, no write operations are performed on the log file. Therefore, having the log file on a separate disk is not required for the read-only databases.

As a general rule of thumb, you should try, where possible, to isolate files with the highest I/O from other files with high I/O. This will reduce contention on the disks and possibly improve performance. To identify those files using the most I/O, reference `sys.dm_io_virtual_file_stats`.

## Partitioning Tables

In addition to simply adding files to filegroups and letting SQL Server distribute the data between them, it's possible to define a horizontal segmentation of data called a *partition* so that data is divided up between multiple files by the partition. A filtered set of data is a *segment*; for example, if the partition is by month, the segment of data is any given month. Creating a partition moves the segment of data to a particular filegroup and only that filegroup. This provides a massive increase in speed because, when querying against well-defined partitions, only the files with the partitions of data you're interested in will be accessed during a given query. If you assume for a moment that data is partitioned by month, then each month's data file can be set to read-only as each month ends. That read-only status means that no locking will occur on a file as read queries are run against it, further increasing the performance of your queries. Just remember that partitions are primarily a manageability feature. While you can see some performance benefits from them in certain situations, it shouldn't be counted on as part of partitioning the data. SQL Server Denali supports up to 15,000 partitions.

## Processor Bottleneck Analysis

SQL Server 2008 makes heavy use of any processor resource available. You can use the Performance Monitor counters in Table 2-4 to analyze pressure on the processor resource.

I'll now walk you through these counters in more detail.

**Table 2-4.** Performance Monitor Counters to Analyze CPU Pressure

Object[Instance], InstanceN]	Counter	Description	Value
Processor (_Total)%	<b>Processor Time</b>	Percentage of time processor was busy	Average value < 80%
	<b>% Privileged</b>	Time percentage of processor time spent in privileged mode	Average value < 10%
System	<b>Processor Queue Length</b>	Number of requests outstanding on the processor	Average value < 2
	<b>Context Switches/sec</b>	Rate at which processor is switched per processor from one thread to another	Average value < 2,000
SQL Server:SQL Statistics	<b>Batch Requests/sec</b>	SQL command batches received per second	Based on your standard workload
	<b>SQL Compilations/sec</b>	Number of times SQL is compiled	Based on your standard workload
	<b>SQL Recompilations/sec</b>	Number of Recompiles	

## % Processor Time

% Processor Time should not be consistently high (greater than 75 percent). The effect of any sustained processor time greater than 90 percent is the same as that of 100 percent. If % Processor Time is consistently high and disk and network counter values are low, your first priority must be to reduce the stress on the processor. Just remember that the numbers suggested are simply suggestions. Honest people can disagree with these numbers for valid reasons. Use them as a starting point for evaluating your system, not as a hard and fast specific recommendation.

For example, if **% Processor Time** is 85 percent and **% Disk Time** is 50 percent, it is quite likely that a major part of the processor time is spent on managing the disk activities. This will be reflected in the **% Privileged Time** counter of the processor, as explained in the next section. In that case, it will be advantageous to optimize the disk bottleneck first. Further, remember that the disk bottleneck in turn can be because of a memory bottleneck, as explained earlier in the chapter.

You can track processor time as an aggregate of all the processors on the machine, or you can track the percentage utilization individually to particular processors. This allows you to segregate the data collection in the event that SQL Server runs on three processors of a four-processor machine. Remember, you might be seeing one processor maxed out while another processor has very little load. The average value wouldn't reflect reality in that case.

## % Privileged Time

Processing on a Windows server is done in two modes: *user mode* and *privileged* (or *kernel*) mode. All system-level activities, including disk access, are done in privileged mode. If you find that **% Privileged Time** on a dedicated SQL Server system is 20 to 25 percent or more, then the system is probably doing a lot of I/O—likely more than you need. The **% Privileged Time** counter on a dedicated SQL Server system should be at most 5 to 10 percent.

## Processor Queue Length

Processor Queue Length is the number of threads in the processor queue. (There is a single processor queue, even on computers with multiple processors.) Unlike the disk counters, the Processor Queue Length counter does not read threads that are already running. On systems with lower CPU utilization, the Processor Queue Length counter is typically 0 or 1.

A sustained **Processor Queue Length** counter of greater than 2 generally indicates processor congestion. Because of multiple processors, you may need to take into account the number of schedulers dealing with the processor queue length. A processor queue length more than two times the number of schedulers (usually 1:1 with processors) can also indicate a processor bottleneck. Although a high **% Processor Time** counter indicates a busy processor, a sustained high **Processor Queue Length** counter is a more certain indicator. If the recommended value is exceeded, this generally indicates that there are more threads ready to run than the current number of processors can service in an optimal way.

## Context Switches/sec

The **Context Switches/sec** counter monitors the combined rate at which all processors on the computer are switched from one thread to another. A context switch occurs when a running thread voluntarily relinquishes the processor, is preempted by a higher-priority ready thread, or switches between user mode and privileged mode to use an executive or a subsystem service. It is the sum of **Thread:Context Switches/sec** for all threads running on all processors in the computer, and it is measured in numbers of switches.

A figure of 300 to 2,000 **Context Switches/sec** per processor is excellent to fair. Abnormally high rates, greater than 20,000 per second, can be caused by page faults due to memory starvation.

## Batch Requests/sec

Batch Requests/sec gives you a good indicator of just how much load is being placed on the system, which has a direct correlation to how much load is being placed on the processor. Since you could see a lot of low-cost queries on your system or a few high-cost queries, you can't look at this number by itself but must reference the other counters defined in this section; 10,000 requests in a second would be considered a busy system. Greater values may be cause for concern. The best way to know which value has meaning within your own systems is to establish a baseline and then monitor from there. Just remember that a high number here is not necessarily cause for concern. If all your other resources are in hand and you're sustaining a high number of batch requests/sec, it just means your server is busy.

## SQL Compilations/sec

The **SQL Compilations/sec** counter shows both batch compiles and statement recompiles as part of its aggregation. This number can be extremely high when a server is first turned on (or after a failover or any other startup type event), but it will stabilize over time. Once stable, spikes in compilations different from a baseline measure is cause for concern and will certainly manifest as problems in the processor. If you are working with some type of object relational mapping engine, such as nHibernate or Entity Framework, a high number of compilations might be normal. [Chapter 9](#) covers SQL compilation in detail.

## SQL Recompilations/sec

SQL Recompilations/sec is a measure of the recompiles of both batches and statements. A high number of recompiles will lead to processor stress. Because statement recompiles are part of this count, it can be much higher than in versions of SQL Server prior to 2005. [Chapter 10](#) covers query recompilation in detail.

## Other Tools for Measuring CPU Performance

You can use the DMOs to capture information about your CPU as well. The information in these DMOs will have to be captured by running the query and then keeping the information as part of your baseline measurement.

### Sys.dm\_os\_wait\_stats

Wait statistics are a good way to understand if there are bottlenecks on the system. You can't simply say something greater than X is a bad number, though. You need to gather metrics over time in order to understand what represents normal on your system. The deviations from that are interesting. Queries against this DMO that look for signal wait time will be indications of CPU bottlenecks.

### Sys.dm\_os\_workers and Sys.dm\_osSchedulers

These DMOs display the worker and scheduler threads within the Windows operating system. Running queries against these regularly will allow you to get counts of the number of processes that are in a runnable state. This is an excellent indication of processor load.

## Processor Bottleneck Resolutions

A few of the common processor bottleneck resolutions are as follows:

- Optimizing application workload
- Eliminating or reducing excessive compiles/recompiles
- Using more or faster processors
- Using a large L2/L3 cache
- Running with more efficient controllers/drivers
- Not running unnecessary software

Let's consider each of these resolutions in turn.

### Optimizing Application Workload

To identify the processor-intensive queries, capture all the SQL queries using Extended Events sessions (which I will discuss in the next chapter), and then group the output on the CPU column. The queries with the highest amount of CPU time contribute the most to the CPU stress. You should then analyze and optimize those queries to reduce stress on the CPU. You can also query directly against the **sys.dm\_exec\_query\_stats** or **sys.dm\_exec\_procedure\_stats** dynamic management views to see immediate issues in real time. Finally, using both a query hash and a query plan hash, you can identify and tune common queries or common execution plans (this is discussed in detail in [Chapter 9](#)). Most of the rest of the chapters in this book are concerned with optimizing application workload.

## Eliminating Excessive Compiles/Recompiles

A certain number of query compiles and recompiles is simply to be expected, especially, as already noted, when working with ORM tools. It's when there is a large number of these over sustained periods that a problem exists. It's also worth noting the ratio between them. A high number of compiles and a very low number of recompiles means that few queries are being reused within the system (query reuse is covered in detail in [Chapter 9](#)). A high number of recompiles will cause high processor use. Methods for addressing recompiles are covered in [Chapter 10](#).

## Using More or Faster Processors

One of the easiest resolutions, and one that you will adopt most of the time, is to increase system processing power. However, because of the high cost involved in a processor upgrade, you should first optimize CPU-intensive operations as much as possible.

The system's processing power can be increased by increasing the power of individual processors or by adding more processors. When you have a high **% Processor Time** counter and a low **Processor Queue Length** counter, it makes sense to increase the power of individual processors. In the case of both a high **% Processor Time** counter and a high **Processor Queue Length** counter, you should consider adding more processors. Increasing the number of processors allows the system to execute more requests simultaneously.

## Using a Large L2/L3 Cache

Modern processors have become so much faster than memory that they need at least two levels of memory cache to reduce latency. On Pentium-class machines, the fast L1 cache holds 8KB of data and 8KB of instructions, while the slower L2 cache holds up to 6MB of mixed code and data. New processors are shipping with an L3 cache on top of the others varying in size from 6MiB to 256MiB and 2MB (MiB refers to *mebibyte*, a binary representation,  $2^{20}$ , that is very similar in size to but not exactly the same as a megabyte, which is  $10^6$ ). References to content found in the L1 cache cost one cycle, references to the L2/L3 cache cost four to seven cycles, and references to the main memory cost dozens of processor cycles. With the increase in processing power, the latter figure will soon exceed 100 cycles. In many ways, the cache is like small, fast, virtual memory inside the processor.

Database engines like L2/L3 caches because they keep processing off the system bus. The processor does not have to go through the system bus to access memory; it can work out of the L2/L3 cache. Not having enough L2/L3 cache can cause the processor to wait a longer period of time for the data/code to move from the main memory to the L2/L3 cache. A processor with a high clock speed but a slow L2/L3 cache may waste a large number of CPU cycles waiting on the small L2/L3 cache. A large L2/L3 cache helps maximize the use of CPU cycles for actual processing instead of waiting on the L2/L3 cache.

Today, it is very common to have megabyte caches on four-way systems. With new four- and eight-way systems, you will often get up to a 6MB L2 cache and, as mentioned earlier, 256MiB on L3. For example, sometimes you may get a performance improvement of 20 percent or more simply by using a 512KB L2 cache instead of a 256KB L2 cache.

## Running More Efficient Controllers/Drivers

There is a big difference in **% Privileged Time** consumption between different controllers and controller drivers on the market today. The techniques used by controller drivers to do I/O are quite different and consume different amounts of CPU time. If you can change to a controller that frees up 4 to 5 percent of **% Privileged Time**, you can improve performance.

## Not Running Unnecessary Software

Corporate policy frequently requires virus checking software be installed on the server. You can also have other products running on the server. When possible, no unnecessary software should be running on the same server as SQL Server. Exterior applications that have nothing to do with maintaining the Windows Server or SQL Server are best placed on a different machine.

## Network Bottleneck Analysis

In SQL Server OLTP production environments, you find few performance issues that are because of problems with the network. Most of the network issues you face in the OLTP environment are in fact hardware or driver limitations or issues with switches or routers. Most of these issues can be best diagnosed with the Network Monitor tool. However, Performance Monitor also provides objects that collect data on network activity, as shown in Table 2-5.

### Bytes Total/sec

You can use the **Bytes Total/sec** counter to determine how the network interface card (NIC) or network adapter is performing. The **Bytes Total/sec** counter should report high values to indicate a large number of successful transmissions. Compare this value with that reported by the **Network Interface\Current Bandwidth** performance counter, which reflects each adapter's bandwidth.

To allow headroom for spikes in traffic, you should usually average no more than 50 percent of capacity. If this number is close to the capacity of the connection and if processor and memory use are moderate, then the connection may well be a problem.

### % Net Utilization

The **% Net Utilization** counter represents the percentage of network bandwidth in use on a network segment. The threshold for this counter depends on the type of network. For Ethernet networks, for example, 30 percent is the recommended threshold when SQL Server is on a shared network hub. For SQL Server on a dedicated full-duplex network, even though near 100 percent usage of the network is acceptable, it is advantageous to keep the network utilization below an acceptable threshold to keep room for the spikes in the load.

**Table 2-5.** Performance Monitor Counters to Analyze Network Pressure

Object\Instance[,InstanceN]	Counter	Description	Value
Network Interface(Network card)	<b>Bytes Total/sec</b>	Rate at which bytes are transferred on the NIC	Average value < 50% of NIC capacity
Network Segment	<b>% Net Utilization</b>	Percentage of network bandwidth in use on a network segment	Average value < 80% of network bandwidth

**Note** You must install the Network Monitor Driver to collect performance data using the Network Segment object counters.

---

In Windows Server 2008, you can install the Network Monitor Driver from the local area connection properties for the network adapter. The Network Monitor Driver is available in the network protocol list of network components for the network adapter.

## Network Bottleneck Resolutions

A few of the common network bottleneck resolutions are as follows:

- Optimizing application workload
- Adding network adapters
- Moderating and avoiding interruptions

Let's consider these resolutions in more detail.

### Optimizing Application Workload

To optimize network traffic between a database application and a database server, make the following design changes in the application:

- Instead of sending a long SQL string, create a stored procedure for the SQL query. Then, you just need to send over the network the name of the stored procedure and its parameters.
- Group multiple database requests into one stored procedure. Then, only one database request is required across the network for the set of SQL queries implemented in the stored procedure.
- Request a small data set. Do not request table columns that are not used in the application logic.
- Move data-intensive business logic into the database as stored procedures or database triggers to reduce network round-trips.
- If data doesn't change frequently, try caching the information on the application instead of frequently calling the database for information that is going to be exactly the same as the last call.

## SQL Server Overall Performance

To analyze the overall performance of a SQL Server, besides examining hardware resource utilization, you should also examine some general aspects of SQL Server itself. You can use the performance counters presented in Table 2-6.

Let's take a look at each of these counters in context.

**Table 2-6.** Performance Monitor Counters to Analyze Generic SQL Pressure

Object([Instance[, InstanceN]])	Counter
SQLServer:Access Methods	FreeSpace Scans/sec
	Full Scans/sec
	Table Lock Escalations/sec
	Worktables Created/sec
SQLServer:Latches	Total Latch Wait Time (ms)
SQLServer:Locks(_Total)	Lock Timeouts/sec
	Lock Wait Time (ms)
	Number of Deadlocks/sec
SQLServer:SQL Statistics	Batch Requests/sec
	SQL Re-Compilations/sec
SQLServer:General Statistics	Processes Blocked
	User Connections
	Temp Tables Creation Rate
	Temp Tables for Destruction

**Table 2-7.** Performance Monitor Counter to Analyze Excessive Data Scans

Object([Instance[, InstanceN]])	Counter
SQLServer:Access Methods	Full Scans/sec

## Missing Indexes

To analyze the possibility of missing indexes causing table scans or large data set retrievals, you can use the counter in Table 2-7.

### Full Scans/sec

This counter monitors the number of unrestricted full scans on base tables or indexes. A few of the main causes of high **Full Scans/sec** are as follows:

- Missing indexes
- Too many rows requested

To further investigate queries producing these problems, use SQL Profiler to identify the queries (I will cover this tool in the next chapter). Queries with missing indexes or too many rows requested will have a large number of logical reads and an increased CPU time.

Be aware of the fact that full scans may be performed for the temporary tables used in a stored procedure, because most of the time you will not have indexes (or you will not need indexes) on temporary tables. Still, adding this counter to the baseline helps identify the possible increase in the use of temporary tables, which are usually not good for performance.

## Dynamic Management Objects

Another way to check for missing indexes is to query the dynamic management view `sys.dm_db_missing_index_details`. This management view returns information that can suggest candidates for indexes based on the execution plans of the queries being run against the database. The view `sys.dm_db_missing_index_details` is part of a series of DMVs collectively referred to as the *missing indexes feature*. These DMVs are based on data generated from execution plans stored in the cache. You can query directly against this view to gather data to decide whether you want to build indexes based on the information available from within the view. Missing indexes will also be shown within the XML execution plan for a given query, but I'll cover that more in the next chapter. While these views are useful for suggesting possible indexes, since they can't be linked to a particular query, you must test these suggestions prior to implementing them on your systems.

The opposite problem to a missing index is one that is never used. The DMV `sys.dm_db_index_usage_stats` shows which indexes have been used, at least since the last reboot of the system. You can also view the indexes in use with a lower-level DMV, `sys.dm_db_index_operational_stats`. It will help to show where indexes are slowing down because of contention or I/O. I'll cover these both in more detail in [Chapter 10](#). You may also find that the suggestions from the Database Tuning Advisor can help you with specific indexes for specific queries.

## Database Blocking

To analyze the impact of database blocking on the performance of SQL Server, you can use the counters shown in Table 2-8.

### Total Latch Wait time (ms)

Latches are used internally by SQL Server to protect the integrity of internal structures, such as a table row, and are not directly controlled by users. This counter monitors total latch wait time (in milliseconds) for latch requests that had to wait in the last second. A high value for this counter indicates that SQL Server is spending too much time waiting on its internal synchronization mechanism.

### Lock timeouts/sec and Lock Wait time (ms)

You should expect **Lock Timeouts/sec** to be 0 and **Lock Wait Time (ms)** to be very low. A nonzero value for **Lock Timeouts/sec** and a high value for **Lock Wait Time (ms)** indicate that excessive blocking is occurring in the database. Two approaches can be adopted in this case.

- You can identify the costly queries using data from SQL Profiler or by querying `sys.dm_exec_querystats` and then optimize the queries appropriately.

**Table 2-8.** Performance Monitor Counters to Analyze SQL Server Locking

Object(Instance[,InstanceN])	Counter
SQLServer:Latches	<b>Total Latch Wait Time (ms)</b>
SQLServer:Locks(_Total)	<b>Lock Timeouts/sec</b> <b>Lock Wait Time (ms)</b> <b>Number of Deadlocks/sec</b>

- You can use blocking analysis to diagnose the cause of excessive blocking. It is usually advantageous to concentrate on optimizing the costly queries first, because this, in turn, reduces blocking for others. In [Chapter 12](#), you will learn how to analyze and resolve blocking.

Just remember that some degree of locks are a necessary part of the system. You'll want to establish a baseline in order to track thoroughly if a given value is cause for concern.

## Number of Deadlocks/sec

You should expect to see a 0 value for this counter. If you find a nonzero value, then you should identify the victimized request and either resubmit the database request automatically or suggest that the user do so. More importantly, an attempt should be made to troubleshoot and resolve the deadlock. Again, [Chapter 12](#) shows how to do this.

## Nonreusable Execution Plans

Since generating an execution plan for a stored procedure query requires CPU cycles, you can reduce the stress on the CPU by reusing the execution plan. To analyze the number of stored procedures that are recompiling, you can look at the counter in [Table 2-9](#).

Recompilations of stored procedures add overhead on the processor. You want to see a value close to 0 for the **SOL Re-Compilations/sec** counter. If you consistently see nonzero values, then you should use Extended Events to further investigate the stored procedures undergoing recompilations. Once you identify the relevant stored procedures, you should attempt to analyze and resolve the cause of recompilations. In [Chapter 10](#), you will learn how to analyze and resolve various causes of recompilation.

## General Behavior

SQL Server provides additional performance counters to track some general aspects of a SQL Server system. [Table 2-10](#) lists a few of the most commonly used counters.

## User Connections

Multiple read-only SQL Servers can work together in a load-balancing environment (where SQL Server is spread over several machines) to support a large number of database requests. In such cases, it is better to monitor the **User Connections** counter to evaluate the distribution of user connections across multiple SQL Server instances.

**Table 2-9.** Performance Monitor Counter to Analyze Execution Plan Reusability

Object(Instance[,InstanceN])	Counter
SQLServer: SOL Statistics	<b>SOL Re-Compilations/sec</b>

**Table 2-10.** Performance Monitor Counters to Analyze Volume of Incoming Requests

Object(Instance[,InstanceN])	Counter
SQLServer: General Statistics	<b>User Connections</b>
SQLServer: SQL Statistics	<b>Batch Requests/sec</b>

**User Connections** can range all over the spectrum with normal application behavior. This is where a normal baseline is essential to determine the expected behavior. You will see how you can establish this baseline shortly.

## Batch requests/sec

This counter is a good indicator of the load on SQL Server. Based on the level of system resource utilization and **Batch Requests/sec**, you can estimate the number of users SQL Server may be able to take without developing resource bottlenecks. This counter value, at different load cycles, helps you understand its relationship with the number of database connections. This also helps you understand SQL Server's relationship with **WebRequest/sec**, that is, **Active Server Pages.Requests/sec** for web applications using Microsoft Internet Information Services (IIS) and Active Server Pages (ASP). All this analysis helps you better understand and predict system behavior as the user load changes.

The value of this counter can range over a wide spectrum with normal application behavior. A normal baseline is essential to determine the expected behavior.

## Considerations for Monitoring Virtual Machines

When you are working with Virtual Machines (VM) many of the standard performance metrics counters are no longer applicable. If you monitor these counters within the VM, you will be getting very unrealistic numbers. If you monitor these counters on the physical box, which doubtless is shared by multiple different VMs, you will be unable to identify specific SQL Server instance resource bottlenecks. Because of this, additional information must be monitored when working with a VM. Most of the information that you can gather on disk and network performance are still applicable within a VM setting. It's the memory and CPU metrics that are completely different.

This is because CPU and memory are shared between machines within a virtualized server environment. You may start a process on one CPU and finish it on another one entirely. Some virtual environments can actually change the memory allocated to a machine as that machine's demands for memory go up and down. With these kinds of changes, traditional monitoring just isn't applicable. The good news is that the major VM vendors provide you with guidance on how to monitor their systems and how to use SQL Server within their systems. You can largely rely on these third party documents for the specifics of monitoring a VM.

The queues counters, such as processor queue length, are still applicable when monitoring within a VM. These indicate that the VM itself is starved for resources, starving your SQL Server instance so that it has to wait for access to the virtual CPU. The important thing to remember is, CPU and memory are going to be slower on a VM because of the management of the VM getting in the way of the system resources.

## Creating a Baseline

Now that you have looked at a few of the main performance counters, let's see how to bring these counters together to create a system baseline. These are the steps you need to follow:

1. Create a reusable list of performance counters.
2. Create a counter log using your list of performance counters.
3. Minimize Performance Monitor overhead.

## Creating a Reusable List of Performance Counters

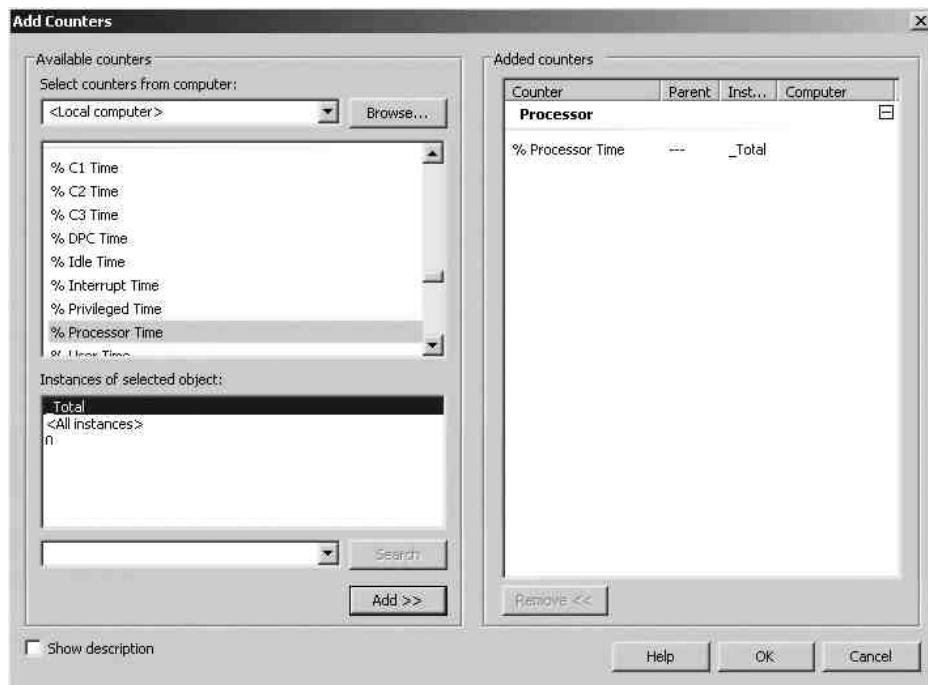
Run the Performance Monitor tool on a Windows Server 2008 machine connected to the same network as that of the SQL Server system. Add performance counters to the View Chart display of the Performance Monitor through the Properties > Data > Add Counters dialog box, as shown in Figure 2-10.

For example, to add the performance counter **Processor(\_Total)\% Processor Time**, follow these steps:

1. Select the option Select Counters from Computer and specify the computer name running SQL Server in the corresponding entry field.
2. Click the box next to the performance object **Processor**.
3. Choose the **% Processor Time** counter from the list of performance counters.
4. Choose **instance Total** from the instances in the Instances of Selected Object list.
5. Click the Add button to add this performance counter to the list of counters to be added.
6. Continue as needed with other counters. When finished, click the OK button.

When creating a reusable list for your baseline, you can repeat the preceding steps to add all the performance counters listed in Table 2-11.

Once you have added all the performance counters, close the Add Counters dialog box. To save the list of counters as an .htm file, right-click anywhere in the right frame of Performance Monitor, and select the Save Settings As menu item.



**Figure 2-10.** Adding Performance Monitor counters

**Table 2-11.** Performance Monitor Counters to Analyze SQL Server Performance

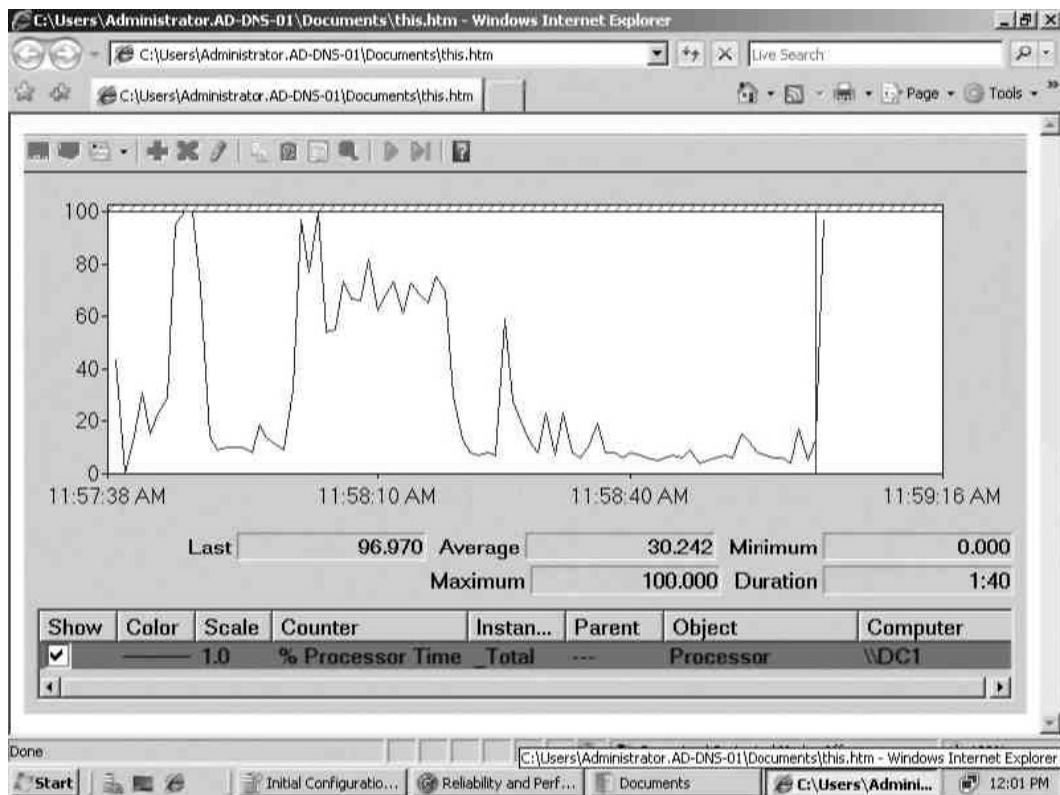
Object(Instance[,InstanceN])	Counter
Memory	Available MBytes Pages/sec
PhysicalDisk(Data-disk, Log-disk)	% Disk Time Current Disk Queue Length Disk Transfers/sec Disk Bytes/sec
Processor(_Total)	% Processor Time % Privileged Time
System	Processor Queue Length Context Switches/sec
Network Interface(Network card)	Bytes Total/sec
Network Segment	% Net Utilization
SQLServer:Access Methods	FreeSpace Scans/sec Full Scans/sec
SQLServer:Buffer Manager	Buffer cache hit ratio Free pages
SQLServer:Latches	Total Latch Wait Time (ms)
SQLServer:Locks(_Total)	Lock Timeouts/sec Lock Wait Time (ms) Number of Deadlocks/sec
SQLServer:Memory Manager	Memory Grants Pending Target Server Memory (KB) Total Server Memory (KB)
SQLServer:SQL Statistics	Batch Requests/sec SQL Re-Compilations/sec
SQLServer:General Statistics	User Connections

The .htm file lists all the performance counters that can be used as a base set of counters to create a counter log or to view Performance Monitor graphs interactively for the same SQL Server machine. To use this list of counters for other SQL Server machines, open the .htm file in an editor such as Notepad, and replace all instances of \\SQLServerMachineName with " (a blank string), without the quotes.

You can also use this counter list file to view Performance Monitor graphs interactively in an Internet browser, as shown in Figure 2-11.

## Creating a Counter Log Using the List of Performance Counters

Performance Monitor provides a counter log facility to save the performance data of multiple counters over a period of time. You can view the saved counter log using Performance Monitor to analyze the performance data. It is usually convenient to create a counter log from a defined list of performance counters. Simply collecting the data rather than viewing it through the GUI is the preferred method of automation to prepare for troubleshooting your server's performance or establishing a baseline.

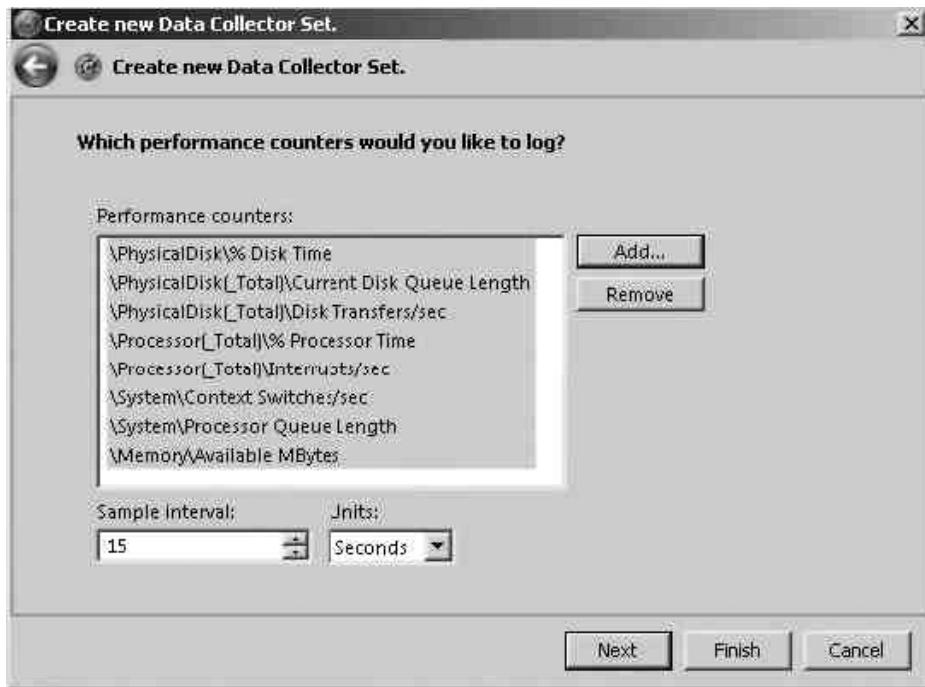


**Figure 2-11.** Performance Monitor in Internet browser

Expand Data Collector Sets ► User Defined. Right-click, and select New ► Data Collector Set. Define the name of the set, and make this a manual creation by clicking the appropriate radio button; then click Next. You'll have to define what type of data you're collecting. In this case, select the check box Performance Counters under the Create Data Logs radio button, and then click Next. Here you can define the performance objects you want to collect using the same Add Counters dialog box shown earlier in Figure 2-10. Clicking Next allows you to define the destination folder. Click Next, then select the radio button Open Properties for This Data Collector Set, and click Finish. You can schedule the counter log to automatically start at a specific time and stop after a certain time period or at a specific time. You can configure these settings through the Schedule pane. Figure 2-12 shows the summary of which counters have been selected as well as the frequency with which the counters will be collected.

**Tip** I'll offer additional suggestions for these settings in the section that follows.

For additional information on how to create counter logs using Performance Monitor, please refer to the Microsoft Knowledge Base article "Performance Tuning Guidelines for Windows Server 2008" at <http://download.microsoft.com/download/9/c/5/9c5b2167-8017-4bae-9fde-d599bac8184a/Perf-tun-srv.docx>.



**Figure 2-12.** Defining a Performance Monitor counter log

## Performance Monitor Considerations

The Performance Monitor tool is designed to add as little overhead as possible, if used correctly. To minimize the impact of using this tool on a system, consider the following suggestions:

- Limit the number of counters, specifically performance objects.
- Use counter logs instead of viewing Performance Monitor graphs interactively.
- Run Performance Monitor remotely while viewing graphs interactively.
- Save the counter log file to a different local disk.
- Increase the sampling interval.

Let's consider each of these points in more detail.

### Limit the Number of Counters

Monitoring large numbers of performance counters with small sampling intervals could incur some amount of overhead on the system. The bulk of this overhead comes from the number of performance objects you are monitoring, so selecting them wisely is important. The number of counters for the selected performance objects does not add much overhead, because it gives only an attribute of the object itself. Therefore, it is important to know what objects you want to monitor and why.

## Prefer Counter Logs

Use counter logs instead of viewing a Performance Monitor graph interactively, because Performance Monitor graphing is more costly in terms of overhead. Monitoring current activities should be limited to short-term viewing of data, troubleshooting, and diagnosis. Performance data reported via a counter log is *sAMPLEd*, meaning that data is collected periodically rather than traced, whereas the Performance Monitor graph is updated in real time as events occur. Using counter logs will reduce that overhead.

## View performance Monitor Graphs remotely

Since viewing the live performance data using Performance Monitor graphs creates a fair amount of overhead on the system, run the tool remotely on a different machine and connect to the SQL Server system through the tool. To remotely connect to the SQL Server machine, run the Performance Monitor tool on a machine connected to the network to which the SQL Server machine is also connected.

As shown in Figure 2-10, type the computer name (or IP address) of the SQL Server machine in the Select Counters from Computer box. Be aware that if you connect to the production server through a Windows Server 2008 terminal service session, the major part of the tool will still run on the server.

## Save Counter Log Locally

Collecting the performance data for the counter log does not incur the overhead of displaying any graph. So, while using counter log mode, it is more efficient to log counter values locally on the SQL Server system instead of transferring the performance data across the network. Put the counter log file on a local disk other than the ones that are monitored.

## Increase the Sampling Interval

Because you are mainly interested in the resource utilization pattern during baseline monitoring, you can easily increase the performance data sampling interval to 60 seconds or more to decrease the log file size and reduce demand on disk I/Os. You can use a short sampling interval to detect and diagnose timing issues. Even while viewing Performance Monitor graphs interactively, increase the sampling interval from the default value of one second per sample. Just remember, changing the sampling size up or down can affect the granularity of the data as well as the quantity. You have to weigh these choices carefully.

## System Behavior Analysis Against Baseline

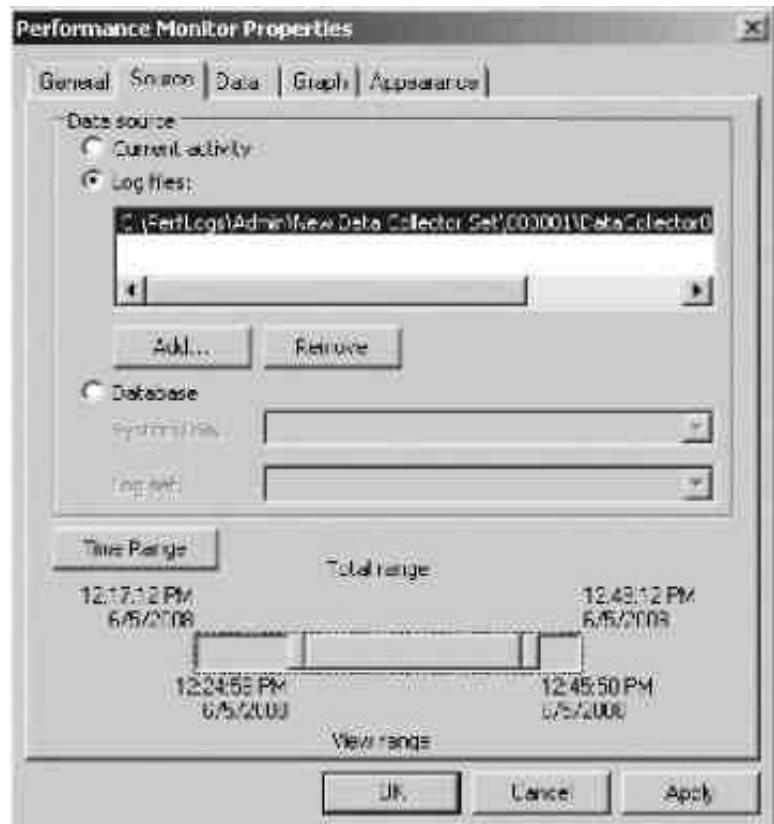
The default behavior of a database application changes over time because of various factors such as the following:

- Data volume and distribution changes
- Increased user base
- Change in usage pattern of the application
- Additions to or changes in the application's behavior
- Installation of new service packs or software upgrades
- Changes to hardware

Because of these changes, the baseline created for the database server slowly loses its significance. It may not always be accurate to compare the current behavior of the system with an old baseline. Therefore, it is important to keep the baseline current creating a new baseline at regular time intervals. It is also beneficial to archive the previous baseline logs so that they can be referred to later, if required. So while, yes, older baselines are not applicable to day-to-day operations, they do help you in establishing patterns and long term trends.

The counter log for the baseline or the current behavior of the system can be analyzed using the Performance Monitor tool by following these steps:

1. Open the counter log. Use Performance Monitor's toolbar item View Log File Data, and select the log file name.
2. Add all the performance counters to analyze the performance data. Note that only the performance objects, counters, and instances selected during the counter log creation are shown in the selection lists.
3. Analyze the system behavior at different parts of the day by adjusting the time range accordingly, as shown in Figure 2-13.



**Figure 2-13.** Defining time range for log analysis

During a performance review, you can analyze the system-level behavior of the database by comparing the current value of performance counters with the latest baseline. Take the following considerations into account while comparing the performance data:

- Use the same set of performance counters in both cases.
- Compare the minimum, maximum, or average value of the counters as applicable for the individual counters. I explained the specific values for the counters earlier.
- Some counters have an absolute good/bad value, as mentioned previously. The current value of these counters need not be compared with the baseline values. For example, if the current average value of the **Pages/sec** counter is 100, it indicates that the system has developed a memory bottleneck. Even though it does not require a comparison with the baseline, it is still advantageous to review the corresponding baseline value, because the memory bottleneck might have existed for a long time. Having the archived baseline logs helps detect the first occurrence of the memory bottleneck.
- Some counters do not have a definitive good/bad value. Because their value depends on the application, a relative comparison with the corresponding baseline counters is a must. For example, the current value of the **User Connections** counter for SQL Server does not signify anything good or bad with the application. But comparing it with the corresponding baseline value may reveal a big increase in the number of user connections, indicating an increase in the workload.
- Compare a range of values for the counters from the current and the baseline counter logs. The fluctuation in the individual values of the counters will be normalized by the range of values.
- Compare logs from the same part of the day. For most applications, the usage pattern varies during different parts of the day. To obtain the minimum, maximum, and average value of the counters for a specific time, adjust the time range of the counter logs as shown previously.

Once the system-level bottleneck is identified, the internal behavior of the application should be analyzed to determine the cause of the bottleneck. Identifying and optimizing the source of the bottleneck will help use the system resources efficiently.

## Summary

In this chapter, you learned how to use the Performance Monitor tool to analyze the overall behavior of SQL Server as well as the effect of a slow-performing database application on system resources. For every resultant system bottleneck, there are two types of resolutions: hardware resolutions and application optimization. Of course, it is always beneficial to optimize the database application before considering a hardware upgrade.

In the next chapter, you will learn how to analyze the workload of a database application for performance tuning.

## CHAPTER 3



# SQL Query Performance Analysis

A common cause of slow SQL Server performance is a heavy database application workload—the nature of the queries themselves. Thus, to analyze the cause of a system bottleneck, it is important to examine the database application workload and identify the SQL queries causing the most stress on system resources. To do this, you can use the Extended Events and other Management Studio tools.

In this chapter, I cover the following topics:

- The basics of the Extended Events
- How to analyze SQL Server workload and identify costly SQL queries using Extended Events
- How to combine the baseline measurements with data collected from Extended Events
- How to analyze the processing strategy of a costly SQL query using Management Studio
- How to track query performance through dynamic management objects
- How to analyze the effectiveness of index and join strategies for a SQL query
- How to measure the cost of a SQL query using SQL utilities

## Extended Events Wizard

Extended Events were introduced in SQL Server 2008, but with no GUI in place and a reasonably complex set of code to set them up, they weren't used much to capture performance metrics. With SQL Server 2012, a GUI for managing extended events was introduced, making this the preferred mechanism for gathering query performance metrics among other things. The SQL Profiler and traces, previously the best mechanism for gathering these metrics is going into deprecation. It's still available, but it's on its way out. As a result, all examples in the book will be using extended events.

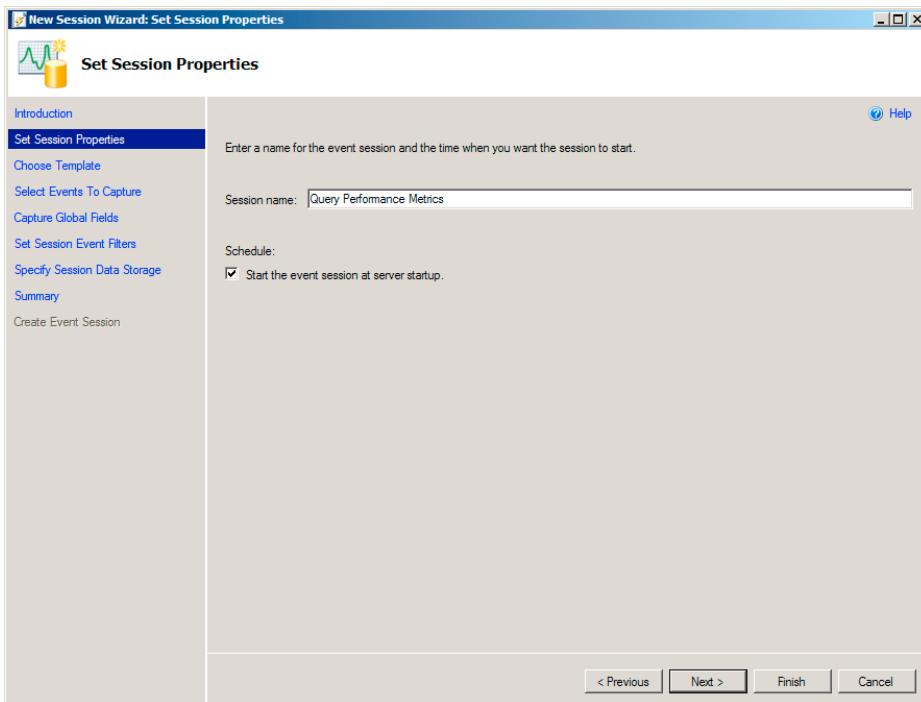
The Extended Events wizard allows you to do the following:

- Graphically monitor SQL Server queries
- Collect query information in the background
- Analyze performance
- Diagnose problems such as deadlocks
- Debug a Transact-SQL (T-SQL) statement

You can also use Extended events to capture other sorts of activities performed on a SQL Server instance. You can run extended events from the graphical front end or through direct calls to the procedures. The most efficient way to define a trace is through the system procedures, but a good place to start learning about sessions is through the GUI.

## Extended Events Sessions

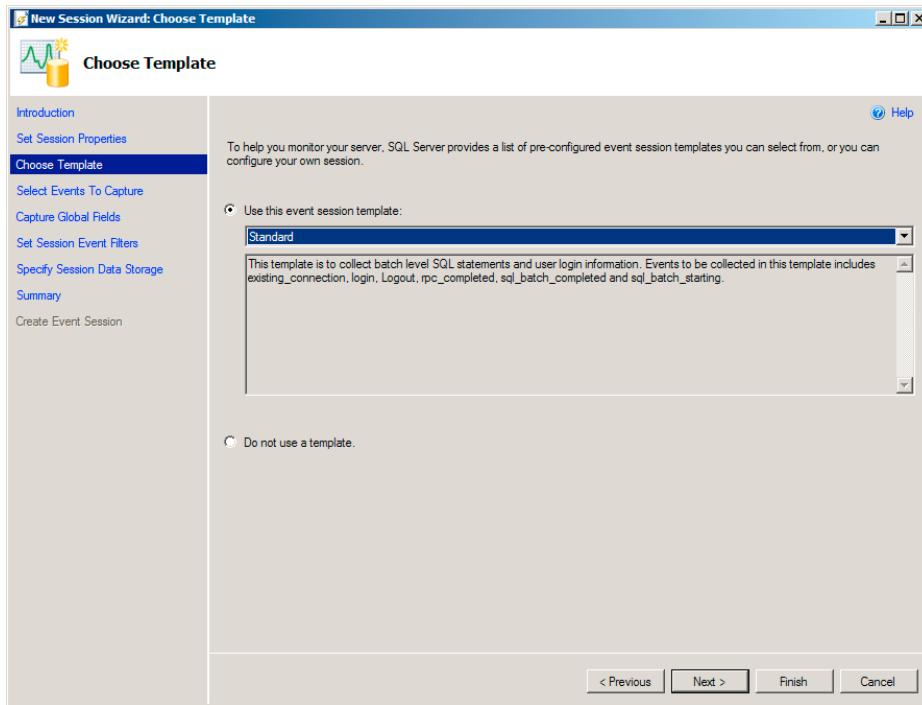
Extended Events are found in the Management Studio GUI. You can navigate through the Object Explorer to the Management folder on a given instance to find the Extended Events folder. From there you can look at Sessions that have already been built on the system, but to start setting up your own sessions, just right-click the Sessions folder and select “New Session Wizard.” An introduction screen will open the first time you run the wizard. You can turn it off so that it stops displaying. The next screen is the “Set Session Properties” screen as shown in Figure 3.1:



**Figure 3.1.** Extended Events New Session Wizard, the first screen.

You will have to supply a Session Name. I strongly suggest giving it a very clear name so you know what the session is doing when you check on it later. Whether or not you set the session to start with the server is a different decision that you'll have to make on your own. Collecting performance metrics over a long period of time generates lots of data that you'll have to deal with. Clicking the Next button will open the Choose Template screen as shown in Figure 3-2:

Multiple templates are available and you can use those as a basis for your own Sessions. Eventually you'll find that you need to build your own sessions from scratch and ultimately you'll simply use the TSQL commands



**Figure 3-2.** Extended Events New Session Wizard, Choose Template screen

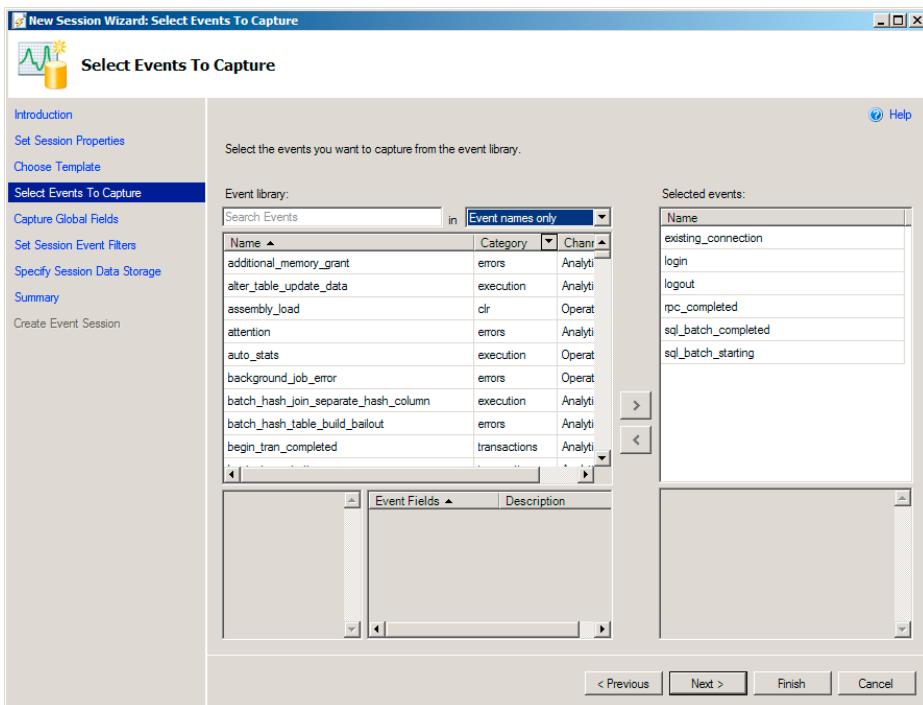
to build out your sessions. For this example I'll go ahead and use the Standard template, which basically identical to the old Standard template in the deprecated Profiler GUI. Clicking the Next button will take us to the Select Events To Capture window.

## Events

An *event* represents various activities performed in SQL Server and in some cases, the underlying operating system. There's an entire architecture around event targets, event packages and event sessions, but the use of the GUI means you don't have to worry about all that. We will cover some of the architecture when we script a session later in this chapter. Figure 3-3 shows the events that are defined by the Standard template:

For performance analysis, you are mainly interested in the events that help you judge levels of resource stress for various activities performed on SQL Server. By *resource stress*, I mean things such as the following:

- What kind of CPU utilization was involved for the SQL activity?
- How much memory was used?
- How much I/O was involved?
- How long did the SQL activity take to execute?
- How frequently was a particular query executed?
- What kind of errors and warnings were faced by the queries?



**Figure 3-3.** Extended Events Wizard, Select Events to Capture window

You can calculate the resource stress of a SQL activity after the completion of an event, so the main events you use for performance analysis are those that represent the completion of a SQL activity. Table 3-1 describes these events.

**Table 3-1.** Events to Monitor Query Completion

Event Category	Event	Description
Execution	rpc_completed	A remote procedure call completion event
	sp_statement_completed	A SQL statement completion event within a stored procedure
	sql_batch_completed	A T-SQL batch completion event
	sql_statement_completed	A T-SQL statement completion event

An RPC event indicates that the stored procedure was executed using the Remote Procedure Call (RPC) mechanism through an OLEDB command. If a database application executes a stored procedure using the T-SQL EXECUTE statement, then that stored procedure is resolved as a SQL batch rather than as an RPC.

A *T-SQL batch* is a set of SQL queries that are submitted together to SQL Server. A T-SQL batch is usually terminated by a GO command. The GO command is not a T-SQL statement. Instead, the GO command is recognized by the sqlcmd utility, as well as by Management Studio, and it signals the end of a batch. Each SQL query in the batch is considered a T-SQL statement. Thus, a T-SQL batch consists of one or more T-SQL statements. Statements or T-SQL statements are also the individual, discrete commands within a stored procedure. Capturing

individual statements with the `sp_statement_completed` or `sql_statement_completed` event can be a more expensive operation, depending on the number of individual statements within your queries. Assume for a moment that each stored procedure within your system contains one, and only one, T-SQL statement.

In this case, the collection of completed statements is very low. Now assume that you have multiple statements within your procedures and that some of those procedures are calls to other procedures with other statements. Collecting all this extra data now becomes a more noticeable load on the system. My own testing suggested that you won't see much impact until you're hitting upward of ten distinct statements per procedure. Statement completion events should be collected judiciously, especially on a production system. You should apply filters to limit the returns from these events. Filters are covered later in this chapter.

After you've selected a trace template, a preselected list of events will already be defined in the Selected Events list on the right. To add an event to the session, find the event in the Event library and use the arrow buttons to move the event from the library to the Selected Events list. To remove events not required, click the arrow to move it back out of the list and into the library.

Although the events listed in Table 3-1 represent the most common events used for determining query performance, you can sometimes use a number of additional events to diagnose the same thing. For example, as mentioned in Chapter 1, repeated recompilation of a stored procedure adds processing overhead, which hurts the performance of the database request. The execution category in the Event library includes an event, `sql_statement_recompile`, to indicate the recompilation of a statement (this event is explained in depth in Chapter 10). The Event library contains additional events to indicate other performance-related issues with a database workload. Table 3-2 shows a few of these events.

**Table 3-2. Events for Query Performance**

Event Category	Event	Description
Session	login	Keeps track of database connections when users connect to and disconnect from SQL Server.
	logout	
	existing_connection	Represents all the users connected to SQL Server before the session was started.
cursor	cursor_implicit_conversion	Indicates that the cursor type created is different from the requested type.
errors	attention	Represents the intermediate termination of a request caused by actions such as query cancellation by a client or a broken database connection including timeouts.
	error_reported	Occurs when an error is reported.
	execution_warning	Indicates the occurrence of any warning during the execution of a query or a stored procedure.
	hash_warning	Indicates the occurrence of an error in a hashing operation.
warnings	missing_column_statistics	Indicates that the statistics of a column, statistics required by the optimizer to decide a processing strategy, are missing.
	missing_join_predicate	Indicates that a query is executed with no joining predicate between two tables.
	sort_warnings	Indicates that a sort operation performed in a query such as SELECT did not fit into memory.
lock	lock_deadlock	Occurs when a process is chosen as a deadlock victim

(continued)

**Table 3-2.** (continued)

Event Category	Event	Description
	lock_deadlock_chain lock_timeout	Shows a trace of the chain of queries creating the deadlock. Signifies that the lock has exceeded the timeout parameter, which is set by SET LOCK_TIMEOUT timeout_period(ms).
execution	sql_statement_recompile	Indicates that an execution plan for a query statement had to be recompiled, because one did not exist, a recompilation was forced, or the existing execution plan could not be reused.
	rpc_starting	Represents the starting of a stored procedure. They are useful to identify procedures that started but could not finish because of an operation that caused an Attention event.
	Query_post_compilation_showplan Query_post_execution_showplan	Shows the execution plan after a SQL statement has been compiled. Shows the execution plan after the SQL statement has been executed which includes execution statistics
transactions	sql_transaction	Provides information about a database transaction, including information such as when a transaction starts, completes, and rolls back

## Global Fields

Once you've selected the events that are of interest in the Session Wizard, you'll have to click next, which will open the Capture Global Fields window as shown in Figure 3-4:

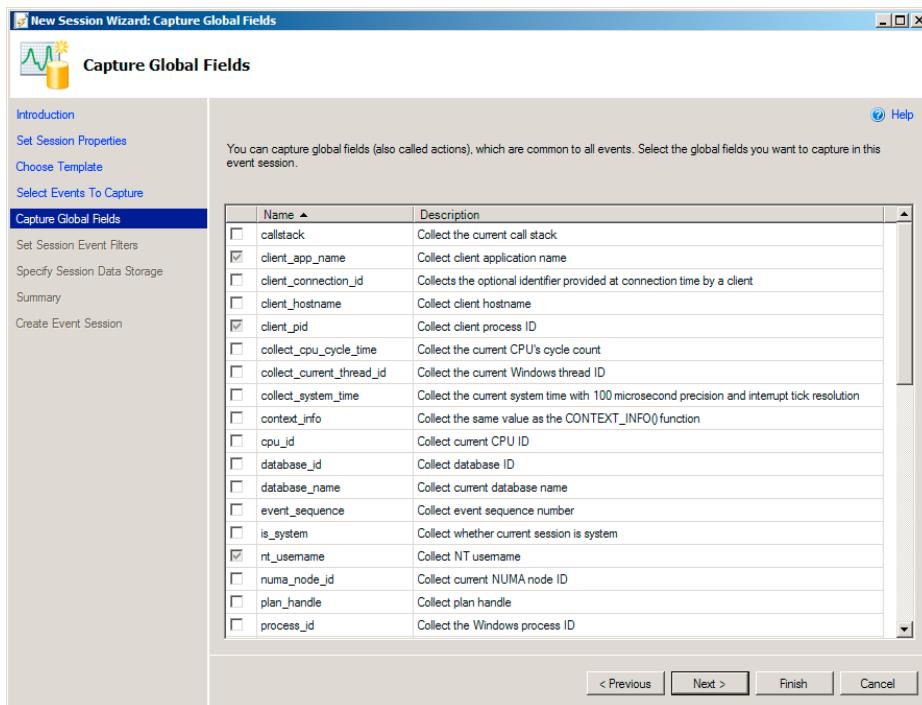
The fields, called actions in the TSQL, represent different attributes of an event, such as the user involved with the event, the SQL statement for the event, the resource cost of the event, and the source of the event.

The standard set of event fields are generated by the wizard and the template, others are automatic with the event type. You can select others from the list in the wizard. Table 3-3 shows some of the common actions that you'll use for performance analysis.

Each logical read and write consists of an 8KB page activity in memory, which may require zero or more physical I/O operations.

To add an action, just click the check box in the list provided in the Global Fields page shown in Figure 3-4. You can use additional data columns from time to time to diagnose the cause of poor performance. For example, in the case of a stored procedure recompilation, the event indicates the cause of the recompile through the recompile\_cause event field (This field is explained in depth in Chapter 10.) A few of the commonly used additional actions are as follows:

- plan\_handle
- query\_hash
- query\_plan\_hash
- database\_id
- client\_app\_name
- transaction\_id



**Figure 3-4.** Capture Global Fields screen allows you to select Fields or Actions for the Events you're monitoring

**Table 3-3.** Actions Command for Query Analysis

Data Column	Description
Statement	The SQL text from the rpc_completed event
Batch_text	The SQL text from the sql_batch_completed event
cpu_time	CPU cost of an event in microseconds (mc). For example, CPU = 100 for a SELECT statement indicates that the statement took 100 mc to execute.
logical_reads	Number of logical reads performed for an event. For example, logical_reads = 800 for a SELECT statement indicates that the statement required a total of 800 page reads.
Physical_reads	Number of physical reads performed for an event, can differ from the logical_reads due to access to the disk subsystem
writes	Number of logical writes performed for an event.
duration	Execution time of an event in ms.
session_id	SQL Server session identifier used for the event.

Other information is available as part of the event fields. For example the `binary_data` and `integer_data` event fields provide specific information about a given SQL Server activity. For example, in the case of a cursor, they specify the type of cursor requested and the type of cursor created. Although the names of these additional fields indicate their purpose to a great extent, I will explain the usefulness of these global fields in later chapters as you use them.

## Event Filters

In addition to defining events and fields for an extended event session, you can also define various filter criteria. These help keep the session output small, which is usually a good idea. Table 3-4 describes the filter criteria that you will commonly use during performance analysis.

**Table 3-4. SQL Trace Filters**

Events	Filter Criteria Example	Use
<code>sqlserver.username</code>	<code>= &lt;some value&gt;</code>	Captures only events for a single user or login
<code>sqlserver.database_id</code>	<code>= &lt;ID of the database to monitor&gt;</code>	This filters out events generated by other databases. You can determine the ID of a database from its name as follows: <code>SELECT DB_ID('AdventureWorks2008R2');</code>
<code>sqlos.duration</code>	<code>&gt;= 200</code>	For performance analysis, you will often capture a trace for a large workload. In a large trace, there will be many event logs with a duration that is less than what you're interested in. Filter out these event logs, because there is hardly any scope for optimizing these SQL activities.
<code>sqlserver.physical_reads</code>	<code>&gt;= 2</code>	This is similar to the criterion on the duration filter.
<code>sqlserver.session_id</code>	<code>= &lt;Database users to monitor&gt;</code>	This troubleshoots queries sent by a specific server session

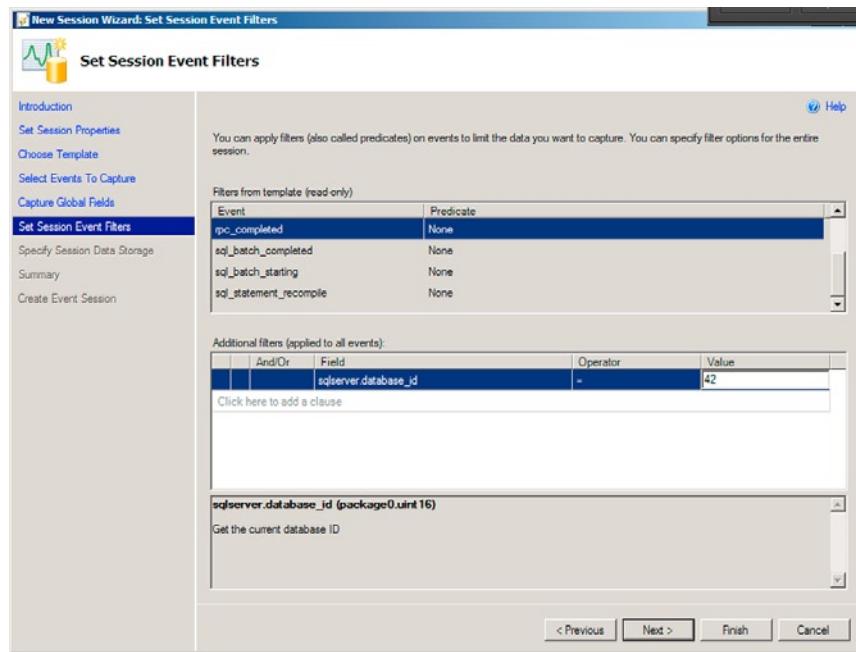
Figure 3-4 shows a snippet of the preceding filter criteria selection in the Session Wizard.

If you look at the Field value in Figure 3-5, you'll note that it says `sqlserver.database_id`. This is because there are different sets of data available to you and they are qualified by the type of data being referenced. In this case, we're talking specifically about a `sqlserver.database_id`. But we could be referring to something from the `sqlos` or even the Extended Events package itself.

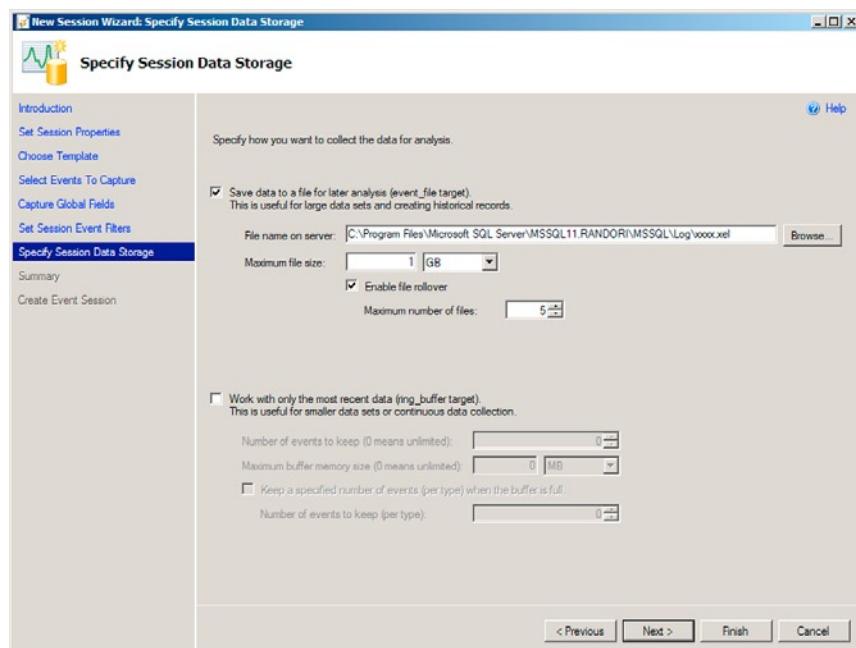
## Data Storage

The next window on the wizard is for determining how you're going to deal with the data generated by the session. The output mechanism is referred to as the target. You have two basic choices, output the information to a file, or simply use the buffer to capture the events and then get rid of the results. You should only use very small data sets with the buffer because it will consume memory. Because it works with memory within the system, the buffer is built so that, rather than overwhelm the system memory, it will drop events, so you're more likely to lose information using the buffer. In most circumstances for monitoring query performance, you should capture the output of the session to a file.

If you select the file checkbox, the first one in the window, it will enable the other information with defaults as shown in Figure 3-6:



**Figure 3-5.** Filters applied in the Session Wizard

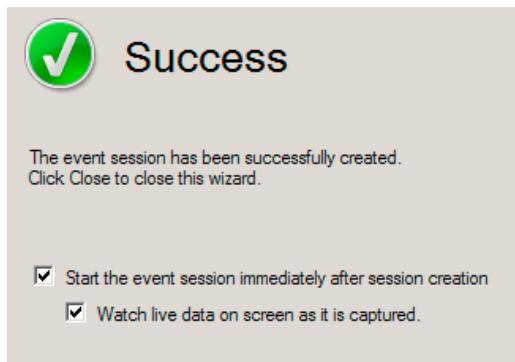


**Figure 3-6.** Specify Data Storage window in the New Session Wizard

As you can see it defaulted to local storage on my server. You can specify an appropriate location on your system. You can also decide if you're using more than one file, how many, and whether or not those files rollover. All of those are management decisions that you'll have to deal with as part of working with your environment and your sql query monitoring. You can run this 24/7, but you have to be prepared to deal with large amounts of data depending on how stringent the filters you've created are.

## Finishing the Wizard and Starting the Session

Once you've defined the storage, you've set everything needed for the session. If you click the Next button, it will take you to a summary screen where you can review the settings you've chosen to ensure that the session reflects what you intended. Clicking finish will create the session in SQL Server. But, it won't start the session. One of the beauties of Extended Events sessions is that they're stored on the server and you can turn them on and off as needed. The Wizard finishes on a screen that gives you two options you can choose the start the session and, you can choose to start watching the data as it is captured to the screen.



**Figure 3-7.** The Success screen of the Wizard

Watching the output from Extended Events doesn't have the problems that the old Profiler GUI had where the GUI itself put an additional load on the system. These events are coming off the same buffer as the one that is writing out to disk, so you can watch events real time. Take a look at Figure 3-8 to see this in action:

You can see the events on the top of the window showing the type of event and the date and time of the event. Clicking the event on the top will open the fields that were captured with the event on the bottom of the screen. As you can see, all the information we've been talking about is available to you. Also, if you're unhappy with having a divided output, you can right-click a column and select "Show Column in Table" from the context menu. This will move it up into the top part of the screen, displaying all the information in a single location like Figure 3-9:

Watching this information through the GUI and browsing through files is fine, but you're going to want to automate the creation of these sessions. That's what the next section covers.

**Figure 3-8.** Live output of the extended event session created by the wizard

	name	timestamp	statement
	rpc_completed	2012-02-06 20:33:03.8691983	exec sp_execute...
	rpc_completed	2012-02-06 20:33:03.8801989	exec sp_execute...
	rpc_completed	2012-02-06 20:33:13.2897371	exec sp_execute...
	rpc_completed	2012-02-06 20:33:13.4507463	exec sp_execute...
	rpc_completed	2012-02-06 20:33:13.5277507	exec sp_execute...
	rpc_completed	2012-02-06 20:33:15.0708390	exec sp_execute...
	rpc_completed	2012-02-06 20:33:15.0788394	exec sp_execute...
	rpc_completed	2012-02-06 20:33:15.1458433	exec sp_execute...
▶	rpc_completed	2012-02-06 20:33:15.1518436	exec sp_execute...
	rpc_completed	2012-02-06 20:33:15.1648443	exec sp_execute...
	rpc_completed	2012-02-06 20:33:15.1708447	exec sp_execute...

**Figure 3-9.** The statement column has been added to the table

## Extended Events Automation

The ability to use the GUI to build out a session and define the extended events you want to capture does make things very simple, but, unfortunately, it's not a model that will scale. If you need to manage multiple servers where you're going to create sessions for capturing key query performance metrics, you're not going to want to connect to each one and go through the GUI to select the events, the output, etc. This is especially true if you take into account the chance of a mistake. Instead, it's much better to learn how to work with sessions directly from TSQL. This will enable you to build a session that can be run on a number of servers in your system. Even better, you're going to find that building sessions directly is easier in some ways than using the Wizard and you're going to be much more knowledgeable about how these processes work.

## Creating a Session Script Using the GUI

You can create a scripted trace in one of two ways, manually or with the GUI. Until you get comfortable with all the requirements of the scripts, the easy way is to use the Extended Events tool GUI. These are the steps you'll need to perform:

1. Define a session (this time, outside the wizard).
2. Right-click the session, and select Script Sessions As, CREATE To, and File to output straight to a file.

These steps will generate all the script that you need to create a session and output it to a file.

To manually create this new trace, use Management Studio as follows:

1. Open the file.
2. Modify the path and file location for the server you're creating this session on
3. Execute the script.

Once the sessions is created, you can use the following command to start it:

```
ALTER EVENT SESSION test_session
ON SERVER
STATE = start
```

You may want to automate the execution of the last step through the SQL Agent, or you can even run the script from the command line using the `sqlcmd.exe` utility. Whatever method you use, the final step will start the session. To stop the session, just run the same script with the STATE set to stop. I'll show how to do that in the next section.

## Defining a Session Using Stored Procedures

If you look at the script defined in the previous section, you will see a single command that was used to define the session, `CREATE EVENT SESSION`.

Once the session has been defined, you can activate it using `ALTER EVENT`.

Once a session is started on the server, you don't have to keep Management Studio open any more. You can identify the active sessions by using the dynamic management view `sys.dm_xe_sessions`, as shown in the following query:

```
SELECT dxs.name,
       dxs.create_time
  FROM sys.dm_xe_sessions AS dxs;
```

Figure 3-10 shows the output of the view.

	name	create_time
1	Query Performance Tuning	2011-09-29 04:25:49.087

**Figure 3-10.** Output of `sys.dm_xe_sessions`

The number of rows returned indicates the number of sessions active on SQL Server. You can stop a specific session by executing the stored procedure `ALTER EVENT SESSION`:

```
ALTER EVENT SESSION test_session
ON SERVER
STATE = stop;
```

To verify that the session is stopped successfully, reexecute the view `sys.dm_xe_sessions`, and ensure that the output of the view doesn't contain the named session.

Using a script to create your sessions allows you to automate across a large number of servers. Using the scripts to start and stop the sessions means you can control them through scheduled events such as through SQL Agent. In [Chapter 16](#), you will learn how to control the schedule of a session while capturing the activities of a SQL workload over an extended period of time.

**Note** The time captured through a session defined as illustrated in this section is stored in microseconds, not milliseconds. This difference between units can cause confusion if not taken into account. You must filter based on microseconds.

---

## Extended Events Recommendations

Extended events are such a game-changer in the way that information is collected that many of the problematic areas that used to come up when using Trace Events have been completely eliminated. You just no longer need to worry as much about limiting the number of events collected or the number of fields returned. There are still a few areas you need to watch out for:

- Set max file size appropriately
- Avoid debug events
- Partition memory in the sessions
- Avoid use of No\_Event\_Loss

I'll go over these in a little more detail in the following sections.

### Set Max File Size Appropriately

If you use the Wizard to create a session, the default value for the files is 1gb. That's actually very small when you consider the amount of information that can be gathered with extended events. It's a good idea to set this number much higher, somewhere in the 50gb–100gb range to ensure you have adequate space to capture information and you're not waiting on the file sub-system to create files for you while your buffer fills. This can lead to event loss. But, it does depend on your system. If you have a good grasp of the level of output you can expect, set the file size more appropriate to your individual environment.

### Avoid Debug Events

Not only do extended events provide you with a mechanism for observing the behavior of SQL Server and its internals in a way that far exceeds what was possible under trace events, but Microsoft uses the same functionality as part of troubleshooting SQL Server. There are a number of events related to debugging SQL Server. These are not available through the Wizard, but you do have access to them through the TSQL command.

Do not use them. They are subject to change and are meant for Microsoft internal use only. If you do feel the need to experiment, you need to pay close attention to any of the events that include a break action. This means that should the event fire, it will stop SQL Server at the exact line of code that caused the event to fire. This means your server will be completely offline and in an unknown state. This could lead to a major outage if you were to do it in a production system. It could lead to loss of data and database corruption.

### Partition Memory in the Sessions

For a simple set of events, such as those outlined earlier in the section on using the wizard, you don't need to worry too much about partitioning your memory, but as the number of events you are collecting grows, you're going to want to use the functions that will change the way that memory is handled in your sessions.

First, the default max for the buffer memory is 4mb. If you're operating on a larger system and you are collecting a larger number of different events, you will want to raise this value. Specific numbers are hard to come by, so the guidance at this point must be vague. Changing the setting would be done by adding the command (for example, to double the buffer) to the TSQL code that creates the session:

```
MAX_MEMORY = 8192
```

Next, you can create multiple buffers on systems with multiple CPUs or on systems with Non-Uniform Memory Access (NUMA). To enable it on a system with multiple CPUs you would add the command:

```
MEMORY_PARTITION_MODE = Per_CPU
```

For a system with NUMA nodes configured you can use the following:

```
MEMORY_PARTITION_MODE = Per_Node
```

Either of these will break up the buffer and can provide you with improved performance in your extended event collection for some scenarios. You will need to test this for your environment.

## Avoid Use of No\_Event\_Loss

Extended events are set up such that some events will be lost. It's extremely likely, by design. But, you can use a setting, `No_Event_Loss`, when configuring your session. If you do this on systems that are already under load, you may see a significant additional load placed on the system since you're effectively telling it to retain information in the buffer regardless of consequences. For very small and focused sessions that are targeting a particular behavior, this approach can be acceptable.

## Other Methods for Query Performance Metrics

Setting up a session allows you to collect a lot of data for later use, but the collection can be a little bit expensive, you have to wait on the results, and then you have a lot of data to deal with. If you need to immediately capture performance metrics about your system, especially as they pertain to query performance, then the dynamic management views `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` for queries and `sys.dm_exec_procedure_stats` for stored procedures are what you need. If you still need a historical tracking of when queries were run and their individual costs, an extended events session is still the better tool. But if you just need to know, at this moment, the longest-running queries or the most physical reads, then you can get that information from these two dynamic management objects. The `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` DMO will return results for all queries, including stored procedures, but the `sys.dm_exec_procedure_stats` will only return information for stored procedures.

Since both these DMOs are just views, you can simply query against them and get information about the statistics of queries in the plan cache on the server. Table 3-5 shows some of the data returned from the `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` DMO.

Table 3-5 is just a sampling. For complete details, see Books Online.

To filter the information returned from `sys.dm_exec_query_stats`, you'll need to join it with other dynamic management functions such as `sys.dm_exec_sql_text`, which shows the query text associated with the plan, or `sys.dm_query_plan`, which has the execution plan for the query. Once joined to these other DMOs, you can limit the database or procedure that you want to filter. These other DMOs are covered in detail in other chapters of the book. We'll have examples of using `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` and the others, in combination, in this chapter, and throughout the rest of the book.

**Table 3-5.** *sys.dm\_exec\_query\_stats* Output

Column	Description
Plan_handle	Pointer that refers to the execution plan
Creation_time	Time that the plan was created
Last_execution_time	Last time the plan was used by a query
Execution_count	Number of times the plan has been used
Total_worker_time	Total CPU time used by the plan since it was created
Total_logical_reads	Total number of reads used since the plan was created
Total_logical_writes	Total number of writes used since the plan was created
Query_hash	A binary hash that can be used to identify queries with similar logic
Query_plan_hash	A binary hash that can be used to identify plans with similar logic

## Costly Queries

Now that you have seen two different ways of collecting query performance metrics, let's look at what the data represents: the costly queries themselves. When the performance of SQL Server goes bad, two things are most likely happening:

- First, certain queries create high stress on system resources. These queries affect the performance of the overall system, because the server becomes incapable of serving other SQL queries fast enough.
- Additionally, the costly queries block all other queries requesting the same database resources, further degrading the performance of those queries. Optimizing the costly queries improves not only their own performance but also the performance of other queries by reducing database blocking and pressure on SQL Server resources.
- Finally, a query that, by itself is not terribly costly, could be called thousands of times a minute, which, by the simple accumulation of less than optimal code, can lead to major resource bottlenecks.

To begin to determine which queries you need to spend time working with, you're going to use the resources that we've talked about so far. For example, assuming the queries are in cache, you will be able to use the DMOs to pull together meaningful data to determine the most costly queries. Alternatively, because you've captured the queries using extended events, you can access that data as a means to identify the costliest queries.

One small note on the extended events data: It's going to be collected to a file. You'll then need to load the data into a table or just query it directly. You can read directly from the extended events file you can query it using this system function:

```
SELECT *
FROM sys.fn_xe_file_target_read_file
('C:\Program Files\Microsoft SQL Server\MSSQL11.RANDORI\MSSQL\Log\Query Performance
Tuning*.xel', NULL, NULL, NULL);
```

The query returns each extended event as a single row. The data about the event is stored in an XML column, `event_data`. You'll need to use XQuery to go against the data directly, but once you do, you can search, sort and aggregate the data captured. I'll walk you through a full example of this mechanism in the next section.

## Identifying Costly Queries

The goal of SQL Server is to return result sets to the user in the shortest time. To do this, SQL Server has a built-in, cost-based optimizer called the *query optimizer*, which generates a cost-effective strategy called a *query execution plan*. The query optimizer weighs many factors, including (but not limited to) the usage of CPU, memory, and disk I/O required to execute a query, all derived from the statistics maintained by indexes or generated on the fly, and it then creates a cost-effective execution plan. Although minimizing the number of I/Os is not a requirement for a cost-effective plan, you will often find that the least costly plan generally has the fewest I/Os because I/O operations are expensive.

In the data returned from a session, the `cpu_time` and `logical_reads` or `physical_reads` fields also show where a query costs you. The `cpu_time` field represents the CPU time used to execute the query. The two reads fields represent the number of pages (8KB in size) a query operated on and thereby indicates the amount of memory or I/O stress caused by the query. It also provides an indication of disk stress, since memory pages have to be backed up in the case of action queries, populated during first-time data access, and displaced to disk during memory bottlenecks. The higher the number of logical reads for a query, the higher the possible stress on the disk could be. An excessive number of logical pages also increases load on the CPU in managing those pages. This is not an automatic correlation. You can't always count on the query with the highest number of reads being the poorest performer. But it is a general metric and a good starting point.

The queries that cause a large number of logical reads usually acquire locks on a correspondingly large set of data. Even reading (as opposed to writing) may require shared locks on all the data, depending on the isolation level. These queries block all other queries requesting this data (or a part of the data) for the purposes of modifying it, not for reading it. Since these queries are inherently costly and require a long time to execute, they block other queries for an extended period of time. The blocked queries then cause blocks on further queries, introducing a chain of blocking in the database. ([Chapter 12](#) covers lock modes.)

As a result, it makes sense to identify the costly queries and optimize them first, thereby doing the following:

- Improving the performance of the costly queries themselves
  - Thereby reducing the overall stress on system resources
  - Which can reduce database blocking

The costly queries can be categorized into the following two types:

- *Single execution*: An individual execution of the query is costly.
- *Multiple executions*: A query itself may not be costly, but the repeated execution of the query causes pressure on the system resources.

You can identify these two types of costly queries using different approaches, as explained in the following sections.

## Costly Queries with a Single Execution

You can identify the costly queries by analyzing a session output file or by querying `sys.dm_exec_query_stats`. For this example, we'll start with identifying queries that perform a large number of logical reads, so you should sort the trace output on the `logical_reads` data column. You can change that around to sort on duration, CPU, or even combine them in interesting ways. You can access the trace information by following these steps:

1. Capture a session that contains a typical workload.
2. Save the session output to a file.
3. Query the trace file for analysis Sorting by the logical\_reads field

```
WITH xEvents AS
(SELECT object_name AS xEventName,
CAST (event_data AS xml) AS xEventData
FROM sys.fn_xe_file_target_read_file
('D:\Sessions\QueryPerformanceTuning*.xel', NULL, NULL, NULL)
)
SELECT
xEventName,
xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''duration'']/value')[1],'bigint') Duration,
xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''physical_reads'']/value)[1],'bigint') PhysicalReads,
xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''logical_reads'']/value)[1],'bigint') LogicalReads,
xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''cpu_time'']/value)[1],'bigint') CpuTime,
CASE xEventName WHEN 'sql_batch_completed' THEN
xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''batch_text'']/value)[1],'varchar(max)')
WHEN 'rpc_completed' THEN
xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''statement'']/value)[1],'varchar(max)')
END AS SQLText,
xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''query_plan_hash'']/value)[1],'binary(8)') QueryPlanHash
INTO Session_Table
FROM xEvents;
```

In some cases, you may have identified a large stress on the CPU from the System Monitor output. The pressure on the CPU may be because of a large number of CPU-intensive operations, such as stored procedure recompilations, aggregate functions, data sorting, hash joins, and so on. In such cases, you should sort the session output on the `cpu_time` field to identify the queries taking up a large number of processor cycles.

## Costly Queries with Multiple Executions

As I mentioned earlier, sometimes a query may not be costly by itself, but the cumulative effect of multiple executions of the same query might put pressure on the system resources. In this situation, sorting on the `logical_reads` field won't help you identify this type of costly query. You instead want to know the total number of reads, or total CPU time, or just the accumulated duration performed by multiple executions of the query.

- Query the session output and group on some of the values you're interested in.
- Access the `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` DMO to retrieve the information from the production server. This assumes that you're dealing with an immediate issue and not looking at a historical problem because this data is only what is currently in the procedure cache

Depending on the amount of data collected and the size of your files, running queries directly against the files you've collected from extended events may be excessively slow. In that case, use the same basic function, `sys.fn_xe_file_target_read_file`, to load the data into a table instead of querying it directly. Once that's done, you can apply indexing to the table in order to speed up the queries. In this case, I'll load the data into a table on the database so that I can run queries against it using the previous script.

Once the session data is imported into a database table, execute a SELECT statement to find the total number of reads performed by the multiple executions of the same query as follows (`reads.sql` in the download):

```
SELECT COUNT(*) AS TotalExecutions,
       st.xEventName,
       st.SQLText,
       SUM(st.Duration) AS DurationTotal,
       SUM(st.CpuTime) AS CpuTotal,
       SUM(st.LogicalReads) AS LogicalReadTotal,
       SUM(st.PhysicalReads) AS PhysicalReadTotal
  FROM Session_Table AS st
 GROUP BY st.xEventName, st.SQLText
 ORDER BY LogicalReadTotal DESC;
```

The `TotalExecutions` column in the preceding script indicates the number of times a query was executed. The `LogicalReadTotal` column indicates the total number of logical reads performed by the multiple executions of the query.

The costly queries identified by this approach are a better indication of load than the costly queries with single execution identified by a session. For example, a query that requires 50 reads might be executed 1,000 times. The query itself may be considered cheap enough, but the total number of reads performed by the query turns out to be 50,000 ( $= 50 \times 1,000$ ), which cannot be considered cheap. Optimizing this query to reduce the reads by even 10 for individual execution reduces the total number of reads by 10,000 ( $= 10 \times 1,000$ ), which can be more beneficial than optimizing a single query with 5,000 reads.

The problem with this approach is that most queries will have a varying set of criteria in the `WHERE` clause or that procedure calls will have different values passed in. That makes the simple grouping by `SqlText` impossible. You can take care of this problem with a number of approaches. One of the better ones is outlined on the Microsoft Developers Network at [http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/aal75800\(SOL.80\).aspx](http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/aal75800(SOL.80).aspx). Although it was written originally for SQL Server 2000, it will work fine with SQL Server 2008.

Getting the same information out of the `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` view simply requires a query against the DMV:

```
SELECT s.totalexecutioncount,
       t.text,
       s.TotalExecutionCount,
       s.TotalElapsedTime,
       s.TotalLogicalReads,
       s.TotalPhysicalReads
  FROM (SELECT deqs.plan_handle,
              SUM(deqs.execution_count) AS TotalExecutionCount,
              SUM(deqs.total_elapsed_time) AS TotalElapsedTime,
              SUM(deqs.total_logical_reads) AS TotalLogicalReads,
              SUM(deqs.total_physical_reads) AS TotalPhysicalReads
    FROM sys.dm_exec_query_stats AS deqs
   GROUP BY deqs.plan_handle
  ) AS s
 CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(s.plan_handle) AS t
 ORDER BY s.TotalLogicalReads DESC ;
```

Another mechanism you can apply to the data available from the execution DMOs is to use the `query_hash` and `query_plan_hash` as aggregation mechanisms. While a given stored procedure or parameterized query might

have different values passed to it, changing the query\_hash, the query\_plan\_hash for these will be identical. This means, you can aggregate against the hash values to identify common plans or common query patterns that you wouldn't be able to see otherwise. This is just a slight modification from the previous query:

```

SELECT s.TotalExecutionCount,
       t.text,
       s.TotalExecutionCount,
       s.TotalElapsedTime,
       s.TotalLogicalReads,
       s.TotalPhysicalReads
  FROM (SELECT deqs.query_plan_hash,
              SUM(deqs.execution_count) AS TotalExecutionCount,
              SUM(deqs.total_elapsed_time) AS TotalElapsedTime,
              SUM(deqs.total_logical_reads) AS TotalLogicalReads,
              SUM(deqs.total_physical_reads) AS TotalPhysicalReads
    FROM sys.dm_exec_query_stats AS deqs
   GROUP BY deqs.query_plan_hash
  AS s
  CROSS APPLY (SELECT plan_handle
               FROM sys.dm_exec_query_stats as deqs
              WHERE s.query_plan_hash = deqs.query_plan_hash) AS p
  CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(p.plan_handle) AS t
 ORDER BY TotalLogicalReads DESC ;

```

This is so much easier than all the work required to gather session data that it makes you wonder why you would ever use extended events at all. The main reason is precision. The sys.dm\_exec\_query\_stats view is a running aggregate for the time that a given plan has been in memory. An extended events session, on the other hand, is a historical track for whatever time frame you ran it in. You can even add session results together within a database and have a list of data that you can generate totals in a more precise manner rather than simply relying on a given moment in time. But understand that a lot of troubleshooting of performance problems is focused on that moment in time when the query is running slowly. That's when sys.dm\_exec\_query\_stats becomes irreplaceably useful.

## Identifying Slow-Running Queries

Because a user's experience is highly influenced by the response time of their requests, you should regularly monitor the execution time of incoming SQL queries and find out the response time of slow-running queries. If the response time (or duration) of slow-running queries becomes unacceptable, then you should analyze the cause of performance degradation. Not every slow-performing query is caused by resource issues, though. Other concerns such as blocking can also lead to slow query performance. Blocking is covered in detail in [Chapter 12](#).

To identify slow running queries, just change the queries against your session data to change what you're ordering by like this:

```

WITH xEvents AS
(SELECT object_name AS xEventName,
     CAST (event_data AS xml) AS xEventData
   FROM sys.fn_xe_file_target_read_file
  ('D:\Session\Query Performance Tuning*.xel', NULL, NULL, NULL)
)

```

```

SELECT
    xEventName,
    xEventData.value('(/event/data[@name=''duration'']/value)[1]', 'bigint') Duration,
    xEventData.value('(/event/data[@name=''physical_reads'']/value)[1]', 'bigint')
        PhysicalReads,
    xEventData.value('(/event/data[@name=''logical_reads'']/value)[1]', 'bigint')
        LogicalReads,
    xEventData.value('(/event/data[@name=''cpu_time'']/value)[1]', 'bigint') CpuTime,
    xEventData.value('(/event/data[@name=''batch_text'']/value)[1]', 'varchar(max)')
        BatchText,
    xEventData.value('(/event/data[@name=''statement'']/value)[1]', 'varchar(max)')
        StatementText,
    xEventData.value('(/event/data[@name=''query_plan_hash'']/value)[1]', 'binary(8)')
        QueryPlanHash
FROM xEvents
ORDER BY Duration DESC;

```

For a slow-running system, you should note the duration of slow-running queries before and after the optimization process. After you apply optimization techniques, you should then work out the overall effect on the system. It is possible that your optimization steps may have adversely affected other queries, making them slower.

## Execution Plans

Once you have identified a costly query, you need to find out *why* it is so costly. You can identify the costly procedure from SQL Profiler or `sys.dm_exec_procedure_stats`, rerun it in Management Studio, and look at the execution plan used by the query optimizer. An execution plan shows the processing strategy (including multiple intermediate steps) used by the query optimizer to execute a query.

To create an execution plan, the query optimizer evaluates various permutations of indexes and join strategies. Because of the possibility of a large number of potential plans, this optimization process may take a long time to generate the most cost-effective execution plan. To prevent the overoptimization of an execution plan, the optimization process is broken into multiple phases. Each phase is a set of transformation rules that evaluate various permutations of indexes and join strategies ultimately attempting to find a good enough plan, not a perfect plan. It's that difference between good enough and perfect that can lead to poor performance because of inadequately optimized execution plans. The query optimizer will only attempt a limited number of optimizations before it simply goes with the least costly plan it has currently.

After going through a phase, the query optimizer examines the estimated cost of the resulting plan. If the query optimizer determines that the plan is cheap enough, it will use the plan without going through the remaining optimization phases. However, if the plan is not cheap enough, the optimizer will go through the next optimization phase. I will cover execution plan generation in more depth in [Chapter 9](#).

SQL Server displays a query execution plan in various forms and from two different types. The most commonly used forms in SQL Server 2012 are the graphical execution plan and the XML execution plan. Actually, the graphical execution plan is simply an XML execution plan parsed for the screen. The two types of execution plan are the estimated plan and the actual plan. The *estimated* plan represents the results coming from the query optimizer, and the *actual* plan is the plan used by the query engine. The beauty of the estimated plan is that it doesn't require the query to be executed. The plans generated by these types can differ, but most of the time they will be the same. The primary difference is the inclusion of some execution statistics in the actual plan that are not present in the estimated plan.

The graphical execution plan uses icons to represent the processing strategy of a query. To obtain a graphical estimated execution plan, select **Query > Display Estimated Execution Plan**. An XML execution plan contains

the same data available through the graphical plan but in a more programmatically accessible format. Further, with the XQuery capabilities of SQL Server 2008, XML execution plans can be queried as if they were tables. An XML execution plan is produced by the statements `SET SHOWPLAN_XML`, for an estimated plan, and `SET STATISTICS XML`, for the actual execution plan. You can also right-click a graphical execution plan and select Showplan XML.

You can obtain the estimated XML execution plan for the costliest query identified previously using the `SET SHOWPLAN_XML` command as follows:

```
USE DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2;
GO
SET SHOWPLAN_XML ON
GO
SELECT soh.AccountNumber,
       sod.LineTotal,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.UnitPrice,
       p.Name
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader soh
JOIN   Sales.SalesOrderDetail sod
       ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
JOIN   Production.Product p
       ON sod.ProductID = p.ProductID
WHERE  sod.LineTotal > 20000 ;
GO
SET SHOWPLAN_XML OFF
GO
```

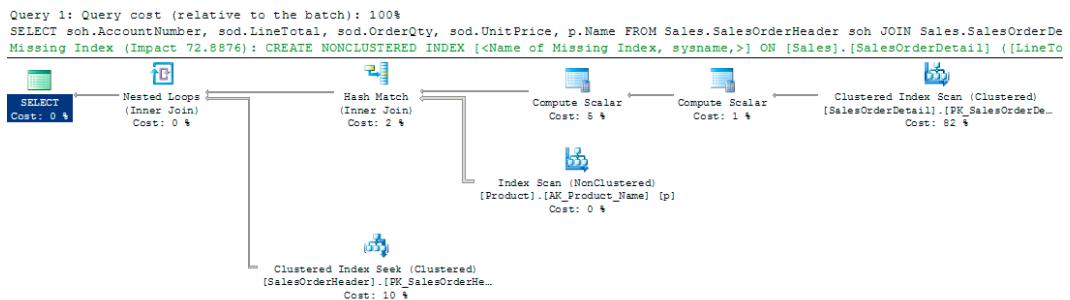
Running this query results in a link to an execution plan, not an execution plan or any data. Clicking the link will open an execution plan. Although the plan will be displayed as a graphical plan, right-clicking the plan and selecting Show Execution Plan XML will display the XML data. Figure 3-11 shows a portion of the XML execution plan output.

The screenshot displays a portion of the XML execution plan output. The XML is nested within a large black rectangular box. The visible part of the XML starts with the root element `<ShowPlanXML xmlns="http://schemas.microsoft.com/sqlserver/2004/07/showplan" Version="1.1" Build="10.0.1600.22">`. It includes sections for `<BatchSequence>`, `<Batch>`, `<Statements>`, `<StatementSimple StatementText="SELECT soh.AccountNumber, sod.LineTotal, sod.OrderQty, sod.UnitPrice, p.Name FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader soh JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail sod ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID JOIN Production.Product p ON sod.ProductID = p.ProductID WHERE sod.LineTotal > 20000 ;" ...>`, `<MissingIndexes>`, and `<RelOp NodeId="0" PhysicalOp="Hash Match" LogicalOp="Inner Join" EstimateRows="26293.6" EstimateIO="0" EstimateCPU="0.2048" ...>`. The XML uses standard XML syntax with opening and closing tags and nested elements like `<ColumnGroup Usage="INEQUALITY">` and `<Column Name="LineTotal" ColumnId="9" />`.

**Figure 3-11.** XML execution plan output

## Analyzing a Query Execution Plan

Let's start with the costly query identified in previous query. Copy it (minus the `SET SHOWPLAN_XML` statements) into Management Studio, and turn on Include Actual Execution Plan. Now, on executing this query, you'll see the execution plan in Figure 3-12.



**Figure 3-12.** Query execution plan

Execution plans show two different flows of information. Reading from the left side, you can see the logical flow, starting with the `SELECT` operator and proceeding through each of the execution steps. Starting from the right side and reading the other way is the physical flow of information, pulling data from the `Index Scan` operator first and then proceeding to each subsequent step.. Most of the time, reading in the direction of the physical flow of data is more applicable to understanding what's happening with the execution plan. Each step represents an operation performed to get the final output of the query. Some of the aspects of a query execution represented by an execution plan are as follows:

- If a query consists of a batch of multiple queries, the execution plan for each query will be displayed in the order of execution. Each execution plan in the batch will have a relative estimated cost, with the total cost of the whole batch being 100 percent.
- Every icon in an execution plan represents an operator. They will each have a relative estimated cost, with the total cost of all the nodes in an execution plan being 100 percent.
- Usually the first physical operator in an execution plan represents a data-retrieval mechanism from a database object (a table or an index). For example, in the execution plan in Figure 3-10, the three starting points represent retrievals from the `SalesOrderHeader`, `SalesOrderDetail`, and `Product` tables.
- Data retrieval will usually be either a table operation or an index operation. For example, in the execution plan in Figure 3-10, all three data retrieval steps are index operations.
- Data retrieval on an index will be either an index scan or an index seek. For example, the first and second index operations in Figure 3-14 are index scans, and the third one is an index seek.
- The naming convention for a data-retrieval operation on an index is `[Table Name]. [Index Name]`.
- Data flows from right to left between two operators and is indicated by a connecting arrow between the two operators.

- The thickness of a connecting arrow between operators represents a graphical representation of the number of rows transferred.
- The joining mechanism between two operators in the same column will be a nested loop join, a hash match join, or a merge join. For example, in the execution plan shown in Figure 3-14, there is one merge and one hash match. (Join mechanisms are covered in more detail later).
- Running the mouse over a node in an execution plan shows a pop-up window with some details, as you can see in Figure 3-13.

<b>SELECT</b>	
<b>Cached plan size</b>	64 KB
<b>Degree of Parallelism</b>	0
<b>Estimated Operator Cost</b>	0 (0%)
<b>Memory Grant</b>	1056
<b>Estimated Subtree Cost</b>	1.27986
<b>Estimated Number of Rows</b>	42.3155
<b>Statement</b>	
<pre>SELECT soh.AccountNumber,        sod.LineTotal,        sod.OrderQty,        sod.UnitPrice,        p.Name   FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader soh   JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail sod     ON soh.SalesOrderID =       sod.SalesOrderID   JOIN Production.Product p     ON sod.ProductID = p.ProductID  WHERE sod.LineTotal &gt; 20000 ;</pre>	

**Figure 3-13.** Tool-tip sheet from an execution plan operator

- A complete set of details about an operator is available in the Properties window, which you can open by right-clicking the operator and selecting Properties. This is visible in Figure 3-12.
- An operator detail shows both physical and logical operation types at the top. Physical operations represent those actually used by the storage engine, while the logical operations are the constructs used by the optimizer to build the estimated execution plan. If logical and physical operations are the same, then only the physical operation is shown. It also displays other useful information, such as row count, I/O cost, CPU cost, and so on.
- Reading through the properties on all operators can be necessary to understand how a query is being executed within SQL Server in order to better know how to tune that query.

Actual Execution Mode	Row
Actual Number of Batches	0
Actual Number of Rows	26
Actual Rebinds	0
Actual Rewinds	0
Defined Values	[AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail]
Description	Scanning a clustered index, entirely or in parts.
Estimated CPU Cost	0.133606
Estimated Execution Mode	Row
Estimated I/O Cost	0.916458
Estimated Number of Executions	1
Estimated Number of Rows	42.3155
Estimated Operator Cost	1.05006 (82%)
Estimated Rebinds	0
Estimated Rewinds	0
Estimated Row Size	37 B
Estimated Subtree Cost	1.05006
Forced Index	False
ForceScan	False
Logical Operation	Clustered Index Scan
Node ID	5
NoExpandHint	False
Number of Executions	1
Object	[AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail]
Ordered	False
Output List	[AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail]
Parallel	False
Physical Operation	Clustered Index Scan
Predicate	isnull(CONVERT_IMPLICIT(numeric(19,4),
TableCardinality	121317

**Figure 3-14.** Clustered index scan properties

## Identifying the Costly Steps in an Execution Plan

The most immediate approach in the execution plan is to find out which steps are relatively costly. These steps are the starting point for your query optimization. You can choose the starting steps by adopting the following techniques:

- Each node in an execution plan shows its relative estimated cost in the complete execution plan, with the total cost of the whole plan being 100 percent. Therefore, focus attention on the node(s) with the highest relative cost. For example, the execution plan in Figure 3-10 has one step with 82 percent estimated cost.
- An execution plan may be from a batch of statements, so you may also need to find the most costly estimated statement. In Figure 3-15 and Figure 3-14, you can see at the top of the plan the text “Query 1.” In a batch situation, there will be multiple plans, and they will be numbered in the order they occurred within the batch.

Actual Execution Mode	Row
Actual Number of Batches	0
Actual Number of Rows	26
Actual Rebinds	0
Actual Rewinds	0
Defined Values	[AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderHeader].AccountNumber
Description	Scanning a particular range of rows from a clustered index.
Estimated CPU Cost	0.0001581
Estimated Execution Mode	Row
Estimated I/O Cost	0.003125
Estimated Number of Executions	42.3155
Estimated Number of Rows	1
Estimated Operator Cost	0.132057 (10%)
Estimated Rebinds	41.3155
Estimated Rewinds	0
Estimated Row Size	26 B
Estimated Subtree Cost	0.132057
Forced Index	False
ForceScan	False
ForceSeek	False
Logical Operation	Clustered Index Seek
Node ID	14
NoExpandHint	False
Number of Executions	26
Object	[AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderHeader].[PK_SalesOrderHeader]
Ordered	True
Output List	[AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderHeader].AccountNumber
Parallel	False
Physical Operation	Clustered Index Seek
Scan Direction	FORWARD
Seek Predicates	Seek Keys[1]: Prefix: [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderHeader]
Storage	RowStore
TableCardinality	31465

**Figure 3-15.** Data-retrieval mechanism for the *SalesOrderHeader* table

- Observe the thickness of the connecting arrows between nodes. A very thick connecting arrow indicates a large number of rows being transferred between the corresponding nodes. Analyze the node to the left of the arrow to understand why it requires so many rows. Check the properties of the arrows too. You may see that the estimated rows and the actual rows are different. This can be caused by out-of-date statistics, among other things.
- Look for hash join operations. For small result sets, a nested loop join is usually the preferred join technique. You will learn more about hash joins compared to nested loop joins later in this chapter. Just remember that hash joins are not necessarily bad, and loop joins are not necessarily good. It does depend on the amounts of data being returned by the query.

- Look for bookmark lookup operations. A bookmark operation for a large result set can cause a large number of logical reads. I will cover bookmark lookups in more detail in [Chapter 6](#).
- There may be warnings, indicated by an exclamation point on one of the operators, which are areas of immediate concern. These can be caused by a variety of issues, including a join without join criteria or an index or a table with missing statistics. Usually resolving the warning situation will help performance.
- Look for steps performing a sort operation. This indicates that the data was not retrieved in the correct sort order.
- Watch for extra operators that may be placing additional load on the system such as table spools. These may be necessary for the operation of the query, or they may be indications of an improperly written query or badly designed indexes.
- The default cost threshold for parallel query execution is an estimated cost of 5 and that's very low. Watch for parallel operations where they are not warranted.

## Analyzing Index Effectiveness

To examine a costly step in an execution plan further, you should analyze the data-retrieval mechanism for the relevant table or index. First, you should check whether an index operation is a seek or a scan. Usually, for best performance, you should retrieve as few rows as possible from a table, and an index *seek* is usually the most efficient way of accessing a small number of rows. A *scan* operation usually indicates that a larger number of rows have been accessed. Therefore, it is generally preferable to seek rather than scan.

Next, you want to ensure that the indexing mechanism is properly set up. The query optimizer evaluates the available indexes to discover which index will retrieve data from the table in the most efficient way. If a desired index is not available, the optimizer uses the next best index. For best performance, you should always ensure that the best index is used in a data-retrieval operation. You can judge the index effectiveness (whether the best index is used or not) by analyzing the Argument section of a node detail for the following:

- A data-retrieval operation
- A join operation

Let's look at the data-retrieval mechanism for the `SalesOrderHeader` table in the previous execution plan ([Figure 3-12](#)). [Figure 3-15](#) shows the operator properties.

In the operator properties for the `SalesOrderHeader` table, the `Object` property specifies the index used, `PK_SalesOrderHeader`. It uses the following naming convention: `[Database]. [Owner].[Table Name]. [Index Name]`. The `Seek Predicates` property specifies the column, or columns, used to find keys in the index. The `SalesOrderHeader` table is joined with the `SalesOrderDetail` table on the `SalesOrderID` column. The `SEEK` works on the fact that the join criteria, `SalesOrderID`, is the leading edge of the clustered index and primary key, `PK_SalesOrderHeader`.

Sometimes you may have a different data-retrieval mechanism. Instead of the Seek Predicate that you saw in [Figure 3-15](#), [Figure 3-16](#) shows a simple predicate, indicating a totally different mechanism for retrieving the data:

In the properties in [Figure 3-16](#), there is no seek predicate. Because of the function being performed on the column, the `ISNULL` and the `CONVERT_IMPLICIT`, the entire table must be checked for existence of the Predicate value. Because a calculation is being performed on the data, the index doesn't store the results of the calculation, so instead of simply looking information up on the index, you have to scan the data, performing the calculation, and then checking that the data is correct.

Actual Execution Mode	Row
Actual Number of Batches	0
Actual Number of Rows	26
Actual Rebinds	0
Actual Rewinds	0
Defined Values	[AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].SalesOrderID, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].SalesOrderDetailID, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].ProductID, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].UnitPrice, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].Quantity, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].LineTotal, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].rowguid, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].ModifiedDate
Description	Scanning a clustered index, entirely or only a range.
Estimated CPU Cost	0.133606
Estimated Execution Mode	Row
Estimated I/O Cost	0.916458
Estimated Number of Executions	1
Estimated Number of Rows	42.3155
Estimated Operator Cost	1.05006 (82%)
Estimated Rebinds	0
Estimated Rewinds	0
Estimated Row Size	37 B
Estimated Subtree Cost	1.05006
Forced Index	False
ForceScan	False
Logical Operation	Clustered Index Scan
Node ID	5
NoExpandHint	False
Number of Executions	1
Object	[AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].[PK_SalesOrderDetail]
Ordered	False
Output List	[AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].SalesOrderID, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].SalesOrderDetailID, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].ProductID, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].UnitPrice, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].Quantity, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].LineTotal, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].rowguid, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].ModifiedDate
Parallel	False
Physical Operation	Clustered Index Scan
Predicate	isnull(CONVERT_IMPLICIT(numeric(19,4),[AdventureWorks2008R2].[Sales].[SalesOrderDetail].UnitPrice,1))=0
TableCardinality	121317

**Figure 3-16.** A variation of the data-retrieval mechanism, a scan

## Analyzing Join Effectiveness

In addition to analyzing the indexes used, you should examine the effectiveness of join strategies decided by the optimizer. SQL Server uses three types of joins:

- Hash joins
- Merge joins
- Nested loop joins

In many simple queries affecting a small set of rows, nested loop joins are far superior to both hash and merge joins. The join types to be used in a query are decided dynamically by the optimizer.

## Hash Join

To understand SQL Server's hash join strategy, consider the following simple query:

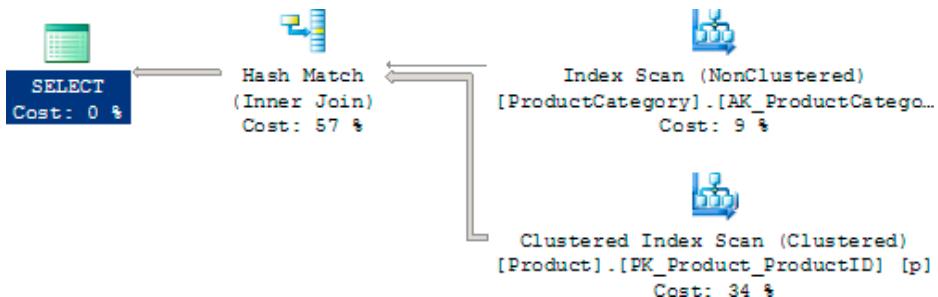
```
SELECT p.*  
FROM Production.Product p  
JOIN Production.ProductCategory pc  
ON p.ProductSubcategoryID = pc.ProductCategoryID;
```

Table 3-6 shows the two tables' indexes and number of rows.

**Table 3-6. Indexes and Number of Rows of the Products and ProductCategory Tables**

Table	indexes	Number of Rows
Product	Clustered index on ProductID	504
ProductCategory	Clustered index on ProductCategoryld	4

Figure 3-17 shows the execution plan for the preceding query.



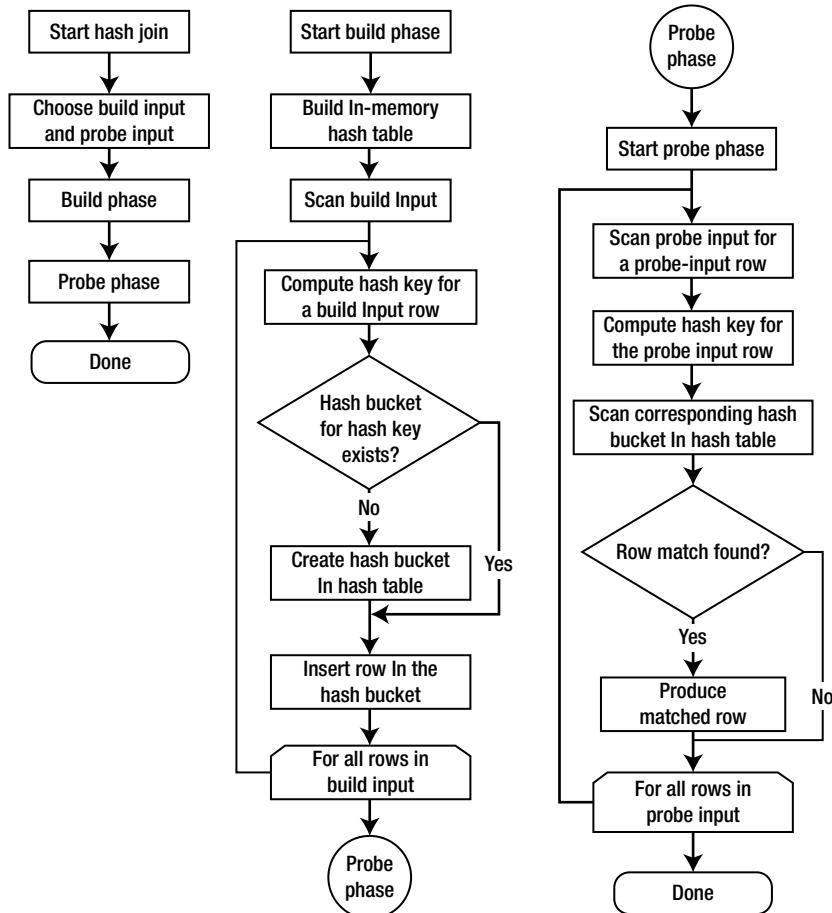
**Figure 3-17. Execution plan with a hash join**

You can see that the optimizer used a hash join between the two tables.

A hash join uses the two join inputs as a *build input* and a *probe input*. The build input is shown as the top input in the execution plan, and the probe input is shown as the bottom input. The smaller of the two inputs serves as the build input.

The hash join performs its operation in two phases: the *build phase* and the *probe phase*. In the most commonly used form of hash join, the *in-memory hash join*, the entire build input is scanned or computed, and then a hash table is built in memory. Each row is inserted into a hash bucket depending on the hash value computed for the *hash key* (the set of columns in the equality predicate).

This build phase is followed by the probe phase. The entire probe input is scanned or computed one row at a time, and for each probe row, a hash key value is computed. The corresponding hash bucket is scanned for the hash key value from the probe input, and the matches are produced. Figure 3-18 illustrates the process of an in-memory hash join.



**Figure 3-18.** Workflow for an in-memory hash join

The query optimizer uses hash joins to process large, unsorted, nonindexed inputs efficiently. Let's now look at the next type of join: the merge join.

## Merge Join

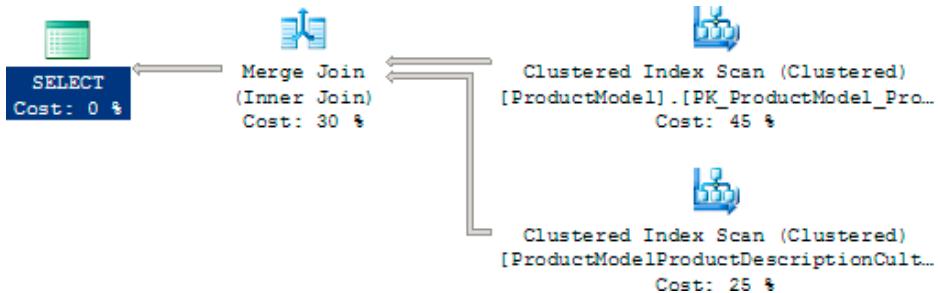
In the previous case, input from the Product table is larger, and the table is not indexed on the joining column (ProductCategoryID). Using the following simple query, you can see different behavior:

```

SELECT pm.*
FROM Production.ProductModel pm
JOIN Production.ProductModelProductDescriptionCulture pmpd
    ON pm.ProductModelID = pmpd.ProductModelID ;

```

Figure 3-19 shows the resultant execution plan for this query.



**Figure 3-19.** Execution plan with a merge join

For this query, the optimizer used a merge join between the two tables. A merge join requires both join inputs to be sorted on the merge columns, as defined by the join criterion. If indexes are available on both joining columns, then the join inputs are sorted by the index. Since each join input is sorted, the merge join gets a row from each input and compares them for equality. A matching row is produced if they are equal. This process is repeated until all rows are processed.

In situations where the data is ordered by an index, a merge join can be one of the fastest join operations, but if the data is not ordered and the optimizer still chooses to perform a merge join, then the data has to be ordered by an extra operation. This can make the merge join slower and more costly in terms of memory and I/O resources.

In this case, the query optimizer found that the join inputs were both sorted (or indexed) on their joining columns. As a result, the merge join was chosen as a faster join strategy than the hash join.

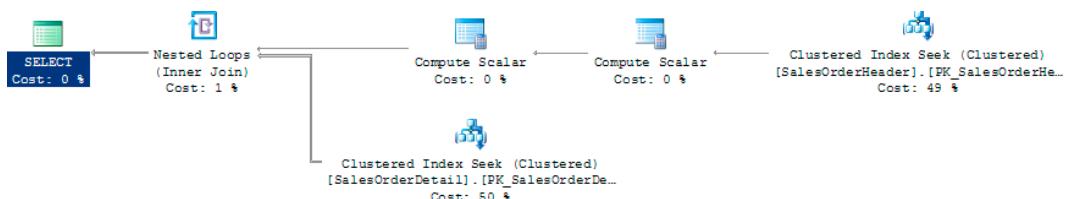
## Nested Loop Join

The final type of join I'll cover here is the nested loop join. For better performance, you should always access a limited number of rows from individual tables. To understand the effect of using a smaller result set, decrease the join inputs in your query as follows:

```

SELECT soh.*
FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader soh
JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail sod
  ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
WHERE soh.SalesOrderID = 71832 ;
  
```

Figure 3-20 shows the resultant execution plan of the new query.



**Figure 3-20.** Execution plan with a nested loop join

As you can see, the optimizer used a nested loop join between the two tables.

A nested loop join uses one join input as the outer input table and the other as the inner input table. The outer input table is shown as the top input in the execution plan, and the inner input table is shown as the bottom input table. The outer loop consumes the outer input table row by row. The inner loop, executed for each outer row, searches for matching rows in the inner input table.

Nested loop joins are highly effective if the outer input is quite small and the inner input is large but indexed. In many simple queries affecting a small set of rows, nested loop joins are far superior to both hash and merge joins. Joins operate by gaining speed through other sacrifices. A loop join can be fast because it uses memory to take a small set of data and compare it quickly to a second set of data. A merge join similarly uses memory and a bit of tempdb to do its ordered comparisons. A hash join uses memory and tempdb to build out the hash tables for the join. Although a loop join is faster, it will consume more memory than a hash or merge as the data sets get larger, which is why SQL Server will use different plans in different situations for different sets of data.

Even for small join inputs, such as in the previous query, it's important to have an index on the joining columns. As you saw in the preceding execution plan, for a small set of rows, indexes on joining columns allow the query optimizer to consider a nested loop join strategy. A missing index on the joining column of an input will force the query optimizer to use a hash join instead.

Table 3-7 summarizes the use of the three join types.

**Table 3-7 Characteristics of the Three Join Types**

Join Type	Index on Joining Columns	Usual Size of Joining Tables	Presorted	Join Clause
Hash	Inner table: Not indexed Outer table: Optional Optimal condition: Small outer table, large inner table	Any	No	Equi-join
Merge	Both tables: Must Optimal condition: Clustered or covering index on both	Large	Yes	Equi-join
Nested loop	Inner table: Must Outer table: Preferable	Small	Optional	All

---

**Note** The outer table is usually the smaller of the two joining tables in the hash and loop joins.

---

I will cover index types, including clustered and covering indexes, in [Chapter 4](#).

## Actual vs. Estimated Execution Plans

There are estimated and actual execution plans. To a degree, these are interchangeable. But, the actual plan carries with it information from the execution of the query, specifically the row counts affected and some other information, that is not available in the estimated plans. This information can be extremely useful, especially when trying to understand statistic estimations. For that reason, actual execution plans are preferred when tuning queries.

Unfortunately, you won't always be able to access them. You may not be able to execute a query, say in a production environment. You may only have access to the plan from cache, which contains no runtime information. So there are situations where the estimated plan is what you will have to work with.

However, there are other situations where the estimated plans will not work at all. Consider the following stored procedure (`createp1.sql` in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('p1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROC p1

GO
CREATE PROC p1
AS
CREATE TABLE t1 (c1 INT) ;
INSERT INTO t1
    SELECT ProductID
        FROM Production.Product ;
SELECT *
FROM t1 ;
DROP TABLE t1 ;

GO
```

You may try to use `SHOWPLANXML` to obtain the estimated XML execution plan for the query as follows (`showplan.sql` in the download):

```
SET SHOWPLAN_XML ON
GO
EXEC p1 ;
GO
SET SHOWPLAN_XML OFF
GO
```

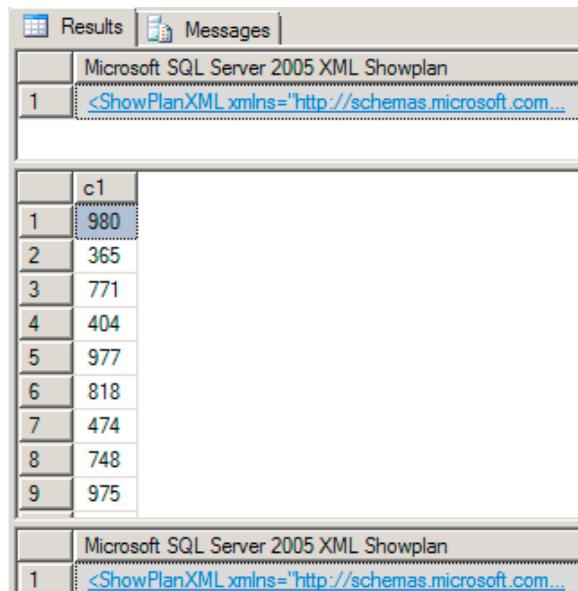
But this fails with the following error:

```
Msg 208, Level 16, State 1, Procedure p1, Line 3
Invalid object name 't1'..
```

Since `SHOWPLANXML` doesn't actually execute the query, the query optimizer can't generate an execution plan for `INSERT` and `SELECT` statements on the table (`t1`). Instead, you can use `STATISTICS XML` as follows:

```
SET STATISTICS XML ON
GO
EXEC p1;
GO
SET STATISTICS XML OFF
GO
```

Since `STATISTICS XML` executes the query, the table is created and accessed within the query which is all captured by the execution plan. Figure 3-21 shows the results of the query and the two plans for the two statements within the procedure provided by `STATISTICS XML`.



**Figure 3-21.** STATISTICS PROFILE output

**Tip** Remember to switch Query ► Show Execution Plan off in Management Studio, or you will see the graphical, rather than textual, execution plan.

## Plan Cache

One final place to access execution plans is to read them directly from the memory space where they are stored, the plan cache. Dynamic management views and functions are provided from SQL Server to access this data. To see a listing of execution plans in cache, run the following query:

```
SELECT p.query_plan,
       t.text
  FROM sys.dm_exec_cached_plans r
 CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_query_plan(r.plan_handle) p
 CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(r.plan_handle) t ;
```

The query returns a list of XML execution plan links. Opening any of them will show the execution plan. These execution plans are the compiled plans, but they contain no execution metrics. Working further with columns available through the dynamic management views will allow you to search for specific procedures or execution plans.

While not having the runtime data is somewhat limiting, having access to execution plans, even as the query is executing, is an invaluable resource for someone working on performance tuning. As mentioned earlier, you might not be able to execute a query in a production environment, so getting any plan at all is useful.

## Query Cost

Even though the execution plan for a query provides a detailed processing strategy and the estimated relative costs of the individual steps involved, it doesn't provide the actual cost of the query in terms of CPU usage, reads/writes to disk, or query duration. While optimizing a query, you may add an index to reduce the relative cost of a step. This may adversely affect a dependent step in the execution plan, or sometimes it may even modify the execution plan itself. Thus, if you look only at the execution plan, you can't be sure that your query optimization benefits the query as a whole, as opposed to that one step in the execution plan. You can analyze the overall cost of a query in different ways.

You should monitor the overall cost of a query while optimizing it. As explained previously, you can use Extended Events to monitor the duration, cpu, reads and writes information for the query. Extended events is an extremely efficient mechanism for gathering metrics. You should plan on taking advantage of this fact and use this mechanism to gather your query performance metrics. Just understand that collecting this information leads to large amounts of data that you will have to find a place to maintain within your system.

There are other ways to collect performance data that are more immediate than extended events.

## Client Statistics

Client statistics capture execution information from the perspective of your machine as a client of the server. This means that any times recorded include the time it takes to transfer data across the network, not merely the time involved on the SQL Server machine itself. To use them, simply click **Query > Include Client Statistics**. Now, each time you run a query, a limited set of data is collected including execution time, the number of rows affected, round-trips to the server, and more. Further, each execution of the query is displayed separately on the Client Statistics tab, and a column aggregating the multiple executions shows the averages for the data collected. The statistics will also show whether a time or count has changed from one run to the next, showing up as arrows, as shown in Figure 3-22. For example, consider this query:

	Trial 2	Trial 1	Average
Client Execution Time	18:06:58	18:06:44	
<b>Query Profile Statistics</b>			
Number of INSERT, DELETE and UPDATE statements	0 → 0	→ 0.0000	
Rows affected by INSERT, DELETE, or UPDATE statem...	0 → 0	→ 0.0000	
Number of SELECT statements	1 → 1	→ 1.0000	
Rows returned by SELECT statements	100 → 100	→ 100.0000	
Number of transactions	0 → 0	→ 0.0000	
<b>Network Statistics</b>			
Number of server roundtrips	1 → 1	→ 1.0000	
TDS packets sent from client	1 → 1	→ 1.0000	
TDS packets received from server	4 → 4	→ 4.0000	
Bytes sent from client	126 → 126	→ 126.0000	
Bytes received from server	14005 → 14005	→ 14005.0000	
<b>Time Statistics</b>			
Client processing time	0 → 0	→ 0.0000	
Total execution time	0 → 0	→ 0.0000	
Wait time on server replies	0 → 0	→ 0.0000	

**Figure 3-22.** Client statistics

```
SELECT TOP 100 p.*  
FROM Production.Product p
```

The client statistics information for the query should look something like that shown in Figure 3-22.

Although capturing client statistics can be a useful way to gather data, it's a limited set of data, and there is no way to show how one execution is different from another. You could even run a completely different query, and its data would be mixed in with the others, making the averages useless. If you need to, you can reset the client statistics. Select the Query menu and then the Reset Client Statistics menu item.

## Execution Time

Both Duration and CPU represent the time factor of a query. To obtain detailed information on the amount of time (in milliseconds) required to parse, compile, and execute a query, use SET STATISTICS TIME as follows:

```
SET STATISTICS TIME ON  
GO  
SELECT soh.AccountNumber,  
       sod.LineTotal,  
       sod.OrderQty,  
       sod.UnitPrice,  
       p.Name  
  FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader soh  
 JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail sod  
    ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID  
JOIN Production.Product p  
  ON sod.ProductID = p.ProductID  
 WHERE sod.LineTotal > 1000 ;  
GO  
SET STATISTICS TIME OFF  
GO
```

The output of STATISTICS TIME for the preceding SELECT statement is as follows:

```
SQL Server parse and compile time:  
  CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.  
  
(32101 row(s) affected)  
  
SQL Server Execution Times:  
  CPU time = 516 ms, elapsed time = 1620 ms.  
SQL Server parse and compile time:  
  
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 2 ms.
```

The CPU time = 516 ms part of the execution times represents the CPU value provided by the Profiler tool and the Server Trace option. Similarly, the corresponding Elapsed time = 1620 ms represents the Duration value provided by the other mechanisms.

A 0 ms parse and compile time signifies that the optimizer reused the existing execution plan for this query and therefore didn't have to spend any time parsing and compiling the query again. If the query is executed for the first time, then the optimizer has to parse the query first for syntax and then compile it to produce the execution plan. This can be easily verified by clearing out the cache using the system call DBCC FREEPROCCACHE and then rerunning the query:

```
SQL Server parse and compile time:
  CPU time = 78 ms, elapsed time = 135 ms.

(32101 row(s) affected)

SQL Server Execution Times:
  CPU time = 547 ms, elapsed time = 1318 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:
  CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.
```

This time, SQL Server spent 78 ms of CPU time and a total of 135 ms parsing and compiling the query.

**Note** You should not run DBCC FREEPROCCACHE on your production systems unless you are prepared to incur the not insignificant cost of recompiling every query on the system. In some ways, this will be as costly to your system as a reboot or a SQL Server instance restart.

## Statistics Io

As discussed in the “Identifying Costly Queries” section earlier in the chapter, the number of reads in the Reads column is frequently the most significant cost factor among duration, cpu, reads and writes. The total number of reads performed by a query consists of the sum of the number of reads performed on all tables involved in the query. The reads performed on the individual tables may vary significantly, depending on the size of the result set requested from the individual table and the indexes available.

To reduce the total number of reads, it will be useful to find all the tables accessed in the query and their corresponding number of reads. This detailed information helps you concentrate on optimizing data access on the tables with a large number of reads. The number of reads per table also helps you evaluate the impact of the optimization step (implemented for one table) on the other tables referred to in the query.

In a simple query, you determine the individual tables accessed by taking a close look at the query. This becomes increasingly difficult the more complex the query becomes. In the case of a stored procedure, database views, or functions, it becomes more difficult to identify all the tables actually accessed by the optimizer. You can use STATISTICS IO to get this information, irrespective of query complexity.

To turn STATISTICS IO on, navigate to Query ► Query Options ► Advanced ► Set Statistics IO in Management Studio. You may also get this information programmatically as follows:

```
SET STATISTICS IO ON
GO
SELECT soh.AccountNumber,
       sod.LineTotal,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.UnitPrice,
       p.Name
```

```

FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader soh
JOIN   Sales.SalesOrderDetail sod
       ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
JOIN   Production.Product p
       ON sod.ProductID = p.ProductID
WHERE  sod.SalesOrderID = 71856 ;
GO
SET STATISTICS IO OFF
GO

```

If you run this query and look at the execution plan, it consists of three clustered index seeks with two loop joins. If you remove the WHERE clause and run the query again, you get a set of scans and some hash joins. That's an interesting fact—but you don't know how it affects the query cost! You can use SET STATISTICS IO as shown previously to compare the cost of the query (in terms of logical reads) between the two processing strategies used by the optimizer.

You get following STATISTICS IO output when the query uses the hash join:

```

Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0, physical reads 0...
Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 1240, physical reads 0...
Table 'SalesOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 686, physical reads 0...
Table 'Product'. Scan count 1, logical reads 6, physical reads 0...

```

Now when you add back in the WHERE clause to appropriately filter the data, the resultant STATISTICS IO output turns out to be this:

```

Table 'Product'. Scan count 0, logical reads 4, physical reads 0...
Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 4, physical reads 0...
Table 'SalesOrderHeader'. Scan count 0, logical reads 3, physical reads 0...

```

Logical reads for the SalesOrderDetail table have been cut from 1,240 to 4 because of the index seek and the loop join. It also hasn't significantly affected the data retrieval cost of the Product table.

While interpreting the output of STATISTICS IO, you mostly refer to the number of logical reads. Sometimes you also refer to the scan count, but even if you perform few logical reads per scan, the total number of logical reads provided by STATISTICS IO can still be high. If the number of logical reads per scan is small for a specific table, then you may not be able to improve the indexing mechanism of the table any further. The number of physical reads and read-ahead reads will be nonzero when the data is not found in the memory, but once the data is populated in memory, the physical reads and read-ahead reads will tend to be zero.

There is another advantage to knowing all the tables used and their corresponding reads for a query. Both the duration and CPU values may fluctuate significantly when reexecuting the same query with no change in table schema (including indexes) or data because the essential services and background applications running on the SQL Server machine usually affect the processing time of the query under observation. But, don't forget that logical reads are not always the most accurate measure. Duration and CPU are absolutely useful and an important part of any query tuning.

During optimization steps, you need a nonfluctuating cost figure as a reference. The reads (or logical reads) don't vary between multiple executions of a query with a fixed table schema and data. For example, if you execute the previous SELECT statement ten times, you will probably get ten different figures for duration and CPU, but Reads will remain the same each time. Therefore, during optimization, you can refer to the number of reads for an individual table to ensure that you really have reduced the data access cost of the table.

Even though the number of logical reads can also be obtained from the Extended Events, you get another benefit when using **STATISTICS IO**. The number of logical reads for a query shown by Profiler or the Server Trace option increases as you use different **SET** statements (mentioned previously) along with the query. But the number of logical reads shown by **STATISTICS IO** doesn't include the additional pages that are accessed as **SET** statements are used with a query. Thus, **STATISTICS IO** provides a consistent figure for the number of logical reads.

## Summary

In this chapter, you saw that you can use Extended Events to identify the queries causing a high amount of stress on the system resources in a SQL workload. Collecting the session data can, and should be, automated using system stored procedures. For immediate access to statistics about running queries, use the DMV `sys.dm_exec_query_stats`. You can further analyze these queries with Management Studio to find the costly steps in the processing strategy of the query. For better performance, it is important to consider both the index and join mechanisms used in an execution plan while analyzing a query. The number of data retrievals (or reads) for the individual tables provided by **SET STATISTICS IO** helps concentrate on the data access mechanism of the tables with most number of reads. You also should focus on the CPU cost and overall time of the most costly queries.

Once you identify a costly query and finish the initial analysis, the next step should be to optimize the query for performance. Because indexing is one of the most commonly used performance-tuning techniques, in the next chapter I will discuss in depth the various indexing mechanisms available in SQL Server.

## CHAPTER 4



# Index Analysis

The right index on the right column, or columns, is the basis on which query tuning begins. On the other hand, a missing index or an index placed on the wrong column, or columns, can be the basis for all performance problems starting with basic data access, continuing through joins, and ending in filtering clauses. For these reasons, it is extremely important for everyone—not just the DBA—to understand the different indexing techniques that can be used to optimize the database design.

In this chapter, I cover the following topics:

- What an index is
- The benefits and overhead of an index
- General recommendations for index design
- Clustered and nonclustered index behavior and comparisons
- Recommendations for clustered and nonclustered indexes
- Advanced indexing techniques: covering indexes, index intersections, index joins, filtered indexes, distributed indexes, indexed views, index compression, and columnstore indexes
- Special index types
- Additional characteristics of indexes

## What Is an Index?

One of the best ways to reduce disk I/O is to use an index. An index allows SQL Server to find data in a table without scanning the entire table. An index in a database is analogous to an index in a book. Say, for example, that you wanted to look up the phrase *table scan* in this book. In the paper version, without the index at the back of the book, you would have to peruse the entire book to find the text you needed. With the index, you know exactly where the information you want is stored.

While tuning a database for performance, you create indexes on the different columns used in a query to help SQL Server find data quickly. For example, the following query against the `Production.Product` table results in the data shown in Figure 4-1 (the first 10 of 500+ rows).

	ProductID	Name	StandardCost	Weight	RowNumber
1	852	Women's Tights, S	30.9334	NULL	1
2	853	Women's Tights, M	30.9334	NULL	2
3	854	Women's Tights, L	30.9334	NULL	3
4	867	Women's Mountain Shorts, S	26.1763	NULL	4
5	868	Women's Mountain Shorts, M	26.1763	NULL	5
6	869	Women's Mountain Shorts, L	26.1763	NULL	6
7	870	Water Bottle - 30 oz.	1.8663	NULL	7
8	842	Touring-Panniers, Large	51.5625	NULL	8
9	965	Touring-3000 Yellow, 62	461.4448	30.00	9
10	964	Touring-3000 Yellow, 58	461.4448	29.79	10

**Figure 4-1.** Sample Production.Product table

```
SELECT TOP 10
    p.ProductID,
    p.[Name],
    p.StandardCost,
    p.[Weight],
    ROW_NUMBER() OVER (ORDER BY p.Name DESC) AS RowNumber
FROM Production.Product p ;
```

The preceding query scanned the entire table since there was no WHERE clause. If you need to add a filter through the WHERE clause to retrieve all the products where StandardCost is greater than 150, without an index the table will still have to be scanned, checking the value of StandardCost at each row to determine which rows contain a value greater than 150. An index on the StandardCost column could speed up this process by providing a mechanism that allows a structured search against the data rather than a row-by-row check. You can take two different, and fundamental, approaches for creating this index:

- *Like a dictionary:* A dictionary is a distinct listing of words in alphabetical order. An index can be stored in a similar fashion. The data is ordered, although it will still have duplicates. The first ten rows, ordered by StandardCost instead of by Name, would look like the data shown in Figure 4-2. Notice the RowNumber column shows the original placement of the row when ordering by Name.

So now if you wanted to find all the rows where StandardCost is greater than 150, the index would allow you to find them immediately by moving down to the first value greater than 150. An index that orders the data stored based on the index order is known as a *clustered index*. Because of how SQL Server stores data, this is one of the most important indexes in your database design. I explain this in detail later in the chapter.

- *Like a book's index:* An ordered list can be created without altering the layout of the table, similar to the way the index of a book is created. Just like the keyword index of a book lists the keywords in a separate section with a page number to refer to the main content of the book, the list of StandardCost values is created as a separate structure and refers to the corresponding row in the Product table through a pointer. For the example, I'll use RowNumber as the pointer. Table 4-1 shows the structure of the manufacturer index.

	ProductID	Name	StandardCost	Weight	RowNumber
1	828	HL Road Rear Wheel	158.5346	890.00	146
2	951	HL Crankset	179.8156	575.00	168
3	832	ML Mountain Frame - Black, 48	185.8193	2.85	112
4	831	ML Mountain Frame - Black, 44	185.8193	2.81	113
5	830	ML Mountain Frame - Black, 40	185.8193	2.77	114
6	814	ML Mountain Frame - Black, 38	185.8193	2.73	115
7	730	LL Road Frame - Red, 62	187.1571	2.50	126
8	729	LL Road Frame - Red, 60	187.1571	2.48	127
9	728	LL Road Frame - Red, 58	187.1571	2.46	128
10	727	LL Road Frame - Red, 52	187.1571	2.40	129

**Figure 4-2.** Product table sorted on StandardCost**Table 4-1.** Structure of the Manufacturer Index

StandardCost	RowNumber
158.5346	146
179.8156	168
185.8193	112
185.8193	113
185.8193	114

SQL Server can scan the manufacturer index to find rows where StandardCost is greater than 150. Since the StandardCost values are arranged in a sorted order, SQL Server can stop scanning as soon as it encounters the row with a value of 150. This type of index is called a *nonclustered index*, and I explain it in detail later in the chapter.

In either case, SQL Server will be able to find all the products where StandardCost is greater than 150 more quickly than without an index under most circumstances.

You can create indexes on either a single column (as described previously) or a combination of columns in a table. SQL Server automatically creates indexes for certain types of constraints (for example, PRIMARY KEY and UNIQUE constraints).

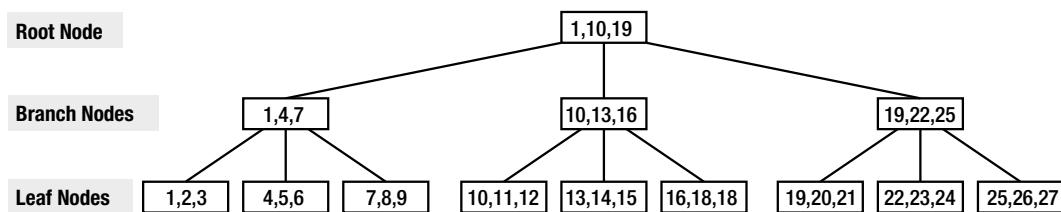
## The Benefit of Indexes

SQL Server has to be able to find data, even when no index is present on a table. When no clustered index is present to establish a storage order for the data, the storage engine will simply read through the entire table to find what it needs. A table without a clustered index is called a *heap table*. A heap is just an unordered stack of data with a row identifier as a pointer to the storage location. This data is not ordered or searchable except by walking through the data, row-by-row, in a process called a *scan*. When a clustered index is placed on a table, the key values of the index establish an order for the data. Further, with a clustered index, the data is stored with the index so that the data itself is now ordered. When a clustered index is present, the pointer on the nonclustered index consists of the values that define the clustered index key. This is a big part of what makes clustered indexes so important.

24,14,12	11,20,9	25,15,10	19,13,7	2,26,17	21,10,22	19,6,5	1,8,3	27,4,23
----------	---------	----------	---------	---------	----------	--------	-------	---------

**Figure 4-3.** Initial layout of 27 rows

1,2,3	4,5,6	7,8,9	10,11,12	13,14,15	16,17,18	19,20,21	22,23,24	25,26,27
-------	-------	-------	----------	----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

**Figure 4-4.** Ordered layout of 27 rows**Figure 4-5.** B-tree layout of 27 rows

Since a page has a limited amount of space, it can store a larger number of rows if the rows contain a fewer number of columns. The nonclustered index usually doesn't (and shouldn't) contain all the columns of the table; it usually contains only a limited number of the columns. Therefore, a page will be able to store more rows of a nonclustered index than rows of the table itself, which contains all the columns. Consequently, SQL Server will be able to read more values for a column from a page representing a nonclustered index on the column than from a page representing the table that contains the column.

Another benefit of the nonclustered index is that, because it is in a separate structure from the data table, it can be put in a different filegroup, with a different I/O path, as explained in [Chapter 2](#). This means that SQL Server can access the index and table concurrently, making searches even faster.

Indexes store their information in a balanced tree, referred to as a B-tree, structure, so the number of reads required to find a particular row is minimized. The following example shows the benefit of a B-tree structure.

Consider a single-column table with 27 rows in a random order and only 3 rows per leaf page. Suppose the layout of the rows in the pages is as shown in Figure 4-3.

To search the row (or rows) for the column value of 5, SQL Server has to scan all the rows and the pages, since even the last row in the last page may have the value 5. Because the number of reads depends on the number of pages accessed, nine read operations have to be performed without an index on the column. This content can be ordered by creating an index on the column, with the resultant layout of the rows and pages shown in Figure 4-4.

Indexing the column arranges the content in a sorted fashion. This allows SQL Server to determine the possible value for a row position in the column with respect to the value of another row position in the column. For example, in Figure 4-4, when SQL Server finds the first row with the column value 6, it can be sure that there are no more rows with the column value 5. Thus, only two read operations are required to fetch the rows with the value 5 when the content is indexed. However, what happens if you want to search for the column value 25? This will require nine read operations! This problem is solved by implementing indexes using the B-tree structure (as in Figure 4-5).

A B-tree consists of a starting node (or page) called a *root node* with *branch nodes* (or pages) growing out of it (or linked to it). All keys are stored in the leaves. Contained in each interior node (above the leaf nodes) are pointers to its branch nodes and values representing the smallest value found in the branch node. Keys are kept in sorted order within each node. B-trees use a balanced tree structure for efficient record retrieval—a B-tree is balanced when the leaf nodes are all at the same level from the root node. For example, creating an index on the preceding content will generate the balanced B-tree structure shown in Figure 4-5. At the bottom level, all the leaf nodes are connected to each other through a doubly-linked list, meaning each page points to the page that follows it, and the page that follows it points back to the preceding page. This prevents having to go back up the chain when pages are traversed beyond the definitions of the intermediate pages.

The B-tree algorithm minimizes the number of pages to be accessed to locate a desired key, thereby speeding up the data access process. For example, in Figure 4-5, the search for the key value 5 starts at the top root node. Since the key value is between 1 and 10, the search process follows the left branch to the next node. As the key value 5 falls between the values 4 and 7, the search process follows the middle branch to the next node with the starting key value of 4. The search process retrieves the key value 5 from this leaf page. If the key value 5 doesn't exist in this page, the search process will stop since it's the leaf page. Similarly, the key value 25 can also be searched using the same number of reads.

## Index Overhead

The performance benefit of indexes does come at a cost. Tables with indexes require more storage and memory space for the index pages in addition to the data pages of the table. Data manipulation queries (INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE statements, or the CUD part of create, read, update, delete [CRUD]) can take longer, and more processing time is required to maintain the indexes of constantly changing tables. This is because, unlike a SELECT statement, data manipulation queries modify the data content of a table. If an INSERT statement adds a row to the table, then it also has to add a row in the index structure. If the index is a clustered index, the overhead is greater still, because the row has to be added to the data pages themselves in the right order, which may require other data rows to be repositioned below the entry position of the new row. The UPDATE and DELETE data manipulation queries change the index pages in a similar manner.

When designing indexes, you'll be operating from two different points of view: the existing system, already in production, where you need to measure the overall impact of an index, and the tactical approach where all you worry about is the immediate benefits of an index, usually when initially designing a system. When you have to deal with the existing system, you should ensure that the performance benefits of an index outweigh the extra cost in processing resources. You can do this by using Extended Events (explained in Chapter 3) to do an overall workload optimization (explained in Chapter 16). When you're focused exclusively on the immediate benefits of an index, SQL Server supplies a series of dynamic management views that provide detailed information about the performance of indexes, `sys.dm_db_index_operational_stats` or `sys.dm_db_index_usage_stats`. The view `sys.dm_db_index_operational_stats` shows the low-level activity, such as locks and I/O, on an index that is in use. The view `sys.dm_db_index_usage_stats` returns statistical counts of the various index operations that have occurred to an index over time. Both of these will be used more extensively in Chapter 12 when I discuss blocking.

**Note** Throughout the book, I use the STATISTICS IO and STATISTICS TIME measurements against the queries that we're running. You can add SET commands to the code, or you can change the connection settings for the query window. I suggest just changing the connection settings.

To understand the overhead cost of an index on data manipulation queries, consider the following example. First, create a test table with 10,000 rows:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('Test1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1
    (C1 INT,
     C2 INT,
     C3 VARCHAR(50)
    ) ;
WITH Nums
AS (SELECT TOP (10000)
      ROW_NUMBER() OVER (ORDER BY (SELECT 1
                                     )) AS n
     FROM Master.sys.All_Columns ac1
     CROSS JOIN Master.sys.ALL_Columns ac2
    )
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
    (C1, C2, C3)
    SELECT n,
           n,
           'C3'
FROM Nums;
```

Run an UPDATE statement, like so:

```
UPDATE dbo.Test1
SET   C1 = 1,
      C2 = 1
WHERE C2 = 1 ;
```

Then the number of logical reads reported by SET STATISTICS IO is as follows:

Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 29

Add an index on column c1, like so:

```
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX iTest
ON dbo.Test1(C1) ;
```

Then the resultant number of logical reads for the same UPDATE statement increases from 29 to 42:

Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 42

Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 1, logical reads 5

I get to 42 because a worktable was created to help scan through the data, increasing the number of reads beyond what was necessary just because of the incorrect index.

Even though it is true that the amount of overhead required to maintain indexes increases for data manipulation queries, be aware that SQL Server must first find a row before it can update or delete it; therefore, indexes can be helpful for UPDATE and DELETE statements with complex WHERE clauses as well. The increased efficiency in using the index to locate a row usually offsets the extra overhead needed to update the indexes, unless the table has a lot of indexes.

To understand how an index can benefit even data modification queries, let's build on the example. Create another index on table t1. This time, create the index on column c2 referred to in the WHERE clause of the UPDATE statement:

```
CREATE INDEX iTest2
    ON dbo.Test1(C2) ;
```

After adding this new index, run the UPDATE command again:

```
UPDATE dbo.Test1
SET    C1 = 1,
       C2 = 1
WHERE C2 = 1 ;
```

The total number of logical reads for this UPDATE statement decreases from 43 to 20 (= 15 + 5):

```
Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 15
Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 1, logical reads 5
```

**Note** A worktable is a temporary table used internally by SQL Server to process the intermediate results of a query. Worktables are created in the tempdb database and are dropped automatically after query execution.

The examples in this section have demonstrated that although having an index adds some overhead cost to action queries, the overall result is a decrease in cost because of the beneficial effect of indexes on searching, even during updates.

## Index Design Recommendations

The main recommendations for index design are as follows:

- Examine the WHERE clause and JOIN criteria columns.
- Use narrow indexes.
- Examine column uniqueness.
- Examine the column data type.
- Consider column order.
- Consider the type of index (clustered vs. nonclustered).

Let's consider each of these recommendations in turn.

### Examine the WHERE Clause and JOIN Criteria Columns

When a query is submitted to SQL Server, the query optimizer tries to find the best data access mechanism for every table referred to in the query. Here is how it does this:

1. The optimizer identifies the columns included in the WHERE clause and the JOIN criteria.
2. The optimizer then examines indexes on those columns.

3. The optimizer assesses the usefulness of each index by determining the selectivity of the clause (that is, how many rows will be returned) from statistics maintained on the index.
4. Finally, the optimizer estimates the least costly method of retrieving the qualifying rows, based on the information gathered in the previous steps.

**Note** Chapter 7 covers statistics in more depth.

To understand the significance of a WHERE clause column in a query, let's consider an example. Let's return to the original code listing that helped you understand what an index is; the query consisted of a SELECT statement without any WHERE clause, as follows:

```
SELECT p.ProductID,
       p.Name,
       p.StandardCost,
       p.Weight
  FROM Production.Product p ;
```

The query optimizer performs a clustered index scan, the equivalent of a table scan against a heap on a table that has a clustered index, to read the rows as shown in Figure 4-6 (switch on the Include Actual Execution Plan option by using Ctrl-M inside a query window, as well as the Set Statistics IO option by right-clicking and selecting Query Options and then selecting the appropriate check box in the Advanced tab).

The number of logical reads reported by SET STATISTICS IO for the SELECT statement is as follows:

Table 'Product'. Scan count 1, logical reads 15

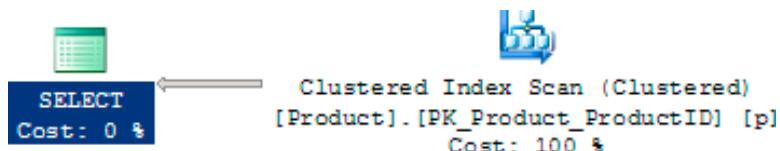
To understand the effect of a WHERE clause column on the query optimizer's decision, let's add a WHERE clause to retrieve a single row:

```
SELECT p.ProductID,
       p.Name,
       p.StandardCost,
       p.Weight
  FROM Production.Product AS p
 WHERE p.ProductID = 738 ;
```

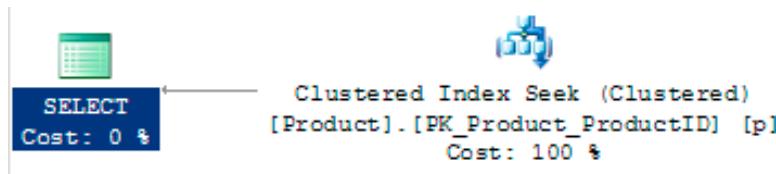
With the WHERE clause in place, the query optimizer examines the WHERE clause column ProductID, identifies the availability of index PK\_Product\_ProductId on column ProductId, assesses a high selectivity (that is, only one row will be returned) for the WHERE clause from the statistics on index PK\_Product\_ProductId, and decides to use that index on column ProductId, as shown in Figure 4-7.

The resultant number of logical reads is as follows:

Table 'Product'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2



**Figure 4-6.** Execution plan with no WHERE clause



**Figure 4-7.** Execution plan with a WHERE clause

The behavior of the query optimizer shows that the WHERE clause column helps the optimizer choose an optimal indexing operation for a query. This is also applicable for a column used in the JOIN criteria between two tables. The optimizer looks for the indexes on the WHERE clause column or the JOIN criterion column and, if available, considers using the index to retrieve the rows from the table. The query optimizer considers index(es) on the WHERE clause column(s) and the JOIN criteria column(s) while executing a query. Therefore, having indexes on the frequently used columns in the WHERE clause and the JOIN criteria of a SQL query helps the optimizer avoid scanning a base table.

When the amount of data inside a table is so small that it fits onto a single page (8KB), a table scan may work better than an index seek. If you have a good index in place but you're still getting a scan, consider this issue.

## Use Narrow Indexes

For best performance, you should use as narrow a data type as possible when creating indexes. Narrow in this context means as small a data type as you can. You should also avoid very wide data type columns in an index. Columns with string data types (CHAR, VARCHAR, NCHAR, and NVARCHAR) sometimes can be quite wide as can binary and globally unique identifiers (GUID). Unless they are absolutely necessary, minimize the use of wide data type columns with large sizes in an index. You can create indexes on a combination of columns in a table. For the best performance, use as few columns in an index as you can.

A narrow index can accommodate more rows in an 8KB index page than a wide index. This has the following effects:

- Reduces I/O (by having to read fewer 8KB pages)
- Makes database caching more effective, because SQL Server can cache fewer index pages, consequently reducing the logical reads required for the index pages in the memory
- Reduces the storage space for the database

To understand how a narrow index can reduce the number of logical reads, create a test table with 20 rows and an index:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('Test1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
 DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT, C2 INT) ;

WITH Nums
AS (SELECT 1 AS n
UNION ALL
SELECT n + 1
FROM Nums
WHERE n < 20
)
```

```

INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
    (C1, C2)
    SELECT n,
        2
    FROM Nums ;
CREATE INDEX iTest ON dbo.Test1(C1) ;

```

Since the indexed column is narrow (the INT data type is 4 bytes), all the index rows can be accommodated in one 8KB index page. As shown in Figure 4-8, you can confirm this in the dynamic management views associated with indexes:

```

SELECT i.Name,
    i.type_desc,
    ddips.page_count,
    ddips.record_count,
    ddips.index_level
FROM sys.indexes i
JOIN sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats(DB_ID(N'AdventureWorks2008R2'),
    OBJECT_ID(N'dbo.Test1'),
    NULL, NULL,
    'DETAILED') AS ddips
ON i.index_id = ddips.index_id
WHERE i.object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'dbo.Test1') ;

```

The sys.indexes system table is stored in each database and contains the basic information on every index in the database. The dynamic management function, sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats, contains the more detailed information about the statistics on the index (you'll learn more about this DMF in [Chapter 7](#)). To understand the disadvantage of a wide index key, modify the data type of the indexed column c1 from INT to CHAR(500) ([narrow\\_alter.sql](#) in the download):

```

DROP INDEX dbo.Test1.iTest ;
ALTER TABLE dbo.Test1 ALTER COLUMN C1 CHAR(500) ;
CREATE INDEX iTest ON dbo.Test1(C1) ;

```

The width of a column with the INT data type is 4 bytes, and the width of a column with the CHAR(500) data type is 500 bytes. Because of the large width of the indexed column, two index pages are required to contain all 20 index rows. You can confirm this in the sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats dynamic management function by running the query against it again (see Figure 4-9).

A large index key size increases the number of index pages, thereby increasing the amount of memory and disk activities required for the index. It is always recommended that the index key size is as narrow as possible.

Drop the test table before continuing:

```
DROP TABLE dbo.Test1;
```

	Name	type_desc	page_count	record_count	index_level
1	NULL	HEAP	1	20	0
2	iTest	NONCLUSTERED	1	20	0

**Figure 4-8.** Number of pages for a narrow, nonclustered index

	Name	type_desc	page_count	record_count	index_level
1	NULL	HEAP	2	25	0
2	iTest	NONCLUSTERED	2	20	0
3	iTest	NONCLUSTERED	1	2	1

Figure 4-9. Number of pages for a wide, nonclustered index

## Examine Column Uniqueness

Creating an index on columns with a very low range of possible unique values (such as gender) will not benefit performance, because the query optimizer will not be able to use the index to effectively narrow down the rows to be returned. Consider a Gender column with only two unique values: M and F. When you execute a query with the Gender column in the WHERE clause, you end up with a large number of rows from the table (assuming the distribution of M and F is relatively even), resulting in a costly table or clustered index scan. It is always preferable to have columns in the WHERE clause with lots of unique rows (or *high selectivity*) to limit the number of rows accessed. You should create an index on those column(s) to help the optimizer access a small result set.

Furthermore, while creating an index on multiple columns, which is also referred to as a *composite index*, column order matters. In some cases, using the most selective column first will help filter the index rows more efficiently.

**Note** The importance of column order in a composite index is explained later in the chapter in the “Consider Column Order” section.

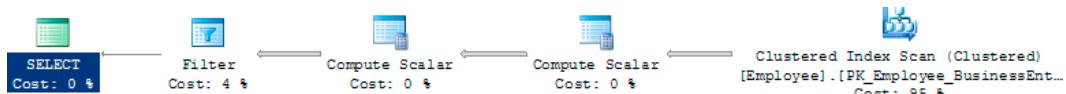
From this, you can see that it is important to know the selectivity of a column before creating an index on it. You can find this by executing a query like this one; just substitute the table and column name:

```
SELECT COUNT(DISTINCT e.Gender) AS DistinctColValues,
       COUNT(e.Gender) AS NumberOfRows,
       (CAST(COUNT(DISTINCT e.Gender) AS DECIMAL)
        / CAST(COUNT(e.Gender) AS DECIMAL)) AS Selectivity
  FROM HumanResources.Employee AS e ;
```

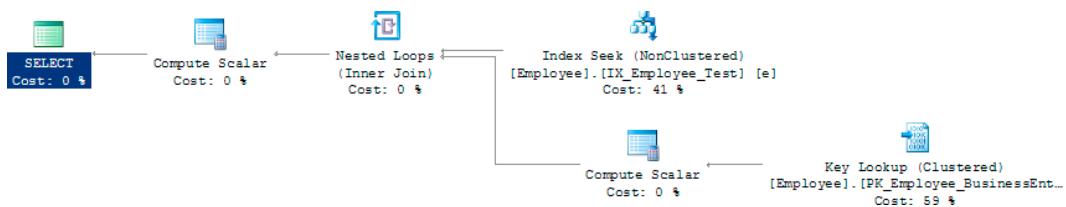
The column with the highest number of unique values (or selectivity) can be the best candidate for indexing when referred to in a WHERE clause or a join criterion. You may also have the exceptional data where you have hundreds of rows of common data with only a few that are unique. The few will also benefit from an index. You can make this even more beneficial by using filtered indexes (discussed in more detail later).

To understand how the selectivity of an index key column affects the use of the index, take a look at the Gender column in the HumanResources.Employee table. If you run the previous query, you’ll see that it contains only two distinct values in more than 290 rows, which is a selectivity of .006. A query to look only for a Gender of F would look like this:

```
SELECT e.*
  FROM HumanResources.Employee AS e
 WHERE e.Gender = 'F'
   AND e.SickLeaveHours = 59
   AND e.MaritalStatus = 'M' ;
```



**Figure 4-10.** Execution plan with no index



**Figure 4-11.** Execution plan with a composite index

This results in the execution plan in Figure 4-10 and the following I/O and elapsed time:

```
Table 'Employee'. Scan count 1, logical reads 9
CPU time = 15 ms, elapsed time = 135 ms.
```

The data is returned by scanning the clustered index (where the data is stored) to find the appropriate values where Gender = 'F'. (The other operators will be covered in Chapter 9.) If you were to place an index on the column, like so, and run the query again, the execution plan remains the same.

```
CREATE INDEX IX_Employee_Test ON HumanResources.Employee (Gender) ;
```

The data is just not selective enough for the index to be used, let alone be useful. If instead you use a composite index that looks like this:

```
CREATE INDEX IX_Employee_Test ON
HumanResources.Employee (SickLeaveHours, Gender, MaritalStatus)
WITH (DROP_EXISTING = ON) ;
```

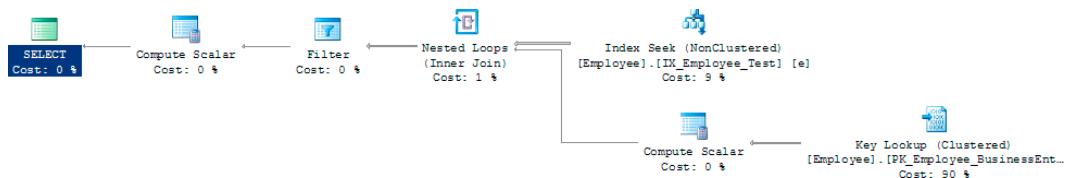
and then rerun the query to see the execution plan in Figure 4-11 and the performance results, you get this:

```
Table 'Employee'. Scan count 1, logical reads 6
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 32 ms.
```

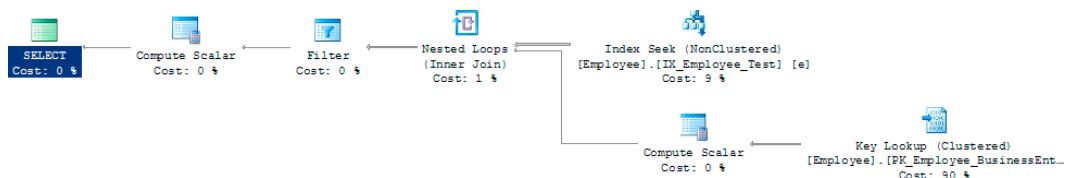
Now you're doing better than you were with the clustered index scan. A nice clean Index Seek operation takes about half the time to gather the data. The rest is spent in the Key Lookup operation. A Key Lookup operation is commonly referred to as a *bookmark lookup*.

**Note** You will learn more about bookmark lookups in Chapter 6.

Although none of the columns in question would probably be selective enough on their own to make a decent index, together they provide enough selectivity for the optimizer to take advantage of the index offered.



**Figure 4-12.** Execution plan when the index is chosen with a query hint



**Figure 4-13.** Forcing a Seek operation using FORCESEEK query hint

It is possible to attempt to force the query to use the first test index you created. If you drop the compound index, create the original again, and then modify the query as follows by using a query hint to force the use of the original index:

```
SELECT e.*  
FROM HumanResources.Employee AS e WITH (INDEX (IX_Employee_Test))  
WHERE e.SickLeaveHours = 59  
AND e.Gender = 'F'  
AND e.MaritalStatus = 'M' ;
```

then the results and execution plan shown in Figure 4-12, while similar, are not the same:

Table 'Employee'. Scan count 1, logical reads 170  
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 55 ms.

You see the same index seek, but the number of reads has more than doubled, and the estimated costs within the execution plan have changed. Although forcing the optimizer to choose an index is possible, it clearly isn't always an optimal approach.

Another way to force a different behavior on SQL Server 2012 is the FORCESEEK query hint. FORCESEEK makes it so the optimizer will choose only Index Seek operations. If the query were rewritten like this:

```
SELECT e.*  
FROM HumanResources.Employee AS e WITH (FORCESEEK)  
WHERE e.SickLeaveHours = 59  
AND e.Gender = 'F'  
AND e.MaritalStatus = 'M' ;
```

which changes the I/O, execution time, and execution plan results yet again (Figure 4-13), you end up with these results:

Table 'Employee'. Scan count 1, logical reads 170  
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 66 ms.

Limiting the options of the optimizer and forcing behaviors can in some situations help, but frequently, as shown with the results here, an increase in execution time and the number of reads is not helpful.

**Note** To make the best use of your indexes, it is highly recommended that you create the index on a column (or set of columns) with very high selectivity.

Before moving on, be sure to drop the test index from the table:

```
DROP INDEX HumanResources.Employee.IX_Employee_Test;
```

## Examine the Column Data Type

The data type of an index matters. For example, an index search on integer keys is very fast because of the small size and easy arithmetic manipulation of the INTEGER (or INT) data type. You can also use other variations of integer data types (BIGINT, SMALLINT, and TINYINT) for index columns, whereas string data types (CHAR, VARCHAR, NCHAR, and NVARCHAR) require a string match operation, which is usually costlier than an integer match operation.

Suppose you want to create an index on one column and you have two candidate columns—one with an INTEGER data type and the other with a CHAR(4) data type. Even though the size of both data types is 4 bytes in SQL Server 2012, you should still prefer the INTEGER data type index. Look at arithmetic operations as an example. The value 1 in the CHAR(4) data type is actually stored as 1 followed by three spaces, a combination of the following four bytes: 0x35, 0x20, 0x20, and 0x20. The CPU doesn't understand how to perform arithmetic operations on this data, and therefore it converts to an integer data type before the arithmetic operations, whereas the value 1 in an integer data type is saved as 0x00000001. The CPU can easily perform arithmetic operations on this data.

Of course, most of the time, you won't have the simple choice between identically sized data types, allowing you to choose the more optimal type. Keep this information in mind when designing and building your indexes.

## Consider Column Order

An index key is sorted on the first column of the index and then subsorted on the next column within each value of the previous column. The first column in a compound index is frequently referred to as the *leading edge* of the index. For example, consider Table 4-2.

If a composite index is created on the columns (c1, c2), then the index will be ordered as shown in Table 4-3.

As shown in Table 4-3, the data is sorted on the first column (c1) in the composite index. Within each value of the first column, the data is further sorted on the second column (c2).

Therefore, the column order in a composite index is an important factor in the effectiveness of the index. You can see this by considering the following:

- Column uniqueness
- Column width
- Column data type

For example, suppose most of your queries on table t1 are similar to the following:

```
SELECT * FROM t1 WHERE c2=12 ;
SELECT * FROM t1 WHERE c2=12 AND c1=11 ;
```

**Table 4-2.** Sample Table

c1	c2
1	1
2	1
3	1
1	2
2	2
3	2

**Table 4-3.** Composite Index on Columns (c1, c2)

c1	c2
1	1
1	2
2	1
2	2
3	1
3	2

An index on (c2, c1) will benefit both the queries. But an index on (c1, c2) will not be helpful to both queries, because it will sort the data initially on column c1, whereas the first SELECT statement needs the data to be sorted on column c2.

To understand the importance of column ordering in an index, consider the following example. In the Person.Address table, there is a column for City and another for PostalCode. Create an index on the table like this:

```
CREATE INDEX IX_Test ON Person.Address (City, PostalCode) ;
```

A simple SELECT statement run against the table that will use this new index will look something like this:

```
SELECT a.*  
FROM Person.Address AS a  
WHERE a.City = 'Warrington' ;
```

The I/O and execution time for the query is as follows:

```
Table 'Address'. Scan count 1, logical reads 188  
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 186 ms.
```

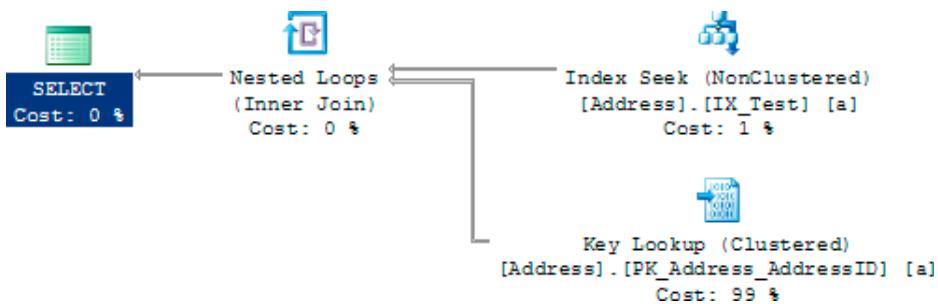
And the execution plan in Figure 4-14 shows the use of the index.

So, this query is taking advantage of the leading edge of the index to perform a Seek operation to retrieve the data. If, instead of querying using the leading edge, you use another column in the index like the following query:

```
SELECT *  
FROM Person.Address AS a  
WHERE a.PostalCode = 'WA3 7BH' ;
```

then the results are as follows:

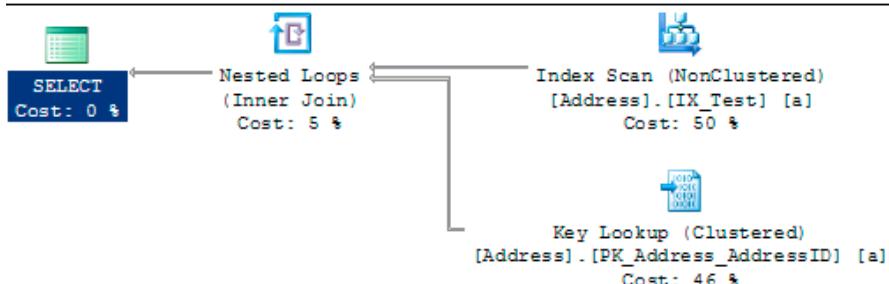
```
Table 'Address'. Scan count 1, logical reads 180  
CPU time = 16 ms, elapsed time = 249 ms.
```

**Figure 4-14.** Execution plan for query against leading edge of index

```

Query 1: Query cost (relative to the batch): 100%
SELECT * FROM [Person].[Address] [a] WHERE [a].[PostalCode]='01
Missing Index (Impact 91.6889): CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [<Name>

```

**Figure 4-15.** Execution plan for query against inner columns

And the execution plan is clearly different, as you can see in Figure 4-15.

The reads for the second query are slightly lower than the first, but when you take into account that the first query returned 86 rows worth of data and the second query returned only 31, you begin to see the difference between the Index Seek operation in Figure 4-14 and the Index Scan operation in Figure 4-15. Also note that because it had to perform a scan, the optimizer marked the column as possibly missing an index.

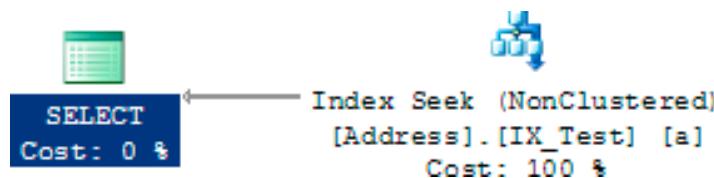
Missing index information is useful as a pointer to the potential for a new or better index on a table, but don't assume it's always correct. You can right-click the place where the missing index information is and select "Missing Index Details..." from the context menu. That will open a new query window with the details of the index laid out, ready for creation. If you do decide to test that index, make sure you rename it from the default name.

Finally, to see the order of the index really shine, change the query to this:

```

SELECT a.AddressID,
       a.City,
       a.PostalCode
  FROM Person.Address AS a
 WHERE a.City = 'Warrington'
   AND a.PostalCode = 'WA3 7BH' ;

```



**Figure 4-16.** Execution plan using both columns

Executing this query will return the same 31 rows as the previous query, resulting in the following:

```
Table 'Address'. Scan count 1, logical reads 2
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.
```

The execution plan is visible in Figure 4-16.

The radical changes in I/O and execution plan represent the real use of a compound index, the covering index. This is covered in detail in the section “Covering Indexes” later in the chapter.

When finished, drop the index:

```
DROP INDEX Person.Address.IX_Test
```

## Consider the Type of Index

In SQL Server, from all the different types of indexes available to you, most of the time you’ll be working with the two main index types: *clustered* and *nonclustered*. Both types have a B-tree structure. The main difference between the two types is that the leaf pages in a clustered index are the data pages of the table and are therefore in the same order as the data to which they point. This means that the clustered index is the table. As you proceed, you will see that the difference at the leaf level between the two index types becomes very important when determining the type of index to use.

## Clustered Indexes

The leaf pages of a clustered index and the data pages of the table the index is on are one and the same. Because of this, table rows are physically sorted on the clustered index column, and since there can be only one physical order of the table data, a table can have only one clustered index.

**Tip** When you create a primary key constraint, SQL Server automatically creates it as a unique clustered index on the primary key if one does not already exist and if it is not explicitly specified that the index should be a unique nonclustered index. This is not a requirement; it’s just default behavior. You can change the primary key prior to creating the table.

## Heap Tables

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, a table with no clustered index is called a *heap table*. The data rows of a heap table are not stored in any particular order or linked to the adjacent pages in the table. This unorganized structure of the heap table usually increases the overhead of accessing a large heap table when compared to accessing a large nonheap table (a table with a clustered index).

## Relationship with Nonclustered Indexes

There is an interesting relationship between a clustered index and the nonclustered indexes in SQL Server. An index row of a nonclustered index contains a pointer to the corresponding data row of the table. This pointer is called a *row locator*. The value of the row locator depends on whether the data pages are stored in a heap or are clustered. For a nonclustered index, the row locator is a pointer to the RID for the data row in a heap. For a table with a clustered index, the row locator is the clustered index key value.

For example, say you have a heap table with no clustered index, as shown in Table 4-4.

A nonclustered index on column c1 in a heap will cause the row locator for the index rows to contain a pointer to the corresponding data row in the database table, as shown in Table 4-5.

On creating a clustered index on column c2, the row locator values of the nonclustered index rows are changed. The new value of the row locator will contain the clustered index key value, as shown in Table 4-6.

To verify this dependency between a clustered and a nonclustered index, let's consider an example. In the AdventureWorks2008R2 database, the table dbo.DatabaseLog contains no clustered index, just a nonclustered primary key. If a query is run against it like the following, then the execution will look like Figure 4-17.

```
SELECT dl.DatabaseLogID,
       dl.PostTime
  FROM dbo.DatabaseLog AS dl
 WHERE dl.DatabaseLogID = 115 ;
```

As you can see, the index was used in a Seek operation. But because the data is stored separately from the nonclustered index, an additional operation, the RID Lookup operation, is required in order to retrieve the data, which is then joined back to the information from the Index Seek operation through a Nested Loop operation. This is a classic example of what is known as a *bookmark lookup*, which is explained in more detail in the “Defining the Bookmark Lookup” section. A similar query run against a table with a clustered index in place will look like this:

```
SELECT d.DepartmentID,
       d.ModifiedDate
  FROM HumanResources.Department AS d
 WHERE d.DepartmentID = 10 ;
```

**Table 4-4.** Data Page for a Sample Table

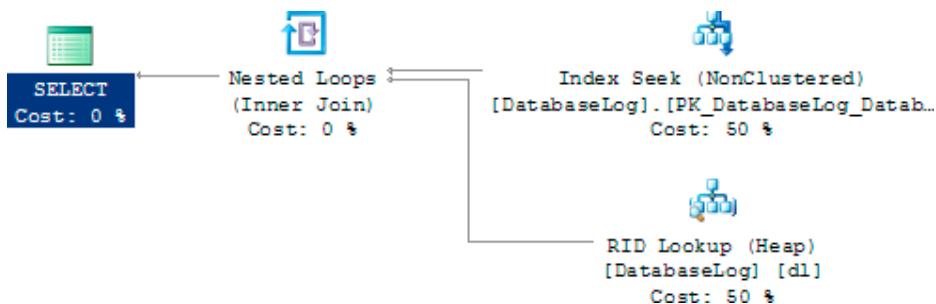
RowID (Not a Real Column)	c1	c2	c3
1	A1	A2	A3
2	B1	B2	B3

**Table 4-5.** Nonclustered Index Page with No Clustered Index

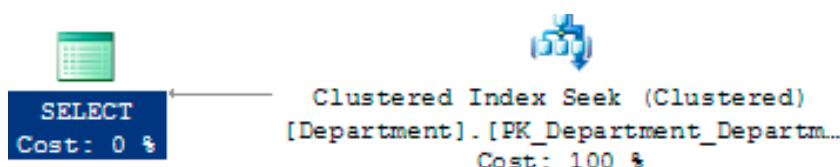
c1	Row Locator
A1	Pointer to RID = 1
B1	Pointer to RID = 2

**Table 4-6.** Nonclustered Index Page with a Clustered Index on c2

c1	Row Locator
A1	A2
B1	B2



**Figure 4-17.** Execution plan against a heap



**Figure 4-18.** Execution plan with a clustered index

Figure 4-18 shows this execution plan returned.

Although the primary key is used in the same way as the previous query, this time it's against a clustered index. As you now know, this means the data is stored with the index, so the additional column doesn't require a lookup operation to get the data. Everything is returned by the simple clustered Index Seek operation.

To navigate from a nonclustered index row to a data row, this relationship between the two index types requires an additional indirection for navigating the B-tree structure of the clustered index. Without the clustered index, the row locator of the nonclustered index would be able to navigate directly from the nonclustered index row to the data row in the base table. The presence of the clustered index causes the navigation from the nonclustered index row to the data row to go through the B-tree structure of the clustered index, since the new row locator value points to the clustered index key.

On the other hand, consider inserting an intermediate row in the clustered index key order or expanding the content of an intermediate row. For example, imagine a clustered index table containing four rows per page, with clustered index column values of 1, 2, 4, and 5. Adding a new row in the table with the clustered index value 3 will require space in the page between values 2 and 4. If enough space is not available in that position, a page split will occur on the data page (or clustered index leaf page). Even though the data page split will cause relocation of the data rows, the nonclustered index row locator values need not be updated. These row locators continue to point to the same logical key values of the clustered index key, even though the data rows have physically moved to a different location. In the case of a data page split, the row locators of the nonclustered indexes need not be updated. This is an important point, since tables often have a large number of nonclustered indexes.

Things don't work the same way for heap tables. While page splits are not a common practice, anything that causes the location of the heap pages to change automatically requires that the nonclustered indexes get immediately updated.

**Note** Page splits and their effect on performance are explained in more detail in [Chapter 8](#).

## Clustered Index Recommendations

The relationship between a clustered index and a nonclustered index imposes some considerations on the clustered index, which are explained in the sections that follow.

### Create the Clustered Index First

Since all nonclustered indexes hold clustered index keys within their index rows, the order of nonclustered and clustered index creation is very important. For example, if the nonclustered indexes are built before the clustered index is created, then the nonclustered index row locator will contain a pointer to the corresponding RID of the table. Creating the clustered index later will modify all the nonclustered indexes to contain clustered index keys as the new row locator value. This effectively rebuilds all the nonclustered indexes.

For the best performance, I recommend that you create the clustered index *before* you create any nonclustered index. This allows the nonclustered indexes to have their row locator set to the clustered index keys at the time of creation. This does not have any effect on the final performance, but rebuilding the indexes may be quite a large job.

I would also suggest that you design the tables in your database around the clustered index. It should be the first index created because you should be storing your data as a clustered index by default.

### Keep Indexes Narrow

Since all nonclustered indexes hold the clustered keys as their row locator, for the best performance keep the overall byte size of the clustered index as small as possible. If you create a wide clustered index, say CHAR(500), this will add 500 bytes to every nonclustered index. Thus, keep the number of columns in the clustered index to a minimum, and carefully consider the byte size of each column to be included in the clustered index. A column of the integer data type often makes a good candidate for a clustered index, whereas a string data type column will be a less-than-optimal choice.

To understand the effect of a wide clustered index on a nonclustered index, consider this example. Create a small test table with a clustered index and a nonclustered index:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('Test1')
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT, C2 INT) ;
WITH Nums
AS (SELECT TOP (20)
        ROW_NUMBER() OVER (ORDER BY (SELECT 1)) AS n
    FROM Master.sys.All_Columns ac1
    CROSS JOIN Master.sys.ALL_Columns ac2
    )
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1, C2)
SELECT n,
       n + 1
FROM   Nums ;
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX iClustered
ON dbo.Test1 (C2) ;
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX iNonClustered
ON dbo.Test1 (C1) ;
```

	name	type_desc	page_count	record_count	index_level
1	iClustered	CLUSTERED	1	20	0
2	iNonClustered	NONCLUSTERED	1	20	0

**Figure 4-19.** Number of index pages for a narrow index

	name	type_desc	page_count	record_count	index_level
1	iClustered	CLUSTERED	2	20	0
2	iClustered	CLUSTERED	1	2	1
3	iNonClustered	NONCLUSTERED	2	20	0
4	iNonClustered	NONCLUSTERED	1	2	1

**Figure 4-20.** Number of index pages for a wide index

Since the table has a clustered index, the row locator of the nonclustered index contains the clustered index key value—therefore:

Width of the nonclustered index row = width of the nonclustered index column + width of the clustered index column = size of INT data type + size of INT data type

$$= 4 \text{ bytes} + 4 \text{ bytes} = 8 \text{ bytes}$$

With this small size of a nonclustered index row, all the rows can be stored in one index page. You can confirm this by querying against the index statistics as shown in Figure 4-19.

```
SELECT i.name,
       i.type_desc,
       s.page_count,
       s.record_count,
       s.index_level
  FROM sys.indexes i
 JOIN sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats(DB_ID(N'AdventureWorks2008R2'),
                                      OBJECT_ID(N'dbo.Test1'), NULL,
                                      NULL,
                                      DETAILED') AS s
 WHERE i.index_id = s.index_id
   AND i.object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'dbo.Test1') ;
```

To understand the effect of a wide clustered index on a nonclustered index, modify the data type of the clustered indexed column c2 from INT to CHAR(500):

```
DROP INDEX dbo.Test1.iClustered ;
ALTER TABLE dbo.Test1 ALTER COLUMN C2 CHAR(500) ;
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX iClustered ON dbo.Test1(C2) ;
```

Running the query against sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats again returns the result in Figure 4-20.

You can see that a wide clustered index increases the width of the nonclustered index row size. Because of the large width of the nonclustered index row, one 8KB index page can't accommodate all the index rows. Instead, two index pages will be required to store all 20 index rows. In the case of a large table, an expansion in

the size of the nonclustered indexes because of a large clustered index key size can significantly increase the number of pages of the nonclustered indexes.

Therefore, a large clustered index key size not only affects its own width but also widens all nonclustered indexes on the table. This increases the number of index pages for all the indexes on the table, increasing the logical reads and disk I/Os required for the indexes.

## Rebuild the Clustered Index in a Single Step

Because of the dependency of nonclustered indexes on the clustered index, rebuilding the clustered index as separate `DROP INDEX` and `CREATE INDEX` statements causes all the nonclustered indexes to be rebuilt twice. To avoid this, use the `DROP_EXISTING` clause of the `CREATE INDEX` statement to rebuild the clustered index in a single atomic step. Similarly, you can also use the `DROP_EXISTING` clause with a nonclustered index.

It's worth noting that in SQL Server 2005 and better, when you perform a straight rebuild of a clustered index, you won't see the clustered indexes rebuilt as well.

## When to Use a Clustered Index

In certain situations, using a clustered index is very helpful. I discuss these in the sections that follow.

### Accessing the Data Directly

With all the data stored on the leaf pages of a clustered index, any time you access the cluster, the data is immediately available. One use for a clustered index is to support the most commonly used access path to the data. Any access of the clustered index does not require any additional reads to retrieve the data, which means seeks or scans against the clustered index do not require any additional reads to retrieve that data. This is the likely reason that Microsoft has made the primary key a clustered index by default. Since the primary key is frequently the most likely means of accessing data in a table, it serves well as a clustered index.

Just remember that the primary key being the clustered index is a default behavior, but not necessarily the most common access path to the data. This could be through foreign key constraints, alternate keys in the table, or other columns. Plan and design the cluster with storage and access in mind, and you should be fine.

The clustered index works well as the primary path to the data only if you're accessing a considerable portion of the data within a table. If, on the other hand, you're accessing small subsets of the data, you might be better off with a nonclustered covering index. Also, you have to take into account the number and types of columns that define the access path to the data. Since the key of a clustered index becomes the pointer for nonclustered indexes, excessively wide clustered keys can seriously impact performance and storage for nonclustered indexes.

### Retrieving Presorted Data

Clustered indexes are particularly efficient when the data retrieval needs to be sorted. If you create a clustered index on the column or columns that you may need to sort by, then the rows will be physically stored in that order, eliminating the overhead of sorting the data after it is retrieved.

Let's see this in action. Create a test table as follows (`createsort.sql` in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('od')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP TABLE dbo.od ;
GO
SELECT pod.*
```

```
INTO dbo.od
FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod ;
```

The new table od is created with data only. It doesn't have any indexes. You can verify the indexes on the table by executing the following, which returns nothing:

```
EXEC sp_helpindex 'dbo.od' ;
```

To understand the use of a clustered index, fetch a large range of rows ordered on a certain column:

```
SELECT      od.*
FROM        dbo.od
WHERE       od.ProductID BETWEEN 500 AND 510
ORDER BY    od.ProductID ;
```

You can obtain the cost of executing this query (without any indexes) from the STATISTICS IO output:

Table 'od'. Scan count 1, logical reads 78

To improve the performance of this query, you should create an index on the WHERE clause column. This query requires both a range of rows and a sorted output. The result set requirement of this query meets the recommendations for a clustered index. Therefore, create a clustered index as follows, and reexamine the cost of the query:

```
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX i1 ON od(ProductID) ;
```

When you run the query again, the resultant cost of the query (with a clustered index) is as follows:

Table 'od'. Scan count 1, logical reads 8

Creating the clustered index reduced the number of logical reads and therefore should contribute to the query performance improvement.

On the other hand, if you create a nonclustered index (instead of a clustered index) on the candidate column, then the query performance may be affected adversely. Let's verify the effect of a nonclustered index in this case:

```
DROP INDEX      od.i1 ;
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX i1 on dbo.od(ProductID) ;
```

The resultant cost of the query (with a nonclustered index) is as follows:

Table 'od'. Scan count 1, logical reads 87

The nonclustered index significantly increases the number of logical reads. There was also an increase in query performance, probably related to the increase in reads. Drop the test table when you're done:

```
DROP TABLE dbo.od ;
```

## Poor Design Practices for a Clustered Index

In certain situations, you are better off not using a clustered index. I discuss these in the sections that follow.

### Frequently Updatable Columns

If the clustered index columns are frequently updated, this will cause the row locator of all the nonclustered indexes to be updated accordingly, significantly increasing the cost of the relevant action queries. This also affects database concurrency by blocking all other queries referring to the same part of the table and the nonclustered indexes during that period. Therefore, avoid creating a clustered index on columns that are highly updatable.

■ Note Chapter 12 covers blocking in more depth.

---

To understand how the cost of an UPDATE statement that modifies only a clustered key column is increased by the presence of nonclustered indexes on the table, consider the following example. The Sales.SpecialOfferProduct table has a composite clustered index on the primary key, which is also the foreign key from two different tables; this is a classic many-to-many join. In this example, I update one of the two columns using the following statement (note the use of the transaction to keep the test data intact):

```
BEGIN TRAN  
SET STATISTICS IO ON ;  
UPDATE Sales.SpecialOfferProduct  
SET ProductID = 345  
WHERE SpecialOfferID = 1  
    AND ProductID = 720 ;  
SET STATISTICS IO OFF ;  
ROLLBACK TRAN
```

The STATISTICS IO output shows the reads necessary:

```
Table 'Product'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2  
Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 1240  
Table 'SpecialOfferProduct'. Scan count 0, logical reads 15
```

If you added a nonclustered index to the table, you would see the reads increase:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX ixTest  
ON Sales.SpecialOfferProduct (ModifiedDate) ;
```

When you run the same query again, the output of STATISTICS IO changes for the SpecialOfferProduct table:

```
Table 'Product'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2, physical re  
Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 1240,  
Table 'SpecialOfferProduct'. Scan count 0, logical reads 19
```

As you can see, the number of reads caused by the update of the clustered index is increased with the addition of the nonclustered index. Be sure to drop the index:

```
DROP INDEX Sales.SpecialOfferProduct.ixTest ;
```

## Wide Keys

Since all nonclustered indexes hold the clustered keys as their row locator, for performance reasons you should avoid creating a clustered index on a very wide column (or columns) or on too many columns. As explained in the preceding section, a clustered index must be as narrow as possible.

## Nonclustered Indexes

A nonclustered index does not affect the order of the data in the table pages, because the leaf pages of a nonclustered index and the data pages of the table are separate. A pointer (the row locator) is required to navigate from an index row to the data row. As you learned in the earlier “Clustered Indexes” section, the structure of the row locator depends on whether the data pages are stored in a heap or a clustered index. For a heap, the row locator is a pointer to the RID for the data row; for a table with a clustered index, the row locator is the clustered index key.

## Nonclustered Index Maintenance

The row locator value of the nonclustered indexes continues to have the same clustered index value, even when the clustered index rows are physically relocated.

In a table that is a heap, where there is no clustered index, to optimize this maintenance cost, SQL Server adds a pointer to the old data page to point to the new data page after a page split, instead of updating the row locator of all the relevant nonclustered indexes. Although this reduces the maintenance cost of the nonclustered indexes, it increases the navigation cost from the nonclustered index row to the data row within the heap, since an extra link is added between the old data page and the new data page. Therefore, having a clustered index as the row locator decreases this overhead associated with the nonclustered index.

## Defining the Bookmark Lookup

When a query requests columns that are not part of the nonclustered index chosen by the optimizer, a lookup is required. This may be a key lookup when going against a clustered index or an RID lookup when performed against a heap. The common term for these lookups comes from the old definition name, *bookmark lookup*. The lookup fetches the corresponding data row from the table by following the row locator value from the index row, requiring a logical read on the data page besides the logical read on the index page. However, if all the columns required by the query are available in the index itself, then access to the data page is not required. This is known as a *covering index*.

These lookups are the reason that large result sets are better served with a clustered index. A clustered index doesn't require a bookmark lookup, since the leaf pages and data pages for a clustered index are the same.

 **Note** [Chapter 6](#) covers lookup operations in more detail.

## Nonclustered Index Recommendations

Since a table can have only one clustered index, you can use the flexibility of multiple nonclustered indexes to help improve performance. I explain the factors that decide the use of a nonclustered index in the following sections.

## When to Use a Nonclustered Index

A nonclustered index is most useful when all you want to do is retrieve a small number of rows and columns from a large table. As the number of columns to be retrieved increases, the ability to have a covering index decreases. Then, if you're also retrieving a large number of rows, the overhead cost of the bookmark lookup rises proportionately. To retrieve a small number of rows from a table, the indexed column should have a very high selectivity.

Furthermore, there will be indexing requirements that won't be suitable for a clustered index, as explained in the "Clustered Indexes" section:

- Frequently updatable columns
- Wide keys

In these cases, you can use a nonclustered index, since, unlike a clustered index, it doesn't affect other indexes in the table. A nonclustered index on a frequently updatable column isn't as costly as having a clustered

index on that column. The UPDATE operation on a nonclustered index is limited to the base table and the nonclustered index. It doesn't affect any other nonclustered indexes on the table. Similarly, a nonclustered index on a wide column (or set of columns) doesn't increase the size of any other index, unlike that with a clustered index. However, remain cautious, even while creating a nonclustered index on a highly updatable column or a wide column (or set of columns), since this can increase the cost of action queries, as explained earlier in the chapter.

---

■ **Tip** A nonclustered index can also help resolve blocking and deadlock issues. I cover this in more depth in [Chapters 12 and 13](#).

---

## When Not to Use a Nonclustered Index

Nonclustered indexes are not suitable for queries that retrieve a large number of rows. Such queries are better served with a clustered index, which doesn't require a separate bookmark lookup to retrieve a data row. Since a bookmark lookup requires additional logical reads to get to the data page besides the logical read on the nonclustered index page, the cost of a query using a nonclustered index increases significantly for a large number of rows, such as when in a loop join that requires one lookup after another. The SQL Server query optimizer takes this cost into effect and accordingly can discard the nonclustered index when retrieving a large result set.

If your requirement is to retrieve a large result set from a table, then having a nonclustered index on the filter criterion (or the join criterion) column will probably not be useful unless you use a special type of nonclustered index called a *covering index*. I describe this index type in detail later in the chapter.

## Clustered vs. Nonclustered Indexes

The main considerations in choosing between a clustered and a nonclustered index are as follows:

- Number of rows to be retrieved
- Data-ordering requirement
- Index key width
- Column update frequency
- Lookup cost
- Any disk hot spots

## Benefits of a Clustered Index over a Nonclustered Index

When deciding upon a type of index on a table with no indexes, the clustered index is usually the preferred choice. Because the index page and the data pages are the same, the clustered index doesn't have to jump from the index row to the base row as required in the case of a non-covering nonclustered index.

To understand how a clustered index can outperform a nonclustered index in these circumstances, even in retrieving a small number of rows, create a test table with a high selectivity for one column:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1')
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT, C2 INT) ;
WITH Nums
AS (SELECT TOP (10000)
    ROW_NUMBER() OVER (ORDER BY (SELECT 1)) AS n
    FROM Master.sys.all_columns AS ac1
    CROSS JOIN Master.sys.all_columns AS ac2
    )
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
    (C1, C2)
    SELECT n,
        2
    FROM Nums ;
```

The following SELECT statement fetches only 1 out of 10,000 rows from the table:

```
SELECT t.C1,
    t. C2
FROM dbo.Test1 AS t
WHERE C1 = 1000 ;
```

This will be with the graphical execution plan shown in Figure 4-21 and the output of SET STATISTICS IO as follows:

Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 22

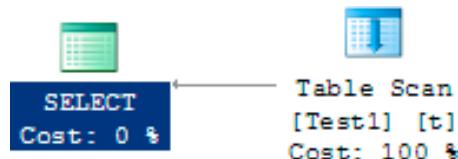
Considering the small size of the result set retrieved by the preceding SELECT statement, a nonclustered column on c1 can be a good choice:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX incl ON dbo.Test1(C1) ;
```

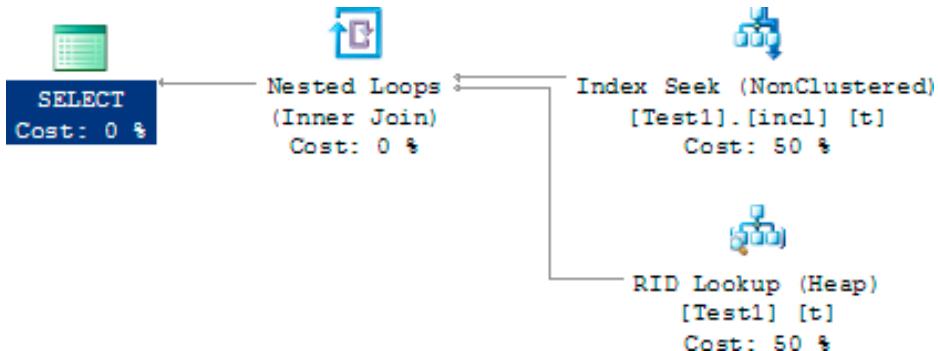
You can run the same SELECT command again. Since retrieving a small number of rows through a nonclustered index is more economical than a table scan, the optimizer used the nonclustered index on column c1, as shown in Figure 4-22. The number of logical reads reported by STATISTICS IO is as follows:

Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 3

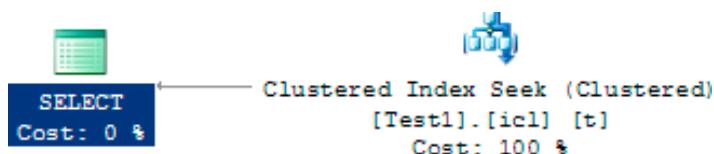
Even though retrieving a small result set using a column with high selectivity is a good pointer toward creating a nonclustered index on the column, a clustered index on the same column can be equally beneficial



**Figure 4-21.** Execution plan with no index



**Figure 4-22.** Execution plan with a nonclustered index



**Figure 4-23.** Execution plan with a clustered index

or even better. To evaluate how the clustered index can be more beneficial than the nonclustered index, create a clustered index on the same column:

```
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX icl ON dbo.Test1(C1) ;
```

Run the same SELECT command again. From the resultant execution plan (see Figure 4-22) of the preceding SELECT statement, you can see that the optimizer used the clustered index (instead of the nonclustered index) even for a small result set. The number of logical reads for the SELECT statement decreased from three to two (Figure 4-23).

Table 't1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 2

**Note** Even though a clustered index can outperform a nonclustered index in many instances of data retrieval, a table can have only one clustered index. Therefore, reserve the clustered index for a situation in which it can be of the greatest benefit.

## Benefits of a Nonclustered Index over a Clustered Index

As you learned in the previous section, a nonclustered index is preferred over a clustered index in the following situations:

- When the index key size is large
- To avoid the overhead cost associated with a clustered index since rebuilding the clustered index rebuilds all the nonclustered indexes of the table

- To resolve blocking by having a database reader work on the pages of a nonclustered index, while a database writer modifies other columns (not included in the nonclustered index) in the data page; in this case, the writer working on the data page won't block a reader that can get all the required column values from the nonclustered index without hitting the base table. I'll explain this in detail in [Chapter 12](#).
- When all the columns (from a table) referred to by a query can be safely accommodated in the nonclustered index itself, as explained in this section

As already established, the data-retrieval performance when using a nonclustered index is generally poorer than that when using a clustered index, because of the cost associated with jumping from the nonclustered index rows to the data rows in the base table. In cases where the jump to the data rows is not required, the performance of a nonclustered index should be just as good as—or even better than—a clustered index. This is possible if the nonclustered index key includes all the columns required from the table.

To understand the situation in which a nonclustered index can outperform a clustered index, consider the following example. Assume for our purposes that you need to examine the credit cards that are expiring between the months of June and September of 2008. You may have a query that returns a large number of rows and looks like this:

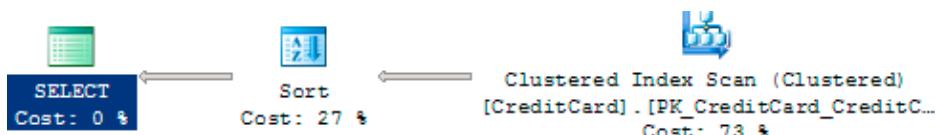
```
SELECT cc.CreditCardID,
       cc.CardNumber,
       cc.ExpMonth,
       cc.ExpYear
  FROM Sales.CreditCard cc
 WHERE cc.ExpMonth BETWEEN 6 AND 9
   AND cc.ExpYear = 2008
 ORDER BY cc.ExpMonth ;
```

The following are the I/O results, and Figure 4-24 shows the execution plan:

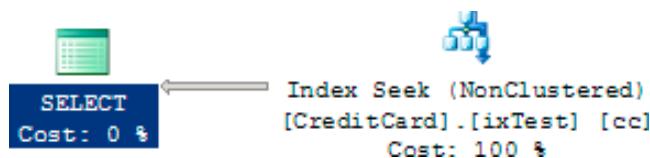
Table 'CreditCard'. Scan count 1, logical reads 189

The clustered index is on the primary key, and although most access against the table may be through that key, making the index useful, the cluster in this instance is just not performing in the way you need. Although you could expand the definition of the index to include all the other columns in the query, they're not really needed to make the cluster function, and they would interfere with the operation of the primary key. Instead, you can use the INCLUDE operation to store the columns defined within it at the leaf level of the index. They don't affect the key structure of the index in any way, but provide the ability, through the sacrifice of some additional disk space, to make a nonclustered index covering (covered in more detail later). In this instance, creating a different index is in order:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX ixTest
ON Sales.CreditCard (ExpMonth, ExpYear)
INCLUDE (CardNumber) ;
```



**Figure 4-24.** Execution plan scanning the clustered index



**Figure 4-25.** Execution plan with a nonclustered index

Now when the query is run again, this is the result:

Table 'CreditCard'. Scan count 1, logical reads 32

Figure 4-25 shows the corresponding execution plan.

In this case, the SELECT statement doesn't include any column that requires a jump from the nonclustered index page to the data page of the table, which is what usually makes a nonclustered index costlier than a clustered index for a large result set and/or sorted output. This kind of nonclustered index is called a *covering index*.

Clean up the index after the testing is done:

```
DROP INDEX Sales.CreditCard.ixTest ;
```

## Advanced Indexing Techniques

A few of the more advanced indexing techniques that you can also consider are as follows:

- *Covering indexes*: These were introduced in the preceding section.
- *Index intersections*: Use multiple nonclustered indexes to satisfy all the column requirements (from a table) for a query.
- *Index joins*: Use the index intersection and covering index techniques to avoid hitting the base table.
- *Filtered indexes*: To be able to index fields with odd data distributions or sparse columns, a filter can be applied to an index so that it indexes only some data.
- *Indexed views*: This materializes the output of a view on disk.
- *Index compression*: The storage of indexes can be compressed through SQL Server, putting more rows of data on a page, improving performance.
- *Columnstore indexes*: Instead of grouping and storing data for a row, like traditional indexes, these indexes group and store based on columns.

I cover these topics in more detail in the following sections.

### Covering Indexes

A *covering index* is a nonclustered index built upon all the columns required to satisfy a SQL query without going to the heap or the clustered index. If a query encounters an index and does not need to refer to the underlying structures at all, then the index can be considered a covering index.

For example, in the following SELECT statement, irrespective of where the columns are referred, all the columns (StateProvinceID and PostalCode) should be included in the nonclustered index to cover the query fully:

```
SELECT a.PostalCode
FROM Person.Address AS a
WHERE a.StateProvinceID = 42 ;
```

Then all the required data for the query can be obtained from the nonclustered index page, without accessing the data page. This helps SQL Server save logical and physical reads. If you run the query, you'll get the following I/O and execution time as well as the execution plan in Figure 4-26.

Table 'Address'. Scan count 1, logical reads 19.

Here you have a classic bookmark lookup with the Key Lookup operator pulling the PostalCode data from the clustered index and joining it with the Index Seek operator against the IX\_Address\_StateProvinceID index.

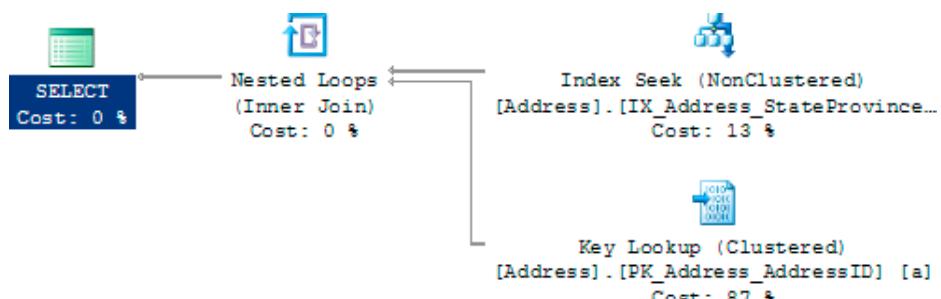
Although you can re-create the index with both key columns, another way to make an index a covering index is to use the new INCLUDE operator. This stores data with the index without changing the structure of the index itself. Use the following to re-create the index:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [IX_Address_StateProvinceID]
ON [Person].[Address] ([StateProvinceID] ASC)
INCLUDE (PostalCode)
WITH (
DROP_EXISTING = ON) ;
```

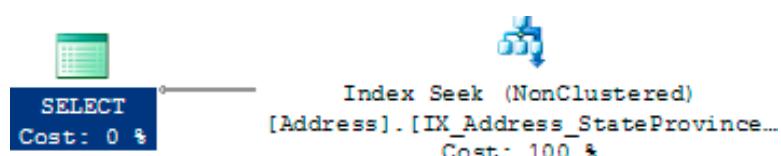
If you rerun the query, the execution plan (Figure 4-27), I/O, and execution time change:

Table 'Address'. Scan count 1, logical reads 2

The reads have dropped from 19 to 2, and the execution plan is just about as simple as it's possible to be; it's a single Index Seek operation against the new and improved index, which is now covering. A covering index



**Figure 4-26.** Query without a covering index



**Figure 4-27.** Query with a covering index

is a useful technique for reducing the number of logical reads of a query. Adding columns using the INCLUDE statement makes this functionality easier to achieve without adding to the number of columns in an index or the size of the index key since the included columns are stored only at the leaf level of the index.

The INCLUDE is best used in the following cases:

- You don't want to increase the size of the index keys, but you still want to make the index a covering index.
- You're indexing a data type that can't be indexed (except text, ntext, and images).
- You've already exceeded the maximum number of key columns for an index (although this is a problem best avoided).

## A Pseudoclustered Index

The covering index physically organizes the data of all the indexed columns in a sequential order. Thus, from a disk I/O perspective, a covering index that doesn't use included columns becomes a clustered index for all queries satisfied completely by the columns in the covering index. If the result set of a query requires a sorted output, then the covering index can be used to physically maintain the column data in the same order as required by the result set—it can then be used in the same way as a clustered index for sorted output. As shown in the previous example, covering indexes can give better performance than clustered indexes for queries requesting a range of rows and/or sorted output. The included columns are not part of the key and therefore wouldn't offer the same benefits for ordering as the key columns of the index.

## Recommendations

To take advantage of covering indexes, be careful with the column list in SELECT statements to move only the data you need to. It's also a good idea to use as few columns as possible to keep the index key size small for the covering indexes. Add columns using the INCLUDE statement in places where it makes sense. Since a covering index includes all columns used in a query, it has a tendency to be very wide, increasing the maintenance cost of the covering indexes. You must balance the maintenance cost with the performance gain that the covering index brings. If the number of bytes from all the columns in the index is small compared to the number of bytes in a single data row of that table and you are certain the query taking advantage of the covered index will be executed frequently, then it may be beneficial to use a covering index.

**Tip** Covering indexes can also help resolve blocking and deadlocks, as you will see in [Chapters 12 and 13](#).

Before building a lot of covering indexes, consider how SQL Server can effectively and automatically create covering indexes for queries on the fly using index intersection.

## Index Intersections

If a table has multiple indexes, then SQL Server can use multiple indexes to execute a query. SQL Server can take advantage of multiple indexes, selecting small subsets of data based on each index and then performing an intersection of the two subsets (that is, returning only those rows that meet all the criteria). SQL Server can exploit multiple indexes on a table and then employ a join algorithm to obtain the *index intersection* between the two subsets.

In the following SELECT statement, for the WHERE clause columns, the table has a nonclustered index on the SalesPersonID column, but it has no index on the OrderDate column:

```
SELECT soh.*  
FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh  
WHERE soh.SalesPersonID = 276  
AND soh.OrderDate BETWEEN '4/1/2005' AND '7/1/2005' ;
```

Figure 4-28 shows the execution plan for this query.

As you can see, the optimizer didn't use the nonclustered index on the SalesPersonID column. Since the value of the OrderDate column is also required, the optimizer chose the clustered index to fetch the value of all the referred columns. The I/O for retrieving this data was as follows:

Table 'SalesOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 686

To improve the performance of the query, the OrderDate column can be added to the nonclustered index on the SalesPersonId column or defined as an included column on the same index. But in this real-world scenario, you may have to consider the following while modifying an existing index:

- It may not be permissible to modify an existing index for various reasons.
- The existing nonclustered index key may be already quite wide.
- The cost of the queries using the existing index will be affected by the modification.

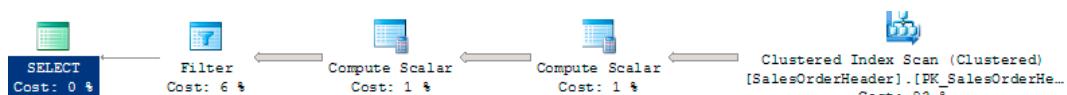
In such cases, you can create a new nonclustered index on the OrderDate column:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX IX_Test  
ON Sales.SalesOrderHeader (OrderDate);
```

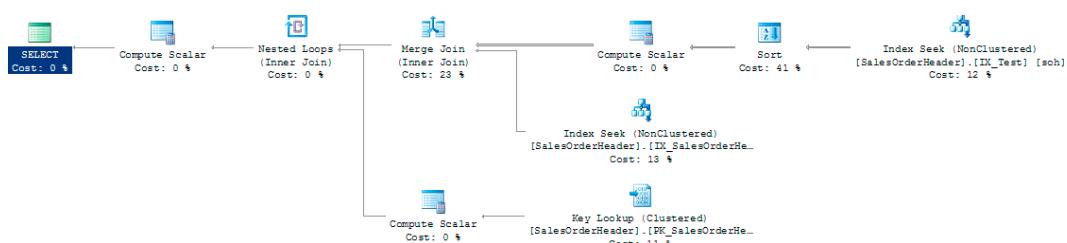
Run your SELECT command again.

Figure 4-29 shows the resultant execution plan of the SELECT statement.

As you can see, SQL Server exploited both the nonclustered indexes as index seeks (rather than scans) and then employed an intersection algorithm to obtain the index intersection of the two subsets. It then did a Key Lookup from the resulting dataset to retrieve the rest of the data not included in the indexes.



**Figure 4-28.** Execution plan with no index on the OrderDate column



**Figure 4-29.** Execution plan with an index on the OrderDate column

To improve the performance of a query, SQL Server can use multiple indexes on a table. Therefore, instead of creating wide index keys, consider creating multiple narrow indexes. SQL Server will be able to use them together where required, and when not required, queries benefit from narrow indexes. While creating a covering index, determine whether the width of the index will be acceptable and whether using include columns will get the job done. If not, then identify the existing nonclustered indexes that include most of the columns required by the covering index. You may already have two existing nonclustered indexes that jointly serve all the columns required by the covering index. If it is possible, rearrange the column order of the existing nonclustered indexes appropriately, allowing the optimizer to consider an index intersection between the two nonclustered indexes.

At times, it is possible that you may have to create a separate nonclustered index for the following reasons:

- Reordering the columns in one of the existing indexes is not allowed.
- Some of the columns required by the covering index may not be included in the existing nonclustered indexes.
- The total number of columns in the two existing nonclustered indexes may be more than the number of columns required by the covering index.

In such cases, you can create a nonclustered index on the remaining columns. If the combined column order of the new index and an existing nonclustered index meets the requirement of the covering index, the optimizer will be able to use index intersection. While identifying the columns and their order for the new index, try to maximize their benefit by keeping an eye on other queries, too.

Drop the index that was created for the tests:

```
DROP INDEX Sales.SalesOrderHeader.IX_Test;
```

## Index Joins

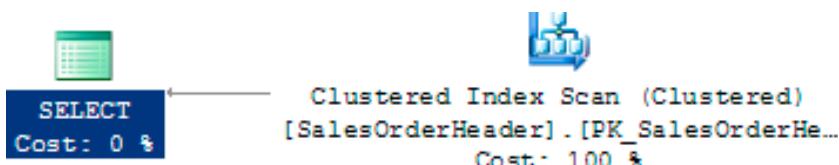
The *index join* is a variation of index intersection, where the covering index technique is applied to the index intersection. If no single index covers a query but multiple indexes together can cover the query, SQL Server can use an index join to satisfy the query fully without going to the base table.

Let's look at this indexing technique at work. Make a slight modification to the query from the "Index Intersections" section like this:

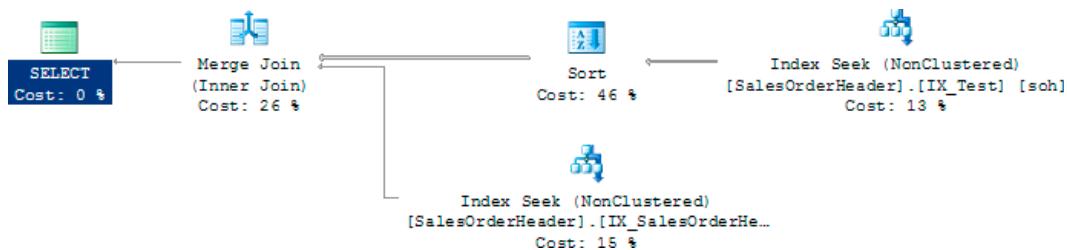
```
SELECT soh.SalesPersonID,
       soh.OrderDate
  FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
 WHERE soh.SalesPersonID = 276
   AND soh.OrderDate BETWEEN '4/1/2005' AND '7/1/2005' ;
```

The execution plan for this query is shown in Figure 4-30, and the reads are as follows:

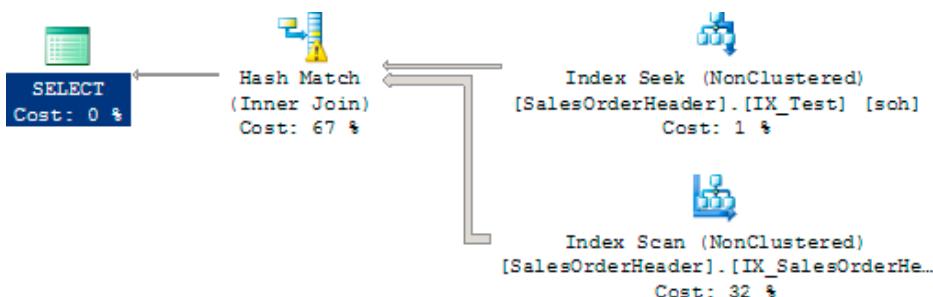
Table 'SalesOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 686



**Figure 4-30.** Execution plan with no index join



**Figure 4-31.** Execution plan with an index join



**Figure 4-32.** Execution plan with index join through a hint

As shown in Figure 4-30, the optimizer didn't use the existing nonclustered index on the SalesPersonID column. Since the query requires the value of the OrderDate column also, the optimizer selected the clustered index to retrieve values for all the columns referred to in the query. If an index is created on the OrderDate column like this:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX IX_Test
ON Sales.SalesOrderHeader (OrderDate ASC);
```

and the query is rerun, then Figure 4-31 shows the result, and you can see the reads here:

Table 'SalesOrderHeader'. Scan count 2, logical reads 4

The combination of the two indexes acts like a covering index reducing the reads against the table from 686 to 4 because it's using two Index Seek operations joined together instead of a clustered index scan.

But what if the WHERE clause didn't result in both indexes being used? Instead, you know that both indexes exist and that a seek against each would work like the previous query, so you choose to use an index hint:

```
SELECT      soh.SalesPersonID
,soh.OrderDate FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh WITH (INDEX (IX_Test,
IX_SalesOrderHeader_SalesPersonID)) WHERE soh.OrderDate BETWEEN '4/1/2002' AND '7/1/2002';
```

The results of this new query are shown in Figure 4-32, and the I/O is as follows:

able 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0  
able 'SalesOrderHeader'. Scan count 2, logical reads 61

The reads have clearly increased, and you have a hash warning that tempdb was used to store data during the processing. Most of the time, the optimizer makes very good choices when it comes to indexes and execution

plans. Although query hints are available to allow you to take control from the optimizer, this control can cause as many problems as it solves. In attempting to force an index join as a performance benefit, instead the forced selection of indexes slowed down the execution of the query.

Remove the test index before continuing:

```
DROP INDEX Sales.SalesOrderHeader.IX_Test ;
```

**Note** While generating a query execution plan, the SQL Server optimizer goes through the optimization phases not only to determine the type of index and join strategy to be used but also to evaluate the advanced indexing techniques such as index intersection and index join. Therefore, instead of creating wide covering indexes, consider creating multiple narrow indexes. SQL Server can use them together to serve as a covering index yet use them separately where required. But you will need to test to be sure which works better in your situation, wider indexes, or index intersections and joins.

## Filtered Indexes

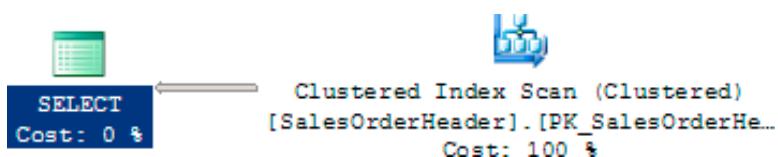
A filtered index is a nonclustered index that uses a filter, basically a WHERE clause, to create a highly selective set of keys against a column or columns that may not have good selectivity otherwise. For example, a column with a large number of null values may be stored as a sparse column to reduce the overhead of those null values. Adding a filtered index to the column will allow you to have an index available on the data that is not null. The best way to understand this is to see it in action.

The Sales.SalesOrderHeader table has more than 30,000 rows. Of those rows, 27,000+ have a null value in the PurchaseOrderNumber column and the SalesPersonId column. If you wanted to get a simple list of purchase order numbers, the query might look like this:

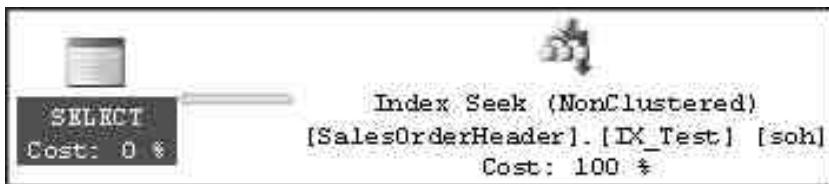
```
SELECT soh.PurchaseOrderNumber,
       soh.OrderDate,
       soh.ShipDate,
       soh.SalesPersonID
  FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
 WHERE PurchaseOrderNumber LIKE 'P05%'
   AND soh.SalesPersonID IS NOT NULL ;;
```

Running the query results in, as you might expect, a clustered index scan, and the following I/O and execution time, as shown in Figure 4-33.

```
Table 'SalesOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 686
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 619 ms.
```



**Figure 4-33.** Execution plan without an index



**Figure 4-34.** Execution plan with a covering index

To fix this, it is possible to create an index and include some of the columns from the query to make this a covering index (as shown in Figure 4-34):

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX IX_Test
ON Sales.SalesOrderHeader(PurchaseOrderNumber ,SalesPersonID)
INCLUDE (OrderDate,ShipDate);
```

When you rerun the query, the performance improvement is fairly radical (see Figure 4-33 and the I/O and time in the following result):

Table 'SalesOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 5 CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 52 ms.

As you can see, the covering index dropped the reads from 686 down to 5 and the time from 619 ms to 52 ms. Normally, this would be enough. Assume for a moment that this query has to be called frequently—very frequently. Now, every bit of speed you can wring from it will pay dividends. Knowing that so much of the data in the indexed columns is null, you can adjust the index so that it filters out the null values, which aren't used by the index anyway, reducing the size of the tree and therefore the amount of searching required:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX IX_Test
ON Sales.SalesOrderHeader(PurchaseOrderNumber,SalesPersonID)
INCLUDE (OrderDate,ShipDate)
WHERE PurchaseOrderNumber IS NOT NULL AND SalesPersonID IS NOT NULL
WITH (DROP_EXISTING = ON);
```

The final run of the query is visible in the following result and in Figure 4-35.

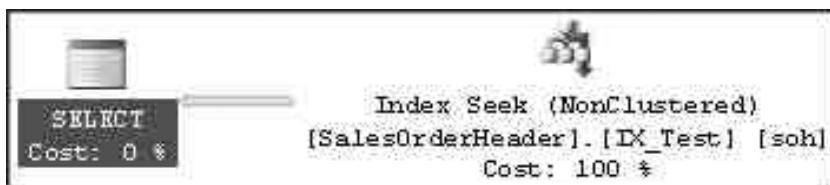
Table 'SalesOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 4 CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 40 ms.

Although in terms of sheer numbers reducing the reads from 5 to 4 isn't much, it is a 20 percent reduction in the I/O cost of the query, and if this query were running hundreds or even thousands of times in a minute, as some queries do, that 20 percent reduction would be a great payoff indeed. Another visible evidence of the payoff is visible in the execution time, which dropped again from 52 ms to 40 ms.

Filtered indexes improve performance in many ways:

- Improving the efficiency of queries by reducing the size of the index
- Reducing storage costs by making smaller indexes
- Cutting down on the costs of index maintenance because of the reduced size

One of the first places suggested for their use is just like the previous example, eliminating null values from the index. You can also isolate frequently accessed sets of data with a special index so that the queries against that data perform much faster. You can use the WHERE clause to filter data in a fashion similar to creating an indexed view (covered in more detail in the “Indexed Views” section) without the data maintenance headaches associated with indexed views by creating a filtered index that is a covering index, just like the earlier example.



**Figure 4-35.** Execution plan with a filtered index

Filtered indexes require a specific set of ANSI settings when they are accessed or created:

- ON: ANSI\_NULLS, ANSI\_PADDING, ANSI\_WARNINGS, ARITHABORT, CONCAT\_NULL\_YIELDS\_NULL, QUOTED\_IDENTIFIER
- OFF: NUMERIC\_ROUNDABORT

When completed, drop the testing index:

```
DROP INDEX Sales.SalesOrderHeader.IX_Test;
```

## Indexed Views

A database view in SQL Server is like a virtual table that represents the output of a SELECT statement. You create a view using the CREATE VIEW statement, and you can query it exactly like a table. In general, a view doesn't store any data—only the SELECT statement associated with it. Every time a view is queried, it further queries the underlying tables by executing its associated SELECT statement.

A database view can be materialized on the disk by creating a unique clustered index on the view. Such a view is referred to as an *indexed view* or a *materialized view*. After a unique clustered index is created on the view, the view's result set is materialized immediately and persisted in physical storage in the database, saving the overhead of performing costly operations during query execution. After the view is materialized, multiple nonclustered indexes can be created on the indexed view.

## Benefit

You can use an indexed view to increase the performance of a query in the following ways:

- Aggregations can be precomputed and stored in the indexed view to minimize expensive computations during query execution.
- Tables can be prejoined, and the resulting data set can be materialized.
- Combinations of joins or aggregations can be materialized.

## Overhead

Indexed views can produce major overhead on an OLTP database. Some of the overheads of indexed views are as follows:

- Any change in the base table(s) has to be reflected in the indexed view by executing the view's SELECT statement.

- Any changes to a base table on which an indexed view is defined may initiate one or more changes in the nonclustered indexes of the indexed view. The clustered index will also have to be changed if the clustering key is updated.
- The indexed view adds to the ongoing maintenance overhead of the database.
- Additional storage is required in the database.

The restrictions on creating an indexed view include the following:

- The first index on the view must be a unique clustered index.
- Nonclustered indexes on an indexed view can be created only after the unique clustered index is created.
- The view definition must be *deterministic*—that is, it is able to return only one possible result for a given query. (A list of deterministic and nondeterministic functions is provided in “SQL Server Books Online.”)
- The indexed view must reference only base tables in the same database, not other views.
- The indexed view may contain float columns. However, such columns cannot be included in the clustered index key.
- The indexed view must be a schema bound to the tables referred to in the view to prevent modifications of the table schema.
- There are several restrictions on the syntax of the view definition. (A list of the syntax limitations on the view definition is provided in “SQL Server Books Online.”)
- The list of SET options that must be fixed are as follows:
  - ON: ARITHABORT, CONCAT\_NULL\_YIELDS\_NULL, QUOTED\_IDENTIFIER, ANSI\_NULLS, ANSI\_PADDING, and ANSI\_WARNINGS
  - OFF: NUMERIC\_ROUNDABORT

**Note** If the query connection settings don't match these ANSI standard settings, you may see errors on the insert/update/delete of tables that are used within the indexed view.

## Usage Scenarios

Reporting systems benefit the most from indexed views. OLTP systems with frequent writes may not be able to take advantage of the indexed views because of the increased maintenance cost associated with updating both the view and the underlying base tables. The net performance improvement provided by an indexed view is the difference between the total query execution savings offered by the view and the cost of storing and maintaining the view.

An indexed view need not be referenced in the query for the query optimizer to use it during query execution. This allows existing applications to benefit from the newly created indexed views without changing those applications. The query optimizer considers indexed views only for queries with nontrivial cost. You may also find that the new columnstore index will work better for you than indexed views, especially when you're preaggregating data.

Let's see how indexed views work with the following example. Consider the three queries in Listings 4-1 through 4-3.

***Listing 4-1.*** Query1.sql

```

SELECT      p.[Name] AS ProductName,
            SUM(pod.OrderQty) AS OrderQty,
            SUM(pod.ReceivedQty) AS ReceivedQty,
            SUM(pod.RejectedQty) AS RejectedQty
FROM        Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
JOIN        Production.Product AS p
ON          p.ProductID = pod.ProductID
GROUP BY    p.[Name] ;

```

***Listing 4-2.*** Query2.sql

```

SELECT      p.[Name] AS ProductName,
            SUM(pod.OrderQty) AS OrderQty,
            SUM(pod.ReceivedQty) AS ReceivedQty,
            SUM(pod.RejectedQty) AS RejectedQty
FROM        Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
JOIN        Production.Product AS p
ON          p.ProductID = pod.ProductID
GROUP BY    p.[Name]
HAVING     (SUM(pod.RejectedQty) / SUM(pod.ReceivedQty)) > .08;

```

***Listing 4-3.*** Query3.sql

```

SELECT      p.[Name] AS ProductName,
            SUM(pod.OrderQty) AS OrderQty,
            SUM(pod.ReceivedQty) AS ReceivedQty,
            SUM(pod.RejectedQty) AS RejectedQty
FROM        Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
JOIN        Production.Product AS p
ON          p.ProductID = pod.ProductID
WHERE       p.[Name] LIKE 'Chain%'
GROUP BY    p.[Name] ;

```

All three queries use the aggregation function SUM on columns of the PurchaseOrderDetail table. Therefore, you can create an indexed view to precompute these aggregations and minimize the cost of these complex computations during query execution.

Listings 4-4 through 4-6 show the number of logical reads performed by these queries to access the appropriate tables.

***Listing 4-4.*** Logical Reads by Query1

```

Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0
Table 'Product'. Scan count 1, logical reads 6
Table 'PurchaseOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 66
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 33 ms.CPU time = 15 ms, elapsed time = 100 ms.

```

***Listing 4-5.*** Logical Reads by Query2

```
Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0
Table 'Product'. Scan count 1, logical reads 6
Table 'PurchaseOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 66CPU time = 16 ms,
elapsed time = 12 ms.
```

***Listing 4-6.*** Logical Reads by Query3

```
Table 'PurchaseOrderDetail'. Scan count 5, logical reads 894
Table 'Product'. Scan count 1, logical reads 2
CPU time = 16 ms, elapsed time = 5 ms.
```

Create an indexed view to precompute the costly computations and join the tables (odView.sql) in the download):

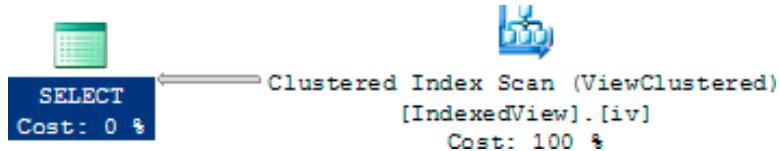
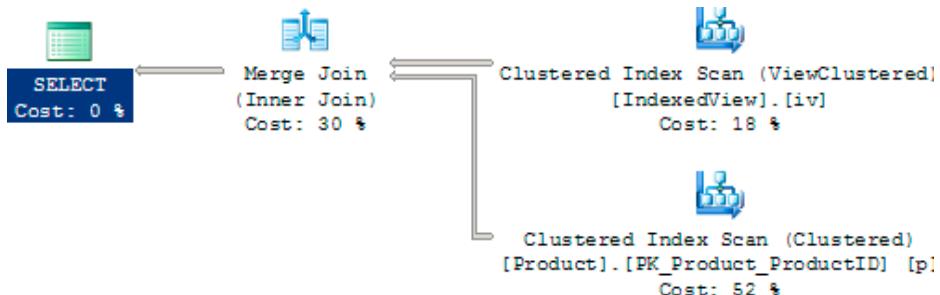
```
IF EXISTS ( SELECT *
            FROM sys.views
            WHERE object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'[Purchasing].[IndexedView]') )
    DROP VIEW [Purchasing].[IndexedView] ;
GO
CREATE VIEW Purchasing.IndexedView
WITH SCHEMABINDING
AS
SELECT      pod.ProductID,
            SUM(pod.OrderQty) AS OrderQty,
            SUM(pod.ReceivedQty) AS ReceivedQty,
            SUM(pod.RejectedQty) AS RejectedQty,
            COUNT_BIG(*) AS [Count]
FROM        Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
GROUP BY    pod.ProductID ;
GO
CREATE UNIQUE CLUSTERED INDEX iv
ON Purchasing.IndexedView (ProductID) ;
GO
```

Certain constructs such as AVG are disallowed. (For the complete list of disallowed constructs, refer to “SQL Server Books Online.”) If aggregates are included in the view, as in this one, you must include COUNT\_BIG by default.

The indexed view materializes the output of the aggregate functions on the disk. This eliminates the need for computing the aggregate functions during the execution of a query interested in the aggregate outputs. For example, Query3.sql requests the sum of ReceivedQty and RejectedQty for certain products from the PurchaseOrderDetail table. Because these values are materialized in the indexed view for every product in the PurchaseOrderDetail table, you can fetch these preaggregated values using the following SELECT statement on the indexed view:

```
SELECT  iv.ProductID,
        iv.ReceivedQty,
        iv.RejectedQty
FROM    Purchasing.IndexedView AS iv ;
```

As shown in the execution plan in Figure 4-36, the SELECT statement retrieves the values directly from the indexed view without accessing the base table (PurchaseOrderDetail).

**Figure 4-36.** Execution plan with an indexed view**Figure 4-37.** Execution plan with the indexed view automatically used

The indexed view benefits not only the queries based on the view directly but also other queries that may be interested in the materialized data. For example, with the indexed view in place, the three queries on PurchaseOrderDetail benefit without being rewritten (see the execution plan in Figure 4-37 for the execution plan from the first query), and the number of logical reads decreases, as shown in Listings 4-7 through 4-9.

#### ***Listing 4-7.*** Logical Reads by Query1 with an Indexed View

```
Table 'Product'. Scan count 1, logical reads 13
Table 'IndexedView'. Scan count 1, logical reads 4
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 99 ms.
```

#### ***Listing 4-8.*** Logical Reads by Query2 with an Indexed View

```
Table 'Product'. Scan count 1, logical reads 13
Table 'IndexedView'. Scan count 1, logical reads 4
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 28 ms.
```

#### ***Listing 4-9.*** Logical Reads by Query3 with an Indexed View

```
Table 'IndexedView'. Scan count 0, logical reads 10
Table 'Product'. Scan count 1, logical reads 2
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 35 ms.
```

Even though the queries are not modified to refer to the new indexed view, the optimizer still uses the indexed view to improve performance. Thus, even existing queries in the database application can benefit from new indexed views without any modifications to the queries. If you do need different aggregations than what the indexed view offers, you'll be out of luck. Here again the columnstore index shines.

## Index Compression

Data and index compression was introduced in SQL Server 2008 (available in the Enterprise and Developer Editions). *Compressing* an index means getting more key information onto a single page. This can lead to significant performance improvements because fewer pages and fewer index levels are needed to store the index. There will be overhead in the CPU as the key values in the index are compressed and decompressed, so this may not be a solution for all indexes. Memory benefits also because the compressed pages are stored in memory in a compressed state.

By default, an index will not be compressed. You have to explicitly call for the index to be compressed when you create the index. There are two types of compression: row- and page-level compression. Nonleaf pages in an index receive no compression under the page type. To see index compression in action, consider the following index (don't run this code since the index already exists):

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX IX_Test
ON Person.Address(City ASC, PostalCode ASC) ;
```

This index was created earlier in the chapter. If you were to re-create it as defined here, this creates a row type of compression on an index with the same two columns as the first test index `IX_Test`.

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX IX_Comp_Test
ON Person.Address (City,PostalCode)
WITH (DATA_COMPRESSION = ROW ) ;
```

Create one more index:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX IX_Comp_Page_Test
ON Person.Address (City,PostalCode)
WITH (DATA_COMPRESSION = PAGE) ;
```

To examine the indexes being stored, modify the original query against `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` to add another column, `compressed_page_count`:

```
SELECT i.Name,
       i.type_desc,
       s.page_count,
       s.record_count,
       s.index_level,
       compressed_page_count
  FROM sys.indexes i
 JOIN sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats(DB_ID(N'AdventureWorks2008R2'),
                                     OBJECT_ID(N'Person.Address'), NULL,
                                     NULL, 'DETAILED') AS s
    ON i.index_id = s.index_id
 WHERE i.OBJECT_ID = OBJECT_ID(N'Person.Address') ;
```

Running the query, you get the results in Figure 4-38.

	Name	type_desc	page_count	record_count	index_level	compressed_page_count
12	IX_Test	NONCLUSTERED	106	19614	0	0
13	IX_Test	NONCLUSTERED	1	106	1	0
14	IX_Comp_Test	NONCLUSTERED	63	19614	0	0
15	IX_Comp_Test	NONCLUSTERED	1	63	1	0
16	IX_Comp_Page_Test	NONCLUSTERED	25	19614	0	25
17	IX_Comp_Page_Test	NONCLUSTERED	1	25	1	0

**Figure 4-38.** `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` output about compressed indexes

For this index, you can see that the page compression was able move the index from 106 pages down to 25, of which 25 were compressed. The row type compression in this instance made a difference in the number of pages in the index, but not nearly as dramatic as that of the page compression.

To see the compression in action, run the following query:

```
SELECT a.City,
       a.PostalCode
  FROM Person.Address AS a
 WHERE a.City = 'Newton'
   AND a.PostalCode = 'V2M1N7' ;
```

The optimizer chose, on my system, to use the IXCompPageTest index. Even if I forced it to use the IXTest index, thusly, the performance was identical, although one extra page was read in the second query.

```
SELECT a.City,
       a.PostalCode
  FROM Person.Address AS a WITH (INDEX = IX_Test)
 WHERE a.City = 'Newton'
   AND a.PostalCode = 'V2M1N7' ;
```

So although one index is taking up radically less room on approximately one quarter as many pages, it's done at no cost in performance.

Compression has a series of impacts on other processes within SQL Server, so further understanding of the possible impacts as well as the possible benefits should be explored thoroughly prior to implementation. In most cases, the cost to CPU is completely outweighed by the benefits everywhere else, but you should test and monitor your system.

Clean up the indexes after you finish testing:

```
DROP INDEX Person.Address.IX_Test;
DROP INDEX Person.Address.IX_Comp_Test;
DROP INDEX Person.Address.IX_Comp_Page_Test;
```

## ColumnStore Indexes

Introduced in SQL Server 2012, the columnstore index is used to index information by columns rather than by rows. This is especially useful when working within data warehousing systems where very large amounts of data have to be aggregated and accessed quickly. The information stored within a columnstore index is grouped on each column, and these groupings are stored individually. This makes aggregations on different sets of columns extremely fast since the columnstore index can be accessed rather than accessing large numbers of rows in order to aggregate the information and because the columnar data is stored compressed. There are a number of limits on using columnstore indexes:

- Tables that have a columnstore index cannot be updated. You must first drop the columnstore index or you must partition around the columnstore index in order to support changes to the underlying data.
- You can't use certain data types such as binary, text, varchar(max), uniqueidentifier, clr data types, xml, or decimal with a precision greater than 18.
- You can't create a columnstore index on a sparse column.

For the complete list of restrictions, refer to “Books Online.”

Columnstores are primarily meant for use within data warehouses and therefore work best when dealing with the associated styles of storage such as star schemas. You can see how a columnstore can help even with

OLTP systems if you can isolate the storage so that updates are controlled. In the AdventureWorks2008R2 database, the Production.TransactionHistoryArchive table is a structure that is more likely to be used for aggregate queries than many of the other structures. Since it's an archive table, the load of it is also controlled so that a columnstore index could be used successfully here. Take this query as an example:

```
SELECT      tha.ProductID,
            COUNT(tha.ProductID) AS CountProductID,
            SUM(tha.Quantity) AS SumQuantity,
            AVG(tha.ActualCost) AS AvgActualCost
FROM        Production.TransactionHistoryArchive AS tha
GROUP BY    tha.ProductID ;
```

If you run this query against the table as it is currently configured, you'll see an execution plan that looks like Figure 4-39.

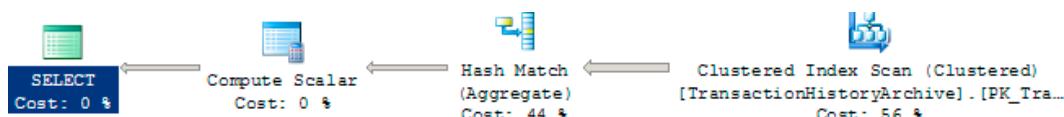
The reads and execution time for the query are as follows:

```
Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0
Table 'TransactionHistoryArchive'. Scan count 1, logical reads 622
CPU time = 94 ms, elapsed time = 348 ms.
```

There are a large number of reads, and this query uses quite a bit of CPU and is not terribly fast to execute. Creating a columnstore index is very simple:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED COLUMNSTORE INDEX ix_csTest
ON Production.TransactionHistoryArchive
(ProductID,
Quantity,
ActualCost) ;
```

With the columnstore index in place, the optimizer now has the option of using that index to satisfy the foregoing query. Just like all other indexes available to the optimizer, costs are associated with the columnstore index, so it may or may not be chosen to satisfy the requirements for any given query against the table. In this case, if you rerun the original aggregate query, you can see that the optimizer determined that the costs associated with using the columnstore index were beneficial to the query. The execution plan now looks like Figure 4-40.



**Figure 4-39.** A clustered index scan and hash match aggregate for a GROUP BY query



**Figure 4-40.** The columnstore index is used instead of the clustered index.

Misc	Actual Execution Mode	Row
	Actual Number of Batches	0

**Figure 4-41.** Actual execution mode

As you can see, the basic operations of the query are the same, but the columnstore index is scanned instead of the clustered index. The real differences are seen in the reads and execution times for the query:

```
Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0
Table 'TransactionHistoryArchive'. Scan count 1, logical reads 54
CPU time = 78 ms, elapsed time = 194 ms.
```

The radical reduction in the number of reads required to retrieve the data and the marginal increase in speed are all the result of being able to reference information that is indexed by column instead of by row. The foregoing query ran in what's called row mode. A columnstore index has two operations, batch mode and row mode. Of the two, batch mode is much faster. It takes advantage of a special method of accessing the data that allows for pulling large sets of data, in batches, so that decompression isn't necessary. The batch mode processing also has extra benefits when working with multiprocessor machines. To see if a columnstore ran in batch or row mode, you just have to check the properties of the columnstore operation. For example, in the foregoing query, here's the property sheet from the columnstore scan operator in Figure 4-41.

There is only a limited set of operations, documented in "Books Online," that result in batch mode processing, but when working with those operations on a system with enough processors, you will see yet another substantial performance enhancement.

Columnstore indexes don't require you to have the columns in a particular order, unlike clustered and nonclustered indexes. Also, unlike these other indexes, you should place multiple columns within a columnstore index so that you get benefits across those columns. But if you're retrieving large numbers of columns from a columnstore index, you might see some performance degradation.

While the limitations for the use of the columnstore index are stringent, the benefits for structures that can operate within those limitations are very clear.

## Special Index Types

As special data types and storage mechanisms are introduced to SQL Server by Microsoft, methods for indexing these special storage types are also developed. Explaining all the details possible for each of these special index types is outside the scope of the book. In the following sections, I introduce the basic concepts of each index type in order to facilitate the possibility of their use in tuning your queries.

### Full-Text

You can store large amounts of text in SQL Server by using the MAX value in the VARCHAR, NVARCHAR, CHAR, and NCHAR fields. A normal clustered or nonclustered index against these large fields would be unsupportable because a single value can far exceed the page size within an index. So, a different mechanism of indexing text is to use the full-text engine, which must be running to work with full-text indexes. You can also build a full-text index on VARBINARY data.

You need to have one column on the table that is unique. The best candidates for performance are integers: INT or BIGINT. This column is then used along with the word to identify which row within the table it belongs to, as well as its location within the field. SQL Server allows for incremental changes, either change tracking or time-based, to the full-text indexes as well as complete rebuilds.

SQL Server 2012 introduces another method for working with text called Semantic Search. It uses phrases from documents to identify relationships between different sets of text stored within the database.

## Spatial

Introduced in SQL Server 2008 is the ability to store spatial data. This data can be either a geometry type or the very complex geographical type, literally identifying a point on the earth. To say the least, indexing this type of data is complicated. SQL Server stores these indexes in a flat B-tree, similar to regular indexes, except that it is also a hierarchy of four grids linked together. Each of the grids can be given a density of low, medium, or high, outlining how big each grid is. There are mechanisms to support indexing of the spatial data types so that different types of queries, such as finding when one object is within the boundaries or near another object, can benefit from performance increases inherent in indexing.

A spatial index can be created only against a column of type geometry or geography. It has to be on a base table, it must have no indexed views, and the table must have a primary key. You can create up to 249 spatial indexes on any given column on a table. Different indexes are used to define different types of index behavior. More information is available in the book *Beginning Spatial with SQL Server 2008* by Alastair Aitchison (Apress, 2009).

## XML

Introduced as a data type in SQL Server 2005, XML can be stored not as text but as well-formed XML data within SQL Server. This data can be queried using the XQuery language as supported by SQL Server. To enhance the performance capabilities, a special set of indexes has been defined. An XML column can have one primary and several secondary indexes. The primary XML shreds the properties, attributes, and elements of the XML data and stores it as an internal table. There must be a primary key on the table, and that primary key must be clustered in order to create an XML index. After the XML index is created, the secondary indexes can be created. These indexes have types Path, Value, and Property, depending on how you query the XML. For more details, check out *Pro SQL Server 2008 XML* by Michael Coles (Apress, 2008).

## Additional Characteristics of Indexes

Other index properties can affect performance, positively and negatively. A few of these behaviors are explored here.

### Different Column Sort Order

SQL Server supports creating a composite index with a different sort order for the different columns of the index. Suppose you want an index with the first column sorted in ascending order and the second column sorted in descending order in order to eliminate a sort operation, which can be quite costly. You could achieve this as follows:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX i1 ON t1(c1 ASC, c2 DESC) ;
```

## Index on Computed Columns

You can create an index on a computed column, as long as the expression defined for the computed column meets certain restrictions, such as that it references columns only from the table containing the computed column and it is deterministic.

## Index on BIT Data Type Columns

SQL Server allows you to create an index on columns with the BIT data type. The ability to create an index on a BIT data type column by itself is not a big advantage since such a column can have only two unique values, except for the rare circumstance where the vast majority of the data is one value and only a few rows are the other. As mentioned previously, columns with such low selectivity (number of unique values) are not usually good candidates for indexing. However, this feature comes into its own when you consider covering indexes. Because covering indexes require including all the columns in the index, the ability to add the BIT data type column to an index allows covering indexes to include such a column, if required.

## CREATE INDEX Statement Processed As a Query

The CREATE INDEX operation is integrated into the query processor. The optimizer can use existing index(es) to reduce scan cost and sort while creating an index.

Take, for example, the Person.Address table. A nonclustered index exists on a number of columns: AddressLine1, AddressLine2, City, StateProvinceId, and PostalCode. If you needed to run queries against the City column with the existing index, you'll get a scan of that index. Now create a new index like this:

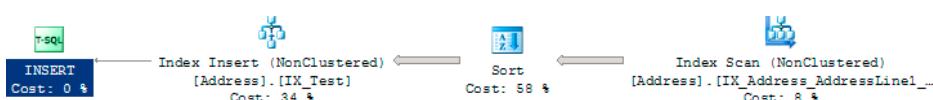
```
CREATE INDEX IX_Test
ON Person.Address(City) ;
```

You can see in Figure 4-42 that, instead of scanning the table, the optimizer chose to scan the index in order to create the new index because the column needed for the new index was contained within the other nonclustered index.

## Parallel Index Creation

SQL Server supports parallel plans for a CREATE INDEX statement, as supported in other SQL queries. On a multiprocessor machine, index creation won't be restricted to a single processor but will benefit from the multiple processors. You can control the number of processors to be used in a CREATE INDEX statement with the max degree of parallelism configuration parameter of SQL Server. The default value for this parameter is 0, as you can see by executing the sp\_configure stored procedure:

```
EXEC    sp_configure
      'max degree of parallelism' ;
```



**Figure 4-42.** Execution plan for CREATE INDEX

The default value of 0 means that SQL Server can use all the available CPUs in the system for the parallel execution of a T-SQL statement. On a system with four processors, the maximum degree of parallelism can be set to 2 by executing spconfigure:

```
EXEC    sp_configure
        'max degree of parallelism',
        2 ;
RECONFIGURE WITH OVERRIDE ;
```

This allows SQL Server to use up to two CPUs for the parallel execution of a T-SQL statement. This configuration setting takes effect immediately, without a server restart.

The query hint MAXDOP can be used for the CREATE INDEX statement. Also, be aware that the parallel CREATE INDEX feature is available only in SQL Server Enterprise Editions.

## Online Index Creation

The default creation of an index is done as an offline operation. This means that exclusive locks are placed on the table, restricting user access while the index is created. It is possible to create the indexes as an online operation. This allows users to continue to access the data while the index is being created. This comes at the cost of increasing the amount of time and resources it takes to create the index. With SQL Server 2012, indexes with varchar(MAX), nvarchar(MAX), and nbinary(MAX) can actually be rebuilt online. Online index operations are available only in SQL Server Enterprise Editions.

## Considering the Database Engine Tuning Advisor

A simple approach to indexing is to use the Database Engine Tuning Advisor tool provided by SQL Server. This tool is a usage-based tool that looks at a particular workload and works with the query optimizer to determine the costs associated with various index combinations. Based on the tool's analysis, you can add or drop indexes as appropriate.

**Note** I will cover the Database Engine Tuning Advisor tool in more depth in [Chapter 5](#).

## Summary

In this chapter, you learned that indexing is an effective method for reducing the number of logical reads and disk I/O for a query. Although an index may add overhead to action queries, even action queries such as UPDATE and DELETE can benefit from an index.

To decide the index key columns for a particular query, evaluate the WHERE clause and the join criteria of the query. Factors such as column selectivity, width, data type, and column order are important in deciding the columns in an index key. Since an index is mainly useful in retrieving a small number of rows, the selectivity of an indexed column should be very high. It is important to note that nonclustered indexes contain the value of a clustered index key as their row locator, because this behavior greatly influences the selection of an index type.

For better performance, try to cover a query fully using a covering index. Since SQL Server can benefit from multiple indexes, use the index intersection and index join techniques, and consider having multiple narrow indexes instead of one very wide index. When working with special data types, apply the indexes that work with those special data types in order to help performance.

In the next chapter, you will learn more about the Database Engine Tuning Advisor, the SQL Server-provided tool that can help you determine the correct indexes in a database for a given SQL workload.

## CHAPTER 5



# Database Engine Tuning Advisor

SQL Server's performance largely depends upon having proper indexes on the database tables. However, as the workload and data change over time, the existing indexes may not be entirely appropriate, and new indexes may be required. The task of deciding upon the correct indexes is complicated by the fact that an index change that benefits one set of queries may be detrimental to another set of queries.

To help you through this process, SQL Server provides a tool called the Database Engine Tuning Advisor. This tool helps identify an optimal set of indexes and statistics for a given workload without requiring an expert understanding of the database schema, workload, or SQL Server internals. It can also recommend tuning options for a small set of problem queries. In addition to the tool's benefits, I cover its limitations in this chapter, because it is a tool that can cause more harm than good if used incorrectly.

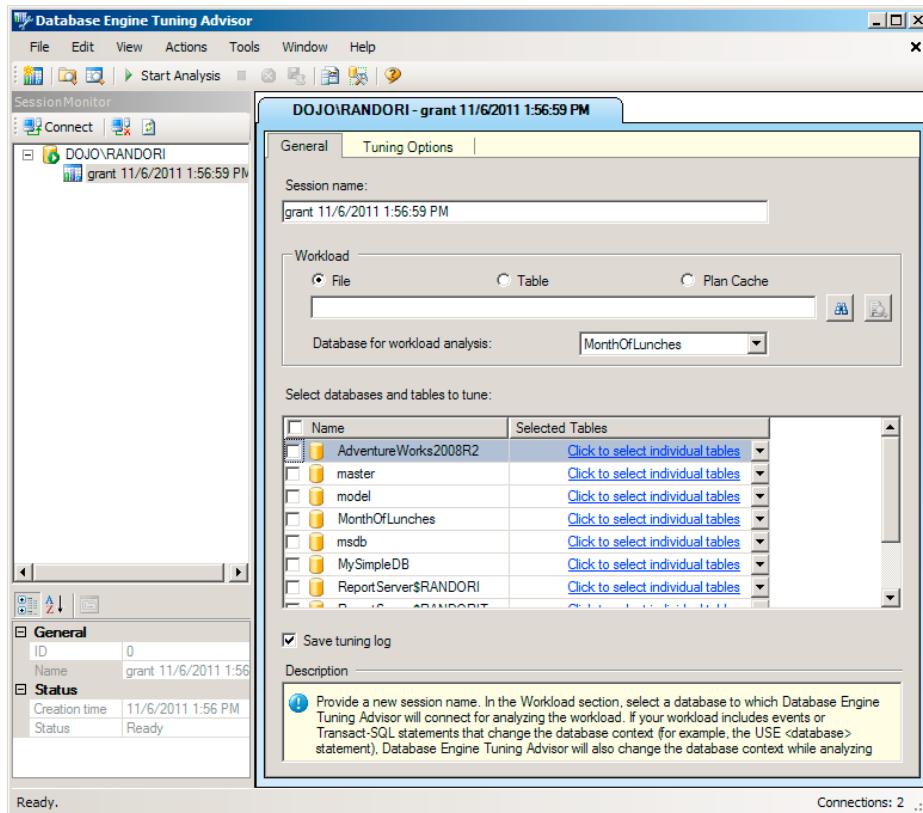
In this chapter, I cover the following topics:

- How the Database Engine Tuning Advisor works
- How to use the Database Engine Tuning Advisor on a set of problematic queries for index recommendations, including how to define traces
- The limitations of the Database Engine Tuning Advisor

## Database Engine Tuning Advisor Mechanisms

You can run the Database Engine Tuning Advisor directly by selecting Microsoft SQL Server 2012 ► Performance Tools ► Database Engine Tuning Advisor. You can also run it from the command prompt (`dta.exe`), from SQL Profiler (Tools ► Database Engine Tuning Advisor), from a query in Management Studio (highlight the required query, and select Query ► Analyze Query in Database Engine Tuning Advisor), or from Management Studio (select Tools ► Database Engine Tuning Advisor). Once the tool is opened and you're connected to a server, you should see a window like the one in Figure 5-1. I'll run through the options to define and run an analysis in this section and then follow up in the next session with some detailed examples.

The Database Engine Tuning Advisor is already connected to a server. From here, you begin to outline the workload and the objects you want to tune. Creating a session name is necessary to label the session for documentation purposes. Then you need to pick a workload. The workload can come from a trace file, a table, or, new with SQL Server 2012, you can use the queries that exist in the plan cache. Finally you need to browse to the appropriate location. The workload is defined depending on how you launched the Database Engine Tuning Advisor. If you launched it from a query window, you would see a Query radio button, and the File and Table radio buttons would be disabled. You also have to define the Database for Workload Analysis setting and finally select a database to tune.



**Figure 5-1.** Selecting the server and database in the Database Engine Tuning Advisor

**Tip** The Database Engine Tuning Advisor recommends indexed views only for platforms that support them. SQL Server 2008 Enterprise Edition does, but Standard Edition doesn't.

When you select a database, you can also select individual tables to be tuned by clicking the drop-down box on the right side of the screen; you'll see a list of tables like those shown in Figure 5-2.

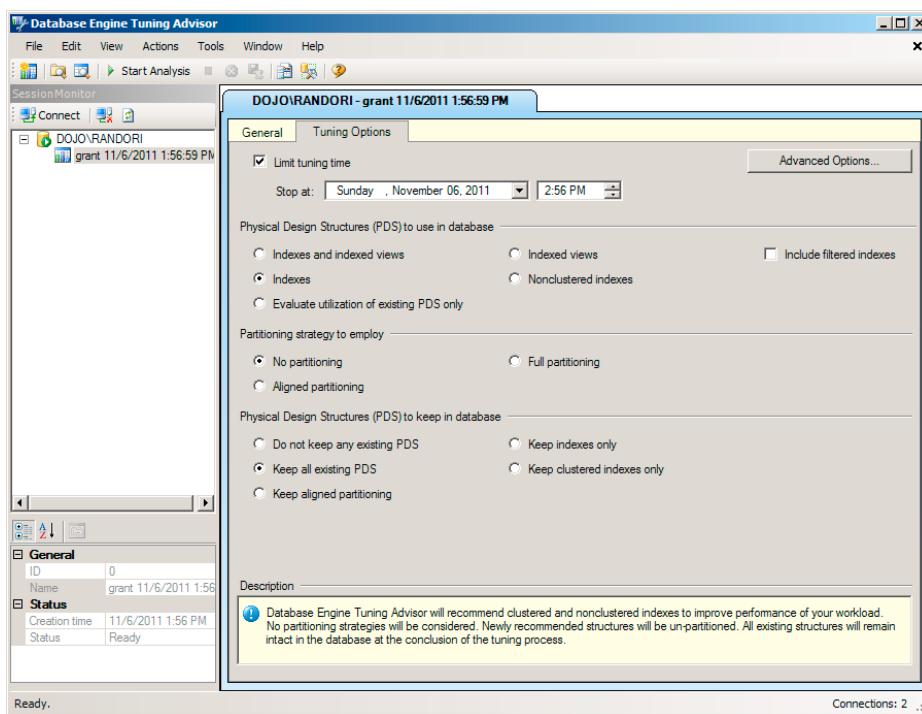
Once you define the workload, you need to select the Tuning Options tab, which is shown in Figure 5-3.

You define the length of time you want the Database Engine Tuning Advisor to run by selecting Limit Tuning Time and then defining a date and time for the tuning to stop. The longer the Database Engine Tuning Advisor runs, the better recommendations it should make. You pick the type of physical design structures to be considered for creation by the Database Engine Tuning Advisor, and you can also set the partitioning strategy so that the Tuning Advisor knows whether it should consider partitioning the tables and indexes as part of the analysis. Just remember, partitioning isn't necessarily a desirable outcome if your data and structures don't warrant it. Finally, you can define the physical design structures that you want left alone within the database. Changing these options will narrow or widen the choices that the Database Engine Tuning Advisor can make to improve performance.

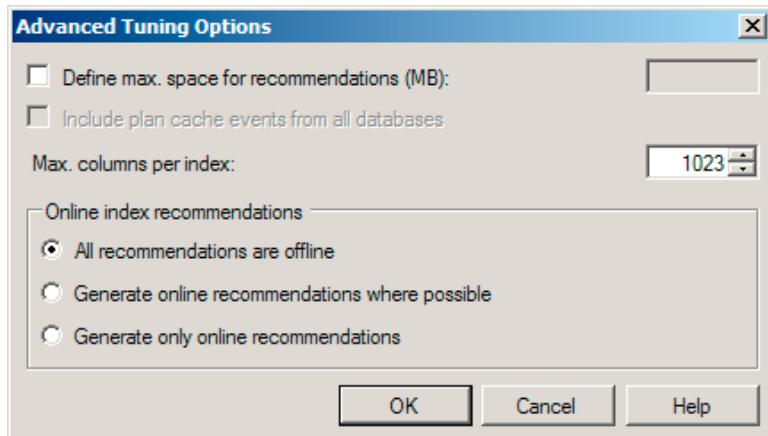
You can click the Advanced Options button to see even more options, as shown in Figure 5-4.

Name	Schema	ID	Size (KB)	Rows	Projected Rows
AWBuildVersion	dbo	469576711	16	1	1
DatabaseLog	dbo	245575913	5,232	1597	1597
ErrorLog	dbo	277576027	0	0	0
Department	HumanResources	1045578763	32	16	16
Employee	HumanResources	1237579447	192	290	290
EmployeeDepartmentHistory	HumanResources	1445580188	64	296	296
EmployeePayHistory	HumanResources	1493580359	32	316	316
JobCandidate	HumanResources	1589580701	160	13	13
Shift	HumanResources	46623209	48	3	3
Address	Person	373576369	6,248	19614	19614
AddressType	Person	421576540	48	6	6
BusinessEntity	Person	629577281	1,336	20777	20777

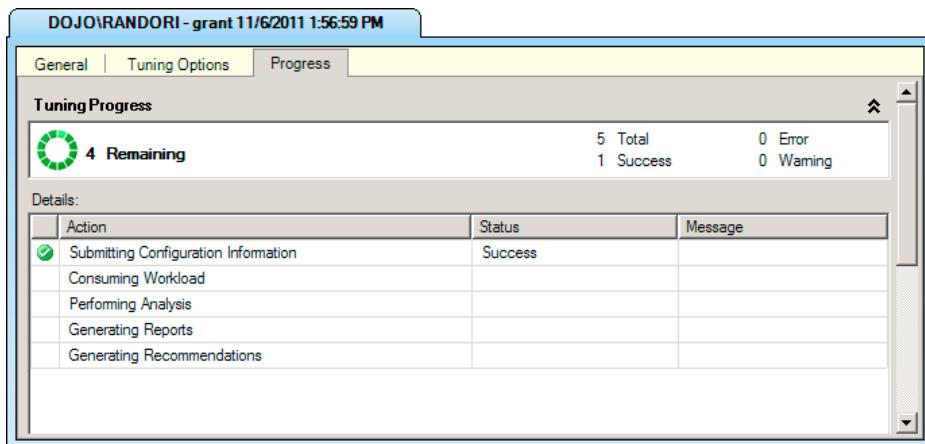
**Figure 5-2.** Clicking the boxes defines individual tables for tuning in the Database Engine Tuning Advisor



**Figure 5-3.** Defining options in the Database Engine Tuning Advisor



**Figure 5-4.** Advanced Tuning Options dialog box



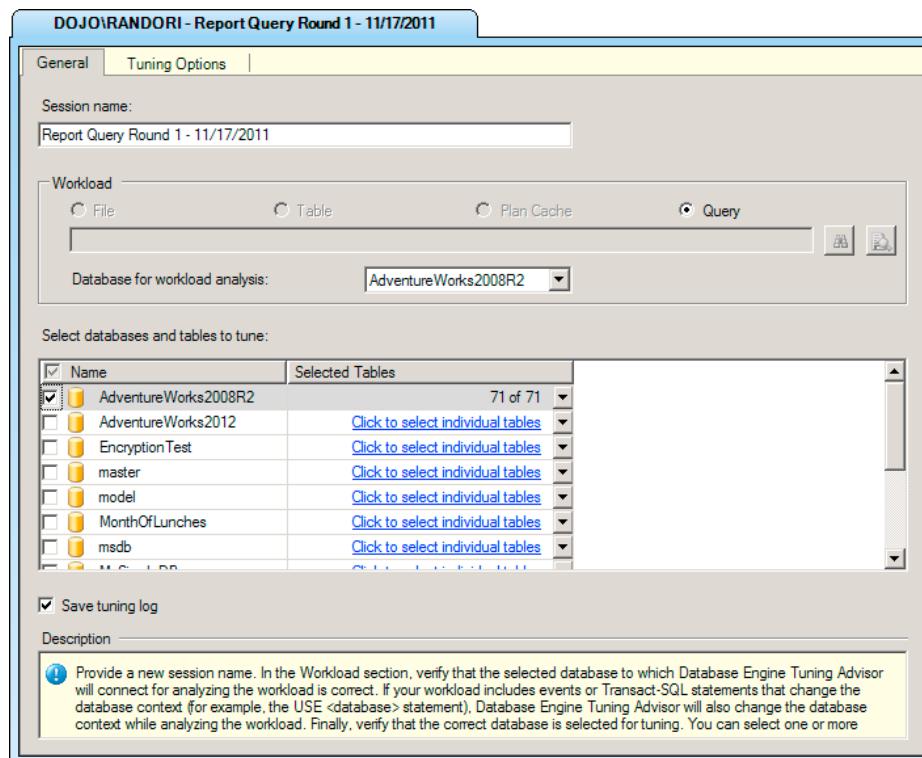
**Figure 5-5.** Tuning progress

This dialog box allows you to limit the space of the recommendations and the number of columns that can be included in an index. You decide if you want to include plan cache events from every database on the system. Finally, you can define whether the new indexes or changes in indexes are done as an online or offline index operation.

Once you've appropriately defined all of these settings, you can start the Database Engine Tuning Advisor by clicking the Start Analysis button. The sessions created are kept in the msdb database for any server instance that you run the Database Engine Tuning Advisor against. It displays details about what is being analyzed and the progress made, which you can see in Figure 5-5.

You'll see more detailed examples of the progress displayed in the example analysis in the next session.

After the analysis completes, you'll get a list of recommendations (visible in Figure 5-6), and a number of reports become available. Table 5-1 describes the reports.



**Figure 5-6.** Query tuning general settings

**Table 5-1.** Database Engine Tuning Advisor Reports

Report Name	Report Description
Column Access	Lists the columns and tables referenced in the workload
Database Access	Lists each database referenced in the workload and percentage of workload statements for each database
Event Frequency	Lists all events in the workload ordered by frequency of occurrence
Index Detail (Current)	Defines indexes and their properties referenced by the workload
Index Detail (Recommended)	Is the same as the Index Detail (Current) report but shows the information about the indexes recommended by the Database Engine Tuning Advisor
Index Usage (Current)	Lists the indexes and the percentage of their use referenced by the workload
Index Usage (Recommended)	Is the same as the Index Usage (Current) report but from the recommended indexes
Statement Cost	Lists the performance improvements for each statement if the recommendations are implemented

(continued)

**Table 5-1.** (continued)

Report Name	Report Description
Statement Cost Range	Breaks down the cost improvements by percentiles to show how much benefit you can achieve for any given set of changes; these costs are estimated values provided by the optimizer.
Statement Detail	Lists the statements in the workload, their cost, and the reduced cost if the recommendations are implemented
Statement-to-Index Relationship	Lists the indexes referenced by individual statements; current and recommended versions of the report are available.
Table Access	Lists the tables referenced by the workload
View-to-Table Relationship	Lists the tables referenced by materialized views
Workload Analysis	Gives details about the workload, including the number of statements, the number of statements whose cost is decreased, and the number where the cost remains the same

## Database Engine Tuning Advisor Examples

The best way to learn how to use the Database Engine Tuning Advisor is to use it. It's not a terribly difficult tool to master, so I recommend opening it and getting started.

### Tuning a Query

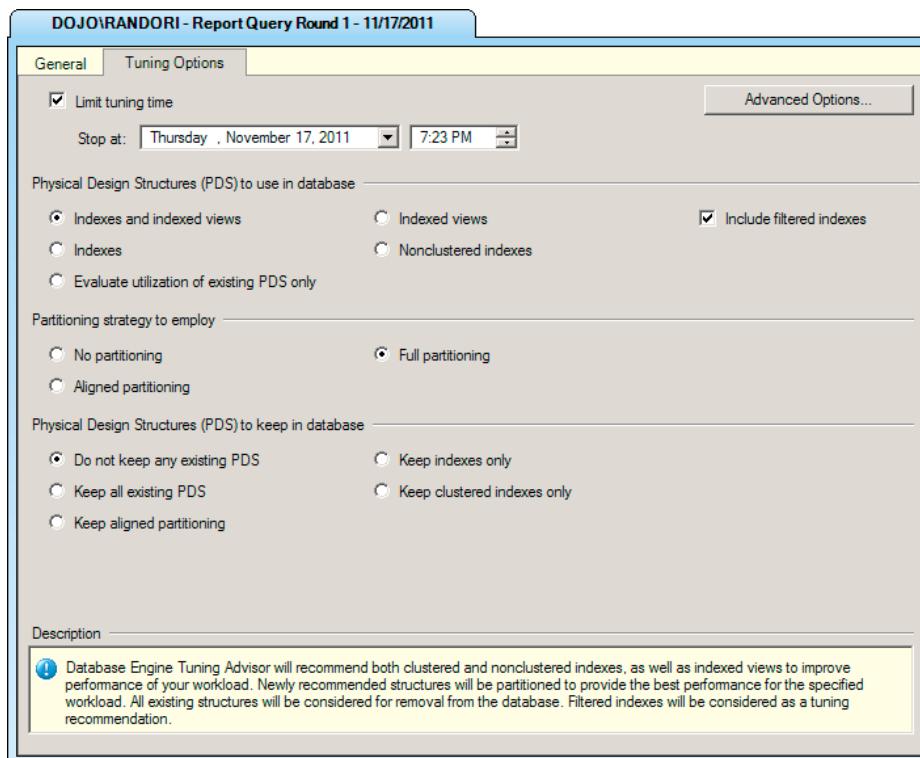
You can use the Database Engine Tuning Advisor to recommend indexes for a complete database by using a workload that fairly represents all SQL activities. You can also use it to recommend indexes for a set of problematic queries.

To learn how you can use the Database Engine Tuning Advisor to get index recommendations on a set of problematic queries, say you have a simple query that is called rather frequently. Because of the frequency, you want a quick turnaround for some tuning. This is the query:

```
SELECT  soh.DueDate,
        soh.CustomerID,
        soh.Status
FROM    Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
WHERE   soh.DueDate BETWEEN '1/1/2008' AND '2/1/2008';
```

To analyze the query, right-click it in the query window, and select Analyze Query in the Database Engine Tuning Advisor. The advisor opens with a window where you can change the session name to something meaningful. In this case, I chose Report Query Round 1 – 11/17/2011. The database and tables don't need to be edited. The first tab, General, will look like Figure 5-6 when you're done.

Because this query is important and tuning it is extremely critical to the business, I'm going to change some settings on the Tuning Options tab to try to maximize the possible suggestions. For the purposes of the example, I'm going to let the Database Engine Tuning Advisor run for the default of one hour, but for bigger loads or more complex queries, you might want to consider giving the system more time. I'm going to select the Include Filtered Indexes check box so that if a filtered index will help, it can be considered. I'm also going to switch the Partitioning Strategy to Employ setting from No Partitioning to Full Partitioning. Finally, I'm going to allow the



**Figure 5-7.** Tuning Options tab adjusted

Database Engine Tuning Advisor to come up with structural changes if it can find any that will help by switching from Keep All Existing PDS to Do Not Keep Any Existing PDS. Once completed, the Tuning Options tab will look like Figure 5-7.

After starting the analysis, the progress screen should appear. Although the settings were for 15 minutes of evaluations, it took only about a minute for the DTA to evaluate this query. The initial recommendations were not a good set of choices. As you can see in Figure 5-8, the Database Engine Tuning Advisor has recommended dropping a huge swath of indexes in the database. This is not the type of recommendation that you want when running the tool.

This is because the Database Engine Tuning Advisor assumes that the load being tested is the full load of the database. If there are indexes not being used, then they should be removed. This is a best practice and one that should be implemented on any database. However, in this case, this is a single query, not a full load of the system. To see whether the advisor can come up with a more meaningful set of recommendations, you must start a new session.

This time, I'll adjust the options so that the Database Engine Tuning Advisor will not be able to drop any of the existing structure. This is set on the Tuning Options tab (shown earlier in Figure 5-7). There I'll change the Physical Design Structure (PDS) to Keep in Database setting from Do Not Keep Any Existing PDS to Keep All Existing PDS. I'll keep the running time the same because the evaluation worked well within the time frame. After running the Database Engine Tuning Advisor again, it finishes in less than a minute and displays the recommendations shown in Figure 5-9.

The screenshot shows the 'Recommendations' tab of the Database Engine Tuning Advisor. At the top, it displays 'Estimated improvement: 98%'. Below this, the 'Index Recommendations' section is expanded, showing a list of objects from the 'AdventureWorks2008R2' database with their current state (e.g., [HumanResources].[Employee]), the recommended action (e.g., 'drop'), and the target index name (e.g., 'IX\_Employee\_G'). The list includes various tables and views from the 'Person', 'HumanResources', and 'Production' schemas. A checkbox at the bottom left allows users to 'Show existing objects', and a link below it provides information on object sizes.

Database Name	Object Name	Recommendation	Target of Recommendation
AdventureWorks2008R2	[HumanResources].[Employee]	drop	IX_Employee_G
AdventureWorks2008R2	[HumanResources].[Employee]	drop	IX_Employee_G
AdventureWorks2008R2	[HumanResources].[EmployeeDepartmentHistory]	drop	IX_EmployeeDe
AdventureWorks2008R2	[HumanResources].[EmployeeDepartmentHistory]	drop	IX_EmployeeDe
AdventureWorks2008R2	[HumanResources].[JobCandidate]	drop	IX_JobCandidat
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[Address]	drop	IX_Test
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[Address]	drop	IX_Address_Star
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[BusinessEntityAddress]	drop	IX_BusinessEnt
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[BusinessEntityAddress]	drop	IX_BusinessEnt
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[BusinessEntityContact]	drop	IX_BusinessEnt
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[BusinessEntityContact]	drop	IX_BusinessEnt
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[EmailAddress]	drop	IX_EmailAddres
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[Person]	drop	XMLPROPERTY
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[Person]	drop	XMLVALUE_Pe
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[Person]	drop	IX_Person_Last
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[Person]	drop	XMLPATH_Per
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[PersonPhone]	drop	IX_PersonPhon
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Production].[BillOfMaterials]	drop	IX_BillOfMateria
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Production].[Document]	drop	IX_Document_f

Show existing objects     [See Reports for sizes of existing objects](#)

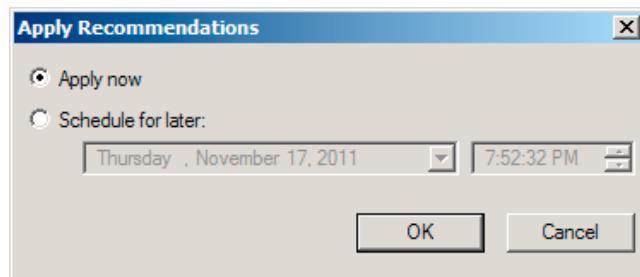
**Figure 5-8.** Query tuning initial recommendations

This screenshot shows the 'Recommendations' tab of the Database Engine Tuning Advisor. It displays 'Estimated improvement: 98%' and the 'Index Recommendations' section. A single recommendation is listed: 'AdventureWorks2008R2 [Sales].[SalesOrderHeader] create IX\_dta\_index\_SalesOrderHeader\_9\_1266103'. Below the table, there is a checkbox to 'Show existing objects' and a link to 'See Reports for sizes of existing objects'.

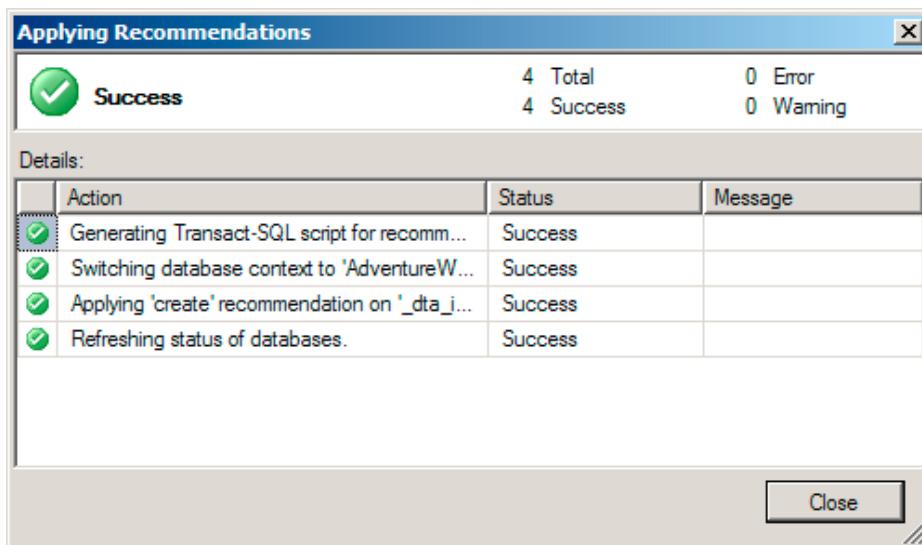
Database Name	Object Name	Recommendation	Target of Recommendation
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Sales].[SalesOrderHeader]	create	IX_dta_index_SalesOrderHeader_9_1266103

Show existing objects     [See Reports for sizes of existing objects](#)

**Figure 5-9.** Query tuning recommendations



**Figure 5-10.** Apply Recommendations dialog box



**Figure 5-11.** A successful tuning session applied

The first time through, the Database Engine Tuning Advisor suggested dropping most of the indexes on the tables being tested and a bunch of the related tables. This time it suggests creating a covering index on the columns referenced in the query. As outlined in Chapter 4, a covering index can be one of the best performing methods of indexing. The Database Engine Tuning Advisor was able to recognize that an index with all the columns referenced by the query, a covering index, would perform best.

Once you've received a recommendation, you should closely examine the proposed T-SQL command. The suggestions are not always helpful, so you need to evaluate them to be sure. Assuming the examined recommendation looks good, you'll want to apply it. Select Actions ▶ Evaluate Recommendations. This opens a new Database Engine Tuning Advisor session and allows you to evaluate whether the recommendations will work using the same measures that made the recommendations in the first place. All of this is to validate that the original recommendation has the effect that it claims it will have. The new session looks just like a regular evaluation report. If you're still happy with the recommendations, select Actions ▶ Apply Recommendation. This opens a dialog box that allows you to apply the recommendation immediately or schedule the application (see Figure 5-10).

If you click the OK button, the Database Engine Tuning Advisor will apply the index to the database where you've been testing queries (see Figure 5-11).

After you generate recommendations, you may want to, instead of applying them on the spot, save the T-SQL statements to a file and accumulate a series of changes for release to your production environment during scheduled deployment windows. Remember that applying indexes to tables, especially large tables, can cause a performance impact to processes actively running on the system while the index is being created.

Although getting index suggestions one at a time is nice, it would be better to be able to get large swaths of the database checked all at once. That's where tuning a trace workload comes in.

## Tuning a Trace Workload

Capturing a trace from the real-world queries that are running against a production server is a way to feed meaningful data to the Database Engine Tuning Advisor. (Capturing traces will be covered in [Chapter 15](#).) The easiest way to define a trace for use in the Database Engine Tuning Advisor is to implement the trace using the Tuning template. Start the trace on the system you need to tune. I generated an artificial load by running queries in a loop from the PowerShell `sqlps.exe` command prompt. This is the PowerShell command prompt with the SQL Server configuration settings. It gets installed with SQL Server.

In order to find something interesting, I'm going to create one stored procedure with an obvious tuning issue:

```
CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.uspProductSize
AS
SELECT p.ProductID,
       p.Size
FROM Production.Product AS p
WHERE p.Size = '62';
```

Here is the very simple script I used. You'll need to adjust the connection string for your environment. After you have downloaded the file to a location, you'll be able to run it by simply referencing the file and the full path through the command prompt. You may run into security issues since this is an unsigned, raw script. Follow the help guidance provided in that error message if you need to (`queryload.ps1`):

```
[reflection.assembly]::LoadWithPartialName("Microsoft.SqlServer.Smo") | out-null
# Get the connection
$SqlConnection = New-Object System.Data.SqlClient.SqlConnection
$SqlConnection.ConnectionString =
"Server=DOJO\RANDORI;Database=AdventureWorks2008R2;Integrated
Security=True"

# Load Product data
$ProdCmd = New-Object System.Data.SqlClient.SqlCommand
$ProdCmd.CommandText = "SELECT ProductID FROM Production.Product"
$ProdCmd.Connection = $SqlConnection
$SqlAdapter = New-Object System.Data.SqlClient.SqlDataAdapter
$SqlAdapter.SelectCommand = $ProdCmd
$ProdDataSet = New-Object System.Data.DataSet
$SqlAdapter.Fill($ProdDataSet)

# Load the Employee data
$EmpCmd = New-Object System.Data.SqlClient.SqlCommand
$EmpCmd.CommandText = "SELECT BusinessEntityID FROM
HumanResources.Employee"
$EmpCmd.Connection = $SqlConnection
$SqlAdapter.SelectCommand = $EmpCmd
$EmpDataSet = New-Object System.Data.DataSet
$SqlAdapter.Fill($EmpDataSet)
```

```

# Set up the procedure to be run
$WhereCmd = New-Object System.Data.SqlClient.SqlCommand
$WhereCmd.CommandText = "dbo.uspGetWhereUsedProductID"
@StartProductID = @ProductId, @CheckDate=NULL"
$WhereCmd.Parameters.Add("@ProductID",[System.Data.SqlDbType]"Int")
$WhereCmd.Connection = $SqlConnection

# And another one
$BomCmd = New-Object System.Data.SqlClient.SqlCommand
$BomCmd.CommandText = "dbo.uspGetBillOfMaterials @StartProductID =
@ProductId, @CheckDate=NULL"
$BomCmd.Parameters.Add("@ProductID",[System.Data.SqlDbType]"Int")
$BomCmd.Connection = $SqlConnection

# And one more
$ManCmd = New-Object System.Data.SqlClient.SqlCommand
$ManCmd.CommandText = "dbo.uspGetEmployeeManagers @BusinessEntityID
=@EmpId"
$ManCmd.Parameters.Add("@EmpId",[System.Data.SqlDbType]"Int")
$ManCmd.Connection = $SqlConnection

# And the special
$SpecCmd = New-Object System.Data.SqlClient.SqlCommand
$SpecCmd.CommandText = "dbo.uspProductSize"
$SpecCmd.Connection = $SqlConnection

# Loop forever
while(1 -ne 0)
{
    foreach($row in $ProdDataSet.Tables[0])
    {
        $SqlConnection.Open()
        $ProductId = $row[0]
        $WhereCmd.Parameters["@ProductID"].Value = $ProductId
        $WhereCmd.ExecuteNonQuery() | Out-Null
        $SqlConnection.Close()

        foreach($row in $EmpDataSet.Tables[0])
        {
            $SqlConnection.Open()
            $EmpId = $row[0]
            $ManCmd.Parameters["@EmpID"].Value = $EmpId
            $ManCmd.ExecuteNonQuery() | Out-Null
            $SqlConnection.Close()
        }

        $SqlConnection.Open()
        $BomCmd.Parameters["@ProductID"].Value = $ProductId
        $BomCmd.ExecuteNonQuery() | Out-Null
        $SpecCmd.ExecuteNonQuery() | Out-Null
        $SqlConnection.Close()
    }
}

```

**Note** For more information on PowerShell, check out *Pro Windows PowerShell* by Hristo Deshev (Apress, 2008).

Once you've created the trace file, open the Database Engine Tuning Advisor. It defaults to a file type, so you'll only have to browse to the trace file location. As before, you'll want to select the AdventureWorks2008R2 database as the database for workload analysis from the drop-down list. To limit the suggestions, also select AdventureWorks2008R2 from the list of databases at the bottom of the screen. Set the appropriate tuning options, and start the analysis. This time, it will take more than a minute to run (see Figure 5-12).

As you can see, simply passing any number to the uspGetEmployeeManagers procedure, and others, can generate instances where no tables were referenced. The processing runs for about 15 minutes on my machine. Then it generates output, shown in Figure 5-13.

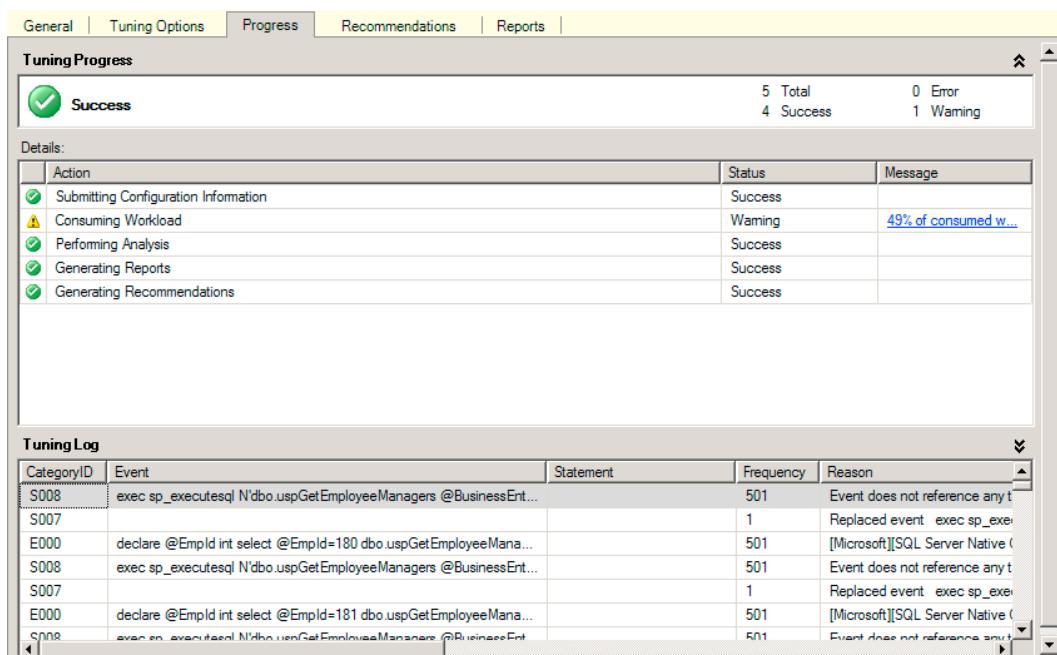


Figure 5-12. Database tuning engine in progress

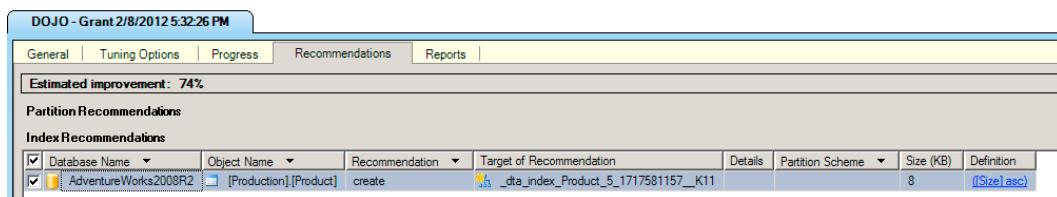
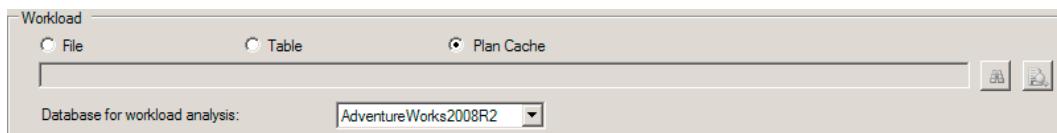


Figure 5-13. Recommendation for a manual statistic



**Figure 5-14.** Selecting Plan Cache as the source for the DTA

Database Name	Object Name	Recommendation	Target of Recommendation	Data
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[Person]	create	_dta_stat_1765581328_5_7_1	
AdventureWorks2008R2	[Person].[Person]	create	_dta_index_Person_9_1765581328_K1_K5_K7	

**Figure 5-15.** Recommendations from the plan cache

After running all the queries through the Database Engine Tuning Advisor, the Tuning Advisor came up with a suggestion for a new statistic to increase performance. Personally, I would have suggested adding an index, not a statistic, but you can see how suggestions are derived from the load presented to the Database Engine Tuning Advisor.

## Tuning from the Procedure Cache

Introduced in SQL Server 2012 is the ability to use the query plans that are stored in the cache as a source for tuning recommendations. The process is very simple. There's just one more choice on the General page that lets you choose that as a source for the tuning effort, as shown in Figure 5-14.

All other options behave exactly the same way as previously outlined in this chapter. The processing time is radically less than when the Tuning Advisor processes a workload. It has only the queries in cache to process, so, depending on the amount of memory in your system, this can be a very short list. The results from processing my cache suggested two indexes based on some system-generated statistics. These are estimated to enhance performance by about 45 percent, as you can see in Figure 5-15.

This gives you one more mechanism to try to tune your system in an automated fashion.

## Database Engine Tuning Advisor Limitations

The Database Engine Tuning Advisor recommendations are based on the input workload. If the input workload is not a true representation of the actual workload, then the recommended indexes may sometimes have a *negative* effect on some queries that are missing in the workload. But most importantly, as you saw in the second example of this chapter, the Database Engine Tuning Advisor may not recognize possible tuning opportunities. It has a sophisticated testing engine, but in some scenarios, its capabilities are limited.

For a production server, you should ensure that the SQL trace includes a complete representation of the database workload. For most database applications, capturing a trace for a complete day usually includes most of the queries executed on the database, although there are exceptions to this. Be sure you understand your load and what's needed to capture it appropriately. A few of the other considerations/limitations with the Database Engine Tuning Advisor are as follows:

- *Trace input using the SQL:BatchCompleted event:* As mentioned earlier, the SQL trace input to the Database Engine Tuning Advisor must include the SQL:BatchCompleted event; otherwise, the wizard won't be able to identify the queries in the workload.
- *Query distribution in the workload:* In a workload, a query may be executed multiple times with the same parameter value. Even a small performance improvement to the most common query can make a bigger contribution to the performance of the overall workload, compared to a large improvement in performance of a query that is executed only once.
- *Index hints:* Index hints in a SQL query can prevent the Database Engine Tuning Advisor from choosing a better execution plan. The wizard includes all index hints used in a SQL query as part of its recommendations. Because these indexes may not be optimal for the table, remove all index hints from queries before submitting the workload to the wizard, bearing in mind that you need to add them back in to see whether they do actually improve performance.

## Summary

As you learned in this chapter, the Database Engine Tuning Advisor is a useful tool for analyzing the effectiveness of existing indexes and recommending new indexes for a SQL workload. As the SQL workload changes over time, you can use this tool to determine which existing indexes are no longer in use and which new indexes are required to improve performance. It can be a good idea to run the wizard occasionally just to check that your existing indexes really are the best fit for your current workload. It also provides many useful reports for analyzing the SQL workload and the effectiveness of its own recommendations. Just remember that the limitations of the tool prevent it from spotting all tuning opportunities. Also remember that the suggestions provided by the DTA are only as good as the input that you provide to it. If your database is in bad shape, this tool can give you a quick leg up. If you're already monitoring and tuning your queries regularly, you may see no benefit from the recommendations of the Database Engine Tuning Advisor.

Frequently, you will rely on nonclustered indexes to improve the performance of a SQL workload. This assumes that you've already assigned a clustered index to your tables. Because the performance of a nonclustered index is highly dependent on the cost of the bookmark lookup associated with the nonclustered index, you will see in the next chapter how to analyze and resolve a bookmark lookup.

## CHAPTER 6



# Lookup Analysis

To maximize the benefit from nonclustered indexes, you must minimize the cost of the data retrieval as much as possible. A major overhead associated with nonclustered indexes is the cost of excessive lookups, formerly known as *bookmark lookups*, which are a mechanism to navigate from a nonclustered index row to the corresponding data row in the clustered index or the heap. Therefore, it makes sense to look at the cause of lookups and to evaluate how to avoid this cost.

In this chapter, I cover the following topics:

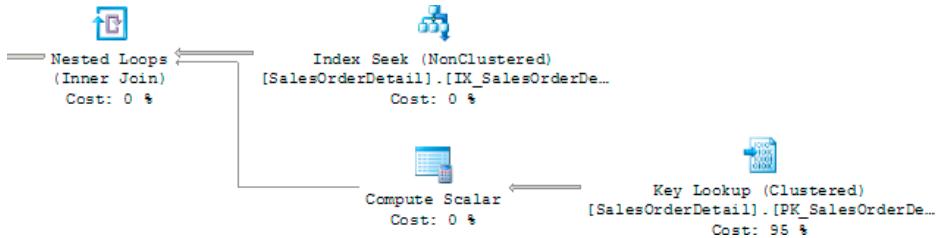
- The purpose of lookups
- Drawbacks of using lookups
- Analysis of the cause of lookups
- Techniques to resolve lookups

## Purpose of Lookups

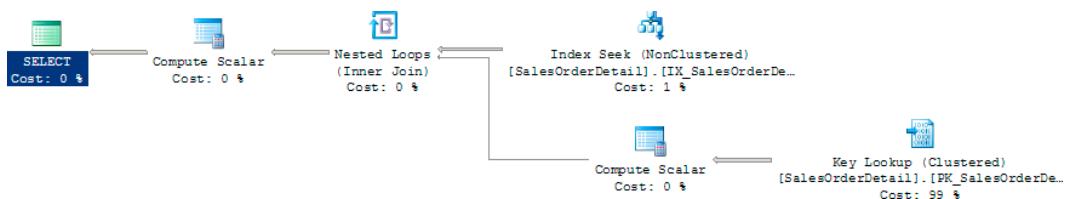
When a SQL query requests a small number of rows, the optimizer can use the nonclustered index, if available, on the column(s) in the WHERE or JOIN clause to retrieve the data. If the query refers to columns that are not part of the nonclustered index used to retrieve the data, then navigation is required from the index row to the corresponding data row in the table to access these columns.

For example, in the following SELECT statement, if the nonclustered index used by the optimizer doesn't include all the columns, navigation will be required from a nonclustered index row to the data row in the clustered index or heap to retrieve the value of those columns:

```
SELECT      p.[Name],  
            AVG(sod.LineTotal)  
FROM        Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod  
JOIN        Production.Product p  
            ON sod.ProductID = p.ProductID  
WHERE       sod.ProductID = 776  
GROUP BY    sod.CarrierTrackingNumber,  
            p.[Name]  
HAVING      MAX(sod.OrderQty) > 1  
ORDER BY    MIN(sod.LineTotal) ;
```



**Figure 6-1.** Key lookup in part of a more complicated execution plan



**Figure 6-2.** Execution plan with a bookmark lookup

The SalesOrderDetail table has a nonclustered index on the ProductID column. The optimizer can use the index to filter the rows from the table. The table has a clustered index on SalesOrderID and SalesOrderDetailID, so they would be included in the nonclustered index. But since they're not referenced in the query, they won't help the query at all. The other columns (LineTotal, CarrierTrackingNumber, OrderQty, and LineTotal) referred to by the query are not available in the nonclustered index. To fetch the values for those columns, navigation from the nonclustered index row to the corresponding data row through the clustered index is required, and this operation is a key lookup. You can see this in action in Figure 6-1.

To better understand how a nonclustered index can cause a lookup, consider the following SELECT statement, which requests only a few rows from the SalesOrderDetail table by using a filter criterion on column ProductID:

```

SELECT *
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
WHERE  sod.ProductID = 776 ;
  
```

The optimizer evaluates the WHERE clause and finds that the column ProductID included in the WHERE clause has a nonclustered index on it that filters the number of rows down. Since only a few rows, 228, are requested, retrieving the data through the nonclustered index will be cheaper than scanning the clustered index (containing more than 120,000 rows) to identify the matching rows. The nonclustered index on the column ProductID will help identify the matching rows quickly. The nonclustered index includes the column ProductID and the clustered index columns SalesOrderID and SalesOrderDetailID; all the other columns are not included. Therefore, as you may have guessed, to retrieve the rest of the columns while using the nonclustered index, you require a lookup.

This is shown in the following metrics and in the execution plan in Figure 6-2 (you can turn on STATISTICS IO using the Query ► Query Options menu). Look for the Key Lookup (Clustered) operator. That is the lookup in action.

```

Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 710
Elapsed time = 179 ms.
  
```

## Drawbacks of Lookups

A lookup requires data page access in addition to index page access. Accessing two sets of pages increases the number of logical reads for the query. Additionally, if the pages are not available in memory, a bookmark lookup will probably require a random (or nonsequential) I/O operation on the disk to jump from the index page to the data page as well as requiring the necessary CPU power to marshal this data and perform the necessary operations. This is because, for a large table, the index page and the corresponding data page usually won't be close to each other on the disk.

The increased logical reads and costly physical reads (if required) make the data-retrieval operation of the lookup quite costly. This cost factor is the reason that nonclustered indexes are better suited for queries that return a small set of rows from the table. As the number of rows retrieved by a query increases, the overhead cost of a lookup becomes unacceptable.

To understand how a lookup makes a nonclustered index ineffective as the number of rows retrieved increases, let's look at a different example. The query that produced the execution plan in Figure 6-2 returned just a few rows from the SalesOrderDetail table. Leaving the query the same but changing the parameter to a different value will, of course, change the number of rows returned. If you change the parameter value to look like this:

```
SELECT *
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
WHERE  sod.ProductID = 793 ;
```

Then running the query returns more than 700 rows, with different performance metrics and a completely different execution plan (Figure 6-3).

```
Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 1240
CPU time = 31 ms, elapsed time = 270 ms.
```

To determine how costly it will be to use the nonclustered index, consider the number of logical reads (1,240) performed by the query during the table scan. If you force the optimizer to use the nonclustered index by using an index hint, like this:

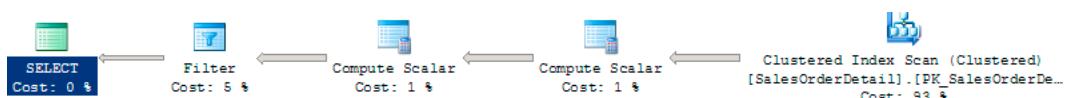
```
SELECT *
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod WITH (INDEX (IX_SalesOrderDetail_ProductID))
WHERE  sod.ProductID = 793 ;
```

Then the number of logical reads increases from 1240 to 2173:

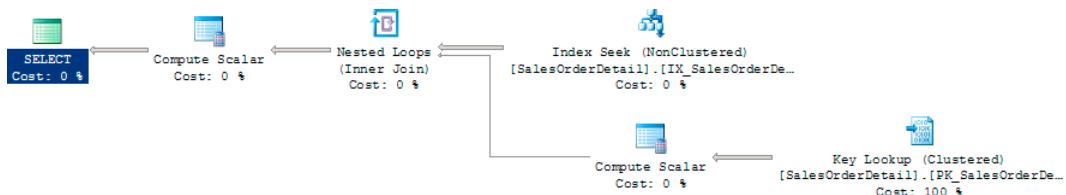
```
Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 2173
CPU time = 31 ms, elapsed time = 319 ms.
```

Figure 6-4 shows the corresponding execution plan.

To benefit from nonclustered indexes, queries should request a relatively small number of rows. Application design plays an important role for the requirements that handle large result sets. For example, search engines on the Web mostly return a limited number of articles at a time, even if the search criterion returns thousands of matching articles. If the queries request a large number of rows, then the increased overhead cost of a lookup makes the nonclustered index unsuitable; subsequently, you have to consider the possibilities of avoiding the lookup operation.



**Figure 6-3.** A different execution plan for a query returning more rows



**Figure 6-4.** Execution plan for fetching more rows with an index hint

## Analyzing the Cause of a Lookup

Since a lookup can be a costly operation, you should analyze what causes a query plan to choose a lookup step in an execution plan. You may find that you are able to avoid the lookup by including the missing columns in the nonclustered index key or as INCLUDE columns at the index page level and thereby avoid the cost overhead associated with the lookup.

To learn how to identify the columns not included in the nonclustered index, consider the following query, which pulls information from the HumanResources.Employee table based on NationalIDNumber:

```

SELECT NationalIDNumber,
       JobTitle,
       HireDate
  FROM HumanResources.Employee AS e
 WHERE e.NationalIDNumber = '693168613' ;
  
```

This produces the following performance metrics and execution plan (see Figure 6-5).

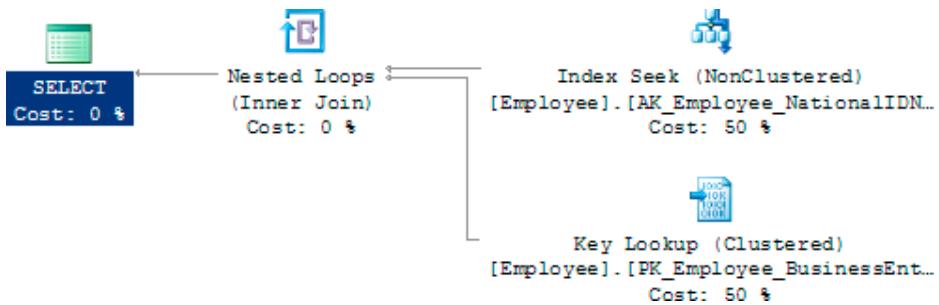
Table 'Employee'. Scan count 0, logical reads 4  
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 56 ms

As shown in the execution plan, you have a key lookup. The SELECT statement refers to columns NationalIDNumber, JobTitle, and HireDate. The nonclustered index on column NationalIDNumber doesn't provide values for columns JobTitle and HireDate, so a lookup operation was required to retrieve those columns from the data storage location. It's a Key Lookup because it's retrieving the data through the use of the clustered key stored with the nonclustered index. If the table were a heap, it would be a RID lookup. However, in the real world, it usually won't be this easy to identify all the columns used by a query. Remember that a lookup operation will be caused if all the columns referred to in any part of the query (not just the selection list) aren't a part of the nonclustered index used.

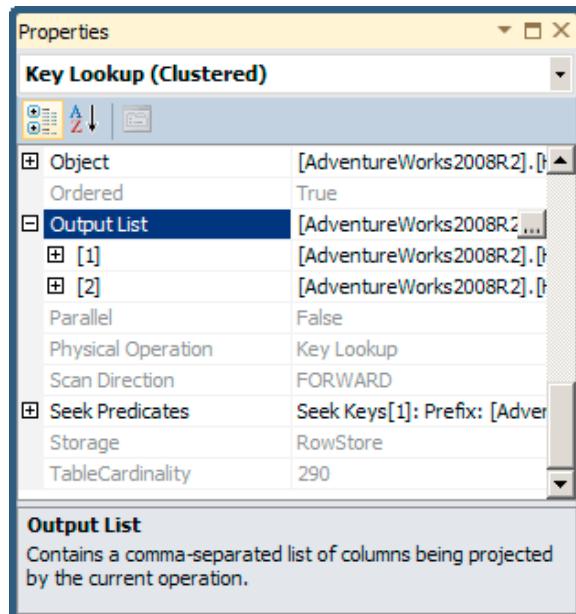
In the case of a complex query based on views and user-defined functions, it may be too difficult to find all the columns referred to by the query. As a result, you need a standard mechanism to find the columns returned by the lookup that are not included in the nonclustered index.

If you look at the properties on the Key Lookup (Clustered) operation, you can see the output list for the operation. This shows you the columns being output by the lookup. To get the list of output columns quickly and easily and be able to copy them, right-click the operator, which in this case is Key Lookup (Clustered). Then select the Properties menu item. Scroll down to the Output List property in the Properties window that opens (Figure 6-6). This property has a plus sign, which allows you to expand the column list, and has plus signs next to each column, which allows you to expand the properties of the column.

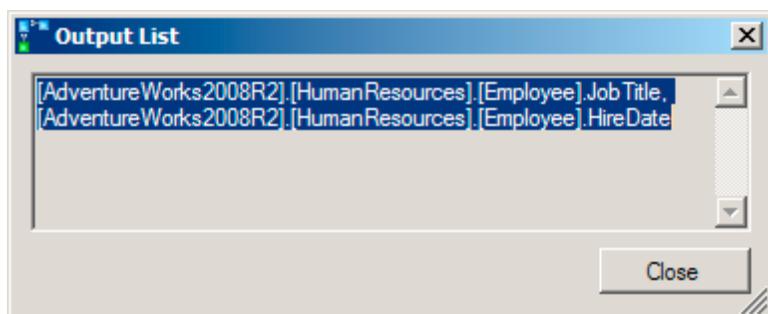
To get the list of columns directly from the Properties window, click the ellipsis on the right side of the Output List property. This opens the output list in a text window from which you can copy the data for use when modifying your index (Figure 6-7).



**Figure 6-5.** Execution plan with a lookup



**Figure 6-6.** Key lookup Properties window



**Figure 6-7.** The required columns that were not available in the nonclustered index

## Resolving Lookups

Since the relative cost of a lookup can be very high, you should, wherever possible, try to get rid of lookup operations. In the preceding section, you needed to obtain the values of columns `JobTitle` and `HireDate` without navigating from the index row to the data row. You can do this in three different ways, as explained in the following sections.

### Using a Clustered Index

For a clustered index, the leaf page of the index is the same as the data page of the table. Therefore, when reading the values of the clustered index key columns, the database engine can also read the values of other columns without any navigation from the index row. In the previous example, if you convert the nonclustered index to a clustered index for a particular row, SQL Server can retrieve values of all the columns from the same page.

Simply saying that you want to convert the nonclustered index to a clustered index is easy to do. However, in this case, and in most cases you're likely to encounter, it isn't possible to do so, since the table already has a clustered index in place. The clustered index on this table also happens to be the primary key. You would have to drop all foreign key constraints, drop and re-create the primary key as a nonclustered index, and then re-create the index against `NationalIDNumber`. Not only do you need to take into account the work involved, but also you may seriously affect other queries that are dependent on the existing clustered index.

**Note** Remember that a table can have only one clustered index.

### Using a Covering Index

In [Chapter 4](#), you learned that a covering index is like a pseudoclustered index for the queries, since it can return results without recourse to the table data. So, you can also use a covering index to avoid a lookup.

To understand how you can use a covering index to avoid a lookup, examine the query against the `HumanResources.Employee` table again:

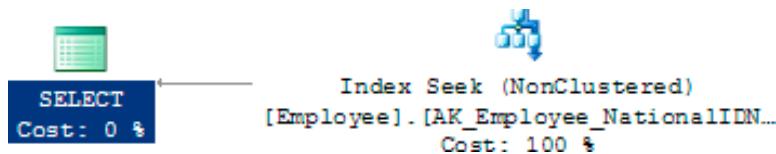
```
SELECT NationalIDNumber,
       JobTitle,
       HireDate
  FROM HumanResources.Employee AS e
 WHERE e.NationalIDNumber = '693168613' ;
```

To avoid this bookmark, you can add the columns referred to in the query, `JobTitle` and `HireDate`, directly to the nonclustered index key. This will make the nonclustered index a covering index for this query because all columns can be retrieved from the index without having to go to the heap or clustered index.

```
CREATE UNIQUE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [AK_Employee_NationalIDNumber] ON
[HumanResources].[Employee]
(NationalIDNumber ASC,
JobTitle ASC,
HireDate ASC )
WITH DROP_EXISTING ;
```

Now when the query gets run, you'll see the following metrics and a different execution plan ([Figure 6-8](#)).

```
Table 'Employee'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.
```



**Figure 6-8.** Execution plan with a covering index

There are a couple of caveats to creating a covering index by changing the key, however. If you add too many columns to a nonclustered index, it becomes too wide, and the index maintenance cost associated with the action queries can increase, as discussed in [Chapter 4](#). Therefore, evaluate closely the number of columns (for size and data type) to be added to the nonclustered index key. If the total width of the additional columns is not too large (best determined through testing and measuring the resultant index size), then those columns can be added in the nonclustered index key to be used as a covering index. Also, if you add columns to the index key, depending on the index, of course, you may be affecting other queries in a negative fashion. They may have expected to see the index key columns in a particular order or may not refer to some of the columns in the key, causing the index to not be used by the optimizer.

Another way to arrive at the covering index, without reshaping the index by adding key columns, is to use the INCLUDE columns. Change the index to look like this:

```
CREATE UNIQUE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [AK_Employee_NationalIDNumber]
ON [HumanResources].[Employee]
(NationalIDNumber ASC )
INCLUDE (JobTitle,HireDate)
WITH DROP_EXISTING ;
```

Now when the query is run, you get the following metrics and execution plan ([Figure 6-9](#)).

Table 'Employee'. Scan count 1, logical reads 2  
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

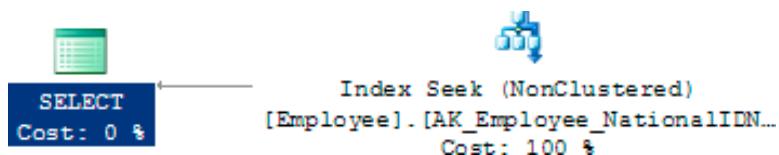
The index is still covering, exactly as it was in the execution plan displayed in [Figure 6-8](#). Because the data is stored at the leaf level of the index, when the index is used to retrieve the key values, the rest of the columns in the INCLUDE statement are available for use, almost like they were part of the key. Refer to [Figure 6-10](#).

Another way to get a covering index is to take advantage of the structures within SQL Server. If the previous query were modified slightly to retrieve a different set of data instead of a particular NationalIDNumber and its associated JobTitle and HireDate, this time the query would retrieve the NationalIDNumber as an alternate key and the BusinessEntityID, the primary key for the table, over a range of values:

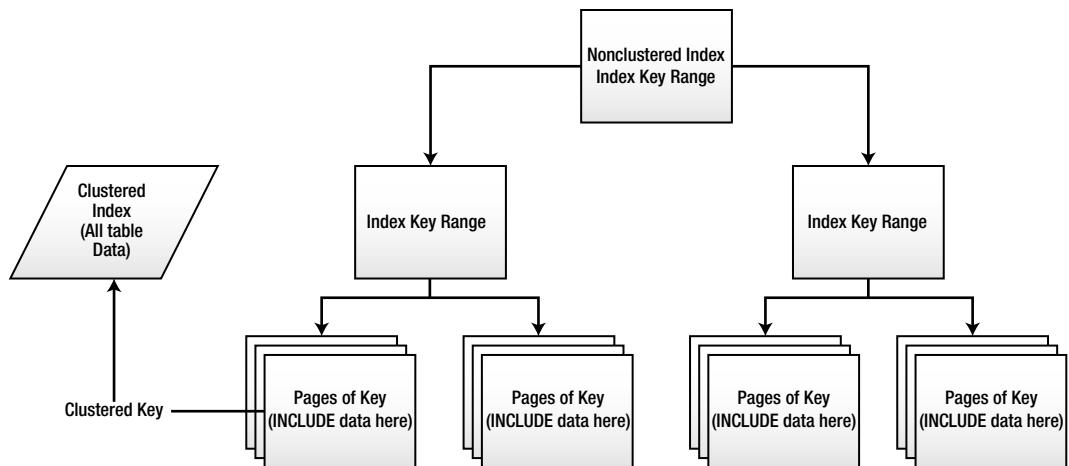
```
SELECT NationalIDNumber,
       BusinessEntityID
FROM   HumanResources.Employee AS e
WHERE  e.NationalIDNumber BETWEEN '693168613'
                                AND '7000000000' ;
```

The original index on the table doesn't reference the BusinessEntityID column in any way:

```
CREATE UNIQUE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [AK_Employee_NationalIDNumber]
ON [HumanResources].[Employee]
(
[NationalIDNumber] ASC
)WITH DROP_EXISTING ;
```



**Figure 6-9.** Execution plan with *INCLUDE* columns



**Figure 6-10.** Index storage using the *INCLUDE* key word

When the query is run against the table, you can see the results shown in Figure 6-11.

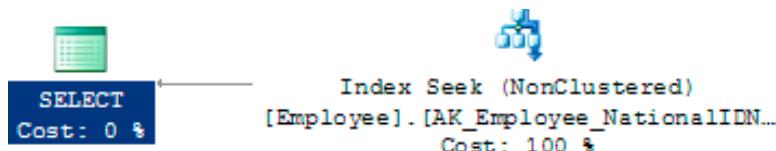
How did the optimizer arrive at a covering index for this query based on the index provided? It's aware that on a table with a clustered index, the clustered index key, in this case the `BusinessEntityID` column, is stored as a pointer to the data with the nonclustered index. That means that any query that incorporates a clustered index and a set of columns from a nonclustered index as part of the filtering mechanisms of the query, the `WHERE` clause, or the join criteria can take advantage of the covering index.

To see how these three different indexes are reflected in storage, you can look at the statistics of the indexes themselves using `DBCC SHOWSTATISTICS`. When you run the following query against the index, you can see the output in Figure 6-12.

```
DBCC SHOW_STATISTICS('HumanResources.Employee',
AK_Employee_NationalIDNumber');
```

As you can see, the `NationalIDNumber` is listed first, but the primary key for the table is included as part of the index, so a second row that includes the `BusinessEntityID` column is there. It makes the average length of the key about 22 bytes. This is how indexes that refer to the primary key values as well as the index key values can function as covering indexes.

If you run the same `DBCC SHOW_STATISTICS` on the first alternate index you tried, with all three columns included in the key, like so, you will see a different set of statistics (Figure 6-13).

**Figure 6-11.** Unexpected covering index

	Name	Updated	Rows	Rows Sampled	Steps	Density	Average key length
1	AK_Employee_NationalIDNumber	Nov 21 2011 8:35PM	290	290	177	1	21.66207
	All density	Average Length	Columns				
1	0.003448276	17.66207	NationalIDNumber				
2	0.003448276	21.66207	NationalIDNumber, BusinessEntityID				

**Figure 6-12.** DBCC SHOW\_STATISTICS output for original index

	Name	Updated	Rows	Rows Sampled	Steps	Density	Average key length
1	AK_Employee_NationalIDNumber	Nov 21 2011 8:40PM	290	290	177	1	74.48276
	All density	Average Length	Columns				
1	0.003448276	17.66207	NationalIDNumber				
2	0.003448276	67.48276	NationalIDNumber, JobTitle				
3	0.003448276	70.48276	NationalIDNumber, JobTitle, HireDate				
4	0.003448276	74.48276	NationalIDNumber, JobTitle, HireDate, BusinessE...				

**Figure 6-13.** DBCC SHOW\_STATISTICS output for a wide key covering index

```

CREATE UNIQUE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [AK_Employee_NationalIDNumber] ON
[HumanResources].[Employee]
(NationalIDNumber ASC,
JobTitle ASC,
HireDate ASC )
WITH DROP_EXISTING ;
  
```

You now see the columns added up, all three of the index key columns, and finally the primary key added on. Instead of a width of 22 bytes, it's grown to 74. That reflects the addition of the JobTitle column, a VARCHAR(50) as well as the 16-byte-wide datetime field.

Finally, looking at the statistics for the second alternate index, with the included columns you'll see the output in Figure 6-14.

```

CREATE UNIQUE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [AK_Employee_NationalIDNumber]
ON [HumanResources].[Employee]
(NationalIDNumber ASC )
INCLUDE (JobTitle,HireDate)
WITH DROP_EXISTING ;
  
```

	Name	Updated	Rows	Rows Sampled	Steps	Density	Average key length
1	AK_Employee_NationalIDNumber	Nov 21 2011 8:42PM	290	290	177	1	21.66207
All density	Average Length	Columns					
1	0.003448276	17.66207	NationalIDNumber				
2	0.003448276	21.66207	NationalIDNumber, BusinessEntityID				

**Figure 6-14.** DBCC SHOW\_STATISTICS output for a covering index using INCLUDE

Now the key width is back to the original size because the columns in the INCLUDE statement are stored not with the key but at the leaf level of the index.

There is more interesting information to be gleaned from the data stored about statistics, but I'll cover that in Chapter 7.

## Using an Index Join

If the covering index becomes very wide, then you might consider an index join technique. As explained in Chapter 4, the index join technique uses an index intersection between two or more indexes to cover a query fully. Since the index join technique requires access to more than one index, it has to perform logical reads on all the indexes used in the index join. Consequently, it requires a higher number of logical reads than the covering index. But since the multiple narrow indexes used for the index join can serve more queries than a wide covering index (as explained in Chapter 4), you can certainly consider the index join as a technique to avoid lookups.

To better understand how an index join can be used to avoid lookups, run the following query against the PurchaseOrderHeader table in order to retrieve a PurchaseOrderID for a particular vendor on a particular date:

```
SELECT poh.PurchaseOrderID,
       poh.VendorID,
       poh.OrderDate
  FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
 WHERE VendorID = 1636
   AND poh.OrderDate = '12/5/2007' ;
```

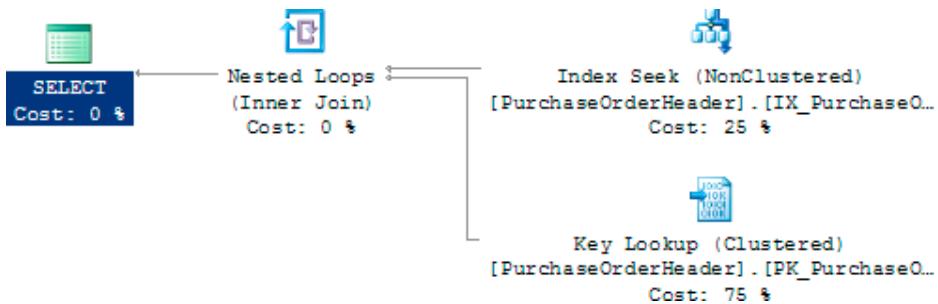
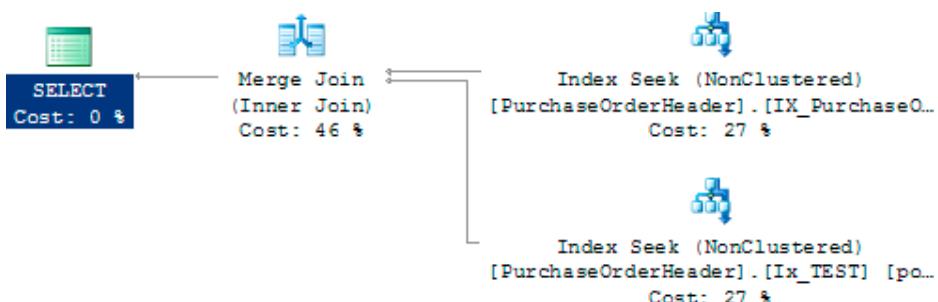
When run, this query results in a Key Lookup operation (Figure 6-15) and the following I/O.

Table 'Employee'. Scan count 1, logical reads 10 CPU time = 15 ms, elapsed time = 19 ms.

The lookup is caused since all the columns referred to by the SELECT statement and WHERE clause are not included in the nonclustered index on column VendorID. Using the nonclustered index is still better than not using it, since that would require a scan on the table (in this case, a clustered index scan) with a larger number of logical reads.

To avoid the lookup, you can consider a covering index on the column OrderDate, as explained in the previous section. But in addition to the covering index solution, you can consider an index join. As you learned, an index join requires narrower indexes than the covering index and thereby provides the following two benefits:

- Multiple narrow indexes can serve a larger number of queries than the wide covering index.
- Narrow indexes require less maintenance overhead than the wide covering index.

**Figure 6-15.** A Key Lookup operation**Figure 6-16.** Execution plan without a lookup

To avoid the lookup using an index join, create a narrow nonclustered index on column OrderDate that is not included in the existing nonclustered index:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX Ix_TEST
ON Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader(OrderDate);
```

If you run the SELECT statement again, the following output and the execution plan shown in Figure 6-16 are returned:

```
Table 'PurchaseOrderHeader'. Scan count 2, logical reads 4
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 28 ms.
```

From the preceding execution plan, you can see that the optimizer used the nonclustered index, IX\_PurchaseOrder\_VendorID, on column VendorID and the new nonclustered index, IxTEST, on column OrderID to serve the query fully without hitting the storage location of the rest of the data. This index join operation avoided the lookup and consequently decreased the number of logical reads from 10 to 4.

It is true that a covering index on columns VendorID and OrderID (c1, c2) could reduce the number of logical reads further. But it may not always be possible to use covering indexes, since they can be wide and have their associated overhead. In such cases, an index join can be a good alternative.

## Summary

As demonstrated in this chapter, the lookup step associated with a nonclustered index can make data retrieval through a nonclustered index very costly. The SQL Server optimizer takes this into account when generating an execution plan, and if it finds the overhead cost of using a nonclustered index to be very high, it discards the index and performs a table scan (or a clustered index scan if the table is stored as a clustered index). Therefore, to improve the effectiveness of a nonclustered index, it makes sense to analyze the cause of a lookup and consider whether you can avoid it completely by adding fields to the index key or to the `INCLUDE` column (or index join) and creating a covering index.

Up to this point, you have concentrated on indexing techniques and presumed that the SQL Server optimizer would be able to determine the effectiveness of an index for a query. In the next chapter, you will see the importance of statistics in helping the optimizer determine the effectiveness of an index.

## CHAPTER 7



# Statistics Analysis

By now, you should have a good understanding of the importance of indexes. It is even more important for the optimizer to have the necessary information on the data distribution so that it can choose indexes effectively. In SQL Server, this information is maintained in the form of *statistics* on the index key.

In this chapter, you'll learn the importance of statistics in query optimization. Specifically, I will cover the following topics:

- The role of statistics in query optimization
- The importance of statistics on columns with indexes
- The importance of statistics on nonindexed columns used in join and filter criteria
- Analysis of single-column and multicolumn statistics, including the computation of selectivity of a column for indexing
- Statistics maintenance
- Effective evaluation of statistics used in a query execution

## The Role of Statistics in Query Optimization

SQL Server's query optimizer is a cost-based optimizer; it decides on the best data access mechanism and join strategy by identifying the selectivity, how unique the data is, and which columns are used in filtering the data (meaning via the WHERE or JOIN clause). Statistics exist with an index, but they also exist on columns without an index that are used as part of a predicate. As you learned in [Chapter 4](#), a nonclustered index is a great way to retrieve data that is covered by the index, whereas with queries that need columns outside the key, a clustered index can work better. With a large result set, going to the clustered index or table directly is usually more beneficial.

Up-to-date information on data distribution in the columns referenced as predicates helps the optimizer determine the query strategy to use. In SQL Server, this information is maintained in the form of statistics, which are essential for the cost-based optimizer to create an effective query execution plan. Through the statistics, the optimizer can make reasonably accurate estimates about how long it will take to return a result set or an intermediate result set and therefore determine the most effective operations to use. As long as you ensure that the default statistical settings for the database are set, the optimizer will be able to do its best to determine effective processing strategies dynamically. Also, as a safety measure while troubleshooting performance, you should ensure that the automatic statistics maintenance routine is doing its job as desired. Where necessary, you may even have to take manual control over the creation and/or maintenance of statistics. (I cover this in

the “Manual Maintenance” section, and I cover the precise nature of the functions and shape of statistics in the “Analyzing Statistics” section.) In the following section, I show you why statistics are important to indexed columns and nonindexed columns functioning as predicates.

## Statistics on an Indexed Column

The usefulness of an index is fully dependent on the statistics of the indexed columns; without statistics, SQL Server’s cost-based query optimizer can’t decide upon the most effective way of using an index. To meet this requirement, SQL Server automatically creates the statistics of an index key whenever the index is created. It isn’t possible to turn this feature off.

As data changes, the data-retrieval mechanism required to keep the cost of a query low may also change. For example, if a table has only one matching row for a certain column value, then it makes sense to retrieve the matching rows from the table by going through the nonclustered index on the column. But if the data in the table changes so that a large number of rows are added with the same column value, then using the nonclustered index no longer makes sense. To be able to have SQL Server decide this change in processing strategy as the data changes over time, it is vital to have up-to-date statistics.

SQL Server can keep the statistics on an index updated as the contents of the indexed column are modified. By default, this feature is turned on and is configurable through the Properties ▶ Options ▶ Auto Update Statistics setting of a database. Updating statistics consumes extra CPU cycles. To optimize the update process, SQL Server uses an efficient algorithm to decide when to execute the update statistics procedure, based on factors such as the number of modifications and the size of the table:

- When a table with no rows gets a row
- When a table has fewer than 500 rows and is increased by 500 or more rows
- When a table has more than 500 rows and is increased by 500 rows + 20 percent of the number of rows

This built-in intelligence keeps the CPU utilization by each process very low. It’s also possible to update the statistics asynchronously. This means when a query would normally cause statistics to be updated, instead that query proceeds with the old statistics, and the statistics are updated offline. This can speed up the response time of some queries, such as when the database is large or when you have a short timeout period.

You can manually disable (or enable) the auto update statistics and the auto update statistics asynchronously features by using the `ALTER DATABASE` command. By default, the auto update statistics feature is enabled, and it is strongly recommended that you keep it enabled. The auto update statistics asynchronously feature is disabled by default. Turn this feature on only if you’ve determined it will help with timeouts on your database.

---

**Note** I explain `ALTER DATABASE` later in this chapter in the “Manual Maintenance” section.

---

## Benefits of Updated Statistics

The benefits of performing an auto update usually outweigh its cost on the system resources. If you have very large tables, and I mean hundreds of GB for a single table, you may be in a situation where letting the statistics update automatically is less beneficial. But this is an edge case, and even here, you may find that auto update of the statistics doesn’t negatively impact your system.

To more directly control the behavior of the data, instead of using the tables in AdventureWorks2008R2, for this set of examples, you will create one manually. Specifically, create a test table (teststats in the download) with only three rows and a nonclustered index:

```

IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('Test1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT, C2 INT IDENTITY) ;
SELECT TOP 1500
    IDENTITY( INT,1,1 ) AS n
INTO #Nums
FROM Master.dbo.SysColumns sC1,
Master.dbo.SysColumns sC2 ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1)
SELECT n
FROM #Nums
DROP TABLE #Nums
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX i1 ON dbo.Test1 (C1) ;

```

If you execute a SELECT statement with a very selective filter criterion on the indexed column to retrieve only one row, as shown in the following line of code, then the optimizer uses a nonclustered index seek, as shown in the execution plan in Figure 7-1.

```

SELECT *
FROM Test1
WHERE C1 = 2 ;

```

To understand the effect of small data modifications on a statistics update, create a session using Extended Events. In the session, add the event auto\_stats, which captures statistics update and create events, and add sql\_batch\_completed. Add only one row to the table:

```

INSERT INTO Test1
(C1)
VALUES (2) ;
Test1

```

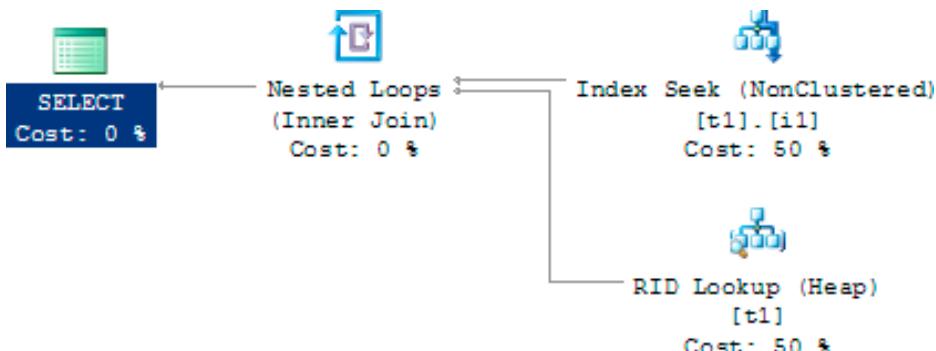


Figure 7-1. Execution plan for a very small result set

Field	Value
batch_text	SELECT * FROM t1 WHERE c1 = 2 ; --Retrieve 1 row
cpu_time	0
duration	2597
logical_reads	8
physical_reads	0
result	OK
row_count	0
writes	0

**Figure 7-2.** Session output on the addition of a small number of rows

When you reexecute the preceding SELECT statement, you get the same execution plan as shown in Figure 7-1. Figure 7-2 shows the events generated by the SELECT query.

The session output doesn't contain any SQL activity representing a statistics update because the number of changes fell below the threshold where any table that has more than 500 rows must have an increase of 500 rows plus 20 percent of the number of rows.

To understand the effect of large data modification on statistics update, add 1,500 rows to the table (--addrows in the download):

```
SELECT TOP 1500
    IDENTITY( INT,1,1 ) AS n
INTO #Nums
FROM Master.dbo.SysColumns scl,
     Master.dbo.SysColumns sC2 ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
    (C1)
    SELECT 2
    FROM #Nums ;
DROP TABLE #Nums ;
Test1
```

Now, if you reexecute the SELECT statement, like so, a large result set (1,502 rows out of 3,001 rows) will be retrieved:

```
SELECT *
FROM dbo.Test1
WHERE C1 = 2 ;
```

Since a large result set is requested, scanning the base table directly is preferable to going through the nonclustered index to the base table 1,502 times. Accessing the base table directly will prevent the overhead cost of bookmark lookups associated with the nonclustered index. This is represented in the resultant execution plan (see Figure 7-3).

Figure 7-4 shows the resultant session output.

The session output includes an auto\_stats event since the threshold was exceeded by the large-scale update this time. These SQL activities consume some extra CPU cycles. However, by doing this, the optimizer determines a better data-processing strategy and keeps the overall cost of the query low.

**Figure 7-3.** Execution plan for a large result set

	name	timestamp
▶	auto_stats	2011-11-26 17:27:43.8568828
	sql_batch_completed	2011-11-26 17:27:43.9389543

Event: auto\_stats (2011-11-26 17:27:43.8568828)

Details

Field	Value
count	1
database_id	14
database_name	
duration	12034
index_id	2
job_id	0
job_type	StatsUpdate
last_error	0
object_id	245575913
retries	0
statistics_list	Updated:t1.i1
status	Other
success	True

**Figure 7-4.** Session output on the addition of a large number of rows

## Drawbacks of Outdated Statistics

As explained in the preceding section, the auto update statistics feature allows the optimizer to decide on an efficient processing strategy for a query as the data changes. If the statistics become outdated, however, then the processing strategies decided on by the optimizer may not be applicable for the current data set and thereby will degrade performance.

To understand the detrimental effect of having outdated statistics, follow these steps:

1. Re-create the preceding test table with 1,500 rows only and the corresponding nonclustered index.
2. Prevent SQL Server from updating statistics automatically as the data changes. To do so, disable the auto update statistics feature by executing the following SQL statement

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET AUTO_UPDATE_STATISTICS OFF ;
```

3. Add 1,500 rows to the table as before.

Now, reexecute the SELECT statement to understand the effect of the outdated statistics on the query optimizer. The query is repeated here for clarity:

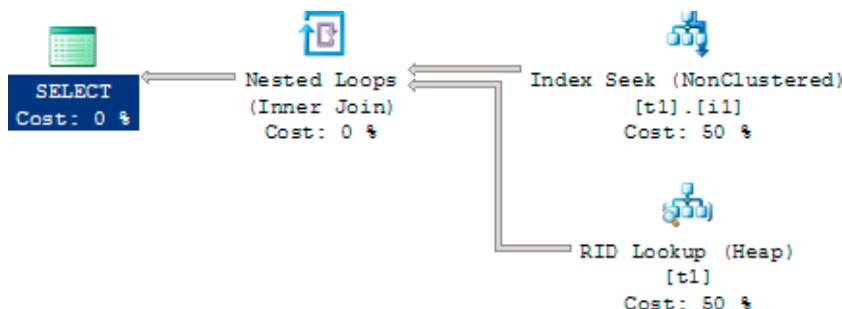
```
SELECT *
FROM   dbo.Test1Test
WHERE  C1 = 2 ;
```

Figure 7-5 and Figure 7-6 show the resultant execution plan and the session output for this query, respectively.

With the auto update statistics feature switched off, the query optimizer has selected a different execution plan from the one it selected with this feature on. Based on the outdated statistics, which have only one row for the filter criterion ( $C1 = 2$ ), the optimizer decided to use a nonclustered index seek. The optimizer couldn't make its decision based on the current data distribution in the column. For performance reasons, it would have been better to hit the base table directly instead of going through the nonclustered index, since a large result set (1,501 rows out of 3,000 rows) is requested.

You can see that turning off the auto update statistics feature has a negative effect on performance by comparing the cost of this query with and without updated statistics. Table 7-1 shows the difference in the cost of this query.

The number of logical reads and the CPU utilization are significantly higher when the statistics are out-of-date, even though the data returned is nearly identical and the query was precisely the same. Therefore, it



**Figure 7-5.** Execution plan with AUTO\_UPDATE\_STATISTICS OFF

Field	Value
batch_text	SELECT * FROM dbo.t1 WHERE c1 = 2;
cpu_time	16000
duration	116383
logical_reads	1510
physical_reads	0
result	OK
row_count	0
writes	0

**Figure 7-6.** Session output with AUTO\_UPDATE\_STATISTICS OFF

**Table 7-1.** Cost of the Query With and Without Updated Statistics

Statistics Update Status	Figure	Cost (SQLBatch)	Completed Event
		CPU (ms)	Number of Reads
Updated	Figure 7-4	2597	8
Not updated	Figure 7-6	116383	1510

is recommended that you keep the auto update statistics feature on. The benefits of keeping statistics updated outweigh the costs of performing the update. Before you leave this section, turn AUTO\_UPDATE\_STATISTICS back on (although you can also use sp\_autostats):

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET AUTO_UPDATE_STATISTICS ON ;
```

## Statistics on a Nonindexed Column

Sometimes you may have columns in join or filter criteria without any index. Even for such nonindexed columns, the query optimizer is more likely to make the best choice if it knows the data distribution (or statistics) of those columns.

In addition to statistics on indexes, SQL Server can build statistics on columns with no indexes. The information on data distribution, or the likelihood of a particular value occurring in a nonindexed column, can help the query optimizer determine an optimal processing strategy. This benefits the query optimizer even if it can't use an index to actually locate the values. SQL Server automatically builds statistics on nonindexed columns if it deems this information valuable in creating a better plan, usually when the columns are used in a predicate. By default, this feature is turned on, and it's configurable through the Properties ► Options ► Auto Create Statistics setting of a database. You can override this setting programmatically by using the ALTER DATABASE command. However, for better performance, it is strongly recommended that you keep this feature on.

In general, you should not disable the automatic creation of statistics on nonindexed columns. One of the scenarios in which you may consider disabling this feature is while executing a series of ad hoc SQL activities that you will not execute again. In such a case, you must decide whether you want to pay the cost of automatic statistics creation to get a better plan in this one case and affect the performance of other SQL Server activities. So, for average sized systems, you should keep this feature on and not be concerned about it.

## Benefits of Statistics on a Nonindexed Column

To understand the benefit of having statistics on a column with no index, create two test tables with disproportionate data distributions, as shown in the following code (create\_Test1\_Test2.sql in the download). Both tables contain 10,001 rows. Table Test1 contains only one row for a value of the second column (Test1\_C2) equal to 1, and the remaining 10,000 rows contain this column value as 2. Table Test2 contains exactly the opposite data distribution.

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1') IS NOT NULL
DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1
(Test1_C1 INT IDENTITY,
Test1_C2 INT
) ;
```

```

INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(Test1_C2)
VALUES (1);

SELECT TOP 10000
IDENTITY( INT,1,1 ) AS n
INTO #Nums
FROM Master.dbo.SysColumns scl,
Master.dbo.SysColumns sc2;

INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(Test1_C2)
SELECT 2
FROM #Nums
GO

CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX i1 ON dbo.Test1(Test1_C1)

--Create second table with 10001 rows, -- but opposite data distribution IF(SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test2')) IS NOT NULL
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test2'))
) IS NOT NULL
DROP TABLE dbo.Test2 ;
GO

CREATE TABLE dbo.Test2
(Test2_C1 INT IDENTITY,
Test2_C2 INT
);

INSERT INTO dbo.Test2
(Test2_C2)
VALUES (2);

INSERT INTO dbo.Test2
(Test2_C2)
SELECT 1
FROM #Nums ;
DROP TABLE #Nums ;
GO
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX i1 ON dbo.Test2(Test2_C1) ;

```

Table 7-2 illustrates how the tables will look.

**Table 7-2. Sample Tables**

Column	Table Test1		Table Test2	
	Test1_c1	Test1_C2	Test2_c1	Test2_C2
Row1	1	1	1	2
Row2	2	2	2	1
RowN	N	2	N	1
Row1OOOI	10001	2	10001	1

To understand the importance of statistics on a nonindexed column, use the default setting for the auto create statistics feature. By default, this feature is on. You can verify this using the DATABASEPROPERTYEX function (although you can also query the sys.databases view):

```
SELECT DATABASEPROPERTYEX('AdventureWorks2008R2',
'IsAutoCreateStatistics') ;
```

**Note** You can find a detailed description of configuring the auto create statistics feature later in this chapter.

Use the following SELECT statement (–nonindexedselect in the download) to access a large result set from table Test1 and a small result set from table Test2. Table Test1 has 10,000 rows for the column value of Test1\_C2 = 2, and table Test2 has 1 row for Test2\_C2 = 2. Note that these columns used in the join and filter criteria have no index on either table.

```
SELECT Test1.Test1_C2,
       Test2.Test2_C2
  FROM dbo.Test1
  JOIN dbo.Test2
    ON Test1.Test1_C2 = Test2.Test2_C2
 WHERE Test1.Test1_C2 = 2 ;
```

Figure 7-7 shows the execution plan for this query.

Figure 7-8 shows the session output with all completed events and the auto\_stats events for this query. You can use this to evaluate some of the added costs for a given query.

The session output shown in Figure 7-8 includes two auto\_stats events creating statistics on the nonindexed columns referred to in the JOIN and WHERE clauses, Test2\_C2 and Test1\_C2. This activity consumes a few extra CPU cycles (since none could be detected) and took about 10,000 microseconds, or 10ms. However, by consuming these extra CPU cycles, the optimizer decides upon a better processing strategy for keeping the overall cost of the query low.

To verify the statistics automatically created by SQL Server on the nonindexed columns of each table, run this SELECT statement against the sys.stats table:

```
SELECT *
  FROM sys.stats
 WHERE object_id = OBJECT_ID('Test1') ;
```

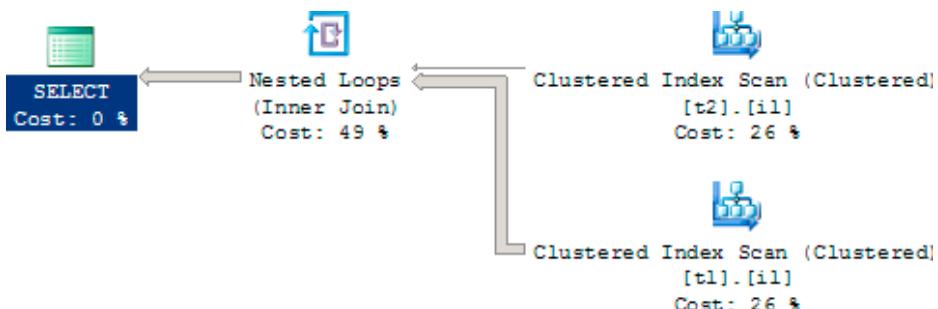


Figure 7-7. Execution plan with AUTO\_CREATE\_STATISTICS ON

	name	timestamp
▶	auto_stats	2011-11-27 15:41:19.8391849
	auto_stats	2011-11-27 15:41:19.8513366
	sql_batch_completed	2011-11-27 15:41:19.9379050

Event: auto\_stats (2011-11-27 15:41:19.8391849)

Details	
Field	Value
count	1
database_id	9
database_name	
duration	10999
index_id	0
job_id	0
job_type	StatsUpdate
last_error	0
object_id	1319675749
retries	0
statistics_list	Created: t2_c2
status	Other
success	True

**Figure 7-8.** Extended Events session output with AUTO\_CREATE\_STATISTICS ON

	object_id	name	stats_id	auto_created	user_created
1	1303675692	i1	1	0	0
2	1303675692	_WA_Sys_00000002_4DB4832C	2	1	0

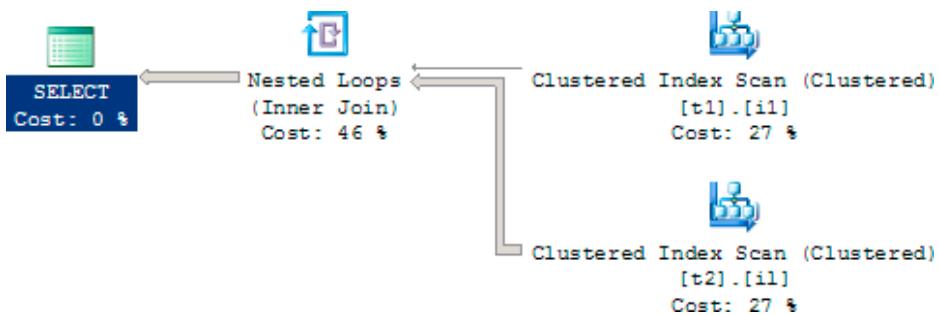
**Figure 7-9.** Automatic statistics for table Test1

Figure 7-9 shows the automatic statistics created for table Test1.

To verify how a different result set size from the two tables influences the decision of the query optimizer, modify the filter criteria of --nonindexedselect to access an opposite result set size from the two tables (small from Test1 and large from Test2). Instead of filtering on Test1.Test1\_C2 = 2, change it to filter on 1:

```
SELECT Test1.Test1_C2,
       Test2.Test2_C2
  FROM dbo.Test1
  JOIN dbo.Test2
    ON Test1.Test1_C2 = Test2.Test2_C2
 WHERE Test1.Test1_C2 = 1 ;
```

Figure 7-10 shows the resultant execution plan, and Figure 7-11 shows the Extended Events session output of this query.



**Figure 7-10.** Execution plan for a different result set

Field	Value
batch_text	SELECT t1.t1_c2, t2.t2_c2 FF
cpu_time	47000
duration	111350
logical_reads	147
physical_reads	0
result	OK
row_count	0
writes	0

**Figure 7-11.** Trace output for a different result set

The resultant session output doesn't perform any additional SQL activities to manage statistics. The statistics on the nonindexed columns (`Test1.Test1_C2` and `Test2.Test2_C2`) had already been created when the indexes themselves were created and updated as the data changed.

For effective cost optimization, in each case the query optimizer selected different processing strategies, depending upon the statistics on the nonindexed columns (`Test1.Test1_C2` and `Test2.Test2_C2`). You can see this from the last two execution plans. In the first, table `Test1` is the outer table for the nested loop join, whereas in the latest one, table `Test2` is the outer table. By having statistics on the nonindexed columns (`Test1.Test1_C2` and `Test2.Test2_C2`), the query optimizer can create a cost-effective plan suitable for each case.

An even better solution would be to have an index on the column. This would not only create the statistics on the column but also allow fast data retrieval through an Index Seek operation, while retrieving a small result set. However, in the case of a database application with queries referring to nonindexed columns in the `WHERE` clause, keeping the auto create statistics feature on still allows the optimizer to determine the best processing strategy for the existing data distribution in the column.

If you need to know which column or columns might be covered by a given statistic, you need to look into the `sys.stats_columns` system table. You can query it in the same way as you did the `sys.stats` table:

```

SELECT *
FROM sys.stats_columns
WHERE object_id = OBJECT_ID('Test1') ;
    
```

This will show the column or columns being referenced by the automatically created statistics. You can use this information to help you if you decide you need to create an index to replace the statistics, because you will need to know which columns to create the index on.

## Drawback of Missing Statistics on a Nonindexed Column

To understand the detrimental effect of not having statistics on nonindexed columns, drop the statistics automatically created by SQL Server and prevent SQL Server from automatically creating statistics on columns with no index by following these steps:

1. Drop the automatic statistics created on column Test1.Test1\_C2 through the Manage Statistics dialog box as shown in the section “Benefits of Statistics on a Nonindexed Column,” or use the following SQL command:  

```
DROP STATISTICS [Test1].StatisticsName;
```
2. Similarly, drop the corresponding statistics on column Test2.Test2\_C2.
3. Disable the auto create statistics feature by deselecting the Auto Create Statistics check box for the corresponding database or by executing the following SQL command:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET AUTO_CREATE_STATISTICS OFF;
```

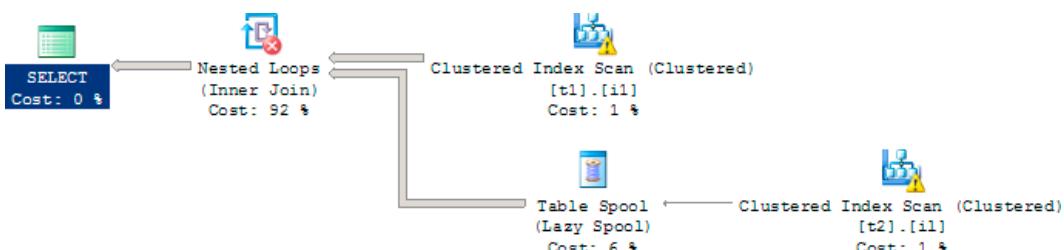
Now reexecute the SELECT statement --nonindexed\_select:

```
SELECT Test1.Test1_C2,
       Test2.Test2_C2
  FROM dbo.Test1
  JOIN dbo.Test2
    ON Test1.Test1_C2 = Test2.Test2_C2
 WHERE Test1.Test1_C2 = 2 ;
```

Figure 7-12 and Figure 7-13 show the resultant execution plan and Profiler trace output, respectively.

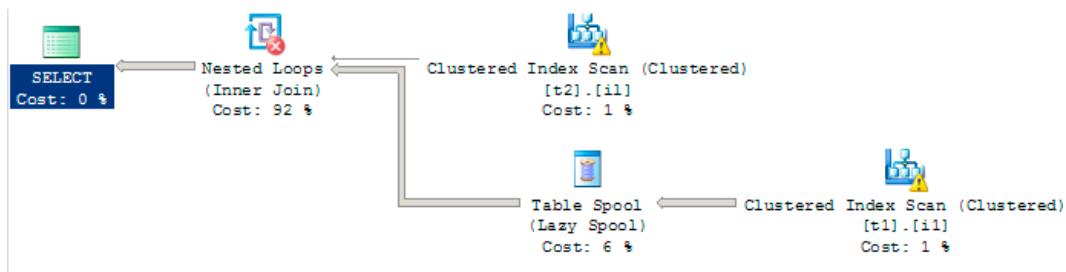
With the auto create statistics feature off, the query optimizer selected a different execution plan compared to the one it selected with the auto create statistics feature on. On not finding statistics on the relevant columns, the optimizer chose the first table (Test1) in the FROM clause as the outer table of the nested loop join operation. The optimizer couldn't make its decision based on the actual data distribution in the column. You can see the missing statistics information as exclamation points on the data access operators, the clustered index scans. If you modify the query to reference table Test2 as the first table in the FROM clause, then the optimizer selects table Test2 as the outer table of the nested loop join operation. Figure 7-14 shows the execution plan.

```
SELECT Test1.Test1_C2,
       Test2.Test2_C2
  FROM dbo.Test2
  JOIN dbo.Test1
    ON Test1.Test1_C2 = Test2.Test2_C2
 WHERE Test1.Test1_C2 = 2 ;
```



**Figure 7-12.** Execution plan with AUTO\_CREATE\_STATISTICS OFF

Field	Value
batch_text	SELECT t1.t1_c2, t2.t2_c2
cpu_time	32000
duration	130049
logical_reads	48
physical_reads	0
result	OK
row_count	0
writes	0

**Figure 7-13.** Trace output with AUTO\_CREATE\_STATISTICS OFF**Figure 7-14.** Execution plan with AUTO\_CREATE\_STATISTICS OFF (a variation)**Table 7-3.** Cost Comparison of a Query With and Without Statistics on a Nonindexed Column

Statistics on Nonindexed Column	Figure	Cost (SQLBatch)	Completed Event
		Duration (ms)	Number of Reads
With statistics	Figure 7-11	98	48
Without statistics	Figure 7-13	130	52

You can see that turning off the auto create statistics feature has a negative effect on performance by comparing the cost of this query with and without statistics on a nonindexed column. Table 7-3 shows the difference in the cost of this query.

The number of logical reads and the CPU utilization are higher with no statistics on the nonindexed columns. Without these statistics, the optimizer can't create a cost-effective plan.

A query execution plan highlights the missing statistics by placing an exclamation point on the operator that would have used the statistics. You can see this in the clustered index scan operators in the previous execution plans (Figures 7-12 and 7-14), as well as in the detailed description in the Warnings section in the properties of a node in a graphical execution plan, as shown in Figure 7-15 for table Test1.

Warnings	Columns With No Statistics: [AdventureWork]
Columns With No Statistics	
Column Reference	[AdventureWorks2008R2].[dbo].[Test1]. <a href="#">[...]</a>
Column	Test1_C2
Database	[AdventureWorks2008R2]
Schema	[dbo]
Table	[Test1]

**Figure 7-15.** Missing statistics indication in a graphical plan

**Note** In a database application, there is always the possibility of queries using columns with no indexes. Therefore, for performance reasons, leaving the auto create statistics feature of SQL Server databases on is recommended.

## Analyzing Statistics

Statistics are collections of information stored as histograms. A *histogram* is a statistical construct that shows how often data falls into varying categories. The histogram stored by SQL Server consists of a sampling of data distribution for a column or an index key (or the first column of a multicolumn index key) of up to 200 rows. The information on the range of index key values between two consecutive samples is called a *step*. These steps consist of varying size intervals between the 200 values stored. A step provides the following information:

- The top value of a given step (RANGE\_HI\_KEY)
- The number of rows equal to RANGE\_HI\_KEY (EQ\_ROWS)
- The range of rows between the previous top value and the current top value, without counting either of these samples (RANGE\_ROWS)
- The number of distinct rows in the range (DISTINCT\_RANGE\_ROWS); if all values in the range are unique, then RANGE\_ROWS equals DISTINCT\_RANGE\_ROWS.
- The average number of rows equal to a key value within a range (AVG\_RANGE\_ROWS)

The value of EQ\_ROWS for an index key value (RANGE\_HI\_KEY) helps the optimizer decide how (and whether) to use the index when the indexed column is referred to in a WHERE clause. Because the optimizer can perform a SEEK or SCAN operation to retrieve rows from a table, the optimizer can decide which operation to perform based on the number of matching rows (EQ\_ROWS) for the index key value.

To understand how the optimizer's data-retrieval strategy depends on the number of matching rows, create a test table (`create_t3.sql` in the download) with different data distributions on an indexed column:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1')  
 ) IS NOT NULL  
DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;  
GO
```

```

CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT, C2 INT IDENTITY) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1)
VALUES (1) ;
SELECT TOP 10000
IDENTITY( INT,1,1 ) AS n
INTO #Nums
FROM Master.dbo.SysColumns sc1,
Master.dbo.SysColumns sc2 ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1)
SELECT 2
FROM #Nums ;
DROP TABLE #Nums;
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX FirstIndex ON dbo.Test1 (C1) ;
Test1Test1Test1Test1Test1Test1

```

When the preceding nonclustered index is created, SQL Server automatically creates statistics on the index key. You can obtain statistics for this nonclustered index key (FirstIndex) by executing the DBCC SHOW\_STATISTICS command:

```
DBCC SHOW_STATISTICS(Test1, FirstIndex) ;
```

Figure 7-16 shows the statistics output.

Now, to understand how effectively the optimizer decides upon different data-retrieval strategies based on statistics, execute the following two queries requesting different numbers of rows:

```
--Retrieve 1 row;
SELECT *
FROM dbo.Test1
WHERE C1 = 1 ;

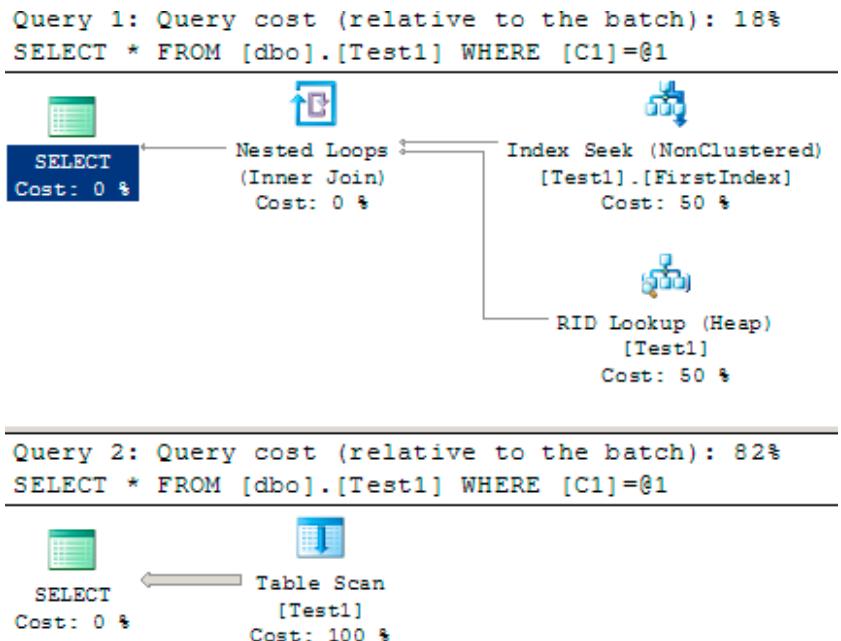
--Retrieve 10000 rows;
SELECT *
FROM dbo.Test1
WHERE C1 = 2 ;
```

Figure 7-17 shows execution plans of these queries.

From the statistics, the optimizer can find the number of rows affected by the preceding two queries. Understanding that there is only one row to be retrieved for the first query, the optimizer chose an Index Seek

	Name	Updated	Rows	Rows Sampled	Steps	Density	Average key length	String Index	Filter Expression	Unfiltered Rows
1	FirstIndex	Nov 27 2011 5:11PM	10001	10001	2	0	4	NO	NULL	10001
	All density	Average Length	Columns							
1	0.5	4	C1							
	RANGE_HI_KEY	RANGE_ROWS	EQ_ROWS	DISTINCT_RANGE_ROWS	AVG_RANGE_ROWS					
1	1	0	1	0	1					
2	2	0	10000	0	1					

Figure 7-16. Statistics on index FirstIndex



**Figure 7-17.** Execution plans of small and large result set queries

operation, followed by the necessary RID Lookup to retrieve the data not stored with the clustered index. For the second query, the optimizer knows that a large number of rows (10,000 rows) will be affected and therefore avoided the index to attempt to improve performance. ([Chapter 4](#) explains indexing strategies in detail.)

Besides the information on steps, other useful information in the statistics includes the following:

- The time statistics were last updated
- The number of rows in the table
- The average index key length
- The number of rows sampled for the histogram
- Densities for combinations of columns

Information on the time of the last update can help you decide whether you should manually update the statistics. The average key length represents the average size of the data in the index key column(s). It helps you understand the width of the index key, which is an important measure in determining the effectiveness of the index. As explained in [Chapter 4](#), a wide index is usually costly to maintain and requires more disk space and memory pages.

## Density

When creating an execution plan, the query optimizer analyzes the statistics of the columns used in the filter and JOIN clauses. A filter criterion with high selectivity limits the number of rows from a table to a small result set and helps the optimizer keep the query cost low. A column with a unique index will have a very high selectivity, since it can limit the number of matching rows to one.

	(No column name)
1	0.500000000000

**Figure 7-18.** Results of density calculation for column C1

On the other hand, a filter criterion with low selectivity will return a large result set from the table. A filter criterion with very low selectivity makes a nonclustered index on the column ineffective. Navigating through a nonclustered index to the base table for a large result set is usually costlier than scanning the base table (or clustered index) directly because of the cost overhead of bookmark lookups associated with the nonclustered index. You can observe this behavior in the execution plan in Figure 7-17.

Statistics track the selectivity of a column in the form of a density ratio. A column with high selectivity (or uniqueness) will have low density. A column with low density (that is, high selectivity) is suitable for a nonclustered index, because it helps the optimizer retrieve a small number of rows very fast. This is also the principle on which filtered indexes operate since the filter's goal is to increase the selectivity, or density, of the index.

Density can be expressed as follows:

Density = 1 / Number of distinct values for a column

Density will always come out as a number somewhere between 0 and 1. The lower the column density, the more suitable it is for use in a nonclustered index. You can perform your own calculations to determine the density of columns within your own indexes and statistics. For example, to calculate the density of column c1 from the test table built by `create_t3.sql`, use the following (results in Figure 7-18).

```
SELECT 1.0 / COUNT(DISTINCT C1)
FROM dbo.Test1 ;
Test1
```

You can see this as actual data in the All\_density column in the output from `DBCC SHOW_STATISTICS`. This high-density value for the column makes it a less suitable candidate for an index, even a filtered index. However, the statistics of the index key values maintained in the steps help the query optimizer use the index for the predicate `C1 = 1`, as shown in the previous execution plan.

## Statistics on a Multicolumn Index

In the case of an index with one column, statistics consist of a histogram and a density value for that column. Statistics for a composite index with multiple columns consist of one histogram for the first column only and multiple density values. This is one reason why it's generally a good practice to put the more selective column, the one with the lowest density, first when building a compound index or compound statistics. The density values include the density for the first column and for each prefix combination of the index key columns. Multiple density values help the optimizer find the selectivity of the composite index when multiple columns are referred to by predicates in the `WHERE` and `JOIN` clauses. Although the first column can help determine the histogram, the final density of the column itself would be the same regardless of column order.

To better understand the density values maintained for a multicolumn index, you can modify the nonclustered index used earlier to include two columns:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX FirstIndex
ON dbo.Test1(C1,C2) WITH DROP_EXISTING ;Test1
```

Figure 7-19 shows the resultant statistics provided by `DBCC SHOWSTATISTICS`.

	Name	Updated	Rows	Rows Sampled	Steps	Density	Average key length	String Index	Filter Expression	Unfiltered Rows
1	FirstIndex	Nov 28 2011 4:42PM	10001	10001	2	0	8	NO	NULL	10001
	All density	Average Length	Columns							
1	0.5	4	C1							
2	9.999E-05	8	C1, C2							
	RANGE_HI_KEY	RANGE_ROWS	EQ_ROWS	DISTINCT_RANGE_ROWS	AVG_RANGE_ROWS					
1	1	0	1	0	1					
2	2	0	10000	0	1					

**Figure 7-19.** Statistics on the multicolumn index i1

As you can see, there are two density values under the All density column:

- The density of the first column
- The density of the (first + second) columns

For a multicolumn index with three columns, the statistics for the index would also contain the density value of the (first + second + third) columns. The statistics won't contain a density value for any other combination of columns. Therefore, this index (FirstIndex) won't be very useful for filtering rows only on the second column (C2), because the density value of the second column (C2) alone isn't maintained in the statistics.

You can compute the second density value (0.190269999) shown in Figure 7-18 through the following steps. This is the number of distinct values for a column combination of (C1, C2):

```
SELECT 1.0 / COUNT(*)
FROM (SELECT DISTINCT
          C1,
          C2
     FROM dbo.Test1
   ) DistinctRows ;Test1
```

## Statistics on a Filtered Index

The purpose of a filtered index is to limit the data that makes up the index and therefore change the density and histogram to make the index perform better. Instead of a test table, this example will use the AdventureWorks2008R2 database. Create an index on the Sales.PurchaseOrderHeader table on the PurchaseOrderNumber column:

```
CREATE INDEX IX_Test
ON Sales.SalesOrderHeader (PurchaseOrderNumber) ;
```

Figure 7-20 shows the header and the density of the output from DBCC SHOWSTATISTICS run against this new index:

```
DBCC SHOW_STATISTICS('Sales.SalesOrderHeader',IX_Test) ;
```

If the same index is re-created to deal with values of the column that are not null, it would look something like this:

```
CREATE INDEX IX_Test
ON Sales.SalesOrderHeader (PurchaseOrderNumber)
WHERE PurchaseOrderNumber IS NOT NULL
WITH DROP_EXISTING ;
```

	Name	Updated	Rows	Rows Sampled	Steps	Density	Average key length	String Index	Filter Expression	Unfiltered Rows
1	IX_Test	Nov 28 2011 4:57PM	31465	31465	152	1	7.01516	YES	NULL	31465
	All density	Average Length	Columns							
1	0.000262674	3.01516	PurchaseOrderNumber							
2	3.178134E-05	7.01516	PurchaseOrderNumber, SalesOrderID							

**Figure 7-20.** Statistics header of an unfiltered index

	Name	Updated	Rows	Rows Sampled	Steps	Density	Average key length	String Index	Filter Expression	Unfiltered Rows
1	IX_Test	Nov 28 2011 4:57PM	31465	31465	152	1	7.01516	YES	NULL	31465
	All density	Average Length	Columns							
1	0.000262674	3.01516	PurchaseOrderNumber							
2	3.178134E-05	7.01516	PurchaseOrderNumber, SalesOrderID							

**Figure 7-21.** Statistics header for a filtered index

And now, in Figure 7-21, take a look at the statistics information.

First you can see that the number of rows that compose the statistics has radically dropped in the filtered index because there is a filter in place. Notice also that the average key length has increased since you're no longer dealing with zero-length strings. A filter expression has been defined rather than the NULL value visible in Figure 7-20. But the unfiltered rows of both sets of data are the same.

The density measurements are very interesting. Notice that the density is close to the same for both values, but the filtered density is slightly lower, meaning fewer unique values. This is because the filtered data, while marginally less selective, is actually more accurate, eliminating all the empty values that won't contribute to a search. And the density of the second value, which represents the clustered index pointer, is identical with the value of the density of the PurchaseOrderNumber alone because each represents the same amount of unique data. The density of the additional clustered index in the previous column is a much smaller number because of all the unique values of SalesOrderID that are not included in the filtered data because of the elimination of the null values.

One other option open to you is to create filtered statistics. This allows you to create even more fine-tuned histograms. This can be especially useful on partitioned tables. This is necessary because statistics are not automatically created on partitioned tables and you can't create your own using CREATE STATISTICS. You can create filtered indexes by partition and get statistics or create filtered statistics specifically by partition.

Before going on, clean the indexes created, if any:

```
DROP INDEX Sales.SalesOrderHeader.IX_Test;
```

## Statistics Maintenance

SQL Server allows a user to manually override the maintenance of statistics in an individual database. The four main configurations controlling automatic statistics maintenance behavior of SQL Server are as follows:

- New statistics on columns with no index (auto create statistics)
- Updating existing statistics (auto update statistics)
- The degree of sampling used to generate statistics
- Asynchronous updating of existing statistics (auto update statistics async)

You can control the preceding configurations at the levels of a database (all indexes and statistics on all tables) or on a case-by-case basis on individual indexes or statistics. The auto create statistics setting is applicable for nonindexed columns only, because SQL Server always creates statistics for an index key when the index is created. The auto update statistics setting, and the asynchronous version, is applicable for statistics on both indexes and WHERE clause columns with no index.

## Automatic Maintenance

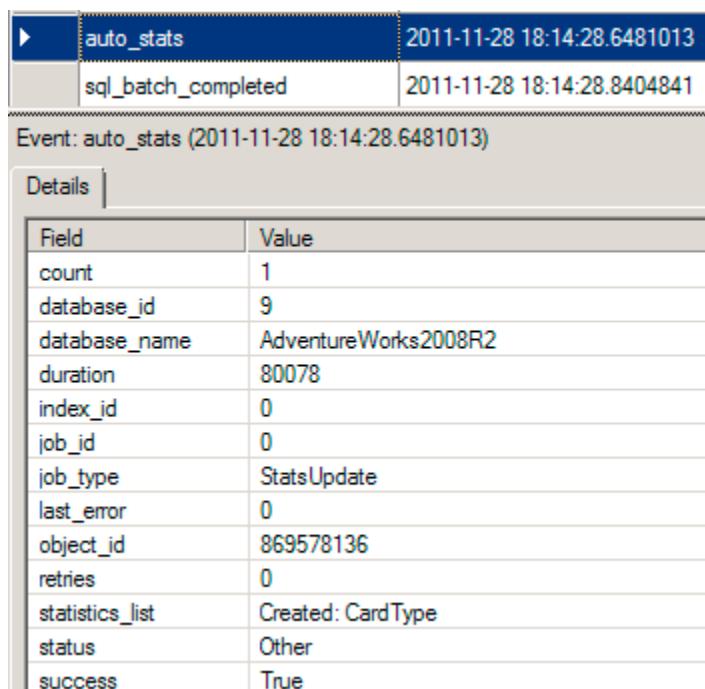
By default, SQL Server automatically takes care of statistics. Both the auto create statistics and auto update statistics settings are on by default. As explained previously, it is usually better to keep these settings on. The auto update statistics async setting is off by default.

## Auto Create Statistics

The auto create statistics feature automatically creates statistics on nonindexed columns when referred to in the WHERE clause of a query. For example, when this SELECT statement is run against the Sales.SalesOrderHeader table on a column with no index, statistics for the column are created:

```
SELECT *
FROM   Sales.CreditCard AS cc
WHERE  cc.CardType = 'Vista' ;
```

Then the auto create statistics feature (make sure it is turned back on if you have turned it off) automatically creates statistics on column CardType. You can see this in the Extended Events session output in Figure 7-22.



The screenshot shows the Extended Events session output for an auto\_stats event. The event was triggered on 2011-11-28 18:14:28.6481013. The details table lists the following information:

Field	Value
count	1
database_id	9
database_name	AdventureWorks2008R2
duration	80078
index_id	0
job_id	0
job_type	StatsUpdate
last_error	0
object_id	869578136
retries	0
statistics_list	Created: CardType
status	Other
success	True

**Figure 7-22.** Session output with AUTO\_CREATE\_STATISTICS ON

## Auto Update Statistics

The auto update statistics feature automatically updates existing statistics on the indexes and columns of a permanent table when the table is referred to in a query, provided the statistics have been marked as out-of-date. The types of changes are action statements, such as INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE. The threshold for the number of changes depends on the number of rows in the table, as shown in Table 7-4.

In SQL Server, cardinality is counted as the number of rows in the table.

Using a threshold reduces the frequency of the automatic update of statistics. For example, consider the following table ( --autoupdates in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;

CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT) ;

CREATE INDEX ix1 ON dbo.Test1(C1) ;

INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1)
VALUES (0) ;
```

After the nonclustered index is created, a single row is added to the table. This outdates the existing statistics on the nonclustered index. If the following SELECT statement is executed with a reference to the indexed column in the WHERE clause, like so, then the auto update statistics feature automatically updates statistics on the nonclustered index, as shown in the session output in Figure 7-23.

```
SELECT *
FROM dbo.Test1
WHERE C1 = 0 ;
```

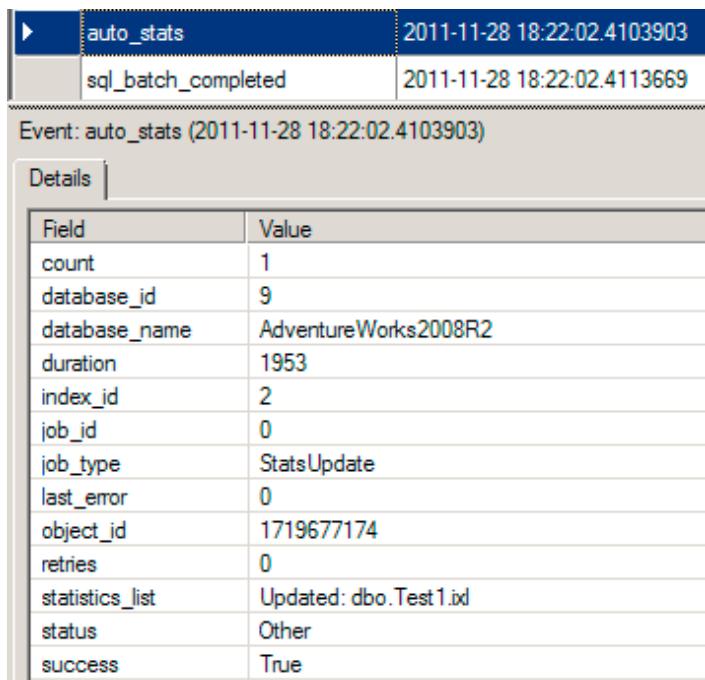
Once the statistics are updated, the change-tracking mechanisms for the corresponding tables are set to 0. This way, SQL Server keeps track of the number of changes to the tables and manages the frequency of automatic updates of statistics.

## Auto Update Statistics Asynchronously

If auto update statistics asynchronously is set to on, the basic behavior of statistics in SQL Server isn't changed radically. When a set of statistics is marked as out-of-date and a query is then run against those statistics, the statistics update does not interrupt the query, as normally happens. Instead, the query finishes execution using the older set of statistics. Once the query completes, the statistics are updated. The reason this may be attractive is that when statistics are updated, query plans in the procedure cache are removed, and the query being run must be recompiled. So, rather than make a query wait for both the update of the statistics and a recompile of the procedure, the query completes its run. The next time the same query is called, it will have updated statistics waiting for it, and it will have to recompile only.

**Table 7-4.** Update Statistics Threshold for Number of Changes

Number of Rows	Threshold for Number of Changes
0	> 1 insert
<500	> 500 changes
>500	500 + 20 percent of cardinality changes



The screenshot shows a session output window in SQL Server Management Studio. At the top, there are two rows of data:

auto_stats	2011-11-28 18:22:02.4103903
sql_batch_completed	2011-11-28 18:22:02.4113669

Below this, the message "Event: auto\_stats (2011-11-28 18:22:02.4103903)" is displayed. A "Details" tab is selected, showing a table of statistics:

Field	Value
count	1
database_id	9
database_name	AdventureWorks2008R2
duration	1953
index_id	2
job_id	0
job_type	StatsUpdate
last_error	0
object_id	1719677174
retries	0
statistics_list	Updated: dbo.Test1.idx
status	Other
success	True

**Figure 7-23.** Session output with AUTO\_UPDATE\_STATISTICS ON

Although this functionality does make recompiles somewhat faster, it can also cause queries that could benefit from updated statistics and a new execution plan to work with the old execution plan. Careful testing is required before turning this functionality on to ensure it doesn't cause more harm than good.

---

**Note** If you are attempting to update statistics asynchronously, you must also have AUTO\_UPDATE\_STATISTICS set to ON.

---

## Manual Maintenance

The following are situations in which you need to interfere with or assist the automatic maintenance of statistics:

- *When experimenting with statistics:* Just a friendly suggestion—please spare your production servers from experiments such as the ones you are doing in this book.
- *After upgrading from a previous version to SQL Server 2012:* Since the statistics maintenance of SQL Server 2012 has been upgraded, you should manually update the statistics of the complete database immediately after the upgrade instead of waiting for SQL Server to update it over time with the help of automatic statistics. The only versions that I know this does not apply to is going from SQL Server 2008 to SQL Server 2008R2.

- *While executing a series of ad hoc SQL activities that you won't execute again:*  
In such cases, you must decide whether you want to pay the cost of automatic statistics maintenance to get a better plan in that one case and affect the performance of other SQL Server activities. So, in general, you don't need to be concerned with such one-timers. This is mainly applicable to larger databases, but you can test it in your environment if you think it may apply.
- *When you come upon an issue with the automatic statistics maintenance and the only workaround for the time being is to keep the automatic statistics maintenance feature off:* Even in these cases, you can turn the feature off for the specific database table that faces the problem instead of disabling it for the complete database. Issues like this can be found in large data sets where the data is updated a lot, but not enough to trigger the threshold update.
- *While analyzing the performance of a query, you realize that the statistics are missing for a few of the database objects referred to by the query:* This can be evaluated from the graphical and XML execution plans, as explained earlier in the chapter.
- *While analyzing the effectiveness of statistics, you realize that they are inaccurate:* This can be determined when poor execution plans are being created from what should be good sets of indexes.

SQL Server allows a user to control many of its automatic statistics maintenance features. You can enable (or disable) the automatic statistics creation and update features by using the auto create statistics and auto update statistics settings, respectively, and then you can get your hands dirty.

## Manage Statistics Settings

You can control the auto create statistics setting at a database level. To disable this setting, use the ALTER DATABASE command:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET AUTO_CREATE_STATISTICS OFF ;
```

You can control the auto update statistics setting at different levels of a database, including all indexes and statistics on a table, or at the individual index or statistics level. To disable auto update statistics at the database level, use the ALTER DATABASE command:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET AUTO_UPDATE_STATISTICS OFF ;
```

Disabling this setting at the database level overrides individual settings at lower levels. Auto update statistics asynchronously requires that the auto update statistics be on first. Then you can enable the asynchronous update:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET AUTO_UPDATE_STATISTICS_ASYNC ON ;
```

To configure auto update statistics for all indexes and statistics on a table in the current database, use the sp\_autostats system stored procedure:

```
USE AdventureWorks2008R2 ;
EXEC sp_autostats
    'HumanResources.Department',
    'OFF' ;
```

You can also use the same stored procedure to configure this setting for individual indexes or statistics. To disable this setting for the AK\_Department\_Name index on AdventureWorks2008R2.HumanResources.Department, execute the following statements:

```
USE AdventureWorks2008R2 ;
EXEC sp_autostats
    'HumanResources.Department',
    'OFF',
    AK_Department_Name ;
```

You can also use the UPDATE STATISTICS command's WITH NORECOMPUTE option to disable this setting for all or individual indexes and statistics on a table in the current database. The sp\_createstats stored procedure also has the NORECOMPUTE option. The NORECOMPUTE option will not disable automatic update of statistics directly, but it will prevent them, which is almost the same.

Avoid disabling the automatic statistics features, unless you have confirmed through testing that this brings a performance benefit. If the automatic statistics features are disabled, then you should manually identify and create missing statistics on the columns that are not indexed and then keep the existing statistics up-to-date.

If you want to check the status of whether a table has its automatic statistics turned off, you can use this:

```
EXEC sp_autostats 'Production.Product';
```

Reset the automatic maintenance of the index so that it is on where it has been turned off:

```
EXEC sp_autostats
    'HumanResources.Department',
    'ON' ;
EXEC sp_autostats
    'HumanResources.Department',
    'ON',
    AK_Department_Name ;
```

## Generate Statistics

To create statistics manually, use one of the following options:

- **CREATE STATISTICS:** You can use this option to create statistics on single or multiple columns of a table or an indexed view. Unlike the CREATE INDEX command, CREATE STATISTICS uses sampling by default.
- **sys.sp\_createstats:** Use this stored procedure to create single-column statistics for all eligible columns for all user tables in the current database. This includes all columns except computed columns; columns with the NTEXT, TEXT, GEOMETRY, GEOGRAPHY, or IMAGE data type; sparse columns; and columns that already have statistics or are the first column of an index. This is mainly meant for backwards compatibility, and I wouldn't recommend using it.

Similarly, to update statistics manually, use one of the following options:

- **UPDATE STATISTICS:** You can use this option to update the statistics of individual or all index keys and nonindexed columns of a table or an indexed view.
- **sys.sp\_updatestats:** Use this stored procedure to update statistics of all user tables in the current database.

You may find that allowing the automatic updating of statistics is not quite adequate for your system. Scheduling UPDATE STATISTICS for the database during off-hours is an acceptable way to deal with this issue. UPDATE STATISTICS is the preferred mechanism because it offers a greater degree of flexibility and control. It's possible, because of the types of data inserted, that the sampling method for gathering the statistics, used because it's faster, may not gather the appropriate data. In these cases, you can force a FULLSCAN so that all the data is used to update the statistics just like what happens when the statistics are initially created. This can be a very costly operation, so it's best to be very selective about which indexes receive this treatment and when it is run.

**Note** In general, you should always use the default settings for automatic statistics. Consider modifying these settings only after identifying that the default settings appear to detract from performance.

## Statistics Maintenance Status

You can verify the current settings for the autostats feature using the following:

- sys.databases
- DATABASEPROPERTYEX
- sp\_autostats

## Status of Auto Create Statistics

You can verify the current setting for auto create statistics by running a query against the sys.databases system table:

```
SELECT is_auto_create_stats_on
FROM sys.databases
WHERE [name] = 'AdventureWorks2008R2' ;
```

A return value of 1 means enabled, and a value of 0 means disabled.

You can also verify the status of this feature using the sp\_autostats system stored procedure, as shown in the following code. Supplying any table name to the stored procedure will provide the configuration value of auto create statistics for the current database under the Output section of the global statistics settings:

```
USE AdventureWorks2008R2 ;
EXEC sys.sp_autostats
    'HumanResources.Department' ;
```

Figure 7-24 shows an excerpt of the preceding sp\_autostats statement's output.

	Index Name	AUTOSTATS	Last Updated
1	[PK_Department_DepartmentID]	ON	2010-08-02 17:26:50.420
2	[AK_Department_Name]	ON	2010-08-02 17:26:55.783

**Figure 7-24.** sp\_autostats output

A return value of ON means enabled, and a value of OFF means disabled. This stored procedure is more useful when verifying the status of auto update statistics, as explained later in this chapter.

## Status of Auto Update Statistics

You can verify the current setting for auto update statistics, and auto update statistics asynchronously, in a similar manner to auto create statistics. Here's how to do it using the function DATABASEPROPERTYEX:

```
SELECT DATABASEPROPERTYEX('AdventureWorks2008R2', 'IsAutoUpdateStatistics') ;
```

Here's how to do it using spautostats:

```
USE AdventureWorks2008R2 ;
EXEC sp_autostats
    'Sales.SalesOrderDetail' ;
```

## Analyzing the Effectiveness of Statistics for a Query

For performance reasons, it is extremely important to maintain proper statistics on your database objects. Issues with statistics can be fairly common. You need to keep your eyes open to the possibility of problems with statistics while analyzing the performance of a query. If an issue with statistics does arise, then it can really take you for a ride. In fact, checking that the statistics are up-to-date at the beginning of a query-tuning session eliminates an easily fixed problem. In this section, you'll see what you can do should you find statistics to be missing or out-of-date.

While analyzing an execution plan for a query, look for the following points to ensure a cost-effective processing strategy:

- Indexes are available on the columns referred to in the filter and join criteria.
- In the case of a missing index, statistics should be available on the columns with no index. It is preferable to have the index itself.
- Since outdated statistics are of no use and can even be misleading, it is important that the estimates used by the optimizer from the statistics are up-to-date.

You analyzed the use of a proper index in [Chapter 4](#). In this section, you will analyze the effectiveness of statistics for a query.

## Resolving a Missing Statistics Issue

To see how to identify and resolve a missing statistics issue, consider the following example. To more directly control the data, I'll use a test table instead of one of the AdventureWorks2008R2 tables. First, disable both auto create statistics and auto update statistics using the ALTER DATABASE command:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET AUTO_CREATE_STATISTICS OFF ;
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET AUTO_UPDATE_STATISTICS OFF ;
```

Create a test table with a large number of rows and a nonclustered index (create\_t6.sql in the download):

```
IF EXISTS (
    SELECT *
    FROM sys.objects
    WHERE object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'dbo.Test1')
)
DROP TABLE [dbo].[Test1] ;
GO
```

```

CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT, C2 INT, C3 CHAR(50)) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1, C2, C3)
VALUES (51, 1, 'C3') ,
(52, 1, 'C3') ;

CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX iFirstIndex ON dbo.Test1 (C1, C2) ;

SELECT TOP 10000
IDENTITY( INT,1,1 ) AS n
INTO #Nums
FROM Master.dbo.SysColumns scl,
Master.dbo.SysColumns sC2 ;

INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1, C2, C3)
SELECT n % 50,
n,
'C3'
FROM #Nums ;
DROP TABLE #Nums ;
Test1Test1Test1Test1Test1Test1Test1

```

Since the index is created on (c1, C2), the statistics on the index contain a histogram for the first column, c1, and density values for the prefixed column combinations (c1 and c1 + C2). There are no histograms or density values for column C2.

To understand how to identify missing statistics on a column with no index, execute the following SELECT statement. Since the auto create statistics feature is off, the optimizer won't be able to find the data distribution for the column C2 used in the WHERE clause. You can see this in the execution plan:

```

SELECT *
FROM dbo.Test1
WHERE C2 = 1 ;

```

If you right-click the execution plan, you can take a look at the XML data behind it. As shown in Figure 7-25, the XML execution plan indicates missing statistics for a particular execution step under its Warnings element. This shows that the statistics on column Test1.C2 are missing.

The information on missing statistics is also provided by the graphical execution plan, as shown in Figure 7-26.

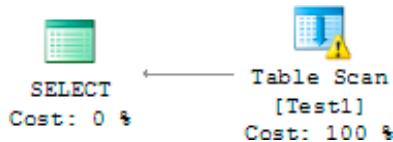
The graphical execution plan contains a node with the yellow exclamation point. This indicates some problem with the data-retrieval mechanism (usually missing statistics). You can obtain a detailed description of the warning by right-clicking the Table Scan operator and then selecting Properties from the context menu. There's a warning section in the properties page that you can drill into, as shown in Figure 7-27.

```

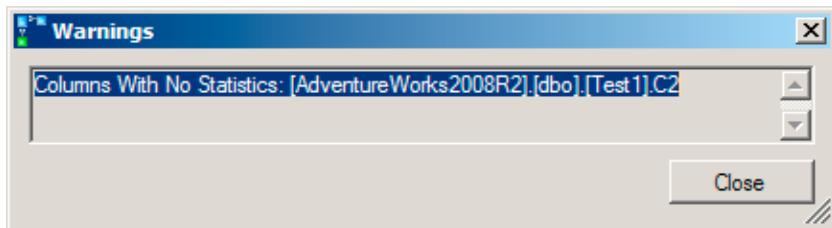
<Warnings>
<ColumnsWithNoStatistics>
<ColumnReference Database="[AdventureWorks2008R2]" Schema="[dbo]" Table="[Test1]" Column="C2" />
</ColumnsWithNoStatistics>
</Warnings>

```

**Figure 7-25.** Missing statistics indication in an XML plan



**Figure 7-26.** Missing statistics indication in a graphical plan



**Figure 7-27.** Tool tip of a graphical plan's node

Figure 7-27 shows that the statistics for the column are missing. This may prevent the optimizer from selecting the best processing strategy. The current cost of this query as shown by SET STATISTICS IO and SET STATISTICS TIME is as follows:

```
Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 84
SQL Server Execution Times: CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 12 ms.
```

To resolve this missing statistics issue, you can create the statistics on column Test1.C2 by using the CREATE STATISTICS statement:

```
CREATE STATISTICS Stats1 ON Test1(C2) ;
```

Before rerunning the procedure, be sure to clean out the procedure cache because this query will benefit from simple parameterization:

```
DBCC FREEPROCCACHE();
```

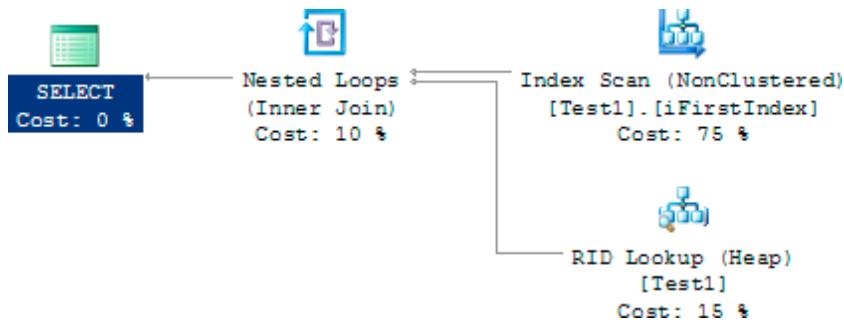
Figure 7-28 shows the resultant execution plan with statistics created on column C2.

```
Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 34
SQL Server Execution Times: CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 7 ms.
```

The query optimizer uses statistics on a noninitial column in a composite index to determine whether scanning the leaf level of the composite index to obtain the bookmarks will be a more efficient processing strategy than scanning the whole table. In this case, creating statistics on column C2 allows the optimizer to determine that instead of scanning the base table, it will be less costly to scan the composite index on (C1, C2) and bookmark lookup to the base table for the few matching rows. Consequently, the number of logical reads has decreased from 84 to 34, but the elapsed time has decreased only slightly.

## Resolving an Outdated Statistics Issue

Sometimes outdated or incorrect statistics can be more damaging than missing statistics. Based on old statistics or a partial scan of changed data, the optimizer may decide upon a particular indexing strategy, which may be



**Figure 7-28.** Execution plan with statistics in place

	Name	Updated	Rows	Rows Sampled	Steps	Density	Average key length	String Index	Filter Expression	Unfiltered Rows
1	iFirstIndex	Nov 29 2011 8:52PM	2	2	2	0	8	NO	NULL	2
<hr/>										
1	All density	Average Length	Columns							
1	0.5	4	C1							
2	0.5	8	C1, C2							
<hr/>										
1	RANGE_HI_KEY	RANGE_ROWS	EQ_ROWS	DISTINCT_RANGE_ROWS	AVG_RANGE_ROWS					
1	51	0	1	0	1					
2	52	0	1	0	1					

**Figure 7-29.** Statistics on index FirstIndex

highly inappropriate for the current data distribution. Unfortunately, the execution plans don't show the same glaring warnings for outdated or incorrect statistics as they do for missing statistics.

To identify outdated statistics, you should examine how close the optimizer's estimation of the number of rows affected is to the actual number of rows affected.

The following example shows you how to identify and resolve an outdated statistics issue. Figure 7-29 shows the statistics on the nonclustered index key on column C1 provided by DBCC SHOW\_STATISTICS.

```
DBCC SHOW_STATISTICS(Test1, iFirstIndex) ;Test1
```

These results say that the density value for column C1 is 0.5. Now consider the following SELECT statement:

```
SELECT *
FROM dbo.Test1
WHERE C1 = 51 ;Test1
```

Since the total number of rows in the table is currently 10,002, the number of matching rows for the filter criteria C1 = 51 can be estimated to be 5,001 ( $= 0.5 \times 10,002$ ). This estimated number of rows (5,001) is way off the actual number of matching rows for this column value. The table actually contains only one row for C1 = 51.

You can get the information on both the estimated and actual number of rows from the actual execution plan. An estimated plan refers to and uses the statistics only, not the actual data. This means it can be wildly different from the real data, as you're seeing now. The actual execution plan, on the other hand, has both the estimated and actual number of rows available.

Executing the query results in this execution plan (Figure 7-30) and performance.

```
Table 'Test1'. Scan count logical reads 84
SQL Server Execution Times:CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 2 ms.
```

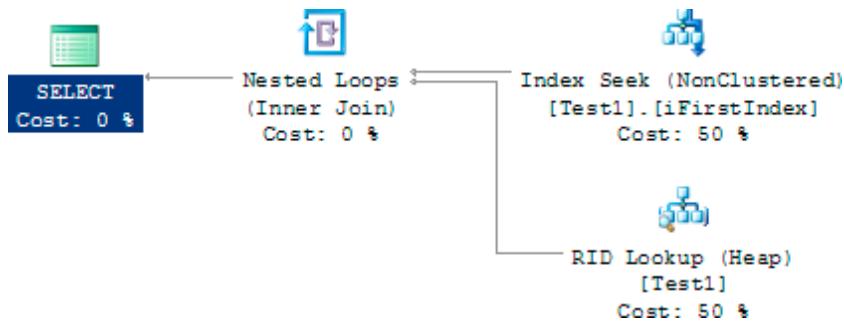
To see the estimated and actual rows, you can view the tool tip by hovering over the Table Scan operator (Figure 7-31).

**Figure 7-30.** Execution plan with outdated statistics

Table Scan	
Scan rows from a table.	
<b>Physical Operation</b>	Table Scan
<b>Logical Operation</b>	Table Scan
<b>Actual Execution Mode</b>	Row
<b>Estimated Execution Mode</b>	Row
<b>Actual Number of Rows</b>	1
<b>Actual Number of Batches</b>	0
<b>Estimated I/O Cost</b>	0.0646065
<b>Estimated Operator Cost</b>	0.0757657 (100%)
<b>Estimated CPU Cost</b>	0.0111592
<b>Estimated Subtree Cost</b>	0.0757657
<b>Number of Executions</b>	1
<b>Estimated Number of Executions</b>	1
<b>Estimated Number of Rows</b>	5001
<b>Estimated Row Size</b>	65 B
<b>Actual Rebinds</b>	0
<b>Actual Rewinds</b>	0
<b>Ordered</b>	False
<b>Node ID</b>	0
<b>Predicate</b>	
[AdventureWorks2008R2].[dbo].[Test1].[C1]=(51)	
<b>Object</b>	
[AdventureWorks2008R2].[dbo].[Test1]	
<b>Output List</b>	
[AdventureWorks2008R2].[dbo].[Test1].C1, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[dbo].[Test1].C2, [AdventureWorks2008R2].[dbo].[Test1].C3	

**Figure 7-31.** Tool tip showing row count discrepancy

From the estimated rows value vs. the actual rows value, it's clear that the optimizer made an incorrect estimation based on out-of-date statistics. If the difference between the estimated rows and actual rows is more than a factor of 10, then it's quite possible that the processing strategy chosen may not be very cost-effective for the current data distribution. An inaccurate estimation may misguide the optimizer in deciding the processing strategy. Statistics can be off for a number of reasons. Table variables and multi-statement user-defined functions



**Figure 7-32.** Actual and estimated number of rows with up-to-date statistics

don't have statistics at all, so all estimates for these objects assume a single row, without regard to how many rows are actually involved with the objects.

To help the optimizer make an accurate estimation, you should update the statistics on the nonclustered index key on column C1 (alternatively, of course, you can just leave the auto update statistics feature on):

```
UPDATE STATISTICS Test1 iFirstIndex ;
```

If you run the query again, you'll get the following statistics, and the resultant output is as shown in Figure 7-32.

```
Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 4
SQL Server Execution Times:
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.
```

The optimizer accurately estimated the number of rows using updated statistics and consequently was able to come up with a plan. Since the estimated number of rows is 1, it makes sense to retrieve the row through the nonclustered index on C1 instead of scanning the base table.

Updated, accurate statistics on the index key column help the optimizer come to a better decision on the processing strategy and thereby reduce the number of logical reads from 84 to 4 and reduce the execution time from 16 ms to -0 ms (there is a -4 ms lag time).

Before continuing, turn the statistics back on for the database:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET AUTO_CREATE_STATISTICS ON;
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET AUTO_UPDATE_STATISTICS ON;
```

## Recommendations

Throughout this chapter, I covered various recommendations for statistics. For easy reference, I've consolidated and expanded upon these recommendations in the sections that follow.

### Backward Compatibility of Statistics

Statistical information in SQL Server 2012 is different from that in previous versions of SQL Server. However, SQL Server 2012 transfers the statistics during upgrade and, by default, automatically updates these statistics over time. For the best performance, however, manually update the statistics immediately after an upgrade.

## Auto Create Statistics

This feature should usually be left on. With the default setting, during the creation of an execution plan, SQL Server determines whether statistics on a nonindexed column will be useful. If this is deemed beneficial, SQL Server creates statistics on the nonindexed column. However, if you plan to create statistics on nonindexed columns manually, then you have to identify exactly for which nonindexed columns statistics will be beneficial.

## Auto Update Statistics

This feature should usually be left on, allowing SQL Server to decide on the appropriate execution plan as the data distribution changes over time. Usually the performance benefit provided by this feature outweighs the cost overhead. You will seldom need to interfere with the automatic maintenance of statistics, and such requirements are usually identified while troubleshooting or analyzing performance. To ensure that you aren't facing surprises from the automatic statistics features, it's important to analyze the effectiveness of statistics while diagnosing SQL Server issues.

Unfortunately, if you come across an issue with the auto update statistics feature and have to turn it off, make sure to create a SQL Server job to update the statistics and schedule it to run at regular intervals. For performance reasons, ensure that the SQL job is scheduled to run during off-peak hours.

You can create a SQL Server job to update the statistics from SQL Server Management Studio by following these simple steps:

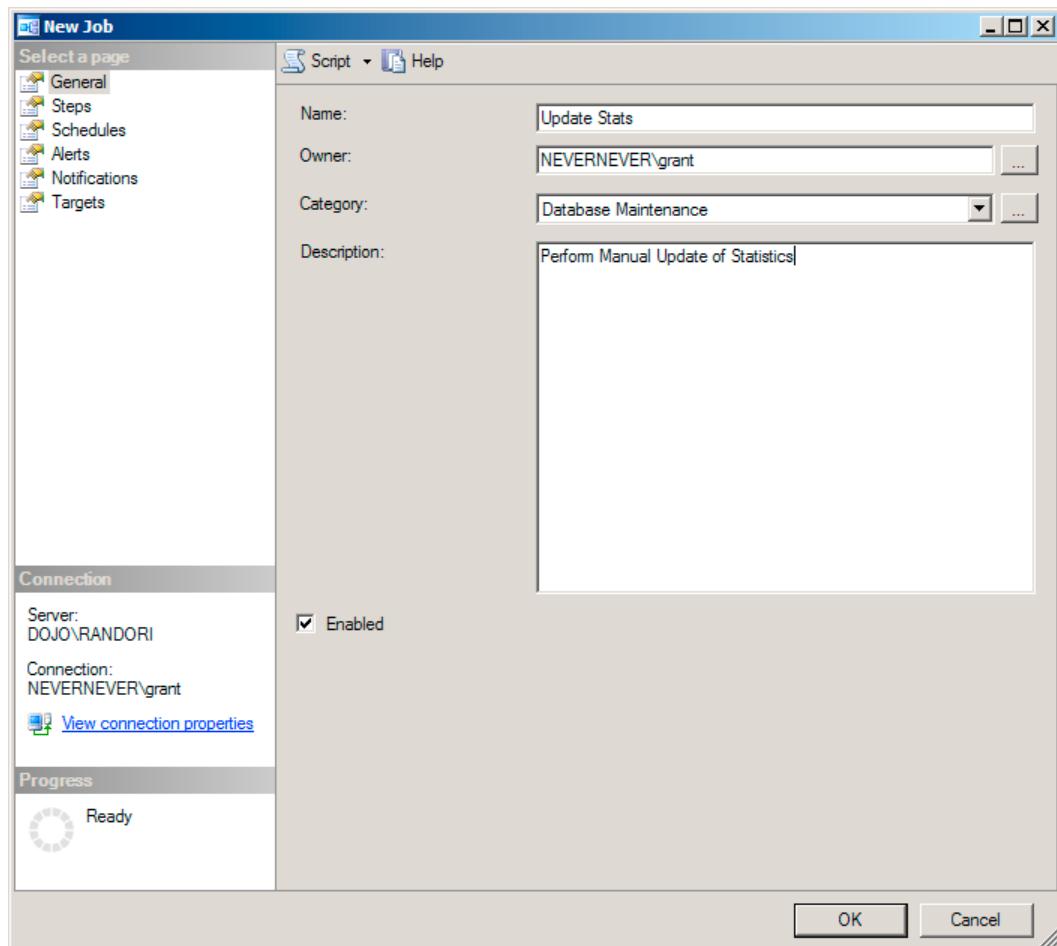
1. Select ServerName ➤ SQL Server Agent ➤ Jobs, right-click, and select New Job.
2. On the General page of the New Job dialog box, enter the job name and other details, as shown in Figure 7-33.
3. Choose the Steps page, click New, and enter the SQL command for the user database, as shown in Figure 7-34. I used `sp_updatestats` here instead of `UPDATE STATISTICS` because it's a shortcut. I could have run `UPDATE STATISTICS` against each table in the database a different way, especially if I was interested in taking advantage of all the control offered by `UPDATE STATISTICS`, such as using the `FULLSCAN` option to ensure a complete read of all the rows in a table, which, if you can afford the additional load, will result in more accurate statistics:

```
EXEC sys.sp_MSforeachtable
    'UPDATE STATISTICS ? ALL' ;
```

4. Return to the New Job dialog box by clicking the OK button.
5. On the Schedules page of the New Job dialog box, click New Schedule, and enter an appropriate schedule to run the SQL Server job. Return to the New Job dialog box by clicking the OK button.
6. Once you've entered all the information, click OK in the New Job dialog box to create the SQL Server job.
7. Ensure that SQL Server Agent is running so that the SQL Server job is run automatically at the set schedule.

## Automatic Update Statistics Asynchronously

Letting statistics update at the beginning of a query, which is the default behavior, will be just fine in most cases. In the very rare circumstances where the statistics update or the execution plan recompiles resulting from that update are very expensive (more expensive than the cost of out-of-date statistics), then you can turn on the

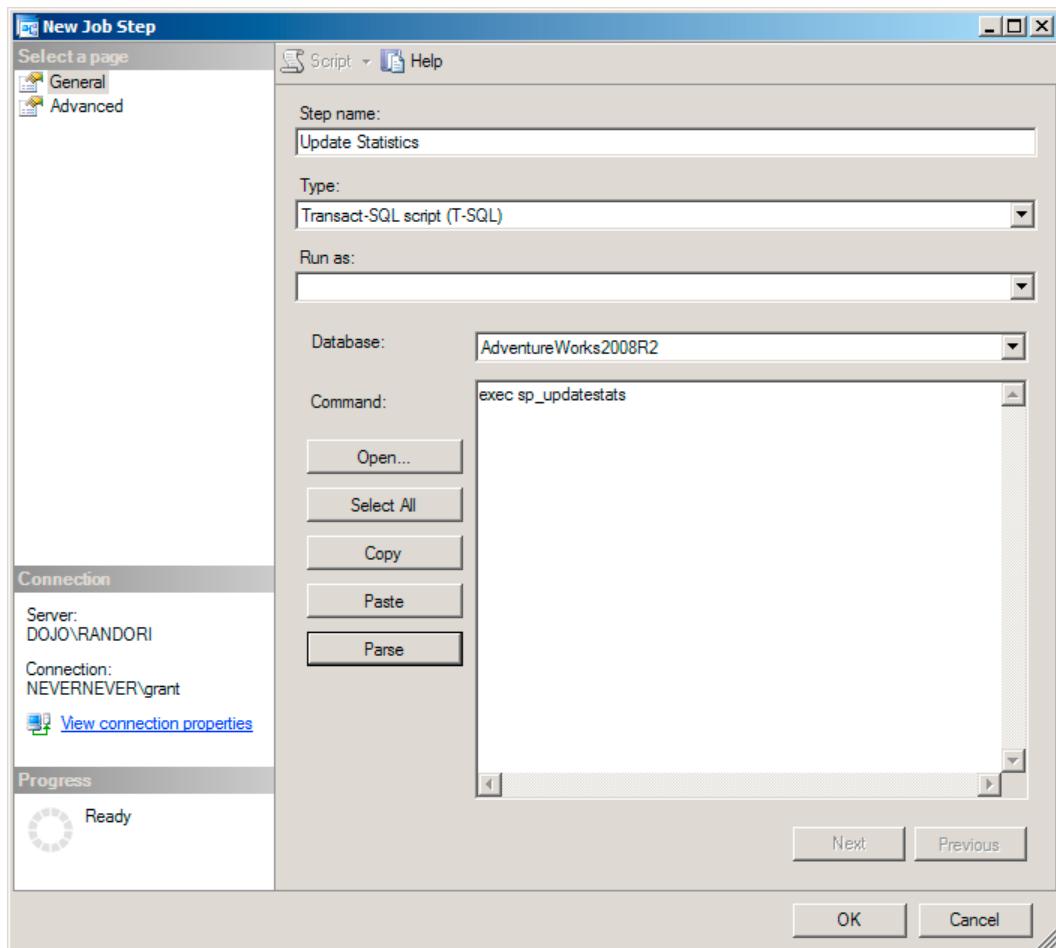


**Figure 7-33.** Entering new job information

asynchronous update of statistics. Just understand that it may mean that procedures that would benefit from more up-to-date statistics will suffer until the next time they are run. Don't forget—you do need automatic update of statistics enabled in order to enable the asynchronous updates.

## Amount of Sampling to Collect Statistics

It is generally recommended that you use the default sampling rate. This rate is decided by an efficient algorithm based on the data size and number of modifications. Although the default sampling rate turns out to be best in most cases, if for a particular query you find that the statistics are not very accurate, then you can manually update them with FULLSCAN.



**Figure 7-34.** Entering the SQL command for the user database

If this is required repeatedly, then you can add a SQL Server job to take care of it. For performance reasons, ensure that the SQL job is scheduled to run during off-peak hours. To identify cases in which the default sampling rate doesn't turn out to be the best, analyze the statistics effectiveness for costly queries while troubleshooting the database performance. Remember that FULLSCAN is expensive, so you should run it only on those tables or indexes that you've determined will really benefit from it.

## Summary

As discussed in this chapter, SQL Server's cost-based optimizer requires accurate statistics on columns used in filter and join criteria to determine an efficient processing strategy. Statistics on an index key are always created during the creation of the index, and, by default, SQL Server also keeps the statistics on indexed and nonindexed

columns updated as the data changes. This enables it to determine the best processing strategies applicable to the current data distribution.

Even though you can disable both the auto create statistics and auto update statistics features, it is recommended that you leave these features *on*, since their benefit to the optimizer is almost always more than their overhead cost. For a costly query, analyze the statistics to ensure that the automatic statistics maintenance lives up to its promise. The best news is that you can rest easy with a little vigilance, since automatic statistics do their job well most of the time. If manual statistics maintenance procedures are used, then you can use SQL Server jobs to automate these procedures.

Even with proper indexes and statistics in place, a heavily fragmented database will incur an increased data-retrieval cost. In the next chapter, you will see how fragmentation in an index can affect query performance, and you'll learn how to analyze and resolve fragmentation.

## CHAPTER 8



# Fragmentation Analysis

As explained in [Chapter 4](#), index column values are stored in the leaf pages of an index's B-tree structure. When you create an index (clustered or nonclustered) on a table, the cost of data retrieval is reduced by properly ordering the leaf pages of the index and the rows within the leaf pages. In an OLTP database, data changes continually, causing fragmentation of the indexes. As a result, the number of reads required to return the same number of rows increases over time.

In this chapter, I cover the following topics:

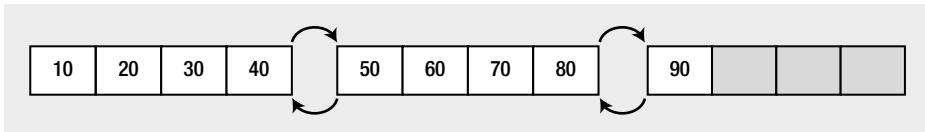
- The causes of index fragmentation, including an analysis of page splits caused by INSERT and UPDATE statements
- The overhead costs associated with fragmentation
- How to analyze the amount of fragmentation
- Techniques used to resolve fragmentation
- The significance of the fill factor in helping to control fragmentation
- How to automate the fragmentation analysis process

## Causes of Fragmentation

Fragmentation occurs when data is modified in a table. When you insert or update data in a table (via INSERT or UPDATE), the table's corresponding clustered indexes and the affected nonclustered indexes are modified. This can cause an index leaf page split if the modification to an index can't be accommodated in the same page. A new leaf page will then be added that contains part of the original page and maintains the logical order of the rows in the index key. Although the new leaf page maintains the *logical* order of the data rows in the original page, this new page usually won't be *physically* adjacent to the original page on the disk. Or, put a slightly different way, the logical key order of the index doesn't match the physical order within the file.

For example, suppose an index has nine key values (or index rows) and the average size of the index rows allows a maximum of four index rows in a leaf page. As explained in [Chapter 4](#), the 8KB leaf pages are connected to the previous and next leaf pages to maintain the logical order of the index. Figure 8-1 illustrates the layout of the leaf pages for the index.

Since the index key values in the leaf pages are always sorted, a new index row with a key value of 25 has to occupy a place between the existing key values 20 and 30. Because the leaf page containing these existing index key values is full with the four index rows, the new index row will cause the corresponding leaf page to split.



**Figure 8-1.** Leaf pages layout

A new leaf page will be assigned to the index, and part of the first leaf page will be moved to this new leaf page so that the new index key can be inserted in the correct logical order. The links between the index pages will also be updated so that the pages are logically connected in the order of the index. As shown in Figure 8-2, the new leaf page, even though linked to the other pages in the correct logical order, can be physically out of order.

The pages are grouped together in bigger units called *extents*, which can contain eight pages. SQL Server uses an extent as a physical unit of allocation on the disk. Ideally, the physical order of the extents containing the leaf pages of an index should be the same as the logical order of the index. This reduces the number of switches required between extents when retrieving a range of index rows. However, page splits can physically disorder the pages within the extents, and they can also physically disorder the extents themselves. For example, suppose the first two leaf pages of the index are in extent 1, and say the third leaf page is in extent 2. If extent 2 contains free space, then the new leaf page allocated to the index because of the page split will be in extent 2, as shown in Figure 8-3.

With the leaf pages distributed between two extents, ideally you expect to read a range of index rows with a maximum of one switch between the two extents. However, the disorganization of pages between the extents can cause more than one extent switch while retrieving a range of index rows. For example, to retrieve a range of index rows between 25 and 90, you will need three extent switches between the two extents, as follows:

- First extent switch to retrieve the key value 30 after the key value 25
- Second extent switch to retrieve the key value 50 after the key value 40
- Third extent switch to retrieve the key value 90 after the key value 80

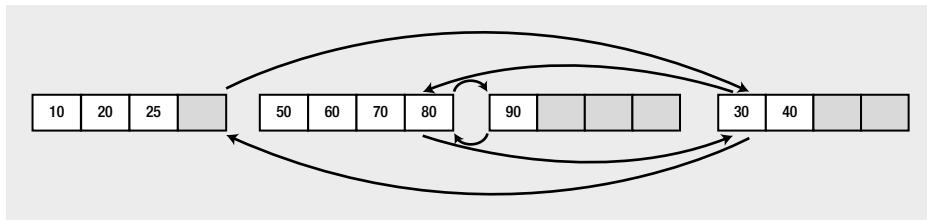
This type of fragmentation is called *external fragmentation*. External fragmentation is always undesirable.

Fragmentation can also happen within an index page. If an INSERT or UPDATE operation creates a page split, then free space will be left behind in the original leaf page. Free space can also be caused by a DELETE operation. The net effect is to reduce the number of rows included in a leaf page. For example, in Figure 8-3, the page split caused by the INSERT operation has created an empty space within the first leaf page. This is known as *internal fragmentation*.

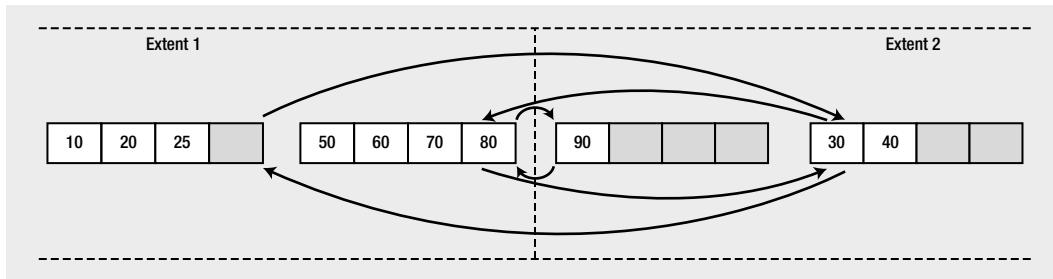
For a highly transactional database, it is desirable to deliberately leave some free space within your leaf pages so that you can add new rows, or change the size of existing rows, without causing a page split. In Figure 8-3, the free space within the first leaf page allows an index key value of 26 to be added to the leaf page without causing a page split.

**Note** Note that this index fragmentation is different from disk fragmentation. The index fragmentation cannot be fixed simply by running the disk defragmentation tool, because the order of pages within a SQL Server file is understood only by SQL Server, not by the operating system.

Heap pages can become fragmented in exactly the same way. Unfortunately, because of how heaps are stored and how any nonclustered indexes use the physical data location for retrieving data from the heap,



**Figure 8-2.** Out-of-order leaf pages



**Figure 8-3.** Out-of-order leaf pages distributed across extents

defragmenting heaps is quite problematic. You can use the REBUILD command of ALTER TABLE to perform a heap rebuild, but understand that you will force a rebuild of any nonclustered indexes associated with that table.

SQL Server 2012 exposes the leaf pages and other data through a dynamic management view called sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats. It stores both the index size and the fragmentation. I'll cover it in more detail in the next section. The DMV is much easier to work with than the old DBCC SHOWCONTIG.

Let's now take a look at the mechanics of fragmentation.

## Page Split by an UPDATE Statement

To show what happens when a page split is caused by an UPDATE statement, I'll use a constructed. This small test table will have a clustered index, which orders the rows within one leaf (or data) page as follows (you'll find this code in --fragment in the code download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('Test1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
 DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1
 (C1 INT,
 C2 CHAR(999),
 C3 VARCHAR(10)
 )
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
```

```

VALUES  (100, 'C2', ''),
        (200, 'C2', ''),
        (300, 'C2', ''),
        (400, 'C2', ''),
        (500, 'C2', ''),
        (600, 'C2', ''),
        (700, 'C2', ''),
        (800, 'C2', '') ;

CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX iClust
ON dbo.Test1(C1) ;

```

The average size of a row in the clustered index leaf page (excluding internal overhead) is not just the sum of the average size of the clustered index columns; it's the sum of the average size of all the columns in the table, since the leaf page of the clustered index and the data page of the table are the same. Therefore, the average size of a row in the clustered index based on the foregoing sample data is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
&= (\text{Average size of } [C1]) + (\text{Average size of } [C2]) + (\text{Average size of } [C3]) \text{ bytes} = (\text{Size of INT}) \\
&+ (\text{Size of CHAR(999)}) + (\text{Average size of data in } [C3]) \text{ bytes} \\
&= 4 + 999 + 0 = 1,003 \text{ bytes}
\end{aligned}$$

The maximum size of a row in SQL Server is 8,060 bytes. Therefore, if the internal overhead is not very high, all eight rows can be accommodated in a single 8KB page.

To determine the number of leaf pages assigned to the iClust clustered index, execute the SELECT statement against sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats:

```

SELECT ddips.avg_fragmentation_in_percent,
       ddips.fragment_count,
       ddips.page_count,
       ddips.avg_page_space_used_in_percent,
       ddips.record_count,
       ddips.avg_record_size_in_bytes
FROM   sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats(DB_ID('AdventureWorks2008R2'),
                                      OBJECT_ID(N'dbo.Test1'), NULL,
                                      NULL, 'Sampled') AS ddips ;

```

You can see the results of this query in Figure 8-4.

From the page\_count column in this output, you can see that the number of pages assigned to the clustered index is 1. You can also see the average space used, 100, in the avg\_page\_space\_used\_in\_percent column. From this you can infer that the page has no free space left to expand the content of C3, which is of type VARCHAR(10) and is currently empty.

**Note** I'll analyze more of the information provided by sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats in the "Analyzing the Amount of Fragmentation" section later in this chapter.

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	0	1	1	100	8	1010

**Figure 8-4.** Physical layout of index i1

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	50	2	2	50.0741289844329	8	1011.75

Figure 8-5. i1 index after a data update

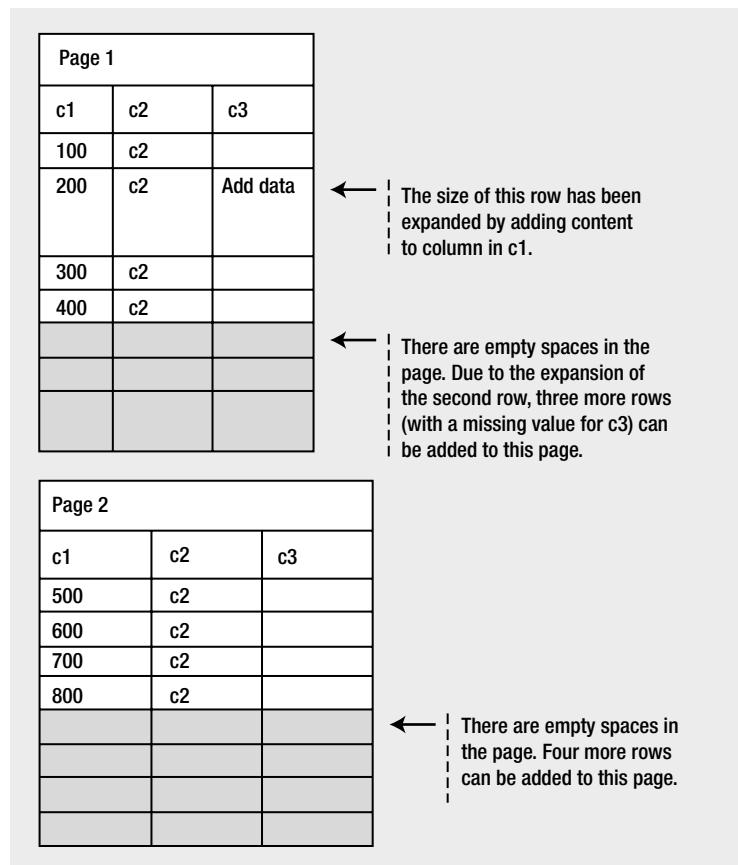


Figure 8-6. Page split caused by an UPDATE statement

Therefore, if you attempt to expand the content of column C3 for one of the rows as follows, it should cause a page split:

```
UPDATE dbo.Test1
SET    C3 = 'Add data'
WHERE   C1 = 200 ;
```

Selecting the data from sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats results in the information in Figure 8-5.

From the output in Figure 8-5, you can see that SQL Server has added a new page to the index. On a page split, SQL Server generally moves half the total number of rows in the original page to the new page. Therefore, the rows in the two pages are distributed as shown in Figure 8-6.

	PageFID	PagePID	IAMFID	IAMPID	ObjectID	IndexID	PartitionNumber	PartitionID	iam_chain_type	PageType
1	1	23126	NULL	NULL	839674039	1	1	72057594059620352	In-row data	10
2	1	23125	1	23126	839674039	1	1	72057594059620352	In-row data	1
3	1	23123	1	23126	839674039	1	1	72057594059620352	In-row data	2
4	1	23124	1	23126	839674039	1	1	72057594059620352	In-row data	1

**Figure 8-7.** Output from DBCC IND showing two pages

```
Record Type = PRIMARY_RECORD      Record Attributes = NULL_BITMAP      Record Size = 1010
Memory Dump @0x00000000663EB80C
0000000000000000:  1000ef03 84030000 43342020 20202020 20202020 ..i....C4
0000000000000014:  20202020 20202020 20202020 20202020 20202020
```

**Figure 8-8.** Pages after the addition of more rows

From the preceding tables, you can see that the page split caused by the UPDATE statement results in an internal fragmentation of data in the leaf pages. If the new leaf page can't be written physically next to the original leaf page, there will be external fragmentation as well. For a large table with a high amount of fragmentation, a larger number of leaf pages will be required to hold all the index rows.

Another way to look at the distribution of pages is to use some less thoroughly documented DBCC commands. First up, we can look at the pages in the table using DBCC IND:

```
DBCC IND(AdventureWorks2008R2,'dbo.Test1',-1)
```

This command lists the pages that make up a table. You get an output like Figure 8-7.

If you focus on the PageType, you can see that there are now two pages of PageType = 1, which is a data page. There are other columns in the output that also show how the pages are linked together.

To show the resultant distribution of rows shown in the previous pages, you can add a trailing row to each page (--Test1\_insert in the download):

```
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
VALUES (410, 'C4', ''),
       (900, 'C4', '') ;
```

These new rows are accommodated in the existing two leaf pages without causing a page split. You can confirm this by querying the other mechanism for looking at page information, DBCC PAGE. To call this, you'll need to get the PagePID from the output of DBCC IND. This will enable you to pull back a full dump of everything on a page:

```
DBCC TRACEON(3604);
DBCC PAGE('AdventureWorks2008R2',1,23125,3);
```

The output from this is very involved to interpret, but if you scroll down to the bottom, you can see the output as shown in Figure 8-8.

On the right side of the screen, you can see the output from the memory dump, a value, "C4". That was added by the foregoing data. Both rows were added to one page in my tests. Getting into a full explanation of all possible permutations of these two DBCC calls is very far beyond the scope of this chapter. Know that you can determine which page data is stored on for any given table.

## Page Split by an INSERT Statement

To understand how a page split can be caused by an `INSERT` statement, create the same test table (`--fragment`) as you did previously, with the eight initial rows and the clustered index. Since the single index leaf page is completely filled, any attempt to add an intermediate row as follows should cause a page split in the leaf page:

```
INSERT INTO Test1
VALUES (110, 'C2', '') ;
```

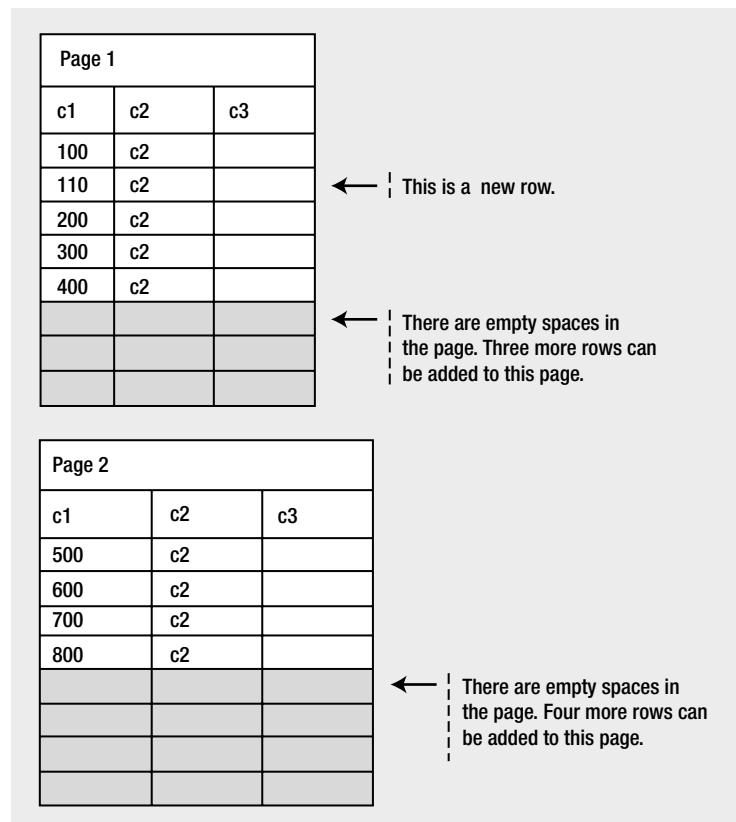
You can verify this by examining the output of `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` (Figure 8-9).

As explained previously, half the rows from the original leaf page are moved to the new page. Once space is cleared in the original leaf page, the new row is added in the appropriate order to the original leaf page.

Be aware that a row is associated with only one page; it cannot span multiple pages. Figure 8-10 shows the resultant distribution of rows in the two pages.

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	50	2	2	56.2391895231035	9	1010

**Figure 8-9.** Pages after insert



**Figure 8-10.** Page split caused by an `INSERT` statement

From the previous index pages, you can see that the page split caused by the `INSERT` statement spreads the rows sparsely across the leaf pages, causing internal fragmentation. It often causes external fragmentation also, since the new leaf page may not be physically adjacent to the original page. For a large table with a high amount of fragmentation, the page splits caused by the `INSERT` statement will require a larger number of leaf pages to accommodate all the index rows.

To demonstrate the row distribution shown in the index pages, you can run `Test1_insert.sql` again, adding more rows to the pages:

```
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
VALUES (410, 'C4', ''),
(900, 'C4', '') ;
```

The result is the same as for the previous example: these new rows can be accommodated in the two existing leaf pages without causing any page split. You can validate that by calling `DBCC IND` and `DBCC PAGE`. Note that in the first page, new rows are added in between the other rows in the page. This won't cause a page split, since free space is available in the page.

What about when you have to add rows to the trailing end of an index? In this case, even if a new page is required, it won't split any existing page. For example, adding a new row with `C1` equal to 1,300 will require a new page, but it won't cause a page split since the row isn't added in an intermediate position. Therefore, if new rows are added in the order of the clustered index, then the index rows will be always added at the trailing end of the index, preventing the page splits otherwise caused by the `INSERT` statements.

Fragmentation caused by page splits hurts data-retrieval performance, as you will see next.

## Fragmentation Overhead

Both internal and external fragmentations adversely affect data-retrieval performance. External fragmentation causes a noncontiguous sequence of index pages on the disk, with new leaf pages far from the original leaf pages, and their physical ordering different from their logical ordering. Consequently, a range scan on an index will need more switches between the corresponding extents than ideally required, as explained earlier in the chapter. Also, a range scan on an index will be unable to benefit from read-ahead operations performed on the disk. If the pages are arranged contiguously, then a read-ahead operation can read pages in advance without much head movement.

For better performance, it is preferable to use sequential I/O, since this can read a whole extent (eight 8KB pages together) in a single disk I/O operation. By contrast, a noncontiguous layout of pages requires nonsequential or random I/O operations to retrieve the index pages from the disk, and a random I/O operation can read only 8KB of data in a single disk operation (this may be acceptable, however, if you are retrieving only one row). The increasing speed of hard drives, especially SSDs, has reduced the impact of this issue, but it's still there.

In the case of internal fragmentation, rows are distributed sparsely across a large number of pages, increasing the number of disk I/O operations required to read the index pages into memory and increasing the number of logical reads required to retrieve multiple index rows from memory. As mentioned earlier, even though it increases the cost of data retrieval, a little internal fragmentation can be beneficial, because it allows you to perform `INSERT` and `UPDATE` queries without causing page splits. For queries that don't have to traverse a series of pages to retrieve the data, fragmentation can have minimal impact.

To understand how fragmentation affects the cost of a query, create a test table with a clustered index, and insert a highly fragmented data set in the table. Since an `INSERT` operation in between an ordered data set can cause a page split, you can easily create the fragmented data set by adding rows in the following order (`--createfragmented` in the code download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('Test1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
```

```

CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1
    (C1 INT,
     C2 INT,
     C3 INT,
     c4 CHAR(2000)
    ) ;

CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX i1 ON dbo.Test1 (C1) ;

WITH Nums
    AS (SELECT 1 AS n
        UNION ALL
        SELECT n + 1
        FROM Nums
        WHERE n < 21
       )
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
    (C1, C2, C3, c4)
    SELECT n,
           n,
           n,
           'a'
      FROM Nums ;

WITH Nums
    AS (SELECT 1 AS n
        UNION ALL
        SELECT n + 1
        FROM Nums
        WHERE n < 21
       )
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
    (C1, C2, C3, c4)
    SELECT 41 - n,
           n,
           n,
           'a'
      FROM Nums;

```

To determine the number of logical reads required to retrieve a small result set and a large result set from this fragmented table, execute the two SELECT statements with STATISTICS IO and TIME set to ON (–fragmentstats in the download):

```

--Reads 6 rows
SELECT *
FROM   dbo.Test1
WHERE  C1 BETWEEN 21 AND 25 ;

--Reads all rows
SELECT *
FROM   dbo.Test1
WHERE  C1 BETWEEN 1 AND 40 ;

```

The number of logical reads performed by the individual queries is, respectively, as follows:

```
Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 6
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 52 ms.
Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 15
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 80 ms.
```

To evaluate how the fragmented data set affects the number of logical reads, rearrange the index leaf pages physically by rebuilding the clustered index:

```
ALTER INDEX i1 ON dbo.Test1 REBUILD ;
```

With the index leaf pages rearranged in the proper order, rerun --fragmentstats. The number of logical reads required by the preceding two SELECT statements reduces to 5 and 13, respectively:

```
Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 5
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 47 ms.
Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 13
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 72 ms.
```

Notice, though, that the execution time wasn't radically reduced, because dropping a single page from the read just isn't likely to increase speed much. The cost overhead because of fragmentation usually increases in line with the number of rows retrieved, because this involves reading a greater number of out-of-order pages. For *point queries* (queries retrieving only one row), fragmentation doesn't usually matter, since the row is retrieved from one leaf page only, but this isn't always the case. Because of the internal structure of the index, fragmentation may increase the cost of even a point query. For instance, the following SELECT statement (--singlestat in the download) performs two logical reads with the leaf pages rearranged properly, but it requires three logical reads on the fragmented data set. To see this in action, run --createfragmented again. Now run this query with STATISTICS IO and TIME enabled:

```
SELECT *
FROM   dbo.Test1
WHERE  C1 = 10 ;
```

The resulting message in the query window for this script is as follows:

```
Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 3 CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.
```

Once more, rebuild the index using this script:

```
ALTER INDEX i1 ON dbo.Test1 REBUILD;
```

Running the earlier SELECT statement again results in the following output:

```
Table 'Test1'. Scan count 1, logical reads 2
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.
```

Remember that this test is on a very small scale, but the number of reads was decreased by a third. Imagine what reducing a third of the number of reads against a table with millions of rows could accomplish.

**Note** The lesson from this section is that, for better query performance, it is important to analyze the amount of fragmentation in an index and rearrange it if required.

## Analyzing the Amount of Fragmentation

You can analyze the fragmentation ratio of an index by using the `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` dynamic management function. For a table with a clustered index, the fragmentation of the clustered index is congruous with the fragmentation of the data pages, since the leaf pages of the clustered index and data pages are the same. `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` also indicates the amount of fragmentation in a heap table (or a table with no clustered index). Since a heap table doesn't require any row ordering, the logical order of the pages isn't relevant for the heap table.

The output of `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` shows information on the pages and extents of an index (or a table). A row is returned for each level of the B-tree in the index. A single row for each allocation unit in a heap is returned. As explained earlier, in SQL Server, eight contiguous 8KB pages are grouped together in an extent that is 64KB in size. For very small tables (much less than 64KB), the pages in an extent can belong to more than one index or table—these are called *mixed extents*. If there are lots of small tables in the database, mixed extents help SQL Server conserve disk space.

As a table (or an index) grows and requests more than eight pages, SQL Server creates an extent dedicated to the table (or index) and assigns the pages from this extent. Such an extent is called a *uniform extent*, and it serves up to eight page requests for the same table (or index). Uniform extents help SQL Server lay out the pages of a table (or an index) contiguously. They also reduce the number of page creation requests by an eighth, since a set of eight pages is created in the form of an extent. Information stored in a uniform extent can still be fragmented, but to access an allocation of pages is going to be much more efficient. If you have mixed extents, pages shared between multiple objects, and you have fragmentation within those extents, access of the information becomes even more problematic. But there is no defragmenting done on mixed extents.

To analyze the fragmentation of an index, let's re-create the table with the fragmented data set used in the "Fragmentation Overhead" section (--createt1fragmented). You can obtain the fragmentation detail of the clustered index (Figure 8-11) by executing the query against the `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` dynamic view used earlier:

```
SELECT ddips.avg_fragmentation_in_percent,
       ddips.fragment_count,
       ddips.page_count,
       ddips.avg_page_space_used_in_percent,
       ddips.record_count,
       ddips.avg_record_size_in_bytes
  FROM sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats(DB_ID('AdventureWorks2008R2'),
                                       OBJECT_ID(N'dbo.Test1'), NULL, NULL,
                                       'Sampled') AS ddips ;
```

The dynamic management function `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` scans the pages of an index to return the data. You can control the level of the scan, which affects the speed and the accuracy of the scan. To quickly check the fragmentation of an index, use the Limited option. You can obtain an increased accuracy with only a moderate decrease in speed by using the Sample option, as in the previous example, which scans 1 percent of the pages. For the most accuracy, use the Detailed scan, which hits all the pages in an index. Just understand that the Detailed scan can have a major performance impact depending on the size of the table and index in question. If the index has fewer than 10,000 pages and you select the Sample mode, then the Detailed mode is used instead. This means that despite the choice made in the earlier query, the Detailed scan mode was used. The default mode is Limited.

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	69.2307692307692	10	13	80.6599456387447	42	2019.38

**Figure 8-11.** Fragmented statistics

By defining the different parameters, you can get fragmentation information on different sets of data.

By removing the OBDECTID function in the earlier query and supplying a NULL value, the query would return information on all indexes within the database. Don't get surprised by this and accidentally run a Detailed scan on all indexes. You can also specify the index you want information on or even the partition with a partitioned index.

The output from `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` includes 21 different columns. I selected the basic set of columns used to determine the fragmentation and size of an index. This output represents the following:

- `avg_fragmentation_in_percent`: This number represents the logical average fragmentation for indexes and heaps as a percentage. If the table is a heap and the mode is Sampled, then this value will be NULL. If average fragmentation is less than 10 to 20 percent, fragmentation is unlikely to be an issue. If the index is between 20 and 40 percent, fragmentation might be an issue, but it can generally be resolved by defragmenting the index through an index reorganization (more information on index reorganization and index rebuild is available in the “Fragmentation Resolutions” section). Large-scale fragmentation, usually greater than 40 percent, may require an index rebuild. Your system may have different requirements than these general numbers.
- `fragment_count`: This number represents the number of fragments, or separated groups of pages, that make up the index. It's a useful number to understand how the index is distributed, especially when compared to the `pagecount` value. `fragmentcount` is NULL when the sampling mode is Sampled. A large fragment count is an additional indication of storage fragmentation.
- `page_count`: This number is a literal count of the number of index or data pages that make up the statistic. This number is a measure of size but can also help indicate fragmentation. If you know the size of the data or index, you can calculate how many rows can fit on a page. If you then correlate this to the number of rows in the table, you should get a number close to the `pagecount` value. If the `pagecount` value is considerably higher, you may be looking at a fragmentation issue. Refer to the `avg_fragmentation_in_percent` value for a precise measure.
- `avg_page_space_used_in_percent`: To get an idea of the amount of space allocated within the pages of the index, use this number. This value is NULL when the sampling mode is Limited.
- `recordcount`: Simply put, this is the number of records represented by the statistics. For indexes, this is the number of records within the current level of the B-tree as represented from the scanning mode. (Detailed scans will show all levels of the B-tree, not simply the leaf level.) For heaps, this number represents the records present, but this number may not correlate precisely to the number of rows in the table since a heap may have two records after an update and a page split.
- `avg_record_size_in_bytes`: This number simply represents a useful measure for the amount of data stored within the index or heap record.

Running `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` with a Detailed scan will return multiple rows for a given index. That is, multiple rows are displayed if that index spans more than one level. Multiple levels exist in an index when that index spans more than a single page. To see what this looks like and to observe some of the other columns of data present in the dynamic management function, run the query this way:

```
SELECT ddips.*  
FROM sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats(DB_ID('AdventureWorks2008'),  
                                     OBJECT_ID(N'dbo.t1Test1'), NULL, NULL,  
                                     'Detailed') AS ddips ;
```

	database_id	object_id	index_id	partition_number	index_type_desc
1	9	68195293	1	1	CLUSTERED INDEX
2	9	68195293	1	1	CLUSTERED INDEX
alloc_unit_type_desc	index_depth	index_level	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	
IN_ROW_DATA	2	0	69.2307692307692	10	
IN_ROW_DATA	2	1	0	1	
avg_fragment_size_in_pages	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	ghost_record_count	
1.3	13	80.6599456387447	42	0	
1	1	2.50803063998023	13	0	
version_ghost_record_count	min_record_size_in_bytes	max_record_size_in_bytes			
0	2019	2027			
0	11	14			
avg_record_size_in_bytes	forwarded_record_count	compressed_page_count			
2019.38	NULL	0			
13.769	NULL	0			

**Figure 8-12.** Detailed scan of fragmented index

To make the data readable, I've broken down the resulting data table into three pieces in a single graphic; see Figure 8-12.

As you can see, two rows were returned, representing the leaf level of the index (`index_level = 0`) and representing the first level of the B-tree (`index_level = 1`), which is the second row. You can see the additional information offered by `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` that can provide more detailed analysis of your indexes. For example, you can see the minimum and maximum record sizes, as well as the index depth (the number of levels in the B-tree) and how many records are on each level. A lot of this information will be less useful for basic fragmentation analysis, which is why I chose to limit the number of columns in the samples as well as use the Sampled scan mode.

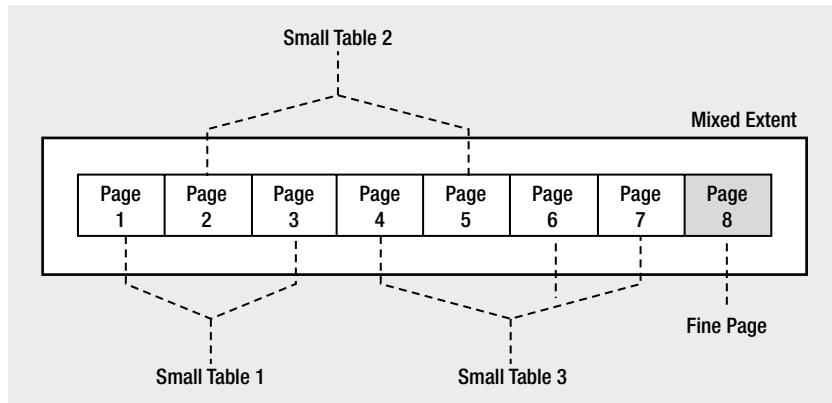
## Analyzing the Fragmentation of a Small Table

Don't be overly concerned with the output of `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` for small tables. For a small table or index with fewer than eight pages, SQL Server uses mixed extents for the pages. For example, if a table (`SmallTable1` or its clustered index) contains only two pages, then SQL Server allocates the two pages from a mixed extent instead of dedicating an extent to the table. The mixed extent may contain pages of other small tables/indexes also, as shown in Figure 8-13.

The distribution of pages across multiple mixed extents may lead you to believe that there is a high amount of external fragmentation in the table or the index, when in fact this is by design in SQL Server and is therefore perfectly acceptable.

To understand how the fragmentation information of a small table or index may look, create a small table with a clustered index (–createsmall1f in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1') 
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
```



**Figure 8-13.** Mixed extent

```

CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1
(C1 INT,
C2 INT,
C3 INT,
C4 CHAR(2000)
) ;
DECLARE @n INT = 1 ;
WHILE @n <= 28
BEGIN
    INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
    VALUES (@n, @n, @n, 'a') ;
    SET @n = @n + 1 ;
END
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX FirstIndex ON dbo.Test1(C1) ;

```

In the preceding table, with each INT taking 4 bytes, the average row size is 2,012 ( $=4 + 4 + 4 + 2,000$ ) bytes. Therefore, a default 8KB page can contain up to four rows. After all 28 rows are added to the table, a clustered index is created to physically arrange the rows and reduce fragmentation to a minimum. With the minimum internal fragmentation, seven ( $= 28 / 4$ ) pages are required for the clustered index (or the base table). Since the number of pages is not more than eight, SQL Server uses pages from mixed extents for the clustered index (or the base table). If the mixed extents used for the clustered index are not side by side, then the output of `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` may express a high amount of external fragmentation. But as a SQL user, you can't reduce the resultant external fragmentation. Figure 8-14 shows the output of `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats`.

From the output of `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats`, you can analyze the fragmentation of the small clustered index (or the table) as follows:

- `avgfragmentationinpercent`: Although this index may cross to multiple extents, the fragmentation shown here is not an indication of external fragmentation because this index is being stored on mixed extents.
- `avgpagespaceusedinpercent`: This shows that all or most of the data is stored well within the seven pages displayed in the `pagecount` field. This eliminates the possibility of logical fragmentation.

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	28.5714285714286	3	7	99.8517420311342	28	2019

**Figure 8-14.** Fragmentation of a small clustered index

- fragmentcount: This shows that the data is fragmented and stored on more than one extent, but since it's less than eight pages long, SQL Server doesn't have much choice about where it stores the data.

In spite of the preceding misleading values, a small table (or index) with fewer than eight pages is simply unlikely to benefit from efforts to remove the fragmentation because it will be stored on mixed extents.

Once you determine that fragmentation in an index (or a table) needs to be dealt with, you need to decide which defragmentation technique to use. The factors affecting this decision, and the different techniques, are explained in the following section.

## Fragmentation Resolutions

You can resolve fragmentation in an index by rearranging the index rows and pages so that their physical and logical orders match. To reduce external fragmentation, you can physically reorder the leaf pages of the index to follow the logical order of the index. You achieve this through the following techniques:

- Dropping and re-creating the index
- Re-creating the index with the `DROP_EXISTING` clause
- Executing the `ALTER INDEX REBUILD` statement on the index
- Executing the `ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE` statement on the index

### Dropping and Re-creating the Index

One of the apparently easiest ways to remove fragmentation in an index is to drop the index and then re-create it. Dropping and re-creating the index reduces fragmentation the most, since it allows SQL Server to use completely new pages for the index and populate them appropriately with the existing data. This avoids both internal and external fragmentation. Unfortunately, this method has a large number of shortcomings:

- *Blocking*: This technique of defragmentation adds a high amount of overhead on the system, and it causes blocking. Dropping and re-creating the index blocks all other requests on the table (or on any other index on the table). It can also be blocked by other requests against the table.
- *Missing index*: With the index dropped, and possibly being blocked and waiting to be re-created, queries against the table will not have the index available for use. This can lead to the poor performance that the index was intended to remedy.
- *Nonclustered indexes*: If the index being dropped is a clustered index, then all the nonclustered indexes on the table have to be rebuilt after the cluster is dropped. They then have to be rebuilt again after the cluster is re-created. This leads to further blocking and other problems such as statement recompiles (covered in detail in [Chapter 10](#)).

- *Unique constraints:* Indexes that are used to define a primary key or a unique constraint cannot be removed using the `DROP INDEX` statement. Also, both unique constraints and primary keys can be referred to by foreign key constraints. Prior to dropping the primary key, all foreign keys that reference the primary key would have to be removed first. Although this is possible, this is a risky and time-consuming method for defragmenting an index.

It is possible to use the `ONLINE` option for dropping a clustered index, which means the index is still readable while it is being dropped, but that saves you only from the foregoing blocking issue. For all these reasons, dropping and re-creating the index is not a recommended technique for a production database, especially at anything outside off-peak times.

## Re-creating the Index with the `DROP_EXISTING` Clause

To avoid the overhead of rebuilding the nonclustered indexes twice while rebuilding a clustered index, use the `DROPEXISTING` clause of the `CREATE INDEX` statement. This re-creates the clustered index in one atomic step, avoiding re-creating the nonclustered indexes since the clustered index key values used by the row locators remain the same. To rebuild a clustered key in one atomic step using the `DROPEXISTING` clause, execute the `CREATE INDEX` statement as follows:

```
CREATE UNIQUE CLUSTERED INDEX FirstIndex
ON dbo.Test1(C1)
WITH (DROP_EXISTING = ON) ;
```

You can use the `DROP_EXISTING` clause for both clustered and nonclustered indexes, and even to convert a nonclustered index to a clustered index. However, you can't use it to convert a clustered index to a nonclustered index.

The drawbacks of this defragmentation technique are as follows:

- *Blocking:* Similar to the `DROP` and `CREATE` methods, this technique also causes and faces blocking from other queries accessing the table (or any index on the table).
- *Index with constraints:* Unlike the first method, the `CREATE INDEX` statement with `DROP_EXISTING` can be used to re-create indexes with constraints. If the constraint is a primary key or the unique constraint is associated with a foreign key, then failing to include the `UNIQUE` keyword in the `CREATE` statement will result in an error like this:

### ■ Msg 1907, Level 16, State 1, Line 1

Cannot recreate index 'PK\_Name'. The new index definition does not match the constraint being enforced by the existing index.

- *Table with multiple fragmented indexes:* As table data fragments, the indexes often become fragmented as well. If this defragmentation technique is used, then all the indexes on the table have to be identified and rebuilt individually.

You can avoid the last two limitations associated with this technique by using `ALTER INDEX REBUILD`, as explained next.

## Executing the ALTER INDEX REBUILD Statement

`ALTER INDEX REBUILD` rebuilds an index in one atomic step, just like `CREATE INDEX` with the `DROP_EXISTING` clause. Since `ALTER INDEX REBUILD` also rebuilds the index physically, it allows SQL Server to assign fresh pages to reduce both internal and external fragmentation to a minimum. But unlike `CREATE INDEX` with the `DROP_EXISTING` clause, it allows an index (supporting either the `PRIMARY KEY` or `UNIQUE` constraint) to be rebuilt dynamically without dropping and re-creating the constraints.

To understand the use of `ALTER INDEX REBUILD` to defragment an index, consider the fragmented table used in the “Fragmentation Overhead” and “Analyzing the Amount of Fragmentation” sections (–createfragmented). This table is repeated here:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('Test1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1
(C1 INT,
 C2 INT,
 C3 INT,
 c4 CHAR(2000)
) ;
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX i1 ON dbo.Test1 (C1) ;

WITH Nums
AS (SELECT 1 AS n
UNION ALL
SELECT n + 1
FROM Nums
WHERE n < 21
)
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1, C2, C3, c4)
SELECT n,
n,
n,
'a'
FROM Nums ;

WITH Nums
AS (SELECT 1 AS n
UNION ALL
SELECT n + 1
FROM Nums
WHERE n < 21
)
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1, C2, C3, c4)
SELECT 41 - n,
n,
n,
'a'
FROM Nums;
```

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	69.2307692307692	10	13	80.6599456387447	42	2019.38

**Figure 8-15.** Internal and external fragmentation

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	27.2727272727273	4	11	95.3298739807265	42	2019.38

**Figure 8-16.** Fragmentation resolved by ALTER INDEX REBUILD

If you take a look at the current fragmentation, you can see that it is both internally and externally fragmented (Figure 8-15).

You can defragment the clustered index (or the table) by using the ALTER INDEX REBUILD statement:

```
ALTER INDEX i1 ON dbo.Test1 REBUILD;
```

Figure 8-16 shows the resultant output of the standard SELECT statement against sys. dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats.

Compare the preceding results of the query in Figure 8-16 with the earlier results in Figure 8-15. You can see that both internal and external fragmentation have been reduced efficiently. Here's an analysis of the output:

- *Internal fragmentation:* The table has 42 rows with an average row size (2,019.38 bytes) that allows a maximum of four rows per page. If the rows are highly defragmented to reduce the internal fragmentation to a minimum, then there should be 11 data pages in the table (or leaf pages in the clustered index). You can observe the following in the preceding output:
  - *Number of leaf (or data) pages:* pagecount = 11
  - *Amount of information in a page:* avg\_page\_space\_used\_in\_percent = 95.33 percent
- *External fragmentation:* A minimum of two extents is required to hold the 11 pages. For a minimum of external fragmentation, there should not be any gap between the two extents, and all pages should be physically arranged in the logical order of the index. The preceding output illustrates the number of out-of-order pages = avg\_fragmentation\_in\_percent = 27.27 percent. Although this may not be a perfect level of fragmentation, being greater than 20 percent, this is adequate considering the size of the index. With fewer extents, aligned with each other, access will be faster.

Rebuilding an index in SQL Server 2005 and greater will also compact the large object (LOB) pages. You can choose not to by setting a value LOB\_COMPACTION = OFF.

When you use the PAD\_INDEX setting while creating an index, it determines how much free space to leave on the index intermediate pages, which can help you deal with page splits. This is taken into account during the index rebuild, and the new pages will be set back to the original values you determined at the index creation unless you specify otherwise.

If you don't specify otherwise, the default behavior is to defragment all indexes across all partitions. If you want to control the process, you just need to specify which partition you want to rebuild when.

As shown previously, the ALTER INDEX REBUILD technique effectively reduces fragmentation. You can also use it to rebuild *all* the indexes of a table in one statement:

```
ALTER INDEX ALL ON dbo.Test1 REBUILD;
```

Although this is the most effective defragmentation technique, it does have some overhead and limitations:

- *Blocking*: Similar to the previous two index-rebuilding techniques, ALTER INDEX REBUILD introduces blocking in the system. It blocks all other queries trying to access the table (or any index on the table). It can also be blocked by those queries.
- *Transaction rollback*: Since ALTER INDEX REBUILD is fully atomic in action, if it is stopped before completion, then all the defragmentation actions performed up to that time are lost. You can run ALTER INDEX REBUILD using the ONLINE keyword, which will reduce the locking mechanisms, but it will increase the time involved in rebuilding the index.

## Executing the ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE Statement

ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE reduces the fragmentation of an index without rebuilding the index. It reduces external fragmentation by rearranging the existing leaf pages of the index in the logical order of the index key. It compacts the rows within the pages, reducing internal fragmentation, and discards the resultant empty pages. This technique doesn't use any new pages for defragmentation.

To avoid the blocking overhead associated with ALTER INDEX REBUILD, this technique uses a nonatomic online approach. As it proceeds through its steps, it requests a small number of locks for a short period. Once each step is done, it releases the locks and proceeds to the next step. While trying to access a page, if it finds that the page is being used, it skips that page and never returns to the page again. This allows other queries to run on the table along with the ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE operation. Also, if this operation is stopped intermediately, then all the defragmentation steps performed up to then are preserved.

Since ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE doesn't use any new pages to reorder the index and it skips the locked pages, the amount of defragmentation provided by this approach is usually less than that of ALTER INDEX REBUILD. To observe the relative effectiveness of ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE compared to ALTER INDEX REBUILD, rebuild the test table (–createfragmented) used in the previous section on ALTER INDEX REBUILD.

Now, to reduce the fragmentation of the clustered index, use ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE as follows:

```
ALTER INDEX i1 ON dbo.Test1 REORGANIZE;
```

Figure 8-17 shows the resultant output from sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats.

From the output, you can see that ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE doesn't reduce fragmentation as effectively as ALTER INDEX REBUILD, as shown in the previous section. For a highly fragmented index, the ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE operation can take much longer than rebuilding the index. Also, if an index spans multiple files, ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE doesn't migrate pages between the files. However, the main benefit of using ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE is that it allows other queries to access the table (or the indexes) simultaneously.

Table 8-1 summarizes the characteristics of these four defragmentation techniques.

You can also reduce internal fragmentation by compressing more rows within a page, reducing free spaces within the pages. The maximum amount of compression that can be done within the leaf pages of an index is controlled by the fill factor, as you will see next.

When dealing with very large databases and the indexes associated, it may become necessary to split the tables and the indexes up across disks using partitioning. Indexes on partitions can also become fragmented as the data within the partition changes. When dealing with a portioned index, you will need to determine whether you want to either REORGANIZE or REBUILD one, some, or all partitions as part of the ALTER INDEX command. Partitioned indexes cannot be rebuilt online. Keep in mind that doing anything that affects all partitions is likely to be a very costly operation.

If compression is specified on an index, even on a partitioned index, you must be sure to set the compression while performing the ALTER INDEX operation to what it was before; if you don't, it will be lost, and you'll have to rebuild the index again. This is especially important for nonclustered indexes, which will not inherit the compression setting from the table.

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	54.5454545454545	7	11	95.3298739807265	42	2019.38

**Figure 8-17.** Results of *ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE***Table 8-1.** Characteristics of Four Defragmentation Techniques

Characteristics/ Issues	Drop and Create Index	Create Index with DROP_EXISTING	ALTER INDEX REBUILD	ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE
Rebuild nonclustered indexes on clustered index fragmentation	Twice	No	No	No
Missing indexes	Yes	No	No	No
Defragment index with constraints	Highly complex	Moderately	Easy	Easy
Defragment multiple indexes together	No	No	Yes	Yes
Concurrency with others	Low	Low	Medium, depending on concurrent user activity	High
Intermediate cancellation	Dangerous with no transaction	Progress lost	Progress lost	Progress preserved
Degree of defragmentation	High	High	High	Moderate to low
Apply new fill factor	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Statistics are updated	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

## Significance of the Fill Factor

The internal fragmentation of an index is reduced by getting more rows per leaf page in an index. Getting more rows within a leaf page reduces the total number of pages required for the index and in turn decreases disk I/O and the logical reads required to retrieve a range of index rows. On the other hand, if the index key values are highly transactional, then having fully used index pages will cause page splits. Therefore, for a transactional table, a good balance between maximizing the number of rows in a page and avoiding page splits is required.

SQL Server allows you to control the amount of free space within the leaf pages of the index by using the *fill factor*. If you know that there will be enough INSERT queries on the table or UPDATE queries on the index key columns, then you can pre-add free space to the index leaf page using the fill factor to minimize page splits. If the table is read-only, you can create the index with a high fill factor to reduce the number of index pages.

The default fill factor is 0, which means the leaf pages are packed to 100 percent, although some free space is left in the branch nodes of the B-tree structure. The fill factor for an index is applied only when the index is created. As keys are inserted and updated, the density of rows in the index eventually stabilizes within a narrow range. As you saw in the previous chapter's sections on page splits caused by UPDATE and INSERT, when a page split occurs, generally half the original page is moved to a new page, which happens irrespective of the fill factor used during the index creation.

To understand the significance of the fill factor, let's use a small test table (--filltest in the download) with 24 rows:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1')
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test1;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT, C2 CHAR(999)) ;
WITH Nums
AS (SELECT 1 AS n
UNION ALL
SELECT      n + 1
FROM        Nums
WHERE       n < 24
)
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1, C2)
SELECT n * 100,
'a'
FROM      Nums ;
```

Increase the maximum number of rows in the leaf (or data) page by creating a clustered index with the default fill factor:

```
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX FillIndex ON Test1(C1);
```

Since the average row size is 1,010 bytes, a clustered index leaf page (or table data page) can contain a maximum of eight rows. Therefore, at least three leaf pages are required for the 24 rows. You can confirm this in the `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` output shown in Figure 8-18.

Note that `avg_page_space_used_in_percent` is 100 percent, since the default fill factor allows the maximum number of rows to be compressed in a page. Since a page cannot contain a part row to fill the page fully, `avg_page_space_used_in_percent` will be often a little less than 100 percent, even with the default fill factor.

To prevent page splits caused by `INSERT` and `UPDATE` operations, create some free space within the leaf (or data) pages by re-creating the clustered index with a fill factor as follows:

```
ALTER INDEX FillIndex ON dbo.Test1 REBUILD
WITH (FILLFACTOR= 75) ;
```

Because each page has a total space for eight rows, a fill factor of 75 percent will allow six rows per page. Thus, for 24 rows, the number of leaf pages should increase to four, as in the `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats` output shown in Figure 8-19.

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	66.6666666666667	3	3	100	24	1010

**Figure 8-18.** Fill factor set to default value of 0

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	50	3	4	74.9938225846306	24	1010

**Figure 8-19.** Fill factor set to 75

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	50	3	4	81.2453669384729	26	1010

**Figure 8-20.** Fragmentation after new records

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes
1	60	4	5	67.4919693600198	27	1010

**Figure 8-21.** Number of pages goes up

Note that avg\_page\_space\_used\_in\_percent is about 75 percent, as set by the fill factor. This allows two more rows to be inserted in each page without causing a page split. You can confirm this by adding two rows to the first set of six rows (C1 = 100 - 600, contained in the first page):

```
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
VALUES      (110, 'a'), --25th row
            (120, 'a') ; --26th row
```

Figure 8-20 shows the current fragmentation.

From the output, you can see that the addition of the two rows has not added any pages to the index. Accordingly, avg\_page\_space\_used\_in\_percent increased from 74.99 percent to 81.25 percent. With the addition of two rows to the set of the first six rows, the first page should be completely full (eight rows). Any further addition of rows within the range of the first eight rows should cause a page split and thereby increase the number of index pages to five:

```
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
VALUES (130, 'a') ; --27th row
```

Now sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats displays the difference in Figure 8-21.

Note that even though the fill factor for the index is 75 percent, Avg. Page Density (full) has decreased to 67.49 percent, which can be computed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Avg. Page Density (full)} \\ = \text{Average rows per page} / \text{Maximum rows per page} \\ = (27 / 5) / 8 \\ = 67.5\% \end{aligned}$$

From the preceding example, you can see that the fill factor is applied when the index is created. But later, as the data is modified, it has no significance. Irrespective of the fill factor, whenever a page splits, the rows of the original page are distributed between two pages, and avg\_page\_space\_used\_in\_percent settles accordingly. Therefore, if you use a nondefault fill factor, you should ensure that the fill factor is reapplied regularly to maintain its effect.

You can reapply a fill factor by re-creating the index or by using ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE or ALTER INDEX REBUILD, as was shown. ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE takes the fill factor specified during the index creation into account. ALTER INDEX REBUILD also takes the original fill factor into account, but it allows a new fill factor to be specified, if required.

Without periodic maintenance of the fill factor, for both default and nondefault fill factor settings, avg\_page\_space\_used\_in\_percent for an index (or a table) eventually settles within a narrow range. Therefore, in most cases, without manual maintenance of the fill factor, the default fill factor is generally good enough.

You should also consider one final aspect when deciding upon the fill factor. Even for a heavy OLTP application, the number of database reads typically outnumbers writes by a factor of 5 to 10. Specifying a fill factor other than the default can degrade read performance by an amount inversely proportional to the fill

factor setting, since it spreads keys over a wider area. Before setting the fill factor at a database-wide level, use Performance Monitor to compare the SOL Server:Buffer Manager:Page reads/sec counter to the SOL Server:Buffer Manager:Page writes/sec counter, and use the fill factor option only if writes are a substantial fraction of reads (greater than 30 percent).

## Automatic Maintenance

In a database with a great deal of transactions, tables and indexes become fragmented over time. Thus, to improve performance, you should check the fragmentation of the tables and indexes regularly, and you should defragment the ones with a high amount of fragmentation. You can do this analysis for a database by following these steps:

1. Identify all user tables in the current database to analyze fragmentation.
2. Determine fragmentation of every user table and index.
3. Determine user tables and indexes that require defragmentation by taking into account the following considerations:
  - high level of fragmentation where avg\_fragmentation\_in\_percent is greater than 20 percent
  - Not a very small table/index—that is, pagecount is greater than 8
4. Defragment tables and indexes with high fragmentation.

A sample SQL stored procedure (IndexDefrag .sql in the download) is included here for easy reference. This script will perform the basic actions, and I include it here for educational purposes. But for a fully functional script that includes a large degree of capability, I strongly recommend using the script from Michelle Ufford located here: [http://sqlfool.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/dba\\_indexDefrag\\_sp\\_v41.txt](http://sqlfool.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/dba_indexDefrag_sp_v41.txt)

My script performs the following actions:

- Walks all databases on the system and identifies indexes on user tables in each database that meets the fragmentation criteria and saves them in a temporary table
- Based on the level of fragmentation, reorganizes lightly fragmented indexes and rebuilds those that are highly fragmented

Here's how to analyze and resolve database fragmentation (store this where appropriate on your system; we have a designated database for enterprise-level scripts):

```
CREATE PROCEDURE IndexDefrag
AS
DECLARE @DBName NVARCHAR(255),
        @TableName NVARCHAR(255),
        @SchemaName NVARCHAR(255),
        @IndexName NVARCHAR(255),
        @PctFrag DECIMAL,
        @Defrag NVARCHAR(MAX)
IF EXISTS ( SELECT *
            FROM sys.objects
            WHERE object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'#Frag') )
    DROP TABLE #Frag ;
CREATE TABLE #Frag
        (@DBName NVARCHAR(255),
```

```

TableName NVARCHAR(255),
SchemaName NVARCHAR(255),
IndexName NVARCHAR(255),
AvgFragment DECIMAL
)
EXEC sys.sp_MSforeachdb
    'INSERT INTO #Frag ( DBName, TableName, SchemaName, IndexName, AvgFragment ) SELECT ''?'' AS
DBName ,t.Name AS TableName ,sc.Name AS SchemaName ,i.name AS IndexName ,s.avg_fragmentation_in_
percent FROM ?.sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats(DB_ID('?''), NULL, NULL,
NULL, ''Sampled'') AS s JOIN ?.sys.indexes i ON s.Object_Id = i.Object_id
AND s.Index_id = i.Index_id JOIN ?.sys.tables t ON i.Object_id = t.Object_Id JOIN ?.sys.schemas
sc ON t.schema_id = sc.SCHEMA_ID
WHERE s.avg_fragmentation_in_percent > 20
AND t.TYPE = ''U''
AND s.page_count > 8
ORDER BY TableName,IndexName' ;

DECLARE cList CURSOR
FOR
SELECT *
FROM  #Frag

OPEN cList ;
FETCH NEXT FROM cList
INTO @DBName, @TableName, @SchemaName, @IndexName, @PctFrag ;

WHILE @@FETCH_STATUS = 0
BEGIN
IF @PctFrag BETWEEN 20.0 AND 40.0
BEGIN
    SET @Defrag = N'ALTER INDEX ' + @IndexName + ' ON ' + @DBName
        + '.' + @SchemaName + '.' + @TableName + ' REORGANIZE' ;
    EXEC sp_executesql
        @Defrag ;
    PRINT 'Reorganize index: ' + @DBName + '.' + @SchemaName + '.'
        + @TableName + '.' + @IndexName ;
END
ELSE
IF @PctFrag > 40.0
BEGIN
    SET @Defrag = N'ALTER INDEX ' + @IndexName + ' ON '
        + @DBName + '.' + @SchemaName + '.' + @TableName
        + ' REBUILD' ;
    EXEC sp_executesql
        @Defrag ;
    PRINT 'Rebuild index: ' + @DBName + '.' + @SchemaName
        + '.' + @TableName + '.' + @IndexName ;
END
FETCH NEXT FROM cList
INTO @DBName, @TableName, @SchemaName, @IndexName, @PctFrag ;

```

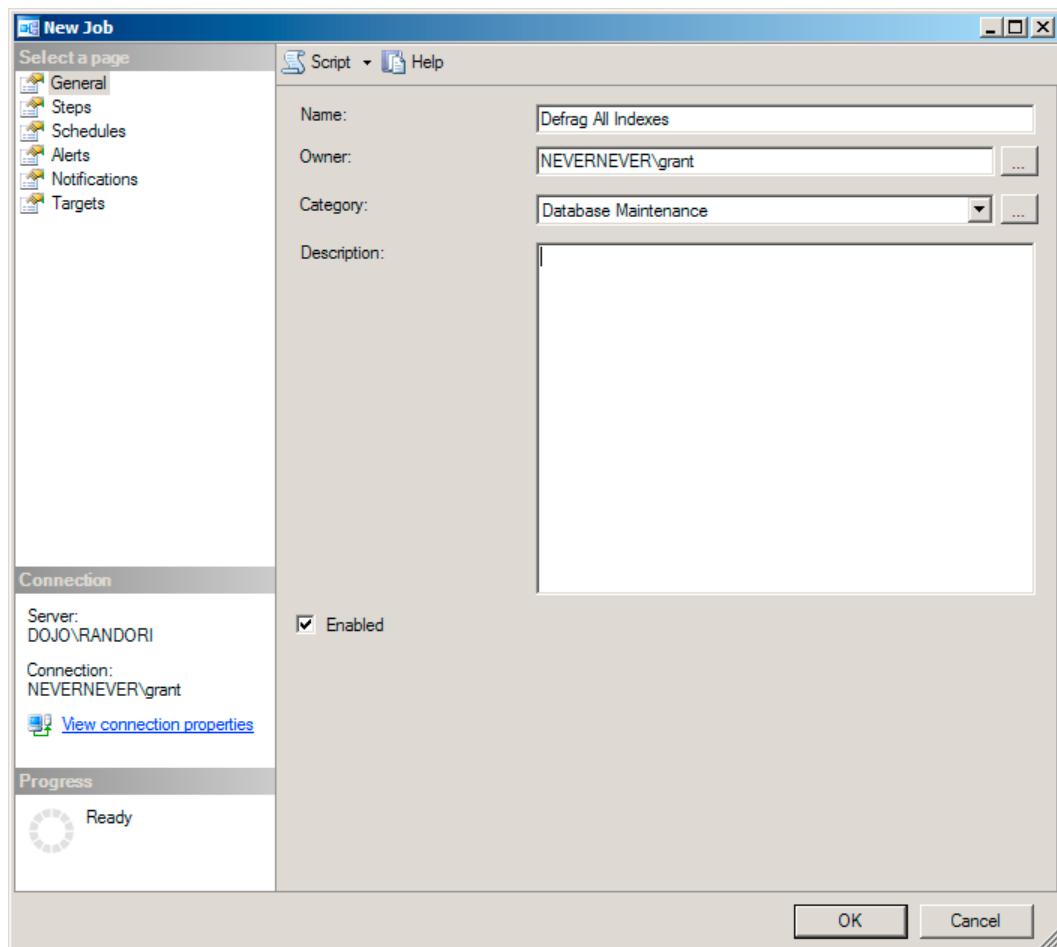
```

END
CLOSE cList ;
DEALLOCATE cList ;
DROP TABLE #Frag ;
GO

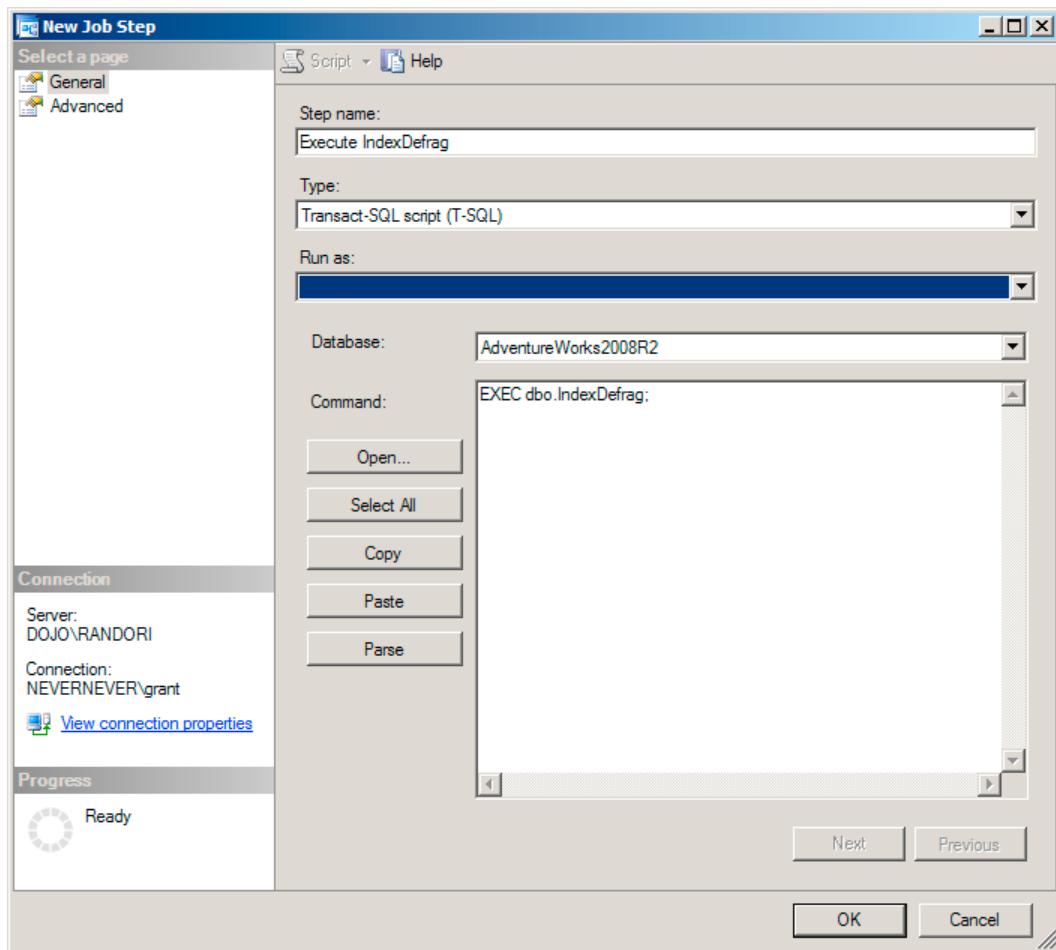
```

To automate the fragmentation analysis process, you can create a SQL Server job from SQL Server Enterprise Manager by following these simple steps:

1. Open Management Studio, right-click the SQL Server Agent icon, and select New à Job.
2. On the General page of the New Job dialog box, enter the job name and other details, as shown in Figure 8-22.
3. On the Steps page of the New Job dialog box, click New, and enter the SQL command for the user database, as shown in Figure 8-23.

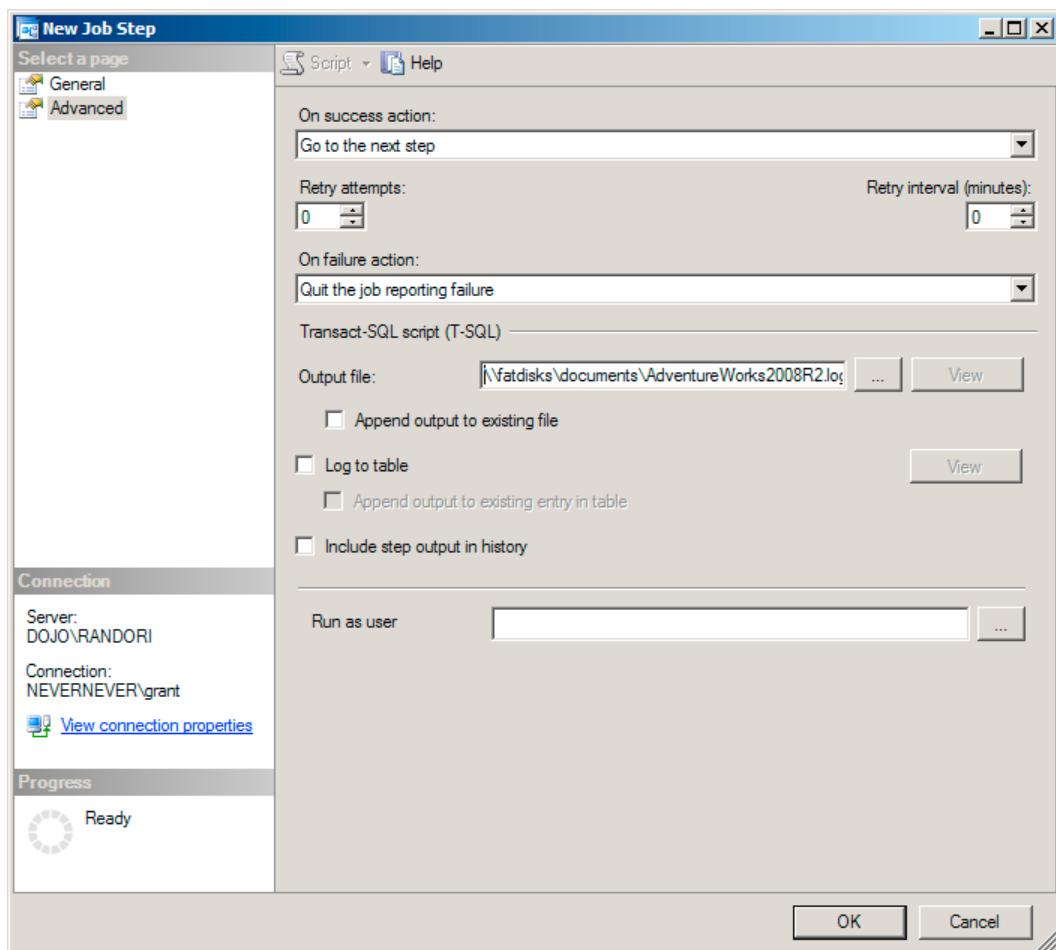


**Figure 8-22.** Entering the job name and details



**Figure 8-23.** Entering the SQL command for the user database

4. On the Advanced page of the New Job Step dialog box, enter an output file name to report the fragmentation analysis outcome, as shown in Figure 8-24.
5. Return to the New Job dialog box by clicking OK.
6. On the Schedules page of the New Job dialog box, click New Schedule, and enter an appropriate schedule to run the SQL Server job, as shown in Figure 8-25. Schedule this stored procedure to execute during nonpeak hours. To be certain about the usage pattern of your database, log the SQLServer:SQL Statistics\Batch Requests/sec performance counter for a complete day. It will show you the fluctuation in load on the database. (I explain this performance counter in detail in Chapter 2.)
7. Return to the New Job dialog box by clicking the OK button.

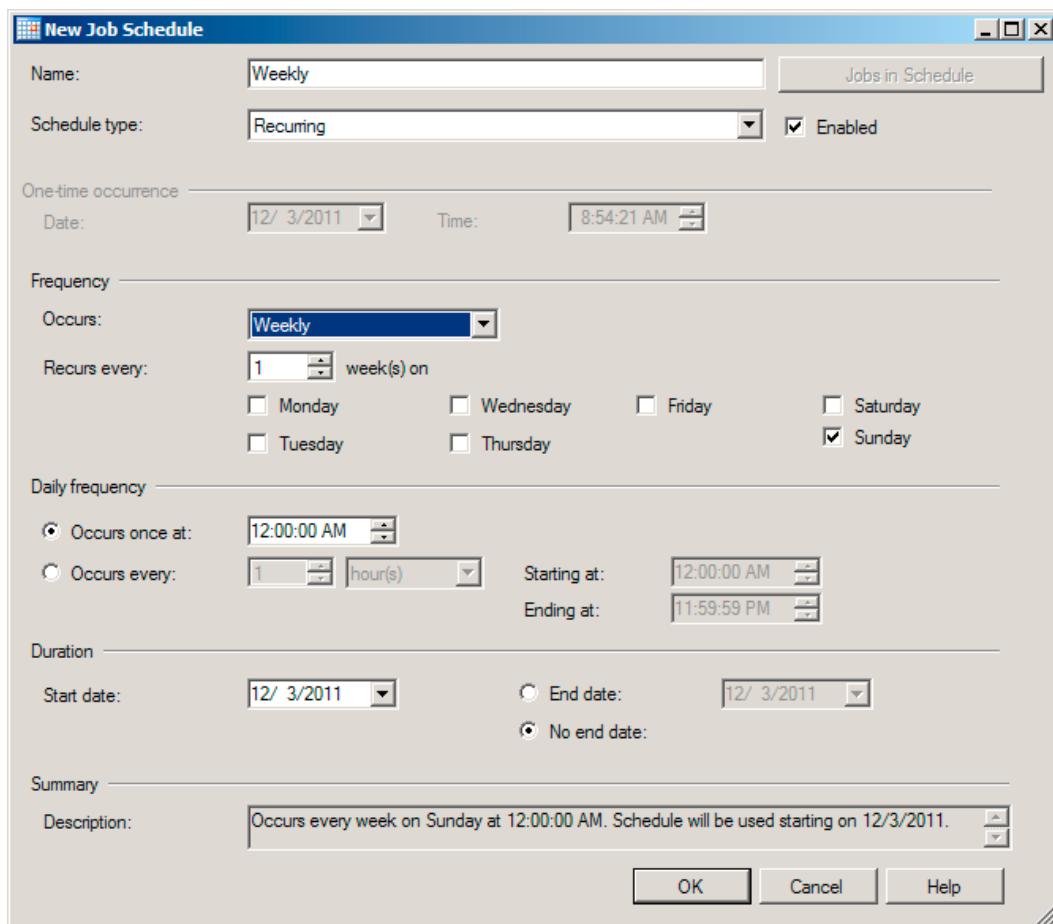


**Figure 8-24.** Entering an output file name

8. Once you've entered all the information, click OK in the New Job dialog box to create the SQL Server job. A SQL Server job is created that schedules the `spIndexDefrag` stored procedure to run at a regular (weekly) time interval.
9. Ensure that SQL Server Agent is running so that the SQL Server job will run automatically according to the set schedule.

The SQL job will automatically analyze and defragment the fragmentation of each database every Sunday at 1 a.m. Figure 8-26 shows the corresponding output of the `FragmentationOutput.txt` file.

The output shows that the job analyzed the fragmentation of the database and identified a series of indexes for defragmentation, specifically for reorganization. Subsequently, it defragments the index. The stored procedure defragmented only the database object that was highly fragmented. Thus, the next run of the SQL job generally won't identify these same indexes for defragmentation.

**Figure 8-25.** Entering a job schedule

```

Job 'Defrag All Indexes' : Step 1, 'Execute IndexDefrag' : Began Executing 2011-12-03 08:55:51
Reorganize index: msdb.dbo.DTA_reports_index.PK__DTA_repo_40BC8AA1F1C76209 [SQLSTATE 01000]
Reorganize index: Adventureworks2008R2.Production.BillOfMaterials.PK_BillOfMaterials_BillOfMa
Reorganize index: Adventureworks2008R2.Production.BillOfMaterials.IX_BillOfMaterials_UnitMeas
Rebuild index: Adventureworks2008R2.Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader.IX_TEST [SQLSTATE 01000]
Reorganize index: Adventureworks2008R2.HumanResources.JobCandidate.PK_JobCandidate_JobCandida
Reorganize index: Adventureworks2008R2.Production.Product.PK_Product_ProductID [SQLSTATE 0100

```

**Figure 8-26.** FragmentationOutput.txt file output

## Summary

As you learned in this chapter, in a highly transactional database page splits caused by INSERT and UPDATE statements fragment the tables and indexes, increasing the cost of data retrieval. You can avoid these page splits by maintaining free spaces within the pages using the fill factor. Since the fill factor is applied only during index creation, you should reapply it at regular intervals to maintain its effectiveness. You can determine the amount of fragmentation in an index (or a table) using `sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats`. Upon determining a high amount of fragmentation, you can use either `ALTER INDEX REBUILD` or `ALTER INDEX REORGANIZE`, depending on the required amount of defragmentation and database concurrency.

Defragmentation rearranges the data so that its physical order on the disk matches its logical order in the table/index, thus improving the performance of queries. However, unless the optimizer decides upon an effective execution plan for the query, query performance even after defragmentation can remain poor. Therefore, it is important to have the optimizer use efficient techniques to generate cost-effective execution plans.

In the next chapter, I explain execution plan generation and the techniques the optimizer uses to decide upon an effective execution plan.

## CHAPTER 9



# Execution Plan Cache Analysis

The performance of any query depends on the effectiveness of the execution plan decided upon by the optimizer, as you learned in previous chapters. Because the overall time required to execute a query is the sum of the time required to generate the execution plan plus the time required to execute the query based on this execution plan, it is important that the cost of generating the execution plan itself is low. The cost incurred when generating the execution plan depends on the process of generating the execution plan, the process of caching the plan, and the reusability of the plan from the plan cache. In this chapter, you will learn how an execution plan is generated and how to analyze the execution plan cache for plan reusability.

In this chapter, I cover the following topics:

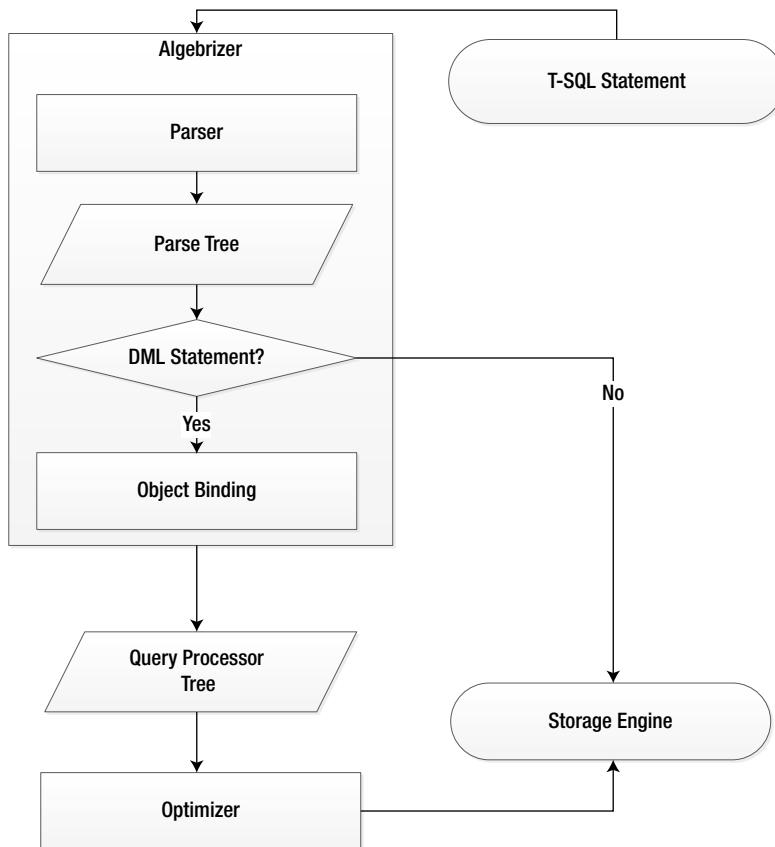
- Execution plan generation and caching
- The SQL Server components used to generate an execution plan
- Strategies to optimize the cost of execution plan generation
- Factors affecting parallel plan generation
- How to analyze execution plan caching
- Query plan hash and query hash as mechanisms for identifying queries to tune
- Execution plans gone wrong and parameter sniffing
- Ways to improve the reusability of execution plan caching

## Execution Plan Generation

As you know by now, SQL Server uses a cost-based optimization technique to determine the processing strategy of a query. The optimizer considers both the metadata of the database objects and the current distribution statistics of the columns referred to in the query when deciding which index and join strategies should be used.

The cost-based optimization allows a database developer to concentrate on implementing a business rule, rather than on the exact syntax of the query. At the same time, the process of determining the query processing strategy remains quite complex and can consume a fair amount of resources. SQL Server uses a number of techniques to optimize resource consumption:

- Syntax-based optimization of the query
- Trivial plan match to avoid in-depth query optimization for simple queries



**Figure 9-1.** SQL Server techniques to optimize query execution

- Index and join strategies based on current distribution statistics
- Query optimization in multiple phases to control the cost of optimization
- Execution plan caching to avoid the regeneration of query plans

The following techniques are performed in order, as shown in the flowchart in Figure 9-1.

- Parsing
- Binding
- Query optimizer
- Execution plan generation, caching, and hash plan generation
- Query execution

Let's take a look at these steps in more detail.

## Parser

When a query is submitted, SQL Server passes it to the algebrizer within the *relational engine*. (This relational engine is one of the two main parts of SQL Server, with the other being the *storage engine*, which is responsible for data access, modifications, and caching.) The relational engine takes care of parsing, name and type resolution, and optimization. It also executes a query as per the query execution plan and requests data from the storage engine.

The first part of the algebrizer process is the parser. The parser checks an incoming query, validating it for the correct syntax. The query is terminated if a syntax error is detected. If multiple queries are submitted together as a batch as follows (note the error in syntax), then the parser checks the complete batch together for syntax and cancels the complete batch when it detects a syntax error. (Note that more than one syntax error may appear in a batch, but the parser goes no further than the first one.)

```
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (c1 INT) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
VALUES (1) ;
CEILEKT * FROM dbo.t1; --Error: I meant, SELECT * FROM t1
```

On validating a query for correct syntax, the parser generates an internal data structure called a *parse tree* for the algebrizer. The parser and algebrizer taken together are called *query compilation*.

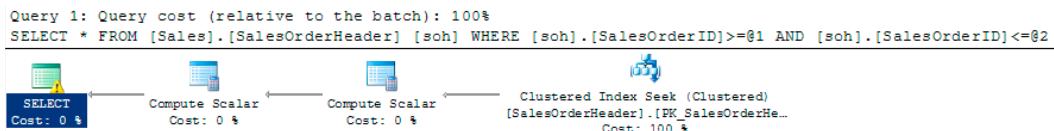
## Binding

The parse tree generated by the parser is passed to the next part of the algebrizer for processing. The algebrizer now resolves all the names of the different objects, meaning the tables, the columns, and so on, that are being referenced in the T-SQL in a process called binding. It also identifies all the various data types being processed. It even checks for the location of aggregates (such as GROUP BY and MAX). The output of all these verifications and resolutions is a binary set of data called a *query processor tree*.

To see this part of the algebrizer in action, if the following batch query (–algebrizertest in the download) is submitted, then the first three statements before the error statement are executed, and the errant statement and the one after it are cancelled.

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (c1 INT) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
VALUES (1) ;
SELECT 'Before Error',
      c1
FROM   dbo.Test1 AS t ;
SELECT 'error',
      c1
FROM   dbo.no_Test1 ;
--Error: Table doesn't exist
SELECT 'after error' c1
FROM dbo.Test1 AS t ;
```

If a query contains an implicit data conversion, then the normalization process adds an appropriate step to the query tree. The process also performs some syntax-based optimization. For example, if the following query (–syntaxoptimize in the download) is submitted, then the syntax-based optimization transforms the syntax of the query, as shown in the T-SQL at the top of Figure 9-2, where BETWEEN becomes >= and <=.



**Figure 9-2.** Syntax-based optimization

```
SELECT *
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
WHERE  soh.SalesOrderID BETWEEN 62500 AND 62550 ;
```

You should also note the Warning indicator on the SELECT operator. Looking at the properties for this operator, you can see that SalesOrderID is actually getting converted as part of the process and the optimizer is warning us:

Type conversion in expression  
(CONVERT(nvarchar(23),[soh].[SalesOrderID],0)) may affect  
“CardinalityEstimate” in query plan choice

For most Data Definition Language (DDL) statements (such as `CREATE TABLE`, `CREATE PROC`, and so on), after passing through the algebrizer, the query is compiled directly for execution, since the optimizer need not choose among multiple processing strategies. For one DDL statement in particular, `CREATE INDEX`, the optimizer can determine an efficient processing strategy based on other existing indexes on the table, as explained in Chapter 4.

For this reason, you will never see any reference to CREATE TABLE in an execution plan, although you will see reference to CREATE INDEX. If the normalized query is a Data Manipulation Language (DML) statement (such as SELECT, INSERT, UPDATE, or DELETE), then the query processor tree is passed to the optimizer to decide the processing strategy for the query.

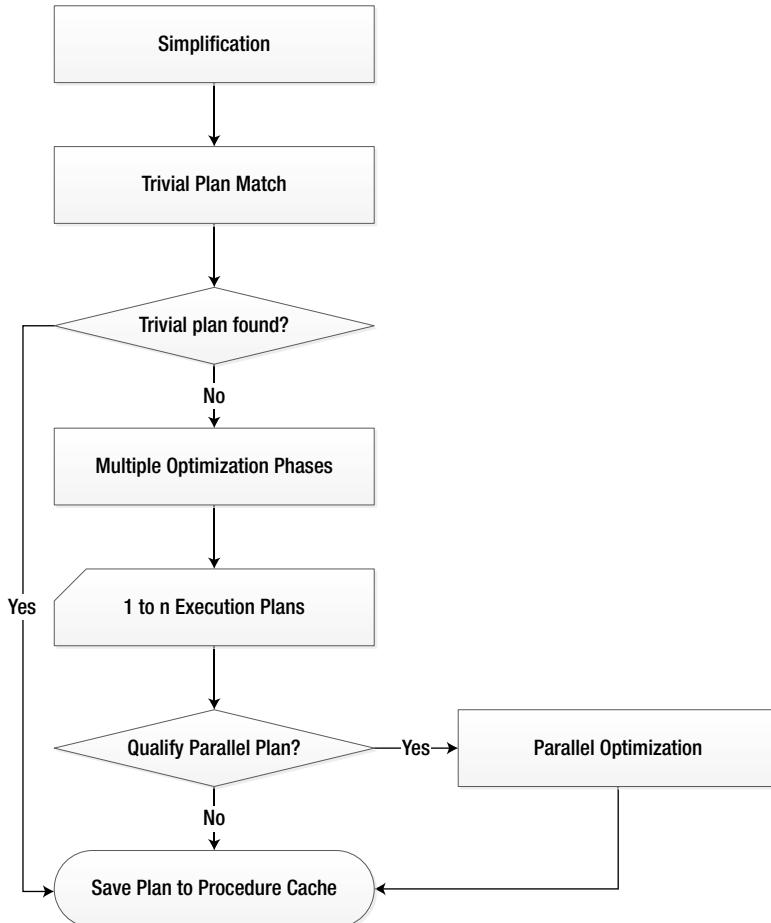
## Optimization

Based on the complexity of a query, including the number of tables referred to and the indexes available, there may be several ways to execute the query contained in the query processor tree. Exhaustively comparing the cost of all the ways of executing a query can take a considerable amount of time, which may sometimes override the benefit of finding the most optimized query. Figure 9-3 shows that, to avoid a high optimization overhead compared to the actual execution cost of the query, the optimizer adopts different techniques, namely the following:

- Trivial plan match
  - Multiple optimization phases
  - Parallel plan optimization

## Trivial Plan Match

Sometimes there might be only one way to execute a query. For example, a heap table with no indexes can be accessed in only one way: via a table scan. To avoid the runtime overhead of optimizing such queries, SQL Server maintains a list of patterns that define a trivial plan. If the optimizer finds a match, then a similar plan is generated for the query without any optimization. The generated plans are then stored in the procedure cache.



**Figure 9-3.** Query optimization steps

## Multiple Optimization Phases

For a complex query, the number of alternative processing strategies to be analyzed can be very high, and it may take a long time to evaluate each option. Therefore the optimizer goes through three different levels of optimizations. These are referred to as search 0, search 1, and search 2. But it's easier to think of them as *transaction*, *quick plan*, and *full optimization*. Depending on the size and complexity of the query, these different optimizations may be tried one at a time, or the optimizer might skip straight to full optimization. Each of the optimizations takes into account using different join techniques and different ways of accessing the data through scans, seeks, and other operations.

The index variations consider different indexing aspects, such as single-column index, composite index, index column order, column density, and so forth. Similarly, the join variations consider the different join techniques available in SQL Server: nested loop join, merge join, and hash join. ([Chapter 3](#) covers these join techniques in detail.) Constraints such as unique values and foreign key constraints are also a part of the optimization decision-making process.

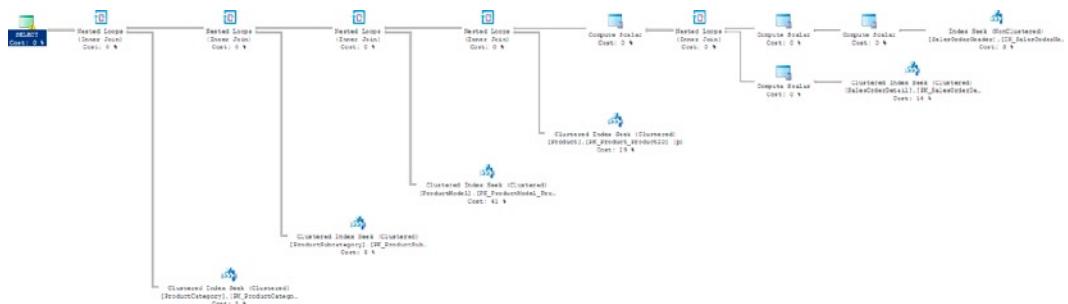
The optimizer considers the statistics of the columns referred to in the WHERE clause to evaluate the effectiveness of the index and the join strategies. Based on the current statistics, it evaluates the cost of the configurations in multiple optimization phases. The cost includes many factors, including (but not limited to) usage of CPU, memory, and disk I/O required to execute the query. After each optimization phase, the optimizer evaluates the cost of the processing strategy. If the cost is found to be cheap enough, then the optimizer stops further iteration through the optimization phases and quits the optimization process. Otherwise, it keeps iterating through the optimization phases to determine a cost-effective processing strategy.

Sometimes a query can be so complex that the optimizer needs to extensively iterate through the optimization phases. While optimizing the query, if it finds that the cost of the processing strategy is more than the cost threshold for parallelism, then it evaluates the cost of processing the query using multiple CPUs. Otherwise, the optimizer proceeds with the serial plan.

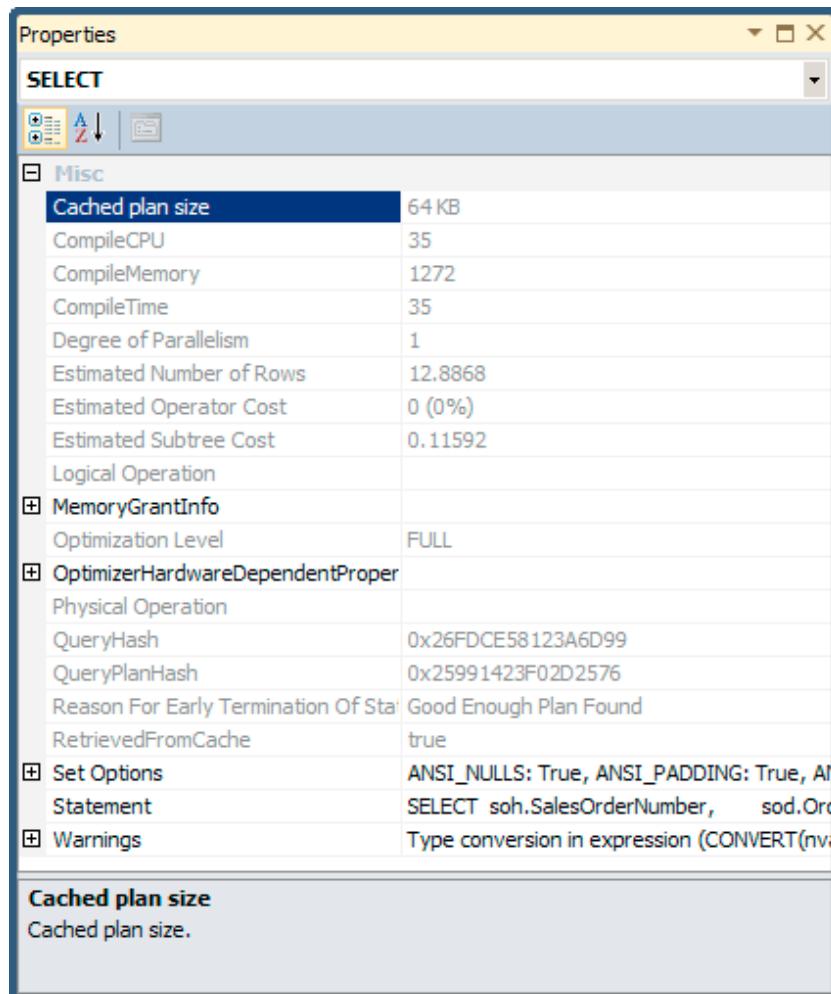
You can find out some detail of what occurred during the multiple optimization phases via two sources. Take, for example, this query (--nontrivialquery):

```
SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.LineTotal,
       sod.UnitPrice,
       sod.UnitPriceDiscount,
       p.[Name] AS ProductName,
       p.ProductNumber,
       ps.[Name] AS ProductSubCategoryName,
       pc.[Name] AS ProductCategoryName
  FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
  JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
    ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
  JOIN Production.Product AS p
    ON sod.ProductID = p.ProductID
  JOIN Production.ProductModel AS pm
    ON p.ProductModelID = pm.ProductModelID
  JOIN Production.ProductSubcategory AS ps
    ON p.ProductSubcategoryID = ps.ProductSubcategoryID
  JOIN Production.ProductCategory AS pc
    ON ps.ProductCategoryID = pc.ProductCategoryID
 WHERE soh.CustomerID = 29658 ;
```

When this query is run, the execution plan in Figure 9-4, a nontrivial plan for sure, is returned.



**Figure 9-4.** Nontrivial execution plan



**Figure 9-5.** SELECT operator property sheet

I realize that this execution plan is hard to read. The important point to take away is that it involves quite a few tables, each with indexes and statistics that all had to be taken into account to arrive at this execution plan. The first place you can go to look for information about the optimizer's work on this execution plan is the property sheet of the T-SQL SELECT operator at the far left of the execution plan. Figure 9-5 shows the property sheet.

Starting at the top, you can see information directly related to the creation and optimization of this execution plan:

- The size of the cached plan, which is 64 bytes
- The number of CPU cycles used to compile the plan, which is 35 ms
- The amount of memory used, which is 1272KB
- The compile time, which is 35 ms

	Counter	Occurrence	Value
1	optimizations	1952	1
2	elapsed time	1952	0.0167167008196721
3	final cost	1952	0.106988072492654
4	trivial plan	309	1
5	tasks	1643	1102.81132075472
6	no plan	0	NULL
7	search 0	547	1
8	search 0 time	549	0.0173315118397086
9	search 0 tasks	549	1817.24954462659

**Figure 9-6.** Output from sys.dm\_exec\_query\_optimizer\_info

The Optimization Level property (StatementOptmLevel in the XML plan) shows what type of processing occurred within the optimizer. In this case, FULL means that the optimizer did a full optimization. This is further displayed in the property Reason for Early Termination of Statement, which is Good Enough Plan Found. So, the optimizer took 35 ms to track down a plan that it deemed good enough in this situation. You can also see the QueryPlanHash value, also known as the *fingerprint*, for the execution plan (you can find more details on this in the section “Query Plan Hash and Query Hash”). The properties of the SELECT (and the INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE) operators are an important first stopping point when evaluating any execution plan because of this information.

The second source for optimizer information is the dynamic management view sys.Dm\_exec\_query\_optimizer\_info. This DMV is an aggregation of the optimization events over time. It won’t show the individual optimizations for a given query, but it will track the optimizations performed. This isn’t as immediately handy for tuning an individual query, but if you are working on reducing the costs of a workload over time, being able to track this information can help you determine whether your query tuning is making a positive difference, at least in terms of optimization time. Some of the data returned is for internal SQL Server use only. Figure 9-6 shows a truncated example of the useful data returned in the results from the following query.

```
SELECT deqoi.counter,
       deqoi.occurrence,
       deqoi.value
  FROM sys.dm_exec_query_optimizer_info AS deqoi ;
```

Running this query before and after another query can show you the changes that have occurred in the number and type of optimizations completed.

## Parallel Plan Optimization

The optimizer considers various factors while evaluating the cost of processing a query using a parallel plan. Some of these factors are as follows:

- Number of CPUs available to SQL Server
- SQL Server edition
- Available memory
- Cost threshold for parallelism

- Type of query being executed
- Number of rows to be processed in a given stream
- Number of active concurrent connections

If only one CPU is available to SQL Server, then the optimizer won't consider a parallel plan. The number of CPUs available to SQL Server can be restricted using the *affinity mask* setting of the SQL Server configuration. The affinity mask value is a bitmap in that a bit represents a CPU, with the rightmost bit position representing CPU0. For example, to allow SQL Server to use only CPU0 to CPU3 in an eight-way box, execute these statements (--affinity\_mask in the download):

```
USE master ;
EXEC sp_configure
    'show advanced option',
    '1' ;
RECONFIGURE ;
EXEC sp_configure
    'affinity mask',
    15 ;
--Bit map: 00001111
RECONFIGURE ;
```

This configuration takes effect immediately. *affinity mask* is a special setting, and I recommend that you use it only in instances where taking control away from SQL Server makes sense, such as when you have multiple instances of SQL Server running on the same machine and you want to isolate them from each other. To set affinity past 32 processors, you have to use the *affinity64 mask* option that is available only in the 64-bit version of SQL Server. You can also bind I/O to a specific set of processors using the *affinity mask I/O* option in the same way.

Even if multiple CPUs are available to SQL Server, if an individual query is not allowed to use more than one CPU for execution, then the optimizer discards the parallel plan option. The maximum number of CPUs that can be used for a parallel query is governed by the *max degree of parallelism* setting of the SQL Server configuration. The default value is 0, which allows all the CPUs (availed by the *affinity mask* setting) to be used for a parallel query. You can also control parallelism through the Resource Governor. If you want to allow parallel queries to use no more than two CPUs out of CPU0 to CPU3, limited by the preceding *affinity mask* setting, execute the following statements (--parallelism in the download):

```
USE master ;
EXEC sp_configure
    'show advanced option',
    '1' ;
RECONFIGURE ;
EXEC sp_configure
    'max degree of parallelism',
    2 ;
RECONFIGURE ;
```

This change takes effect immediately, without any restart. The *max degree of parallelism* setting can also be controlled at a query level using the *MAXDOP* query hint:

```
SELECT *
FROM   dbo.t1
WHERE  C1 = 1
OPTION (MAXDOP 2) ;
```

Changing the `max degree of parallelism` setting is best determined by the needs of your application and the workloads on it. I will usually leave the max degree of parallelism set to the default value unless indications arise that suggest a change is necessary. I will usually adjust the cost threshold for parallelism up from its default value of 5.

Since parallel queries require more memory, the optimizer determines the amount of memory available before choosing a parallel plan. The amount of memory required increases with the degree of parallelism. If the memory requirement of the parallel plan for a given degree of parallelism cannot be satisfied, then SQL Server decreases the degree of parallelism automatically or completely abandons the parallel plan for the query in the given workload context. You can see this part of the evaluation in the SELECT properties of Figure 9-5.

Queries with a very high CPU overhead are the best candidates for a parallel plan. Examples include joining large tables, performing substantial aggregations, and sorting large result sets, all common operations on reporting systems (less so on OLTP systems). For simple queries usually found in transaction-processing applications, the additional coordination required to initialize, synchronize, and terminate a parallel plan outweighs the potential performance benefit.

Whether a query is simple is determined by comparing the estimated execution time of the query with a cost threshold. This cost threshold is controlled by the `cost threshold for parallelism` setting of the SQL Server configuration. By default, this setting's value is 5, which means that if the estimated execution time of the serial plan is more than 5 seconds, then the optimizer considers a parallel plan for the query. For example, to modify the cost threshold to 35 seconds, execute the following statements (`--parallelismthreshold` in the download):

```
USE master ;
EXEC sp_configure
    'show advanced option',
    '1';
RECONFIGURE ;
EXEC sp_configure
    'cost threshold for parallelism',
    35;
RECONFIGURE ;
```

This change takes effect immediately, without any restart. If only one CPU is available to SQL Server, then this setting is ignored. I've found that OLTP systems suffer when the cost threshold for parallelism is set this low. Usually increasing the value to somewhere between 30 and 50 will be beneficial. Be sure to test this suggestion against your system to ensure it works well for you.

The DML action queries (INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE) are executed serially. However, the SELECT portion of an INSERT statement and the WHERE clause of an UPDATE or a DELETE statement can be executed in parallel. The actual data changes are applied serially to the database. Also, if the optimizer determines that the estimated cost is too low, it does not introduce parallel operators.

Note that, even at execution time, SQL Server determines whether the current system workload and configuration information allow for parallel query execution. If parallel query execution is allowed, SQL Server determines the optimal number of threads and spreads the execution of the query across those threads. When a query starts a parallel execution, it uses the same number of threads until completion. SQL Server reexamines the optimal number of threads before executing the parallel query the next time.

Once the processing strategy is finalized by using either a serial plan or a parallel plan, the optimizer generates the execution plan for the query. The execution plan contains the detailed processing strategy decided by the optimizer to execute the query. This includes steps such as data retrieval, result set joins, result set ordering, and so on. A detailed explanation of how to analyze the processing steps included in an execution plan is presented in [Chapter 3](#). The execution plan generated for the query is saved in the plan cache for future reuse.

## Execution Plan Caching

The execution plan of a query generated by the optimizer is saved in a special part of SQL Server's memory pool called the *plan cache* or *procedure cache*. (The procedure cache is part of the SQL Server buffer cache and is explained in [Chapter 2](#).) Saving the plan in a cache allows SQL Server to avoid running through the whole query optimization process again when the same query is resubmitted. SQL Server supports different techniques such as *plan cache aging* and *plan cache types* to increase the reusability of the cached plans. It also stores two binary values called the *query hash* and the *query plan hash*.

**Note** I discuss the techniques supported by SQL Server for improving the effectiveness of execution plan reuse later in this chapter.

## Components of the Execution Plan

The execution plan generated by the optimizer contains two components:

- *Query plan*: This represents the commands that specify all the physical operations required to execute a query.
- *Execution context*: This maintains the variable parts of a query within the context of a given user.

I will cover these components in more detail in the next sections.

### Query Plan

The query plan is a reentrant, read-only data structure, with commands that specify all the physical operations required to execute the query. The reentrant property allows the query plan to be accessed concurrently by multiple connections. The physical operations include specifications on which tables and indexes to access, how and in what order they should be accessed, the type of join operations to be performed between multiple tables, and so forth. No user context is stored in the query plan.

### Execution Context

The execution context is another data structure that maintains the variable part of the query. Although the server keeps track of the execution plans in the procedure cache, these plans are context neutral. Therefore, each user executing the query will have a separate execution context that holds data specific to their execution, such as parameter values and connection details.

## Aging of the Execution Plan

The procedure cache is part of SQL Server's buffer cache, which also holds data pages. As new execution plans are added to the procedure cache, the size of the procedure cache keeps growing, affecting the retention of useful data pages in memory. To avoid this, SQL Server dynamically controls the retention of the execution plans in the procedure cache, retaining the frequently used execution plans and discarding plans that are not used for a certain period of time.

SQL Server keeps track of the frequency of an execution plan's reuse by associating an age field to it. When an execution plan is generated, the age field is populated with the cost of generating the plan. A complex query requiring extensive optimization will have an age field value higher than that for a simpler query.

At regular intervals, the current cost of all the execution plans in the procedure cache is examined by SQL Server's lazy writer process (which manages most of the background processes in SQL Server). If an execution plan is not reused for a long time, then the current cost will eventually be reduced to 0. The cheaper the execution plan was to generate, the sooner its cost will be reduced to 0. Once an execution plan's cost reaches 0, the plan becomes a candidate for removal from memory. SQL Server removes all plans with a cost of 0 from the procedure cache when memory pressure increases to such an extent that there is no longer enough free memory to serve new requests. However, if a system has enough memory and free memory pages are available to serve new requests, execution plans with a cost of 0 can remain in the procedure cache for a long time so that they can be reused later, if required.

As well as changing the costs downward, execution plans can also find their costs increased to the max cost of generating the plan every time the plan is reused (or to the current cost of the plan for ad hoc plans). For example, suppose you have two execution plans with generation costs equal to 100 and 10. Their starting cost values will therefore be 100 and 10, respectively. If both execution plans are reused immediately, their age fields will be set back to that maximum cost. With these cost values, the lazy writer will bring down the cost of the second plan to 0 much earlier than that of the first one, unless the second plan is reused more often. Therefore, even if a costly plan is reused less frequently than a cheaper plan, because of the effect of the initial cost, the costly plan can remain at a nonzero cost value for a longer period of time.

## Analyzing the Execution Plan Cache

You can obtain a lot of information about the execution plans in the procedure cache by accessing various dynamic management objects. The initial DMO for working with execution plans is `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans`:

```
SELECT *
FROM sys.dm_exec_cached_plans ;
```

Table 9-1 shows some of the useful information provided by `sys.dmexeccachedplans` (this is easier to read in Grid view).

**Table 9-1.** `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans`

Column Name	Description
refcounts	Represents the number of other objects in the cache referencing this plan
usecounts	The number of times this object has been used since it was added to the cache
size_in_bytes	The size of the plan stored in the cache
cacheobjtype	What type of plan this is; there are several, but of particular interest are these:  Compiled plan: A completed execution plan Compiled plan stub: A marker used for ad hoc queries (you can find more details in the "Ad Hoc Workload" section of this chapter) Parse tree: A plan stored for accessing a view
Objtype	The type of object that generated the plan. Again, there are several, but these are of particular interest:  Proc Prepared Ad hoc View
Plan_handle	The identifier for this plan in memory; it is used to retrieve query text and execution plans.

Using the DMV `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans` all by itself gets you only a very small part of the information. DMOs are best used in combination with other DMOs and other system views. For example, using the dynamic management function `sys.dm_exec_query_plan(plan_handle)` in combination with `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans` will also bring back the XML execution plan itself so that you can display it and work with it. If you then bring in `sys.dm_exec_sql_text(plan_handle)`, you can also retrieve the original query text. This may not seem useful while you're running known queries for the examples here, but when you go to your production system and begin to pull in execution plans from the cache, it might be handy to have the original query. To get aggregate performance metrics about the cached plan, you can use `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` to return that data. Among other pieces of data, the query hash and query plan hash are stored in this DMF. Finally, to see execution plans for queries that are currently executing, you can use `sys.dm_exec_requests`.

In the following sections, I'll explore how the plan cache works with actual queries of these DMOs.

## Execution Plan Reuse

When a query is submitted, SQL Server checks the procedure cache for a matching execution plan. If one is not found, then SQL Server performs the query compilation and optimization to generate a new execution plan. However, if the plan exists in the procedure cache, it is reused with the private execution context. This saves the CPU cycles that otherwise would have been spent on the plan generation.

Queries are submitted to SQL Server with filter criteria to limit the size of the result set. The same queries are often resubmitted with different values for the filter criteria. For example, consider the following query:

```
SELECT    soh.SalesOrderNumber,
          soh.OrderDate,
          sod.OrderQty,
          sod.LineTotal
FROM      Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN      Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
          ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
WHERE     soh.CustomerID = 29690
          AND sod.ProductID = 711 ;
```

When this query is submitted, the optimizer creates an execution plan and saves it in the procedure cache to reuse in the future. If this query is resubmitted with a different filter criterion value—for example, `soh.CustomerID = 29500`—it will be beneficial to reuse the existing execution plan for the previously supplied filter criterion value. But whether the execution plan created for one filter criterion value can be reused for another filter criterion value depends on how the query is submitted to SQL Server.

The queries (or workload) submitted to SQL Server can be broadly classified under two categories that determine whether the execution plan will be reusable as the value of the variable parts of the query changes:

- Ad hoc
- Prepared

**Tip** To test the output of `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans` for this chapter, it will be necessary to remove the plans from cache on occasion by executing `DBCC FREEPROCCACHE`. Do not run this on your production server since flushing the cache will require all execution plans to be rebuilt as they are executed, placing a serious strain on your production system for no good reason. You can use `DBCC FREEPROCCACHE(plan_handle)` to target specific plans. Retrieve the `plan_handle` using the DMOs we've already talked about.

## Ad Hoc Workload

Queries can be submitted to SQL Server without explicitly isolating the variables from the query. These types of queries executed without explicitly converting the variable parts of the query into parameters are referred to as *ad hoc workloads* (or queries). For example, consider this query (adhoc.sql in the download):

```
SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
       soh.OrderDate,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.LineTotal
  FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
 JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
    ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
 WHERE soh.CustomerID = 29690
   AND sod.productid = 711
```

If the query is submitted as is, without explicitly converting either of the hard-coded values to a parameter (that can be supplied to the query when executed), then the query is an ad hoc query.

In this query, the filter criterion value is embedded in the query itself and is not explicitly parameterized to isolate it from the query. This means that you cannot reuse the execution plan for this query unless you use the same values and all the spacing and carriage returns are identical. However, the places where values are used in the queries can be explicitly parameterized in three different ways that are jointly categorized as a prepared workload.

## Prepared Workload

*Prepared workloads* (or queries) explicitly parameterize the variable parts of the query so that the query plan isn't tied to the value of the variable parts. In SQL Server, queries can be submitted as prepared workloads using the following three methods:

- *Stored procedures*: Allows saving a collection of SQL statements that can accept and return user-supplied parameters
- *Sp\_executesql*: Allows executing a SQL statement or a SQL batch that may contain user-supplied parameters, without saving the SQL statement or batch
- *Prepare/execute model*: Allows a SQL client to request the generation of a query plan that can be reused during subsequent executions of the query with different parameter values, without saving the SQL statement(s) in SQL Server

For example, the SELECT statement shown previously can be explicitly parameterized using a stored procedure as follows (--spBasicSalesInfo in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('spBasicSalesInfo'))
 ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROC dbo.spBasicSalesInfo ;
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.spBasicSalesInfo
    @ProductID INT,
    @CustomerID INT
```

```

AS
SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
       soh.OrderDate,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.LineTotal
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
       ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
WHERE  soh.CustomerID = @CustomerID
       AND sod.ProductID = @ProductID ;

```

The plan of the SELECT statement included within the stored procedure will embed the parameters (@ProductID and @CustomerID), not variable values. I will cover these methods in more detail shortly.

## Plan Reusability of an Ad Hoc Workload

When a query is submitted as an ad hoc workload, SQL Server generates an execution plan and stores that plan in the cache, where it can be reused if exactly the same ad hoc query is resubmitted. Since there are no parameters, the hard-coded values are stored as part of the plan. In order for a plan to be reused from the cache, the T-SQL must match exactly. This includes all spaces and carriage returns plus any values supplied with the plan. If any of these change, the plan cannot be reused.

To understand this, consider the ad hoc query we've used before (-adhoc in the download):

```

SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
       soh.OrderDate,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.LineTotal
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
       ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
WHERE  soh.CustomerID = 29690
       AND sod.ProductID = 711 ;

```

The execution plan generated for this ad hoc query is based on the exact text of the query, which includes comments, case, trailing spaces, and hard returns. You'll have to use the exact text to pull the information out of sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans:

```

SELECT c.usecounts
      ,c.cacheobjtype
      ,c.objtype
FROM   sys.dm_exec_cached_plans c
CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(c.plan_handle) t
WHERE  t.text = 'SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
                   soh.OrderDate,
                   sod.OrderQty,
                   sod.LineTotal
              FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
              JOIN   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
                     ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
              WHERE  soh.CustomerID = 29690
                     AND sod.ProductID = 711 ;'

```

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype
1	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc

**Figure 9-7.** *sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans* output

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype
1	2	Compiled Plan	Adhoc

**Figure 9-8.** Reusing the executable plan from the procedure cache

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype
1	2	Compiled Plan	Adhoc

**Figure 9-9.** *sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans* shows that the existing plan is not reused.

Figure 9-7 shows the output of *sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans*.

You can see from Figure 9-7 that a compiled plan is generated and saved in the procedure cache for the preceding ad hoc query. To find the specific query, I used the query itself in the WHERE clause. You can see that this plan has been used once up until now (usecounts = 1). If this ad hoc query is reexecuted, SQL Server reuses the existing executable plan from the procedure cache, as shown in Figure 9-8.

In Figure 9-8, you can see that the usecounts for the preceding query's executable plan has increased to 2, confirming that the existing plan for this query has been reused. If this query is executed repeatedly, the existing plan will be reused every time.

Since the plan generated for the preceding query includes the filter criterion value, the reusability of the plan is limited to the use of the same filter criterion value. Reexecute *adhoc1.sql*, but change *soh.CustomerID* to 29500:

```
SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
       soh.OrderDate,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.LineTotal
  FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
  JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
    ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
 WHERE soh.CustomerID = 29500
   AND sod.ProductID = 711 ;
```

The existing plan can't be reused, and if the *sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans* is rerun as is, you'll see that the execution count hasn't increased (Figure 9-9).

Instead, I'll adjust the query against *sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans*:

```
SELECT c.usecounts,
       c.cacheobjtype,
       c.objtype,
       t.text,
       c.plan_handle
  FROM sys.dm_exec_cached_plans c
 CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(c.plan_handle) t
```

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text	plan_handle
1	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber, soh.Order...	0x0600090062678F24A032E5F2000...
2	2	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber, soh.Order...	0x0600090030BE7A1DF05E1EF300...

Figure 9-10. sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans showing that the existing plan can't be reused

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text	size_in_bytes
1	1	Compiled Plan Stub	Adhoc	SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber, soh.Order...	272

Figure 9-11. sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans showing a compiled plan stub

```
WHERE t.text LIKE 'SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
soh.OrderDate,
sod.OrderQty,
sod.LineTotal
FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID%' ;
```

You can see the output from this query in Figure 9-10.

From the sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans output in Figure 9-8, you can see that the previous plan for the query hasn't been reused; the corresponding usecounts value remained at the old value of 2. Instead of reusing the existing plan, a new plan is generated for the query and is saved in the procedure cache with a new plan\_handle. If this ad hoc query is reexecuted repeatedly with different filter criterion values, a new execution plan will be generated every time. The inefficient reuse of the execution plan for this ad hoc query increases the load on the CPU by consuming additional CPU cycles to regenerate the plan.

To summarize, ad hoc plan caching uses statement-level caching and is limited to an exact textual match. If an ad hoc query is not complex, SQL Server can implicitly parameterize the query to increase plan reusability by using a feature called *simple parameterization*. The definition of a simple query for simple parameterization is limited to fairly simple cases such as ad hoc queries with only one table. As shown in the previous example, most queries requiring a join operation cannot be autoparameterized.

## Optimize for an Ad Hoc Workload

If your server is going to primarily support ad hoc queries, it is possible to achieve a degree of performance improvement. One server option is called `optimize for ad hoc workloads`. Enabling this for the server changes the way the engine deals with ad hoc queries. Instead of saving a full compiled plan for the query the first time it's called, a compiled plan stub is stored. The stub does not have a full execution plan associated, saving the storage space required for it and the time saving it to the cache. This option can be enabled without rebooting the server:

```
sp_configure
    'optimize for ad hoc workloads',
    1 ;
GO
RECONFIGURE ;
```

After changing the option, flush the cache, and then rerun the query --adhoc. Modify the query against sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans so that you include the size\_in\_bytes column, and then run it to see the results in Figure 9-11.

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text	size_in_bytes
1	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber, soh.Order...	57344

**Figure 9-12.** The compiled plan stub has become a compiled plan.

Figure 9-11 shows in the cacheobjtype column that the new object in the cache is a compiled plan stub. Stubs can be created for lots more queries with less impact on the server than full compiled plans. But the next time an ad hoc query is executed, a fully compiled plan is created. To see this in action, run the query `--adhoc`, and check the results in `sys.dm_exec_cachedplans`, as shown in Figure 9-12.

Check the cacheobjtype value. It has changed from Compiled Plan Stub to Compiled Plan. Finally, to see the real difference between a stub and a full plan, check the sizeinbytes column in Figure 9-11 and Figure 9-12. The size changed from 272 in the stub to 57344 in the full plan. This shows precisely the savings available when working with lots of ad hoc queries. Before proceeding, be sure to disable `optimize for ad hoc workloads`:

```
sp_configure
    'optimize for ad hoc workloads',
    0 ;
GO
RECONFIGURE ;
```

## Simple Parameterization

When an ad hoc query is submitted, SQL Server analyzes the query to determine which parts of the incoming text might be parameters. It looks at the variable parts of the ad hoc query to determine whether it will be safe to parameterize them automatically and use the parameters (instead of the variable parts) in the query so that the query plan can be independent of the variable values. This feature of automatically converting the variable part of a query into a parameter, even though not parameterized explicitly (using a prepared workload technique), is called *simple parameterization*.

During simple parameterization, SQL Server ensures that if the ad hoc query is converted to a parameterized template, the changes in the parameter values won't widely change the plan requirement. On determining the simple parameterization to be safe, SQL Server creates a parameterized template for the ad hoc query and saves the parameterized plan in the procedure cache.

The parameterized plan is not based on the dynamic values used in the query. Since the plan is generated for a parameterized template, it can be reused when the ad hoc query is reexecuted with different values for the variable parts.

To understand the simple parameterization feature of SQL Server, consider the following query (`--simple_parameterization` in the download):

```
SELECT a.*
FROM Person.Address AS a
WHERE a.AddressID = 42 ;
```

When this ad hoc query is submitted, SQL Server can treat this query as it is for plan creation. However, before the query is executed, SQL Server tries to determine whether it can be safely parameterized. On determining that the variable part of the query can be parameterized without affecting the basic structure of the query, SQL Server parameterizes the query and generates a plan for the parameterized query. You can observe this from the `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans` output shown in Figure 9-13.

The usecounts of the executable plan for the parameterized query appropriately represents the number of reuses as 1. Also, note that the objtype for the autoparameterized executable plan is no longer Adhoc; it reflects the fact that the plan is for a parameterized query, Prepared.

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text
1	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT c.usecounts, c.cacheobjtype, c.objtype...
2	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT a.* FROM Person.Address AS a WHERE a.Ad...
3	1	Compiled Plan	Prepared	(@1tinyint)SELECT [a].* FROM [Person].[Address] [a] WHE...

Figure 9-13. sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans output showing an autoparameterized plan

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text
21	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT a.* FROM Person.Address AS a WHERE a.[AddressID] = 52 ; --previous value was 42
22	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT a.* FROM Person.Address AS a WHERE a.AddressID = 42 ;
23	2	Compiled Plan	Prep...	(@1tinyint)SELECT [a].* FROM [Person].[Address] [a] WHERE [a].[AddressID]=@1

Figure 9-14. sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans output showing reuse of the autoparameterized plan

The original ad hoc query, even though not executed, gets compiled to create the query tree required for the simple parameterization of the query. The compiled plan for the ad hoc query will be saved in the plan cache. But before creating the executable plan for the ad hoc query, SQL Server figured out that it was safe to autoparameterize and thus autoparameterized the query for further processing. This is visible as the highlighted line in Figure 9-13.

Since this ad hoc query has been autoparameterized, SQL Server will reuse the existing execution plan if you reexecute `simpleparameterization.sql` with a different value for the variable part:

```
SELECT a.*  
FROM Person.Address AS a  
WHERE a.[AddressID] = 52 --previous value was 42
```

Figure 9-14 shows the output of `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans`.

From Figure 9-14, you can see that although a new plan has been generated for this ad hoc query, the ad hoc one using an AddressId value of 52, the existing prepared plan is reused as indicated by the increase in the corresponding usecounts value to 2. The ad hoc query can be reexecuted repeatedly with different filter criterion values, reusing the existing execution plan—all this despite the fact that the original text of the two queries does not match. The parameterized query for both would be the same, so it was reused.

There is one more aspect to note in the parameterized query for which the execution plan is cached. In Figure 9-10, observe that the body of the parameterized query doesn't exactly match with that of the ad hoc query submitted. For instance, in the ad hoc query, the words `from` and `where` are in lowercase, and the `AddressID` column is enclosed in square brackets.

On realizing that the ad hoc query can be safely autoparameterized, SQL Server picks a template that can be used instead of the exact text of the query.

To understand the significance of this, consider the following query:

```
SELECT a.*  
FROM Person.Address AS a  
WHERE a.AddressID BETWEEN 40 AND 60 ;
```

Figure 9-15 shows the output of `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans`.

From Figure 9-15, you can see that SQL Server put the query through the simplification process and substituted a pair of `>=` and `<=` operators, which are equivalent to the `BETWEEN` operator. Then the

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text
1	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT c.usecounts, c.cacheobjtype, c.objtype, t.text FROM sys.dm_exec_cached_plans c CROSS ...
2	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT a.* FROM Person.Address AS a WHERE a.AddressID BETWEEN 40 AND 60 ;
3	1	Compiled Plan	Prepared	(@1tinyint,@2tinyint)SELECT [a].* FROM [Person].[Address] [a] WHERE [a].[AddressID]>=@1 AND [a].[AddressID]<=@2

**Figure 9-15.** `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans` output showing plan simple parameterization using a template

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text
1	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT c.usecounts, c.cacheobjtype, c.objtype, t.text FROM sys.dm_exec_cached_plans c CROS...
2	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT a.* FROM Person.Address AS a WHERE a.AddressID >= 40 AND a.AddressID <= 60
3	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT a.* FROM Person.Address AS a WHERE a.AddressID BETWEEN 40 AND 60 ;
4	2	Compiled Plan	Prep...	(@1tinyint,@2tinyint)SELECT [a].* FROM [Person].[Address] [a] WHERE [a].[AddressID]>=@1 AND [a].[AddressID]<=@2

**Figure 9-16.** `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans` output showing reuse of the autoparameterized plan

parameterization step modified the query again. That means instead of resubmitting the preceding ad hoc query using the `BETWEEN` clause, if a similar query using a pair of `>=` and `<=` is submitted, SQL Server will be able to reuse the existing execution plan. To confirm this behavior, let's modify the ad hoc query as follows:

```
SELECT a.*  
FROM Person.Address AS a  
WHERE a.AddressID >= 40  
AND a.AddressID <= 60 ;
```

Figure 9-16 shows the output of `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans`.

From Figure 9-16, you can see that the existing plan is reused, even though the query is syntactically different from the query executed earlier. The autoparameterized plan generated by SQL Server allows the existing plan to be reused not only when the query is resubmitted with different variable values but also for queries with the same template form.

## Simple Parameterization Limits

SQL Server is highly conservative during simple parameterization, because the cost of a bad plan can far outweigh the cost of generating a new plan. The conservative approach prevents SQL Server from creating an unsafe autoparameterized plan. Thus, simple parameterization is limited to fairly simple cases, such as ad hoc queries with only one table. An ad hoc query with a join operation between two (or more) tables (as shown in the early part of the “Plan Reusability of an Ad Hoc Workload” section) is not considered safe for simple parameterization.

In a scalable system, do not rely on simple parameterization for plan reusability. The simple parameterization feature of SQL Server makes an educated guess as to which variables and constants can be parameterized. Instead of relying on SQL Server for simple parameterization, you should actually specify it programmatically while building your application.

## Forced Parameterization

If the system you’re working on consists of primarily ad hoc queries, you may want to attempt to increase the number of queries that accept parameterization. You can modify a database to attempt to force, within certain restrictions, all queries to be parameterized just like in simple parameterization.

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text
1	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT c.usecounts, c.cacheobjtype, c.objtype, t.text FROM sys.dm_exec_cac...
2	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT ea.EmailAddress, e.BirthDate, a.City FROM Person.Person AS p JOIN HumanRes...

**Figure 9-17.** A more complicated query doesn't get parameterized.

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text
1	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT c.usecounts, c.cacheobjtype, c.objtype, t.text FROM sys.dm_exec_cached_plans c CROSS AP...
2	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	declare @BatchID uniqueidentifier set @BatchID = newid() ...
3	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	declare @BatchID uniqueidentifier set @BatchID = NEWID() ...
4	1	Compiled Plan	Adhoc	SELECT ea.EmailAddress, e.BirthDate, a.City FROM Person.Person AS p JOIN HumanResources.Employee AS e ...
5	1	Compiled Plan	Prep...	(@0 varchar(8000))select ea . EmailAddress , e . BirthDate , a . City from Person . Person as p join HumanResources . Employee ...

**Figure 9-18.** Forced parameterization changes the plan.

To do this, you have to change the database option PARAMETERIZATION to FORCED using ALTER DATABASE like this:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET PARAMETERIZATION FORCED ;
(--forcedparameterization in the download):
```

```
SELECT ea.EmailAddress,
       e.BirthDate,
       a.City
  FROM Person.Person AS p
  JOIN HumanResources.Employee AS e
    ON p.BusinessEntityID = e.BusinessEntityID
  JOIN Person.BusinessEntityAddress AS bea
    ON e.BusinessEntityID = bea.BusinessEntityID
  JOIN Person.Address AS a
    ON bea.AddressID = a.AddressID
  JOIN Person.StateProvince AS sp
    ON a.StateProvinceID = sp.StateProvinceID
  JOIN Person.EmailAddress AS ea
    ON p.BusinessEntityID = ea.BusinessEntityID
 WHERE ea.EmailAddress LIKE 'david%'
   AND sp.StateProvinceCode = 'WA' ;
```

When you run this query, simple parameterization is not applied, as you can see in Figure 9-17.

No prepared plans are visible in the output from sys.dmexeccachedplans. But if you use the previous script to set PARAMETERIZATION to FORCED, clear the cache, and rerun the query, the output from sys.dmexeccachedplans changes so that the output looks different, as shown in Figure 9-18.

Now a prepared plan is visible in the third row. However, only a single parameter was supplied, @0 varchar(8000). If you get the full text of the prepared plan out of sys.dm\_exec\_querytext and format it, it looks like this:

```
(@0 varchar(8000))
SELECT ea.EmailAddress,
       e.BirthDate,
       a.City
```

```

FROM      Person.Person AS p
JOIN      HumanResources.Employee AS e
          ON p.BusinessEntityID = e.BusinessEntityID
JOIN      Person.BusinessEntityAddress AS bea
          ON e.BusinessEntityID = bea.BusinessEntityID
JOIN      Person.Address AS a
          ON bea.AddressID = a.AddressID
JOIN      Person.StateProvince AS sp
          ON a.StateProvinceID = sp.StateProvinceID
JOIN      Person.EmailAddress AS ea
          ON p.BusinessEntityID = ea.BusinessEntityID
WHERE     ea.EmailAddress LIKE 'david%'
          AND sp.StateProvinceCode = @0
  
```

Because of its restrictions, forced parameterization was unable to substitute anything for the string 'david%', but it was able to for the string 'WA'. Worth noting is that the variable was declared as a full 8,000-length VARCHAR instead of the three-character NCHAR like the actual column in the Person.StateProvince table. Although you have a parameter, it might lead to implicit data conversions that could prevent the use of an index.

Before you start using forced parameterization, the following list of restrictions may give you information to help you decide whether forced parameterization will work in your database. (This is a partial list; for the complete list, please consult "Books Online.")

- INSERT ... EXECUTE queries
- Statements inside procedures, triggers, and user-defined functions since they already have execution plans
- Client-side prepared statements (you'll find more detail on these later in this chapter)
- Queries with the query hint RECOMPILE
- Pattern and escape clause arguments used in a LIKE statement (as shown earlier)

This gives you an idea of the types of restrictions placed on forced parameterization. Forced parameterization is really going to be potentially helpful only if you are suffering from large amounts of compiles and recompiles because of ad hoc queries. Any other load won't benefit from the use of forced parameterization.

Before continuing, change the database back to SIMPLE PARAMETERIZATION:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET PARAMETERIZATION SIMPLE;
```

## Plan Reusability of a Prepared Workload

Defining queries as a prepared workload allows the variable parts of the queries to be explicitly parameterized. This enables SQL Server to generate a query plan that is not tied to the variable parts of the query, and it keeps the variable parts separate in an execution context. As you saw in the previous section, SQL Server supports three techniques to submit a prepared workload:

- Stored procedures
- sp\_executesql
- Prepare/execute model

In the sections that follow, I cover each of these techniques in more depth and point out where it's possible for parameterized execution plans to cause problems.

**Table 9-2.** Events to Analyze Plan Caching for the Stored Procedures Event Class

Event	Description
sp_cache_hit	Plan is found in the cache.
sp_cache_miss	Plan is not found in the cache.

**Table 9-3.** Data Columns to Analyze Plan Caching for Stored Procedures Event Class

Event	Data Column
SP:CacheHit	EventClass
SP:CacheMiss	TextData
SP:Completed	LoginName
SP:ExecContextHit	SPID
SP:Starting	StartTime
SP:StmtCompleted	

## Stored Procedures

Using stored procedures is a standard technique for improving the effectiveness of plan caching. When the stored procedure is compiled, a combined plan is generated for all the SQL statements within the stored procedure. The execution plan generated for the stored procedure can be reused whenever the stored procedure is reexecuted with different parameter values.

In addition to checking `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans`, you can track the execution plan caching for stored procedures using the Extended Events tool. Extended Events provides the events listed in Table 9-2 to track the plan caching for stored procedures.

To track the stored procedure plan caching using Profiler, you can use these events along with the other stored procedure events and data columns shown in Table 9-3.

To understand how stored procedures can improve plan caching, reexamine the procedure created earlier called `spBasicSalesInfo`. The procedure (`spBasicSalesInfo.sql`) is repeated here for clarity:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('spBasicSalesInfo'))
) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROC dbo.spBasicSalesInfo ;
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.spBasicSalesInfo
    @ProductID INT,
    @CustomerID INT
AS
SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
    soh.OrderDate,
    sod.OrderQty,
    sod.LineTotal
FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
    ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
WHERE soh.CustomerID = @CustomerID
    AND sod.ProductID = @ProductID ;
```

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text
1	1	Compiled Plan	Proc	CREATE PROC dbo.spBasicSalesInfo @CustomerID INT, @ProductID INT...

**Figure 9-19.** *sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans* output showing stored procedure plan caching

	name	timestamp	
▶	sp_cache_miss	2011-12-11 08:10:03.6327329	
	sp_cache_insert	2011-12-11 08:10:03.6493345	
	sql_batch_completed	2011-12-11 08:10:03.6503110	

Event: sp\_cache\_miss (2011-12-11 08:10:03.6327329)

Details	
Field	Value
cached_text	EXEC dbo.spBasicSalesInfo @CustomerID = 29690, @ProductID = 711 ;
database_id	9
database_name	AdventureWorks2008R2
object_id	19651015
object_name	
object_type	ADHOC

**Figure 9-20.** Extended Events output showing that the stored procedure plan isn't easily found in the cache

To retrieve a result set for soh.CustomerId = 29690 and sod.ProductId=711, you can execute the stored procedure like this:

```
EXEC dbo.spBasicSalesInfo
    @CustomerID = 29690,
    @ProductID = 711 ;
```

Figure 9-19 shows the output of *sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans*.

From Figure 9-19, you can see that a compiled plan of type Proc is generated and cached for the stored procedure. The usecounts value of the executable plan is 1 since the stored procedure is executed only once.

Figure 9-20 shows the Extended Events output for this stored procedure execution.

From the Extended Events output, you can see that the plan for the stored procedure is not found in the cache. When the stored procedure is executed the first time, SQL Server looks in the procedure cache and fails to find any cache entry for the procedure *sp\_BasicSalesInfo*, causing an *sp\_cache\_miss* event. On not finding a cached plan, SQL Server makes arrangements to compile the stored procedure. Subsequently, SQL Server generates and saves the plan and proceeds with the execution of the stored procedure. You can see this in the *sp\_cache\_insert* event. Figure 9-21 shows the details:

If this stored procedure is reexecuted to retrieve a result set for @ProductId = 777, then the existing plan is reused, as shown in the *sys.dmexeccachedplans* output in Figure 9-22.

```
EXEC dbo.spBasicSalesInfo
    @CustomerID = 29690,
    @ProductID = 777 ;
```

You can also confirm the reuse of the execution plan from the Extended Events output, as shown in Figure 9-23.

Field	Value
cached_text	
database_id	9
database_name	AdventureWorks2008R2
object_id	180195692
object_name	spBasicSalesInfo
object_type	PROC
plan_handle	0x006098FD00000000452364F4FE070000C07098I

**Figure 9-21.** Details of the `sp_cache_hit` extended event

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text
3	2	Compiled Plan	Proc	CREATE PROC dbo.spBasicSalesInfo @ProductID INT, ...

**Figure 9-22.** `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans` output showing reuse of the stored procedure plan

	name	timestamp
	sp_cache_miss	2011-12-11 08:21:17.1821045
▶	sp_cache_hit	2011-12-11 08:21:17.1821045
	sql_batch_completed	2011-12-11 08:21:17.1830810

Event: sp\_cache\_hit (2011-12-11 08:21:17.1821045)

Details	
Field	Value
cached_text	
database_id	9
database_name	AdventureWorks2008R2
object_id	180195692
object_name	spBasicSalesInfo
object_type	PROC
plan_handle	0xE05044F300000000FEBFFFFFFF0000

**Figure 9-23.** Profiler trace output showing reuse of the stored procedure plan

From the Extended Events output, you can see that the existing plan is found in the procedure cache. On searching the cache, SQL Server finds the executable plan for the stored procedure `spBasicSalesInfo` causing an `sp_cache_hit` event. Once the existing execution plan is found, SQL reuses the plan to execute the stored procedure. One interesting note: The `sp_cache_miss` event just prior is for the SQL batch calling the procedure. Because of the change to the parameter value, that statement was not found in the cache, but the procedure's execution plan was. This apparently "extra" cache miss event can cause confusion.

A few other aspects of stored procedures are worth considering:

- Stored procedures are compiled on first execution.
- Stored procedures have other performance benefits, such as reducing network traffic.
- Stored procedures have additional benefits, such as the isolation of the data.

## Stored Procedures Are Compiled on First Execution

The execution plan of a stored procedure is generated when it is executed the first time. When the stored procedure is created, it is only parsed and saved in the database. No normalization and optimization processes are performed during the stored procedure creation. This allows a stored procedure to be created before creating all the objects accessed by the stored procedure. For example, you can create the following stored procedure, even when table NotHere referred to in the stored procedure does not exist:

```
IF(SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.MyNewProc')) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROCEDURE dbo.MyNewProc
GO
CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.MyNewProc
AS
SELECT MyID
FROM dbo.NotHere ; --Table no_t1 doesn't exist
```

The stored procedure will be created successfully, since the normalization process to bind the referred object to the query tree (generated by the command parser during the stored procedure execution) is not performed during the stored procedure creation. The stored procedure will report the error when it is first executed (if table NotHere is not created by then), since the stored procedure is compiled the first time it is executed.

## Other Performance Benefits of Stored Procedures

Besides improving the performance through execution plan reusability, stored procedures provide the following performance benefits:

- *Business logic is close to the data:* The parts of the business logic that perform extensive operations on data stored in the database should be put in stored procedures, since SQL Server's engine is extremely powerful for relational and set theory operations.
- *Network traffic is reduced:* The database application, across the network, sends just the name of the stored procedure and the parameter values. Only the processed result set is returned to the application. The intermediate data doesn't need to be passed back and forth between the application and the database.

## Additional Benefits of Stored Procedures

Some of the other benefits provided by stored procedures are as follows:

- *The application is isolated from data structure changes:* If all critical data access is made through stored procedures, then when the database schema changes, the stored procedures can be re-created without affecting the application code that accesses the data through the stored procedures. In fact, the application accessing the database need not even be stopped.
- *There is a single point of administration:* All the business logic implemented in stored procedures is maintained as part of the database and can be managed centrally on the database itself. Of course, this benefit is highly relative, depending on whom you ask. To get a different opinion, ask a non-DBA!

- *Security can be increased:* User privileges on database tables can be restricted and can be allowed only through the standard business logic implemented in the stored procedure. For example, if you want user UserOne to be restricted from physically deleting rows from table RestrictedAccess and to be allowed to mark only the rows virtually deleted through stored procedure spMarkDeleted by setting the rows' status as 'Deleted', then you can execute the DENY and GRANT commands as follows:

```

IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.RestrictedAccess')
) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.RestrictedAccess ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.RestrictedAccess (ID INT, Status VARCHAR(7)) ;
INSERT INTO t1
VALUES (1, 'New') ;
GO
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.spuMarkDeleted')
) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROCEDURE dbo.spuMarkDeleted ;
GO
CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.spuMarkDeleted @ID INT
AS
UPDATE dbo.RestrictedAccess
SET Status = 'Deleted'
WHERE ID = @ID ;
GO
--Prevent user u1 from deleting rows
DENY DELETE ON dbo.RestrictedAccess TO UserOne ;
--Allow user u1 to mark a row as 'deleted'
GRANT EXECUTE ON dbo.spuMarkDeleted TO UserOne ;

```

This assumes the existence of user UserOne. Note that if the query within the stored procedure spMarkDeleted is built dynamically as a string (@sql) as follows, then granting permission to the stored procedure won't grant any permission to the query, since the dynamic query isn't treated as part of the stored procedure:

```

CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.spuMarkDeleted
@ID INT
AS
DECLARE @SQL NVARCHAR(MAX);
SET @SQL = 'UPDATE dbo.RestrictedAccess
SET Status = ''Deleted''
WHERE ID = ' + @ID ;
EXEC sys.sp_executesql @SQL;
GO
GRANT EXECUTE ON dbo.spuMarkDeleted TO UserOne ;

```

Consequently, user UserOne won't be able to mark the row as 'Deleted' using the stored procedure spMarkDeleted. (I cover the aspects of using a dynamic query in the stored procedure in the next chapter.)

Since stored procedures are saved as database objects, they add maintenance overhead to the database administration. Many times, you may need to execute just one or a few queries from the application. If these singleton queries are executed frequently, you should aim to reuse their execution plans to improve performance. But creating stored procedures for these individual singleton queries adds a large number of stored procedures to the database, increasing the database administrative overhead significantly. To avoid the maintenance overhead of using stored procedures and yet derive the benefit of plan reuse, submit the singleton queries as a prepared workload using the `sp_executesql` system stored procedure.

## sp\_executesql

`sp_executesql` is a system stored procedure that provides a mechanism to submit one or more queries as a prepared workload. It allows the variable parts of the query to be explicitly parameterized, and it can therefore provide execution plan reusability as effective as a stored procedure. The `SELECT` statement from `spBasicSalesInfo` can be submitted through `sp_executesql` as follows (--executesql in the download):

```
DECLARE @query NVARCHAR(MAX),
    @paramlist NVARCHAR(MAX) ;

SET @query = N';SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber ,soh.OrderDate
,sod.OrderQty ,sod.LineTotal FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod ON soh.SalesOrderID =
sod.SalesOrderID WHERE soh.CustomerID = @CustomerID
AND sod.ProductID = @ProductID';

SET @paramlist = N'@CustomerID INT, @ProductID INT' ;

EXEC sp_executesql
    @query,
    @paramlist,
    @CustomerID = 29690,
    @ProductID = 711 ;
```

Note that the strings passed to the `spexecutesql` stored procedure are declared as `NVARCHAR` and that they are built with a prefix of `N`. This is required since `spexecutesql` uses Unicode strings as the input parameters.

The output of `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans` is shown next (see Figure 9-24).

```
SELECT c.usecounts,
    c.cacheobjtype,
    c.objtype,
    t.text
FROM sys.dm_exec_cached_plans c
CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(c.plan_handle) t
WHERE text LIKE '(@CustomerID%');
```

In Figure 9-24, you can see that the plan is generated for the parameterized part of the query submitted through `sp_executesql`, line 2. Since the plan is not tied to the variable part of the query, the existing execution plan can be reused if this query is resubmitted with a different value for one of the parameters (`d.ProductID=777`) as follows:

```
EXEC sp_executesql
    @query,
    @paramlist,
    @CustomerID = 29690,
    @ProductID = 777 ;
```

Figure 9-25 shows the output of `sys.dm_exec_cached_plans`.

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text
1	1	Compiled Plan	Prepared	(@CustomerID INT, @ProductID INT)SELECT soh.S...

**Figure 9-24.** sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans output showing a parameterized plan generated using sp\_executesql

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text
25	2	Compiled Plan	Prepared	(@CustomerID INT, @ProductID INT)SELECT soh.SalesO...

**Figure 9-25.** sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans output showing reuse of the parameterized plan generated using sp\_executesql

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text
14	1	Compiled Plan	Prep...	(@CustomerID INT, @ProductID INT)SELECT soh.Sale...

**Figure 9-26.** sys.dm\_exec\_cached\_plans output showing sensitivity of the plan generated using sp\_executesql

From Figure 9-25, you can see that the existing plan is reused (usecounts is 2 on the plan on line 2) when the query is resubmitted with a different variable value. If this query is resubmitted many times with different values for the variable part, the existing execution plan can be reused without regenerating new execution plans.

The query for which the plan is created (the text column) matches the exact textual string of the parameterized query submitted through sp\_executesql. Therefore, if the same query is submitted from different parts of the application, ensure that the same textual string is used in all places. For example, if the same query is resubmitted with a minor modification in the query string (where in lowercase instead of uppercase letters), then the existing plan is not reused, and instead a new plan is created, as shown in the sys. dm\_exec\_cached\_plans output in Figure 9-26.

```
SET @query = N'SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber ,soh.OrderDate
, sod.OrderQty ,sod.LineTotal FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod ON soh.SalesOrderID =
sod.SalesOrderID where soh.CustomerID = @CustomerID AND
sod.ProductID = @ProductID' ;
```

Another way to see that there are two different plans created in cache is to use additional dynamic management objects to see the properties of the plans in cache:

```
SELECT decp.usecounts,
       decp.cacheobjtype,
       decp.objtype,
       dest.text,
       deqs.creation_time,
       deqs.execution_count,
       deqs.query_hash,
       deqs.query_plan_hash
  FROM   sys.dm_exec_cached_plans AS decp
 CROSS  APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(decp.plan_handle) AS dest
 JOIN   sys.dm_exec_query_stats AS deqs
        ON decp.plan_handle = deqs.plan_handle
 WHERE  dest.text LIKE '(@CustomerID INT, @ProductID INT)%' ;
```

	usecounts	cacheobjtype	objtype	text	creation_time	execution_count	query_hash	query_plan_hash
1	2	Compiled Plan	Prepared	(@CustomerID INT, @ProductID INT)SELECT soh.S... 2011-12-11 09:03:28.480	2		0x59F45ECB2676741C	0x6D47A50D4D8D6689
2	1	Compiled Plan	Prepared	(@CustomerID INT, @ProductID INT)SELECT soh.S... 2011-12-11 09:10:18.807	1		0x59F45ECB2676741C	0x64BDA2A46CEBA861

**Figure 9-27.** Additional output from sys.dm\_exec\_query\_stats

The results from this query can be seen in Figure 9-27.

The output from sys.dm\_exec\_query\_stats shows that the two versions of the query have different creation\_time values. More interestingly, they have identical query\_hashes, but different query\_plan\_hashes (more on the hash values in that section later). All this shows that changing the case resulted in differing execution plans being stored in cache.

In general, use sp\_executesql to explicitly parameterize queries to make their execution plans reusable when the queries are resubmitted with different values for the variable parts. This provides the performance benefit of reusable plans without the overhead of managing any persistent object as required for stored procedures. This feature is exposed by both ODBC and OLEDB through SQLExecDirect and ICommandWithParameters, respectively. As .NET developers or users of ADO.NET (ADO 2.7 or higher), you can submit the preceding SELECT statement using ADO Command and Parameters. If you set the ADO Command Prepared property to FALSE and use ADO Command ('SELECT \* FROM "Order Details" d, Orders o WHERE d.OrderID=o.OrderID and d.ProductID=?') with ADO Parameters, ADO.NET will send the SELECT statement using sp\_executesql.

Along with the parameters, sp\_executesql sends the entire query string across the network every time the query is reexecuted. You can avoid this by using the prepare/execute model of ODBC and OLEDB (or OLEDB .NET).

## Prepare/Execute Model

ODBC and OLEDB provide a prepare/execute model to submit queries as a prepared workload. Like sp\_executesql, this model allows the variable parts of the queries to be parameterized explicitly. The prepare phase allows SQL Server to generate the execution plan for the query and return a handle of the execution plan to the application. This execution plan handle is used by the execute phase to execute the query with different parameter values. This model can be used only to submit queries through ODBC or OLEDB, and it can't be used within SQL Server itself—queries within stored procedures can't be executed using this model.

The SQL Server ODBC driver provides the SQLPrepare and SQLExecute APIs to support the prepare/execute model. The SQL Server OLEDB provider exposes this model through the ICommandPrepare interface. The OLEDB .NET provider of ADO.NET behaves similarly.

---

**Note** For a detailed description of how to use the prepare/execute model in a database application, please refer to the MSDN article “Preparing SQL Statements” (<http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ms175528.aspx>).

---

## Parameter Sniffing

Although the goal of a well-defined workload is to get a plan into the cache that will be reused, it is possible to get a plan into the cache that you don't want to reuse. The first time a procedure is called by SQL Server, the values of the parameters used are included as a part of generating the plan. If these values are representative of the data and statistics, then you'll get a good plan that will be beneficial to most executions of the stored procedure. But if the data is skewed in some fashion, it can seriously impact the performance of the query.

For example, take the following stored procedure (--spAddressByCity in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.spAddressByCity')
) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROC dbo.spAddressByCity
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.spAddressByCity @City NVARCHAR(30)
AS
SELECT a.AddressID,
       a.AddressLine1,
       AddressLine2,
       a.City,
       sp.[Name] AS StateProvinceName,
       a.PostalCode
  FROM Person.Address AS a
 JOIN Person.StateProvince AS sp
    ON a.StateProvinceID = sp.StateProvinceID
 WHERE a.City = @City ;
```

After creating the procedure, run it with this parameter:

```
EXEC dbo.spAddressByCity @City = N'London'
```

This will result in the following I/O and execution times as well as the query plan in Figure 9-28.

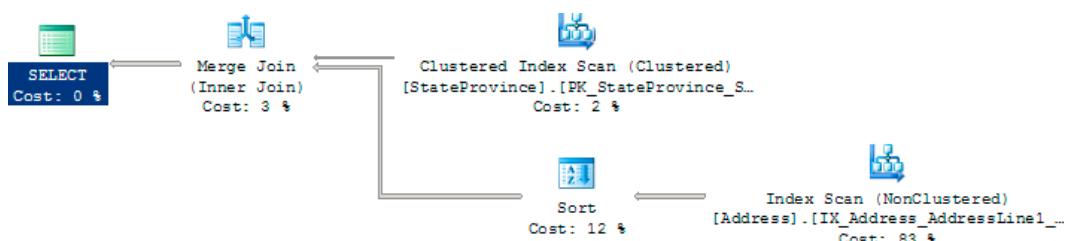
```
Table 'Address'. Scan count 1, logical reads 216
Table 'StateProvince'. Scan count 1, logical reads 3
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 245 ms.
```

If the stored procedure is run again but this time with a different parameter, then it returns with a different set of I/O and execution times but the same execution plan:

```
EXEC dbo.spAddressByCity @City = N'Mentor';
```

```
Table 'Address'. Scan count 1, logical reads 216
Table 'StateProvince'. Scan count 1, logical reads 3
CPU time = 16 ms, elapsed time = 75 ms.
```

The I/O looks roughly the same since the same execution plan is reused. The execution time is much faster because fewer rows are being returned. You can verify that the plan was reused by taking a look at the output from sys.dm\_exec\_query\_stats (in Figure 9-29).



**Figure 9-28.** Execution plan of spAddressByCity

	text	execution_count	creation_time
1	CREATE PROC dbo.spAddressByCity @City NVARCHAR(3...	2	2011-12-11 10:31:37.617

Figure 9-29. Output from sys.dm\_exec\_query\_stats verifies procedure reuse.

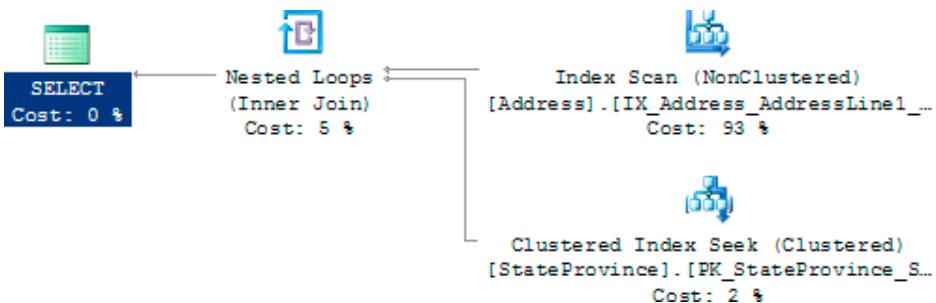


Figure 9-30. The execution plan changes.

```

SELECT dest.text,
       deqs.execution_count,
       deqs.creation_time
  FROM sys.dm_exec_query_stats AS deqs
 CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(deqs.sql_handle) AS dest
 WHERE dest.text LIKE 'CREATE PROC dbo.spAddressByCity%';
  
```

To show how parameters affect execution plans, you can reverse the order of the execution of the procedures. First flush the buffer cache by running DBCC FREEPROCCACHE. Then rerun the queries in reverse order. The first query, using the parameter Mentor, results in the following I/O and execution plan (Figure 9-30).

```

Table 'StateProvince'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2
Table 'Address'. Scan count 1, logical reads 216
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 63 ms
  
```

Figure 9-30 is not the same execution plan as that shown in Figure 9-28. The number of reads drops slightly, but the execution time stays roughly the same. The second execution, using London as the value for the parameter, results in the following I/O and execution times:

```

Table 'StateProvince'. Scan count 0, logical reads 868
Table 'Address'. Scan count 1, logical reads 216
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 283 ms.
  
```

This time the reads are radically higher, and the execution time was increased. The plan created in the first execution of the procedure with the parameter London created a plan best suited to retrieve the 1,000+ rows that match those criteria in the database. Then the next execution of the procedure using the parameter value Mentor did well enough using the same plan generated by the first execution. When the order is reversed, a new execution plan was created for the value Mentor that did not work at all well for the value London. This behavior is caused by the optimizer “sniffing” the parameters, actually sampling these values and using them to do precise lookups against the statistics used in the query. Normally this process is extremely beneficial, but when it isn’t, it’s referred to as “bad parameter sniffing.”

This is a case where having an execution plan in the cache can hurt the performance of your queries. Once you identify the issue for a plan that works well some of the time but doesn't others, you avoid or fix this problem in a number of ways:

- You can force a recompile of the plan either at the time of execution by running `sp_recompile` against the procedure prior to executing it or by getting the statement to recompile each time it executes by using the `WITH RECOMPILE` hint.
- You can reassign input parameters to local parameters. This popular fix forces the optimizer to make a best guess at the values likely to be used by looking at the statistics of the data being referenced, which can and does eliminate the values being taken into account. The problem with the solution is it eliminates the values being taken into account. You may get worse performing procedures overall.
- You can use a query hint, `OPTIMIZE FOR`, when you create the procedure and supply it with known good parameters that will generate a plan that works well for most of your queries. You can specify a value that generates a specific plan, or you can specify `UNKNOWN` to get a generic plan based on the average of the statistics. However, understand that some percentage of the queries won't work well with the parameter supplied.
- You can use a plan guide, which is a mechanism to get a query to behave a certain way without making modifications to the procedure. This will be covered in detail in [Chapter 10](#).
- You can disable parameter sniffing for the server by setting traceflag 4136 to on. Understand that this beneficial behavior will be turned off for the entire server, not just one problematic query.

Just remember that most of the time parameterized queries and plan reuse are not a problem.

## Query Plan Hash and Query Hash

With SQL Server 2008, new functionality around execution plans and the cache was introduced called the *query plan hash* and the *query hash*. These are binary objects using an algorithm against the query or the query plan to generate the binary hash value. These are useful for a very common practice in developing known as *copy and paste*. You will find that very common patterns and practices will be repeated throughout your code. Under the best circumstances, this is a very good thing, because you will see the best types of queries, joins, set-based operations, and so on, copied from one procedure to another as needed. But sometimes, you will see the worst possible practices repeated over and over again in your code. This is where the query hash and the query plan hash come into play to help you out.

You can retrieve the query plan hash and the query hash from `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` or `sys.dm_exec_requests`. Although this is a mechanism for identifying queries and their plans, the hash values are not unique. Dissimilar plans can arrive at the same hash, so you can't rely on this as an alternate primary key.

To see the hash values in action, create two queries (–queryhash in the download):

```
SELECT *
FROM Production.Product AS p
JOIN Production.ProductSubcategory AS ps
  ON p.ProductSubcategoryId = ps.ProductSubcategoryId
JOIN Production.ProductCategory AS pc
  ON ps.ProductCategoryId = pc.ProductCategoryId
WHERE pc.[Name] = 'Bikes'
  AND ps.[Name] = 'Touring Bikes' ;
```

```

SELECT *
FROM Production.Product AS p
JOIN Production.ProductSubcategory AS ps
  ON p.ProductSubcategoryID = ps.ProductSubcategoryID
JOIN Production.ProductCategory AS pc
  ON ps.ProductCategoryID = pc.ProductCategoryID
WHERE pc.[Name] = 'Bikes'
  AND ps.[Name] = 'Road Bikes' ;

```

Note that the only substantial difference between the two queries is that `ProductSubcategory.Name` is different, `Touring Bikes` in one and `Road Bikes` in the other. However, also note that the `WHERE` and `AND` keywords in the second query are lowercase. After you execute each of these queries, you can see the results of these format changes from `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` in Figure 9-31 from the following query:

```

SELECT deqs.execution_count,
       deqs.query_hash,
       deqs.query_plan_hash,
       dest.text
  FROM sys.dm_exec_query_stats AS deqs
CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(deqs.plan_handle) dest
 WHERE dest.text LIKE 'SELECT *'
  FROM Production.Product AS p%';

```

Two different plans were created because these are not parameterized queries; they are too complex to be considered for simple parameterization, and forced parameterization is off. These two plans have identical hash values because they varied only in terms of the values passed. The differences in case did not matter to the query hash or the query plan hash value. If, however, you changed the `SELECT` criteria in `queryhash`, then the values would be retrieved from `sys.dm_exec_query_stats`, as shown in Figure 9-32, and the query would have changes.

```

SELECT p.ProductID
  FROM Production.Product AS p
JOIN Production.ProductSubcategory AS ps
  ON p.ProductSubcategoryID = ps.ProductSubcategoryID
JOIN Production.ProductCategory AS pc
  ON ps.ProductCategoryID = pc.ProductCategoryID
 WHERE pc.[Name] = 'Bikes'
  AND ps.[Name] = 'Touring Bikes' ;

```

	execution_count	query_hash	query_plan_hash	text
1	1	0x64B958E521FAE4FA	0x5CEA78DE96935633	SELECT * FROM Production.Product AS p JOIN ...
2	1	0x64B958E521FAE4FA	0x5CEA78DE96935633	SELECT * FROM Production.Product AS p JOIN ...

**Figure 9-31.** `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` showing the plan hash values

	execution_count	query_hash	query_plan_hash	text
1	1	0x64B958E521FAE4FA	0x5CEA78DE96935633	SELECT * FROM Production.Product AS p JOIN ...
2	1	0xADB55DE6DFDA9B5E	0x8CCBA3922E1324BB	SELECT p.ProductID FROM Production.Product ...
3	1	0x64B958E521FAE4FA	0x5CEA78DE96935633	SELECT * FROM Production.Product AS p JOIN ...

**Figure 9-32.** `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` showing a different hash

	execution_count	query_hash	query_plan_hash	text
36	1	0x938FFEDE885BF7A9	0x98222DB82467EDD3	SELECT p.[Name], tha.TransactionDate, tha.Tr...
37	1	0x938FFEDE885BF7A9	0x8ABEEC7482BAE1AE	SELECT p.[Name], tha.TransactionDate, tha.Tr...

**Figure 9-33.** Differences in the query\_plan\_hash

Although the basic structure of the query is the same, the change in the columns returned was enough to change the query hash value and the query plan hash value.

Because differences in data distribution and indexes can cause the same query to come up with two different plans, the query\_hash can be the same, and the query\_plan\_hash can be different. To illustrate this, execute two new queries (--queryplanhash in the download):

```

SELECT p.[Name],
       tha.TransactionDate,
       tha.TransactionType,
       tha.Quantity,
       tha.ActualCost
  FROM Production.TransactionHistoryArchive tha
 JOIN Production.Product p
    ON tha.ProductID = p.ProductID
 WHERE p.ProductID = 461 ;

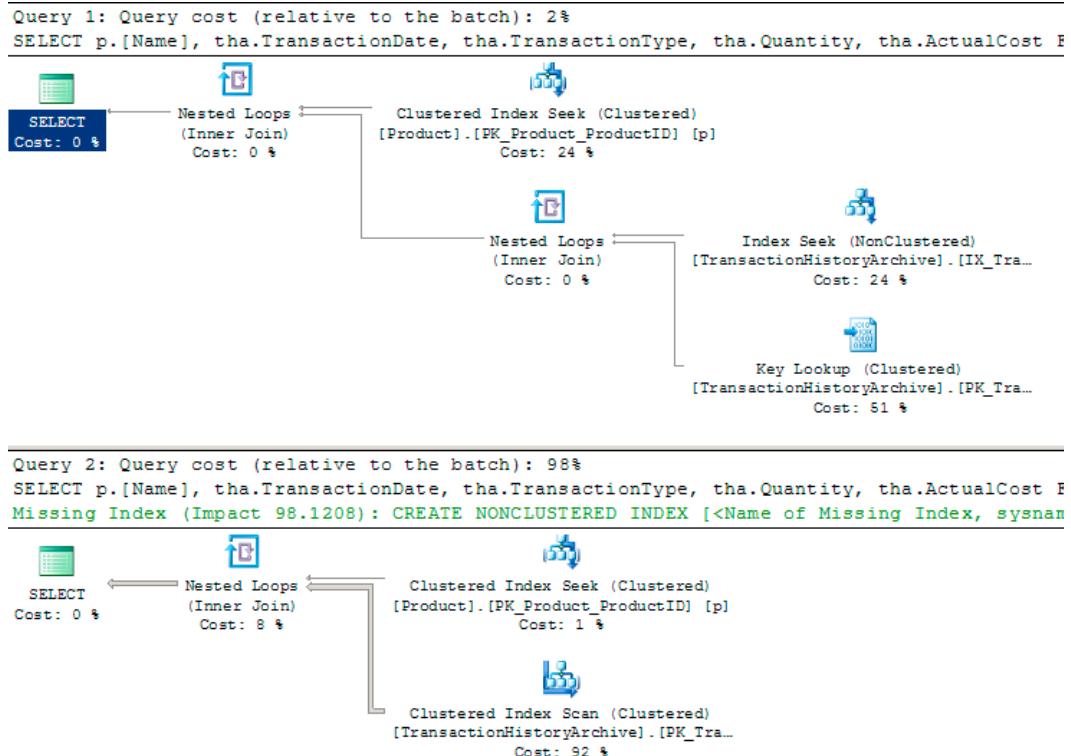
SELECT p.[Name],
       tha.TransactionDate,
       tha.TransactionType,
       tha.Quantity,
       tha.ActualCost
  FROM Production.TransactionHistoryArchive tha
 JOIN Production.Product p
    ON tha.ProductID = p.ProductID
 WHERE p.ProductID = 712 ;

```

Like the original queries used earlier, these queries vary only by the values passed to the ProductID column. When both queries are run, you can select data from sys.dm\_exec\_query\_stats to see the hash values (Figure 9-33).

You can see the queryhash values are identical, but the query\_plan\_hash values are different. This is because the execution plans created, based on the statistics for the values passed in, are radically different, as you can see in Figure 9-34.

The query plan hash and the query hash values can be useful tools for tracking down common issues between disparate queries, but as you've seen, they're not going to retrieve an accurate set of information in every possibility. They do add yet another useful tool in identifying other places where query performance could be poor. They can also be used to track execution plans over time. You can capture the query\_plan\_hash for a query after deploying it to production and then watch it over time to see whether it changes because of data changes. With this you can also keep track of aggregated query stats by plan, referencing sys.dm\_exec\_querystats, although remember that the aggregated data is reset when the server is restarted or the plan cache is cleared in any way. Keep these tools in mind while tuning your queries.



**Figure 9-34.** Different parameters result in radically different plans

## Execution Plan Cache Recommendations

The basic purpose of the plan cache is to improve performance by reusing execution plans. Thus, it is important to ensure that your execution plans actually are reusable. Since the plan reusability of ad hoc queries is inefficient, it is generally recommended that you rely on prepared workload techniques as much as possible. To ensure efficient use of the plan cache, follow these recommendations:

- Explicitly parameterize variable parts of a query.
- Use stored procedures to implement business functionality.
- Use sp\_executesql to avoid stored procedure maintenance.
- Use the prepare/execute model to avoid resending a query string.
- Avoid ad hoc queries.
- Use sp\_executesql over EXECUTE for dynamic queries.
- Parameterize variable parts of queries with care.

- Avoid modifying environment settings between connections.
- Avoid the implicit resolution of objects in queries.

Let's take a closer look at these points.

## Explicitly Parameterize Variable Parts of a Query

A query is often run several times, with the only difference between each run being that there are different values for the variable parts. Their plans can be reused, however, if the static and variable parts of the query can be separated. Although SQL Server has a simple parameterization feature and a forced parameterization feature, they have severe limitations. Always perform parameterization explicitly using the standard prepared workload techniques.

## Create Stored Procedures to Implement Business Functionality

If you have explicitly parameterized your query, then placing it in a stored procedure brings the best reusability possible. Since only the parameters need to be sent along with the stored procedure name, network traffic is reduced. Since stored procedures are precompiled, they run faster than ad hoc queries. And stored procedures can also maintain a single parameterized plan for the set of queries included within the stored procedure, instead of maintaining a large number of small plans for the individual queries. This prevents the plan cache from being flooded with separate plans for the individual queries.

Like anything else, it is possible to have too much of a good thing. There are business processes that belong in the database, but there are also business processes that should never be placed within the database.

## Code with sp\_executesql to Avoid Stored Procedure Maintenance

If the object maintenance required for the stored procedures becomes a consideration or you are using client-side generated queries, then use `sp_executesql` to submit the queries as prepared workloads. Unlike the stored procedure model, `sp_executesql` doesn't create any persistent objects in the database. `sp_executesql` is suited to execute a singleton query or a small batch query.

The complete business logic implemented in a stored procedure can also be submitted with `sp_executesql` as a large query string. However, as the complexity of the business logic increases, it becomes difficult to create and maintain a query string for the complete logic.

## Implement the Prepare/Execute Model to Avoid Resending a Query String

`sp_executesql` requires the query string to be sent across the network every time the query is reexecuted. It also requires the cost of a query string match at the server to identify the corresponding execution plan in the procedure cache. In the case of an ODBC or OLEDB (or OLEDB .NET) application, you can use the prepare/execute model to avoid resending the query string during multiple executions, since only the plan handle and parameters need to be submitted. In the prepare/execute model, since a plan handle is returned to the application, the plan can be reused by other user connections; it is not limited to the user who created the plan.

## Avoid Ad Hoc Queries

Do not design new applications using ad hoc queries! The execution plan created for an ad hoc query cannot be reused when the query is resubmitted with a different value for the variable parts. Even though SQL Server has the simple parameterization and forced parameterization features to isolate the variable parts of the query, because of the strict conservativeness of SQL Server in parameterization, the feature is limited to simple queries only. For better plan reusability, submit the queries as prepared workloads.

There are systems built upon the concept of nothing but ad hoc queries. This is functional and can work within SQL Server, but, as you've seen, it carries with it large amounts of additional overhead that you'll need to plan for.

## Prefer sp\_executesql over EXECUTE for Dynamic Queries

SQL query strings generated dynamically within stored procedures or a database application should be executed using spexecutesql instead of the EXECUTE command. The EXECUTE command doesn't allow the variable parts of the query to be explicitly parameterized.

To understand the preceding comparison between sp\_executesql and EXECUTE, consider the dynamic SQL query string used to execute the SELECT statement in adhocsproc:

```
DECLARE @n VARCHAR(3) = '776',
       @sql VARCHAR(MAX) ;

SET @sql = 'SELECT * FROM Sales.SalesOrderDetail sod '
          + 'JOIN Sales.SalesOrderHeader soh '
          + 'ON sod.SalesOrderID=soh.SalesOrderID ' + 'WHERE sod.ProductID=''
          + @n + '''' ;
--Execute the dynamic query using EXECUTE statement
EXECUTE (@sql) ;
```

The EXECUTE statement submits the query along with the value of d.ProductID as an ad hoc query and thereby may or may not result in simple parameterization. Check the output yourself by looking at the cache:

```
SELECT deqs.execution_count,
       deqs.query_hash,
       deqs.query_plan_hash,
       dest.text,
       deqp.query_plan
  FROM sys.dm_exec_query_stats AS deqs
 CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(deqs.plan_handle) dest
 CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_query_plan(deqs.plan_handle) AS deqp;
```

For improved plan cache reusability, execute the dynamic SQL string as a parameterized query using sp\_executesql:

```
DECLARE @n NVARCHAR(3) = '776',
       @sql NVARCHAR(MAX),
       @paramdef NVARCHAR(6) ;

SET @sql = 'SELECT * FROM Sales.SalesOrderDetail sod '
          + 'JOIN Sales.SalesOrderHeader soh '
          + 'ON sod.SalesOrderID=soh.SalesOrderID ' + 'WHERE sod.ProductID=@1' ;
SET @paramdef = N'@1 INT' ;
```

```
--Execute the dynamic query using sp_executesql system stored procedure
EXECUTE sp_executesql
    @sql,
    @paramdef,
    @1 = @n ;
```

Executing the query as an explicitly parameterized query using `sp_executesql` generates a parameterized plan for the query and thereby increases the execution plan reusability.

## Parameterize Variable Parts of Queries with Care

Be careful while converting variable parts of a query into parameters. The range of values for some variables may vary so drastically that the execution plan for a certain range of values may not be suitable for the other values. This can lead to bad parameter sniffing. Remember that dealing with bad parameter sniffing can be done by either going for specific plans using things like `OPTIMIZE FOR <value>` query hints or by going for generic plans by using local variables within the parameterized code. Your data and statistics will drive the best solution.

## Do Not Allow Implicit Resolution of Objects in Queries

SQL Server allows multiple database objects with the same name to be created under different schemas. For example, table `t1` can be created using two different schemas (`u1` and `u2`) under their individual ownership. The default owner in most systems is `dbo` (database owner). If user `u1` executes the following query, then SQL Server first tries to find whether table `t1` exists for user `u1`'s default schema.

```
SELECT * FROM t1 WHERE c1 = 1
```

If not, then it tries to find whether table `t1` exists for the `dbo` user. This implicit resolution allows user `u1` to create another instance of table `t1` under a different schema and access it temporarily (using the same application code) without affecting other users.

On a production database, I recommend using the schema owner and avoiding implicit resolution. If not, using implicit resolution adds the following overhead on a production server:

- It requires more time to identify the objects.
- It decreases the effectiveness of plan cache reusability.

## Summary

SQL Server's cost-based query optimizer decides upon an effective execution plan not based on the exact syntax of the query but by evaluating the cost of executing the query using different processing strategies. The cost evaluation of using different processing strategies is done in multiple optimization phases to avoid spending too much time optimizing a query. Then, the execution plans are cached to save the cost of execution plan generation when the same queries are reexecuted. To improve the reusability of cached plans, SQL Server supports different techniques for execution plan reuse when the queries are rerun with different values for the variable parts.

Using stored procedures is usually the best technique to improve execution plan reusability. SQL Server generates a parameterized execution plan for the stored procedures so that the existing plan can be reused when the stored procedure is rerun with the same or different parameter values. However, if the existing execution plan for a stored procedure is invalidated, the plan can't be reused without a recompilation, decreasing the effectiveness of plan cache reusability.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how to troubleshoot and resolve unnecessary stored procedure plan recompliations.

## CHAPTER 10



# Query Recompilation

Stored procedures and parameterized queries improve the reusability of an execution plan by explicitly converting the variable parts of the queries into parameters. This allows execution plans to be reused when the queries are resubmitted with the same or different values for the variable parts. Since stored procedures are mostly used to implement complex business rules, a typical stored procedure contains a complex set of SQL statements, making the price of generating the execution plan of the queries within a stored procedure a bit costly. Therefore, it is usually beneficial to reuse the existing execution plan of a stored procedure instead of generating a new plan. However, sometimes the existing plan may not be optimal, or it may not provide the best processing strategy during reuse. SQL Server resolves this condition by recompiling statements within stored procedures to generate a new execution plan. This chapter covers the following topics:

- The benefits and drawbacks of recompilation
- How to identify the statements causing recompilation
- How to analyze the causes of recompliations
- Ways to avoid recompliations when necessary

## Benefits and Drawbacks of Recompilation

The recompilation of queries can be both beneficial and harmful. Sometimes, it may be beneficial to consider a new processing strategy for a query instead of reusing the existing plan, especially if the data distribution in the table (or the corresponding statistics) has changed or new indexes are added to the table. Recompiles in SQL Server 2012 are at the statement level. This increases the overall number of recompiles that can occur within a procedure, but it reduces the effects and overhead of recompiles in general. Statement-level recompiles reduce overhead because they recompile an individual statement only rather than all the statements within a procedure, whereas recompiles back in SQL Server 2000 caused a procedure, in its entirety, to be recompiled over and over. Despite this smaller footprint for recompiles, it's something to be reduced and controlled as much as possible.

To understand how the recompilation of an existing plan can sometimes be beneficial, assume you need to retrieve some information from the `Production.WorkOrder` table. The stored procedure may look like this (`--spWorkOrder` in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.spWorkOrder')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROCEDURE dbo.spWorkOrder ;
GO
```

```

CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.sprWorkOrder
AS
SELECT wo.WorkOrderID,
       wo.ProductID,
       wo.StockedQty
FROM   Production.WorkOrder AS wo
WHERE  wo.StockedQty BETWEEN 500 AND 700 ;

```

With the current indexes, the execution plan for the SELECT statement, which is part of the stored procedure plan, scans the index PKWorkOrderID, as shown in Figure 10-1.

This plan is saved in the procedure cache so that it can be reused when the stored procedure is reexecuted. But if a new index is added on the table as follows, then the existing plan won't be the most efficient processing strategy to execute the query.

```
CREATE INDEX IX_Test ON Production.WorkOrder(StockedQty,ProductID) ;
```

In this case, it is beneficial to spend extra CPU cycles to recompile the stored procedure so that you generate a better execution plan.

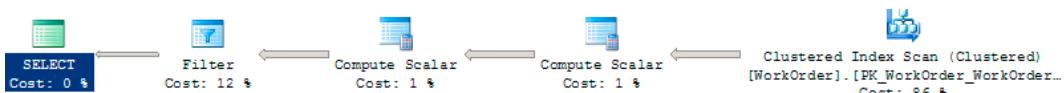
Since index IX\_Test can serve as a covering index for the SELECT statement, the cost of a bookmark lookup can be avoided by using index IX\_Test instead of scanning PK\_WorkOrder\_. WorkOrderID. SQL Server automatically detects this change and recompiles the existing plan to consider the benefit of using the new index. This results in a new execution plan for the stored procedure (when executed), as shown in Figure 10-2.

SQL Server automatically detects the conditions that require a recompilation of the existing plan. SQL Server follows certain rules in determining when the existing plan needs to be recompiled. If a specific implementation of a query falls within the rules of recompilation (execution plan aged out, SET options changed, and so on), then the statement will be recompiled every time it meets the requirements for a recompile, and SQL Server may, or may not, generate a better execution plan. To see this in action, you'll need a different stored procedure. The following procedure returns all the rows from the WorkOrder table (spWorkOrderAll.sql in the download):

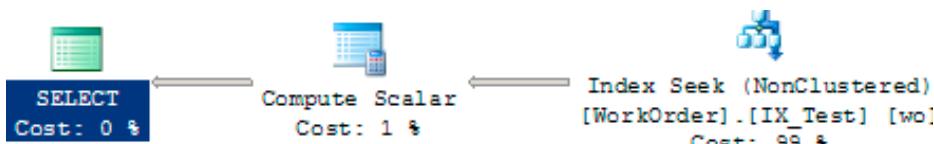
```

IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.spWorkOrderAll')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROCEDURE dbo.spWorkOrderAll ;
GO
CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.sprWorkOrderAll
AS
SELECT *

```



**Figure 10-1.** Execution plan for the stored procedure



**Figure 10-2.** New execution plan for the stored procedure

```
FROM Production.WorkOrder AS wo ;
Before executing this procedure, drop the index IXTest.
```

```
DROP INDEX Production.WorkOrder.IX_Test ;
```

When you execute this procedure, the SELECT statement returns the complete data set (all rows and columns) from the table and is therefore best served through a table scan on the table WorkOrder. As explained in [Chapter 4](#), the processing of the SELECT statement won't benefit from a nonclustered index on any of the columns. Therefore, ideally, creating the non-clustered index (as follows) before the execution of the stored procedure shouldn't matter.

```
EXEC dbo.sprWorkOrderAll ;
GO
CREATE INDEX IX_Test ON Production.WorkOrder(StockedQty,ProductID) ;
GO
```

`EXEC dbo.sprWorkOrderAll ; --After creation of index IX_Test`

But the stored procedure execution after the index creation faces recompilation, as shown in the corresponding extended event output in [Figure 10-3](#).

The `sql_statement_recompile` event was used to trace the statement recompiles. There is no longer a separate procedure recompile event as there was in the older Trace events.

In this case, the recompilation is of no real benefit to the stored procedure. But unfortunately, it falls within the conditions that cause SQL Server to recompile the stored procedure on every execution. This can make plan caching for the stored procedure ineffective and wastes CPU cycles in regenerating the same plan on this execution. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the conditions that cause the recompilation of stored procedures and to make every effort to avoid those conditions when implementing stored procedures. I will discuss these conditions next, after identifying which statements cause SQL Server to recompile the stored procedure in the respective case.

	name	timestamp																						
▶	sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-20 10:25:42.2715789																						
Event: <code>sql_statement_recompile</code> (2011-12-20 10:25:42.2715789)																								
Details																								
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Field</th><th>Value</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>line_number</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr> <td>nest_level</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr> <td>object_id</td><td>1076198884</td></tr> <tr> <td>object_name</td><td>spWorkOrderAll</td></tr> <tr> <td>object_type</td><td>PROC</td></tr> <tr> <td>offset</td><td>84</td></tr> <tr> <td>offset_end</td><td>-1</td></tr> <tr> <td>recompile_cause</td><td>Schema changed</td></tr> <tr> <td>source_database_id</td><td>9</td></tr> <tr> <td>statement</td><td><code>SELECT * FROM Production.WorkOrder AS wo ;</code></td></tr> </tbody> </table>		Field	Value	line_number	3	nest_level	1	object_id	1076198884	object_name	spWorkOrderAll	object_type	PROC	offset	84	offset_end	-1	recompile_cause	Schema changed	source_database_id	9	statement	<code>SELECT * FROM Production.WorkOrder AS wo ;</code>	
Field	Value																							
line_number	3																							
nest_level	1																							
object_id	1076198884																							
object_name	spWorkOrderAll																							
object_type	PROC																							
offset	84																							
offset_end	-1																							
recompile_cause	Schema changed																							
source_database_id	9																							
statement	<code>SELECT * FROM Production.WorkOrder AS wo ;</code>																							

**Figure 10-3.** Nonbeneficial recompilation of the stored procedure

# Identifying the Statement Causing Recompilation

SQL Server can recompile individual statements within a procedure or the entire procedure. Thus, to find the cause of recompilation, it's important to identify the SQL statement that can't reuse the existing plan.

You can use extended events to track statement recompilation. You can also use the same events to identify the stored procedure statement that caused the recompilation. Table 10-1 shows the relevant events you can use.

Consider the following simple stored procedure (`create_p1.sql` in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.p1')
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROC dbo.p1 ;
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.p1
AS
CREATE TABLE #t1 (c1 INT) ;
    INSERT INTO #t1
        (c1)
    VALUES (42) ; -- data change causes recompile
GO
```

On executing this stored procedure the first time, you get the Extended Events output shown in Figure 10-4.

```
EXEC dbo.p1;
```

In Figure 10-4, you can see that you have a recompilation event (`sql_statement_recompile`), indicating that the stored procedure went through recompilation. When a stored procedure is executed for the first time, SQL Server compiles the stored procedure and generates an execution plan, as explained in the previous chapter. By the way, you might see other statements if you're using Extended Events to follow along. Just filter or group by your database ID to make it easier to see the events you're interested in.

Since execution plans are maintained in volatile memory only, they get dropped when SQL Server is restarted. On the next execution of the stored procedure, after the server restart, SQL Server once again compiles the stored procedure and generates the execution plan. These compilations aren't treated as a stored procedure recompilation since a plan didn't exist in the cache for reuse. An `sql_statement_recompile` event indicates that a plan was already there but couldn't be reused.

**Note** I discuss the significance of the `recompile_cause` data column later in the “Analyzing Causes of Recompilation” section.

**Table 10-1.** Events to Analyze Query Recompilation

## Events

`sql_batch_completed` or `module_end`

`sql_statement_recompile`

`sql_batch_starting` or `module_start`

`sp_statement_completed` or `sql_statement_completed` (Optional)

`sp_statement_starting` or `sql_statement_starting` (Optional)

The screenshot shows the Extended Events output interface. At the top, there's a table with four rows:

	name	timestamp
	module_start	2011-12-20 10:44:08.4117724
►	sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-20 10:44:08.4127489
	module_end	2011-12-20 10:44:08.4147021

Below this table is a message: "Event: sql\_statement\_recompile (2011-12-20 10:44:08.4127489)". Underneath the message is a "Details" tab, which is currently selected. A table titled "Details" displays the following information:

Field	Value
line_number	4
nest_level	1
object_id	1092198941
object_name	TestProc
object_type	PROC
offset	126
offset_end	-1
recompile_cause	Deferred compile
source_database_id	9
statement	INSERT INTO #Test1 (C1) VALUES (42); -- data chang...

**Figure 10-4.** Extended Events output showing an SP:StmtCompleted event causing recompilation

To see which statement caused the recompile, look at the statement column within the sql\_statement\_recompile event. It shows specifically the statement being recompiled. You can also identify the stored procedure statement causing the recompilation by using any of the various statement starting events in combination with a recompile event, although that's not necessary they way it used to be. The sp\_statement\_starting event immediately before the sql\_statement\_recompile event indicates the stored procedure statement that caused the recompilation, as shown in Figure 10-5. It's generally easier to use the Statement column.

Note that after the statement recompilation, the stored procedure statement that caused the recompilation is started again to execute with the new plan. You may use either the sp\_statement\_starting event or the sp\_statement\_completed event to identify the stored procedure statement causing the recompilation; using both the events will duplicate the information, and the sql\_statement\_recompile event will further duplicate the information.

## Analyzing Causes of Recompilation

To improve performance, it is important that you analyze the causes of recompilation. Often, recompilation may not be necessary, and you can avoid it to improve performance. For example, every time you go through a compile or recompile process, you're using CPU for the optimizer to get its job done. You're also moving plans in and out of memory as they go through the compile process. When a query recompiles, that query is blocked while the recompile process runs, which means frequently called queries can become major bottlenecks if they also have to go through a recompile. Knowing the different conditions that result in recompilation helps you evaluate the cause of a recompilation and determine how to avoid recompiling when it isn't necessary. Statement recompilation occurs for the following reasons:

- The schema of regular tables, temporary tables, or views referred to in the stored procedure statement have changed. Schema changes include changes to the metadata of the table or the indexes on the table.

	name	timestamp
	module_start	2011-12-20 11:08:02.0574324
	sp_statement_starting	2011-12-20 11:08:02.0574324
	sp_statement_completed	2011-12-20 11:08:02.0584089
▶	sp_statement_starting	2011-12-20 11:08:02.0584089
	sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-20 11:08:02.0584089
	sp_statement_starting	2011-12-20 11:08:02.0593855
	sp_statement_completed	2011-12-20 11:08:02.0593855
	module_end	2011-12-20 11:08:02.0593855

Event: sp\_statement\_starting (2011-12-20 11:08:02.0584089)

Details	
Field	Value
line_number	4
nest_level	1
object_id	1156199169
object_name	TestProc
object_type	PROC
offset	126
offset_end	-1
source_database_id	9
state	Normal
statement	INSERT INTO #Test1 (C1) VALUES (42); -- data chang...

**Figure 10-5.** Extended Events output showing an sp\_statement\_starting event causing recompilation

- Bindings (such as defaults) to the columns of regular or temporary tables have changed.
- Statistics on the table indexes or columns have changed past a certain threshold.
- An object did not exist when the stored procedure was compiled, but it was created during execution. This is called *deferred object resolution*, which is the cause of the preceding recompilation.
- SET options have changed.
- The execution plan was aged and deallocated.
- An explicit call was made to the sp\_recompile system stored procedure.
- There was an explicit use of the RECOMPILE hint.

You can see these changes in the extended events. The cause is indicated by the recompile\_cause data column value for the sql\_statement\_recompile event, as shown in Table 10-2.

Let's look at some of the reasons listed in Table 10-2 for recompilation in more detail and discuss what you can do to avoid them.

**Table 10-2.** Recompile Cause Data Column Reflecting Causes of Recompilation

Description
Schema or bindings to regular table or view changed
Statistics changed
Object did not exist in the stored procedure plan but was created during execution
SET options changed
Schema or bindings to temporary table changed
Schema or bindings of remote rowset changed
FOR BROWSE permissions changed
Query notification environment changed
MPI view changed
Cursor options changed
WITH RECOMPILE option invoked

**Table 10-3.** Formula for Determining Data Changes

Type of Table	Formula
Permanent table	If number of rows ( $n$ ) $\leq 500$ , $RT = 500$ If $n > 500$ , $RT = 500 + .2 * n$
Temporary table	If $n < 6$ , $RT = 6$ If $6 \leq n \leq 500$ , $RT = 500$ If $n > 500$ , $RT = 500 + .2 * n$

## Schema or Bindings Changes

When the schema or bindings to a view, regular table, or temporary table change, the existing stored procedure execution plan becomes invalid. The query must be recompiled before executing any statement that refers to such an object. SQL Server automatically detects this situation and recompiles the stored procedure.

---

**Note** I talk about recompilation due to schema changes in more detail in the “Benefits and Drawbacks of Recompilation” section.

---

## Statistics Changes

SQL Server keeps track of the number of changes to the table. If the number of changes exceeds the recompilation threshold (RT) value, then SQL Server automatically updates the statistics when the table is referred to in the statement, as you saw in Chapter 7. When the condition for the automatic update of statistics is detected, SQL Server automatically recompiles the statement, along with the statistics update.

The RT is determined by a formula that depends on the table being a permanent table or a temporary table (not a table variable) and how many rows are in the table. Table 10-3 shows the basic formula so that you can determine when you can expect to see a statement recompile because of data changes.

To understand how statistics changes can cause recompilation, consider the following example (`stats_changes` in the download). The stored procedure is executed the first time with only one row in the table. Before the second execution of the stored procedure, a large number of rows are added to the table.

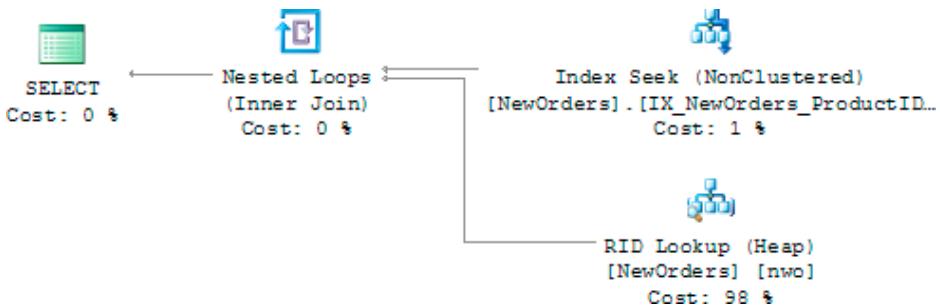
**Note** Please ensure that the `AUTO_UPDATE_STATISTICS` setting for the database is ON. You can determine the `AUTO_UPDATE_STATISTICS` setting by executing the following query:

```
SELECT DATABASEPROPERTYEX('AdventureWorks2008R2', 'IsAutoUpdateStatistics') ;
```

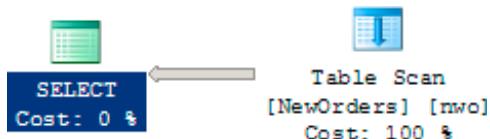
```
IF EXISTS ( SELECT *
            FROM   sys.objects AS o
            WHERE  o.object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'[dbo].[NewOrders]')
                   AND      o.type IN (N'U') )
    DROP TABLE [dbo].[NewOrders] ;
GO
SELECT *
INTO   dbo.NewOrders
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderDetail ;
GO
CREATE INDEX IX_NewOrders_ProductID ON dbo.NewOrders (ProductID) ;
GO
IF EXISTS ( SELECT *
            FROM   sys.objects
            WHERE  object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'[dbo].[spNewOrders]')
                   AND      type IN (N'P', N'PC') )
    DROP PROCEDURE [dbo].[spNewOrders] ;
GO
CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.spNewOrders
AS
SELECT nwo.OrderQty,
       nwo.CarrierTrackingNumber
FROM   dbo.NewOrders nwo
WHERE  ProductID = 897 ;
GO
SET STATISTICS XML ON ;
EXEC dbo.spNewOrders ;
SET STATISTICS XML OFF ;
GO
```

Next, still in `stats_changes.sql`, you need to modify a number of rows before reexecuting the stored procedure.

```
UPDATE  dbo.NewOrders
SET     ProductID = 897
WHERE   ProductID BETWEEN 800 AND 900 ;
GO
SET STATISTICS XML ON ;
EXEC dbo.spNewOrders ;
SET STATISTICS XML OFF ;
GO
```



**Figure 10-6.** Execution plan prior to data changes



**Figure 10-7.** Effect of statistics change on the execution plan

The first time, SQL Server executes the SELECT statement of the stored procedure using an Index Seek operation, as shown in Figure 10-6.

**Note** Please ensure that the setting for the graphical execution plan is OFF; otherwise, the output of STATISTICS XML won't display.

While reexecuting the stored procedure, SQL Server automatically detects that the statistics on the index have changed. This causes a recompilation of the SELECT statement within the procedure, with the optimizer determining a better processing strategy, before executing the SELECT statement within the stored procedure, as you can see in Figure 10-7.

Figure 10-8 shows the corresponding Extended Events output (with the auto\_stats event added).

In Figure 10-8, you can see that to execute the SELECT statement during the second execution of the stored procedure, a recompilation was required. From the value of recompile\_cause (Statistics Changed), you can understand that the recompilation was due to the statistics change. As part of creating the new plan, the statistics are automatically updated, as indicated by the Auto\_Stats event, which occurred after the call for a recompile of the statement. You can also verify the automatic update of the statistics using the DBCC SHOW\_STATISTICS statement, as explained in Chapter 7.

## Deferred Object Resolution

Queries often dynamically create and subsequently access database objects. When such a query is executed for the first time, the first execution plan won't contain the information about the objects to be created during runtime. Thus, in the first execution plan, the processing strategy for those objects is deferred until the runtime of the query. When a DML statement (within the query) referring to one of those objects is executed, the query is recompiled to generate a new plan containing the processing strategy for the object.

The screenshot shows a SQL Server Profiler trace window. At the top, there is a table with columns 'name' and 'timestamp'. Several rows are listed, including 'sql\_batch\_starting', 'sql\_statement\_recompile', 'sql\_batch\_completed', and multiple entries for 'sql\_batch\_starting' and 'sql\_statement\_recompile'. One specific row for 'sql\_statement\_recompile' is highlighted with a blue border. Below this table, a message box displays the event details: 'Event: sql\_statement\_recompile (2011-12-20 15:43:55.7208705)'. A 'Details' button is shown, which when clicked, reveals a detailed table with columns 'Field' and 'Value'. This table contains various parameters of the recompile event, such as 'object\_name' (spNewOrders), 'object\_type' (PROC), and 'statement' (SELECT nwo.OrderQty, nwo.CarrierTrackingNumber FROM...).

	name	timestamp
	sql_batch_starting	2011-12-20 15:43:54.5236049
	sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-20 15:43:54.5245815
	sql_batch_completed	2011-12-20 15:43:55.6495815
	sql_batch_starting	2011-12-20 15:43:55.7208705
►	sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-20 15:43:55.7208705
	auto_stats	2011-12-20 15:43:55.9796596
	sql_batch_completed	2011-12-20 15:43:56.3917690

Event: sql\_statement\_recompile (2011-12-20 15:43:55.7208705)

Details

Field	Value
line_number	3
nest_level	1
object_id	1220199397
object_name	spNewOrders
object_type	PROC
offset	78
offset_end	-1
recompile_cause	Statistics changed
source_database_id	9
statement	SELECT nwo.OrderQty, nwo.CarrierTrackingNumber FROM...

**Figure 10-8.** Effect of statistics change on the stored procedure recompilation

Both a regular table and a local temporary table can be created within a stored procedure to hold intermediate result sets. The recompilation of the statement due to deferred object resolution behaves differently for a regular table when compared to a local temporary table, as explained in the following section.

## Recompilation Due to a Regular Table

To understand the query recompilation issue by creating a regular table within the stored procedure, consider the following example ( --regular in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.TestProc') 
) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROC dbo.TestProc ;
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.TestProc
AS
CREATE TABLE dbo.ProcTest1 (C1 INT) ; --Ensure table doesn't exist
SELECT *
FROM dbo.ProcTest1 ; --Causes recompilation
DROP TABLE dbo.ProcTest1 ;
GO
```

The screenshot shows the Extended Events output for a stored procedure named 'TestProc'. It displays two rows of events: 'sql\_batch\_starting' and 'sql\_statement\_recompile'. The 'sql\_statement\_recompile' event is highlighted in blue and has a timestamp of '2011-12-20 15:59:43.8470225'. Below this event, a 'Details' section is expanded, showing various properties of the recompile event. One of these properties is 'recompile\_cause', which is set to 'Schema changed'. The 'statement' property shows the SQL code: 'SELECT \* FROM dbo.ProcTest1; --Causes recompilation'.

	name	timestamp	
	sql_batch_starting	2011-12-20 15:59:43.8392100	
	sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-20 15:59:43.8421397	
►	sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-20 15:59:43.8470225	
	sql_batch_completed	2011-12-20 15:59:43.8499522	

Event: sql\_statement\_recompile (2011-12-20 15:59:43.8470225)

Field	Value
line_number	4
nest_level	1
object_id	1300199682
object_name	TestProc
object_type	PROC
offset	204
offset_end	326
recompile_cause	Schema changed
source_database_id	9
statement	SELECT * FROM dbo.ProcTest1; --Causes recompilation

**Figure 10-9.** Extended Events output showing a stored procedure recompilation because of a regular table

```
EXEC dbo.TestProc ; --First execution
EXEC dbo.TestProc ; --Second execution
```

When the stored procedure is executed for the first time, an execution plan is generated before the actual execution of the stored procedure. If the table created within the stored procedure doesn't exist (as expected in the preceding code) before the stored procedure is created, then the plan won't contain the processing strategy for the SELECT statement referring to the table. Thus, to execute the SELECT statement, the statement needs to be recompiled, as shown in Figure 10-9.

You can see that the SELECT statement is recompiled when it's executed the second time. Dropping the table within the stored procedure during the first execution doesn't drop the query plan saved in the plan cache. During the subsequent execution of the stored procedure, the existing plan includes the processing strategy for the table. However, because of the re-creation of the table within the stored procedure, SQL Server considers it a change to the table schema. Therefore, SQL Server recompiles the statement within the stored procedure before executing the SELECT statement during the subsequent execution of the rest of the stored procedure. The value of the recompile\_clause for the corresponding sql\_statement\_recompile event reflects the cause of the recompilation.

## Recompilation Due to a Local Temporary Table

Most of the time in the stored procedure you create local temporary tables instead of regular tables. To understand how differently the local temporary tables affect stored procedure recompilation, modify the preceding example by just replacing the regular table with a local temporary table.

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.TestProc') 
    ) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROC dbo.TestProc ;
GO
```

```

CREATE PROC dbo.TestProc
AS
CREATE TABLE #ProcTest1 (C1 INT) ; --Ensure table doesn't exist
SELECT *
FROM #ProcTest1 ; --Causes recompilation
DROP TABLE #ProcTest1 ;
GO

EXEC dbo.TestProc ; --First execution
EXEC dbo.TestProc ; --Second execution

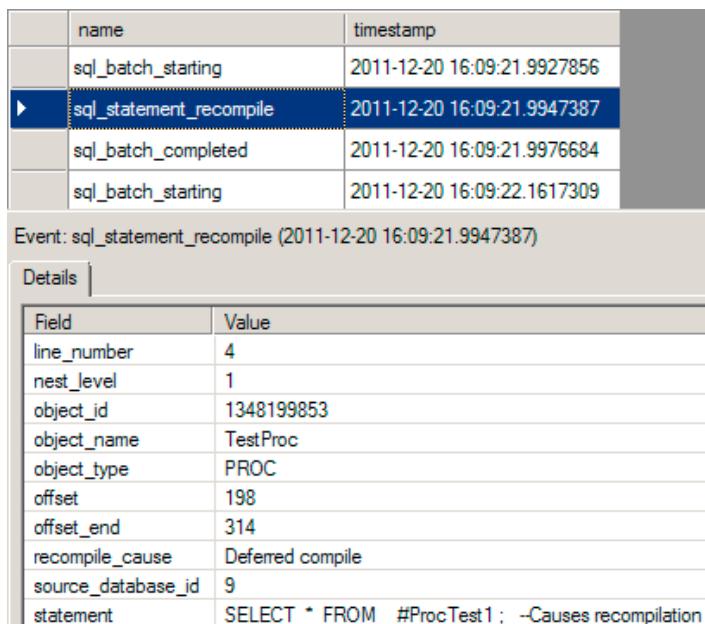
```

Since a local temporary table is automatically dropped when the execution of a stored procedure finishes, it's not necessary to drop the temporary table explicitly. But, following good programming practice, you can drop the local temporary table as soon as its work is done. Figure 10-10 shows the Extended Events output for the preceding example.

You can see that the query is recompiled when executed for the first time. The cause of the recompilation, as indicated by the corresponding recompile\_cause value, is the same as the cause of the recompilation on a regular table. However, note that when the stored procedure is reexecuted, it isn't recompiled, unlike the case with a regular table.

The schema of a local temporary table during subsequent execution of the stored procedure remains exactly the same as during the previous execution. A local temporary table isn't available outside the scope of the stored procedure, so its schema can't be altered in any way between multiple executions. Thus, SQL Server safely reuses the existing plan (based on the previous instance of the local temporary table) during the subsequent execution of the stored procedure and thereby avoids the recompilation.

**Note** To avoid recompilation, it makes sense to hold the intermediate result sets in the stored procedure using local temporary tables, instead of using temporarily created regular tables.



The screenshot shows the Extended Events output for the stored procedure. It includes a main table view and a detailed view for the selected event.

**Main Table View:**

	name	timestamp
	sql_batch_starting	2011-12-20 16:09:21.9927856
▶	sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-20 16:09:21.9947387
	sql_batch_completed	2011-12-20 16:09:21.9976684
	sql_batch_starting	2011-12-20 16:09:22.1617309

**Detailed View (Event: sql\_statement\_recompile):**

Details	
Field	Value
line_number	4
nest_level	1
object_id	1348199853
object_name	TestProc
object_type	PROC
offset	198
offset_end	314
recompile_cause	Deferred compile
source_database_id	9
statement	SELECT * FROM #ProcTest1 ; --Causes recompilation

**Figure 10-10.** Extended Events output showing a stored procedure recompilation because of a local temporary table

## SET Options Changes

The execution plan of a stored procedure is dependent on the environment settings. If the environment settings are changed within a stored procedure, then SQL Server recompiles the queries on every execution. For example, consider the following code (---set in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.TestProc')
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROC dbo.TestProc ;
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.TestProc
AS
SELECT 'a' + NULL + 'b' ; --1st
SET CONCAT_NULL_YIELDS_NULL OFF ;
SELECT 'a' + NULL + 'b' ; --2nd
SET ANSI_NULLS OFF ;
SELECT 'a' + NULL + 'b' ;
--3rd
GO
EXEC dbo.TestProc ; --First execution
EXEC dbo.TestProc ; --Second execution
```

Changing the SET options in the stored procedure causes SQL Server to recompile the stored procedure before executing the statement after the SET statement. Thus, this stored procedure is recompiled twice: once before executing the second SELECT statement and once before executing the third SELECT statement. The Extended Events output in Figure 10-11 shows this.

	name	timestamp
	module_start	2011-12-20 16:22:21.5366293
▶	sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-20 16:22:21.5366293
	sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-20 16:22:21.5366293
	module_end	2011-12-20 16:22:21.5366293

Event: sql\_statement\_recompile (2011-12-20 16:22:21.5366293)

Details	
Field	Value
line_number	5
nest_level	1
object_id	1380199967
object_name	TestProc
object_type	PROC
offset	204
offset_end	272
recompile_cause	Set option change
source_database_id	9
statement	SELECT 'a' + NULL + 'b' ; --2nd

**Figure 10-11.** Extended Events output showing a stored procedure recompilation because of a SET option change

If the procedure were reexecuted, you wouldn't see a recompile since those are now part of the execution plans.

Since `SET NOCOUNT` doesn't change the environment settings, unlike the `SET` statements used to change the ANSI settings as shown previously, `SET NOCOUNT` doesn't cause stored procedure recompilation. I explain how to use `SET NOCOUNT` in detail in [Chapter 11](#).

## Execution Plan Aging

SQL Server manages the size of the procedure cache by maintaining the age of the execution plans in the cache, as you saw in [Chapter 9](#). If a stored procedure is not reexecuted for a long time, the age field of the execution plan can come down to 0, and the plan can be removed from the cache because of memory shortage. When this happens and the stored procedure is reexecuted, a new plan will be generated and cached in the procedure cache. However, if there is enough memory in the system, unused plans are not removed from the cache until memory pressure increases.

## Explicit Call to `sp_recompile`

SQL Server automatically recompiles stored procedures when the schema changes or statistics are altered enough. It also provides the `sp_recompile` system stored procedure to manually mark stored procedures for recompilation. This stored procedure can be called on a table, view, stored procedure, or trigger. If it is called on a stored procedure or a trigger, the stored procedure or trigger is recompiled the next time it is executed. Calling `sp_recompile` on a table or a view marks all the stored procedures and triggers that refer to the table/view for recompilation the next time they are executed.

For example, if `sp_recompile` is called on table `t1`, all the stored procedures and triggers that refer to table `Test1` are marked for recompilation and are recompiled the next time they are executed, like so:

```
sp_recompile 'Test1'
```

You can use `sp_recompile` to cancel the reuse of an existing plan when executing dynamic queries with `sp_executesql`. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, you should not parameterize the variable parts of a query whose range of values may require different processing strategies for the query. For instance, reconsidering the corresponding example, you know that the second execution of the query reuses the plan generated for the first execution. The example is repeated here for easy reference.

```
DBCC FREEPROCCACHE ;
--Clear the procedure cache
GO
DECLARE @query NVARCHAR(MAX) ;
DECLARE @param NVARCHAR(MAX) ;
SET @query = N'SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber ,soh.OrderDate ,sod.OrderQty ,sod.LineTotal FROM
Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
WHERE soh.CustomerID >= @CustomerId';
SET @param = N'@CustomerId INT' ;
EXEC sp_executesql
    @query,
    @param,
    @CustomerId = 1 ;
EXEC sp_executesql
    @query,
    @param,
    @CustomerId = 30118 ;
```

The second execution of the query performs an Index Scan operation on the SalesOrderHeader table to retrieve the data from the table. As explained in [Chapter 4](#), an Index Seek operation may have been preferred on the SalesOrderHeader table for the second execution. You can achieve this by executing the `sp_recompile` system stored procedure on the SalesOrderHeader table as follows:

```
EXEC sp_recompile 'Sales.SalesOrderHeader'
```

Now, if the query with the second parameter value is reexecuted, the plan for the query will be recompiled as marked by the preceding `sp_recompile` statement. This allows SQL Server to generate an optimal plan for the second execution.

Well, there is a slight problem here: you will likely want to reexecute the first statement again. With the plan existing in the cache, SQL Server will reuse the plan (the Index Scan operation on the SalesOrderHeader table) for the first statement even though an Index Seek operation (using the index on the filter criterion column `soh.CustomerID`) would have been optimal. One way of avoiding this problem is to create a stored procedure for the query and use a `WITH RECOMPILE` clause, as explained next.

## Explicit Use of RECOMPILE

SQL Server allows stored procedures and queries to be explicitly recompiled using the `RECOMPILE` command in three different ways: with the `CREATE PROCEDURE` statement, as part of the `EXECUTE` statement, and in a query hint. These methods decrease the effectiveness of plan reusability, so you should consider them only under the specific circumstances explained in the following sections.

### RECOMPILE Clause with the CREATE PROCEDURE Statement

Sometimes the plan requirements of a stored procedure will vary as the parameter values to the stored procedure change. In such a case, reusing the plan with different parameter values may degrade the performance of the stored procedure. You can avoid this by using the `RECOMPILE` clause with the `CREATE PROCEDURE` statement. For example, for the query in the preceding section, you can create a stored procedure with the `RECOMPILE` clause:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.spCustomerList'))
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROC dbo.spCustomerList ;
GO
CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.spCustomerList @CustomerId INT
    WITH RECOMPILE
AS
SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
       soh.OrderDate,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.LineTotal
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
       ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
WHERE  soh.CustomerID >= @CustomerId ;
GO
```

The `RECOMPILE` clause prevents the caching of the stored procedure plan. Every time the stored procedure is executed, a new plan is generated. Therefore, if the stored procedure is executed with the `soh.CustomerID` value as 30118 or 1

```
EXEC spCustomerList
    @CustomerId = 1 ;
EXEC spCustomerList
    @CustomerId = 30118 ;
```

a new plan is generated during the individual execution, as shown in Figure 10-12.

## RECOMPILE Clause with the EXECUTE Statement

As shown previously, specific parameter values in a stored procedure may require a different plan, depending upon the nature of the values. You can take the RECOMPILE clause out of the stored procedure and use it on a case-by-case basis when you execute the stored procedure, as follows:

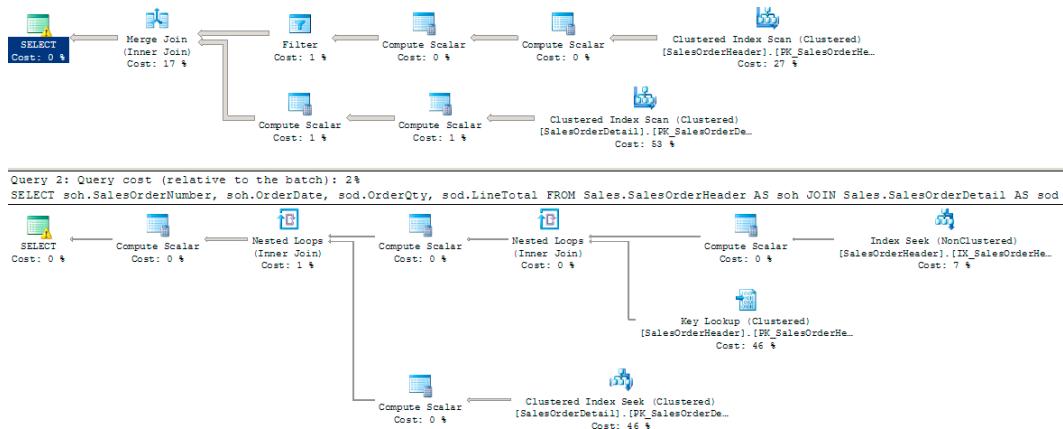
```
EXEC dbo.spCustomerList
    @CustomerId = 1
    WITH RECOMPILE ;
```

When the stored procedure is executed with the RECOMPILE clause, a new plan is generated temporarily. The new plan isn't cached and it doesn't affect the existing plan. When the stored procedure is executed without the RECOMPILE clause, the plan is cached as usual. This provides some control over reusability of the existing plan cache rather than using the RECOMPILE clause with the CREATE PROCEDURE statement.

Since the plan for the stored procedure when executed with the RECOMPILE clause is not cached, the plan is regenerated every time the stored procedure is executed with the RECOMPILE clause. However, for better performance, instead of using RECOMPILE, you should consider creating separate stored procedures, one for each set of parameter values that requires a different plan.

## RECOMPILE Hints to Control Individual Statements

While you can use either of the previous methods to recompile an entire procedure, this can be problematic if the procedure has multiple commands. All statements within a procedure will all be recompiled using either of the previous methods. Compile time for queries can be the most expensive part of executing some queries,



**Figure 10-12.** Effect of the RECOMPILE clause used in stored procedure creation

so recompiles should be avoided. Because of this, a more granular approach is to isolate the recompile to just the statement that needs it. This is accomplished using the RECOMPILE query hint as follows:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.spCustomerList')
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROC dbo.spCustomerList ;
GO
CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.spCustomerList @CustomerId INT
AS
SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
       soh.OrderDate,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.LineTotal
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
       ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
WHERE  soh.CustomerID >= @CustomerId OPTION (RECOMPILE);
GO
```

This procedure will appear to behave the same way as the one where the RECOMPILE was applied to the entire procedure, but if you added multiple statements to this query, only the statement with the OPTION (RECOMPILE) query hint would be compiled at every execution of the procedure.

## Avoiding Recompilations

Sometimes recompilation is beneficial, but at other times it is worth avoiding. If a new index is created on a column referred to in the WHERE or JOIN clause of a query, it makes sense to regenerate the execution plans of stored procedures referring to the table so they can benefit from using the index. However, if recompilation is deemed detrimental to performance, such as when it's causing blocking or using up resources such as the CPU, you can avoid it by following these implementation practices:

- Don't interleave DDL and DML statements.
- Avoid recompilation caused by statistics changes.
  - Use the KEEPFIXED PLAN option.
  - Disable the auto update statistics feature on the table.
- Use table variables.
- Avoid changing SET options within the stored procedure.
- Use the OPTIMIZE FOR query hint.
- Use plan guides.

## Don't Interleave DDL and DML Statements

In stored procedures, DDL statements are often used to create local temporary tables and to change their schema (including adding indexes). Doing so can affect the validity of the existing plan and can cause recompilation when the stored procedure statements referring to the tables are executed. To understand how the use of DDL

statements for local temporary tables can cause repetitive recompilation of the stored procedure, consider the following example (ddl.sql in the download):

```

IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.spTempTable')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROC dbo.spTempTable
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.spTempTable
AS
CREATE TABLE #MyTempTable (ID INT, Dsc NVARCHAR(50))
INSERT INTO #MyTempTable
(
ID,
Dsc
)
SELECT pm.ProductModelID,
pm.[Name]
FROM Production.ProductModel AS pm ; --Needs 1st recompilation
SELECT *
FROM #MyTempTable AS mtt ;
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX iTest ON #MyTempTable (ID) ;
SELECT *
FROM #MyTempTable AS mtt ; --Needs 2nd recompilation
CREATE TABLE #t2 (c1 INT) ;
SELECT *
FROM #t2 ; --Needs 3rd recompilation
GO
EXEC dbo.spTempTable ; --First execution

```

The stored procedure has interleaved DDL and DML statements. Figure 10-13 shows the Extended Events output of this code.

You can see that the statements are recompiled four times.

- The execution plan generated for a query when it is first executed doesn't contain any information about local temporary tables. Therefore, the first generated plan can never be used to access the temporary table using a DML statement.
- The second recompilation comes from the changes encountered in the data contained within the table as it gets loaded.
- The third recompilation is due to a schema change in the first temporary table (#MyTempTable). The creation of the index on #MyTempTable invalidates the existing plan, causing a recompilation when the table is accessed again. If this index had been created before the first recompilation, then the existing plan would have remained valid for the second SELECT statement, too. Therefore, you can avoid this recompilation by putting the CREATE INDEX DDL statement above all DML statements referring to the table.
- The fourth recompilation generates a plan to include the processing strategy for #t2. The existing plan has no information about #t2 and therefore can't be used to access #t2 using the third SELECT statement. If the CREATE TABLE DDL statement for #t2 had been placed before all the DML statements that could cause a recompilation, then the first recompilation itself would have included the information on #t2, avoiding the third recompilation.

The screenshot shows the Extended Events output interface. At the top, there is a table of events with columns 'name' and 'timestamp'. Several rows are listed, including 'module\_start', 'sql\_statement\_recompile' (multiple entries), and 'module\_end'. A specific row for 'sql\_statement\_recompile' is highlighted with a blue border. Below this table, a message says 'Event: sql\_statement\_recompile (2011-12-23 10:00:13.6337060)'. Underneath, there is a 'Details' section with a table showing various parameters like 'line\_number', 'nest\_level', and 'statement'. The 'statement' field contains the query: 'SELECT \* FROM #2 ; -Needs 3rd recompilation'.

name	timestamp
module_start	2011-12-23 10:00:13.3592920
sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-23 10:00:13.3612451
sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-23 10:00:13.3651513
sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-23 10:00:13.5301904
sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-23 10:00:13.6337060
module_end	2011-12-23 10:00:13.7215967

Event: sql\_statement\_recompile (2011-12-23 10:00:13.6337060)

Field	Value
line_number	17
nest_level	1
object_id	1412200081
object_name	spTempTable
object_type	PROC
offset	972
offset_end	-1
recompile_cause	Deferred compile
source_database_id	9
statement	SELECT * FROM #2 ; -Needs 3rd recompilation

**Figure 10-13.** Extended Events output showing recompilation because of DDL and DML interleaving

## Avoiding Recompilations Caused by Statistics Change

In the “Analyzing Causes of Recompilation” section, you saw that a change in statistics is one of the causes of recompilation. On a simple table with uniform data distribution, recompilation due to a change of statistics may generate a plan identical to the previous plan. In such situations, recompilation can be unnecessary and should be avoided if it is too costly.

You have two techniques to avoid recompilations caused by statistics change.

- Use the KEEPFIXED PLAN option.
- Disable the auto update statistics feature on the table.

## Using the KEEPFIXED PLAN Option

SQL Server provides a KEEPFIXED PLAN option to avoid recompilations due to a statistics change. To understand how you can use KEEPFIXED PLAN, consider `statschanges.sql` with an appropriate modification to use the KEEPFIXED PLAN option.

```
--Create a small table with one row and an index
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT, C2 CHAR(50)) ;
```

```

INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
VALUES (1, '2') ;
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX IndexOne ON dbo.Test1 (C1) ;

--Create a stored procedure referencing the previous table
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.TestProc')
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROC dbo.TestProc ;
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.TestProc
AS
SELECT *
FROM    dbo.Test1 AS t
WHERE   t.C1 = 1
OPTION  (KEEPFIXED PLAN) ;
GO

--First execution of stored procedure with 1 row in the table
EXEC dbo.TestProc ;
    --First execution

--Add many rows to the table to cause statistics change
WITH Nums
AS (SELECT 1 AS n
    UNION ALL
    SELECT n + 1
    FROM Nums
    WHERE n < 1000
    )
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1,
C2
)
SELECT 1,
n
FROM Nums
OPTION (MAXRECURSION 1000) ;
GO
--Reexecute the stored procedure with a change in statistics
EXEC dbo.TestProc ; --With change in data distribution

```

Figure 10-14 shows the Extended Events output.

You can see that, unlike in the earlier example with changes in data, there's no `auto_stats` event (see Figure 10-8). Consequently, there's no additional recompilation. The first recompilation occurs because of the initial version of the query. Therefore, by using the `KEEPFIXED PLAN` option, you can avoid recompilation due to a statistics change.

**Note** Before you consider using this option, ensure that any new plans that would have been generated are not superior to the existing plan. In most cases, recompiling queries is preferable.

The screenshot shows the Extended Events output for the 'sql\_statement\_recompile' event. The main table lists five events with their names and timestamps. Below the table, a detailed view for the first event is expanded, showing various properties like line\_number, nest\_level, object\_id, etc.

	name	timestamp
▶	sql_statement_recompile	2011-12-23 10:13:24.0112102
	module_start	2011-12-23 10:13:24.1420695
	module_end	2011-12-23 10:13:24.1420695
	module_start	2011-12-23 10:13:24.3071086
	module_end	2011-12-23 10:13:24.3930461

Event: sql_statement_recompile (2011-12-23 10:13:24.0112102)	
Details	
Field	Value
line_number	2
nest_level	0
object_id	0
object_name	
object_type	ADHOC
offset	96
offset_end	182
recompile_cause	Schema changed
source_database_id	9
statement	INSERT INTO dbo.Test1 VALUES (1, '2');

**Figure 10-14.** Extended Events output showing the role of the `KEEPFIXED PLAN` option in reducing recompilation

## Disable Auto Update Statistics on the Table

You can also avoid recompilation due to a statistics update by disabling the automatic statistics update on the relevant table. For example, you can disable the auto update statistics feature on table t1 as follows:

```
EXEC sp_autostats
    'dbo.Test1',
    'OFF' ;
```

If you disable this feature on the table before inserting the large number of rows that causes statistics change, you can avoid the recompilation due to a statistics change.

However, be very cautious with this technique, since outdated statistics can adversely affect the effectiveness of the cost-based optimizer, as discussed in [Chapter 7](#). Also, as explained in [Chapter 7](#), if you disable the automatic update of statistics, you should have a SQL job to manually update the statistics regularly.

## Using Table Variables

One of the variable types supported by SQL Server 2012 is the table variable. You can create the table variable data type like other data types by using the `DECLARE` statement. It behaves like a local variable, and you can use it inside a stored procedure to hold intermediate result sets, as you do using a temporary table.

You can avoid the recompilations caused by a temporary table if you use a table variable. Since statistics are not created for table variables, the different recompilation issues associated with temporary tables are not applicable to it. For instance, consider --createpl used in the section “Identifying the Statement Causing Recompilation.” It is repeated here for your reference.

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.TestProc')
) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROC dbo.TestProc ;
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.TestProc
AS
CREATE TABLE #TempTable (C1 INT) ;
INSERT INTO #TempTable
(C1)
VALUES (42) ;
-- data change causes recompile
GO
EXEC dbo.TestProc ; --First execution
```

Because of deferred object resolution, the stored procedure is recompiled during the first execution. You can avoid this recompilation caused by the temporary table by using the table variable as follows:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.TestProc')
) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROC dbo.TestProc ;
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.TestProc
AS
DECLARE @TempTable TABLE (C1 INT) ;
INSERT INTO @TempTable
(C1)
VALUES (42) ;
--Recompilation not needed
GO
EXEC dbo.TestProc ; --First execution
```

Figure 10-15 shows the Extended Event output for the first execution of the stored procedure. The recompilation caused by the temporary table has been avoided by using the table variable.

Additional benefits of using the table variables are as follows:

- *No transaction log overhead:* No transaction log activities are performed for table variables, whereas they are for both regular and temporary tables.
- *No lock overhead:* Since table variables are treated like local variables (not database objects), the locking overhead associated with regular tables and temporary tables doesn't exist.
- *No rollback overhead:* Since no transaction log activities are performed for table variables, no rollback overhead is applicable for table variables. For example, consider the following code (--rollback in the download):

```
DECLARE @t1 TABLE (c1 INT) ;
INSERT INTO @t1
```

	name	timestamp
▶	module_start	2011-12-23 11:01:13.6539773
	module_end	2011-12-23 11:01:13.6559304

Event: module_start (2011-12-23 11:01:13.6539773)	
Details	
Field	Value
line_number	2
object_id	1524200480
object_name	TestProc
object_type	P
offset	4
offset_end	-1
source_database_id	9
statement	EXEC dbo.TestProc ; --First execution

**Figure 10-15.** Extended Events output showing the role of a table variable in resolving recompilation

```

VALUES (1);
BEGIN TRAN
INSERT INTO @t1
VALUES (2) ;
ROLLBACK
SELECT *
FROM @t1 ; --Returns 2 rows

```

The ROLLBACK statement won't roll back the second row insertion into the table variable. However, table variables have their limitations. The main ones are as follows:

- No DDL statement can be executed on the table variable once it is created, which means no indexes or constraints can be added to the table variable later. Constraints can be specified only as part of the table variable's DECLARE statement. Therefore, only one index can be created on a table variable, using the PRIMARY KEY or UNIQUE constraint.
- No statistics are created for table variables, which means they resolve as single-row tables in execution plans. This is not an issue when the table actually contains only a small quantity of data, approximately less than 100 rows. It becomes a major performance problem when the table variable contains more data since appropriate decisions regarding the right sorts of operations within an execution plan are completely dependent on statistics.
- The following statements are not supported on the table variables:
  - INSERT INTO TableVariable EXEC StoredProcedure
  - SELECT SelectList INTO TableVariable FROM Table
  - SET TableVariable = Value

## Avoiding Changing SET Options Within a Stored Procedure

It is generally recommended that you not change the environment settings within a stored procedure and thus avoid recompilation because the SET options changed. For ANSI compatibility, it is recommended that you keep the following SET options ON:

- ARITHABORT
- CONCAT\_NULL\_YIELDS\_NULL
- QUOTED\_IDENTIFIER
- ANSI\_NULLS
- ANSI\_PADDING
- ANSI\_WARNINGS
- And NUMERIC\_ROUNDABORT should be OFF.

Although the following approach is not recommended, you can avoid the recompilation caused by some of these SET options changes by resetting the options for the connection as shown in the following modifications to set.sql:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.TestProc')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROC dbo.TestProc
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.TestProc
AS
SELECT 'a' + NULL + 'b' ; --1st SET CONCAT_NULL_YIELDS_NULL OFF
SELECT 'a' + NULL + 'b' ; --2nd
SET ANSI_NULLS OFF
SELECT 'a' + NULL + 'b' ;
--3rd
GO
SET CONCAT_NULL_YIELDS_NULL OFF ;
SET ANSI_NULLS OFF ;
EXEC dbo.TestProc ;
SET CONCAT_NULL_YIELDS_NULL ON ;
--Reset to default
SET ANSI_NULLS ON ; --Reset to default
```

Figure 10-16 shows the Extended Events output.

You can see that there were fewer recompilations when compared to the original set.sql code (Figure 10-11). Out of the SET options listed previously, the ANSI\_NULLS and QUOTED\_IDENTIFIER options are saved as part of the stored procedure when it is created. Therefore, setting these options in the connection outside the stored procedure won't affect any recompilation issues; only re-creating the stored procedure can change these settings.

	name	timestamp
▶	module_start	2011-12-23 11:09:14.3118563
	module_end	2011-12-23 11:09:14.3118563

Event: module_start (2011-12-23 11:09:14.3118563)	
Details	
Field	Value
line_number	5
object_id	1540200537
object_name	TestProc
object_type	P
offset	124
offset_end	168
source_database_id	9
statement	EXEC dbo.TestProc ;

**Figure 10-16.** Extended Events output showing effect of the ANSI SET options on stored procedure recompilation

## Using OPTIMIZE FOR Query Hint

Although you may not always be able to reduce or eliminate recompiles, using the `OPTIMIZE FOR` query hint will help ensure you get the plan you want when the recompile does occur. The `OPTIMIZE FOR` query hint uses parameter values supplied by you to compile the plan, regardless of the values of the parameter passed in by the calling application.

For an example, examine `spCustomerList` from earlier in the chapter. You know that if this procedure receives certain values, it will need to create a new plan. Knowing your data, you also know two more important facts: the frequency that this query will return small data sets is exceedingly small, and when this query uses the wrong plan, performance suffers. Rather than recompiling it over and over again, modify it so that it creates the plan that works best most of the time.

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.spCustomerList')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROC dbo.spCustomerList
GO
CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.spCustomerList @CustomerID INT
AS
SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
       soh.OrderDate,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.LineTotal
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
       ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
WHERE  soh.CustomerID >= @CustomerID
OPTION (OPTIMIZE FOR (@CustomerID = 1)) ;
GO
```

When this query is executed the first time or is recompiled for any reason, it always gets the same execution plan. To test this, execute the procedure this way:

```
EXEC dbo.spCustomerList
    @CustomerID = 7920
    WITH RECOMPILE ;
EXEC dbo.spCustomerList
    @CustomerID = 30118
    WITH RECOMPILE ;
```

Just as earlier in the chapter, this will force the procedure to be recompiled each time it is executed.

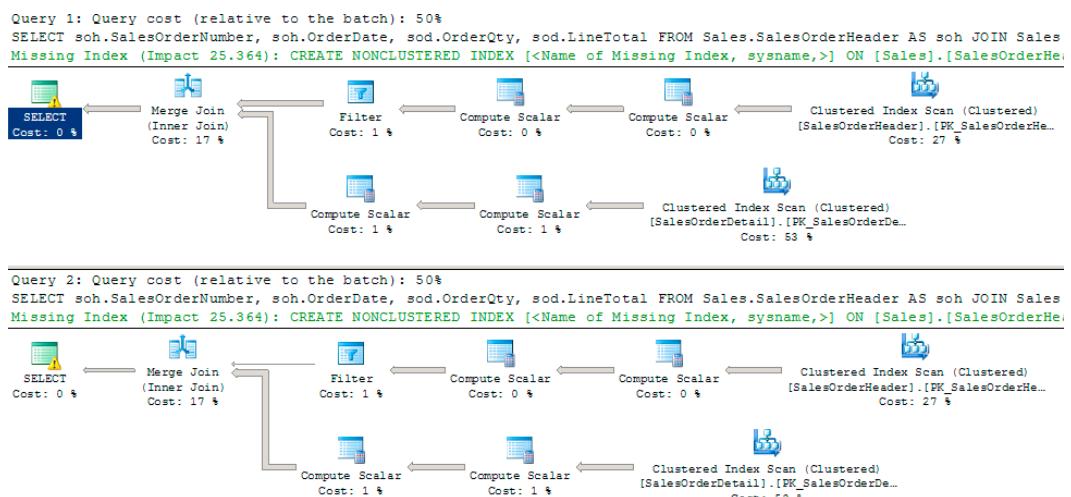
Figure 10-17 shows the resulting execution plans.

Unlike earlier in the chapter, recompiling the procedure now doesn't result in a new execution plan. Instead, the same plan is generated, regardless of input, because the query optimizer has received instructions to use the value supplied, @CustomerID = 1, when optimizing the query.

This can reduce the number of recompiles, and it does help you control the execution plan generated. It requires that you know your data very well. If your data changes over time, you may need to reexamine areas where the OPTIMIZE FOR query hint was used.

To see the hint in the execution plan, just look at the SELECT operator properties, as shown in Figure 10-18.

You can see that while the query was recompiled and it was given a value of 7920, because of the hint, the compiled value used was 1 as supplied by the hint.



**Figure 10-17.** WITH RECOMPILE forces identical execution plans.

Parameter List	
Column	@CustomerID
Parameter Compiled Value	(1)
Parameter Runtime Value	(7920)

**Figure 10-18.** The Parameter Compiled Value matches the value supplied by the query hint

You can specify that the query be optimized using `OPTIMIZE FOR UNKNOWN`. This is almost the opposite of the `OPTIMIZE FOR` hint. What you are directing the processor to do is perform the optimization based on statistics, always, and to ignore the actual values passed when the query is optimized. You can use it in combination with `OPTIMIZE FOR <value>`. It will optimize for the value supplied on that parameter but will use statistics on all other parameters.

## Using Plan Guides

A plan guide allows you to use query hint or other optimization techniques without having to modify the query or procedure text. This is especially useful when you have a third-party product with poorly performing procedures you need to tune but can't modify. As part of the optimization process, if a plan guide exists when a procedure is compiled or recompiled, it will use that guide to create the execution plan.

In the previous section, I showed you how using `OPTIMIZE FOR` would affect the execution plan created on a procedure. The following is the query from the original procedure, with no hints (`--planguide` in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.CustomerList')
 ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROC dbo.CustomerList
GO
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo. CustomerList')
 ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROC dbo. CustomerList
GO
CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.CustomerList @CustomerID INT
AS
SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
       soh.OrderDate,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.LineTotal
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
       ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
WHERE  soh.CustomerID >= @CustomerId
GO
```

Now assume for a moment that this query is part of a third-party application and you are not able to modify it to include `OPTION (OPTIMIZE FOR)`. To provide it with the query hint, `OPTIMIZE FOR`, create a plan guide as follows:

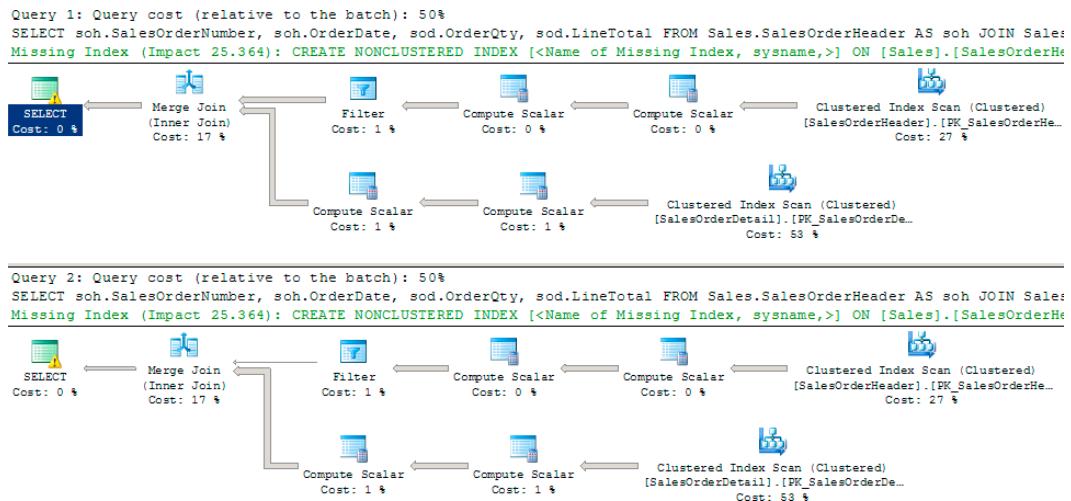
```
sp_create_plan_guide
    @name = N'MyGuide',
    @stmt = N'SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
                  soh.OrderDate,
                  sod.OrderQty,
                  sod.LineTotal
        FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
        JOIN   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
               ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
        WHERE  soh.CustomerID >= @CustomerId',
    @type = N'OBJECT',
    @module_or_batch = N'dbo.CustomerList',
    @params = NULL,
    @hints = N'OPTION (OPTIMIZE FOR (@CustomerId = 1))' ;
```

Now, when the procedure is executed with each of the different parameters, even with the RECOMPILE being forced as shown next, the OPTIMIZE FOR hint is applied. Figure 10-19 shows the resulting execution plan.

```
EXEC    dbo.CustomerList
        @CustomerID = 7920
        WITH RECOMPILE ;
EXEC    dbo.CustomerList
        @CustomerID = 30118
        WITH RECOMPILE ;
```

The results are the same as when the procedure was modified, but in this case, no modification was necessary. You can see that a plan guide was applied within the execution plan by looking at the SELECT properties again (Figure 10-20).

Various types of plan guides exist. The previous example is an *object* plan guide, which is a guide matched to a particular object in the database, in this case spCustomerList. You can also create plan guides for ad hoc queries that come into your system repeatedly by creating a *SQL* plan guide that looks for particular SQL



**Figure 10-19.** Using a plan guide to apply the *OPTIMIZE FOR* query hint

<b>Parameter List</b>	@CustomerID
Column	@CustomerID
Parameter Compiled Value	(1)
Parameter Runtime Value	(7920)
<b>Physical Operation</b>	
PlanGuideDB	AdventureWorks2008R2
PlanGuideName	MyGuide

**Figure 10-20.** SELECT operator properties show the plan guide

statements. Instead of a procedure, the following query gets passed to your system and needs an OPTIMIZE FOR query hint:

```
SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
       soh.OrderDate,
       sod.OrderQty,
       sod.LineTotal
  FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
 JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
    ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
 WHERE soh.CustomerID >= 1 ;
```

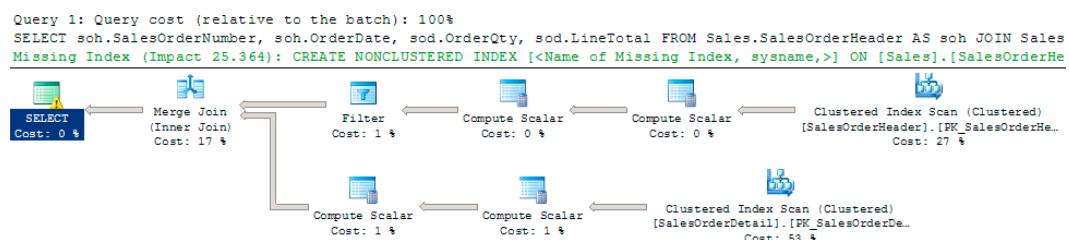
Running this query results in the execution plan you see in Figure 10-21.

To get a query plan guide, you first need to know the precise format used by the query in case parameterization, forced or simple, changes the text of the query. The text has to be precise. If your first attempt at a query plan guide looked like this (–badguide in the download)

```
EXECUTE sp_create_plan_guide
  @name = N'MyBadSQLGuide',
  @stmt = N'SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
                 soh.OrderDate,
                 sod.OrderQty,
                 sod.LineTotal
  FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
  join Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
  ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
  WHERE soh.CustomerID >= @Customerld',
  @type = N'SQL',
  @module_or_batch = NULL,
  @params = N'@CustomerID int',
  @hints = N'OPTION (TABLE HINT(soh, FORCESEEK))' ;
```

then you'll still get the same execution plan when running the select query. This is because the query doesn't look like what was typed in for the –badguide plan guide. Several things are different, such as the spacing and the case on the JOIN statement. You can drop this bad plan guide using the T-SQL statement.

```
EXECUTE sp_control_plan_guide
  @operation = 'Drop',
  @name = N'MyBadSQLGuide' ;
```



**Figure 10-21.** Query uses a different execution plan from the one wanted

Inputting the correct syntax will create a new plan.

```
EXECUTE sp_create_plan_guide
    @name = N'MyGoodSQLGuide',
    @stmt = N'SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber,
        soh.OrderDate,
        sod.OrderQty,
        sod.LineTotal
    FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
    JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
        ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
    WHERE soh.CustomerID >= 1;',
    @type = N'SQL',
    @module_or_batch = NULL,
    @params = NULL,
    @hints = N'OPTION (TABLE HINT(soh, FORCESEEK))' ;
```

Now when the query is run, a completely different plan is created, as shown in Figure 10-22.

One other option exists when you have a plan in the cache that you think performs the way you want. You can capture that plan into a plan guide to ensure that the next time the query is run, the same plan is executed. You accomplish this by running `sp_create_plan_guide_from_handle`.

To test it, first clear out the procedure cache so you can control exactly which query plan is used.

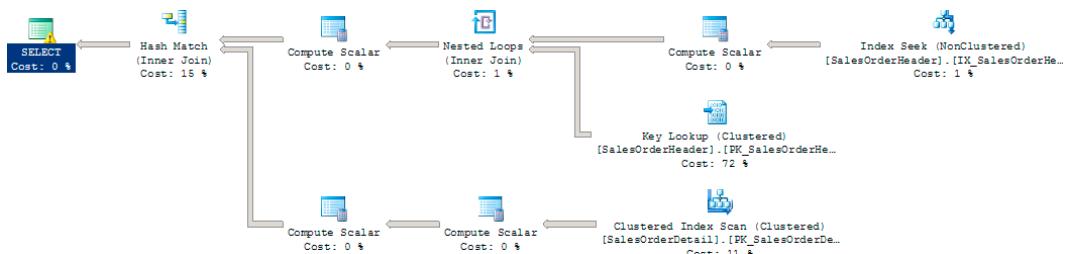
```
DBCC FREEPROCCACHE();
```

With the procedure cache clear and the existing plan guide, `MyGoodSQLGuide`, in place, rerun the query. It will use the plan guide to arrive at the execution plan displayed in Figure 10-20. To see whether this plan can be kept, first drop the plan guide that is forcing the Index Seek operation.

```
EXECUTE sp_control_plan_guide
    @operation = 'Drop',
    @name = N'MyGoodSQLGuide' ;
```

If you were to rerun the query now, it would revert to its original plan. However, right now in the plan cache, you have the plan displayed in Figure 10-20. To keep it, run the following script:

```
DECLARE @plan_handle VARBINARY(64),
    @start_offset INT ;
SELECT @plan_handle = deqs.plan_handle,
    @start_offset = deqs.statement_start_offset
```



**Figure 10-22.** The plan guide forces a new execution plan on the same query.

```

FROM sys.dm_exec_query_stats AS deqs
CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(sql_handle)
CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_text_query_plan(deqs.plan_handle,
                                       deqs.statement_start_offset,
                                       deqs.statement_end_offset) AS qp
WHERE text LIKE N'SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber%'
EXECUTE sp_create_plan_guide_from_handle
    @name = N'ForcedPlanGuide',
    @plan_handle = @plan_handle,
    @statement_start_offset = @start_offset ;
GO

```

This creates a plan guide based on the execution plan as it currently exists in the cache. To be sure this works, clear the cache again. That way, the query has to generate a new plan. Rerun the query, and observe the execution plan. It will be the same as that displayed in Figure 10-20 because of the plan guide created using `sp_create_plan_guide_from_handle`.

Plan guides are useful mechanisms for controlling the behavior of SQL queries and stored procedures, but you should use them only when you have a thorough understanding of the execution plan, the data, and the structure of your system.

## Summary

As you learned in this chapter, query recompilation can both benefit and hurt performance. Recompilations that generate better plans improve the performance of the stored procedure. However, recompilations that regenerate the same plan consume extra CPU cycles without any improvement in processing strategy. Therefore, you should look closely at recompilations to determine their usefulness. You can use Extended Events to identify which stored procedure statement caused the recompilation, and you can determine the cause from the `recompile`\_clause data column value in the extended event output. Once you determine the cause of the recompilation, you can apply different techniques to avoid the unnecessary recompilations.

Up until now, you have seen how to benefit from proper indexing and plan caching. However, the performance benefit of these techniques depends on the way the queries are designed. The cost-based optimizer of SQL Server takes care of many of the query design issues. However, you should adopt a number of best practices while designing queries. In the next chapter, I will cover some of the common query design issues that affect performance.

## CHAPTER 11



# Query Design Analysis

A database schema may include a number of performance-enhancement features such as indexes, statistics, and stored procedures. But none of these features guarantees good performance if your queries are written badly in the first place. The SQL queries may not be able to use the available indexes effectively. The structure of the SQL queries may add avoidable overhead to the query cost. Queries may be attempting to deal with data in a row-by-row fashion (or to quote Jeff Moden, Row By Agonizing Row, which is abbreviated to RBAR and pronounced “reebar”) instead of in logical sets. To improve the performance of a database application, it is important to understand the cost associated with varying ways of writing a query.

In this chapter, I cover the following topics:

- Aspects of query design that affect performance
- How query designs use indexes effectively
- The role of optimizer hints on query performance
- The role of database constraints on query performance
- Query designs that are less resource-intensive
- Query designs that use the procedure cache effectively
- Query designs that reduce network overhead
- Techniques to reduce the transaction cost of a query

## Query Design Recommendations

When you need to run a query, you can often use many different approaches to get the same data. In many cases, the optimizer generates the same plan, irrespective of the structure of the query. However, in some situations the query structure won’t allow the optimizer to select the best possible processing strategy. It is important that you know when this happens and what you can do to avoid it.

In general, keep the following recommendations in mind to ensure the best performance:

- Operate on small result sets.
- Use indexes effectively.
- Avoid optimizer hints.
- Use domain and referential integrity.

- Avoid resource-intensive queries.
- Reduce the number of network round-trips.
- Reduce the transaction cost.

Careful testing is essential to identify the query form that provides the best performance in a specific database environment. You should be conversant with writing and comparing different SQL query forms so you can evaluate the query form that provides the best performance in a given environment.

## Operating on Small Result Sets

To improve the performance of a query, limit the amount of data it operates on, including both columns and rows. Operating on a small result set reduces the amount of resources consumed by a query and increases the effectiveness of indexes. Two of the rules you should follow to limit the data set's size are as follows:

- Limit the number of columns in the select list.
- Use highly selective WHERE clauses to limit the rows returned.

It's important to note that you will be asked to return tens of thousands of rows to an OLTP system. Just because someone tells you those are the business requirements doesn't mean they are right. Human beings don't process tens of thousands of rows. Very few human beings are capable of processing thousands of rows. Be prepared to push back on these requests, and be able to justify your reasons.

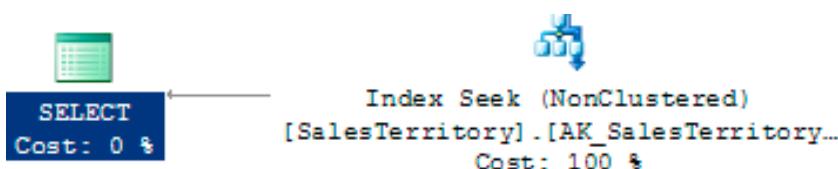
### Limit the Number of Columns in select\_list

Use a minimum set of columns in the select list of a SELECT statement. Don't use columns that are not required in the output result set. For instance, don't use SELECT \* to return all columns. SELECT \* statements render covered indexes ineffective, since it is impractical to include all columns in an index. For example, consider the following query:

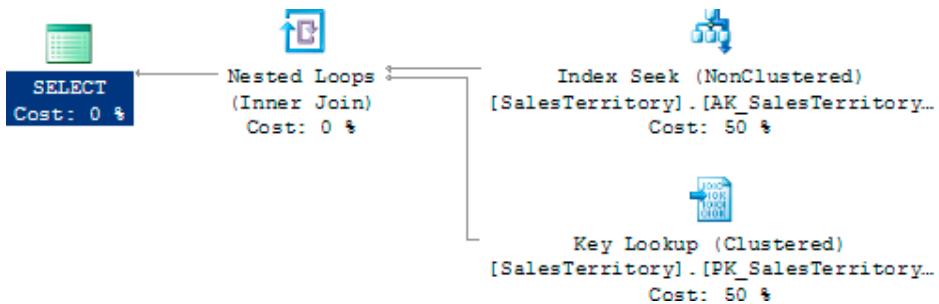
```
SELECT [Name],
       TerritoryID
  FROM Sales.SalesTerritory AS st
 WHERE st.[Name] = 'Australia' ;
```

A covering index on the Name column (and through the clustered key, ProductID) serves the query quickly through the index itself, without accessing the clustered index. When you have STATISTICS 10 and STATISTICS TIME switched on, you get the following number of logical reads and execution time, as well as the corresponding execution plan (shown in Figure 11-1):

```
Table 'SalesTerritory'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.
```



**Figure 11-1.** Execution plan showing the benefit of referring to a limited number of columns



**Figure 11-2.** Execution plan showing the added cost of referring to too many columns

If this query is modified to include all columns in the select list as follows, then the previous covering index becomes ineffective, because all the columns required by this query are not included in that index:

```

SELECT *
FROM Sales.SalesTerritory AS st
WHERE st.[Name] = 'Australia';
  
```

Subsequently, the base table (or the clustered index) containing all the columns has to be accessed, as shown next. The number of logical reads and the execution time have both increased.

Table 'SalesTerritory'. Scan count 0, logical reads 4 CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 75 ms

As shown in Figure 11-2, the fewer the columns in the select list, the better the query performance. Selecting too many columns also increases data transfer across the network, further degrading performance.

## Use Highly Selective WHERE Clauses

As explained in Chapter 4, the selectivity of a column referred to in the WHERE clause governs the use of an index on the column. A request for a large number of rows from a table may not benefit from using an index, either because it can't use an index at all or, in the case of a non-clustered index, because of the overhead cost of the bookmark lookup. To ensure the use of indexes, the columns referred to in the WHERE clause should be highly selective.

Most of the time, an end user concentrates on a limited number of rows at a time. Therefore, you should design database applications to request data incrementally as the user navigates through the data. For applications that rely on a large amount of data for data analysis or reporting, consider using data analysis solutions such as Analysis Services. Remember, returning huge result sets is costly, and this data is unlikely to be used in its entirety.

## Using Indexes Effectively

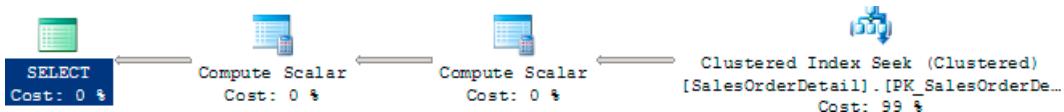
It is extremely important to have effective indexes on database tables to improve performance. However, it is equally important to ensure that the queries are designed properly to use these indexes effectively. These are some of the query design rules you should follow to improve the use of indexes:

- Avoid nonsargable search conditions.
- Avoid arithmetic operators on the WHERE clause column.
- Avoid functions on the WHERE clause column.

I cover each of these rules in detail in the following sections.

**Table 11-1.** Common Sargable and Nonsargable Search Conditions

Type	Search Conditions
Sargable	Inclusion conditions =,>,>=,<,<=, and BETWEEN, and some LIKE conditions such as LIKE '<literal>%'
Nonsargable	Exclusion conditions <>, !=, !=, !<, NOT EXISTS, NOT IN, and NOT LIKE IN, OR, and some LIKE conditions such as LIKE '%<literal>'

**Figure 11-3.** Execution plan for a simple SELECT statement using a BETWEEN clause

## Avoid Nonsargable Search Conditions

A *sargable* predicate in a query is one in which an index can be used. The word is a contraction of “Search ARGument ABLE.” The optimizer’s ability to benefit from an index depends on the selectivity of the search condition, which in turn depends on the selectivity of the column(s) referred to in the WHERE clause. The search predicate used on the column(s) in the WHERE clause determines whether an index operation on the column can be performed.

The sargable search conditions listed in Table 11-1 generally allow the optimizer to use an index on the column(s) referred to in the WHERE clause. The sargable search conditions generally allow SQL Server to seek to a row in the index and retrieve the row (or the adjacent range of rows until the search condition remains true).

On the other hand, the *nonsargable* search conditions listed in Table 11-1 generally prevent the optimizer from using an index on the column(s) referred to in the WHERE clause. The exclusion search conditions generally don’t allow SQL Server to perform Index Seek operations as supported by the sargable search conditions. For example, the != condition requires scanning all the rows to identify the matching rows.

Try to implement workarounds for these nonsargable search conditions to improve performance. In some cases, it may be possible to rewrite a query to avoid a nonsargable search condition. For example, consider replacing an IN/OR search condition with a BETWEEN condition, as described in the following section.

## BETWEEN vs. IN/OR

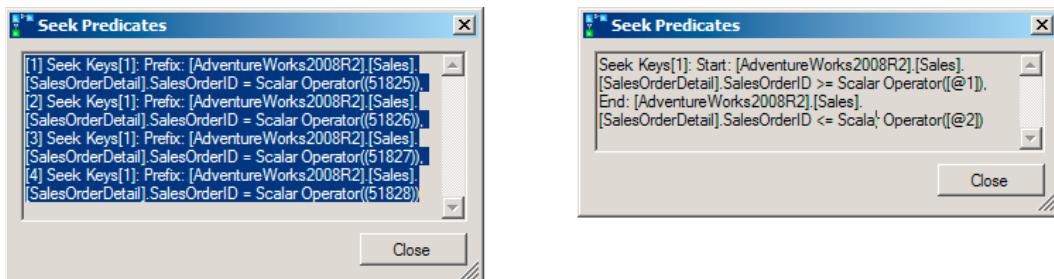
Consider the following query, which uses the search condition IN:

```
SELECT sod.*  
FROM Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod  
WHERE sod.SalesOrderID IN (51825, 51826, 51827, 51828) ;
```

You can replace the nonsargable search condition in this query with a BETWEEN clause as follows:

```
SELECT sod.*  
FROM Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod  
WHERE sod.SalesOrderID BETWEEN 51825 AND 51828 ;
```

On the face of it, the execution plan of both the queries appears to be the same, as shown in Figure 11-3.



**Figure 11-4.** Execution plan details for an IN condition (left) and a condition (right)

However, a closer look at the execution plans reveals the difference in their data-retrieval mechanism, as shown in Figure 11-4. The left box is the IN condition, and the right box is the BETWEEN condition.

As shown in Figure 11-4, SQL Server resolved the IN condition containing four values into four OR conditions. Accordingly, the clustered index (PKSalesTerritoryTerritoryId) is accessed four times (Scan count 4) to retrieve rows for the four OR conditions, as shown in the following corresponding STATISTICS 10 output. On the other hand, the BETWEEN condition is resolved into a pair of  $\geq$  and  $\leq$  conditions, as shown in Figure 11-4. SQL Server accesses the clustered index only once (Scan count 1) from the first matching row until the match condition is true, as shown in the following corresponding STATISTICS10 and QUERY TIME output.

- With the IN condition:

```
Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 4, logical reads 21
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 264 ms.
```

- With the BETWEEN condition:

```
Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 7
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 212 ms.
```

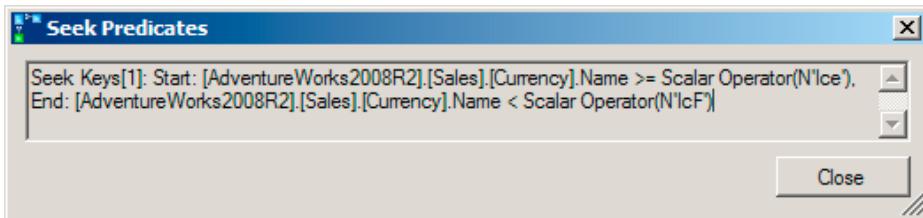
Replacing the search condition IN with BETWEEN decreases the number of logical reads for this query from 21 to 7. As just shown, although both queries use a clustered index seek on OrderID, the optimizer locates the range of rows much faster with the BETWEEN clause than with the IN clause. The same thing happens when you look at the BETWEEN condition and the OR clause. Therefore, if there is a choice between using IN/OR and the BETWEEN search condition, always choose the BETWEEN condition because it is generally much more efficient than the IN/OR condition. In fact, you should go one step further and use the combination of  $\geq$  and  $\leq$  instead of the BETWEEN clause only because you're making the optimizer do a little less work.

Not every WHERE clause that uses exclusion search conditions prevents the optimizer from using the index on the column referred to in the search condition. In many cases, the SQL Server 2012 optimizer does a wonderful job of converting the exclusion search condition to a sargable search condition. To understand this, consider the following two search conditions, which I discuss in the sections that follow:

- The LIKE condition
- The  $\neq$  condition vs. the  $\geq$  condition

## LIKE Condition

While using the LIKE search condition, try to use one or more leading characters in the WHERE clause if possible. Using leading characters in the LIKE clause allows the optimizer to convert the LIKE condition to an index-friendly search condition. The greater the number of leading characters in the LIKE condition, the better the



**Figure 11-5.** Execution plan showing automatic conversion of a LIKE clause with a trailing % sign to an indexable search condition

optimizer is able to determine an effective index. Be aware that using a wildcard character as the leading character in the LIKE condition *prevents* the optimizer from performing a SEEK (or a narrow-range scan) on the index; it relies on scanning the complete table instead.

To understand this ability of the SQL Server 2012 optimizer, consider the following SELECT statement that uses the LIKE condition with a leading character:

```
SELECT c.CurrencyCode
FROM Sales.Currency AS c
WHERE c.[Name] LIKE 'Ice%' ;
```

The SQL Server 2012 optimizer does this conversion automatically, as shown in Figure 11-5.

As you can see, the optimizer automatically converts the LIKE condition to an equivalent pair of  $\geq$  and  $<$  conditions. You can therefore rewrite this SELECT statement to replace the LIKE condition with an indexable search condition as follows:

```
SELECT c.CurrencyCode
FROM Sales.Currency AS c
WHERE c.[Name] >= N'Ice'
AND c.[Name] < N'IcF' ;
```

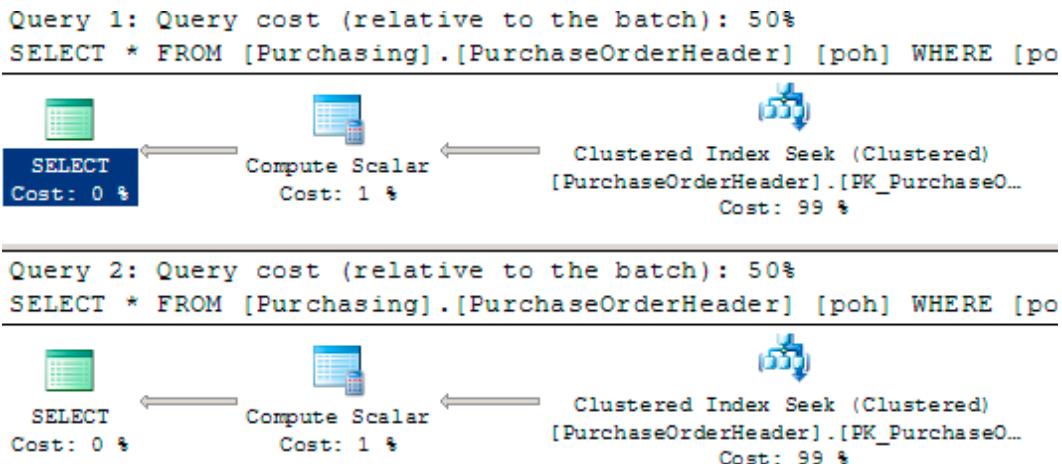
Note that, in both cases, the number of logical reads, the execution time for the query with the LIKE condition, and the manually converted sargable search condition are all the same. Thus, if you include leading characters in the LIKE clause, the SQL Server 2012 optimizer optimizes the search condition to allow the use of indexes on the column.

## !< Condition vs. $\geq$ Condition

Even though both the  $!<$  and  $\geq$  search conditions retrieve the same result set, they may perform different operations internally. The  $\geq$  comparison operator allows the optimizer to use an index on the column referred to in the search argument because the  $=$  part of the operator allows the optimizer to seek to a starting point in the index and access all the index rows from there onward. On the other hand, the  $!<$  operator doesn't have an  $=$  element and needs to access the column value for every row.

Or does it? As explained in Chapter 9, the SQL Server optimizer performs syntax-based optimization, before executing a query, to improve performance. This allows SQL Server to take care of the performance concern with the  $!<$  operator by converting it to  $\geq$ , as shown in the execution plan in Figure 11-6 for the two following SELECT statements:

```
SELECT *
FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
```



**Figure 11-6.** Execution plan showing automatic transformation of a nonindexable !< operator to an indexable >= operator

```
WHERE poh.PurchaseOrderID >= 2975 ;
SELECT *
FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
WHERE poh.PurchaseOrderID !< 2975 ;
```

As you can see, the optimizer often provides you with the flexibility of writing queries in the preferred T-SQL syntax without sacrificing performance.

Although the SQL Server optimizer can automatically optimize query syntax to improve performance in many cases, you should not rely on it to do so. It is a good practice to write efficient queries in the first place.

## Avoid Arithmetic Operators on the WHERE Clause Column

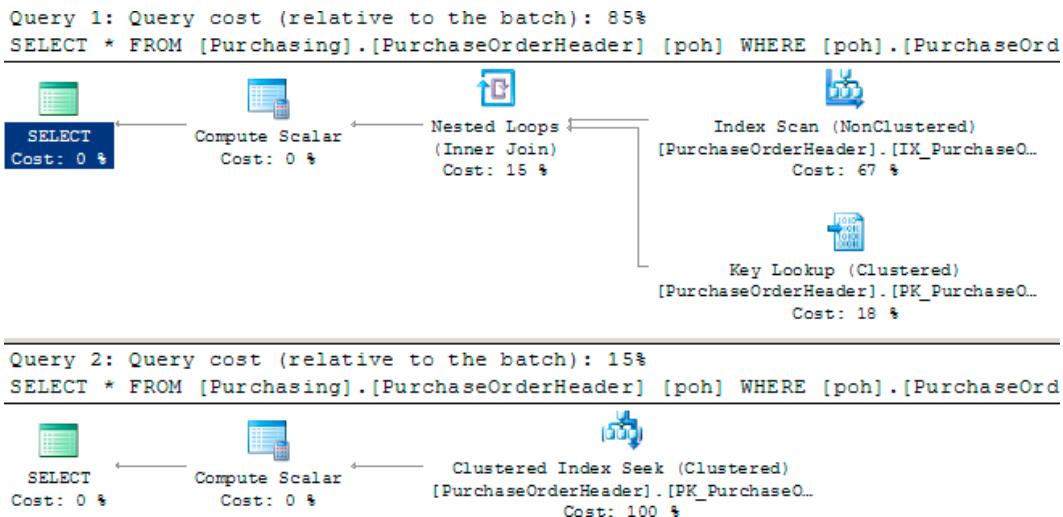
Using an arithmetic operator on a column in the WHERE clause can prevent the optimizer from using the index on the column. For example, consider the following SELECT statement:

```
SELECT *
FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
WHERE poh.PurchaseOrderID * 2 = 3400 ;
```

A multiplication operator, \*, has been applied on the column in the WHERE clause. You can avoid this on the column by rewriting the SELECT statement as follows:

```
SELECT *
FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
WHERE poh.PurchaseOrderID = 3400 / 2 ;
```

The table has a clustered index on the PurchaseOrderID column. As explained in Chapter 4, an Index Seek operation on this index is suitable for this query since it returns only one row. Even though both queries return the same result set, the use of the multiplication operator on the PurchaseOrderID column in the first query prevents the optimizer from using the index on the column, as you can see in Figure 11-7.



**Figure 11-7.** Execution plan showing the detrimental effect of an arithmetic operator on a WHERE clause column

The following are the corresponding STATISTICS IO and TIME outputs.

- With the \* operator on the PurchaseOrderID column:

Table 'PurchaseOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 11 CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 201 ms.

- With no operator on the PurchaseOrderID column:

Table 'PurchaseOrderHeader'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2 CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 75 ms.

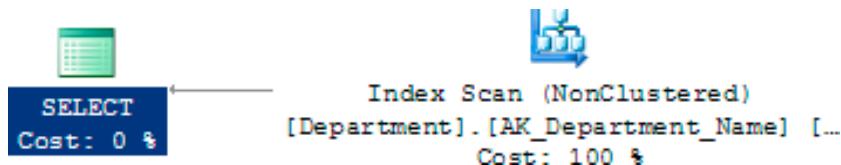
Therefore, to use the indexes effectively and improve query performance, avoid using arithmetic operators on column(s) in the WHERE clause or JOIN criteria when that expression is expected to work with an index.

**Note** For small result sets, even though an index seek is usually a better data-retrieval strategy than a table scan (or a complete clustered index scan), for very small tables (in which all data rows fit on one page) a table scan can be cheaper. I explain this in more detail in [Chapter 4](#).

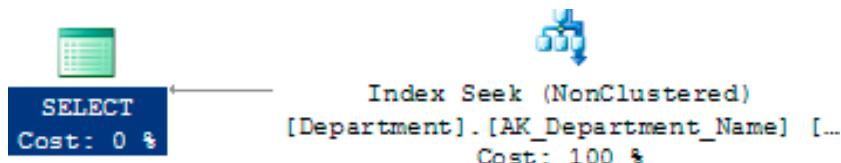
## Avoid Functions on the WHERE Clause Column

In the same way as arithmetic operators, functions on WHERE clause columns also hurt query performance—and for the same reasons. Try to avoid using functions on WHERE clause columns, as shown in the following two examples:

- SUBSTRING vs. LIKE
- Date part comparison



**Figure 11-8.** Execution plan showing the detrimental effect of using the SUBSTRING function on a WHERE clause column



**Figure 11-9.** Execution plan showing the benefit of not using the SUBSTRING function on a WHERE clause column

## SUBSTRING vs. LIKE

In the following SELECT statement (substring.sql in the download), using the SUBSTRING function prevents the use of the index on the ShipPostalCode column.

```

SELECT d.Name
FROM HumanResources.Department AS d
WHERE SUBSTRING(d.[Name], 1, 1) = 'F' ;
    
```

Figure 11-8 illustrates this.

As you can see, using the SUBSTRING function prevented the optimizer from using the index on the [Name] column. This function on the column made the optimizer use a clustered index scan. In the absence of the clustered index on the DepartmentID column, a table scan would have been performed.

You can redesign this SELECT statement to avoid the function on the column as follows:

```

SELECT d.Name
FROM HumanResources.Department AS d
WHERE d.[Name] LIKE 'F%' ;
    
```

This query allows the optimizer to choose the index on the [Name] column, as shown in Figure 11-9.

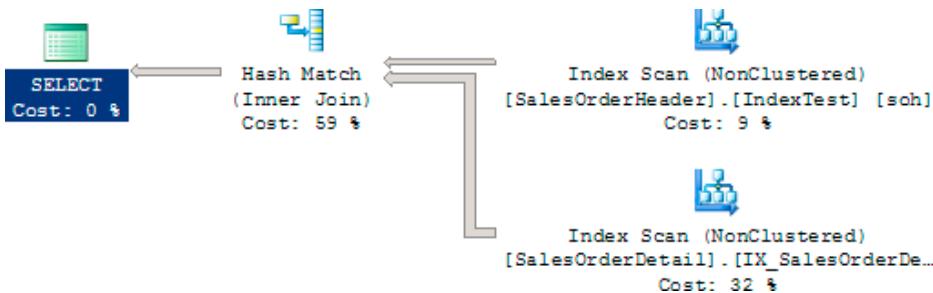
## Date Part Comparison

SQL Server can store date and time data as separate fields or as a combined DATETIME field that has both. Although you may need to keep date and time data together in one field, sometimes you want only the date, which usually means you have to apply a conversion function to extract the date part from the DATETIME data type. Doing this prevents the optimizer from choosing the index on the column, as shown in the following example.

First, there needs to be a good index on the DATETIME column of one of the tables. Use Sales.SalesOrderHeader and create the following index:

```

IF EXISTS ( SELECT *
            FROM sys.indexes
            WHERE object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'[Sales].[SalesOrderHeader]')
                  AND name = N'IndexTest' )
    
```



**Figure 11-10.** Execution plan showing the detrimental effect of using the DATEPART function on a WHERE clause column

```

DROP INDEX IndexTest ON [Sales].[SalesOrderHeader] ;
GO
CREATE INDEX IndexTest ON Sales.SalesOrderHeader(OrderDate) ;

```

To retrieve all rows from Sales.SalesOrderHeader with OrderDate in the month of April in the year 2008, you can execute the following SELECT statement (datetime.sql):

```

SELECT soh.SalesOrderID,
       soh.OrderDate
  FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
  JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
    ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
 WHERE DATEPART(yy, soh.OrderDate) = 2008
   AND DATEPART(mm, soh.OrderDate) = 4;

```

Using the DATEPART function on the column OrderDate prevents the optimizer from properly using the index IndexTest on the column and instead causes a scan, as shown in Figure 11-10.

This is the output of SET STATISTICS IO and TIME:

```

Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0 Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1,
logical reads 273 Table 'SalesOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 73 CPU time = 63 ms,
elapsed time = 220 ms.

```

The date part comparison can be done without applying the function on the DATETIME column.

```

SELECT soh.SalesOrderID,
       soh.OrderDate
  FROM Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
  JOIN Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
    ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
 WHERE soh.OrderDate >= '2008-04-01'
   AND soh.OrderDate < '2008-05-01' ;

```

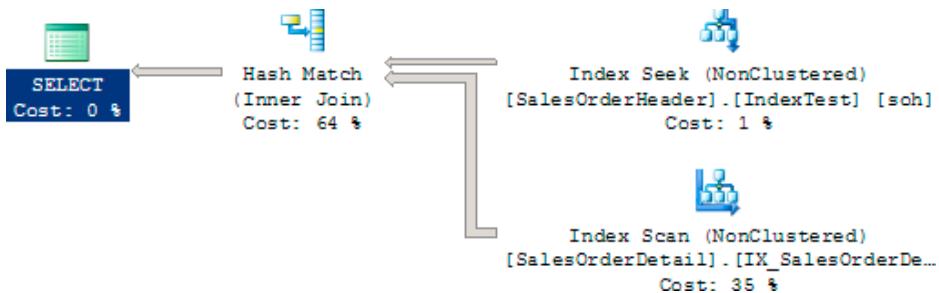
This allows the optimizer to properly reference the index IndexTest that was created on the DATETIME column, as shown in Figure 11-11.

This is the output of SETSTATISTICS IO and TIME:

```

Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0
Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 273

```



**Figure 11-11.** Execution plan showing the benefit of not using the *CONVERT* function on a WHERE clause column

Table 'SalesOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 8  
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 209 ms

Therefore, to allow the optimizer to consider an index on a column referred to in the WHERE clause, always avoid using a function on the indexed column. This increases the effectiveness of indexes, which can improve query performance. In this instance, though, it's worth noting that the performance was minor since there's still a scan of the SalesOrderDetail table.

Be sure to drop the index created earlier.

```
DROP INDEX Sales.SalesOrderHeader.IndexTest ;
```

## Avoiding Optimizer Hints

SQL Server's cost-based optimizer dynamically determines the processing strategy for a query based on the current table/index structure and data. This dynamic behavior can be overridden using optimizer hints, taking some of the decisions away from the optimizer by instructing it to use a certain processing strategy. This makes the optimizer behavior static and doesn't allow it to dynamically update the processing strategy as the table/index structure or data changes.

Since it is usually difficult to outsmart the optimizer, the usual recommendation is to avoid optimizer hints. Generally, it is beneficial to let the optimizer determine a cost-effective processing strategy based on the data distribution statistics, indexes, and other factors. Forcing the optimizer (with hints) to use a specific processing strategy hurts performance more often than not, as shown in the following examples for these hints:

- JOIN hint
- INDEX hint
- FORCEPLAN hint

### JOIN Hint

As explained in [Chapter 3](#), the optimizer dynamically determines a cost-effective JOIN strategy between two data sets based on the table/index structure and data. Table [11-2](#) presents a summary of the JOIN types supported by SQL Server 2012 for easy reference.

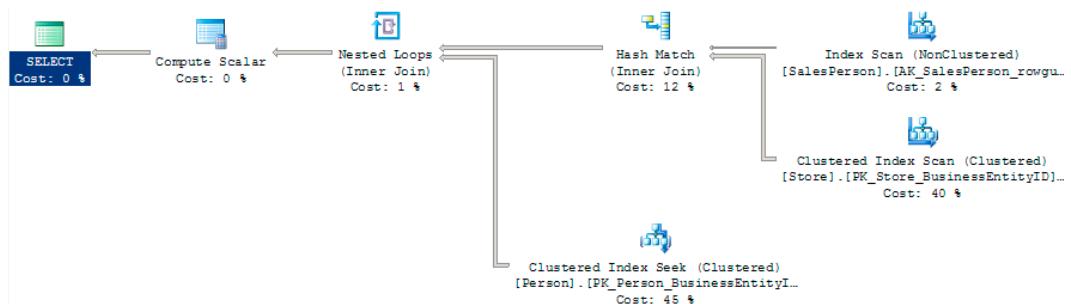
**Note** The outer table is usually the smaller of the two joining tables.

**Table 11-2.** JOIN Types Supported by SQL Server 2012

JOIN Type	Index on Joining Columns	Usual Size of Joining Tables	Presorted JOIN Clause
Nested loop	Inner table a must. Outer table preferable.	Small	Optional
Merge	Both tables a must. Optimal condition: Clustered or covering index on both.	Large	Yes
Hash	Inner table <i>not</i> indexed.	Any Optimal condition: Inner table large, outer table small.	No

**Table 11-3.** JOIN Hints

JOIN Type	JOIN Hint
Nested loop	LOOP JOIN
Merge	MERGE JOIN
Hash	HASH JOIN

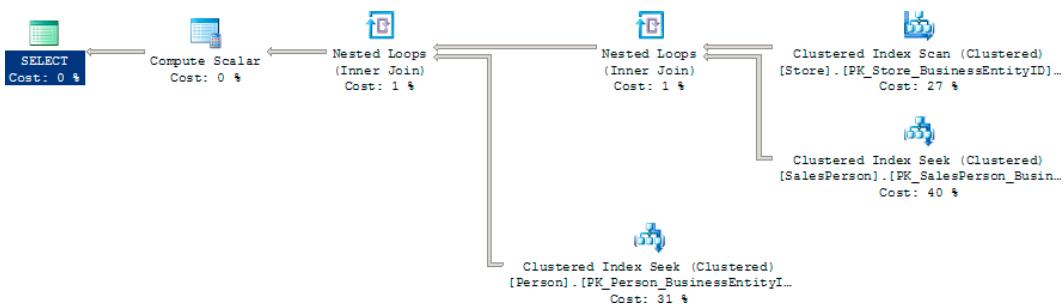
**Figure 11-12.** Execution plan showing choices made by the optimizer

You can instruct SQL Server to use a specific JOIN type by using the JOIN hints in Table 11-3.

To understand how the use of JOIN hints can affect performance, consider the following SELECT statement (--joinin the download):

```
SELECT s.[Name] AS StoreName,
       p.[LastName] + ', ' + p.[FirstName]
  FROM [Sales].[Store] s
 JOIN [Sales].SalesPerson AS sp
    ON s.SalesPersonID = sp.BusinessEntityID
 JOIN HumanResources.Employee AS e
    ON sp.BusinessEntityID = e.BusinessEntityID
 JOIN Person.Person AS p
    ON e.BusinessEntityID = p.BusinessEntityID ;
```

Figure 11-12 shows the execution plan.



**Figure 11-13.** Changes made by using the *JOIN* query hint

As you can see, SQL Server dynamically decided to use a LOOP JOIN to add the data from the Person.Person table and to add a HASH JOIN for the Sales.Salesperson and Sales.Store tables. As demonstrated in [Chapter 3](#), for simple queries affecting a small result set, a LOOP JOIN generally provides better performance than a HASH JOIN or MERGE JOIN. Since the number of rows coming from the Sales.Salesperson table is relatively small, it might feel like you could force the JOIN to be a LOOP like this:

```
SELECT s.[Name] AS StoreName,
       p.[LastName] + ', ' + p.[FirstName]
  FROM [Sales].[Store] s
  JOIN [Sales].SalesPerson AS sp
    ON s.SalesPersonID = sp.BusinessEntityID
  JOIN HumanResources.Employee AS e
    ON sp.BusinessEntityID = e.BusinessEntityID
  JOIN Person.Person AS p
    ON e.BusinessEntityID = p.BusinessEntityID
 OPTION (LOOP JOIN) ;
```

When this query is run, the execution plan changes, as you can see in Figure 11-13.

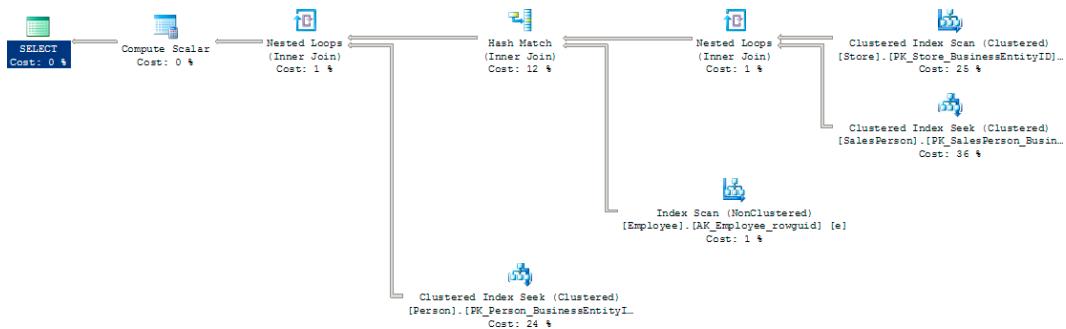
Here are the corresponding STATISTICS IO and TIME outputs for each query.

- With no JOIN hint:

```
Table 'Person'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2155
Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0
Table 'Store'. Scan count 1, logical reads 103
Table 'SalesPerson'. Scan count 1, logical reads 2
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 134 ms.
```

- With a JOIN hint:

```
Table 'Person'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2155
Table 'SalesPerson'. Scan count 0, logical reads 1402
Table 'Store'. Scan count 1, logical reads 103
CPU time = 16 ms, elapsed time = 210 ms.
```



**Figure 11-14.** More changes from using the LOOP join hint

You can see that the query with the JOIN hint takes longer to run than the query without the hint. It also adds overhead to the CPU. And you can make this even worse. Instead of telling all hints used in the query to be a LOOP join, it is possible to target just the one you are interested in, like so:

```
SELECT s.[Name] AS StoreName,
       p.[LastName] + ', ' + p.[FirstName]
  FROM [Sales].[Store] s
 INNER LOOP JOIN [Sales].SalesPerson AS sp
    ON s.SalesPersonID = sp.BusinessEntityID
 JOIN HumanResources.Employee AS e
    ON sp.BusinessEntityID = e.BusinessEntityID
 JOIN Person.Person AS p
    ON e.BusinessEntityID = p.BusinessEntityID ;
```

Running this query results in the execution plan shown in Figure 11-14.

As you can see, there are now four tables referenced in the query plan. There have been four tables referenced through all the previous executions, but the optimizer was able to eliminate one table from the query through the simplification process of optimization (referred to in Chapter 4). Now the hint has forced the optimizer to make different choices than it otherwise might have and removed simplification from the process. The reads and execution time suffered as well.

```
Table 'Person'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2155
Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0
Table 'Employee'. Scan count 1, logical reads 2
Table 'SalesPerson'. Scan count 0, logical reads 1402
Table 'Store'. Scan count 1, logical reads 103
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 220 ms.
```

JOIN hints force the optimizer to ignore its own optimization strategy and use instead the strategy specified by the query. JOIN hints generally hurt query performance because of the following factors:

- Hints prevent autoparameterization.
- The optimizer is prevented from dynamically deciding the joining order of the tables.

Therefore, it makes sense to not use the JOIN hint but to instead let the optimizer dynamically determine a cost-effective processing strategy.

## INDEX Hints

As mentioned earlier, using an arithmetic operator on a WHERE clause column prevents the optimizer from choosing the index on the column. To improve performance, you can rewrite the query without using the arithmetic operator on the WHERE clause, as shown in the corresponding example. Alternatively, you may even think of forcing the optimizer to use the index on the column with an INDEX hint (a type of optimizer hint). However, most of the time, it is better to avoid the INDEX hint and let the optimizer behave dynamically.

To understand the effect of an INDEX hint on query performance, consider the example presented in the “Avoid Arithmetic Operators on the WHERE Clause Column” section. The multiplication operator on the PurchaseOrderID column prevented the optimizer from choosing the index on the column. You can use an INDEX hint to force the optimizer to use the index on the OrderID column as follows:

```
SELECT *
FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh WITH (INDEX (PK_PurchaseOrderHeader_PurchaseOrderID))
WHERE poh.PurchaseOrderID * 2 = 3400 ;
```

Note the relative cost of using the INDEX hint in comparison to not using the INDEX hint, as shown in Figure 11-14. Also, note the difference in the number of logical reads shown in the following STATISTICS IO outputs.

- No hint (with the arithmetic operator on the WHERE clause column):
 

```
Table 'PurchaseOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 11
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 153 ms.
```
- No hint (without the arithmetic operator on the WHERE clause column):
 

```
Table 'PurchaseOrderHeader'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2
CPU time = 16 ms, elapsed time = 76 ms.
```
- INDEX hint:
 

```
Table 'PurchaseOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 44
CPU time = 16 ms, elapsed time = 188 ms.
```

From the relative cost of execution plans and number of logical reads, it is evident that the query with the INDEX hint actually impaired the query performance. Even though it allowed the optimizer to use the index on the PurchaseOrderID column, it did not allow the optimizer to determine the proper index-access mechanism. Consequently, the optimizer used the index scan to access just one row. In comparison, avoiding the arithmetic operator on the WHERE clause column and not using the INDEX hint allowed the optimizer not only to use the index on the PurchaseOrderID column but also to determine the proper index access mechanism: INDEX SEEK.

Therefore, in general, let the optimizer choose the best indexing strategy for the query, and don't override the optimizer behavior using an INDEX hint. Also, not using INDEX hints allows the optimizer to decide the best indexing strategy dynamically as the data changes over time.

## Using Domain and Referential Integrity

Domain and referential integrity help define and enforce valid values for a column, maintaining the integrity of the database. This is done through column/table constraints.

Since data access is usually one of the most costly operations in a query execution, avoiding redundant data access helps the optimizer reduce the query execution time. Domain and referential integrity help the SQL Server 2012 optimizer analyze valid data values without physically accessing the data, which reduces query time.

To understand how this happens, consider the following examples:

- The NOT NULL constraint
- Declarative referential integrity (DRI)

## NOT NULL Constraint

The NOT NULL column constraint is used to implement domain integrity by defining the fact that a NULL value can't be entered in a particular column. SQL Server automatically enforces this fact at runtime to maintain the domain integrity for that column. Also, defining the NOT NULL column constraint helps the optimizer generate an efficient processing strategy when the ISNULL function is used on that column in a query.

To understand the performance benefit of the NOT NULL column constraint, consider the following example. These two queries are intended to return every value that does not equal 'B'. These two queries are running against similarly sized columns, each of which will require a table scan in order to return the data (null.sql in the download).

```
SELECT p.FirstName
FROM Person.Person AS p
WHERE p.FirstName < 'B'
    OR p.FirstName >= 'C' ;
SELECT p.MiddleName
FROM Person.Person AS p
WHERE p.MiddleName < 'B'
    OR p.MiddleName >= 'C' ;
```

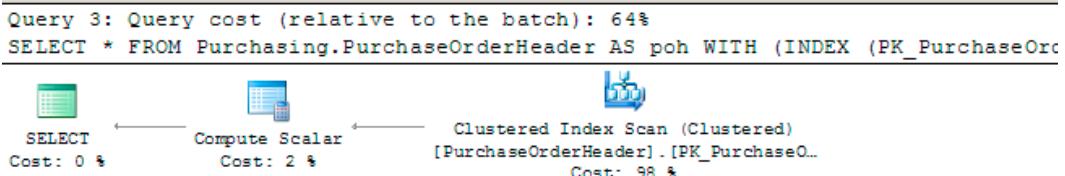
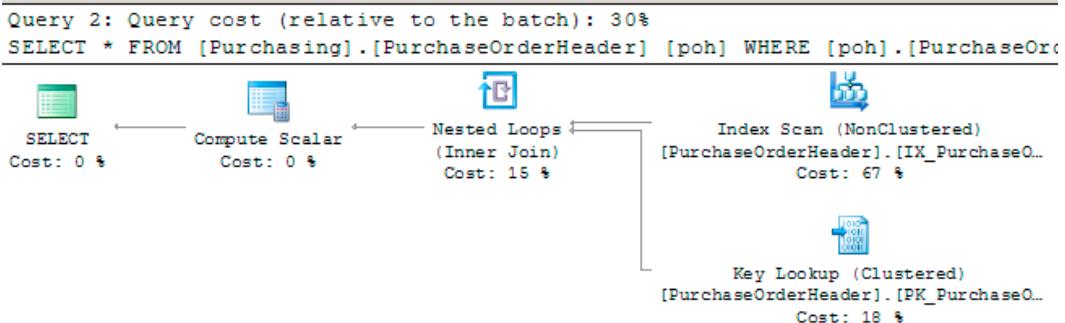
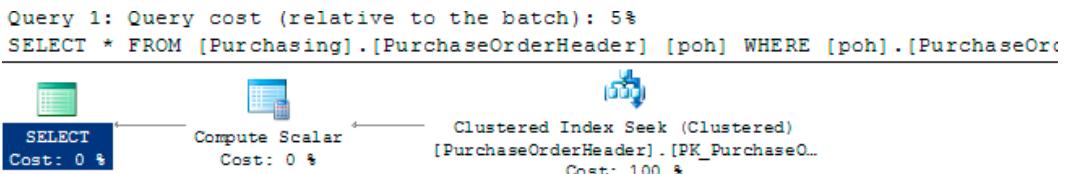
The two queries use identical execution plans, as you can see in Figure 11-16.

Since the column Person.MiddleName can contain NULL, the data returned is incomplete. This is because, by definition, although a NULL value meets the necessary criteria of not being in any way equal to 'B', you can't return NULL values in this manner. An added OR clause is necessary. That would mean modifying the second query like this:

```
SELECT p.FirstName
FROM Person.Person AS p
WHERE p.FirstName < 'B'
    OR p.FirstName >= 'C' ;
SELECT p.MiddleName
FROM Person.Person AS p
WHERE p.MiddleName < 'B'
    OR p.MiddleName >= 'C'
    OR p.MiddleName IS NULL ;
```

Also, as shown in the missing index statements in the execution plan in Figure 11-15, these two queries can benefit from having indexes created on their tables. Creating test indexes like the following should satisfy the requirements:

```
CREATE INDEX TestIndex1
ON Person.Person (MiddleName) ;
CREATE INDEX TestIndex2
ON Person.Person (FirstName) ;
```



**Figure 11-15.** Cost of a query with and without different INDEX hints

Query 1: Query cost (relative to the batch): 50%

```
SELECT p.FirstName FROM Person.Person AS p WHERE p.LastName = 'Doe'
```

Missing Index (Impact 83.6964): CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [IX\_Person\_LastName\_FirstName] ON [Person].[Person]([LastName] ASC, [FirstName] ASC)

Query 2: Query cost (relative to the batch): 50%

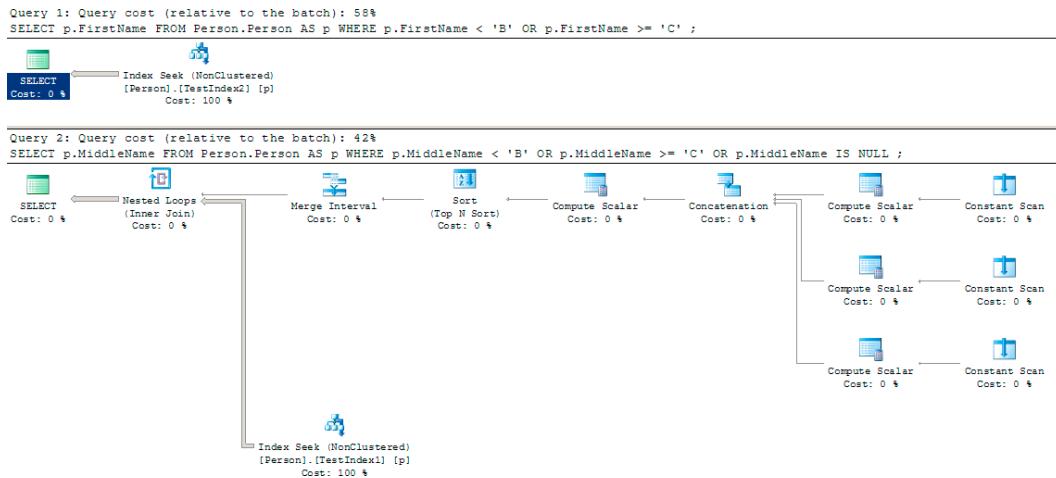
```
SELECT p.MiddleName FROM Person.Person AS p WHERE p.LastName = 'Doe'
```

Missing Index (Impact 89.9147): CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [IX\_Person\_LastName\_FirstName\_MiddleName] ON [Person].[Person]([LastName] ASC, [FirstName] ASC, [MiddleName] ASC)

```

graph LR
    A1[SELECT  
Cost: 0 %] --> B1[Index Scan (NonClustered)  
[Person].[IX_Person_LastName_FirstN...  
Cost: 100 %]
    A2[SELECT  
Cost: 0 %] --> B2[Index Scan (NonClustered)  
[Person].[IX_Person_LastName_FirstN...  
Cost: 100 %]
  
```

**Figure 11-16.** Table scans caused by a lack of indexes

**Figure 11-17.** Effect of the IS NULL option being used

When the queries are reexecuted, Figure 11-17 shows the resultant execution plan for the two SELECT statements.

As shown in Figure 11-17, the optimizer was able to take advantage of the index TestIndex2 on the Person.FirstName column to get a nice clean Index Seek operation. Unfortunately, the requirements for processing the NULL columns were very different. The index TestIndex1 was not used in the same way. Instead, three constants were created for each of the three criteria defined within the query. These were then joined together through the Concatenation operation, sorted and merged prior to scanning the index three times through the Nested Loop operator to arrive at the result set. Although it appears, from the estimated costs in the execution plan, that this was the less costly query (42 percent compared to 58 percent), STATISTICS 10 and TIME tell the more accurate story, which is that the NULL queries were more costly.

Table 'Person'. Scan count 2, logical reads 66 CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 257 ms.  
VS.

Table 'Person'. Scan count 3, logical reads 42 CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 397 ms.

Be sure to drop the test indexes that were created.

```
DROP INDEX TestIndex1 ON Person.Person ;
DROP INDEX TestIndex2 ON Person.Person ;
```

As much as possible, you should attempt to leave NULL values out of the database. However, when data is unknown, default values may not be possible. That's when NULL will come back into the design. I find NULLs to be unavoidable, but they are something to minimize as much as you can.

When it is unavoidable and you will be dealing with NULL values, keep in mind that you can use a filtered index that removes NULL values from the index, thereby improving the performance of that index. This was detailed in Chapter 4. Sparse columns offer another option to help you deal with NULL values. Sparse columns are primarily aimed at storing NULL values more efficiently and therefore reduce space—at a sacrifice in performance. This option is specifically targeted at business intelligence (BI) databases, not OLTP databases where large amounts of NULL values in fact tables are a normal part of the design.

## Declarative Referential Integrity

Declarative referential integrity is used to define referential integrity between a parent table and a child table. It ensures that a record in the child table exists only if the corresponding record in the parent table exists. The only exception to this rule is that the child table can contain a NULL value for the identifier that links the rows of the child table to the rows of the parent table. For all other values of the identifier in the child, a corresponding value must exist in the parent table. In SQL Server, DRI is implemented using a PRIMARY KEY constraint on the parent table and a FOREIGN KEY constraint on the child table.

With DRI established between two tables and the foreign key columns of the child table set to NOT NULL, the SQL Server 2012 optimizer is assured that for every record in the child table, the parent table has a corresponding record. Sometimes this can help the optimizer improve performance, because accessing the parent table is not necessary to verify the existence of a parent record for a corresponding child record.

To understand the performance benefit of implementing declarative referential integrity, let's consider an example. First, eliminate the referential integrity between two tables, Person.Address and Person.StateProvince, using this script:

```
IF EXISTS ( SELECT *
            FROM sys.foreign_keys
            WHERE object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'[Person].[FK_Address_StateProvince_StateProvinceID]')
                  AND parent_object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'[Person].[Address]') )
    ALTER TABLE [Person].[Address] DROP CONSTRAINT [FK_Address_StateProvince_StateProvinceID] ;
```

Consider the following SELECT statement (--prod in the download):

```
SELECT a.AddressID,
       sp.StateProvinceID
  FROM Person.Address AS a
 JOIN Person.StateProvince AS sp
    ON a.StateProvinceID = sp.StateProvinceID
 WHERE a.AddressID = 27234 ;
```

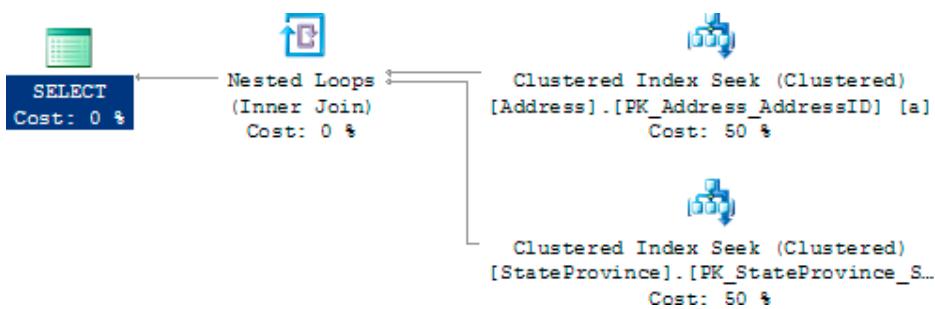
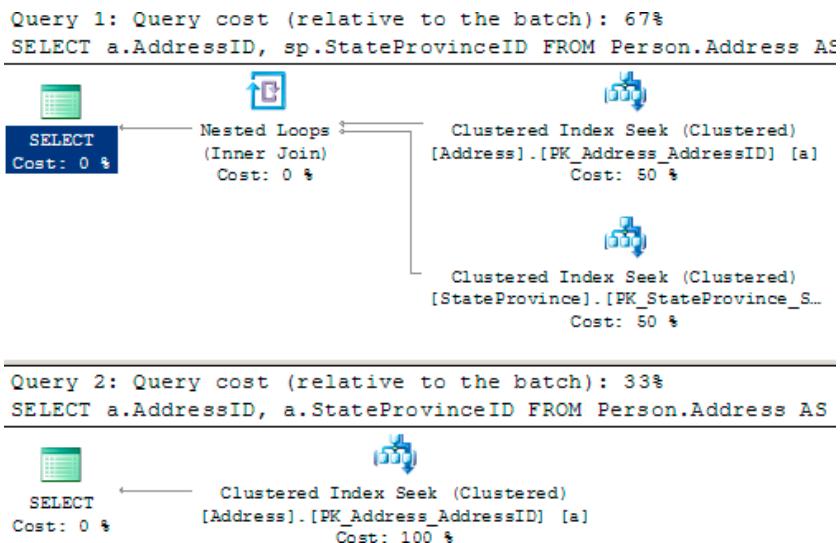
Note that the SELECT statement fetches the value of the StateProvinceID column from the parent table (Person.Address). If the nature of the data requires that for every product (identified by StateProvinceId) in the child table (Person.StateProvince) the parent table (Person.Address) contains a corresponding product, then you can rewrite the preceding SELECT statement as follows (--prod2 in the download):

```
SELECT a.AddressID,
       a.StateProvinceID
  FROM Person.Address AS a
 JOIN Person.StateProvince AS sp
    ON a.StateProvinceID = sp.StateProvinceID
 WHERE a.AddressID = 27234 ;
```

Both SELECT statements should return the same result set. Even the optimizer generates the same execution plan for both the SELECT statements, as shown in Figure 11-18.

To understand how declarative referential integrity can affect query performance, replace the FOREIGN KEY dropped earlier.

```
ALTER TABLE [Person].[Address]
WITH CHECK ADD CONSTRAINT [FK_Address_StateProvince_StateProvinceID]
FOREIGN KEY ([StateProvinceID])
REFERENCES [Person].[StateProvince] ([StateProvinceID]) ;
```

**Figure 11-18.** Execution plan when DRI is not defined between the two tables**Figure 11-19.** Execution plans showing the benefit of defining DRI between the two tables

---

**Note** There is now referential integrity between the tables.

---

Figure 11-19 shows the resultant execution plans for the two SELECT statements.

As you can see, the execution plan of the second SELECT statement is highly optimized: the Person.StateProvince table is not accessed. With the declarative referential integrity in place (and Address.StateProvince set to NOT NULL), the optimizer is assured that for every record in the child table, the parent table contains a corresponding record. Therefore, the JOIN clause between the parent and child tables is redundant in the second SELECT statement, with no other data requested from the parent table.

You probably already knew that domain and referential integrity are Good Things, but you can see that they not only ensure data integrity but also improve performance. As just illustrated, domain and referential integrity provide more choices to the optimizer to generate cost-effective execution plans and improve performance.

To achieve the performance benefit of DRI, as mentioned previously, the foreign key columns in the child table should be NOT NULL. Otherwise, there can be rows (with foreign key column values as NULL) in the child table with no representation in the parent table. That won't prevent the optimizer from accessing the primary table (Prod) in the previous query. By default—that is, if the NOT NULL attribute isn't mentioned for a column—the column can have NULL values. Considering the benefit of the NOT NULL attribute and the other benefits explained in this section, always mark the attribute of a column as NOT NULL if NULL isn't a valid value for that column.

You also must make sure that you are using the WITH CHECK option when building your foreign key constraints. If the NOCHECK option is used, these are considered to be untrustworthy constraints by the optimizer and you won't realize the performance benefits that they can offer.

## Avoiding Resource-Intensive Queries

Many database functionalities can be implemented using a variety of query techniques. The approach you should take is to use query techniques that are very resource friendly and set-based. A few techniques you can use to reduce the footprint of a query are as follows:

- Avoid data type conversion.
- Use EXISTS over COUNT(\*) to verify data existence.
- Use UNION ALL over UNION.
- Use indexes for aggregate and sort operations.
- Avoid local variables in a batch query.
- Be careful naming stored procedures.

I cover these points in more detail in the next sections.

## Avoid Data Type Conversion

SQL Server allows, in some instances (defined by the large table of data conversions available in Books Online), a value/constant with different but compatible data types to be compared with a column's data. SQL Server automatically converts the data from one data type to another. This process is called *implicit data type conversion*. Although useful, implicit conversion adds overhead to the query optimizer. To improve performance, use a variable/constant with the same data type as that of the column to which it is compared.

To understand how implicit data type conversion affects performance, consider the following example (--conversion in the download):

```
IF EXISTS ( SELECT  *
            FROM    sys.objects
            WHERE   object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'dbo.Test1') )
DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;

CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1
(Id INT IDENTITY(1, 1),
 MyKey VARCHAR(50),
 MyValue VARCHAR(50)
) ;
CREATE UNIQUE CLUSTERED INDEX Test1PrimaryKey ON dbo.Test1 ([Id] ASC) ;
```

```

CREATE UNIQUE NONCLUSTERED INDEX TestIndex ON dbo.Test1 (MyKey) ;
GO

SELECT TOP 10000
    IDENTITY( INT,1,1 ) AS n
INTO #Tally
FROM Master.dbo.SysColumns scl,
Master.dbo.SysColumns sc2 ;

INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(MyKey,
MyValue
)
SELECT TOP 10000
    'UniqueKey' + CAST(n AS VARCHAR),
    'Description'
FROM #Tally ;

DROP TABLE #Tally ;

SELECT t.MyValue
FROM dbo.Test1 AS t
WHERE t.MyKey = 'UniqueKey333' ;

SELECT t.MyValue
FROM dbo.Test1 AS t
WHERE t.MyKey = N'UniqueKey333' ;

```

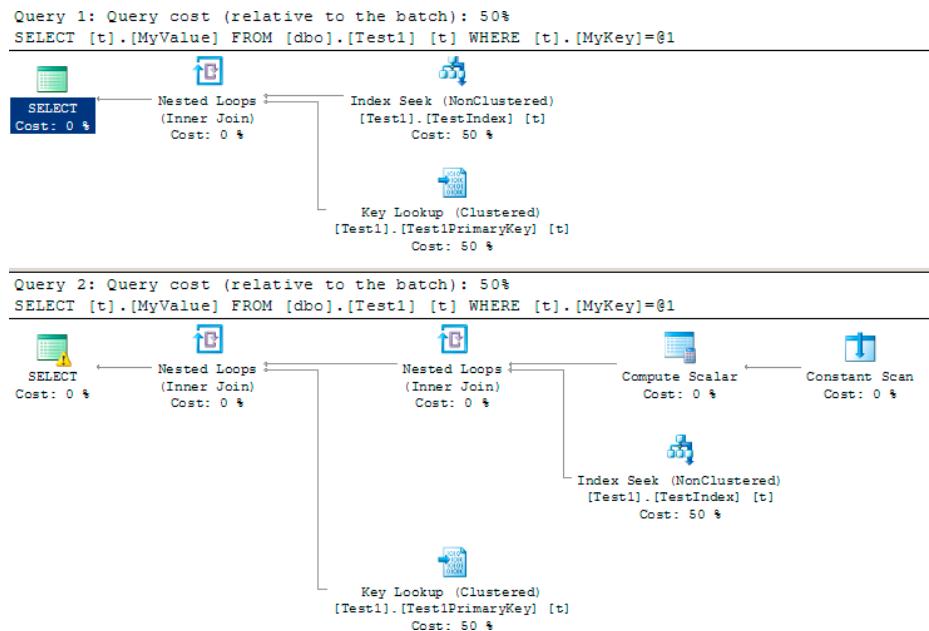
After creating the table `Test1`, creating a couple of indexes on it, and placing some data, two queries are defined. Both queries return the same result set. As you can see, both queries are identical except for the data type of the variable equated to the `MyKey` column. Since this column is `VARCHAR`, the first query doesn't require an implicit data type conversion. The second query uses a different data type from that of the `MyKey` column, requiring an implicit data type conversion and thereby adding overhead to the query performance. Figure 11-20 shows the execution plans for both queries.

The complexity of the implicit data type conversion depends on the precedence of the data types involved in the comparison. The data type precedence rules of SQL Server specify which data type is converted to the other. Usually, the data type of lower precedence is converted to the data type of higher precedence. For example, the `TINYINT` data type has a lower precedence than the `INT` data type. For a complete list of data type precedence in SQL Server 2012, please refer to the MSDN article “Data Type Precedence” (<http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ms190309.aspx>). For further information about which data type can implicitly convert to which data type, refer to the MSDN article “Data Type Conversion” (<http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ms191530.aspx>).

Note the warning icon on the `SELECT` operator. It's letting you know that there's something questionable in this query. In this case, it's the fact that there is a data type conversion operation. The optimizer lets you know that this might negatively affect its ability to find and use an index to assist the performance of the query.

When SQL Server compares a column value with a certain data type and a variable (or constant) with a different data type, the data type of the variable (or constant) is always converted to the data type of the column. This is done because the column value is accessed based on the implicit conversion value of the variable (or constant). Therefore, in such cases, the implicit conversion is always applied on the variable (or constant).

As you can see, implicit data type conversion adds overhead to the query performance both in terms of a poor execution plan and in added CPU cost to make the conversions. Therefore, to improve performance, always use the same data type for both expressions.



**Figure 11-20.** Cost of a query with and without implicit data type conversion

## Use EXISTS over COUNT(\*) to Verify Data Existence

A common database requirement is to verify whether a set of data exists. Usually you'll see this implemented using a batch of SQL queries, as follows (--count in the download):

```

DECLARE @n INT ;
SELECT @n = COUNT(*)
FROM Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
WHERE sod.OrderQty = 1 ;
IF @n > 0
    PRINT 'Record Exists' ;
    
```

Using COUNT(\*) to verify the existence of data is highly resource-intensive, because COUNT(\*) has to scan all the rows in a table. EXISTS merely has to scan and stop at the first record that matches the EXISTS criterion. To improve performance, use EXISTS instead of the COUNT(\*) approach.

```

IF EXISTS ( SELECT sod.*
            FROM Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
            WHERE sod.OrderQty = 1 )
    PRINT 'Record Exists';
    
```

The performance benefit of the EXISTS technique over the COUNT(\*) technique can be compared using the STATISTICS IO and TIME output, as well as the execution plan in Figure 11-21, as you can see from the output of running these queries.

Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 1240  
CPU time = 31 ms, elapsed time = 30 ms.

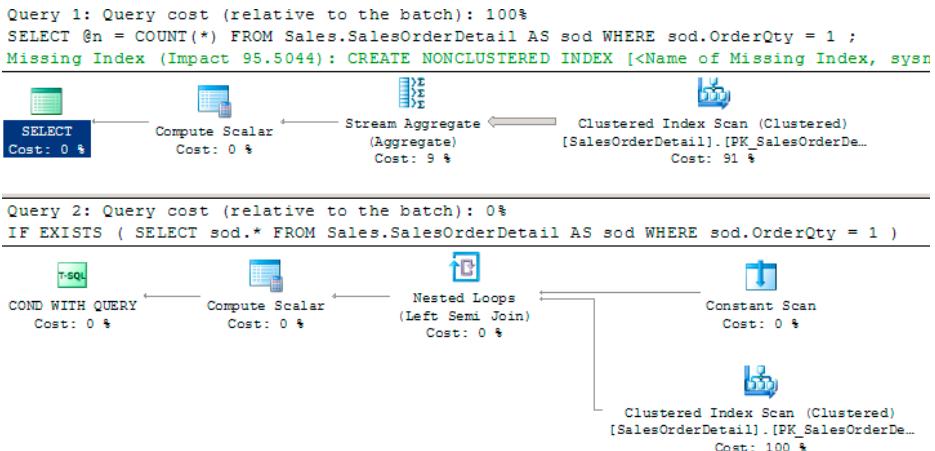
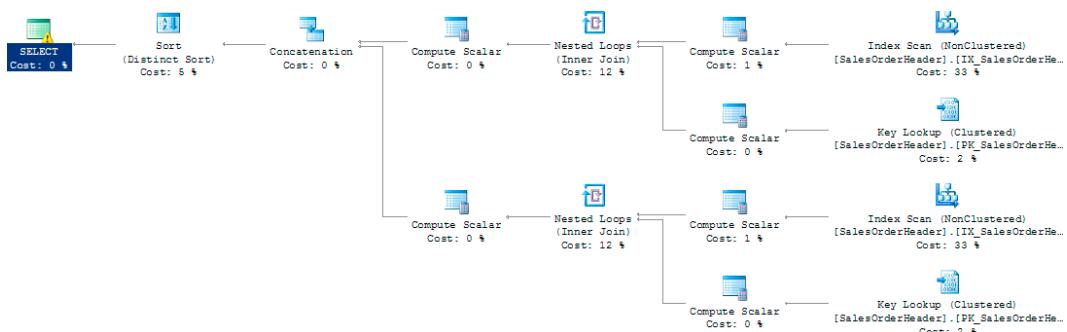
**Figure 11-21.** Difference between COUNT and EXISTS**Figure 11-22.** The execution plan of the query using the UNION clause

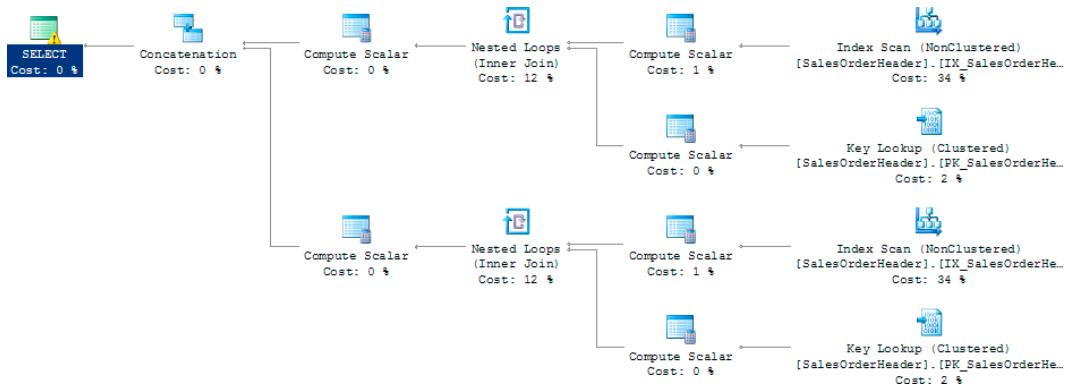
Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 3  
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 12 ms.

As you can see, the EXISTS technique used only three logical reads compared to the 1,240 used by the COUNT(\*) technique, and the execution time went from 30 ms to 12. Therefore, to determine whether data exists, use the EXISTS technique.

## Use UNION ALL Instead of UNION

You can concatenate the result set of multiple SELECT statements using the UNION clause as follows:

```
SELECT *
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
WHERE  soh.SalesOrderNumber LIKE '%47808'
UNION
SELECT *
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
WHERE  soh.SalesOrderNumber LIKE '%65748' ;
```



**Figure 11-23.** The execution plan of the query using UNION ALL

The UNION clause processes the result set from the two SELECT statements, removing duplicates from the final result set and effectively running DISTINCT on each query. If the result sets of the SELECT statements participating in the UNION clause are exclusive to each other or you are allowed to have duplicate rows in the final result set, then use UNION ALL instead of UNION. This avoids the overhead of detecting and removing any duplicates, improving performance, as shown in Figure 11-23.

As you can see, in the first case (using UNION), the optimizer used a unique sort to process the duplicates while concatenating the result set of the two SELECT statements. Since the result sets are exclusive to each other, you can use UNION ALL instead of the UNION clause. Using the UNION ALL clause avoids the overhead of detecting duplicates and thereby improves performance.

## Use Indexes for Aggregate and Sort Conditions

Generally, aggregate functions such as MIN and MAX benefit from indexes on the corresponding column. Without any index on the column, the optimizer has to scan the base table (or the clustered index), retrieve all the rows, and perform a stream aggregate on the group (containing all rows) to identify the MIN/MAX value, as shown in the following example:

```
SELECT MIN(sod.UnitPrice)
FROM Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod ;
```

The STATISTICS IO and TIME output of the SELECT statement using the MIN aggregate function is as follows:

Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count logical reads 1240 CPU time = 47 ms, elapsed time = 44 ms.

As shown in the STATISTICS output, the query performed more than 1,000 logical reads just to retrieve the row containing the minimum value for the UnitPrice column. If you create an index on the UnitPrice column, then the UnitPrice values will be presorted by the index in the leaf pages.

```
CREATE INDEX TestIndex ON Sales.SalesOrderDetail (UnitPrice ASC) ;
```

The index on the UnitPrice column improves the performance of the MIN aggregate function significantly. The optimizer can retrieve the minimum UnitPrice value by seeking to the topmost row in the index. This reduces the number of logical reads for the query, as shown in the corresponding STATISTICS output.

Table 'SalesOrderDetail'. Scan count logical reads 3 CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

Similarly, creating an index on the columns referred to in an ORDER BY clause helps the optimizer organize the result set fast because the column values are prearranged in the index. The internal implementation of the GROUP BY clause also sorts the column values first because sorted column values allow the adjacent matching values to be grouped quickly. Therefore, like the ORDER BY clause, the GROUP BY clause also benefits from having the values of the columns referred to in the GROUP BY clause sorted in advance.

## Avoid Local Variables in a Batch Query

Often, multiple queries are submitted together as a batch, avoiding multiple network round-trips. It's common to use local variables in a query batch to pass a value between the individual queries. However, using local variables in the WHERE clause of a query in a batch doesn't allow the optimizer to generate an efficient execution plan.

To understand how the use of a local variable in the WHERE clause of a query in a batch can affect performance, consider the following batch query (--batch):

```
DECLARE @id INT = 1 ;
SELECT pod.* 
FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
JOIN Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
    ON poh.PurchaseOrderID = pod.PurchaseOrderID
WHERE poh.PurchaseOrderID >= @id ;
```

Figure 11-24 shows the execution plan of this SELECT statement.

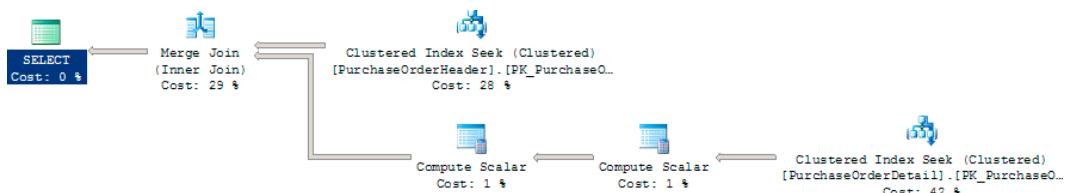
As you can see, an Index Seek operation is performed to access the rows from the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail table. If the SELECT statement is executed without using the local variable, by replacing the local variable value with an appropriate constant value as in the following query, the optimizer makes different choices.

```
SELECT pod.* 
FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
JOIN Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
    ON poh.PurchaseOrderID = pod.PurchaseOrderID
WHERE poh.PurchaseOrderID >= 1 ;
```

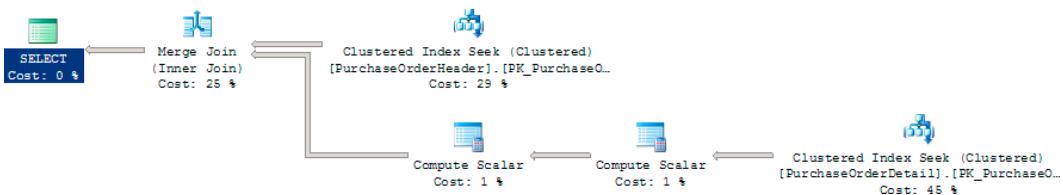
Figure 11-25 shows the result.

Although these two approaches look identical, on closer examination, interesting differences begin to appear. Notice the estimated cost of some of the operations. For example, the Merge Join is different between Figure 11-22 and Figure 11-23; it's 29 percent in the first and 25 percent in the second. If you look at STATISTICS IO and TIME for each query, other differences appear. First, here's the information from the initial query:

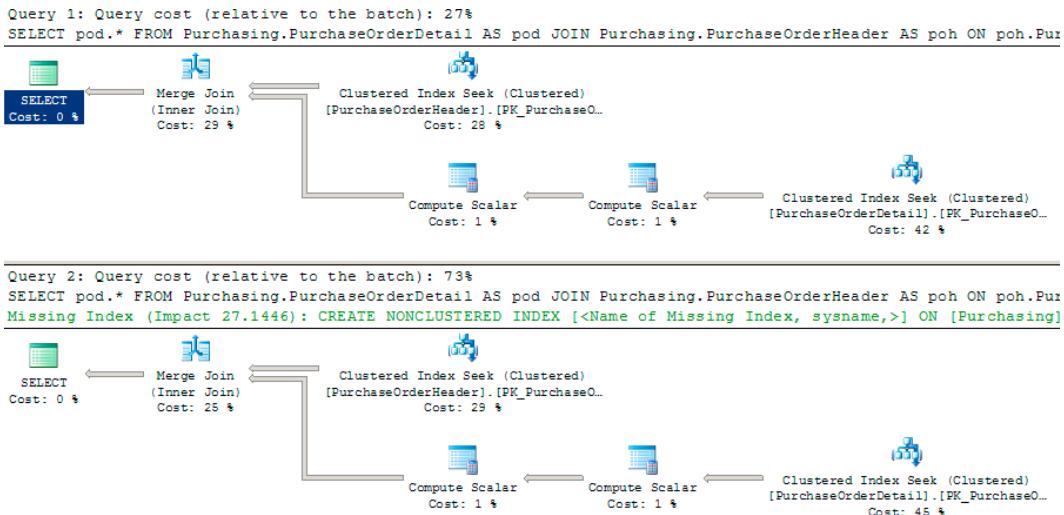
```
Table 'PurchaseOrderDetail'. Scan count logical reads 66
Table 'PurchaseOrderHeader'. Scan count logical reads 44
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 505 ms.
```



**Figure 11-24.** Execution plan showing the effect of a local variable in a batch query



**Figure 11-25.** Execution plan for the query when the local variable is not used



**Figure 11-26.** Relative cost of the query with and without the use of a local variable

Then here's the second query, without the local variable:

```

Table 'PurchaseOrderDetail'. Scan count logical reads 66
Table 'PurchaseOrderHeader'. Scan count logical reads 44
CPU time = 46 ms, elapsed time = 441 ms.
  
```

Notice that the scans and reads are the same, as might be expected of queries with near identical plans. The CPU and elapsed times are different, with the second query (the one without the local variable) consistently being a little less. Based on these facts, you may assume that the execution plan of the first query will be somewhat more costly compared to the second query. But the reality is quite different, as shown in the execution plan cost comparison in Figure 11-26.

From the relative cost of the two execution plans, it appears that the second query isn't cheaper than the first query. However, from the STATISTICS comparison, it appears that the second query should be cheaper than the first query. Which one should you believe: the comparison of STATISTICS or the relative cost of the execution plan? What's the source of this anomaly?

The execution plan is generated based on the optimizer's estimation of the number of rows affected for each execution step. If you take a look at the properties for the various operators in the initial execution plan for the query with the local variable (as shown in Figure 11-24), you may notice a disparity. Take a look at this in Figure 11-27.

Actual Number of Rows	4012
Actual Rebinds	0
Actual Rewinds	0
Defined Values	[AdventureW]
Description	Scanning a pa
Estimated CPU Cost	0.001481
Estimated Execution Mode	Row
Estimated I/O Cost	0.0120139
Estimated Number of Executions	1
Estimated Number of Rows	1203.6

**Figure 11-27.** Clustered index seek details with a local variable

Actual Number of Rows	4012
Actual Rebinds	0
Actual Rewinds	0
Defined Values	[Adventu.
Description	Scanning
Estimated CPU Cost	0.00457
Estimated Execution Mode	Row
Estimated I/O Cost	0.03349
Estimated Number of Executions	1
Estimated Number of Rows	4012

**Figure 11-28.** Clustered index seek details without a local variable

The disparity you're looking for is the Actual Number of Rows value (at the top) compared to the Estimated Number of Rows value (at the bottom). In the properties shown in Figure 11-27, there are 1203.6 estimated rows, while the actual number is considerably higher at 4012. If you compare this to the same operator in the second query (the one without the local variable), you may notice something else. Take a look at Figure 11-28.

Here you'll see that the Actual Number of Rows and Estimated Number of Rows values are the same: 4012. From these two measures, you can see that the estimated rows for the execution steps of the first query (using a local variable in the WHERE clause) is way off the actual number of rows returned by the steps. Consequently, the execution plan cost for the first query, which is based on the estimated rows, is somewhat misleading. The incorrect estimation misguides the optimizer and somewhat causes some variations in how the query is executed. You can see this in the return times on the query, even though the number of rows returned is identical.

Any time you find such an anomaly between the relative execution plan cost and the STATISTICS output for the queries under analysis, you should verify the basis of the estimation. If the underlying facts (estimated rows) of the execution plan itself are wrong, then it is quite likely that the cost represented in the execution plan will also be wrong. But since the output of the various STATISTICS measurements shows the actual number of logical reads and the real elapsed time required to perform the query without being affected by the initial estimation, you can rely on the STATISTICS output.

Now let's return to the actual performance issue associated with using local variables in the WHERE clause. As shown in the preceding example, using the local variable as the filter criterion in the WHERE clause of a batch query doesn't allow the optimizer to determine the right indexing strategy. This happens because, during the optimization of the queries in the batch, the optimizer doesn't know the value of the variable used in the WHERE clause and can't determine the right access strategy—it knows the value of the variable only during execution. You can further see this by noting that the second query in Figure 11-24 has a missing index alert, suggesting a possible way to improve the performance of the query, whereas the query with the local variable is unable to make that determination.

To avoid this particular performance problem, use one of the following approaches:

- Don't use a local variable as a filter criterion in a batch for a query like this. A local variable is different than a parameter value, as I'll demonstrate in a minute.
- Create a stored procedure for the batch, and execute it as follows (–batchproc):

```
CREATE PROCEDURE spProductDetails (@id INT)
AS
SELECT pod.*
FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
JOIN Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
    ON poh.PurchaseOrderID = pod.PurchaseOrderID
WHERE poh.PurchaseOrderID >= @id ;
GO
EXEC spProductDetails
@id = 1 ;
```

The optimizer generates the same execution plan as the query that doesn't use a local variable for the ideal case. Correspondingly, the execution time is also reduced. In the case of a stored procedure, the optimizer generates the execution plan during the first execution of the stored procedure and uses the parameter value supplied to determine the right processing strategy.

This approach can backfire. The process of using the values passed to a parameter is referred to as *parameter sniffing*. Parameter sniffing occurs for all stored procedures and parameterized queries automatically. Depending on the accuracy of the statistics and the values passed to the parameters, it is possible to get a bad plan using specific values and a good plan using the sampled values that occur when you have a local variable. Testing is the only way to be sure which will work best in any given situation. However, in most circumstances, you're better off having accurate values rather than sampled ones.

## Be Careful When Naming Stored Procedures

The name of a stored procedure does matter. You should not name your procedures with a prefix of `sp_`. Developers often prefix their stored procedures with `sp_` so that they can easily identify the stored procedures. However, SQL Server assumes that any stored procedure with this exact prefix is probably a system stored procedure, whose home is in the `master` database. When a stored procedure with an `sp_` prefix is submitted for execution, SQL Server looks for the stored procedure in the following places in the following order:

- In the `master` database
- In the current database based on any qualifiers provided (database name or owner)
- In the current database using `dbo` as the schema, if a schema is not specified

Therefore, although the user-created stored procedure prefixed with `sp_` exists in the current database, the `master` database is checked first. This happens even when the stored procedure is qualified with the database name.

To understand the effect of prefixing `sp_` to a stored procedure name, consider the following stored procedure (–spDont in the download):

```
IF EXISTS ( SELECT *
            FROM sys.objects
            WHERE object_id = OBJECT_ID(N'[dbo].[sp_Dont]')
                  AND type IN (N'P', N'PC') )
DROP PROCEDURE [dbo].[sp_Dont]
```

```

GO
CREATE PROC [sp_Dont]
AS
PRINT 'Done!'
GO
--Add plan of sp_Dont to procedure cache
EXEC AdventureWorks2008R2.dbo.[sp_Dont] ;
GO
--Use the above cached plan of sp_Dont
EXEC AdventureWorks2008R2.dbo.[sp_Dont] ;
GO

```

The first execution of the stored procedure adds the execution plan of the stored procedure to the procedure cache. A subsequent execution of the stored procedure reuses the existing plan from the procedure cache unless a recompilation of the plan is required (the causes of stored procedure recompilation are explained in [Chapter 10](#)). Therefore, the second execution of the stored procedure `spDont` shown in Figure 11-29 should find a plan in the procedure cache. This is indicated by an SP:CacheHit event in the corresponding Extended Event output.

Note that an SP:CacheMiss event is fired before SQL Server tries to locate the plan for the stored procedure in the procedure cache. The SP:CacheMiss event is caused by SQL Server looking in the master database for the stored procedure, even though the execution of the stored procedure is properly qualified with the user database name.

This aspect of the `sp_` prefix becomes more interesting when you create a stored procedure with the name of an existing system stored procedure (–`spaddmessage` in the download).

```

CREATE PROC sp_addmessage @param1 NVARCHAR(25)
AS
PRINT   '@param1 = ' + @param1 ;
GO
EXEC AdventureWorks2008R2.dbo.[sp_addmessage] 'AdventureWorks';

```

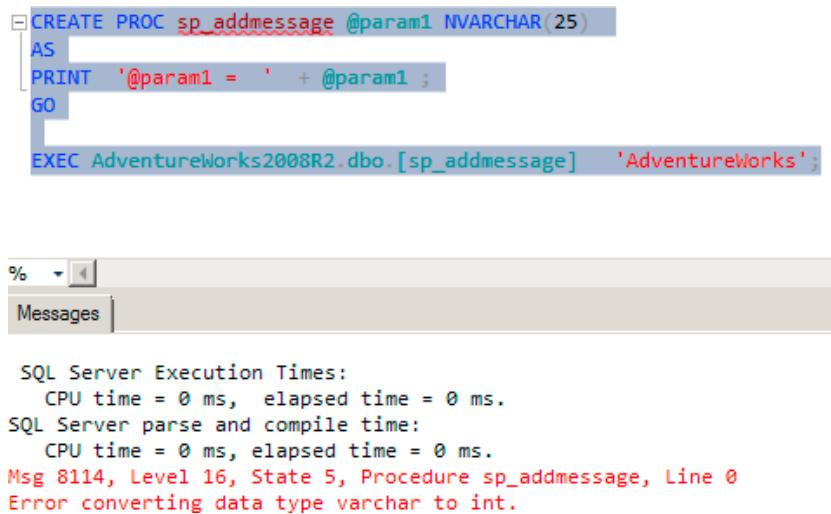
The execution of this user-defined stored procedure causes the execution of the system stored procedure `sp_addmessage` from the master database instead, as you can see in Figure 11-30.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to execute this user-defined stored procedure.

**Tip** As a side note, please don't try to execute the `DROP PROCEDURE` statement on this stored procedure twice. On the second execution, the system stored procedure will be dropped from the master database.

Event: sp_cache_miss (2011-12-28 12:27:16.7572041)	
Details	
Field	Value
cached_text	EXEC AdventureWorks2008R2.dbo.[sp_Dont];
database_id	9
database_name	AdventureWorks2008R2
object_id	90197888
object_name	
object_type	ADHOC

**Figure 11-29.** Extended Events output showing the effect of the `sp_` prefix on a stored procedure name



The screenshot shows a T-SQL script window and a Messages window. The script window contains:

```

CREATE PROC sp_addmessage @param1 NVARCHAR(25)
AS
PRINT '@param1 = ' + @param1 ;
GO

EXEC AdventureWorks2008R2 dbo.[sp_addmessage] 'AdventureWorks';

```

The Messages window displays the execution results:

```

SQL Server Execution Times:
    CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.
SQL Server parse and compile time:
    CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.
Msg 8114, Level 16, State 5, Procedure sp_addmessage, Line 0
Error converting data type varchar to int.

```

**Figure 11-30.** Execution result for stored procedure showing the effect of the sp\_ prefix on a stored procedure name

You can see now why you should not prefix a user-defined stored procedure's name with sp\_. Use some other naming convention.

## Reducing the Number of Network Round-Trips

Database applications often execute multiple queries to implement a database operation. Besides optimizing the performance of the individual query, it is important that you optimize the performance of the batch. To reduce the overhead of multiple network round-trips, consider the following techniques:

- Execute multiple queries together.
- Use SET NOCOUNT.

Let's look at these techniques in a little more depth.

### Execute Multiple Queries Together

It is preferable to submit all the queries of a set together as a batch or a stored procedure. Besides reducing the network round-trips between the database application and the server, stored procedures also provide multiple performance and administrative benefits, as described in [Chapter 9](#). This means that the code in the application needs to be able to deal with multiple result sets. It also means your T-SQL code may need to deal with XML data or other large sets of data, not single-row inserts or updates.

### Use SET NOCOUNT

You need to consider one more factor when executing a batch or a stored procedure. After every query in the batch or the stored procedure is executed, the server reports the number of rows affected.

(<Number> row(s) affected)

This information is returned to the database application and adds to the network overhead. Use the T-SQL statement SET NOCOUNT to avoid this overhead.

```
SET NOCOUNT ON <SQL queries> SET NOCOUNT OFF
```

Note that the SET NOCOUNT statement doesn't cause any recompilation issue with stored procedures, unlike some SET statements, as explained in [Chapter 10](#).

## Reducing the Transaction Cost

Every action query in SQL Server is performed as an *atomic* action so that the state of a database table moves from one *consistent* state to another. SQL Server does this automatically and it can't be disabled. If the transition from one consistent state to another requires multiple database queries, then atomicity across the multiple queries should be maintained using explicitly defined database transactions. The old and new state of every atomic action is maintained in the transaction log (on the disk) to ensure *durability*, which guarantees that the outcome of an atomic action won't be lost once it completes successfully. An atomic action during its execution is *isolated* from other database actions using database locks.

Based on the characteristics of a transaction, here are two broad recommendations to reduce the cost of the transaction:

- Reduce logging overhead.
- Reduce lock overhead.

## Reduce Logging Overhead

A database query may consist of multiple data manipulation queries. If atomicity is maintained for each query separately, then a large number of disk writes are performed on the transaction log. Since disk activity is extremely slow compared to memory or CPU activity, the excessive disk activity can increase the execution time of the database functionality. For example, consider the following batch query (--logging in the download):

```
--Create a test table
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 TINYINT) ;
GO

--Insert 10000 rows
DECLARE @Count INT = 1 ;
WHILE @Count <= 10000
BEGIN
    INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
        (C1)
    VALUES (@Count % 256) ;
    SET @Count = @Count + 1 ;
END
```

Since every execution of the `INSERT` statement is atomic in itself, SQL Server will write to the transaction log for every execution of the `INSERT` statement.

An easy way to reduce the number of log disk writes is to include the action queries within an explicit transaction.

```
BEGIN TRANSACTION
WHILE @Count <= 10000
BEGIN
    INSERT INTO t1
    VALUES (@Count % 256) ;
    SET @Count = @Count + 1 ;
END
COMMIT
```

The defined transaction scope (between the `BEGIN TRANSACTION` and `COMMIT` pair of commands) expands the scope of atomicity to the multiple `INSERT` statements included within the transaction. This decreases the number of log disk writes and improves the performance of the database functionality. To test this theory, run the following T-SQL command before and after each of the `WHILE` loops:

```
DBCC SQLPERF(LOGSPACE);
```

This will show you the percentage of log space used. On running the first set of inserts on my database, the log went from 2.6 percent used to 29 percent. When running the second set of inserts, the log grew about 6 percent.

The best way is to work with sets of data rather than individual rows. A `WHILE` loop can be an inherently costly operation, like a cursor (more details on cursors in [Chapter 14](#)). So, running a query that avoids the `WHILE` loop and instead works from a set-based approach is even better.

```
DECLARE @Count INT = 1 ;
BEGIN TRANSACTION
WHILE @Count <= 10000
BEGIN
    INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
    (C1)
    VALUES (@Count % 256) ;
    SET @Count = @Count + 1 ;
END
COMMIT
```

Running this query with the `DBCC SQLPERF()` function before and after showed less than 4 percent growth of the used space within the log, and it ran in 41 ms as compared to more than 2 seconds for the `WHILE` loop.

One area of caution, however, is that by including too many data manipulation queries within a transaction, the duration of the transaction is increased. During that time, all other queries trying to access the resources referred to in the transaction are blocked.

## Reduce Lock Overhead

By default, all four SQL statements (`SELECT`, `INSERT`, `UPDATE`, and `DELETE`) use database locks to isolate their work from that of other SQL statements. This lock management adds a performance overhead to the query. The performance of a query can be improved by requesting fewer locks. By extension, the performance of other queries are also improved because they have to wait a shorter period of time to obtain their own locks.

By default, SQL Server can provide row-level locks. For a query working on a large number of rows, requesting a row lock on all the individual rows adds a significant overhead to the lock-management process. You can reduce this lock overhead by decreasing the lock granularity, say to the page level or table level. SQL Server performs the lock escalation dynamically by taking into consideration the lock overheads. Therefore, generally, it is not necessary to manually escalate the lock level. But, if required, you can control the concurrency of a query programmatically using lock hints as follows:

```
SELECT * FROM <TableName> WITH(PAGLOCK) --Use page level lock
```

Similarly, by default, SQL Server uses locks for SELECT statements besides those for INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE statements. This allows the SELECT statements to read data that isn't being modified. In some cases, the data may be quite static, and it doesn't go through much modification. In such cases, you can reduce the lock overhead of the SELECT statements in one of the following ways:

- Mark the database as READONLY.

```
ALTER DATABASE SET READONLY
```

This allows users to retrieve data from the database, but it prevents them from modifying the data. The setting takes effect immediately. If occasional modifications to the database are required, then it may be temporarily converted to READWRITE mode.

```
ALTER DATABASE SET READ_WRITE
<Database modifications>
ALTER DATABASE SET READONLY
```

- Place the specific tables on a filegroup, and mark the filegroup as READONLY.

--Add a new filegroup with a file to the database.

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2
ADD FILEGROUP READONLYFILEGROUP ;
GO
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2
ADD FILE(NAME=ReadOnlyFile, FILENAME='C:\Data\adw_1.ndf')
TO FILEGROUP READONLYFILEGROUP ;
GO
```

--Create specific table(s) on the new filegroup.

```
CREATE TABLE T1 (C1 INT, C2 INT)
ON READONLYFILEGROUP ;
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX II ON T1(C1);
```

```
INSERT INTO T1
VALUES (1, 1);
```

--Or move existing table(s) to the new filegroup

```
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX II ON T1(C1)
WITH DROP_EXISTING ON READONLYFILEGROUP ;
```

--Set the filegroup property to READONLY.

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2
MODIFY FILEGROUP READONLYFILEGROUP READONLY
```

This allows you to limit the data access to only the tables residing on the specific filegroup to READONLY but keep the data access to tables on other filegroups as READWRITE.

This filegroup setting takes effect immediately. If occasional modifications to the specific tables are required, then the property of the corresponding filegroup may be temporarily converted to READWRITE mode.

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2
MODIFY FILEGROUP READONLYFILEGROUP READWRITE <Database modifications> ALTER
DATABASE AdventureWorks2008
MODIFY FILEGROUP READONLYFILEGROUP READONLY
```

- Use one of the snapshot isolations.

SQL Server provides a mechanism to put versions of data into tempdb as updates are occurring, radically reducing locking overhead and blocking for read operations. You can change the isolation level of the database by using an ALTER statement.

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2 SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL READ_
COMMITTED_SNAPSHOT;
```

- Prevent SELECT statements from requesting any lock.

```
SELECT * FROM <TableName> WITH(NOLOCK)
```

This prevents the SELECT statement from requesting any lock, and it is applicable to SELECT statements only. Although the NOLOCK hint can't be used directly on the tables referred to in the action queries (INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE), it may be used on the data-retrieval part of the action queries, as shown here:

```
DELETE Sales.SalesOrderDetail
FROM Sales.SalesOrderDetail sod WITH(NOLOCK)
JOIN Production.Product p WITH(NOLOCK)
ON sod.ProductID = p.ProductID
AND p.ProductID = 0
```

Just know that this leads to dirty reads, which can cause duplicate rows or missing rows and is therefore considered to be a last resort to control locking. The best approach is to mark the database as read-only or use one of the snapshot isolation levels.

This is a huge topic and a lot more can be said about it. I discuss the different types of lock requests and how to manage lock overhead in the next chapter. If you made any of the proposed changes to the database from this section, I would recommend restoring from a backup.

## Summary

As discussed in this chapter, to improve the performance of a database application, it is important to ensure that SQL queries are designed properly to benefit from performance-enhancement techniques such as indexes, stored procedures, database constraints, and so on. Ensure that queries are resource friendly and don't prevent the use of indexes. In many cases the optimizer has the ability to generate cost-effective execution plans irrespective of query structure, but it is still a good practice to design the queries properly in the first place. Even after you design individual queries for great performance, the overall performance of a database application may not be satisfactory. It is important not only to improve the performance of individual queries but also to ensure that they work well with other queries without causing serious blocking issues. In the next chapter, you will look into the different blocking aspects of a database application.

## CHAPTER 12



# Blocking Analysis

You would ideally like your database application to scale linearly with the number of database users and the volume of data. However, it is common to find that performance degrades as the number of users increases and as the volume of data grows. One cause for degradation is blocking. In fact, database blocking is usually the biggest enemy of scalability for database applications.

In this chapter, I cover the following topics:

- The fundamentals of blocking in SQL Server
- The ACID properties of a transactional database
- Database lock granularity, escalation, modes, and compatibility
- ANSI isolation levels
- The effect of indexes on locking
- The information necessary to analyze blocking
- SQL script to collect blocking information
- Resolutions and recommendations to avoid blocking
- Techniques to automate the blocking detection and information collection processes

## Blocking Fundamentals

In an ideal world, every SQL query would be able to execute concurrently, without any blocking by other queries. However, in the real world, queries *do* block each other, similar to the way a car crossing through a green traffic signal at an intersection blocks other cars waiting to cross the intersection. In SQL Server, this traffic management takes the form of the *lock manager*, which controls concurrent access to a database resource to maintain data consistency. The concurrent access to a database resource is controlled across multiple database connections.

I want to make sure things are clear before moving on. Three terms are used within databases that sound the same and are interrelated but have different meanings. These are frequently confused, and people often use the terms incorrectly. These terms are *locking*, *blocking*, and *deadlocking*. Locking is an integral part of the process of SQL Server managing multiple sessions. When a session needs access to a piece of data, a lock of some type is placed on it. This is different from blocking, which is when one session, or thread, needs access to a piece of data and has to wait for another session's lock to clear. Finally, deadlocking is when two sessions, or threads, form what is sometimes referred to as a *deadly embrace*. They are each waiting on the other for a lock to clear. Deadlocking could also be referred to as a permanent blocking situation, but one that won't resolve by waiting

any period of time. Deadlocking will be covered in more detail in [Chapter 13](#). Please understand the differences between these terms and use them correctly. It will help in your understanding of the system, your ability to troubleshoot, and your ability to communicate with other database administrators and developers.

In SQL Server, a database connection is identified by a session ID. Connections may be from one or many applications and one or many users on those applications; as far as SQL Server is concerned, every connection is treated as a separate session. Blocking between two sessions accessing the same piece of data at the same time is a natural phenomenon in SQL Server. Whenever two sessions try to access a common database resource in conflicting ways, the lock manager ensures that the second session waits until the first session completes its work in conjunction with the management of transactions within the system. For example, a session might be modifying a table record while another session tries to delete the record. Since these two data access requests are incompatible, the second session will be blocked until the first session completes its task.

On the other hand, if the two sessions try to read a table concurrently, both requests are allowed to execute without blocking, since these data access requests are compatible with each other.

Usually, the effect of blocking on a session is quite small and doesn't affect its performance noticeably. At times, however, because of poor query and/or transaction design (or maybe bad luck), blocking can affect query performance significantly. In a database application, every effort should be made to minimize blocking and thereby increase the number of concurrent users that can use the database.

## Understanding Blocking

In SQL Server, a database query can execute as a logical unit of work in itself, or it can participate in a bigger logical unit of work. A bigger logical unit of work can be defined using the `BEGIN TRANSACTION` statement along with `COMMIT` and/or `ROLLBACK` statements. Every logical unit of work must conform to a set of four properties called *ACID* properties:

- Atomicity
- Consistency
- Isolation
- Durability

I cover these properties in the sections that follow because understanding how transactions work is fundamental to understanding blocking.

## Atomicity

A logical unit of work must be *atomic*. That is, either all the actions of the logical unit of work are completed or no effect is retained. To understand the atomicity of a logical unit of work, consider the following example (--atomicity in the download):

```
--Create a test table
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.ProductTest')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP TABLE dbo.ProductTest ;

GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.ProductTest
 (ProductID INT CONSTRAINT ValueEqualsOne CHECK (ProductID = 1)
) ;
```

```

GO
--All ProductIDs are added into t1 as a logical unit of work
INSERT INTO dbo.ProductTest
    ELECT      p.ProductID
    FROM      Production.Product AS p ;
GO
SELECT *
FROM  dbo.ProductTest ; --Returns 0 rows
UPDATE

```

SQL Server treats the preceding INSERT statement as a logical unit of work. The CHECK constraint on column c1 of the dbo.t1 table allows only the value of 1. Although the ProductID column in the Production.Product table starts with the value of 1, it also contains other values. For this reason, the INSERT statement won't add any records at all to the dbo.t1 table, and an error is raised because of the CHECK constraint. This atomicity is automatically ensured by SQL Server.

So far, so good. But in the case of a bigger logical unit of work, you should be aware of an interesting behavior of SQL Server. Imagine that the previous insert task consists of multiple INSERT statements. These can be combined to form a bigger logical unit of work, as follows (---logical in the download):

```

BEGIN TRAN
--Start: Logical unit of work
--First:
INSERT      INTO dbo.ProductTest
    SELECT      p.ProductID
    FROM      Production.Product AS p ;
--Second:
INSERT      INTO dbo.ProductTest
VALUES      (1);
COMMIT --End: Logical unit of work
GO

```

With the dbo.ProductTest table already created in the ---atomicity script, the BEGIN TRAN and COMMIT pair of statements defines a logical unit of work, suggesting that all the statements within the transaction should be atomic in nature. However, the default behavior of SQL Server doesn't ensure that the failure of one of the statements within a user-defined transaction scope will undo the effect of the prior statement(s). In the preceding transaction, the first INSERT statement will fail as explained earlier, whereas the second INSERT is perfectly fine. The default behavior of SQL Server allows the second INSERT statement to execute, even though the first INSERT statement fails. A SELECT statement, as shown in the following code, will return the row inserted by the second INSERT statement:

```

SELECT  *
FROM    dbo.ProductTest ; --Returns a row with t1.c1 = 1

```

The atomicity of a user-defined transaction can be ensured in the following two ways:

- SET XACT\_ABORT ON
- Explicit rollback

Let's look at these quickly.

## SETXACT\_ABORTON

You can modify the atomicity of the INSERT task in the preceding section using the SET XACT\_ABORT ON statement:

```
SET XACT_ABORT ON
GO
BEGIN TRAN
    --Start: Logical unit of work
--First:
INSERT INTO dbo.ProductTest
    SELECT p.ProductID
    FROM Production.Product AS p
--Second:
INSERT INTO dbo.ProductTest
VALUES (1)
COMMIT
    --End: Logical unit of work GO
SET XACT_ABORT OFF
GO
```

The SET XACTABORT statement specifies whether SQL Server should automatically roll back and abort an entire transaction when a statement within the transaction fails. The failure of the first INSERT statement will automatically suspend the entire transaction, and thus the second INSERT statement will not be executed.

The effect of SET XACTABORT is at the connection level, and it remains applicable until it is reconfigured or the connection is closed. By default, SET XACT\_ABORT is OFF.

## Explicit Rollback

You can also manage the atomicity of a user-defined transaction by using the TRY/CATCH error-trapping mechanism within SQL Server. If a statement within the TRY block of code generates an error, then the CATCH block of code will handle the error. If an error occurs and the CATCH block is activated, then the entire work of a user-defined transaction can be rolled back, and further statements can be prevented from execution, as follows (rollback.sql in the download):

```
BEGIN TRY
    BEGIN TRAN --Start: Logical unit of work --First:
        INSERT INTO dbo.t1
            SELECT p.ProductID
            FROM Production.Product AS p
    Second:
        INSERT INTO dbo.t1
        VALUES (1)
        COMMIT --End: Logical unit of work
    END TRY
    BEGIN CATCH
        ROLLBACK
        PRINT 'An error occurred'
        RETURN
    END CATCH
```

The ROLLBACK statement rolls back all the actions performed in the transaction until that point. For a detailed description of how to implement error handling in SQL Server-based applications, please refer to the MSDN Library article titled “Using TRY...CATCH in Transact SQL”(<http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ms179296.aspx>) or to the introductory article titled “SQL Server Error Handling Workbench”(<http://www.simple-talk.com/sql/t-sql-programming/sql-server-error-handling-workbench/>).

Since the atomicity property requires that either all the actions of a logical unit of work are completed or no effects are retained, SQL Server *isolates* the work of a transaction from that of others by granting it exclusive rights on the affected resources. This means that the transaction can safely roll back the effect of all its actions, if required. The exclusive rights granted to a transaction on the affected resources block all other transactions (or database requests) trying to access those resources during that time period. Therefore, although atomicity is required to maintain the integrity of data, it introduces the undesirable side effect of blocking.

## Consistency

A logical unit of work should cause the state of the database to travel from one *consistent* state to another. At the end of a transaction, the state of the database should be fully consistent. SQL Server always ensures that the internal state of the databases is correct and valid by automatically applying all the constraints of the affected database resources as part of the transaction. SQL Server ensures that the state of internal structures, such as data and index layout, are correct after the transaction. For instance, when the data of a table is modified, SQL Server automatically identifies all the indexes, constraints, and other dependent objects on the table and applies the necessary modifications to all the dependent database objects as part of the transaction.

The logical consistency of the data required by the business rules should be ensured by a database developer. A business rule may require changes to be applied on multiple tables. The database developer should accordingly define a logical unit of work to ensure that all the criteria of the business rules are taken care of. SQL Server provides different transaction management features that the database developer can use to ensure the logical consistency of the data.

As just explained, maintaining a consistent logical state requires the use of transactions to define the logical unit of work per the business rules. Also, to maintain a consistent physical state, SQL Server identifies and works on the dependent database objects as part of the logical unit of work. The atomicity characteristic of the logical unit of work blocks all other transactions (or database requests) trying to access the affected object(s) during that time period. Therefore, even though consistency is required to maintain a valid logical and physical state of the database, it also introduces the undesirable side effect of blocking.

## Isolation

In a multiuser environment, more than one transaction can be executed simultaneously. These concurrent transactions should be isolated from one another, so that the intermediate changes made by one transaction don't affect the data consistency of other transactions. The degree of *isolation* required by a transaction can vary. SQL Server provides different transaction isolation features to implement the degree of isolation required by a transaction.

**Note** Transaction isolation levels are explained later in the chapter in the “Isolation Levels” section.

The isolation requirements of a transaction operating on a database resource can block other transactions trying to access the resource. In a multiuser database environment, multiple transactions are usually executed simultaneously. It is imperative that the data modifications made by an ongoing transaction be protected

from the modifications made by other transactions. For instance, suppose a transaction is in the middle of modifying a few rows in a table. During that period, to maintain database consistency, you must ensure that other transactions do not modify or delete the same rows. SQL Server logically isolates the activities of a transaction from that of others by blocking them appropriately, which allows multiple transactions to execute simultaneously without corrupting one another's work.

Excessive blocking caused by isolation can adversely affect the scalability of a database application. A transaction may inadvertently block other transactions for a long period of time, thereby hurting database concurrency. Since SQL Server manages isolation using locks, it is important to understand the locking architecture of SQL Server. This helps you analyze a blocking scenario and implement resolutions.

---

**Note** The fundamentals of database locks are explained later in the chapter in the “Capturing Blocking Information” section.

---

## Durability

Once a transaction is completed, the changes made by the transaction should be *durable*. Even if the electrical power to the machine is tripped off immediately after the transaction is completed, the effect of all actions within the transaction should be retained. SQL Server ensures durability by keeping track of all pre- and post-images of the data under modification in a transaction log as the changes are made. Immediately after the completion of a transaction, SQL Server ensures that all the changes made by the transaction are retained even if SQL Server, the operating system, or the hardware fails (excluding the log disk). During restart, SQL Server runs its database recovery feature, which identifies the pending changes from the transaction log for completed transactions and applies them to the database resources. This database feature is called *roll forward*.

The recovery interval period depends on the number of pending changes that need to be applied to the database resources during restart. To reduce the recovery interval period, SQL Server intermittently applies the intermediate changes made by the running transactions as configured by the recovery interval option. The recovery interval option can be configured using the spconfigure statement. The process of intermittently applying the intermediate changes is referred to as the *checkpoint* process. During restart, the recovery process identifies all uncommitted changes and removes them from the database resources by using the pre-images of the data from the transaction log.

The durability property isn't a direct cause of blocking since it doesn't require the actions of a transaction to be isolated from those of others. But in an indirect way, it increases the duration of the blocking. Since the durability property requires saving the pre- and post-images of the data under modification to the transaction log on disk, it increases the duration of the transaction and blocking.

---

**Note** Out of the four ACID properties, the *isolation* property, which is also used to ensure atomicity and consistency, is the main cause of blocking in a SQL Server database. In SQL Server, isolation is implemented using locks, as explained in the next section.

---

## Locks

When a session executes a query, SQL Server determines the database resources that need to be accessed; and, if required, the lock manager grants database locks to the session. The query is blocked if another session has already been granted the locks; however, to provide both transaction isolation and concurrency, SQL Server uses different lock granularities, as explained in the sections that follow.

## Lock Granularity

SQL Server databases are maintained as files on the physical disk. In the case of a nondatabase file such as an Excel file, the file may be written to by only one user at a time. Any attempt to write to the file by other users fails. However, unlike the limited concurrency on a nondatabase file, SQL Server allows multiple users to modify (or access) contents simultaneously, as long as they don't affect one another's data consistency. This decreases blocking and improves concurrency among the transactions.

To improve concurrency, SQL Server implements lock granularities at the following resource levels and in this order:

- Row (RID)
- Key (KEY)
- Page (PAG)
- Extent (EXT)
- Heap or B-tree (HoBT)
- Table (TAB)
- File (FIL)
- Application (APP)
- MetaData (MDT)
- Allocation Unit (AU)
- Database (DB)

Let's take a look at these lock levels in more detail.

## Row-Level Lock

This lock is maintained on a single row within a table and is the lowest level of lock on a database table. When a query modifies a row in a table, an RID lock is granted to the query on the row. For example, consider the transaction on the following test table ( --rowlock):

```
--rowlock
--Create a test table
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1')
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;

GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
VALUES (1) ;
GO

BEGIN TRAN
DELETE dbo.Test1
WHERE C1 = 1 ;
```

```

SELECT dtl.request_session_id,
       dtl.resource_database_id,
       dtl.resource_associated_entity_id,
       dtl.resource_type,
       dtl.resource_description,
       dtl.request_mode,
       dtl.request_status
  FROM sys.dm_tran_locks AS dtl
 WHERE dtl.request_session_id = SPID;
ROLLBACK

```

The dynamic management view, `sys.dm_tran_locks`, can be used to display the lock status. The query against `sys.dm_tran_locks` in Figure 12-1 shows that the DELETE statement acquired an exclusive RID lock on the row to be deleted.

**Note** I explain lock modes later in the chapter in the “Lock Modes” section.

Granting an RID lock to the DELETE statement prevents other transactions from accessing the row.

The resource locked by the RID lock can be represented in the following format from the `resource_description` column:

`DatabaseID:FileID:PageID:Slot(row)`

In the output from the query against `sys.dm_tran_locks` in Figure 12-1, the `DatabaseID` is displayed separately under the `resource_database_id` column. The `resource_description` column value for the RID type represents the remaining part of the RID resource as `1:23593:0`. In this case, a `FileID` of 1 is the primary data file, a `PageID` of 23593 is a page belonging to the `dbo.Test1` table identified by the `Obj_Id` column, and a `Slot (row)` of 0 represents the row position within the page. You can obtain the table name and the database name by executing the following SQL statements:

```

SELECT OBJECT_NAME(176719682),
       DB_NAME(9) ;

```

The row-level lock provides very high concurrency since blocking is restricted to the row under effect.

## Key-Level Lock

This is a row lock within an index, and it is identified as a KEY lock. As you know, for a table with a clustered index, the data pages of the table and the leaf pages of the clustered index are the same. Since both of the rows are the same for a table with a clustered index, only a KEY lock is acquired on the clustered index row, or limited range of

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	55	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	55	9	176719682	OBJECT		IX	GRANT
3	55	9	192719739	OBJECT		IX	GRANT
4	55	9	0	METADATA	Shash = 0xb5bc4716:0xdc7c8517:0xb49afc	Sch-S	GRANT
5	55	9	72057594068336640	PAGE	1:23593	IX	GRANT
6	55	9	72057594068336640	RID	1:23593:0	X	GRANT
7	55	9	0	METADATA	Shash = 0x43b9c8b4:0x1b62caca:0xcbf2b1	Sch-S	GRANT

**Figure 12-1.** Output from `sys.dm_tran_locks` showing the row-level lock granted to the DELETE statement

rows, while accessing the row(s) from the table (or the clustered index). For example, consider having a clustered index on the Test1 table (–keylock):

```
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX TestIndex ON dbo.Test1(C1) ;
```

Next, rerun the following code:

```
BEGIN TRAN
DELETE  dbo.Test1
WHERE   C1 = 1 ;

SELECT  dtl.request_session_id,
        dtl.resource_database_id,
        dtl.resource_associated_entity_id,
        dtl.resource_type,
        dtl.resource_description,
        dtl.request_mode,
        dtl.request_status
FROM    sys.dm_tran_locks AS dtl
WHERE   dtl.request_session_id = SPID ;
ROLLBACK
```

The corresponding output from `sys.dm_tran_locks` shows a KEY lock instead of the RID lock, as you can see in Figure 12-2.

When you are querying `sys.dm_tran_locks`, you will be able to retrieve the database identifier, `resource_database_id`. You can also get information about what is being locked from `resource_associated_entity_id`; however, to get to the particular resource (in this case, the page on the key), you have to go to the `resource_description` column for the value, which is (1:23316). In this case, the `IndId` of 1 is the clustered index on the `dbo.Test1` table. You also see the types of requests that are made: S, Sch-S, X, and so on. I cover these in more detail in the upcoming “Lock Modes” section.

**Note** You’ll learn about different values for the `IndId` column and how to determine the corresponding index name in this chapter’s “Effect of Indexes on Locking” section.

Like the row-level lock, the key-level lock provides very high concurrency.

## Page-Level Lock

A page-level lock is maintained on a single page within a table or an index, and it is identified as a PAG lock. When a query requests multiple rows within a page, the consistency of all the requested rows can be maintained by acquiring either RID/KEY locks on the individual rows or a PAG lock on the entire page. From the query plan, the

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	53	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	53	9	0	METADATA	Shash = 0x789cd507:0xdebb2be9:0x51d248	Sch-S	GRANT
3	53	9	192719739	OBJECT		IX	GRANT
4	53	9	72057594068402176	KEY	(de42f79bc795)	X	GRANT
5	53	9	72057594068402176	PAGE	1:23595	IX	GRANT

**Figure 12-2.** Output from `sys.dm_tran_locks` showing the key-level lock granted to the `DELETE` statement

lock manager determines the resource pressure of acquiring multiple RID/KEY locks; and if the pressure is found to be high, the lock manager requests a PAG lock instead.

The resource locked by the PAG lock may be represented in the following format in the `resource_description` column of `sys.dm_tran_locks`:

`DatabaseID:FileID:PageID`

The page-level lock increases the performance of an individual query by reducing its locking overhead, but it hurts the concurrency of the database by blocking access to all the rows in the page.

## Extent-Level Lock

An extent-level lock is maintained on an extent (a group of eight contiguous data or index pages), and it is identified as an EXT lock. This lock is used, for example, when an `ALTER INDEX REBUILD` command is executed on a table and the pages of the table may be moved from an existing extent to a new extent. During this period, the integrity of the extents is protected using EXT locks.

## Heap or B-tree Lock

A heap or B-tree lock is used to describe when a lock to either type of object could be made. The target object could be an unordered heap table, a table without a clustered index, or a B-tree object, usually referring to partitions. A setting within the `ALTER TABLE` function allows you to exercise a level of control over how locking escalation (covered in the “Lock Escalation” section) is affected with the partitions. Because partitions are stored across multiple filegroups, each one has to have its own data allocation definition. This is where the HoBT comes into play. It acts like a table-level lock, but on a partition instead of on the table itself.

## Table-Level Lock

This is the highest level of lock on a table, and it is identified as a TAB lock. A table-level lock on a table reserves access to the complete table and all its indexes.

When a query is executed, the lock manager automatically determines the locking overhead of acquiring multiple locks at the lower levels. If the resource pressure of acquiring locks at the row level or the page level is determined to be high, then the lock manager directly acquires a table-level lock for the query.

The resource locked by the TAB lock will be represented in `resource_description` in the following format:

`DatabaseID:ObjectID`

A table-level lock requires the least overhead compared to the other locks and thus improves the performance of the individual query. On the other hand, since the table-level lock blocks all write requests on the entire table (including indexes), it can significantly hurt database concurrency.

Sometimes an application feature may benefit from using a specific lock level for a table referred to in a query. For instance, if an administrative query is executed during nonpeak hours, then a table-level lock may not impact the users of the system too much; however, it can reduce the locking overhead of the query and thereby improve its performance. In such cases, a query developer may override the lock manager’s lock level selection for a table referred to in the query by using locking hints:

```
SELECT * FROM <TableName> WITH(TABLOCK)
```

## Database-Level Lock

A database-level lock is maintained on a database and is identified as a DB lock. When an application makes a database connection, the lock manager assigns a database-level shared lock to the corresponding SPID. This prevents a user from accidentally dropping or restoring the database while other users are connected to it.

SQL Server ensures that the locks requested at one level respect the locks granted at other levels. For instance, once a user acquires a row-level lock on a table row, another user can't acquire a lock at any other level that may affect the integrity of the row. The second user may acquire a row-level lock on other rows or a page-level lock on other pages, but an incompatible page- or table-level lock containing the row won't be granted to other users.

The level at which locks should be applied need not be specified by a user or database administrator; the lock manager determines that automatically. It generally prefers row-level and key-level locks when accessing a small number of rows to aid concurrency. However, if the locking overhead of multiple low-level locks turns out to be very high, the lock manager automatically selects an appropriate higher-level lock.

## Lock Operations and Modes

Because of the variety of operations that SQL Server needs to perform, an equally large and complex set of locking mechanisms are maintained. In addition to the different types of locks, there is an escalation path to change from one type of lock to another. The following sections describe these modes and processes, as well as their uses.

### Lock Escalation

When a query is executed, SQL Server determines the required lock level for the database objects referred to in the query, and it starts executing the query after acquiring the required locks. During the query execution, the lock manager keeps track of the number of locks requested by the query to determine the need to escalate the lock level from the current level to a higher level.

The lock escalation threshold is dynamically determined by SQL Server during the course of a transaction. Row locks and page locks are automatically escalated to a table lock when a transaction exceeds its threshold. After the lock level is escalated to a table-level lock, all the lower-level locks on the table are automatically released. This dynamic lock escalation feature of the lock manager optimizes the locking overhead of a query.

It is possible to establish a level of control over the locking mechanisms on a given table. For example, you can control whether lock escalation occurs. Following is the T-SQL syntax to make that change:

```
ALTER TABLE schema.table
SET (LOCK_ESCALATION = DISABLE)
```

This syntax will disable lock escalation on the table entirely (except for a few special circumstances). You can also set it to TABLE, which will cause the escalation to go to a table lock every single time. You can also set lock escalation on the table to AUTO, which will allow SQL Server to make the determination for the locking schema and any escalation necessary. If that table is partitioned, you may see the escalation change to the partition level.

### Lock Modes

The degree of isolation required by different transactions may vary. For instance, consistency of data is not affected if two transactions read the data simultaneously; however, the consistency is affected if two transactions

are allowed to modify the data simultaneously. Depending on the type of access requested, SQL Server uses different lock modes while locking resources:

- Shared (S)
- Update (U)
- Exclusive (X)
- Intent:
  - Intent Shared (IS)
  - Intent Exclusive (IX)
  - Shared with Intent Exclusive (SIX)
- Schema:
  - Schema Modification (Sch-M)
  - Schema Stability (Sch-S)
  - Bulk Update (BU)
  - Key-Range

## Shared (S) Mode

Shared Mode is used for read-only queries, such as a SELECT statement. It doesn't prevent other read-only queries from accessing the data simultaneously because the integrity of the data isn't compromised by the concurrent reads. However, concurrent data modification queries on the data are prevented to maintain data integrity. The (S) lock is held on the data until the data is read. By default, the (S) lock acquired by a SELECT statement is released immediately after the data is read. For example, consider the following transaction:

```
BEGIN TRAN
SELECT *
FROM Production.Product AS p
WHERE p.ProductID = 1 ;
--Other queries
COMMIT
```

The (S) lock acquired by the SELECT statement is not held until the end of the transaction; instead, it is released immediately after the data is read by the SELECT statement under `read_committed`, the default isolation level. This behavior of the (S) lock can be altered by using a higher isolation level or a lock hint.

## Update (U) Mode

Update Mode may be considered similar to the (S) lock, but it also includes an objective to modify the data as part of the same query. Unlike the (S) lock, the (U) lock indicates that the data is read for modification. Since the data is read with an objective to modify it, SQL Server does not allow more than one (U) lock on the data simultaneously. This rule helps to maintain data integrity. Note that concurrent (S) locks on the data are allowed. The (U) lock is associated with an UPDATE statement, and the action of an UPDATE statement actually involves two intermediate steps:

1. Read the data to be modified.
2. Modify the data.

Different lock modes are used in the two intermediate steps to maximize concurrency. Instead of acquiring an exclusive right while reading the data, the first step acquires a (U) lock on the data. In the second step, the (U) lock is converted to an exclusive lock for modification. If no modification is required, then the (U) lock is released; in other words, it's not held until the end of the transaction. Consider the following example, which demonstrates the locking behavior of the UPDATE statement (--updatelock in the download):

```
BEGIN TRANSACTION LockTran1
UPDATE Sales.Currency
SET     Name = 'Euro'
WHERE   CurrencyCode = 'EUR' ;
COMMIT
```

To understand the locking behavior of the intermediate steps of the UPDATE statement, you need to obtain data from sys.dm\_tran\_locks at the end of each step. You can obtain the lock status after each step of the UPDATE statement by following the steps outlined next. You're going to have three connections open that I'll refer to as Connection 1, Connection 2, and Connection 3. This will require three different query windows in Management Studio. You'll run the queries in the connections I list in the order that I specify to arrive at a blocking situation; the point of this is to observe those blocks as they occur. The initial query, which was listed previously, is in Connection 1:

1. Block the second step of the UPDATE statement by first executing a transaction from a second connection (--updatelock2 in the download), Connection 2:

--Execute from a second connection

```
BEGIN TRANSACTION LockTran2
--Retain an (S) lock on the resource
SELECT *
FROM   Sales.Currency AS c WITH (REPEATABLEREAD)
WHERE   c.CurrencyCode = 'EUR' ;
--Allow sp_lock to be executed before second step of
-- UPDATE statement is executed by transaction LockTran1
WAITFOR DELAY '00:00:01' ;
COMMIT
```

The REPEATABLEREAD locking hint, running in Connection 2, allows the SELECT statement to retain the (S) lock on the resource.

2. While the transaction Tx2 is executing, execute the UPDATE transaction, updatelock, from the first connection (repeated here for clarity), Connection 1:

```
BEGIN TRANSACTION LockTran1
UPDATE Sales.Currency
SET     Name = 'Euro'
WHERE   CurrencyCode = 'EUR' ;
-- NOTE: We're not committing yet
--COMMIT
```

3. While the UPDATE statement is blocked, query the sys.dm\_tran\_locks DMV from a third connection, Connection 3, as follows:

```
SELECT    dtl.request_session_id,
          dtl.resource_database_id,
          dtl.resource_associated_entity_id,
          dtl.resource_type,
```

```

        dtl.resource_description,
        dtl.request_mode,
        dtl.request_status
    FROM      sys.dm_tran_locks AS dtl
    ORDER BY  dtl.request_session_id ;

```

The output from `sys.dmtranlocks` in Connection 3 will provide the lock status after the first step of the UPDATE statement since the lock conversion to an exclusive (X) lock by the UPDATE statement is blocked by the SELECT statement.

4. The lock status after the second step of the UPDATE statement will be provided by rerunning the query against `sys.dm_tran_locks` in Connection 3.

Next, let's look at the lock status provided by `sys.dm_tran_locks` as you go through the individual steps of the UPDATE statement:

- Figure 12-3 shows the lock status after Step 1 of the UPDATE statement (obtained from the output from `sys.dm_tran_locks` executed on the third connection, Connection 3, as explained previously).

**Note** The order of these rows is not that important. I've ordered by `session_id` in order to group the locks from each query.

- Figure 12-4 shows the lock status after Step 2 of the UPDATE statement.

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	51	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	51	9	933578364	OBJECT		IS	GRANT
3	51	9	72057594044547072	PAGE	1:749	IS	GRANT
4	51	9	72057594044547072	KEY	(0d881dadfc5c)	S	GRANT
5	54	9	72057594044547072	KEY	(0d881dadfc5c)	U	GRANT
6	54	9	72057594044547072	KEY	(0d881dadfc5c)	X	CONVERT
7	54	9	72057594044547072	PAGE	1:749	IX	GRANT
8	54	9	933578364	OBJECT		IX	GRANT
9	54	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
10	57	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
11	58	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT

**Figure 12-3.** Output from `sys.dm_tran_locks` showing the lock conversion state of an UPDATE statement

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	51	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	54	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
3	54	9	0	METADATA	Shash = 0x789cd507:0xdebb2be9:0x51d248	Sch-S	GRANT
4	54	9	933578364	OBJECT		IX	GRANT
5	54	9	72057594044547072	PAGE	1:749	IX	GRANT
6	54	9	72057594044547072	KEY	(0d881dadfc5c)	X	GRANT
7	57	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
8	58	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT

**Figure 12-4.** Output from `sys.dm_tran_locks` showing the final lock status held by the UPDATE statement

From the `sys.dm_tran_locks` output after the first step of the UPDATE statement, you can note the following:

- A (U) lock is granted to the SPID on the data row.
- A conversion to an (X) lock on the data row is requested.

From the output of `sys.dm_tran_locks` after the second step of the UPDATE statement, you can see that the UPDATE statement holds only an (X) lock on the data row. Essentially, the (U) lock on the data row is converted to an (X) lock.

By not acquiring an exclusive lock at the first step, an UPDATE statement allows other transactions to read the data using the SELECT statement during that period. This is possible because (U) and (S) locks are compatible with each other. This increases database concurrency.

**Note** I discuss lock compatibility among different lock modes later in this chapter.

You may be curious to learn why a (U) lock is used instead of an (S) lock in the first step of the UPDATE statement. To understand the drawback of using an (S) lock instead of a (U) lock in the first step of the UPDATE statement, let's break the UPDATE statement into two steps:

1. Read the data to be modified using an (S) lock instead of a (U) lock.
2. Modify the data by acquiring an (X) lock.

Consider the following code (`splitupdate.sql` in the download):

```
BEGIN TRAN
--1.Read data to be modified using (S)lock instead of (U)lock.
--Retain the (S)lock using REPEATABLEREAD locking hint, since
--the original (U)lock is retained until the conversion to
--(X)lock.
SELECT *
FROM   Sales.Currency AS c WITH (REPEATABLEREAD)
WHERE  c.CurrencyCode = 'EUR' ;
--Allow another equivalent update action to start concurrently
WAITFOR DELAY '00:00:10' ;

--2. Modify the data by acquiring (X)lock
UPDATE Sales.Currency WITH (XLOCK)
SET    Name = 'EURO'
WHERE  CurrencyCode = 'EUR' ;
COMMIT
```

If this transaction is executed from two connections simultaneously, then it causes a deadlock, as follows:

Msg 1205, Level 13, State 51, Line 13

Transaction (Process ID 58) was deadlocked on lock resources with another process and has been chosen as the deadlock victim. Rerun the transaction.

Both transactions read the data to be modified using an (S) lock and then request an (X) lock for modification. When the first transaction attempts the conversion to the (X) lock, it is blocked by the (S) lock held by the second transaction. Similarly, when the second transaction attempts the conversion from (S) lock to the (X) lock, it is blocked by the (S) lock held by the first transaction, which in turn is blocked by the second transaction. This causes a circular block—and therefore, a deadlock.

---

**Note** Deadlocks are covered in more detail in [Chapter 13](#).

---

To avoid this typical deadlock, the UPDATE statement uses a (U) lock instead of an (S) lock at its first intermediate step. Unlike an (S) lock, a (U) lock doesn't allow another (U) lock on the same resource simultaneously. This forces the second concurrent UPDATE statement to wait until the first UPDATE statement completes.

## Exclusive (X) Mode

Exclusive Mode provides an exclusive right on a database resource for modification by data manipulation queries such as INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE. It prevents other concurrent transactions from accessing the resource under modification. Both the INSERT and DELETE statements acquire (X) locks at the very beginning of their execution. As explained earlier, the UPDATE statement converts to the (X) lock after the data to be modified is read. The (X) locks granted in a transaction are held until the end of the transaction.

The (X) lock serves two purposes:

- It prevents other transactions from accessing the resource under modification, so that they see a value either before or after the modification, not a value undergoing modification.
- It allows the transaction modifying the resource to safely roll back to the original value before modification, if needed, since no other transaction is allowed to modify the resource simultaneously.

## Intent Shared (IS), Intent Exclusive (IX), and Shared with Intent Exclusive (SIX) Modes

Intent Shared, Intent Exclusive, and Shared with Intent Exclusive locks indicate that the query intends to grab a corresponding (S) or (X) lock at a lower lock level. For example, consider the following transaction on the Sales. Currency table (--isix in the download):

```
BEGIN TRAN
DELETE Sales.Currency
WHERE CurrencyCode = 'ALL' ;
SELECT tl.request_session_id,
       tl.resource_database_id,
       tl.resource_associated_entity_id,
       tl.resource_type,
       tl.resource_description,
       tl.request_mode,
       tl.request_status
FROM   sys.dm_tran_locks tl ;
ROLLBACK TRAN
```

Figure 12-5 shows the output from sys.dmtranlocks.

The (IX) lock at the table level (PAGE) indicates that the DELETE statement intends to acquire an (X) lock at a page, row, or key level. Similarly, the (IX) lock at the page level (PAGE) indicates that the query intends to acquire

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	55	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	54	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
3	54	9	933578364	OBJECT		IX	GRANT
4	54	9	72057594044547072	KEY	(cadf591d32de)	X	GRANT
5	54	9	72057594044547072	PAGE	1:749	IX	GRANT
6	54	9	72057594049789952	KEY	(f9b93c451603)	X	GRANT
7	54	9	72057594049789952	PAGE	1:1005	IX	GRANT

**Figure 12-5.** Output from sys.dm\_tran\_locks showing the intent locks granted at higher levels

an (X) lock on a row in the page. The (IX) locks at the higher levels prevent another transaction from acquiring an incompatible lock on the table or on the page containing the row.

Flagging the intent lock—(IS) or (IX)—at a corresponding higher level by a transaction, while holding the lock at a lower level, prevents other transactions from acquiring an incompatible lock at the higher level. If the intent locks were not used, then a transaction trying to acquire a lock at a higher level would have to scan through the lower levels to detect the presence of lowerlevel locks. While the intent lock at the higher levels indicates the presence of a lowerlevel lock, the locking overhead of acquiring a lock at a higher level is optimized. The intent locks granted to a transaction are held until the end of the transaction.

Only a single (SIX) lock can be placed on a given resource at once. This prevents updates made by other transactions. Other transactions can place (IS) locks on the lowerlevel resources while the (SIX) lock is in place.

Furthermore, there can be a combination of locks requested (or acquired) at a certain level and the intention of having a lock (or locks) at a lower level. For example, there can be (SIU) and (UIX) lock combinations indicating that an (S) or a (U) lock has beenacquired at the corresponding level and that (U) or (X) lock(s) are intended at a lower level.

## Schema Modification (Sch-M) and Schema Stability (Sch-S) Modes

Schema Modification and Schema Stability locks are acquired on a table by SQL statements that depend on the schema of the table. A DDL statement, working on the schema of a table, acquires an (Sch-M) lock on the table and prevents other transactions from accessing the table. An (Sch-S) lock is acquired for database activities that depend on the schemabtable, but do not modify the schema, such as a query compilation. It prevents an (Sch-M) lock on the table, but it allows other locks to be granted on the table.

Since, on a production database, schema modifications are infrequent, (Sch-M) locks don't usually become a blocking issue. And because (Sch-S) locks don't block other locks except (Sch-M) locks, concurrency is generally not affected by (Sch-S) locks either.

## Bulk Update (BU) Mode

The Bulk Update lock mode is unique to bulk load operations. These operations are the older-style bcp (bulk copy), the BULK INSERT statement, and inserts from the OPENROWSET using the BULK option. As a mechanism for speeding up these processes, you can provide a TABLOCK hint or set the option on the table for it to lock on bulk load. The key to (BU) locking mode is that it will allow multiple bulk operations against the table being locked, but prevent other operations while the bulk process is running.

## Key-range Mode

The Key-Range mode is applicable only while the isolation level is set to Serializable (you'll learn more abouttransaction isolation levels in the later “Isolation Levels” section). The Key-Range locks are applied to a

series, or range, of key values that will be used repeatedly while the transaction is open. Locking a range during a serializable transaction ensures that other rows are not inserted within the range, possibly changing result sets within the transaction. The range can be locked using the other lock modes, making this more like a combined locking mode rather than a distinctively separate locking mode. For the Key-Range lock mode to work, an index must be used to define the values within the range.

## Lock Compatibility

SQL Server provides isolation to a transaction by preventing other transactions from accessing the same resource in an incompatible way. However, if a transaction attempts a compatible task on the same resource, then, to increase concurrency, it won't be blocked by the first transaction. SQL Server ensures this kind of selective blocking by preventing a transaction from acquiring an incompatible lock on a resource held by another transaction. For example, an (S) lock acquired on a resource by a transaction allows other transactions to acquire an (S) lock on the same resource. However, an (Sch-M) lock on a resource by a transaction prevents other transactions from acquiring any lock on that resource.

## Isolation Levels

The lock modes explained in the previous section help a transaction protect its data consistency from other concurrent transactions. The degree of data protection or isolation a transaction gets depends, not only on the lock modes, but also on the isolation level of the transaction. This level influences the behavior of the lock modes. For example, by default an (S) lock is released immediately after the data is read; it isn't held until the end of the transaction. This behavior may not be suitable for some application functionality. In such cases, you can configure the isolation level of the transaction to achieve the desired degree of isolation.

SQL Server implements six isolation levels, four of them as defined by ISO:

- Read Uncommitted
- Read Committed
- Repeatable Read
- Serializable

Two other isolation levels provide row versioning, which is a mechanism whereby a version of the row is created as part of data manipulation queries. This extra version of the row allows read queries to access the data without acquiring locks against it. The extra two isolation levels are as follows:

- Read Committed Snapshot (actually part of the Read Committed isolation)
- Snapshot

The four ISO isolation levels are listed in increasing order of degree of isolation. You can configure them at either the connection or query level by using the `SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL` statement or the locking hints, respectively. The isolation level configuration at the connection level remains effective until the isolation level is reconfigured using the `SET` statement or until the connection is closed. All the isolation levels are explained in the sections that follow.

## Read Uncommitted

Read Uncommitted is the lowest of the four isolation levels, and it allows `SELECT` statements to read data without requesting an (S) lock. Since an (S) lock is not requested by a `SELECT` statement, it neither blocks nor is blocked by

the (X) lock. It allows a SELECT statement to read data while the data is under modification. This kind of data read is called a *dirty read*.

Assume you have an application in which the amount of data modification is extremely minimal and that your application doesn't require much in the way of accuracy from the SELECT statement it issues to read data.. In this case, you can use the Read Uncommitted isolation level to avoid having some other data modification activity block the SELECT statement.

You can use the following SET statement to configure the isolation level of a database connection to the Read Uncommitted isolation level:

```
SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL READ UNCOMMITTED
```

You can also achieve this degree of isolation on a query basis using the NOLOCK locking hint:

```
SELECT * FROM Production.Products WITH(NOLOCK);
```

The effect of the locking hint remains applicable for the query and doesn't change the isolation level of the connection.

The Read Uncommitted isolation level avoids the blocking caused by a SELECT statement, but you should not use it if the transaction depends on the accuracy of the data read by the SELECT statement or if the transaction cannot withstand a concurrent change of data by another transaction.

It's very important to understand what is meant by a dirty read. Lots of people think this means that, while a field is being updated from Tulsa to Tulsa, a query can still read the previous value or even the updated value, prior to the commit. Although that is true, much more egregious data problems could occur. Since no locks are placed while reading the data, indexes may be split. This can result in extra or missing rows of data returned to the query. To be very clear, using Read Uncommitted in any environment where data manipulation is occurring as well as data reads can result in unanticipated behaviors. The intention of this isolation level is for systems primarily focused on reporting and business intelligence, not online transaction processing.

## Read Committed

The Read Committed isolation level prevents the dirty read caused by the Read Uncommitted isolation level. This means that (S) locks are requested by the SELECT statements at this isolation level. This is the default isolation level of SQL Server. If needed, you can change the isolation level of a connection to Read Committed by using the following SET statement:

```
SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL READ COMMITTED
```

The Read Committed isolation level is good for most cases, but since the (S) lock acquired by the SELECT statement isn't held until the end of the transaction, it can cause nonrepeatable read or phantom read issues, as explained in the sections that follow.

The behavior of the Read Committed isolation level can be changed by the `READ_COMMITTED_SNAPSHOT` database option. When this is set to ON, row versioning is used by data manipulation transactions. This places an extra load on `tempdb` because previous versions of the rows being changed are stored there while the transaction is uncommitted. This allows other transactions to access data for reads without having to place locks on the data, which can improve the speed and efficiency of all the queries in the system.

Next, modify the `AdventureWorks2008R2` database so that `READ_COMMITTED_SNAPSHOT` is turned on:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2
SET READ_COMMITTED_SNAPSHOT ON ;
```

Now imagine a business situation. The first connection and transaction will be pulling data from the Production.Product table, acquiring the color of a particular item (–read\_committed):

```
BEGIN TRANSACTION ;
SELECT p.Color
FROM Production.Product AS p
WHERE p.ProductID = 711 ;
```

A second connection is made with a new transaction that will be modifying the color of the same item (–change\_color):

```
BEGIN TRANSACTION ;
UPDATE Production.Product
SET Color = 'Coyote'
WHERE ProductID = 711 ;
SELECT p.Color
FROM Production.Product AS p
WHERE p.ProductID = 711 ;
```

Running the SELECT statement after updating the color, you can see that the color was updated. But if you switch back to the first connection and rerun the original SELECT statement (don't run the BEGIN TRAN statement again), you'll still see the color as Blue. Switch back to the second connection, and finish the transaction:

```
COMMIT TRANSACTION ;
```

Switching again to the first transaction, commit that transaction, and then rerun the original SELECT statement. You'll see the new color updated for the item, Coyote. You can reset the isolation level on AdventureWorks2008R2 before continuing:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2
SET READ_COMMITTED_SNAPSHOT OFF ;
```

**Note** If the tempdb is filled, data modification using row versioning will continue to succeed, but reads may fail since the versioned row will not be available. If you enable any type of row versioning isolation within your database, you must take extra care to maintain free space within tempdb.

## Repeatable Read

The Repeatable Read isolation level allows a SELECT statement to retain its (S) lock until the end of the transaction, thereby preventing other transactions from modifying the data during that time. Database functionality may implement a logical decision inside a transaction based on the data read by a SELECT statement within the transaction. If the outcome of the decision is dependent on the data read by the SELECT statement, then you should consider preventing modification of the data by other concurrent transactions. For example, consider the following two transactions:

- Normalize the price for ProductID = 1: For ProductID = 1, if Price > 10, then decrease the price by 10.
- Apply a discount: For Products with Price > 10, apply a discount of 40 percent.

Now consider the following test table (repeatable.sql in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.MyProduct')
    ) IS NOT NULL
DROP TABLE dbo.MyProduct ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.MyProduct
    (ProductID INT,
     Price MONEY
    ) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.MyProduct
VALUES (1, 15.0) ;
```

You can write the two transactions like this (–repeatabletrans):

```
DECLARE @Price INT ;
BEGIN TRAN NormalizePrice
SELECT @Price = mp.Price
FROM dbo.MyProduct AS mp
WHERE mp.ProductID = 1 ;
/*Allow transaction 2 to execute*/
WAITFOR DELAY '00:00:10' ;
IF @Price > 10
    UPDATE dbo.MyProduct
    SET Price = Price - 10
    WHERE ProductID = 1 ;
COMMIT

--Transaction 2 from Connection 2
BEGIN TRAN ApplyDiscount
UPDATE dbo.MyProduct
SET Price = Price * 0.6 --Discount = 40%
WHERE Price > 10 ;
COMMIT
```

On the surface, the preceding transactions may look good; and yes, they do work in a single-user environment. But in a multiuser environment, where multiple transactions can be executed concurrently, you have a problem here!

To figure out the problem, let's execute the two transactions from different connections in the following order:

1. Start transaction 1 first.
2. Start transaction 2 within tensconds of the start of transaction 1.

As you may have guessed, at the end of the transactions, the new price of the product (with ProductID = 1) will be -1.0. Ouch—it appears that you're ready to go out of business!

The problem occurs because transaction 2 is allowed to modify the data while transaction 1 has finished reading the data and is about to make a decision on it. Transaction 1 requires a higher degree of isolation than that provided by the default isolation level (Read Committed).

As a solution, you want to prevent transaction 2 from modifying the data while transaction 1 is working on it. In other words, provide transaction 1 with the ability to read the data again later in the transaction without being

modified by others. This feature is called *repeatable read*. Considering the context, the implementation of the solution is probably obvious. After re-creating the sample table, you can write this:

```
SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL REPEATABLE READ ;
GO
--Transaction 1 from Connection 1
DECLARE @Price INT ;
BEGIN TRAN NormalizePrice
SELECT @Price = Price
FROM dbo.MyProduct AS mp
WHERE mp.ProductID = 1 ;
/*Allow transaction 2 to execute*/
WAITFOR DELAY '00:00:10' ;
IF @Price > 10
    UPDATE dbo.MyProduct
    SET Price = Price - 10
    WHERE ProductID = 1 ;
COMMIT
GO
SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL READ COMMITTED --Back to default
GO
```

Increasing the isolation level of transaction 1 to Repeatable Read will prevent transaction 2 from modifying the data during the execution of transaction 1. Consequently, you won't have an inconsistency in the price of the product. Since the intention isn't to release the (S) lock acquired by the SELECT statement until the end of the transaction, the effect of setting the isolation level to Repeatable Read can also be implemented at the query level using the lock hint:

```
DECLARE @Price INT ;
BEGIN TRAN NormalizePrice
SELECT @Price = Price
FROM dbo.MyProduct AS mp WITH (REPEATABLEREAD)
WHERE mp.ProductID = 1 ;
/*Allow transaction 2 to execute*/
WAITFOR DELAY '00:00:10' ;
IF @Price > 10
    UPDATE dbo.MyProduct
    SET Price = Price - 10
    WHERE ProductID = 1 ;
COMMIT
```

This solution prevents the data inconsistency of `MyProduct.Price`, but it introduces another problem to this scenario. On observing the result of transaction 2, you realize that it could cause a deadlock. Therefore, although the preceding solution prevented the data inconsistency, it is not a complete solution. Looking closely at the effect of the Repeatable Read isolation level on the transactions, you see that it introduced the typical deadlock issue avoided by the internal implementation of an UPDATE statement, as explained previously. The SELECT statement acquired and retained an (S) lock instead of a (U) lock, even though it intended to modify the data later within the transaction. The (S) lock allowed transaction 2 to acquire a (U) lock, but it blocked the (U) lock's conversion to an (X) lock. The attempt of transaction 1 to acquire a (U) lock on the data at a later stage caused a circular blocking, resulting in a deadlock.

To prevent the deadlock and still avoid data corruption, you can use an equivalent strategy as adopted by the internal implementation of the UPDATE statement. Thus, instead of requesting an (S) lock, transaction 1 can request a (U) lock by using an UPDLOCK locking hint when executing the SELECT statement:

```
DECLARE @Price INT ;
BEGIN TRAN NormalizePrice
SELECT @Price = Price
FROM dbo.MyProduct AS mp WITH (UPDLOCK)
WHERE mp.ProductID = 1 ;
/*Allow transaction 2 to execute*/
WAITFOR DELAY '00:00:10'
IF @Price > 10
    UPDATE dbo.MyProduct
    SET Price = Price - 10
    WHERE ProductID = 1 ;
COMMIT
```

This solution prevents both data inconsistency and the possibility of the deadlock. If the increase of the isolation level to Repeatable Read had not introduced the typical deadlock, then it would have done the job. Since there is a chance of a deadlock occurring because of the retention of an (S) lock until the end of a transaction, it is usually preferable to grab a (U) lock instead of holding the (S) lock, as just illustrated.

## Serializable

Serializable is the highest of the six isolation levels. Instead of acquiring a lock only on the row to be accessed, the Serializable isolation level acquires a range lock on the row and the next row in the order of the data set requested. For instance, a SELECT statement executed at the Serializable isolation level acquires a (RangeS-S) lock on the row to be accessed and the next row in the order. This prevents the addition of rows by other transactions in the data set operated on by the first transaction, and it protects the first transaction from finding new rows in its data set within its transaction scope. Finding new rows in a data set within a transaction is also called a *phantom read*.

To understand the need for a Serializable isolation level, let's consider an example. Suppose a group (with GroupID = 10) in a company has a fund of \$100 to be distributed among the employees in the group as a bonus. The fund balance after the bonus payment should be \$0. Consider the following test table (--serializable in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.MyEmployees') )
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.MyEmployees ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.MyEmployees
    (EmployeeID INT,
     GroupID INT,
     Salary MONEY
    ) ;
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX i1 ON dbo.MyEmployees (GroupID) ;
--Employee 1 in group 10
INSERT INTO dbo.MyEmployees
VALUES (1, 10, 1000) ;
```

```
--Employee 2 in group 10
INSERT INTO dbo.MyEmployees
VALUES (2, 10, 1000);

--Employees 3 & 4 in different groups
INSERT INTO dbo.MyEmployees
VALUES (3, 20, 1000);
INSERT INTO dbo.MyEmployees
VALUES (4, 9, 1000);
```

The preceding business functionality may be implemented as follows (–bonus in the download):

```
DECLARE @Fund MONEY = 100,
        @Bonus MONEY,
        @NumberOfEmployees INT ;

BEGIN TRAN PayBonus
SELECT @NumberOfEmployees = COUNT(*)
FROM dbo.MyEmployees
WHERE GroupID = 10;

/*Allow transaction 2 to execute*/
WAITFOR DELAY '00:00:10';
IF @NumberOfEmployees > 0
    BEGIN
        SET @Bonus = @Fund / @NumberOfEmployees ;
        UPDATE dbo.MyEmployees
        SET Salary = Salary + @Bonus
        WHERE GroupID = 10 ;
        PRINT 'Fund balance =
' + CAST((@Fund - (ROWCOUNT * @Bonus)) AS VARCHAR(6)) + ' $' ;
    END
COMMIT
```

You'll see the returned value as a fund balance of \$0 since the updates complete successfully. The PayBonus transaction works well in a single-user environment. However, in a multiuser environment, there is a problem.

Consider another transaction that adds a new employee to GroupID = 10 as follows (–new\_employee in the download) and is executed concurrently (immediately after the start of the PayBonus transaction) from a second connection:

```
BEGIN TRAN NewEmployee
INSERT INTO MyEmployees
VALUES (5, 10, 1000) ;
COMMIT
```

The fund balance after the PayBonus transaction will be -\$50! Although the new employee may like it, the group fund will be in the red. This causes an inconsistency in the logical state of the data.

To prevent this data inconsistency, the addition of the new employee to the group (or data set) under operation should be blocked. Of the five isolation levels discussed, only Snapshot isolation can provide a similar functionality, since the transaction has to be protected not only on the existing data, but also from the entry of new data in the data set. The Serializable isolation level can provide this kind of isolation by acquiring a range lock on the affected row and the next row in the order determined by the i1 index on the GroupID column. Thus, the data inconsistency of the PayBonus transaction can be prevented by setting the transaction isolation level to Serializable.

Remember to re-create the table first:

```
SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL SERIALIZABLE ;
GO
DECLARE @Fund MONEY = 100,
        @Bonus MONEY,
        @NumberOfEmployees INT ;

BEGIN TRAN PayBonus
SELECT @NumberOfEmployees = COUNT(*)
FROM   dbo.MyEmployees
WHERE  GroupID = 10 ;

/*Allow transaction 2 to execute*/
WAITFOR DELAY '00:00:10' ;
IF @NumberOfEmployees > 0
    BEGIN
        SET @Bonus = @Fund / @NumberOfEmployees ;
        UPDATE dbo.MyEmployees
        SET    Salary = Salary + @Bonus
        WHERE GroupID = 10 ;

        PRINT 'Fund balance =
' + CAST((@Fund - (ROWCOUNT * @Bonus)) AS VARCHAR(6)) + ' $' ;
    END
COMMIT
GO
--Back to default
SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL READ COMMITTED ;
GO
```

The effect of the Serializable isolation level can also be achieved at the query level by using the HOLDLOCK locking hint on the SELECT statement, as shown here:

```
DECLARE @Fund MONEY = 100,
        @Bonus MONEY,
        @NumberOfEmployees INT ;

BEGIN TRAN PayBonus
SELECT @NumberOfEmployees = COUNT(*)
FROM   dbo.MyEmployees WITH (HOLDLOCK)
WHERE  GroupID = 10 ;

/*Allow transaction 2 to execute*/
WAITFOR DELAY '00:00:10' ;

IF @NumberOfEmployees > 0
    BEGIN
        SET @Bonus = @Fund / @NumberOfEmployees
        UPDATE dbo.MyEmployees
        SET    Salary = Salary + @Bonus
        WHERE GroupID = 10 ;
```

```

PRINT 'Fund balance =
' + CAST((@Fund - (ROWCOUNT * @Bonus)) AS VARCHAR(6)) + ' $' ;
END
COMMIT

```

You can observe the range locks acquired by the PayBonus transaction by querying sys.dm\_tran\_locks from another connection while the PayBonus transaction is executing, as shown in Figure 12-6.

The output of sys.dm\_tran\_locks shows that shared-range (RangeS-S) locks are acquired on three index rows: the first employee in GroupID = 10, the second employee in GroupID = 10, and the third employee in GroupID = 20. These range locks prevent the entry of any new employee in GroupID = 10.

The range locks just shown introduce a few interesting side effects:

- No new employee with a GroupID between 10 and 20 can be added during this period. For instance, an attempt to add a new employee with a GroupID of 15 will be blocked by the PayBonus transaction:

```

BEGIN TRAN NewEmployee
INSERT INTO dbo.MyEmployees
VALUES (6, 15, 1000) ;
COMMIT

```

- If the data set of the PayBonus transaction turns out to be the last set in the existing data ordered by the index, then the range lock required on the row, after the last one in the data set, is acquired on the last possible data value in the table.
- To understand this behavior, let's delete the employees with a GroupID > 10 to make the GroupID = 10 data set the last data set in the clustered index (or table):

```

DELETE dbo.MyEmployees
WHERE GroupID > 10 ;

```

Run the updated bonus and newemployee again. Figure 12-7 shows the resultant output of sys.dm\_tran\_locks for the PayBonus transaction.

The range lock on the last possible row (KEY = ffffffff) in the clustered index, as shown in Figure 12-7, will block the addition of employees with all GroupIDs greater than or equal to 10. You know that the lock is on the last row, not because it's displayed in a visible fashion in the output of sys.dm\_tran\_locks, but

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	53	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	56	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
3	54	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
4	54	9	72057594068860928	KEY	(69c872e07e60)	RangeS-S	GRANT
5	54	9	72057594068860928	PAGE	1:23684	IS	GRANT
6	54	9	528720936	OBJECT		IS	GRANT
7	54	9	0	METADATA	\$hash = 0x78e7c021:0x3a6fd800:0xbc8bf6	Sch-S	GRANT
8	54	9	496720822	OBJECT		Sch-S	GRANT
9	54	9	72057594068860928	KEY	(fca1e333d991)	RangeS-S	GRANT
10	54	9	72057594068860928	KEY	(241332e1ddb0)	RangeS-S	GRANT

**Figure 12-6.** Output from sys.dm\_tran\_locks showing range locks granted to the serializable transaction

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	51	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	55	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
3	56	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
4	54	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
5	54	9	72057594068860928	KEY	(ffffffffffff)	RangeS-S	GRANT
6	55	9	72057594068860928	KEY	(ffffffffffff)	RangeI-N	WAIT
7	55	9	72057594068860928	PAGE	1:23684	IX	GRANT
8	54	9	72057594068860928	PAGE	1:23684	IS	GRANT
9	55	9	528720936	OBJECT		IX	GRANT
10	54	9	528720936	OBJECT		IS	GRANT
11	54	9	72057594068860928	KEY	(fca1e333d991)	RangeS-S	GRANT
12	54	9	72057594068860928	KEY	(241332e1ddb0)	RangeS-S	GRANT

**Figure 12-7.** Output from sys.dm\_tran\_locks showing extended range locks granted to the serializable transaction

because you cleaned out everything up to that row previously. For example, an attempt to add a new employee with GroupID = 999 will be blocked by the PayBonus transaction:

```
BEGIN TRAN NewEmployee
INSERT INTO dbo.MyEmployees
VALUES (7, 999, 1000) ;
COMMIT
```

Guess what will happen if the table doesn't have an index on the GroupID column (i.e., the column in the WHERE clause)? While you're thinking, I'll re-create the table with the clustered index on a different column:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.MyEmployees') )
    IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.MyEmployees ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.MyEmployees
    (EmployeeID INT,
     GroupID INT,
     Salary MONEY
    ) ;
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX i1 ON dbo.MyEmployees (EmployeeID) ;
--Employee 1 in group 10
INSERT INTO dbo.MyEmployees
VALUES (1, 10, 1000) ;

--Employee 2 in group 10
INSERT INTO dbo.MyEmployees
VALUES (2, 10, 1000) ;
--Employees 3 & 4 in different groups
INSERT INTO dbo.MyEmployees
VALUES (3, 20, 1000) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.MyEmployees
VALUES (4, 9, 1000) ;
```

Now rerun the updated bonus.sql and newemployee.sql. Figure 12-8 shows the resultant output of sys.dm\_tran\_locks for the PayBonus transaction.

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	53	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	51	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
3	55	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
4	56	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
5	54	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
6	54	9	72057594068992000	KEY	(ffffffffffff)	RangeS-S	GRANT
7	55	9	72057594068992000	KEY	(ffffffffffff)	RangeN-N	WAIT
8	55	9	72057594068992000	PAGE	1:23684	IX	GRANT
9	54	9	72057594068992000	PAGE	1:23684	IS	GRANT
10	55	9	544720993	OBJECT		IX	GRANT
11	54	9	544720993	OBJECT		IS	GRANT
12	54	9	528720936	OBJECT		Sch-S	GRANT
13	54	9	72057594068992000	KEY	(052c8c7d9727)	RangeS-S	GRANT
14	54	9	0	METADATA	Shash = (0x37c2fd14:0xfafeef90:0x42b6ac)	Sch-S	GRANT
15	54	9	72057594068992000	KEY	(9d6bf8154a2a)	RangeS-S	GRANT
16	54	9	72057594068992000	KEY	(de4279bc795)	RangeS-S	GRANT
17	54	9	72057594068992000	KEY	(1a39e6095155)	RangeS-S	GRANT

**Figure 12-8.** Output from sys.dm\_tran\_locks showing range locks granted to the serializable transaction with no index on the WHERE clause column

Once again, the range lock on the last possible row (KEY = ffffffff) in the new clustered index, as shown in Figure 12-8, will block the addition of any new row to the table. I will discuss the reason behind this extensive locking later in the chapter in the “Effect of Indexes on the Serializable Isolation Level” section.

As you’ve seen, the Serializable isolation level not only holds the share locks until the end of the transaction like the Repeatable Read isolation level, but it also prevents any new row from appearing in the data set by holding range locks. Because this increased blocking can hurt database concurrency, you should avoid the Serializable isolation level. If you have to use Serializable, then be sure that you have good indexes and queries in place to optimize performance in order to minimize the size and length of your transactions.

## Snapshot

Snapshot isolation is the second of the row-versioning isolation levels available in SQL Server 2012. Unlike Read Committed Snapshot isolation, Snapshot isolation requires an explicit call to SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL at the start of the transaction. It also requires setting the isolation level on the database. Snapshot isolation is meant as a more stringent isolation level than the Read Committed Snapshot isolation. Snapshot isolation will attempt to put an exclusive lock on the data it intends to modify. If that data already has a lock on it, the snapshot transaction will fail. It provides transaction-level read consistency, which makes it more applicable to financial-type systems than Read Committed Snapshot.

## Effect of Indexes on Locking

Indexes affect the locking behavior on a table. On a table with no indexes, the lock granularities are RID, PAG (on the page containing the RID), and TAB. Adding indexes to the table affects the resources to be locked. For example, consider the following test table with no indexes (--indexlocktest in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1'))
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
```

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	51	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	54	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
3	56	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
4	54	9	72057594069123072	RID	1:23686:0	X	GRANT
5	54	9	72057594069123072	PAGE	1:23686	IX	GRANT
6	54	9	576721107	OBJECT		IX	GRANT

**Figure 12-9.** Output from sys.dm\_tran\_locks showing the locks granted on a table with no index

```
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT, C2 DATETIME) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
VALUES (1, GETDATE()) ;
```

Next, observe the locking behavior on the table for the transaction (--indexlock in the download):

```
BEGIN TRAN LockBehavior
UPDATE dbo.Test1 WITH (REPEATABLEREAD) --Hold all acquired locks
SET C2 = GETDATE()
WHERE C1 = 1 ;
--Observe lock behavior from another connection
WAITFOR DELAY '00:00:10' ;
COMMIT
```

Figure 12-9 shows the output of sys.dm\_tran\_locks applicable to the test table. The following locks are acquired by the transaction:

- An (IX) lock on the table
- An (IX) lock on the page containing the data row
- An (X) lock on the data row within the table

When the resource\_type is an object, the resource\_associated\_entity\_id column value in sys.dm\_tran\_locks indicates the objectid of the object on which the lock is placed. You can obtain the specific object name on which the lock is acquired from the sys.object system table, as follows:

```
SELECT OBJECT_NAME(<object_id>);
```

The effect of the index on the locking behavior of the table varies with the type of index on the WHERE clause column. The difference arises from the fact that the leaf pages of the nonclustered and clustered indexes have a different relationship with the data pages of the table. Let's look into the effect of these indexes on the locking behavior of the table.

## Effect of a Nonclustered Index

Because the leaf pages of the nonclustered index are separate from the data pages of the table, the resources associated with the nonclustered index are also protected from corruption. SQL Server automatically ensures this. To see this in action, create a nonclustered index on the test table:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX iTest ON dbo.Test1(C1) ;
```

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	53	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	54	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
3	56	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
4	54	9	72057594069123072	RID	1:23686:0	X	GRANT
5	54	9	72057594069188608	PAGE	1:23692	IU	GRANT
6	54	9	72057594069123072	PAGE	1:23686	IX	GRANT
7	54	9	576721107	OBJECT		IX	GRANT
8	54	9	72057594069188608	KEY	(0252ca446ce3)	U	GRANT

**Figure 12-10.** Output from sys.dm\_tran\_locks showing the effect of a nonclustered index on locking behavior

On running the LockBehavior transaction (indexlock) again and querying sys.dm\_tranlocks from a separate connection, you get the result shown in Figure 12-10.

The following locks are acquired by the transaction:

- An (IU) lock on the page containing the nonclustered index row, (IndId = 2)
- A (U) lock on the nonclustered index row within the index page, (IndId = 2)
- An (IX) lock on the table, (IndId = 0)
- An (IX) lock on the page containing the data row, (IndId = 0)
- An (X) lock on the data row within the data page, (IndId = 0)

Note that only the row-level and page-level locks are directly associated with the non-clustered index. The next higher level of lock granularity for the nonclustered index is the table-level lock on the corresponding table.

Thus, nonclustered indexes introduce an additional locking overhead on the table. You can avoid the locking overhead on the index by using the ALLOW\_ROW\_LOCKS and ALLOW\_PAGE\_LOCKS options in ALTER INDEX. Understand though, this is a tradeoff that could involve a loss of performance and requires careful testing to ensure it doesn't negatively impact your system (indexoption in the download):

```

ALTER INDEX iTest ON dbo.Test1
    SET (ALLOW_ROW_LOCKS = OFF ,ALLOW_PAGE_LOCKS= OFF) ;

BEGIN TRAN LockBehavior
UPDATE  dbo.Test1 WITH (REPEATABLEREAD) --Hold all acquired locks
SET      C2 = GETDATE()
WHERE    C1 = 1 ;

--Observe lock behavior using sys.dm_tran_locks
--from another connection

WAITFOR DELAY '00:00:10' ;
COMMIT

ALTER INDEX iTest ON dbo.Test1
    SET (ALLOW_ROW_LOCKS = ON ,ALLOW_PAGE_LOCKS= ON) ;

```

You can use these options when working with an index to enable/disable the KEY locks and PAG locks on the index. Disabling just the KEY lock causes the lowest lock granularity on the index to be the PAG lock. Configuring lock granularity on the index remains effective until it is reconfigured.

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	55	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	51	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
3	53	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
4	54	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
5	56	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
6	54	9	0	METADATA	\$hash = 0x2a71cb7c:0xa9ae7cb1:0x570526	Sch-S	GRANT
7	54	9	576721107	OBJECT		X	GRANT
8	54	9	0	METADATA	\$hash = 0xc9992084:0x96fa331:0xd89cc7	Sch-S	GRANT

**Figure 12-11.** Output from sys.dm\_tran\_locks showing the effect of sp\_indexoption on lock granularity

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
1	55	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
2	51	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
3	53	5	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
4	54	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
5	56	9	0	DATABASE		S	GRANT
6	54	9	0	METADATA	\$hash = 0xb245ee51:0x1f332632:0xba301b (de42f79bc795)	Sch-S	GRANT
7	54	9	72057594069254144	KEY		X	GRANT
8	54	9	0	METADATA	\$hash = 0x2a71cb7c:0xa9ae7cb1:0x570526	Sch-S	GRANT
9	54	9	72057594069254144	PAGE	1:23849	IX	GRANT
10	54	9	576721107	OBJECT		IX	GRANT

**Figure 12-12.** Output from sys.dm\_tran\_locks showing the effect of a clustered index on locking behavior

**Note** Modifying locks like this should be a last resort after many other options have been tried. This could cause significant locking overhead that would seriously impact the performance of the system.

Figure 12-11 displays the output of sys.dm\_tran\_locks executed from a separate connection.

The only lock acquired by the transaction on the test table is an (X) lock on the table (IndId = 0).

You can see from the new locking behavior that disabling the KEY lock escalates lock granularity to the table level. This will block every concurrent access to the table or to the indexes on the table; consequently, it can seriously hurt the database concurrency. However, if a nonclustered index becomes a point of contention in a blocking scenario, then it may be beneficial to disable the PAG locks on the index, thereby allowing only KEY locks on the index.

**Note** Using this option can have serious side effects. You should use it only as a last resort.

## Effect of a Clustered Index

Since for a clustered index the leaf pages of the index and the data pages of the table are the same, the clustered index can be used to avoid the overhead of locking additional pages (leaf pages) and rows introduced by a nonclustered index. To understand the locking overhead associated with a clustered index, convert the preceding nonclustered index to a clustered index:

```
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX iTest ON dbo.Test1(C1) WITH DROP_EXISTING ;
```

If you run indexlock.sql again and query sys.dm\_tran\_locks in a different connection, you should see the resultant output for the LockBehavior transaction on t1 shown in Figure 12-12.

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
4	54	9	544720993	OBJECT		S	GRANT

**Figure 12-13.** Output from sys.dm\_tran\_locks showing the locks granted to a SELECT statement with no index on the WHERE clause column

The following locks are acquired by the transaction:

- An (IX) lock on the table, (IndId = 0)
- An (IX) lock on the page containing the clustered index row (IndId = 1)
- An (X) lock on the clustered index row within the table or clustered index(IndId = 1)

The locks on the clustered index row and the leaf page are actually the locks on the data row and data page, too, since the data pages and the leaf pages are the same. Thus, the clustered index reduced the locking overhead on the table compared to the nonclustered index.

Reduced locking overhead of a clustered index is another benefit of using a clustered index over a nonclustered index.

## Effect of Indexes on the Serializable Isolation Level

Indexes play a significant role in determining the amount of blocking caused by the Serializable isolation level. The availability of an index on the WHERE clause column (that causes the data set to be locked) allows SQL Server to determine the order of the rows to be locked. For instance, consider the example used in the section on the Serializable isolation level. The SELECT statement uses a GroupID filter column to form its data set, like so:

```
DECLARE @NumberOfEmployees INT;
SELECT @NumberOfEmployees = COUNT(*)
FROM dbo.MyEmployees WITH (HOLDLOCK)
WHERE GroupID = 10;
```

A clustered index is available on the GroupID column, allowing SQL Server to acquire a (RangeS-S) lock on the row to be accessed and the next row in the correct order.

If the index on the GroupID column is removed, then SQL Server cannot determine the rows on which the range locks should be acquired, since the order of the rows is no longer guaranteed. Consequently, the SELECT statement acquires an (IS) lock at the table level instead of acquiring lower-granularity locks at the row level, as shown in Figure 12-13.

By failing to have an index on the filter column, you significantly increase the degree of blocking caused by the Serializable isolation level. This is another good reason to have an index on the WHERE clause columns.

## Capturing Blocking Information

Although blocking is necessary to isolate a transaction from other concurrent transactions, sometimes it may rise to excessive levels, adversely affecting database concurrency. In the simplest blocking scenario, the lock acquired by a session on a resource blocks another session requesting an incompatible lock on the resource. To improve concurrency, it is important to analyze the cause of blocking and apply the appropriate resolution.

In a blocking scenario, you need the following information to have a clear understanding of the cause of the blocking:

- *The connection information of the blocking and blocked sessions:* You can obtain this information from the sys.dm\_os\_waiting\_tasks dynamic management view or the sp\_who2 system stored procedure.
- *The lock information of the blocking and blocked sessions:* You can obtain this information from the sys.dm\_tran\_locks DMO.
- *The SQL statements last executed by the blocking and blocked sessions:* You can use the sys.dm\_exec\_requests DMV combined with sys.dm\_exec\_sql\_text and sys.dm\_exec\_queryplan or Extended Events to obtain this information.

You can also obtain the following information from the SQL Server Management Studio by running the Activity Monitor. The Processes page provides connection information of all SPIDs. This shows blocked SPIDs, the process blocking them, and the head of any blocking chain with details on how long the process has been running, its SPID, and other information. It is possible to put Extended Events to work using the blocking report to gather a lot of the same information. For immediate checks on locking, use the DMOs; but for extended monitoring and historical tracking, you'll want to use the Extended Events. You can find more on this in the "Extended Events and the blocked\_process\_report Event" section.

To provide more power and flexibility to the process of collecting blocking information, a SQL Server administrator can use SQL scripts to provide the relevant information listed here.

## Capturing Blocking Information with SQL

To arrive at enough information about blocked and blocking processes, you can bring several dynamic management views into play. This query will show information necessary to identify blocked processes based on those that are waiting. You can easily add filtering to only access processes blocked for a certain period of time or only within certain databases, among other options(--blocker):

```

SELECT dtl.request_session_id AS WaitingSessionID,
       der.blocking_session_id AS BlockingSessionID,
       dowt.resource_description,
       der.wait_type,
       dowt.wait_duration_ms,
       DB_NAME(dtl.resource_database_id) AS DatabaseName,
       dtl.resource_associated_entity_id AS WaitingAssociatedEntity,
       dtl.resource_type AS WaitingResourceType,
       dtl.request_type AS WaitingRequestType,
       dest.[text] AS WaitingTsql,
       dtlbl.request_type BlockingRequestType,
       destbl.[text] AS BlockingTsql
  FROM sys.dm_tran_locks AS dtl
  JOIN sys.dm_os_waiting_tasks AS dowt
    ON dtl.lock_owner_address = dowt.resource_address
  JOIN sys.dm_exec_requests AS der
    ON der.session_id = dtl.request_session_id
 CROSS APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(der.sql_handle) AS dest
 LEFT JOIN sys.dm_exec_requests derbl
    ON derbl.session_id = dowt.blocking_session_id
 OUTER APPLY sys.dm_exec_sql_text(derbl.sql_handle) AS destbl

```

```
LEFT JOIN sys.dm_tran_locks AS dtlbl
      ON derbl.session_id = dtlbl.request_session_id ;
```

To understand how to analyze a blocking scenario and the relevant information provided by the blocker script, consider the following example (--blockit in the download). First, create a test table:

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.BlockTest')
 ) IS NOT NULL
DROP TABLE dbo.BlockTest ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.BlockTest
(C1 INT,
 C2 INT,
 C3 DATETIME
) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.BlockTest
VALUES (11, 12, GETDATE()),
(21, 22, GETDATE()) ;
```

Now open three connections and run the following two queries concurrently. Once you run them, use the blocker script in the third connection. Execute the code in Listing 12-1 first.

***Listing 12-1.*** Connection 1

```
BEGIN TRAN User1
UPDATE dbo.BlockTest
SET C3 = GETDATE() ;
```

Next, execute Listing 12-2 while the User1 transaction is executing.

***Listing 12-2.*** Connection 2

```
BEGIN TRAN User2
SELECT C2
FROM dbo.BlockTest
WHERE C1 = 11 ;
COMMIT
```

This creates a simple blocking scenario where the User1 transaction blocks the User2 transaction.

The output of the blocker script provides information immediately useful to begin resolving blocking issues. First, you can identify the specific session information, including the session ID of both the blocking and waiting sessions. You get an immediate resource description from the waiting resource, the wait type, and the length of time in milliseconds that the process has been waiting. It's that value that allows you to provide a filter to eliminate short-term blocks, which are part of normal processing.

The database name is supplied because blocking can occur anywhere in the system, not just in AdventureWorks2008R2. You'll want to identify it where it occurs. The resources and types from the basic locking information are retrieved for the waiting process.

The blocking request type is displayed, and both the waiting T-SQL and blocking T-SQL, if available, are displayed. Once you have the object where the block is occurring, having the T-SQL so that you can understand exactly where and how the process is either blocking or being blocked is a vital part of the process of eliminating or reducing the amount of blocking. All this information is available from one simple query. Figure 12-14 shows the sample output from the earlier blocked process.

Be sure to go back to Connection 1 and commit or roll back the transaction.

WaitingSessionID	BlockingSessionID	resource_description	res_type	res_duration_ms	DatabaseName	WaitingAssociateSession	WaitingResourceType	WaitingTSQL	BlockingRequestType	BlockingTSQL	BlockingText
1	60	keylock held by 72057594029363728 due to block..	LOCK_M_N	570115	Null	72057594029363729	KEY	LOCK	BEGIN TRAN UPDATE t_lock SET x=10	NULL	

Figure 12-14. Output from the blocker script

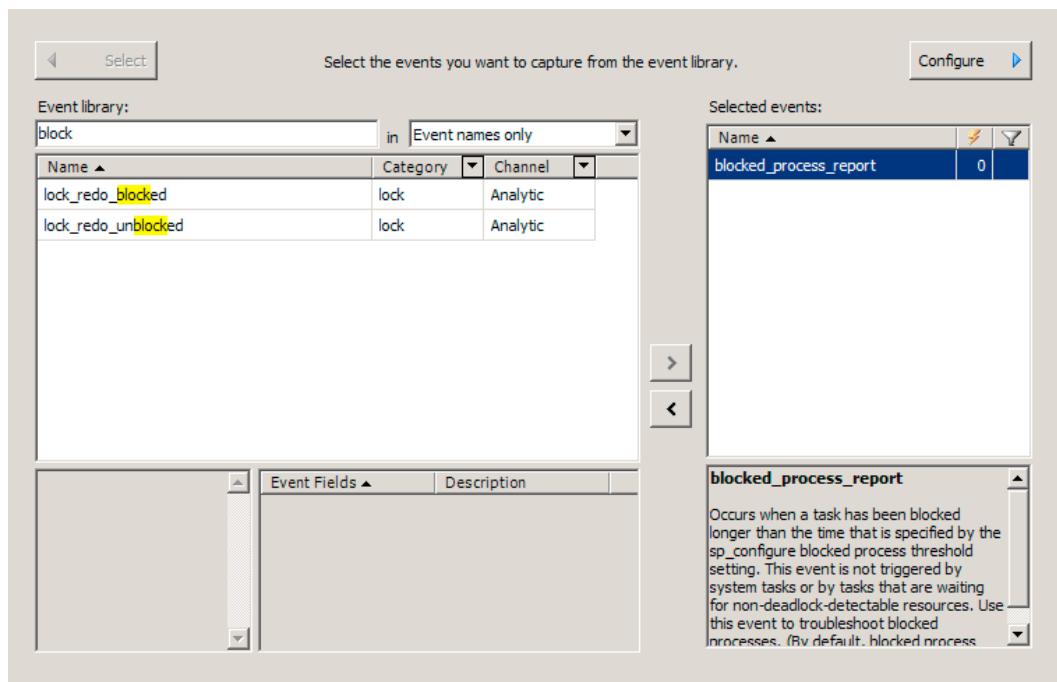


Figure 12-15. The blocked process report event selected in the Extended Event window

## Extended Events and the blocked\_process\_report Event

Extended Events provide an event called `blocked_process_report`. This event works off the blocked process threshold that you need to provide to the system configuration. This script sets the threshold to five seconds:

```
EXEC sp_configure
    'blocked process threshold',
    5 ;
RECONFIGURE ;
```

That would normally be a very low value in most systems. If you have an established performance service-level agreement (SLA), you could use that as the threshold. Once the value is set, you can configure alerts so that emails, tweets, or instant messages are sent if any process is blocked longer than the value you set. It also acts as a trigger for the extended event.

To set up a session that captures the `blocked_process_report`, first open the Extended Event session properties window. (Although you should use scripts to set up this event in a production environment, I'll show how to use the GUI.) Provide the session with a name then navigate to the Events page. You can type "block" into the Event library text box. That will find the `blocked_process_report` event. Select that event by clicking the right arrow. You should see something similar to Figure 12-15.

Field	Value
blocked_process	<blocked-process-report> <blocked-process> <process id="pr..."
database_id	9
database_name	AdventureWorks2008R2
duration	7934000
index_id	0
lock_mode	S
object_id	0
resource_owner_type	LOCK
transaction_id	3018489

**Figure 12-16.** Output from the blocked process report event

The event fields are all pre-selected for you. If you still have the queries running from the previous section that created the block, all you need to do now is click the Run button to capture the event. Otherwise, go back to Listings 12-1 and 12-2 and run them in two different connections. After the blocked process threshold is passed, you'll see the event fire. And fire. It will fire every five seconds if that's how you've configured it, and you're leaving the connections running from Listings 12-1 and 12-2. The output in the Live Data stream looks like Figure 12-16.

Some of the information is self-explanatory; but to get into the details, you need to look at the XML generated in the blocked process field:

```

COMMIT
</inputbuf>
</process>
</blocked-process>
<blocking-process>
<process status="sleeping" spid="54" sbid="0" ecid="0" priority="0" trancount="1"
lastbatchstarted="2012-01-15T11:22:13.017" lastbatchcompleted="2012-01-15T11:22:13.017"
lastattention="2012-01-15T10:29:22.713" clientapp="Microsoft SQL Server Management
Studio - Query" hostname="DOJO" hostpid="2376" loginname="NEVERNEVER\grant"
isolationlevel="read committed (2)" xactid="3018448" currentdb="9" lockTimeout="4294967295"
clientoption1="671098976" clientoption2="390200">
<executionStack />
<inputbuf>
DECLARE @edition sysname; SET @edition = cast(SERVERPROPERTY(N'EDITION') as sysname); select
case when @edition = N'SQL Azure' then 2 else 1 end as 'DatabaseEngineType' </inputbuf>
</process>
</blocking-process>
</blocked-process-report>

```

The elements are clear if you look through this XML. `<blocked-process>` shows information about the process that was blocked, including familiar information such as the session id (labeled with the old fashioned SPID here), the database ID, and so on. You can see the query in the `<inputbuf>` element. Details like the `lockMode` are available within the `<process>` element. Note that the XML doesn't include some of the other information that you can easily get from T-SQL queries, such as the query string of the blocked and waiting process. But with the SPID available, you can get them from the cache, if available, or you can combine the Blocked Process report with other events such as `rpc_starting` to show the query information. However, doing so will add to the overhead of using those events long term within your database. If you know you have a blocking problem, this can be part of a short-term monitoring project to capture the necessary blocking information.

## Blocking Resolutions

Once you've analyzed the cause of a block, the next step is to determine any possible resolutions. Here are a few techniques you can use to do this:

- Optimize the queries executed by blocking and blocked SPIDs.
- Decrease the isolation level.
- Partition the contended data.
- Use a covering index on the contended data.

**Note** A detailed list of recommendations to avoid blocking appears later in the chapter in the "Recommendations to Reduce Blocking" section.

To understand these resolution techniques, let's apply them in turn to the preceding blocking scenario.

## Optimize the Queries

Optimizing the queries executed by the blocking and blocked processes helps reduce the blocking duration. In the blocking scenario, the queries executed by the processes participating in the blocking are as follows:

- Blocking process:

```
BEGIN TRAN User1
UPDATE dbo.BlockTest
SET C3 = GETDATE() ;
```

- Blocked process:

```
BEGIN TRAN User2
SELECT C2
FROM dbo.BlockTest
WHERE C1 = 11 ;
COMMIT
```

Next, let's analyze the individual SQL statements executed by the blocking and blocked SPIDs to optimize their performance:

- The UPDATE statement of the blocking SPID accesses the data without a WHERE clause. This makes the query inherently costly on a large table. If possible, break the action of the UPDATE statement into multiple batches using appropriate WHERE clauses. Remember to try to use set-based operations such as a TOP statement to limit the rows. If the individual UPDATE statements of the batch are executed in separate transactions, then fewer locks will be held on the resource within one transaction, and for shorter time periods.
- The SELECT statement executed by the blocked SPID has a WHERE clause on the c1 column. From the index structure on the test table, you can see that there is no index on this column. To optimize the SELECT statement, you could create a clustered index on the c1 column:

```
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX i1 ON dbo.BlockTest(c1) ;
```

**Note** Since the example table fits with in one page, adding the clustered index won't make much difference to the query performance. However, as the number of rows in the table increases, the beneficial effect of the index will become more pronounced.

Optimizing the queries reduces the duration for which the locks are held by the processes. The query optimization reduces the impact of blocking, but it doesn't prevent the blocking completely. However, as long as the optimized queries execute within acceptable performance limits, a small amount of blocking may be ignored.

## Decrease the Isolation Level

Another approach to resolve blocking can be to use a lower isolation level, if possible. The SELECT statement of the User2 transaction gets blocked while requesting an (S) lock on the data row. The isolation level of this

transaction can be decreased to Read Uncommitted, so that the (S) lock is not requested by the SELECT statement. The Read Uncommitted isolation level can be configured for the connection using the SET statement:

```
SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL READ UNCOMMITTED ;
GO
BEGIN TRAN User2
SELECT C2
FROM dbo.BlockTest
WHERE C1 = 11 ;
COMMIT
GO
--Back to default GO
SET TRANSACTION ISOLATION LEVEL READ COMMITTED ;
```

The Read Uncommitted isolation level can also be configured for the SELECT statement at a query level by using the NOLOCK locking hint:

```
BEGIN TRAN User2
SELECT C2
FROM dbo.BlockTest WITH (NOLOCK)
WHERE C1 = 11 ;
COMMIT
```

The Read Uncommitted isolation level avoids the blocking faced by the User2 transaction.

This example shows the utility of reducing the isolation level. However, as a production solution, this has severe problems. Not only can you get *dirty reads*, which means that the data returned by the select statement is changing or changed, but you can get inconsistent reads. It's possible while reading uncommitted data to get extra rows or fewer rows as pages are split and rearranged by the actions of other queries. Reading uncommitted data is a very popular way to reduce contention and increase performance on the database, but it comes at a very high cost in terms of data accuracy. Be very aware of these costs prior to attempting to use this as an active solution within your database.

## Partition the Contended Data

When dealing with very large data sets or data that can be very discretely stored, it is possible to apply table partitioning to the data. Partitioned data is split horizontally; that is, by certain values (e.g., splitting sales data up by month). This allows the transactions to execute concurrently on the individual partitions, without blocking each other. These separate partitions are treated as a single unit for querying, updating, and inserting; only the storage and access are separated out by SQL Server. It should be noted that partitioning is available only in the Developer Edition and Enterprise Edition of SQL Server.

In the preceding blocking scenario, the data could be separated by date. This would entail setting up multiple filegroups and splitting the data per a defined rule. Once the UPDATE statement gets a WHERE clause, then it and the original SELECT statement will be able to execute concurrently on two separate partitions.

**Note** Partitioning the table does add some overhead to maintaining integrity between the parts of the table. However, if done properly, it can improve both performance and concurrency on very large data sets.

In a blocking scenario, you should analyze whether the query of the blocking or the blocked process can be fully satisfied using a covering index. If the query of one of the processes can be satisfied using a covering index, then it will prevent the process from requesting locks on the contended resource. Also, if the other process doesn't need a lock on the covering index (to maintain data integrity), then both processes will be able to execute concurrently without blocking each other.

For instance, in the preceding blocking scenario, the SELECT statement by the blocked process can be fully satisfied by a covering index on the c1 and c2 columns:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX iAvoidBlocking ON dbo.BlockTest(c1, c2) ;
```

The transaction of the blocking process need not acquire a lock on the covering index since it accesses only the c3 column of the table. The covering index will allow the SELECT statement to get the values for the c1 and c2 columns without accessing the base table. Thus, the SELECT statement of the blocked process can acquire an (S) lock on the covering-index row without being blocked by the (X) lock on the data row acquired by the blocking process. This allows both transactions to execute concurrently without any blocking.

Consider a covering index as a mechanism to “duplicate” part of the table data in which consistency is automatically maintained by SQL Server. This covering index, if mostly read-only, can allow some transactions to be served from the “duplicate” data while the base table (and other indexes) can continue to serve other transactions.

## Recommendations to Reduce Blocking

Single-user performance and the ability to scale with multiple users are both important for a database application. In a multiuser environment, it is important to ensure that the database operations don't hold database resources for a long time. This allows the database to support a large number of operations (or database users) concurrently without serious performance degradation. The following is a list of tips to reduce/avoid database blocking:

- Keep transactions short:
  - Perform the minimum steps/logic within a transaction.
  - Do not perform costly external activity within a transaction, such as sending acknowledgment email or performing activities driven by the end user.
- Optimize queries using indexes:
  - Create indexes as required to ensure optimal performance of the queries within the system.
  - Avoid a clustered index on frequently updated columns. Updates to clustered index key columns require locks on the clustered index and all nonclustered indexes (since their row locator contains the clustered index key).
  - Consider using a covering index to serve the blocked SELECT statements.
- Consider partitioning a contended table.
- Use query timeouts or a resource governor to control runaway queries.
- Avoid losing control over the scope of the transactions because of poor error-handling routines or application logic:
  - Use SET XACTABORT ON to avoid a transaction being left open on an error condition within the transaction.

- Execute the following SQL statement from a client error handler (TRY/CATCH) after executing a SQL batch or stored procedure containing a transaction:

```
IF @@TRANCOUNT > 0 ROLLBACK
```

- Use the lowest isolation level required:
  - Use the default isolation level (Read Committed).
  - Consider using row versioning to help reduce contention.

## Automation to Detect and Collect Blocking Information

In addition to capturing information using extended events, you can automate the process of detecting a blocking condition and collecting the relevant information using SQL Server Agent. SQL Server provides the Performance Monitor counters shown in Table 12-1 to track the amount of wait time.

You can create a combination of SQL Server alerts and jobs to automate the following process:

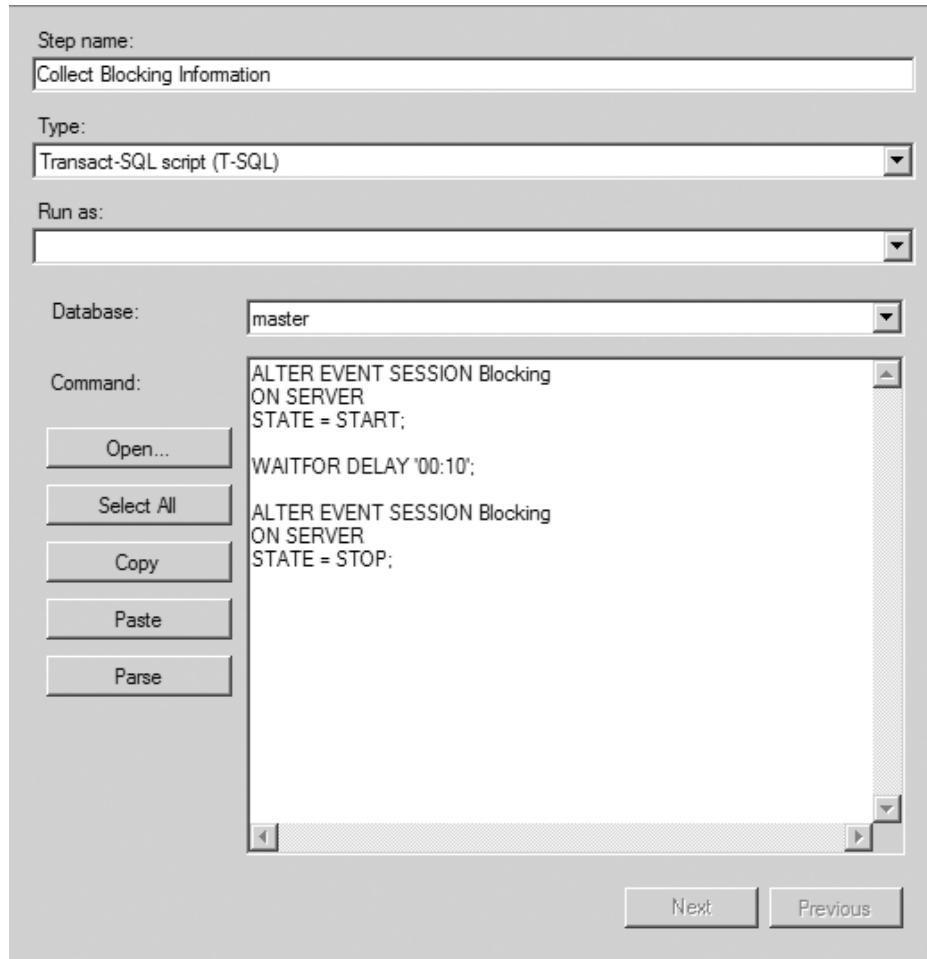
- Determine when the average amount of wait time exceeds an acceptable amount of blocking using the Average Wait Time (ms) counter. Based on your preferences, you can use the Lock Wait Time (ms) counter instead.
- Once you've established the minimum wait, set Blocked Process Threshold. When the average wait time exceeds the limit, notify the SQL Server DBA of the blocking situation through e-mail.
- Automatically collect the blocking information using the blocker script or a trace that relies on the Blocked Process report for a certain period of time.

To set up the Blocked Process report to run automatically, first create the SQL Server job, called Blocking Analysis, so that it can be used by the SQL Server alert you'll create later. You can create this SQL Server job from SQL Server Management Studio to collect blocking information by following these steps:

- Generate an extended events script (as detailed in Chapter 3) using the blocked\_process\_report event.
- Run the script to create the session on the server, but don't start it yet.
- In Management Studio, expand the server by selecting <ServerName> ► SQL Server Agent ► Jobs. Finally, right-click and select New Job.
- On the General page of the New Job dialog box, enter the job name and other details.
- On the Steps page, click New and enter the command to start and stop the session through T-SQL, as shown in Figure 12-17.

**Table 12-1.** Performance Monitor Counters

Object	Counter	Instance	Description
SQLServer:Locks (For SQL Server named instance MSSQL\$<InstanceName>:Locks)	Average Wait Time(ms)	_Total	The average amount of wait time for each lock that resulted in a wait
	Lock Wait Time (ms)	_Total	Total wait time for locks in the last second



**Figure 12-17.** Entering the command to run the blocker script

You can do this using the following command:

```
ALTER EVENT SESSION Blocking  
ON SERVER  
STATE = START;  
  
WAITFOR DELAY '00:10';  
  
ALTER EVENT SESSION Blocking  
ON SERVER  
STATE = STOP;
```

The output of the session is determined by how you defined it when you created it.

6. Return to the New Job dialog box by clicking OK.

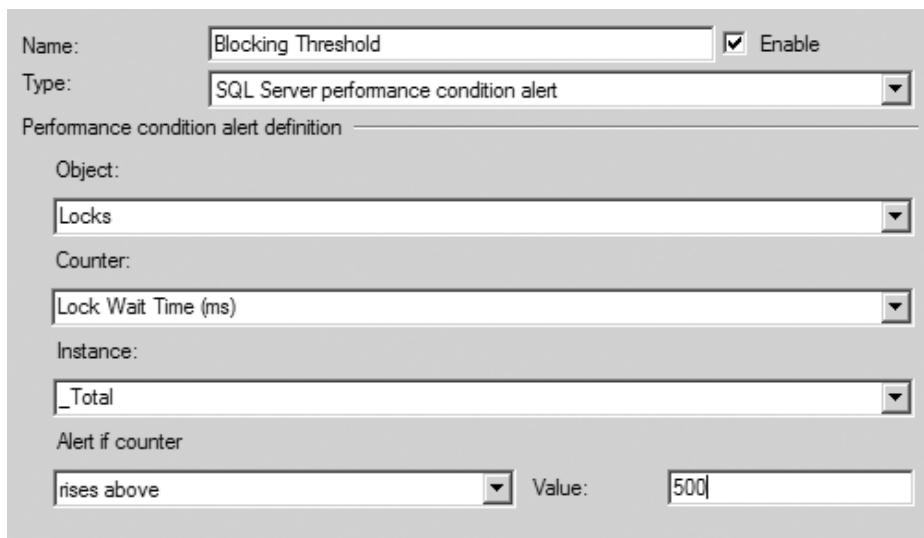
- Click OK to create the SQL Server job. The SQL Server job will be created with an enabled and runnable state to collect blocking information for ten minutes using the trace script.

You can create a SQL Server alert to automate the following tasks:

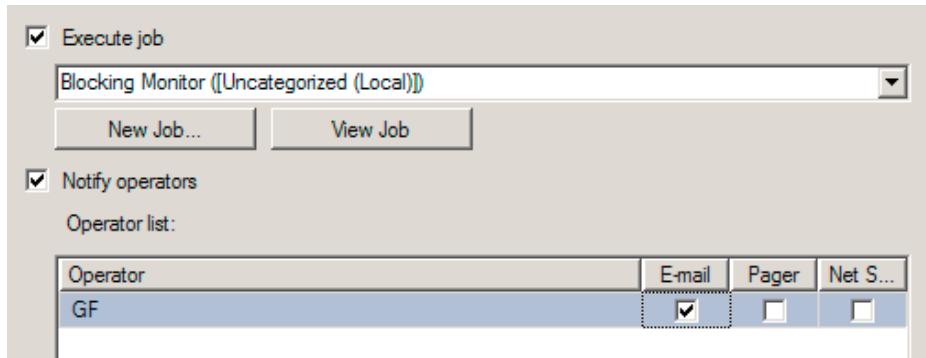
- Inform the DBA via email, SMS text, or pager.
- Execute the Blocking Analysis job to collect blocking information for ten minutes.

You can create the SQL Server alert from SQL Server Enterprise Manager by following these steps:

- In Management Studio, while still in the SQL Agent area of the Object Explorer, right-click Alerts and select New Alert.
- On the General page of the new alert's Properties dialog box, enter the alert name and other details, as shown in Figure 12-18. The specific object you need to capture information from for your instance is Locks (MSSQL\$GF2008:Locks in Figure 12-18). I chose 500ms as an example of a stringent SLA that wants to know when queries extend beyond that value.
- On the Response page, define the response you think appropriate, such as alerting an operator.
- Return to the new alert's Properties dialog box by clicking OK.
- On the Response page, enter the remaining information shown in Figure 12-19.
- The Blocking Analysis job is selected to automatically collect the blocking information.



**Figure 12-18.** Entering the alert name and other details



**Figure 12-19.** Entering the actions to be performed when the alert is triggered

7. Once you've finished entering all the information, click OK to create the SQL Server alert. The SQL Server alert will be created in the enabled state to perform the intended tasks.
8. Ensure that the SQL Server Agent is running.

Together, the SQL Server alert and the job will automate the blocking detection and the information-collection process. This automatic collection of the blocking information will ensure that a good amount of the blocking information will be available whenever the system gets into a massive blocking state.

## Summary

Even though blocking is inevitable and is in fact essential to maintain isolation among transactions, it can sometimes adversely affect database concurrency. In a multiuser database application, you must minimize blocking among concurrent transactions.

SQL Server provides different techniques to avoid/reduce blocking, and a database application should take advantage of these techniques to scale linearly as the number of database users increases. When an application faces a high degree of blocking, you can collect the relevant blocking information using various tools to understand the root cause of the blocking. The next step is to use an appropriate technique to either avoid or reduce blocking.

Blocking can not only hurt concurrency, but lead to an abrupt termination of a database request in the case of mutual blocking between processes or even within a process. We will cover this event, known as *a deadlock*, in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 13



# Deadlock Analysis

When a deadlock occurs between two or more transactions, SQL Server allows one transaction to complete and terminates the other transaction. SQL Server then returns an error to the corresponding application, notifying the user that he has been chosen as a deadlock victim. This leaves the application with only two options: resubmit the transaction or apologize to the end user. To successfully complete a transaction and avoid the apologies, it is important to understand what might cause a deadlock and the ways to handle a deadlock.

In this chapter, I cover the following topics:

- Deadlock fundamentals
- Error handling to catch a deadlock
- Ways to analyze the cause of a deadlock
- Techniques to resolve a deadlock

## Deadlock Fundamentals

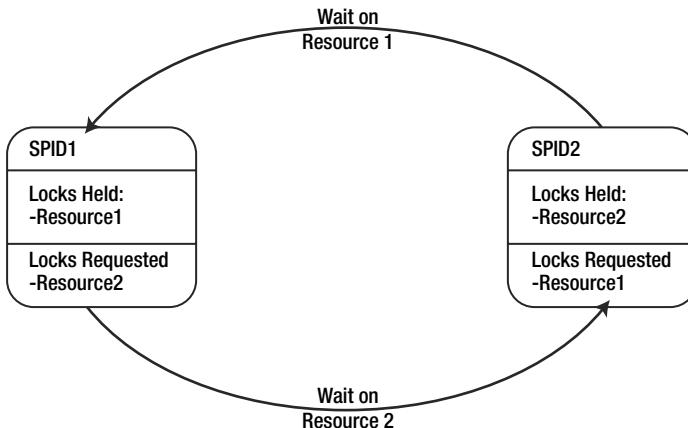
A *deadlock* is a special blocking scenario in which two processes get blocked by each other. Each process, while holding its own resources, attempts to access a resource that is locked by the other process. This will lead to a blocking scenario known as a *deadly embrace*, as illustrated in Figure 13-1.

Deadlocks also frequently occur when two processes attempt to escalate their locking mechanisms on the same resource. In this case, each of the two processes has a shared lock on a resource, such as an RID, and each attempts to promote the lock from shared to exclusive; however, neither can do so until the other releases its shared lock. This too leads to one of the processes being chosen as a deadlock victim.

Finally, it is possible for a single process to get a deadlock during parallel operations. During parallel operations, it's possible for a thread to be holding a lock on one resource, A, while waiting for another resource, B; at the same time, another thread can have a lock on B while waiting for A. This is as much a deadlock situation as when multiple processes are involved.

Deadlocks are an especially nasty type of blocking because a deadlock cannot resolve on its own, even if given an unlimited period of time. A deadlock requires an external process to break the circular blocking.

SQL Server has a deadlock detection routine, called a *lock monitor*, that regularly checks for the presence of deadlocks in SQL Server. Once a deadlock condition is detected, SQL Server selects one of the sessions participating in the deadlock as a *victim* to break the circular blocking. The victim is usually the process with the lowest estimated cost since this implies that process will be the easiest one for SQL Server to roll back. This operation involves withdrawing all the resources held by the victim session. SQL Server does so by rolling back the uncommitted transaction of the session picked as a victim.



**Figure 13-1.** A deadlock scenario

## Choosing the Deadlock Victim

SQL Server determines the session to be a deadlock victim by evaluating the cost of undoing the transaction of the participating sessions, and it selects the one with the least cost. You can exercise some control over the session to be chosen as a victim by setting the deadlock priority of its connection to LOW:

```
SET DEADLOCK_PRIORITY LOW;
```

This steers SQL Server toward choosing this particular session as a victim in the event of a deadlock. You can reset the deadlock priority of the connection to its normal value by executing the following SET statement:

```
SET DEADLOCK_PRIORITY NORMAL;
```

The SET statement allows you to mark a session as a HIGH deadlock priority, too. This won't prevent deadlocks on a given session, but it will reduce the likelihood of a given session being picked as the victim. You can even set the priority level to a number value from -10 for the lowest priority to 10 for the highest.

In the event of a tie, one of the processes is chosen as a victim and rolled back as if it had the least cost. Some processes are invulnerable to being picked as a deadlock victim. These processes are marked as such and will never be chosen as a deadlock victim. The most common example that I've seen occurs when processes are already involved in a rollback.

## Using Error Handling to Catch a Deadlock

When SQL Server chooses a session as a victim, it raises an error with the error number. You can use the TRY/CATCH construct within T-SQL to handle the error. SQL Server ensures the consistency of the database by automatically rolling back the transaction of the victim session. The rollback ensures that the session is back to the same state it was in before the start of its transaction. On determining a deadlock situation in the error handler, it is possible to attempt to restart the transaction within T-SQL a number of times before returning the error to the application.

Take the following T-SQL statement as an example of one method for handling a deadlock error  
 (--trap\_sample in the download):

```

DECLARE @retry AS TINYINT = 1,
        @retrymax AS TINYINT = 2,
        @retrycount AS TINYINT = 0 ;
WHILE @retry = 1
    AND @retrycount <= @retrymax
    BEGIN
        SET @retry = 0 ;
        BEGIN TRY
            UPDATE HumanResources.Employee
            SET     LoginID = '54321'
            WHERE  BusinessEntityID = 100 ;
        END TRY
        BEGIN CATCH
            IF (ERROR_NUMBER() = 1205)
                BEGIN
                    SET @retrycount = @retrycount + 1 ;
                    SET @retry = 1 ;
                END
        END CATCH
    END
  
```

The TRY/CATCH methodology allows you to capture errors. You can then check the error number using the ERRORNUMBER() function to determine whether you have a deadlock. Once a deadlock is established, it's possible to try restarting the transaction a set number of times—two, in this case. Using error trapping will help your application deal with intermittent or occasional deadlocks, but the best approach is to analyze the cause of the deadlock and resolve it, if possible.

## Deadlock Analysis

You can sometimes prevent a deadlock from happening by analyzing the causes. You need the following information to do this:

- The sessions participating in the deadlock
- The resources involved in the deadlock
- The queries executed by the sessions

## Collecting Deadlock Information

You have four ways to collect the deadlock information:

- Use a specific extended event.
- Set trace flag 1222.
- Set trace flag 1204.
- Use a SQL trace.



**Figure 13-2.** A deadlock graph as displayed in the Profiler

Trace flags are used to customize certain SQL Server behavior such as, in this case, generating the deadlock information.

Extended events provide several ways to gather information. This is probably the best method you can apply to your server for collecting deadlock information. You can use these options:

- `Lock_deadlock`: Displays basic information about a deadlock occurrence
- `Lock_deadlock_chain`: Captures information from each participant in a deadlock
- `Xml_deadlock_report`: Displays an XML deadlock graph with the cause of the deadlock

The deadlock graph generates XML output. After the extended event has captured the deadlock events, you can view them within SSMS either through the event viewer or by opening the XML file if you output your event results there. While similar information is displayed in all three events, for basic deadlock information, the easiest to understand is the `xml_deadlock_report`. When monitoring for deadlocks, I would recommend also capturing the `lock_deadlock_chain`, so that you have more detailed information about the individual sessions involved in the deadlock if you need it.

You can open the deadlock graph in Management Studio. You can search the XML, but the deadlock graph generated from the XML works almost like an execution plan for deadlocks, as shown in Figure 13-2.

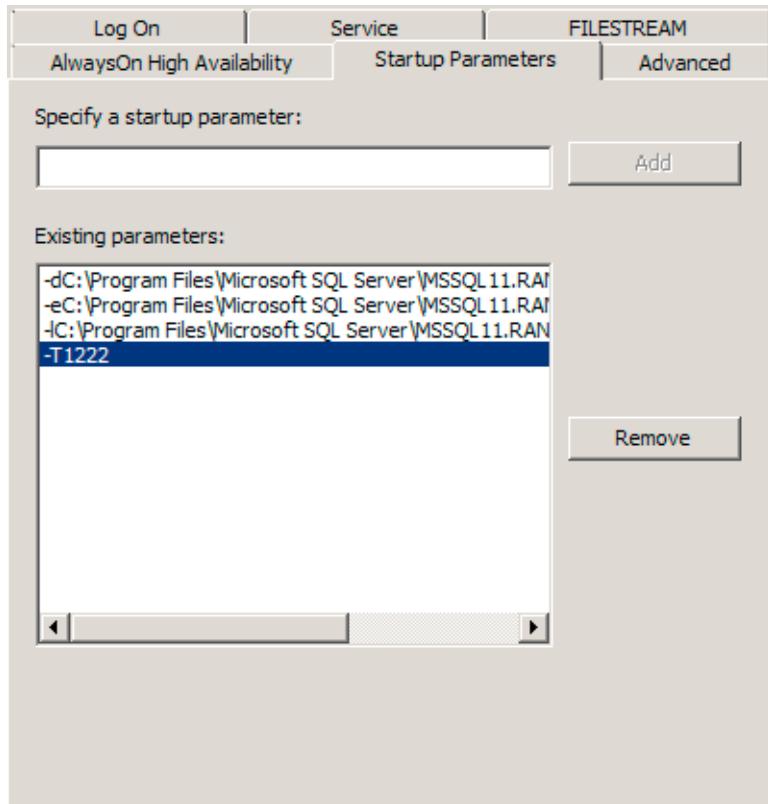
I'll show you how to use this in the "Analyzing the Deadlock" section later in this chapter.

The two trace flags that generate deadlock information can be used together to generate two sets of information. Usually people will prefer to run one or the other because they write a lot of information into the error log of SQL Server. Trace flag 1222 provides the most detailed information on the deadlock. The trace flags write the information gathered into the log file on the server where the deadlock event occurred.

Trace flag 1204 provides detailed deadlock information that helps you analyze the cause of a deadlock. It sorts the information by each of the nodes involved in the deadlock. Trace flag 1222 also provides detailed deadlock information, but it breaks the information down differently. Trace flag 1222 sorts the information by resource and processes, and it provides even more information. Details on both sets of data will be shown in the "Analyzing the Deadlock" section.

The `DBCC TRACEON` statement is used to turn on (or enable) the trace flags. A trace flag remains enabled until it is disabled using the `DBCC TRACEOFF` statement. If the server is restarted, this trace flag will be cleared. You can determine the status of a trace flag using the `DBCC TRACESTATUS` statement. Setting both of the deadlock trace flags looks like this:

```
DBCC TRACEON (1222, -1) ;
DBCC TRACEON (1204, -1) ;
```

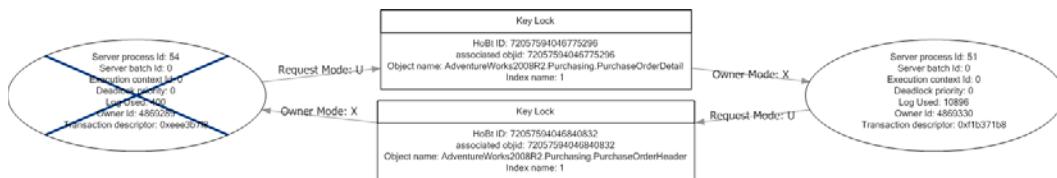


**Figure 13-3.** A SQL Server instance's Properties dialog box showing the Startup Parameters

To ensure that the trace flags are always set, it is possible to make them part of the SQL Server startup in the SQL Server Configuration Manager by following these steps:

1. Open the Properties dialog box of the instance of SQL Server.
2. Switch to the Startup Parameters tab of the Properties dialog box, as shown in Figure 13-3.
3. Type ;T-1222 in the “Specify a startup parameter” text box, and click Add to add trace flag 1222.
4. Click the OK button to close all the dialog boxes.

These trace flag settings will be in effect after you restart your SQL Server instance.



**Figure 13-4.** A deadlock graph displayed in the Profiler tool

## Analyzing the Deadlock

To analyze the cause of a deadlock, let's consider a straightforward little example. First, make sure you've turned on the deadlock trace flag 1222 and created an extended events session that uses the `xml_deadlock_report` event. In one connection, execute this script (---deadlock1 in the download):

```
BEGIN TRAN
UPDATE Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader
SET Freight = Freight * 0.9 -- 10% discount on shipping
WHERE PurchaseOrderID = 1255 ;
```

In a second connection, execute this script (---deadlock2 in the download):

```
UPDATE Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail
SET OrderQty = 4
WHERE ProductID = 448
AND PurchaseOrderID = 1255 ;
```

Each of these scripts opens a transaction and manipulates data, but neither commits or rolls back the transaction. Switch back to the first transaction and run this query:

```
BEGIN TRANSACTION
UPDATE Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail
SET OrderQty = 2
WHERE ProductID = 448
AND PurchaseOrderID = 1255 ;
```

Unfortunately, after possibly a few seconds, the first connection faces a deadlock:

```
Msg 1205, Level 13, State 51, Line 1
Transaction (Process ID 52) was deadlocked on lock resources with another process and has been
chosen as the deadlock victim. Rerun the transaction.
```

Any idea what's wrong here?

Let's analyze the deadlock by first examining the deadlock graph collected through the trace event. There is a separate tab in the Event explorer window. Opening that will show you the deadlock graph (see Figure 13-4).

From the deadlock graph displayed in Figure 13-5, it's fairly clear that two processes were involved: session 51 and session 54. Session 54, the one with the big blue X crossing it out, was chosen as the deadlock victim. Two different keys were in question. The top key was owned by session 51, as demonstrated by the arrow pointing to the session object, named `Owner Mode`, and marked with an X for exclusive. Session 54 was attempting to request the same key for an update. The other key was owned by session 54 with session 51 requesting an update. You can see the exact HoBt ID, object ID, object name, and index name for the objects in question for the deadlock. For a classic, simple deadlock like this, you have most of the information you need. The last piece would be the queries running from each process. These would need to be captured using a different extended event.

```

<process id="processf4ecf498" taskpriority="0" logused="10896" waitresource="KEY
<executionStack>
  <frame procname="AdventureWorks2008R2.Purchasing.uPurchaseOrderDetail" line="3
    UPDATE [Purchasing].[PurchaseOrderHeader]
      SET [Purchasing].[PurchaseOrderHeader].[SubTotal] =
        (SELECT SUM([Purchasing].[PurchaseOrderDetail].[LineTotal])
         FROM [Purchasing].[PurchaseOrderDetail]
         WHERE [Purchasing].[PurchaseOrderHeader].[PurchaseOrderID]
           = [Purchasing].[PurchaseOrderDetail].[PurchaseOrderID])
      WHERE [Purchasing].[PurchaseOrderHeader].[PurchaseOrderID]
        IN (SELECT inserted.[PurchaseOrderID] FROM inserted);  </frame>
    <frame procname="adhoc" line="2" stmtstart="44" sqlhandle="0x02000000e3586a2a8
update Purchasing . PurchaseOrderDetail set OrderQty = @0 where ProductID = @1 and
    <frame procname="adhoc" line="2" stmtstart="38" sqlhandle="0x02000000178f4e282
      UPDATE Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail
      SET OrderQty = 2
      WHERE ProductID = 448
        AND PurchaseOrderID = 1255 ;  </frame>
    </executionStack>
    <inputbuf>
  BEGIN TRANSACTION
  UPDATE Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail
  SET OrderQty = 2
  WHERE ProductID = 448
    AND PurchaseOrderID = 1255 ;  </inputbuf>

```

**Figure 13-5.** The XML information that defines the deadlock graph

This visual representation of the deadlock can do the job. However, you may need to drill down into the underlying XML to really understand exactly where deadlocks occurred, what processes caused them, and which objects were involved. If you open that XML up directly, you can find a lot more information available than the simple set displayed for you in the graphical deadlock graph. Take a look at Figure 13-5.

If you look through this, you can see some of the information on display in the deadlock graph, but you also see a whole lot more. For example, part of this deadlock actually involves code that we did not write or execute as part of the example. There's a trigger on the table called uPurchaseOrderDetail. You can also see the code I used to generate the deadlock. All this information can help you to identify exactly which pieces of code lead to the deadlock. You also get information such as the sqlhandle, which you can then use in combination with DMOs to pull statements and execution plans out of cache. Because the plan is created before the query is run, it will be available for you even for the queries that were chosen as the deadlock victim.

It's worth taking some time to explore this XML in a little more detail. Table 13-1 shows elements from the extended event and the information it represents.

This information is a bit more difficult to read through than the clean set of data provided by the graphical deadlock graph. However, it is a very similar set of information, just more detailed. You can see, highlighted in bold near the bottom, the definition of one of the keys associated with the deadlock. You can also see, just before it, that the text of the execution plans is available through extended event XML output, unlike the deadlock graph. In this case, you are much more likely to have everything you need to isolate the cause of the deadlock.

The information gathered by trace flag 1222 is almost identical to the XML data in every regard. The main difference is the formatting and location. The output from 1222 is located in the SQL Server error log, and it's in text format instead of nice, clean XML. The information collected by trace flag 1204 is completely different from either of the other two sets of data and doesn't provide nearly as much detail. Trace flag 1204 is also much more difficult to interpret. For all these reasons, I suggest you stick to using extended events if you can—or trace flag

**Table 13-1.** XML Deadlock Graph Data

(continued)

**Table 13-1.** (continued)

(continued)

**Table 13-1.** (continued)

Entry in Log	Description
<frame procname="adhoc" line="2" stmtstart="38" sqlhan dle="0x02000000178f4e2824eef68b5abf0096b085df45a8cbe9 d900000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000">	Definition of the T-SQL.
<pre>UPDATE Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail SET OrderQty = 2 WHERE ProductID = 448     AND PurchaseOrderID = 1255 ; &lt;/frame&gt;  &lt;inputbuf&gt; BEGIN TRANSACTION UPDATE Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail SET OrderQty = 2 WHERE ProductID = 448     AND PurchaseOrderID = 1255 ; &lt;/inputbuf&gt;  &lt;/process-list&gt; &lt;resource-list&gt;     &lt;keylock hobtid="72057594046775296" dbid="9" o bjectname="AdventureWorks2008R2.Purchasing. PurchaseOrderDetail" indexname="1" id="lockf98b8c00" mode="X" associatedObjectId="72057594046775296"&gt;         &lt;owner-list&gt;             &lt;owner id="processf4ecf498" mode="X" /&gt;         &lt;/owner-list&gt;         &lt;waiter-list&gt;             &lt;waiter id="processf4ced868" mode="U" requestType="wait" /&gt;         &lt;/waiter-list&gt;     &lt;/keylock&gt;     &lt;keylock hobtid="72057594046840832" dbid="9" o bjectname="AdventureWorks2008R2.Purchasing. PurchaseOrderHeader" indexname="1" id="lockf98b8800" mode="X" associatedObjectId="72057594046840832"&gt;         &lt;owner-list&gt;             &lt;owner id="processf4ced868" mode="X" /&gt;         &lt;/owner-list&gt;         &lt;waiter-list&gt;             &lt;waiter id="processf4ecf498" mode="U" requestType="wait" /&gt;         &lt;/waiter-list&gt;     &lt;/keylock&gt; &lt;/resource-list&gt;</pre>	T-SQL, including the actual values. This would be the cause of firing the trigger.
	The objects that caused the conflict. Within here is the definition of the primary key from the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail table. You can see which process from the earlier code owned which resource. You can also see the information defining the processes that were waiting. Everything you need to discern where the issue exists.

1222 if you can't—to capture deadlock data. You also have the default `system_health` session that captures a number of events by default, including deadlocks. It's a great resource if you are unprepared for capturing this information. Just remember that it keeps only 4, 5mb files online. As these fill, the data in the oldest file is lost. Depending on the number of transactions in your system, and the number of deadlocks or other events that could fill these files, you may only have very recent data available.

This example demonstrated a classic circular reference. Although not immediately obvious, the deadlock was caused by a trigger on the `Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail` table. When `Quantity` is updated on the `Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail` table, it attempts to update the `Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader` table. When the first two queries are run, each within an open transaction, it's just a blocking situation. The second query is waiting on the first to clear, so that it can also update the `Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader` table. But when the third query (i.e., the second within the first transaction) is introduced, a circular reference is created. The only way to resolve it is to kill one of the processes.

Before proceeding, be sure to roll back any open transactions.

Here's the obvious question at this stage: can you avoid this deadlock? If the answer is "yes," then how?

## Avoiding Deadlocks

The methods for avoiding a deadlock scenario depend upon the nature of the deadlock. The following are some of the techniques you can use to avoid a deadlock:

- Access resources in the same physical order.
- Decrease the locking.
- Minimize lock contention.

### Accessing Resources in the Same Physical Order

One of the most commonly adopted techniques for avoiding a deadlock is to ensure that every transaction accesses the resources in the same physical order. For instance, suppose that two transactions need to access two resources. If each transaction accesses the resources in the same physical order, then the first transaction will successfully acquire locks on the resources without being blocked by the second transaction. The second transaction will be blocked by the first while trying to acquire a lock on the first resource. This will cause a typical blocking scenario without leading to a circular blocking.

If the resources are not accessed in the same physical order (as demonstrated in the earlier deadlock analysis example), this can cause a circular blocking between the two transactions:

- Transaction 1:
  - Access Resource 1
  - Access Resource 2
- Transaction 2:
  - Access Resource 2
  - Access Resource 1

In the current deadlock scenario, the following resources are involved in the deadlock:

- Resource 1, hobtid=72057594046578688: This is the index row within index PK\_PurchaseOrderDetail\_PurchaseOrderId\_PurchaseOrderDetailId on the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail table.
- Resource 2, hobtid=72057594046644224: This is the row within clustered index PK\_PurchaseOrderHeader\_PurchaseOrderId on the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader table.

Both sessions attempt to access the resource; unfortunately, the order in which they access the key is different.

It's very common with some of the generated code out of tools like nHibernate and Entity Framework to see objects being referenced in a different order in different queries. You'll have to work with your development team to see that type of issue eliminated within the generated code.

## Decreasing the Number of Resources Accessed

A deadlock involves at least two resources. A session holds the first resource and then requests the second resource. The other session holds the second resource and requests the first resource. If you can prevent the sessions (or at least one of them) from accessing one of the resources involved in the deadlock, then you can prevent the deadlock. You can achieve this by redesigning the application, which is a solution highly resisted by developers late in the project. However, you can consider using the following features of SQL Server without changing the application design:

- Convert a nonclustered index to a clustered index.
- Use a covering index for a SELECT statement.

## Convert a Nonclustered Index to a Clustered Index

As you know, the leaf pages of a nonclustered index are separate from the data pages of the heap or the clustered index. Therefore, a nonclustered index takes two locks: one for the base (either the cluster or the heap) and one for the nonclustered index. However, in the case of a clustered index, the leaf pages of the index and the data pages of the table are the same; it requires one lock, and that one lock protects both the clustered index and the table because the leaf pages and the data pages are the same. This decreases the number of resources to be accessed by the same query, compared to a nonclustered index.

## Use a Covering Index for a SELECT Statement

You can also use a covering index to decrease the number of resources accessed by a SELECT statement. Since a SELECT statement can get everything from the covering index itself, it doesn't need to access the base table. Otherwise, the SELECT statement needs to access both the index and the base table to retrieve all the required column values. Using a covering index stops the SELECT statement from accessing the base table, leaving the base table free to be locked by another session.

## Minimizing Lock Contention

You can also resolve a deadlock by avoiding the lock request on one of the contended resources. You can do this when the resource is accessed only for reading data. Modifying a resource will always acquire an exclusive (X) lock on the resource to maintain the consistency of the resource; therefore, in a deadlock situation, identify the

resource accesses that are read-only and try to avoid their corresponding lock requests by using the dirty read feature, if possible. You can use the following techniques to avoid the lock request on a contended resource:

- Implement row versioning.
- Decrease the isolation level.
- Use locking hints.

## Implement Row Versioning

Instead of attempting to prevent access to resources using a more stringent locking scheme, you could implement row versioning through the READ\_COMMITTED\_SNAPSHOT isolation level or through the SNAPSHOT isolation level. The row versioning isolation levels are used to reduce blocking, as outlined in [Chapter 12](#). Because they reduce blocking, which is the root cause of deadlocks, they can also help with deadlocks. By introducing READ\_COMMITTED\_SNAPSHOT with the following T-SQL, you can have a version of the rows available in tempdb, thus potentially eliminating the contention caused by the lock escalation in the preceding deadlock scenario:

```
ALTER DATABASE AdventureWorks2008R2
SET READ_COMMITTED_SNAPSHOT ON;
```

This will allow any necessary reads without causing lock contention since the reads are on a different version of the data. There is overhead associated with row versioning, especially in tempdb and when marshaling data from multiple resources instead of just the table or indexes used in the query. But that trade-off of increased tempdb overhead vs. the benefit of reduced deadlocking and increased concurrency may be worth the cost.

## Decrease the Isolation Level

Sometimes the (S) lock requested by a SELECT statement contributes to the formation of circular blocking. You can avoid this type of circular blocking by reducing the isolation level of the transaction containing the SELECT statement to READ UNCOMMITTED. This will allow the SELECT statement to read the data without requesting an (S) lock and thereby avoid the circular blocking. However, reading uncommitted data carries with it a serious issue by returning bad data to the client. You need to be in very dire straits to consider this as a method of eliminating your deadlocks.

Also check to see if the connections are setting themselves to be SERIALIZABLE. Sometimes online connection string generators will include this option, and developers will use it completely by accident.

## Use Locking Hints

I absolutely do not recommend this approach. However, you can potentially resolve the deadlock presented in the preceding technique using the following locking hints:

- NOLOCK
- READUNCOMMITTED

Like the READ UNCOMMITTED isolation level, the NOLOCK or READUNCOMMITTED locking hint will avoid the (S) locks requested by a given session, thereby preventing the formation of circular blocking.

The effect of the locking hint is at a query level and is limited to the table (and its indexes) on which it is applied. The NOLOCK and READUNCOMMITTED locking hints are allowed only in SELECT statements and the data selection part of the INSERT, DELETE, and UPDATE statements.

The resolution techniques of minimizing lock contention introduce the side effect of a dirty read, which may not be acceptable in every transaction. A dirty read can involve missing rows or extra rows due to page splits and rearranging pages. Therefore, use these resolution techniques only in situations in which a very low quality of data is acceptable.

## Summary

As you learned in this chapter, a deadlock is the result of conflicting blocking between processes and is reported to an application with the error number 1205. You can analyze the cause of a deadlock by collecting the deadlock information using various resources, but the extended event `Xml_deadlock_report` is probably the best.

You can use a number of techniques to avoid a deadlock; which technique is applicable depends upon the type of queries executed by the participating sessions, the locks held and requested on the involved resources, and the business rules governing the degree of isolation required. Generally, you can resolve a deadlock by reconfiguring the indexes and the transaction isolation levels. However, at times you may need to redesign the application or automatically reexecute the transaction on a deadlock.

In the next chapter, I cover the performance aspects of cursors and how to optimize the cost overhead of using cursors.

## CHAPTER 14



# Cursor Cost Analysis

It is very common to find database applications that use cursors to process one row at a time. Because data manipulation through a cursor in SQL Server incurs significant additional overhead, database applications should avoid using cursors. T-SQL and SQL Server are designed to work best with sets of data, not one row at a time. Jeff Moden famously termed this type of processing RBAR (pronounced, ree-bar), meaning Row By Agonizing Row. However, if a cursor must be used, then use a cursor with the least cost.

In this chapter, I cover the following topics:

- The fundamentals of cursors
- A cost analysis of different characteristics of cursors
- The benefits and drawbacks of a default result set over cursors
- Recommendations to minimize the cost overhead of cursors

## Cursor Fundamentals

When a query is executed by an application, SQL Server returns a set of data consisting of rows. Generally, applications can't process multiple rows together; instead, they process one row at a time by walking through the result set returned by SQL Server. This functionality is provided by a *cursor*, which is a mechanism to work with one row at a time out of a multirow result set.

T-SQL cursor processing usually involves the following steps:

1. Declare the cursor to associate it with a SELECT statement and define the characteristics of the cursor.
2. Open the cursor to access the result set returned by the SELECT statement.
3. Retrieve a row from the cursor. Optionally, modify the row through the cursor.
4. Once all the rows in the result set are processed, close the cursor and release the resources assigned to the cursor.

You can create cursors using T-SQL statements or the data access layers used to connect to SQL Server. Cursors created using data access layers are commonly referred to as *client* cursors. Cursors written in T-SQL

are referred to as *server* cursors. Following is an example of cursor processing of query results from a table (--firstcursor in the download):

```
--Associate a SELECT statement to a cursor and define the
--cursor's characteristics
DECLARE MyCursor CURSOR /*<cursor characteristics>/
FOR
SELECT adt.AddressTypeID,
       adt.Name,
       adt.ModifiedDate
FROM   Person.AddressType adt ;
--Open the cursor to access the result set returned by the
--SELECT statement
OPEN MyCursor ;

--Retrieve one row at a time from the result set returned by
--the SELECT statement
DECLARE @AddressTypeId INT,
        @Name VARCHAR(50),
        @ModifiedDate DATETIME ;
FETCH NEXT FROM MyCursor INTO @AddressTypeId, @Name, @ModifiedDate ;

WHILE FETCH_STATUS = 0
BEGIN
    PRINT 'NAME = ' + @Name ;
--Optionally, modify the row through the cursor
    UPDATE Person.AddressType
    SET     Name = Name + 'z'
    WHERE   CURRENT OF MyCursor ;
    FETCH NEXT FROM MyCursor
    INTO @AddressTypeId, @Name, @ModifiedDate ;
END

--Close the cursor and release all resources assigned to the
--cursor
CLOSE MyCursor ;
DEALLOCATE MyCursor ;
```

Part of the overhead of the cursor depends on the cursor characteristics. The characteristics of the cursors provided by SQL Server and the data access layers can be broadly classified into three categories:

- *Cursor location*: Defines the location of the cursor creation.
- *Cursor concurrency*: Defines the degree of isolation and synchronization of a cursor with the underlying content.
- *Cursor type*: Defines the specific characteristics of a cursor.

Before looking at the costs of cursors, I'll take a few pages to introduce the various characteristics of cursors. You can undo the changes to the `Person.AddressType` table with this query:

```
UPDATE Person.AddressType
SET [Name] = LEFT([Name], LEN([Name]) - 1) ;
```

## Cursor Location

Based on the location of its creation, a cursor can be classified into one of two categories:

- Client-side cursors
- Server-side cursors

The T-SQL cursors are always created on SQL Server. However, the database API cursors can be created on either the client or server side.

### Client-Side Cursors

As its name signifies, a *client-side cursor* is created on the machine running the application, whether the app is a service, a data access layer, or the front end for the user. It has the following characteristics:

- It is created on the client machine.
- The cursor metadata is maintained on the client machine.
- It is created using the data access layers.
- It works against most of the data access layers (OLEDB providers and ODBC drivers).
- It can be a forward-only or static cursor.

**Note** Cursor types, including forward-only and static cursor types, are described later in the chapter in the “Cursor Types” section.

### Server-Side Cursors

A *server-side cursor* is created on the SQL Server machine. It has the following characteristics:

- It is created on the server machine.
- The cursor metadata is maintained on the server machine.
- It is created using either data access layers or T-SQL statements.
- A server-side cursor created using T-SQL statements is tightly integrated with SQL Server.
- It can be any type of cursor. (Cursor types are explained later in the chapter.)

**Note** The cost comparison between client-side and server-side cursors is covered later in the chapter in the “Cost Comparison on Cursor Type” section.

---

## Cursor Concurrency

Depending on the required degree of isolation and synchronization with the underlying content, cursors can be classified into the following concurrency models:

- *Read-only*. A nonupdatable cursor
- *Optimistic*. An updatable cursor that uses the optimistic concurrency model (no locks retained on the underlying data rows)
- *Scroll locks*: An updatable cursor that holds a lock on any data row to be updated

### Read-Only

A read-only cursor is nonupdatable; no locks are held on the base table(s). While fetching a cursor row, whether an (S) lock will be acquired on the underlying row depends upon the isolation level of the connection and any locking hints used in the SELECT statement for the cursor. However, once the row is fetched, by default the locks are released. The following T-SQL statement creates a read-only T-SQL cursor:

```
DECLARE MyCursor CURSOR READ_ONLY
FOR
SELECT adt.Name
FROM Person.AddressType AS adt
WHERE adt.AddressTypeID = 1 ;
```

The lack of locking makes the read-only type of cursor faster and safer. Just remember that you cannot manipulate data through the read-only cursor, which is the sacrifice you make for performance.

### Optimistic

The optimistic with values concurrency model makes a cursor updatable. No locks are held on the underlying data. The factors governing whether an (S) lock will be acquired on the underlying row are the same as for a read-only cursor.

The optimistic concurrency model uses row versioning to determine whether a row has been modified since it was read into the cursor, instead of locking the row while it is read into the cursor. Version-based optimistic concurrency requires a ROWVERSION column (this was formerly a TIMESTAMP data type) in the underlying user table on which the cursor is created. The ROWVERSION data type is a binary number that indicates the relative sequence of modifications on a row. Each time a row with a ROWVERSION column is modified, SQL Server stores the current value of the global ROWVERSION value, @@DBTS, in the ROWVERSION column; it then increments the @@DBTS value.

Before applying a modification through the optimistic cursor, SQL Server determines whether the current ROWVERSION column value for the row matches the ROWVERSION column value for the row when it was read into the cursor. The underlying row is modified only if the ROWVERSION values match, indicating that the row hasn't been modified by another user in the meantime. Otherwise, an error is raised. In case of an error, first refresh the cursor with the updated data.

If the underlying table doesn't contain a ROWVERSION column, then the cursor defaults to value-based optimistic concurrency, which requires matching the current value of the row with the value when the row was read into the cursor. The version-based concurrency control is more efficient than the value-based concurrency control since it requires less processing to determine the modification of the underlying row. Therefore, for the best performance of a cursor with the optimistic concurrency model, ensure that the underlying table has a ROWVERSION column.

The following T-SQL statement creates an optimistic T-SQL cursor:

```
DECLARE MyCursor CURSOR OPTIMISTIC
FOR
SELECT adt.Name
FROM Person.AddressType AS adt
WHERE adt.AddressTypeID = 1 ;Scroll Locks
```

A cursor with scroll locks concurrency holds a (U) lock on the underlying row until another cursor row is fetched or the cursor is closed. This prevents other users from modifying the underlying row when the cursor fetches it. The scroll locks concurrency model makes the cursor updatable.

The following T-SQL statement creates a T-SQL cursor with the scroll locks concurrency model:

```
DECLARE MyCursor CURSOR SCROLL_LOCKS
FOR
SELECT adt.Name
FROM Person.AddressType AS adt
WHERE adt.AddressTypeID = 1 ;
```

Since locks are held on a row being referenced (until another cursor row is fetched or the cursor is closed), it blocks all the other users trying to modify the row during that period. This hurts database concurrency.

## Cursor Types

Cursors can be classified into the following four types:

- Forward-only cursors
- Static cursors
- Keyset-driven cursors
- Dynamic cursors

Let's take a closer look at these four types in the sections that follow.

## Forward-Only Cursors

These are the characteristics of forward-only cursors:

- They operate directly on the base table(s).
- Rows from the underlying table(s) are usually not retrieved until the cursor rows are fetched using the cursor FETCH operation. However, the database API forward-only cursor type, with the following additional characteristics, retrieves all the rows from the underlying table first:
  - Client-side cursor location
  - Server-side cursor location and read-only cursor concurrency

- They support forward scrolling only (FETCH NEXT) through the cursor.
- They allow all changes (INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE) through the cursor. Also, these cursors reflect all changes made to the underlying table(s).

The forward-only characteristic is implemented differently by the database API cursors and the T-SQL cursor. The data access layers implement the forward-only cursor characteristic as one of the four previously listed cursor types. But the T-SQL cursor doesn't implement the forward-only cursor characteristic as a cursor type; rather, it implements it as a property that defines the scrollable behavior of the cursor. Thus, for a T-SQL cursor, the forward-only characteristic can be used to define the scrollable behavior of one of the remaining three cursor types.

A forward-only cursor with a read-only property can be created using a `fast_forward` statement. The T-SQL syntax provides a specific cursor type option, `FAST_FORWARD`, to create a fast-forward-only cursor. The nickname for the `FAST_FORWARD` cursor is the *fire hose* because it is the fastest way to move data through a cursor and because all the information flows one way. However, don't be surprised when the "firehose" is still not as fast as traditional set-based operations. The following T-SQL statement creates a fast-forward-only T-SQL cursor:

```
DECLARE MyCursor CURSOR FAST_FORWARD
FOR
SELECT adt.Name
FROM Person.AddressType AS adt
WHERE adt.AddressTypeID = 1 ;
```

The `FAST_FORWARD` property specifies a forward-only, read-only cursor with performance optimizations enabled.

## Static Cursors

These are the characteristics of static cursors:

- They create a snapshot of cursor results in the tempdb database when the cursor is opened. Thereafter, static cursors operate on the snapshot in the tempdb database.
- Data is retrieved from the underlying table(s) when the cursor is opened.
- Static cursors support all scrolling options: `FETCH FIRST`, `FETCH NEXT`, `FETCH PRIOR`, `FETCH LAST`, `FETCH ABSOLUTE n`, and `FETCH RELATIVE n`.
- Static cursors are always read-only; data modifications are not allowed through static cursors. Also, changes (INSERT, UPDATE, and DELETE) made to the underlying table(s) are not reflected in the cursor.

The following T-SQL statement creates a static T-SQL cursor:

```
DECLARE MyCursor CURSOR STATIC
FOR
SELECT adt.Name
FROM Person.AddressType AS adt
WHERE adt.AddressTypeID = 1 ;
```

Some tests show that a static cursor can perform as well as—and sometimes faster than—a forward-only cursor. Be sure to test this behavior on your own system.

## Keyset-Driven Cursors

These are the characteristics of keyset-driven cursors:

- Keyset cursors are controlled by a set of unique identifiers (or keys) known as a *keyset*. The keyset is built from a set of columns that uniquely identify the rows in the result set.
- These cursors create the keyset of rows in the tempdb database when the cursor is opened.
- Membership of rows in the cursor is limited to the keyset of rows created in the tempdb database when the cursor is opened.
- On fetching a cursor row, the database engine first looks at the keyset of rows in tempdb, and then navigates to the corresponding data row in the underlying table(s) to retrieve the remaining columns.
- They support all scrolling options.
- Keyset cursors allow all changes through the cursor. An INSERT performed outside the cursor is not reflected in the cursor, since the membership of rows in the cursor is limited to the keyset of rows created in the tempdb database on opening the cursor. An INSERT through the cursor appears at the end of the cursor. A DELETE performed on the underlying table(s) raises an error when the cursor navigation reaches the deleted row. An UPDATE on the nonkeyset columns of the underlying table(s) is reflected in the cursor. An UPDATE on the keyset column(s) is treated like a DELETE of an old key value and the INSERT of a new key value. If a change disqualifies a row for membership or affects the order of a row, then the row does not disappear or move unless the cursor is closed and reopened.

The following T-SQL statement creates a keyset-driven T-SQL cursor:

```
DECLARE MyCursor CURSOR KEYSET
FOR
SELECT adt.Name
FROM Person.AddressType AS adt
WHERE adt.AddressTypeID = 1 ;
```

## Dynamic Cursors

These are the characteristics of dynamic cursors:

- Dynamic cursors operate directly on the base table(s).
- The membership of rows in the cursor is not fixed, since they operate directly on the base table(s).
- As with forward-only cursors, rows from the underlying table(s) are not retrieved until the cursor rows are fetched using a cursor FETCH operation.
- Dynamic cursors support all scrolling options except FETCH ABSOLUTE n, since the membership of rows in the cursor is not fixed.
- These cursors allow all changes through the cursor. Also, all changes made to the underlying table(s) are reflected in the cursor.

- Dynamic cursors don't support all properties and methods implemented by the database API cursors. Properties such as `AbsolutePosition`, `Bookmark`, and `RecordCount`, as well as methods such as `Clone` and `Resync`, are not supported by dynamic cursors. Instead, they are supported by keyset-driven cursors.

The following T-SQL statement creates a dynamic T-SQL cursor:

```
DECLARE MyCursor CURSOR DYNAMIC
FOR
SELECT adt.Name
FROM Person.AddressType AS adt
WHERE adt.AddressTypeID = 1 ;
```

The dynamic cursor is absolutely the slowest possible cursor to use in all situations. It takes more locks and holds them longer, which radically increases its poor performance. Take this into account when designing your system.

## Cursor Cost Comparison

Now that you've seen the different cursor flavors, let's look at their costs. If you must use a cursor, you should always use the lightest-weight cursor that meets the requirements of your application. The cost comparisons among the different characteristics of the cursors are detailed next.

## Cost Comparison on Cursor Location

The client-side and server-side cursors have their own cost benefits and overhead, as explained in the sections that follow.

### Client-Side Cursors

Client-side cursors have the following cost benefits compared to server-side cursors:

- *Higher scalability:* Since the cursor metadata is maintained on the individual client machines connected to the server, the overhead of maintaining the cursor metadata is taken up by the client machines. Consequently, the ability to serve a larger number of users is not limited by the server resources.
- *Fewer network round-trips:* Since the result set returned by the `SELECT` statement is passed to the client where the cursor is maintained, extra network round-trips to the server are not required while retrieving rows from the cursor.
- *Faster scrolling:* Since the cursor is maintained locally on the client machine, it's faster to walk through the rows of the cursor.
- *Highly portable:* Since the cursor is implemented using data access layers, it works across a large range of databases: SQL Server, Oracle, Sybase, and so forth.

Client-side cursors have the following cost overhead or drawbacks:

- *Higher pressure on client resources:* Since the cursor is managed at the client side, it increases pressure on the client resources. But it may not be all that bad, considering that most of the time the client applications are web applications and scaling out web applications (or web servers) is quite easy using standard load-balancing solutions. On the other hand, scaling out a transactional SQL Server database is still an art!
- *Support for limited cursor types:* Dynamic and keyset-driven cursors are not supported.
- *Only one active cursor-based statement on one connection:* As many rows of the result set as the client network can buffer are arranged in the form of network packets and sent to the client application. Therefore, until all the cursor's rows are fetched by the application, the database connection remains busy, pushing the rows to the client. During this period, other cursor-based statements cannot use the connection. This is negated by taking advantage of Multiple Active Result Sets (MARS).

## Server-Side Cursors

Server-side cursors have the following cost benefits:

- *Multiple active cursor-based statements on one connection:* While using server-side cursors, no results are left outstanding on the connection between the cursor operations. This frees the connection, allowing the use of multiple cursor-based statements on one connection at the same time. In the case of client-side cursors, as explained previously, the connection remains busy until all the cursor rows are fetched by the application. This means they cannot be used simultaneously by multiple cursor-based statements.
- *Row processing near the data:* If the row processing involves joining with other tables and a considerable amount of set operations, then it is advantageous to perform the row processing near the data using a server-side cursor.
- *Less pressure on client resources:* It reduces pressure on the client resources. But this may not be that desirable because, if the server resources are maxed out (instead of the client resources), then it will require scaling out the database, which is a difficult proposition.
- *Support for all cursor types:* Client-side cursors have limitations on which types of cursors can be supported. There are no limits on the server-side cursors.

Server-side cursors have the following cost overhead or disadvantages:

- *Lower scalability:* They make the server less scalable since server resources are consumed to manage the cursor.
- *More network round-trips:* They increase network round-trips if the cursor row processing is done in the client application. The number of network round-trips can be optimized by processing the cursor rows in the stored procedure or by using the cache size feature of the data access layer.
- *Less portable:* Server-side cursors implemented using T-SQL cursors are not readily portable to other databases because the syntax of the database code managing the cursor is different across databases.

## Cost Comparison on Cursor Concurrency

As expected, cursors with a higher concurrency model create the least amount of blocking in the database and support higher scalability, as explained in the following sections.

### Read-Only

The read-only concurrency model provides the following cost benefits:

- *Lowest locking overhead:* The read-only concurrency model introduces the least locking and synchronization overhead on the database. Since (S) locks are not held on the underlying row after a cursor row is fetched, other users are not blocked from accessing the row. Furthermore, the (S) lock acquired on the underlying row while fetching the cursor row can be avoided by using the NO\_LOCK locking hint in the SELECT statement of the cursor, but only if you don't care about what kind of data you get back due to dirty reads.
- *Highest concurrency:* Since additional locks are not held on the underlying rows, the read-only cursor doesn't block other users from accessing the underlying table(s). The shared lock is still acquired.

The main drawback of the read-only cursor is as follows:

- *Nonupdatable:* The content of underlying table(s) cannot be modified through the cursor.

### Optimistic

The optimistic concurrency model provides the following benefits:

- *Low locking overhead:* Similar to the read-only model, the optimistic concurrency model doesn't hold an (S) lock on the cursor row after the row is fetched. To further improve concurrency, the NOLOCK locking hint can also be used, as in the case of the read-only concurrency model. Modification through the cursor to an underlying row requires exclusive rights on the row as required by an action query.
- *High concurrency:* Since only a shared lock is used on the underlying rows, the cursor doesn't block other users from accessing the underlying table(s). But the modification through the cursor to an underlying row will block other users from accessing the row during the modification.

The following examples detail the cost overhead of the optimistic concurrency model:

- *Row versioning:* Since the optimistic concurrency model allows the cursor to be updatable, an additional cost is incurred to ensure that the current underlying row is first compared (using either version-based or value-based concurrency control) with the original cursor row fetched before applying a modification through the cursor. This prevents the modification through the cursor from accidentally overwriting the modification made by another user after the cursor row is fetched.

- *Concurrency control without a ROWVERSION column:* As explained previously, a ROWVERSION column in the underlying table allows the cursor to perform an efficient version-based concurrency control. In case the underlying table doesn't contain a ROWVERSION column, the cursor resorts to value-based concurrency control, which requires matching the current value of the row to the value when the row was read into the cursor. This increases the cost of the concurrency control. Both forms of concurrency control will cause additional overhead in the TEMPDB.

## Scroll Locks

The major benefit of the scroll locks concurrency model is as follows:

- *Simple concurrency control:* By locking the underlying row corresponding to the last fetched row from the cursor, the cursor assures that the underlying row can't be modified by another user. This eliminates the versioning overhead of optimistic locking. Also, since the row cannot be modified by another user, the application is relieved from checking for a row-mismatch error.

The scroll locks concurrency model incurs the following cost overhead:

- *Highest locking overhead:* The scroll locks concurrency model introduces a pessimistic locking characteristic. A (U) lock is held on the last cursor row fetched, until another cursor row is fetched or the cursor is closed.
- *Lowest concurrency:* Since a (U) lock is held on the underlying row, all other users requesting a (U) or an (X) lock on the underlying row will be blocked. This can significantly hurt concurrency. Therefore, please avoid using this cursor concurrency model unless absolutely necessary.

## Cost Comparison on Cursor Type

Each of the basic four cursor types mentioned in the “Cursor Fundamentals” section earlier in the chapter incurs a different cost overhead on the server. Choosing an incorrect cursor type can hurt database performance. Besides the four basic cursor types, a fast-forward-only cursor (a variation of the forward-only cursor) is provided to enhance performance. The cost overhead of these cursor types is explained in the sections that follow.

## Forward-Only Cursors

These are the cost benefits of forward-only cursors:

- *Lower cursor open cost than static and keyset-driven cursors:* Since the cursor rows are not retrieved from the underlying table(s) and are not copied into the tempdb database during cursor open, the forward-only T-SQL cursor opens very quickly. Similarly, the forward-only, server-side API cursors with optimistic/scroll locks concurrency also open quickly since they do not retrieve the rows during cursor open.
- *Lower scroll overhead:* Since only FETCH NEXT can be performed on this cursor type, it requires less overhead to support different scroll operations.
- *Lower impact on the tempdb database than static and keyset-driven cursors:* Since the forward-only T-SQL cursor doesn't copy the rows from the underlying table(s) into the tempdb database, no additional pressure is created on the database.

The forward-only cursor type has the following drawbacks:

- *Lower concurrency.* Every time a cursor row is fetched, the corresponding underlying row is accessed with a lock request depending on the cursor concurrency model (as noted earlier in the discussion about concurrency). It can block other users from accessing the resource.
- *No backward scrolling.* Applications requiring two-way scrolling can't use this cursor type. But if the applications are designed properly, then it isn't difficult to live without backward scrolling.

## Fast-Forward-Only Cursor

The fast-forward-only cursor is the fastest and least expensive cursor type. This forward-only and read-only cursor is specially optimized for performance. Because of this, you should always prefer it to the other SQL Server cursor types.

Furthermore, the data access layer provides a fast-forward-only cursor on the client side. That type of cursor uses a so-called *default result set* to make cursor overhead almost disappear.

**Note** The default result set is explained later in the chapter in the “Default Result Set” section.

## Static Cursors

These are the cost benefits of static cursors:

- *Lower fetch cost than other cursor types:* Since a snapshot is created in the tempdb database from the underlying rows on opening the cursor, the cursor row fetch is targeted to the snapshot instead of the underlying rows. This avoids the lock overhead that would otherwise be required to fetch the cursor rows.
- *No blocking on underlying rows:* Since the snapshot is created in the tempdb database, other users trying to access the underlying rows are not blocked.

On the downside, the static cursor has the following cost overhead:

- *Higher open cost than other cursor types:* The cursor open operation of the static cursor is slower than that of other cursor types, since all the rows of the result set have to be retrieved from the underlying table(s) and the snapshot has to be created in the tempdb database during the cursor open.
- *Higher impact on tempdb than other cursor types:* There can be significant impact on server resources for creating, populating, and cleaning up the snapshot in the tempdb database.

## Keyset-Driven Cursors

These are the cost benefits of keyset-driven cursors:

- *Lower open cost than the static cursor:* Since only the keyset, not the complete snapshot, is created in the tempdb database, the keyset-driven cursor opens faster than the static cursor. SQL Server populates the keyset of a large keyset-driven cursor asynchronously, which shortens the time between when the cursor is opened and when the first cursor row is fetched.
- *Lower impact on tempdb than that with the static cursor:* Because the keyset-driven cursor is smaller, it uses less space in tempdb.

The cost overhead of keyset-driven cursors is as follows:

- *Higher open cost than forward-only and dynamic cursors:* Populating the keyset in the tempdb database makes the cursor open operation of the keyset-driven cursor costlier than that of forward-only (with the exceptions mentioned earlier) and dynamic cursors.
- *Higher fetch cost than other cursor types:* For every cursor row fetch, the key in the keyset has to be accessed first, and then the corresponding underlying row in the user database can be accessed. Accessing both the tempdb and the user database for every cursor row fetch makes the fetch operation costlier than that of other cursor types.
- *Higher impact on tempdb than forward-only and dynamic cursors:* Creating, populating, and cleaning up the keyset in tempdb impacts server resources.
- *Higher lock overhead and blocking than the static cursor:* Since row fetch from the cursor retrieves rows from the underlying table, it acquires an (S) lock on the underlying row (unless the NOLOCK locking hint is used) during the row fetch operation.

## Dynamic Cursor

The dynamic cursor has the following cost benefits:

- *Lower open cost than static and keyset-driven cursors:* Since the cursor is opened directly on the underlying rows without copying anything to the tempdb database, the dynamic cursor opens faster than the static and keyset-driven cursors.
- *Lower impact on tempdb than static and keyset-driven cursors.* Since nothing is copied into tempdb, the dynamic cursor places far less strain on tempdb than the other cursor types.

The dynamic cursor has the following cost overhead:

- *Higher lock overhead and blocking than the static cursor.* Every cursor row fetch in a dynamic cursor requeries the underlying table(s) involved in the SELECT statement of the cursor. The dynamic fetches are generally expensive because the original select condition might have to be reexecuted.

## Default Result Set

The default cursor type for the data access layers (ADO, OLEDB, and ODBC) is forward-only and read-only. The default cursor type created by the data access layers isn't a true cursor, but a stream of data from the server to the

client, generally referred to as the *default result set* or fast-forward-only cursor (created by the data access layer). In ADO.NET, the DataReader control has the forward-only and read-only properties, and it can be considered as the default result set in the ADO.NET environment. SQL Server uses this type of result set processing under the following conditions:

- The application, using the data access layers (ADO, OLEDB, ODBC), leaves all the cursor characteristics at the default settings, which requests a forward-only and read-only cursor.
- The application executes a SELECT statement instead of executing a DECLARE CURSOR statement.

**Note** Because SQL Server is designed to work with sets of data, not to walk through records one by one, the default result set is always faster than any other type of cursor.

The only request sent from the client to SQL Server is the SQL statement associated with the default cursor. SQL Server executes the query, organizes the rows of the result set in network packets (filling the packets as best it can), and then sends the packets to the client. These network packets are cached in the network buffers of the client. SQL Server sends as many rows of the result set to the client as the client-network buffers can cache. As the client application requests one row at a time, the data access layer on the client machine pulls the row from the client-network buffers and transfers it to the client application.

The following sections outline the benefits and drawbacks of the default result set.

## Benefits

The default result set is generally the best and most efficient way of returning rows from SQL Server for the following reasons:

- *Minimum network round-trips between the client and SQL Server:* Since the result set returned by SQL Server is cached in the client-network buffers, the client doesn't have to make a request across the network to get the individual rows. SQL Server puts most of the rows that it can in the network buffer and sends to the client as much as the client-network buffer can cache.
- *Minimum server overhead:* Since SQL Server doesn't have to store data on the server, this reduces server resource utilization.

## Multiple Active Result Sets

SQL Server 2005 introduced the concept of multiple active result sets (MARS), wherein a single connection can have more than one batch running at any given moment. In prior versions, a single result set had to be processed or closed out prior to submitting the next request. MARS allows multiple requests to be submitted at the same time through the same connection. MARS is enabled on SQL Server all the time. It is not enabled by a connection unless that connection explicitly calls for it. Transactions must be handled at the client level and have to be explicitly declared and committed or rolled back. With MARS in action, if a transaction is not committed on a given statement and the connection is closed, all other transactions that were part of that single connection will be rolled back. MARS is enabled through application connection properties.

## Drawbacks

While there are advantages to the default result set, there are drawbacks as well. Using the default result set requires some special conditions for maximum performance:

- *It doesn't support all properties and methods:* Properties such as `AbsolutePosition`, `Bookmark`, and `RecordCount`, as well as methods such as `Clone`, `MoveLast`, `MovePrevious`, and `Resync`, are not supported.
- *Locks may be held on the underlying resource:* SQL Server sends as many rows of the result set to the client as the client-network buffers can cache. If the size of the result set is large, then the client-network buffers may not be able to receive all the rows. SQL Server then holds a lock on the next page of the underlying table(s), which has not been sent to the client.

To demonstrate these concepts, consider the following test table (`createt1.sql` in the download):

```
USE AdventureWorks2008R2 ;
GO
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1')
) IS NOT NULL
DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (C1 INT, C2 CHAR(996)) ;
CREATE CLUSTERED INDEX Test1Index ON dbo.Test1 (C1) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
VALUES (1, '1') ,
       (2, '2') ;
GO
```

Now consider this PowerShell script, which accesses the rows of the test table using ADO with OLEDB and the default cursor type for the database API cursor (ADODB.Recordset object) as follows (`adocursor.ps1` in the download):

```
$AdoConn = New-Object -comobject ADODB.Connection
$AdoRecordset = New-Object -comobject ADODB.Recordset

$AdoConn.Open("Provider= SQLOLEDB; Data Source=DOJO\RANDORI; Initial
Catalog=AdventureWorks2008R2; Integrated Security=SSPI")

$AdoRecordset.Open("SELECT * FROM dbo.Test1", $AdoConn)

do {
    $C1 = $AdoRecordset.Fields.Item("C1").Value
    $C2 = $AdoRecordset.Fields.Item("C2").Value
    Write-Output "C1 = $C1 and C2 = $C2"
    $AdoRecordset.MoveNext()
} until ($AdoRecordset.EOF -eq $True)
$AdoRecordset.Close()
$AdoConn.Close()
```

This is not a good method for accessing databases from Powershell, but it does show how a client-side cursor operates. Note that the table has two rows with the size of each row equal to 1,000 bytes (= 4 bytes for INT + 996

Event: sql_batch_completed (2012-01-25 15:25:40.8269924)	
Details	
Field	Value
attach_activity_id.g...	45474DB3-FB63-4751-8603-EB711CFC383E
attach_activity_id.s...	1
attach_activity_id._...	CEB1510B-C20B-4327-B6E9-E885D2A63D7C
attach_activity_id._...	0
batch_text	SELECT * FROM dbo.Test1
client_app_name	Microsoft® Windows® Operating System
cpu_time	0
database_id	9
duration	976
logical_reads	54
physical_reads	0
query_hash	0
result	OK
row_count	2
session_id	55
writes	0

**Figure 14-1.** Profiler trace output showing database requests made by the default result set

bytes for CHAR(996)) without considering the internal overhead. Therefore, the size of the complete result set returned by the SELECT statement is approximately 2,000 bytes ( $= 2 \times 1,000$  bytes).

On execution of the cursor open statement (`$AdoRecordset.Open()`), a default result set is created on the client machine running the code. The default result set holds as many rows as the client-network buffer can cache.

Since the size of the result set is small enough to be cached by the client-network buffer, all the cursor rows are cached on the client machine during the cursor open statement itself, without retaining any lock on the dbo.Test1 table. You can verify the lock status for the connection using the `sys.dm_tran_locks` dynamic management view. During the complete cursor operation, the only request from the client to SQL Server is the SELECT statement associated to the cursor, as shown in the extended event output in Figure 14-1.

To find out the effect of a large result set on the default result set processing, let's add some more rows to the test table (`addrows.sql` in the download):

```

SELECT TOP 100000
    IDENTITY( INT,1,1 ) AS n
INTO #Tally
FROM Master.dbo.SysColumns scl,
     Master.dbo.SysColumns sc2 ;

INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
(C1, C2)

SELECT n,
       n
FROM #Tally AS t ;
GO

```

	request_session_id	resource_database_id	resource_associated_entity_id	resource_type	resource_description	request_mode	request_status
5	54	9	72057594070040576	PAGE	1:23648	IS	GRANT
6	54	9	1184723273	OBJECT		IS	GRANT

**Figure 14-2.** sys.dm\_tran\_locks output showing the locks held by the default result set while processing the large result set

The additional rows generated by this example increase the size of the result set considerably. Depending on the size of the client-network buffer, only part of the result set can be cached. On execution of the `AdoRecordset.Open` statement, the default result set on the client machine will get part of the result set, with SQL Server waiting on the other end of the network to send the remaining rows.

On my machine during this period, the locks shown in Figure 14-2 are held on the underlying t1 table as obtained from the output of `sys.dmtranlocks`.

The (IS) lock on the table will block other users trying to acquire an (X) lock. To minimize the blocking issue, follow these recommendations:

- Process all rows of the default result set immediately.
- Keep the result set small. As demonstrated in the example, if the size of the result set is small, then the default result set will be able to read all the rows during the cursor open operation itself.

## Cursor Overhead

When implementing cursor-centric functionality in an application, you have two choices. You can use either a T-SQL cursor or a database API cursor. Because of the differences between the internal implementation of a T-SQL cursor and a database API cursor, the load created by these cursors on SQL Server is different. The impact of these cursors on the database also depends on the different characteristics of the cursors, such as location, concurrency, and type. You can use extended events to analyze the load generated by the T-SQL and database API cursors. The standard events for monitoring queries are, of course, going to be useful. There are also a number of events under the Category of *cursor*. The most useful of these events includes the following:

- `cursor_open`
- `cursor_close`
- `cursor_execute`
- `cursor_prepare`

The other events are useful as well, but you'll only need them when you're attempting to troubleshoot very specific issues. Even the optimization options for these cursors are different. Let's analyze the overhead of these cursors one by one.

## Analyzing Overhead with T-SQL Cursors

The T-SQL cursors implemented using T-SQL statements are always executed on SQL Server because they need the SQL Server engine to process their T-SQL statements. You can use a combination of the cursor characteristics explained previously to reduce the overhead of these cursors. As mentioned earlier, the most lightweight T-SQL cursor is the one created, not with the default settings, but by manipulating the settings to arrive at the forward-only read-only cursor. That still leaves the T-SQL statements used to implement the cursor operations to be

processed by SQL Server. The complete load of the cursor is supported by SQL Server without any help from the client machine. Suppose an application requirement results in the following list of tasks that must be supported:

- Identify all products (from the Production.WorkOrder table) that have been scrapped.
- For each scrapped product, determine the money lost, where Money lost per product = Units in stock × Unit price of the product.
- Calculate the total loss.
- Based on the total loss, determine the business status.

The `For` `each` phrase in the second point suggests that these application tasks could be served by a cursor. However, a FOR, WHILE, cursor, or any other kind of processing of this type can be dangerous. Let's see how it works with a cursor. You can implement this application requirement using a T-SQL cursor as follows (--cursorapp in the download):

```
IF ( SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.spTotalLoss_CursorBased') )
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP PROC dbo.spTotalLoss_CursorBased ;
GO

CREATE PROC dbo.spTotalLoss_CursorBased
AS --Declare a T-SQL cursor with default settings, i.e., fast
--forward-only to retrieve products that have been discarded
    DECLARE ScrappedProducts CURSOR
    FOR
        SELECT p.ProductID ,
               wo.ScrappedQty ,
               p.ListPrice
        FROM Production.WorkOrder AS wo
            JOIN Production.ScrapReason AS sr ON wo.ScrapReasonID = sr.ScrapReasonID
            JOIN Production.Product AS p ON wo.ProductID = p.ProductID ;

--Open the cursor to process one product at a time
    OPEN ScrappedProducts ;

    DECLARE @MoneyLostPerProduct MONEY = 0 ,
            @TotalLoss MONEY = 0 ;

--Calculate money lost per product by processing one product
--at a time
    DECLARE @ProductId INT ,
            @UnitsScrapped SMALLINT ,
            @ListPrice MONEY ;
    FETCH NEXT FROM ScrappedProducts INTO @ProductId, @UnitsScrapped,
            @ListPrice ;

    WHILE FETCH_STATUS = 0
        BEGIN
            SET @MoneyLostPerProduct = @UnitsScrapped * @ListPrice ; --Calculate total loss
            SET @TotalLoss = @TotalLoss + @MoneyLostPerProduct ;

            FETCH NEXT FROM ScrappedProducts INTO @ProductId, @UnitsScrapped,
            @ListPrice ;
        END
    
```

```
--Determine status
IF ( @TotalLoss > 5000 )
    SELECT 'We are bankrupt!' AS Status ;
ELSE
    SELECT 'We are safe!' AS Status ;
--Close the cursor and release all resources assigned to the cursor
CLOSE ScrappedProducts ;
DEALLOCATE ScrappedProducts ;
GO
```

The stored procedure can be executed as follows, but you should execute it twice to take advantage of plan caching (see Figure 14-3):

```
EXEC dbo.spTotalLoss_CursorBased ;
```

As you can see in Figure 14-3, lots of statements are executed on SQL Server. Essentially, all the SQL statements within the stored procedure are executed on SQL Server, with the statements in the WHILE loop executed several times (one for each row returned by the cursor's SELECT statement).

The total number of logical reads performed by the stored procedure is 8,788 (indicated by the last SQL:BatchCompleted event). Well, is it high or low? Considering the fact that the Production.Products table has only 13 pages and the Production.WorkOrder table has only 524, it's surely not low. You can determine the number of pages allocated to these tables by querying the dynamic management view, sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats:

```
SELECT SUM(page_count)
FROM sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats(DB_ID(N'AdventureWorks2008R2'),
OBJECT_ID('Production.WorkOrder'),
DEFAULT, DEFAULT, DEFAULT) ;
```

**Note** The sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats DMV is explained in detail in [Chapter 8](#).

In most cases, you can avoid cursor operations by rewriting the functionality using SQL queries, concentrating on set-based methods of accessing the data. For example, you can rewrite the preceding stored procedure using SQL queries (instead of the cursor operations) as follows (nocursor.sql in the download):

```
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.spTotalLoss'))
) IS NOT NULL
DROP PROC dbo.spTotalLoss ;
GO
CREATE PROC dbo.spTotalLoss
AS
SELECT CASE --Determine status based on following computation
        WHEN SUM(MoneyLostPerProduct) > 5000 THEN 'We are bankrupt!'
        ELSE 'We are safe!'
END AS Status
FROM (--Calculate total money lost for all discarded products
      SELECT SUM(wo.ScrapedQty * p.ListPrice) AS MoneyLostPerProduct
      FROM Production.WorkOrder AS wo
      JOIN Production.ScrapReason AS sr
      ON wo.ScrapReasonID = sr.ScrapReasonID
```

	name	timestamp
	sp_statement_completed	2012-01-25 18:06:04.7100871
	sp_statement_completed	2012-01-25 18:06:04.7100871
▶	sp_statement_completed	2012-01-25 18:06:04.7100871
	sql_statement_completed	2012-01-25 18:06:04.7100871
	sql_statement_completed	2012-01-25 18:06:04.7286418
	sql_statement_completed	2012-01-25 18:06:04.7286418
	sql_statement_completed	2012-01-25 18:06:04.8116496

Event: sp\_statement\_completed (2012-01-25 18:06:04.7100871)

Details	
Field	Value
cpu_time	0
duration	0
last_row_count	1
line_number	30
logical_reads	0
nest_level	1
object_id	1216723387
object_name	
object_type	PROC
offset	1896
offset_end	2072
physical_reads	0
row_count	1
source_database_id	9
statement	SET @MoneyLostPerProduct = @UnitsScrapped * @ListPrice ; -...
writes	0

**Figure 14-3.** Extended event output showing some of the total cost of the data processing using a T-SQL-based cursor

```

JOIN      Production.Product AS p
        ON wo.ProductID = p.ProductID
GROUP BY p.ProductID
) DiscardedProducts ;
GO

```

In this stored procedure, the aggregation functions of SQL Server are used to compute the money lost per product and the total loss. The CASE statement is used to determine the business status based on the total loss incurred. The stored procedure can be executed as follows; but again, you should execute it twice, so you can see the results of plan caching:

```
EXEC dbo.spTotalLoss ;
```

Figure 14-4 shows the corresponding Extended Events output.

In Figure 14-4, you can see that the second execution of the stored procedure, which reuses the existing plan, uses a total of 543 logical reads. However, you can see a result even more important than the reads: the CPU time used drops from 281 milliseconds in the first query to 16 milliseconds in Figure 14-4, and the duration falls from 1085ms to 25ms. Using SQL queries instead of the cursor operations made the execution 43.4 times faster.

Therefore, for better performance, it is almost always recommended that you use set-based operations in SQL queries instead of T-SQL cursors.

## Cursor Recommendations

An ineffective use of cursors can degrade the application performance by introducing extra network round-trips and load on server resources. To keep the cursor cost low, try to follow these recommendations:

- Use set-based SQL statements over T-SQL cursors, since SQL Server is designed to work with sets of data.
- Use the least expensive cursor:
  - When using SQL Server cursors, use the `FAST FORWARD` cursor type, which is generally referred to as the *fast-forward-only cursor*.
  - When using the API cursors implemented by ADO, OLEDB, or ODBC, use the default cursor type, which is generally referred to as the *default result set*.
  - When using ADO.NET, use the `DataReader` object.

Details	
Field	Value
batch_text	EXEC spTotalLoss;
cpu_time	16000
duration	25390
logical_reads	545
physical_reads	0
result	OK
row_count	1
writes	0

**Figure 14-4.** Profiler trace output showing the total cost of the data processing using an equivalent SELECT statement

- Minimize impact on server resources:
  - Use a client-side cursor for API cursors.
  - Do not perform actions on the underlying table(s) through the cursor.
  - Always deallocate the cursor as soon as possible. This helps free resources, especially in tempdb.
  - Redesign the cursor's SELECT statement (or the application) to return the minimum set of rows and columns.
  - Avoid T-SQL cursors entirely by rewriting the logic of the cursor as set-based statements, which are generally more efficient than cursors.
  - Use a ROWVERSION column for dynamic cursors to benefit from the efficient, version-based concurrency control instead of relying upon the value-based technique.
- Minimize impact on tempdb:
  - Minimize resource contention in tempdb by avoiding the static and keyset-driven cursor types.
  - Minimize latch contention in tempdb. When a static or keyset-driven cursor is opened in SQL Server, the tempdb database is used to hold either the keyset or the snapshot for the cursor management. It creates *worktables* in the tempdb database.
- Minimize blocking:
  - Use the default result set, fast-forward-only cursor, or static cursor.
  - Process all cursor rows as quickly as possible.
  - Avoid scroll locks or pessimistic locking.
- Minimize network round-trips while using API cursors:
  - Use the CacheSize property of ADO to fetch multiple rows in one round-trip.
  - Use client-side cursors.
  - Use disconnected record sets.

## Summary

As you learned in this chapter, a cursor is the natural extension to the result set returned by SQL Server, enabling the calling application to process one row of data at a time. Cursors add a cost overhead to application performance and impact the server resources.

You should always be looking for ways to avoid cursors. Set-based solutions work better in almost all cases. However, if a cursor operation is mandated, then choose the best combination of cursor location, concurrency, type, and cache size characteristics to minimize the cost overhead of the cursor.

In the next chapter, I show how to put everything together to analyze the workload of a database in action.

## CHAPTER 15



# Database Performance Testing

Knowing how to identify performance issues and how to fix them is a great skill to have. The problem, though, is that you need to be able to demonstrate that the improvements you make are real improvements. While you can, and should, capture the performance metrics before and after you tune a query or add an index, the best way to be sure that you're looking at real improvement is to put the changes you make to work. Testing means more than simply running a query a few times and then putting it into your production system with your fingers crossed. You need to have a systematic way to validate performance improvements using the full panoply of queries that are run against your system in a realistic manner. SQL Server 2012 provides such a mechanism through its new Distributed Replay tool.

Distributed Replay works with information generated from the SQL Profiler and the trace events created by it. Trace events capture information in a somewhat similar fashion to extended events, but trace events are an older (and somewhat less capable) mechanism for capturing events within the system. Prior to the release of SQL Server 2012, you could use SQL Server's Profiler tool to replay captured events using a server-side trace. This worked, but the process was extremely limited. For example, the tool could only be run on a single machine, and it dealt with the playback mechanism—a single-threaded process that ran in a serial fashion, rather than what happens in reality. Microsoft has added exactly the capability to run from multiple machines in a parallel fashion to SQL Server 2012. Until Microsoft makes a mechanism to use Distributed Replay through extended event output, you'll still be using the trace events for some of your performance testing.

This chapter covers the following topics:

- Concepts of database testing
- How to create a server-side trace
- Using Distributed Replay for database testing

## Database Performance Testing

The general approach to database performance and load testing is pretty simple. You need to capture the calls against a production system under normal load, and then be able to play that load over and over again against a test system. This enables you to directly measure the changes in performance caused by changes to your code or structures. Unfortunately, accomplishing this in the real world is not so simple.

To start with, you can't simply capture the recording of queries. Instead, you must first ensure that you can restore your production database to a moment in time on a test system. Specifically, you need to be able to restore to exactly the point at which you start recording the transactions on the system because, if you restore to any other point, you might have different data or even different structures. This will cause the playback mechanism to generate errors instead of useful information.

Once you establish the ability to restore to the appropriate time, you will need to configure your query capture mechanism—a server-side trace generated by Profiler, in this case. The playback mechanism will define exactly which events you'll need to capture. You'll want to set up your capture process so that it impacts your system as little as possible.

Next, you'll have to deal with the large amounts of data captured by the trace. Depending on how big your system is, you may have a very large number of transactions over a short period of time. All that data has to be stored and managed, and there will be a great many files.

You can set up this process on a single machine; however, to really see the benefits, you'll want to set up multiple machines to support the playback capabilities of the Distributed Replay tool. This means you'll need to have these machines available to you as part of your testing process.

When you have all these various parts in place, you can begin testing. Of course, this leads to a new question: what exactly are you doing with your database testing?

## A Repeatable Process

As explained in [Chapter 1](#), performance tuning your system is an iterative process that you may have to go through on multiple occasions to get your performance to where you need it to be and keep it there. Because of this, one of the most important things you can do for testing is to create a process that you can run over and over again.

The primary reason you need to create a repeatable testing process is because you can't always be sure that the methods outlined in the preceding chapters of this book will work well in every situation. This doubt means you need to be able to validate that the changes you have made resulted in a positive improvement in performance. If not, you need to be able to remove any changes you've made, make a new set of changes, and then repeat the tests, repeating this process iteratively. You may find that you'll need to repeat the entire tuning cycle until you've met your goals for this round.

Because of the iterative nature of this process, you absolutely need to concentrate on automating it as much as possible. This is where the Distributed Replay tool comes into the picture.

## Distributed Replay

The Distributed Replay tool is made up of three different pieces of architecture:

- **Distributed Replay Controller:** This service manages the processes of the Distributed Replay system.
- **Distributed Replay Administrator:** This is an interface to allow you to control the Distributed Replay Controller and the Distributed Replace process.
- **Distributed Replay Client:** This is an interface that runs on one or more machines (up to 16) to make all the calls to your database server.

You can install all three components onto one machine; however, the ideal approach is to have the Controller on one machine, and then have one or more client machines that are completely separated from the Controller, so that each of these machines is handling different processing.

There is no interface for the Distributed Replay utility. Instead, you'll use XML configuration files to take control of the different parts of the Distributed Replay architecture. Begin by installing the Distributed Replay Controller service onto a machine. For the purposes of illustration, I have all the components running on a single instance. Your first task is to capture a set of trace events using a predefined trace. You can use the distributed playback for various tasks, such as basic query playback, server-side cursors, or prepared server statements. Since we're primarily focused with query tuning, we'll focus on the queries and prepared server statements (also known as *parameterized queries*). This defines a particular set of events that must be captured; I'll cover how to do that in the next section.

Once the information is captured in a trace file, you will have to run that file through the pre-process event using the Distributed Replay Controller. This modifies the basic trace data into a different format that can be used to distribute to the various Replay Client machines. You can then fire off a replay process. The reformatted data is sent to the clients, which in turn will create queries to run against the target server. You can capture another trace output from the client machines to see exactly which calls they made, as well as the I/O and CPU of those calls. Presumably you'll also set up standard monitoring on the target server in order to see how the load you are generating impacts that server.

When you go to run the system against your server, you can choose one of two types of playback: Synchronization mode or Stress mode. In Synchronization mode, you will get an exact copy of the original playback, although you can affect the amount of idle time on the system. This is good for precise performance tuning because it helps you understand how the system is working, especially if you're making changes to structures, indexes, or TSQL code. Stress mode doesn't run in any particular order, except within a single connection, where queries will be streamed in the correct order. In this case, the calls are made as fast as the client machines can make them—in any order—as fast as the server can receive them. In short, it performs a stress test. This is very useful for testing database designs or hardware installations.

## Capturing Data with the Server Side Trace

Using trace events to capture data is very similar to capturing query executions with Extended Events. To support the Distributed Replay process, you'll need to capture some very specific events and specific columns for those events. If you want to build your own trace events, you need to go after the events listed in Table 15-1.

**Table 15-1.** Events to Capture

Events	Columns
Prepare SQL	Event Class
Exec Prepared SQL	EventSequence
SQL:BatchStarting	TextData
SQL:BatchCompleted	Application Name
RPC:Starting	LoginName
RPC:Completed	DatabaseName
RPC Output Parameter	Database ID
Audit Login	HostName
Audit Logout	Binary Data
Existing Connection	SPID
	Start Time
	EndTime
	IsSystem

You have two options for setting up these events. First, you can use TSQL. Second, you can use an external tool called Profiler. While Profiler can connect directly to your SQL Server instance, I strongly recommend against using this tool to capture data. Profiler is best used as a way to supply a template for performing the capture. You should use TSQL to generate the actual server-side trace.

On a test or development machine, open Profiler and select TSQL\_Replay from the Template list, as shown in Figure 15-1.

Since you need a file for Distributed Replay, you'll want to save the output of the trace to file. It's the best way to set up a server-side trace anyway, so this works out. You'll want to output to a location that has sufficient space. Depending on the number of transactions you have to support with your system, trace files can be extremely large. Also, it's a good idea to put a limit on the size of the files and allow them to rollover, creating new files as needed. You'll have more files to deal with, but the operating system can actually deal with a larger number of smaller files for writes better than it can deal with a single large file. I've found this to be true because of two things. First, with a smaller file size, you get a quicker rollover, which means the previous file is available for processing if you need to load it into a table or copy it to another server. Second, it seems that it generally takes longer for writes to occur with simple log files as the size of such files gets very large. I would also suggest defining a stop time for the trace process; again, this helps ensure that you don't fill the drive you've designated for storing the trace data.

Since this is a template, the events and columns have already been selected for you. You can validate the events and columns to ensure you are getting exactly what you need by clicking the Events Selection tab. Figure 15-2 shows some of the events and columns, all of which are predefined for you.

This template is generic, so it includes the full list of events, including all the cursor events. You can edit it by clicking boxes to deselect events; however, I do not recommend removing anything other than the cursor events, if you're going to remove any.

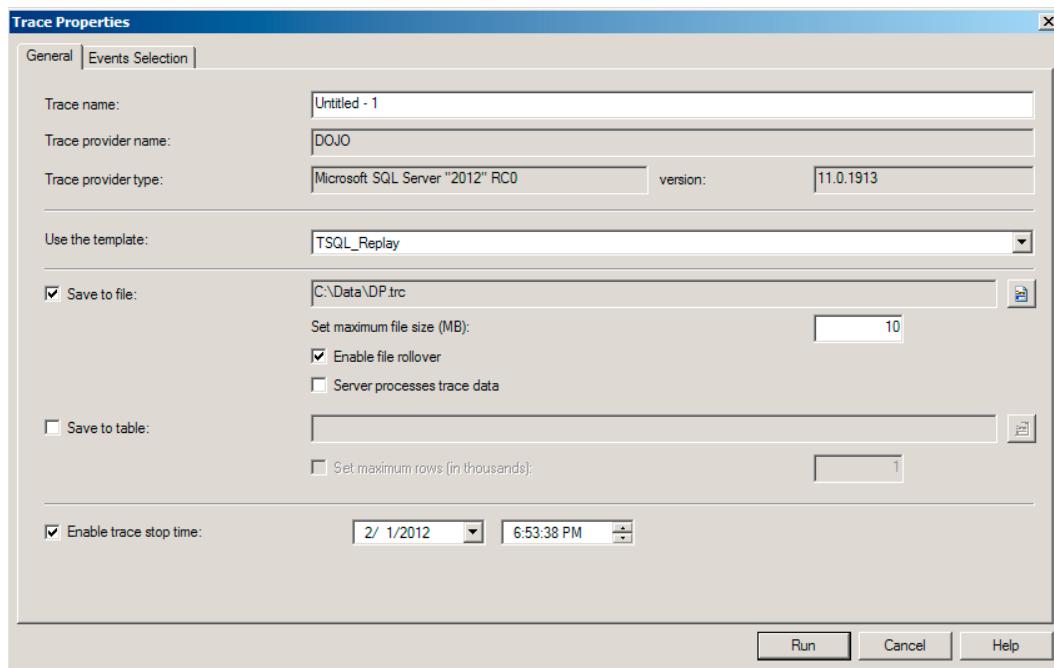
I started this template connected to a test server instead of to a production machine because, once you've set it up appropriately, you have to start the trace by clicking Run. I wouldn't do that on a production system. On a test system, however, you can watch the screen to ensure you're getting the events you think you should. It will display the events, as well as capture them to a file. When you're satisfied that it's correct, you can pause the trace. Next, click the File menu, and then select Export>Script Trace Definition. Finally, select For SQL Server 2005 – SQL 11 (see Figure 15-3).

This template will allow you to save the trace you just created as a TSQL file. Once you have the TSQL, you can configure it to run on any server that you like. The file path will have to be replaced, and you can reset the stop time through parameters within the script. The following script shows the very beginning of the TSQL process used to set up the server-side trace events:

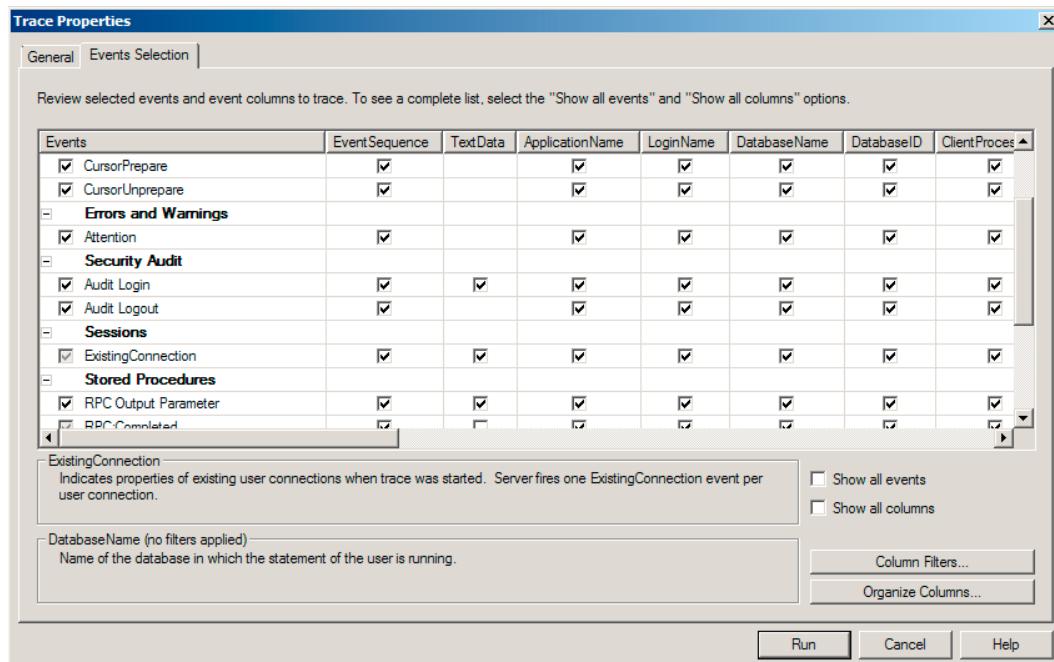
```
*****
/* Created by: SQL Server 2012 RCO Profiler */
/* Date: 03/07/2012 10:18:37 PM */
*****  

-- Create a Queue
declare@rcint
declare@TraceIDint
declare@maxfilesizebigint
set@maxfilesize= 5  

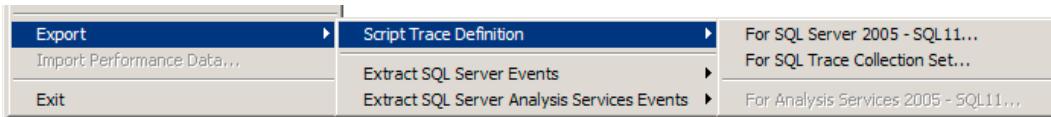
-- Please replace the text InsertFileNameHere, with an appropriate
-- filename prefixed by a path, e.g., c:\MyFolder\MyTrace.
-- The .trc extension
-- will be appended to the filename aut
```



**Figure 15-1.** The Distributed Replay trace template



**Figure 15-2.** The TSQL\_Replay template events and columns



**Figure 15-3.** The menu selection to output the trace definition

omatically.

```
-- If you are writing from
-- remote server to local drive, please use UNC path
-- and make sure server has
-- write access to your network share

exec @rc = sp_trace_create @TraceID output,
      0,
      N'InsertFileNameHere',
      @maxfilesize,
      NULL
if (@rc != 0) goto error
```

You can edit the path where it says InsertFileNameHere and provide different values for @DateTime. At this point, your script can be run on any server.

The amount of information you collect really depends on what kind of test you want to run. For a standard performance test, it's probably a good idea to collect at least one hour's worth of information; however, you wouldn't want to capture more than two to three hours of data in most circumstances. Capturing more than that would entail managing a lot more data, and it would mean that you were planning on running your tests for a very long time.

Before you capture the data, you do need to think about where you're going to run your tests. Let's assume that you're not worried about disk space and that you don't need to protect legally audited data (if you have those issues, you'll need to address them separately). If your database is not in Full Recovery mode, then you can't use the log backups to restore it to a point in time. If this is the case, I strongly recommend running a database backup as part of starting the trace data collection. The reason for this is that you need the database to be in exactly the same condition it's in when you start recording transactions. If it's not, you may get a larger number of errors, which could seriously change the way your performance tests run. If your database remains in the same state that it was at or near the beginning of your trace, then you should have very few, if any, errors.

With a copy of the database ready to go and a set of trace data, you're ready to run the Distributed Replay.

## Distributed Replay for Database Testing

Assuming you used the replay template to capture your trace information, you should be ready to start processing the files. As noted earlier, the first step is to convert the trace file into a different format, one that can be split up among multiple client machines for playback. But there is more to it than simply running the executable against your file. You also need to make some decisions about how you want the distributed replay to run; you make those decisions when you pre-process the trace file.

The decisions are fairly straightforward. First, you need to decide if you're going to replay system processes along with the user processes. Unless you're dealing with the potential of specific system issues, I'd suggest setting this value to No. This is also the default value. Second, you need to decide how you want to deal with idle time. You can use the actual values for how often calls were made to the database; or, you can put in a value, measured in seconds, to limit the wait time to no more than that value. It really depends on what type of playback you're going to run.

Assuming you use Synchronization mode playback, the mode best suited for straight performance measurement, it's a good idea to eliminate idle time by setting the value to something low, such as three to five seconds.

```
c:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server\110\Tools\Binn>dreplay preprocess -d
c:\data -i C:\data\DR.trc -m dojo
2012-02-02 21:33:28:459 Info DReplay Preprocessing pass 1 of 2 in progress.
2012-02-02 21:33:29:432 Info DReplay Preprocessing pass 1 of 2 completed.
2012-02-02 21:33:29:433 Info DReplay Preprocessing pass 2 of 2 in progress.
2012-02-02 21:33:29:434 Info DReplay Preprocessing pass 2 of 2 completed.
2012-02-02 21:33:29:437 Info DReplay 365 replayable events written to interme
diate file in c:\data.
2012-02-02 21:33:29:438 Info DReplay Elapsed time: 0 day(s), 0 hour(s), 0 min
ute(s), 1 second(s).
```

**Figure 15-4.** Output from the pre-processing steps of Distributed Replay

If you choose to use the default values, you don't need to modify the configuration file. But if you've chosen to include the system calls or to change the idle time, then you'll need to change the configuration file, `DReplay.exe.Preprocess.config`. It's a simple XML configuration file; the one I'm using looks like this:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<Options>
<PreprocessModifiers>
<IncSystemSession>No</IncSystemSession>
<MaxIdleTime>2</MaxIdleTime>
</PreprocessModifiers>
</Options>
```

I've made only one change, adjusting `MaxIdleTime` to limit any down period during the playback.

Before you run the pre-processing, make sure that you have installed the DRController and that the `DReplay` service is running on your system. If so, you'll just need to call `DReplay.exe` to execute the pre-processing:

```
dreplay preprocess -i c:\data\dr.trc -d c:\DRProcess
```

In the preceding code, you can see that `dreplay` runs the `preprocess` event. The input file was supplied by the `-i` parameter, and a folder to hold the output was supplied through the `-d` parameter. The trace files will be processed, and the output will go to the folder specified. The output will look something like Figure 15-4.

With the pre-processing complete, you're ready to move ahead with running the distributed replay process. Before you do so, however, you need to make sure you have one or more client systems ready to go.

## Configuring the Client

The client machines will have to be configured to work with the Distributed Replay controller. Begin by installing your clients to the different machines. For illustration purposes only, I'm running everything on a single machine; however, the setup is no different if you use multiple machines. You need to configure the client to work with a controller, and a client can only work with one controller at a time. You also have to have space on the system for two items. First, you need a location for working files that are overwritten at each replay. Second, you need room for trace file output from the client if you want to collect execution data from that client. You also get to decide on the logging level of the client process. All of this is set in another XML configuration file, `DReplayClient.config`. Here is my configuration:

```
<Options>
<Controller>DOJO</Controller>
<WorkingDirectory>C:\DRClientWork\</WorkingDirectory>
<ResultDirectory>C:\DRClientOutput\</ResultDirectory>
<LogLevel>CRITICAL</LogLevel>
</Options>
```

```
c:\Program Files (<x86>)\Microsoft SQL Server\110\Tools\Binn>d replay replay -d c:\data -w DOJO
2012-02-02 21:39:24:046 Info DReplay Dispatching in progress.
2012-02-02 21:39:24:052 Info DReplay 0 events have been dispatched.
2012-02-02 21:39:25:751 Info DReplay Dispatching has completed.
2012-02-02 21:39:25:752 Info DReplay 365 events dispatched in total.
2012-02-02 21:39:25:754 Info DReplay Elapsed time: 0 day(s), 0 hour(s), 0 min
ute(s), 1 second(s).
2012-02-02 21:39:25:755 Info DReplay Event replay in progress.
2012-02-02 21:39:55:761 Info DReplay DOJO: 244 events replayed, 151 events su
cceded (pass rate 61.88 %).
2012-02-02 21:39:55:762 Info DReplay Estimated time remaining: 15 second(s).
2012-02-02 21:40:22:751 Info DReplay 244 events (66.84 %) have been replayed.
2012-02-02 21:40:22:753 Info DReplay Event replay has completed.
2012-02-02 21:40:22:754 Info DReplay 365 events (100 %) have been replayed in
total. Pass rate 50.13 %.
2012-02-02 21:40:22:754 Info DReplay Elapsed time: 0 day(s), 0 hour(s), 0 min
ute(s), 58 second(s).
```

**Figure 15-5.** The output from running DReplay.exe

The directories and logging level are clear. I also had to point the client to the server where the Distributed Replay service is running. No other settings are required for multiple clients to work; you just need to be sure that they're going to the right controller system.

+1

## Running the Distributed Tests

So far you have configured everything and captured the data. Next, you need to go back to the command line to run things from the DReplay.exe. Most of the control is accomplished through the configuration files, so there is very little input required in the executable. You invoke the tests using the following command:

```
Dreplay replay -d c:\data -w DOJO
```

You need to feed in the location of the output from the preprocessing, which means you need to list the client machines that are taking part in a comma delimited list. The output from the execution would look something like Figure 15-5.

As you can see, 365 events were captured, but only 244 events were replayed. Of those, only 151 events actually succeeded. In this case, you might need to establish what information might exist about why some of the events failed. To do so, simply reconfigure the tests and run them again. The whole idea behind having a repeatable testing process is that you can run it over and over. The preceding example represents a light load run against my local copy of AdventureWorks2008R2, captured over about five minutes. However, I configured the limits on idle time, so the replay completes in only 58 seconds.

From here, you can reconfigure the tests, reset the database, and run the tests over and over again, as needed. Note that changing the configuration files will require you to restart the associated services to ensure that the changes are implemented with the next set of tests.

When running these tests, it's a very good idea to use the types of performance data collection we talked about in Chapters 2 and 3. This helps you ensure that you can see exactly how well—or how badly—your tests are performing.

## Conclusion

With the inclusion of the Distributed Replay utilities, SQL Server now gives you the ability to perform load and function testing against your databases. You accomplish this by capturing your code in a simple manner with a server-side trace. If you plan to take advantage of this feature, however, be sure to validate that the changes you make to queries based on the principles put forward in this book actually work and will help improve the performance of your system. You should also make sure you reset the database to avoid errors as much as possible.

## CHAPTER 16



# Database Workload Optimization

So far, you have learned about a number of aspects that can affect query performance, such as the tools that you can use to analyze query performance and the optimization techniques you can use to improve query performance. Next, you will learn how to apply this information to analyze, troubleshoot, and optimize the performance of a database workload. In this chapter, I cover the following topics:

- The characteristics of a database workload
- The steps involved in database workload optimization
- How to identify costly queries in the workload
- How to measure the baseline resource use and performance of costly queries
- How to analyze factors that affect the performance of costly queries
- How to apply techniques to optimize costly queries
- How to analyze the effects of query optimization on the overall workload

## Workload Optimization Fundamentals

Optimizing a database workload often fits the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of the workload consumes about 20 percent of server resources. Trying to optimize the performance of the majority of the workload is usually not very productive. So, the first step in workload optimization is to find the 20 percent of the workload that consumes 80 percent of the server resources.

Optimizing the workload requires a set of tools to measure the resource consumption and response time of the different parts of the workload. As you saw in [Chapter 3](#), SQL Server provides a set of tools and utilities to analyze the performance of a database workload and individual queries.

In addition to using these tools, it is important to know how you can use different techniques to optimize a workload. The most important aspect of workload optimization to remember is that not every optimization technique is guaranteed to work on every performance problem. Many optimization techniques are specific to certain database application designs and database environments. Therefore, for each optimization technique, you need to measure the performance of each part of the workload (that is, each individual query) before and after you apply an optimization technique. After this, you need to measure the impact of the optimization on the complete workload using the testing techniques outlined in [Chapter 15](#).

It is not unusual to find that an optimization technique has little effect—or even a negative effect—on the other parts of the workload, thereby hurting the overall performance of the workload. For instance,

a nonclustered index added to optimize a SELECT statement can hurt the performance of UPDATE statements that modify the value of the indexed column. The UPDATE statements have to update index rows in addition to the data rows. However, as demonstrated in [Chapter 4](#), sometimes indexes can improve the performance of action queries, too. Therefore, improving the performance of a particular query could benefit or hurt the performance of the overall workload. As usual, your best course of action is to validate any assumptions through testing.

## Workload Optimization Steps

The process of optimizing a database workload follows a specific series of steps. As part of this process, you will use the set of optimization techniques presented in previous chapters. Since every performance problem is a new challenge, you can use a different set of optimization techniques for troubleshooting different performance problems. Just remember that the first step is always to ensure that the server is well configured and operating within acceptable limits, as defined in [Chapter 2](#).

To understand the query optimization process, you will simulate a sample workload using a set of queries. These are the optimization steps you will follow as you optimize the sample workload:

1. Capture the workload.
2. Analyze the workload.
3. Identify the costliest/most frequently called/longest running query.
4. Quantify the baseline resource use of the costliest query.
5. Determine the overall resource use.
6. Compile detailed information on resource use.
7. Analyze and optimize external factors.
8. Analyze the use of indexes.
9. Analyze the batch-level options used by the application.
10. Analyze the effectiveness of statistics.
11. Analyze the need for defragmentation.
12. Analyze the internal behavior of the costliest query.
13. Analyze the query execution plan.
14. Identify the costly operators in the execution plan.
15. Analyze the effectiveness of the processing strategy.
16. Optimize the costliest query.
17. Analyze the effects of the changes on database workload.
18. Iterate through multiple optimization phases.

As explained in [Chapter 1](#), performance tuning is an iterative process. Therefore, you should iterate through the performance optimization steps multiple times until you achieve the desired application performance targets. After a certain period of time, you will need to repeat the process to address the impact on the workload caused by database changes.

## Sample Workload

To troubleshoot SQL Server performance, you need to know the SQL workload that is executed on the server. You can then analyze the workload to identify causes of poor performance and applicable optimization steps. Ideally, you should capture the workload on the SQL Server facing the performance problems. In this chapter, you will use a set of queries to simulate a sample workload, so that you can follow the optimization steps listed in the previous section. The sample workload you'll use consists of a combination of good and bad queries.

**Note** I recommend you restore a clean copy of the AdventureWorks2008R2 database, so that any artifacts left over from previous chapters are completely removed.

The very simple test workload is simulated by the following set of sample stored procedures (workload.sql in the download); you execute these using the second script (exec.sql in the download) on the AdventureWorks2008R2 database:

```
USE AdventureWorks2008R2;
GO

CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.spr_ShoppingCart
    @ShoppingCartId VARCHAR(50)
AS
--provides the output from the shopping cart including the line total
SELECT sci.Quantity,
       p.ListPrice,
       p.ListPrice * sci.Quantity AS LineTotal,
       p.[Name]
FROM   Sales.ShoppingCartItem AS sci
JOIN   Production.Product AS p
       ON sci.ProductID = p.ProductID
WHERE  sci.ShoppingCartID = @ShoppingCartId ;
GO

CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.spr_ProductBySalesOrder @SalesOrderID INT
AS
/*provides a list of products from a particular sales order,
and provides line ordering by modified date but ordered by product name*/
SELECT ROW_NUMBER() OVER (ORDER BY sod.ModifiedDate) AS LineNumber,
       p.[Name],
       sod.LineTotal
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
JOIN   Sales.SalesOrderDetail AS sod
       ON soh.SalesOrderID = sod.SalesOrderID
JOIN   Production.Product AS p
       ON sod.ProductID = p.ProductID
WHERE  soh.SalesOrderID = @SalesOrderID
ORDER BY p.[Name] ASC ;
```

```

CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.spr_PersonByFirstName
    @FirstName NVARCHAR(50)
AS
--gets anyone by first name from the Person table
SELECT p.BusinessEntityID,
       p.Title,
       p.LastName,
       p.FirstName,
       p.PersonType
FROM Person.Person AS p
WHERE p.FirstName = @FirstName ;
GO

CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.spr_ProductTransactionsSinceDate
    @LatestDate DATETIME,
    @ProductName NVARCHAR(50)
AS
--Gets the latest transaction against
-all products that have a transaction

SELECT p.Name,
       th.ReferenceOrderID,
       th.ReferenceOrderLineID,
       th.TransactionType,
       th.Quantity
FROM Production.Product AS p
JOIN Production.TransactionHistory AS th
ON p.ProductID = th.ProductID AND
    th.TransactionID = (SELECT TOP (1)
                           th2.TransactionID
                           FROM Production.TransactionHistory th2
                           WHERE th2.ProductID = p.ProductID
                           ORDER BY th2.TransactionID DESC
                         )
WHERE th.TransactionDate > @LatestDate AND
      p.Name LIKE @ProductName ;
GO

CREATE PROCEDURE dbo.spr_PurchaseOrderBySalesPersonName @LastName NVARCHAR(50)
AS
SELECT poh.PurchaseOrderID,
       poh.OrderDate,
       pod.LineTotal,
       p.[Name] AS ProductName,
       e.JobTitle,
       per.LastName + ' ' + per.FirstName AS SalesPerson
FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
JOIN Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
ON poh.PurchaseOrderID = pod.PurchaseOrderID

```

```

JOIN      Production.Product AS p
ON pod.ProductID = p.ProductID
JOIN      HumanResources.Employee AS e
ON poh.EmployeeID = e.BusinessEntityID
JOIN      Person.Person AS per
ON e.BusinessEntityID = per.BusinessEntityID
WHERE    per.LastName LIKE @LastName
ORDER BY per.LastName,
        per.FirstName ;
GO

```

Once these procedures are created, you can execute them using the following scripts:

```

EXEC dbo.spr_ShoppingCart
    '20621' ;
GO
EXEC dbo.spr_ProductBySalesOrder
    43867 ;
GO
EXEC dbo.spr_PersonByFirstName
    'Gretchen' ;
GO
EXEC dbo.spr_ProductTransactionsSinceDate
    @LatestDate = '9/1/2004',
    @ProductName = 'Hex Nut%' ;
GO
EXEC dbo.spr_PurchaseOrderBySalesPersonName
    @LastName = 'Hill%' ;
GO

```

This is an extremely simplistic workload that's here just to illustrate the process. You're going to see hundreds and thousands of additional calls in a typical system. As simple as it is, however, this sample workload does consist of the different types of queries you usually execute on SQL Server:

- Queries using aggregate functions
- Point queries that retrieve only one row or a small number of rows; usually, these are the best kind for performance
- Queries joining multiple tables
- Queries retrieving a narrow range of rows
- Queries performing additional result set processing, such as providing a sorted output

The first optimization step is to identify the worst performing queries, as explained in the next section.

## Capturing the Workload

As a part of the diagnostic-data collection step, you must define an extended event session to capture the workload on the database server. You can use the tools and methods recommended in [Chapter 3](#) to do this. Table 16-1 lists the specific events that you should use to measure how resource intensive the queries are.

**Table 16-1.** Events to Capture Information About Costly Queries

Category	Event
Execution	rpc_completed sql_batch_completed

As explained in [Chapter 3](#), for production databases it is recommended that you capture the output of the Extended Events session to a file. Here are a couple significant advantages to capturing output to a file:

- Since you intend to analyze the SQL queries once the workload is captured, you do not need to display the SQL queries while capturing them.
- Running the Session through SSMS doesn't provide a very flexible timing control over the tracing process.

Let's look at timing control more closely. Assume you want to start capturing events at 11 p.m. and record the SQL workload for 24 hours. You can define an extended event session using the GUI or through TSQL. However, you don't have to start the process until you're ready. This means you can create commands in SQL Agent or with some other scheduling tool to start and stop the process with the `ALTER EVENT SESSION` command:

```
ALTER EVENT SESSION <sessionname>
ON SERVER
STATE = <start/stop> ;
```

For this example, I've put a filter on the session to capture events only from the AdventureWorks2008R2 database. The file will only capture queries against that database, reducing the amount of information I need to deal with. This may be a good choice for your systems, too.

## Analyzing the Workload

Once the workload is captured in a file, you can analyze the workload either by browsing through the data using SSMS or by importing the content of the output file into a database table.

SSMS provides the following two methods for analyzing the content of the file, both of which are relatively straightforward:

- **Sort the output on a data column by right-clicking to select a sort order or to Group By a particular column:** You may want to select columns from the Details tab and use the `Show column in table` command to move them up. Once there, you can issue grouping and sorting commands on that column.
- **Rearrange the output to a selective list of columns and events:** You can change the output displayed through SSMS by right-clicking the table and selecting `Pick Columns` from the context menu. This lets you do more than simply pick and choose columns; it also lets you combine them into new columns.

Unfortunately, using SSMS provides limited ways of analyzing the Extended Events output. For instance, consider a query that is executed frequently. Instead of looking at the cost of only the individual execution of the query, you should also try to determine the cumulative cost of repeatedly executing the query within a fixed period of time. Although the individual execution of the query may not be that costly, the query may be executed so many times that even a little optimization may make a big difference. SSMS is not powerful enough to help analyze the workload in such advanced ways. So, while you can group by the `batch_text` column, the differences in parameter values mean that you'll see different groupings of the same stored procedure call.

For in-depth analysis of the workload, you must import the content of the trace file into a database table. The output from the session puts most of the important data into an XML field, so you'll want to query it as you load the data as follows:

```

IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.ExEvents')
    ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.ExEvents ;
GO
WITH xEvents
    AS (SELECT object_name AS xEventName,
               CAST (event_data AS xml) AS xEventData
        FROM sys.fn_xe_file_target_read_
        file('D:\Apath\Query Performance Tuning*.xel',
             NULL, NULL, NULL)
    )
SELECT xEventName,
       xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''duration'']/value')[1],
       'bigint') Duration,
       xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''physical_reads'']/value)[1],
       'bigint') PhysicalReads,
       xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''logical_reads'']/value)[1],
       'bigint') LogicalReads,
       xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''cpu_time'']/value)[1],
       'bigint') CpuTime,
       CASE xEventName
           WHEN 'sql_batch_completed'
           THEN
               xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''batch_text'']/value)[1],
               'varchar(max)')
           WHEN 'rpc_completed'
           THEN
               xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''statement'']/value)[1],
               'varchar(max)')
           END AS SQLText,
       xEventData.value('/event/data[@name=''query_plan_hash'']/value)[1],
       'binary(8)') QueryPlanHash
    INTO dbo.ExEvents
    FROM xEvents ;

```

You need to substitute your own path and file name for <ExEventsFileName>. Once you have the content in a table, you can use SQL queries to analyze the workload. For example, to find the slowest queries, you can execute this SQL query:

```

SELECT *
FROM dbo.ExEvents AS ee
ORDER BY ee.Duration DESC ;

```

The preceding query will show the single costliest query, and it is adequate for the tests you're running in this chapter. You may also want to run a query like this on a production system; however, it's more likely you'll want to work off of aggregations of data, as in this example:

```

SELECT ee.BatchText,
       SUM(Duration) AS SumDuration,

```

```

    AVG(Duration) AS AvgDuration,
    COUNT(Duration) AS CountDuration
  FROM    dbo.ExEvents AS ee
 GROUP BY ee.BatchText ;

```

Executing this query lets you order things by the fields you're most interested in—say, CountDuration to get the most frequently called procedure or SumDuration to get the procedure that runs for the longest cumulative amount of time. You need a method to remove or replace parameters and parameter values. This is necessary in order to aggregate based on just the procedure name or just the text of the query without the parameters or parameter values (since these will be constantly changing). The objective of analyzing the workload is to identify the costliest query (or costly queries in general); the next section covers how to do this.

## Identifying the Costliest Query

As just explained, you can use SSMS or the query technique to identify costly queries for different criteria. The queries in the workload can be sorted on the CPU, Reads, or Writes column to identify the costliest query, as discussed in [Chapter 3](#). You can also use aggregate functions to arrive at the cumulative cost, as well as individual costs. In a production system, knowing the procedure that is accumulating the longest run times, the most CPU usage, or the largest number of reads and writes is frequently more useful than simply identifying the query that had the highest numbers one time.

Since the total number of reads usually outnumbers the total number of writes by at least seven to eight times for even the heaviest OLTP database, sorting the queries on the Reads column usually identifies more bad queries than sorting on the Writes column (but you should always test this on your systems). It's also worth looking at the queries that simply take the longest to execute. As outlined in [Chapter 3](#), you can capture wait states with Performance Monitor and view those along with a given query to help identify why a particular query is taking a long time to run. Each system is different. In general, I approach the most frequently called procedures first; then the longest-running; and finally, those with the most reads. Of course, performance tuning is an iterative process, so you will need to reexamine each category on a regular basis.

To analyze the sample workload for the worst-performing queries, you need to know how costly the queries are in terms of duration or reads. Since these values are known only after the query completes its execution, you are mainly interested in the completed events. (The rationale behind using completed events for performance analysis is explained in detail in [Chapter 3](#).)

For presentation purposes, open the trace file in SSMS. Figure 16-1 shows the captured trace output after moving several columns to the grid.

The worst-performing query in terms of duration is also one of the worst in terms of CPU usage as well as reads. That procedure, `spr_PurchaseOrderByhSalesPersonName`, is highlighted in Figure 16-1 (you may have

name	timestamp	batch_text	cpu_time	duration	logical_reads
sql_batch_completed	2012-02-16 17:20:10.4943317	EXEC dbo.spr_ShoppingCart '20621';	0	48002	10
sql_batch_completed	2012-02-16 17:20:10.5783365	EXEC dbo.spr_ProductBySalesOrder 43867;	0	46002	47
sql_batch_completed	2012-02-16 17:20:10.6653414	EXEC dbo.spr_PersonByFirstName 'Gretchen';	47000	40002	3820
sql_batch_completed	2012-02-16 17:20:10.7553466	EXEC dbo.spr_ProductTransactionsSinceDate @LatestDat...	0	29001	121
► sql_batch_completed	2012-02-16 17:20:10.8823539	EXEC dbo.spr_PurchaseOrderBySalesPersonName @Last...	31000	77004	1901
sql_batch_completed	2012-02-16 17:20:10.9533579	SET STATISTICS XML OFF	0	0	0
rpc_completed	2012-02-16 17:20:16.9916379	NULL	0	25	0
rpc_completed	2012-02-16 17:20:16.9926380	NULL	0	1323	12
sql_batch_completed	2012-02-16 17:20:16.9936381	select SERVERPROPERTY('Nservername')	0	1000	0
sql_batch_completed	2012-02-16 17:20:16.9946381	DECLARE @edition sysname, SET @edition = cast(SERVERP...	0	0	0

**Figure 16-1.** Extended Events session output showing the SQL workload

different values, but this query is likely to be the worst-performing query or at least one of the worst). The query inside that procedure is presented here for easy reference:

```

SELECT poh.PurchaseOrderID,
       poh.OrderDate,
       pod.LineTotal,
       p.[Name] AS ProductName,
       e.JobTitle,
       per.LastName + ' ' + per.FirstName AS SalesPerson
  FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
 JOIN Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
    ON poh.PurchaseOrderID = pod.PurchaseOrderID
 JOIN Production.Product AS p
    ON pod.ProductID = p.ProductID
 JOIN HumanResources.Employee AS e
    ON poh.EmployeeID = e.BusinessEntityID
 JOIN Person.Person AS per
    ON e.BusinessEntityID = per.BusinessEntityID
 WHERE per.LastName LIKE @LastName
 ORDER BY per.LastName,
          per.FirstName ;

```

Another method open to you if you can't run Extended Events is to use the `sys.dm_exec_query_stats` DMO. This will provide you with aggregate information about all the queries currently in cache. It's a fast way to identify the most frequently called, longest running, and most resource intensive procedures. It brings along the added benefit of being able to quickly join to other DMOs to pull out the execution plan and other interesting information.

Once you've identified the worst-performing query, the next optimization step is to determine the resources consumed by the query.

## Determining the Baseline Resource Use of the Costliest Query

The current resource use of the worst-performing query can be considered as a baseline figure before you apply any optimization techniques. You may apply different optimization techniques to the query, and you can compare the resultant resource use of the query with the baseline figure to determine the effectiveness of a given optimization technique. The resource use of a query can be presented in two categories:

- Overall resource use
- Detailed resource use

## Overall Resource Use

The overall resource use of the query provides a gross figure for the amount of hardware resources consumed by the worst performing query. You can compare the resource use of an optimized query to the overall resource use of a nonoptimized query to ensure the overall effectiveness of the performance techniques you've applied.

You can determine the overall resource use of the query from the workload trace. Table 16-3 shows the overall use of the query from the trace in Figure 16-1.

**Table 16-3.** Data Columns Representing the Amount of Resources Used by a Query

Data Column	Value	Description
LogicalReads	1901	Number of logical reads performed by the query. If a page is not found in memory, then a logical read for the page will require a physical read from the disk to fetch the page to the memory first.
Writes	0	Number of pages modified by the query.
CPU	31 ms	How long the CPU was used by the query.
Duration	77 ms	The time it took SQL Server to process this query from compilation to returning the result set.

**Note** In your environment, you may have different figures for the preceding data columns. Irrespective of the data columns' absolute values, it's important to keep track of these values, so that you can compare them with the corresponding values later.

## Detailed Resource Use

You can break down the overall resource use of the query to locate bottlenecks on the different database tables accessed by the query. This detailed resource use helps you determine which table accesses are the most problematic. Understanding the wait states in your system will help you identify where you need to focus your tuning, whether it's on CPU usage, reads, or writes. A rough rule of thumb can be to simply look at duration; however, duration can be affected by so many factors that it's an imperfect measure, at best. In this case, I'll spend time on all three: CPU usage, reads, and duration. Reads are a popular measure of performance, but they can be as problematic to look at in isolation as duration. This is why I spend time on all the values.

As you saw in [Chapter 3](#), you can obtain the number of reads performed on the individual tables accessed by a given query from the STATISTICS IO output for that query. You can also set the STATISTICS TIME option to get the basic execution time and CPU time for the query, including its compile time. You can obtain this output by reexecuting the query with the SET statements as follows (or by selecting the Set Statistics IO checkbox in the query window):

```
DBCC FREEPROCCACHE() ;
DBCC DROPCLEANBUFFERS ;
GO
SET STATISTICS TIME ON ;
GO
SET STATISTICS IO ON ;
GO
EXEC dbo.spr_PurchaseOrderBySalesPersonName
    @LastName = 'Hill%' ;
GO
SET STATISTICS TIME OFF ;
GO
SET STATISTICS IO OFF ;
GO
```

To simulate the same first-time run shown in Figure 16-1, clean out the data stored in memory using DBCC DROPCLEANBUFFERS (not to be run on a production system) and remove the procedure from cache by running DBCC FREEPROCCACHE (also not to be run on a production system).

The STATISTICS output for the worst performing query looks like this:

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 1 ms.

DBCC execution completed. If DBCC printed error messages, contact your system administrator.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 1 ms.

DBCC execution completed. If DBCC printed error messages, contact your system administrator.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 2 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 1 ms.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 46 ms, elapsed time = 109 ms.

(1496 row(s) affected)

Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0, physical reads 0, read-ahead reads 0, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'PurchaseOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 66, physical reads 1, read-ahead reads 64, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'PurchaseOrderHeader'. Scan count 4, logical reads 1673, physical reads 8, read-ahead reads 8, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'Employee'. Scan count 0, logical reads 174, physical reads 2, read-ahead reads 0, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'Person'. Scan count 1, logical reads 4, physical reads 1, read-ahead reads 2, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'Product'. Scan count 1, logical reads 5, physical reads 1, read-ahead reads 8, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 16 ms, elapsed time = 435 ms.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 62 ms, elapsed time = 544 ms.

Table 16-4 summarizes the output of STATISTICS IO.

**Table 16-4.** Breaking Down the Output from STATISTICS IO

Table	Logical Reads
Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail	66
Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader	1,673
Person.Employee	174
Person.Person	4
Production.Product	5

**Table 16-5.** Breaking down the Output from STATISTICS TIME

Event	Duration	CPU
Compile	109 ms	46 ms
Execution	435 ms	16 ms
Completion	544 ms	62 ms

Usually, the sum of the reads from the individual tables referred to in a query will be less than the total number of reads performed by the query. This is because additional pages have to be read to access internal database objects, such as sysobjects, syscolumns, and sysindexes.

Table 16-5 summarizes the output of STATISTICS TIME.

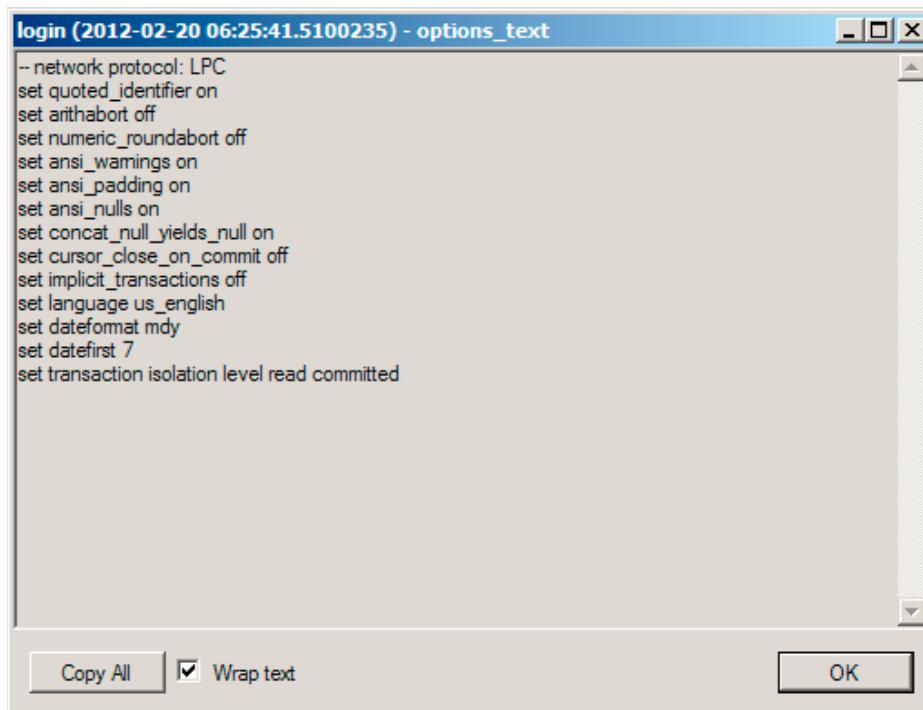
Don't use the logical reads in isolation from the execution times. You need to take all the measures into account when determining poorly performing queries. Conversely, don't assume that the execution time is a perfect measure, either. Resource contention plays a big part in execution time, so you'll see some variation in this measure. Use both values, but use them with a full understanding of what they mean.

Once the worst performing query has been identified and its resource use has been measured, the next optimization step is to determine the factors that are affecting the performance of the query. However, before you do this, you should check to see whether any factors external to the query might be causing that poor performance.

## Analyzing and Optimizing External Factors

In addition to factors such as query design and indexing, external factors can affect query performance. Thus, before diving into the execution plan of the query, you should analyze and optimize the major external factors that can affect query performance. Here are some of those external factors:

- The connection options used by the application
- The statistics of the database objects accessed by the query
- The fragmentation of the database objects accessed by the query



**Figure 16-2.** An existing connection showing the batch-level options

## Analyzing the Connection Options Used by the Application

When making a connection to SQL Server, various options, such as ANSI\_NULL or CONCAT\_NULL\_YIELDS\_NULL, can be set differently than the defaults for the server or the database. However, changing these settings per connection can lead to recompiles of stored procedures, causing slower behavior. Also, some options, such as ARITHABORT, must be set to ON when dealing with indexed views and certain other specialized indexes. If they are not, you can get poor performance or even errors in the code. For example, setting ANSI\_WARNINGS to OFF will cause the optimizer to ignore indexed views and indexed computed columns when generating the execution plan. You can use the output from Extended Events to see this information. The options\_text column contains the settings used by the connection in the login event and in the existing\_connection event, as shown in Figure 16-2.

This column does more than display the batch-level options; it also lets you check the transaction isolation level. You can also get these settings from the properties of the first operator in an execution plan.

I recommend using the ANSI standard settings, in which you set the following options to ON: ANSI\_NULLS, ANSI\_NULL\_DFLT\_ON, ANSI\_PADDING, ANSI\_WARNINGS, CURSOR\_CLOSE\_ON\_COMMIT, IMPLICIT\_TRANSACTIONS, and QUOTED\_IDENTIFIER. You can use the single command SET ANSI\_DEFAULTS ON to set them all to ON at the same time.

## Analyzing the Effectiveness of Statistics

The statistics of the database objects referred to in the query are one of the key pieces of information that the query optimizer uses to decide upon certain execution plans. As explained in Chapter 7, the optimizer generates the execution plan for a query based on the statistics of the objects referred to in the query. The optimizer looks

	Name	Updated	Rows	Rows Sampled	Steps	Density	Average key length	String Index	Filter Expression	Unfiltered Rows
1	PK_PurchaseOrderHeader_PurchaseOrderID	Jan 11 2011 4:48PM	4012	4012	44	1	4	NO	NULL	4012
1	All density	Average Length	Columns							
1	0.0002492522	4	PurchaseOrderID							
	RANGE_HI_KEY	RANGE_ROWS	EQ_ROWS	DISTINCT_RANGE_ROWS	AVG_RANGE_ROWS					
1	1	0	1	0	1					
2	87	85	1	85	1					
3	146	58	1	58	1					
4	248	101	1	101	1					
5	336	87	1	87	1					
6	400	63	1	63	1					

**Figure 16-3.** SHOW\_STATISTICS output for Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader

at the statistics of the database objects referred to in the query and estimates the number of rows affected. In this way, it determines the processing strategy for the query. If a database object's statistics are not accurate, then the optimizer may generate an inefficient execution plan for the query.

As explained in [Chapter 7](#), you can check the statistics of a table and its indexes using DBCC SHOW\_STATISTICS. There are five tables referenced in this query: Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader, Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail, Person.Employee, Person.Person, and Production.Product. You must know which indexes are in use by the query to get the statistics information about them. You can determine this when you look at the execution plan. For now, I'll check the statistics on the primary key of the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader table since it had the most reads, as shown in Table 16-4. Now run the following query:

```
DBCC SHOW_STATISTICS('Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader',
'PK_PurchaseOrderHeader_PurchaseOrderID');
```

When the preceding query completes, you'll see the output shown in Figure 16-3.

You can see the selectivity on the index is very high since the density is quite low, as shown in the All density column. In this instance, it's doubtful that statistics are likely to be the cause of this query's poor performance. You can also check the Updated column to determine the last time this set of statistics was updated. If has been more than a few days since the statistics were updated, then you need to check your statistics maintenance plan, and you should update these statistics manually.

## Analyzing the Need for Defragmentation

As explained in [Chapter 8](#), a fragmented table increases the number of pages to be accessed by a query, which adversely affects performance. For this reason, you should ensure that the database objects referred to in the query are not too fragmented.

You can determine the fragmentation of the five tables accessed by the worst performing query by running a query against sys.dm\_db\_index\_physical\_stats (–showcontig in the download). Begin by running the query against the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader table:

```
SELECT s.avg_fragmentation_in_percent,
s.fragment_count,
s.page_count,
s.avg_page_space_used_in_percent,
s.record_count,
s.avg_record_size_in_bytes,
s.index_id
```

```

FROM      sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats(DB_ID('AdventureWorks2008R2'),
                                         OBJECT_ID(N'Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader'),
                                         NULL, NULL, 'Sampled') AS s
WHERE    s.record_count > 0
ORDER BY s.index_id ;

```

Figure 16-4 shows the output of this query.

If you run the same query for the other four tables (in order: Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail, Production.Product, Person.Employee, and Person.Person), the output will look like Figure 16-5.

The fragmentation of the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader table is extremely light: 33 percent. Meanwhile, the avg\_page\_space\_used\_in\_percent is greater than 90 percent for all the indexes. When you take into account the number of pages for the indexes on the table—three or less—you're very unlikely to get an improvement in performance by defragging the index (assuming you can), as detailed in [Chapter 8](#).

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes	index_id
1	0	1	42	99.110452186805	4012	82	1
2	33.33333333333333	3	6	90.849196936002	4012	9	2
3	33.33333333333333	3	6	90.849196936002	4012	9	3

**Figure 16-4.** The index fragmentation of the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader table

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes	index_id
1	0	2	64	99.0089201877934	8845	56	1
2	17.6470588235294	5	17	96.3974796145293	8845	13	2
	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes	index_id
1	38.4615384615385	6	13	92.7999876451693	504	191.793	1
2	50	2	2	85.2606869285891	504	25.392	2
3	66.66666666666667	3	3	99.2257721769212	504	45.817	3
4	50	2	2	71.5838893007166	504	21	4
	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes	index_id
1	0	1	2	80.9241413392637	504	24	0
2	0	2	2	94.8480355819125	84	180.833	0
3	0	36	774	64.7566963182604	1597	2539.262	0
4	0	NULL	35	80.206152705708	40	5680.15	0
5	0	1	1	10.6498640968619	32	25	1
6	0	1	1	6.69631826043983	1	542	1
7	0	1	1	2.84161106992834	4	56	1
8	0	1	1	5.47319001729676	5	87	1
	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes	index_id
1	0.026267402153927	71	3807	85.7145663454411	19972	1320.83	1
2	0.961538461538462	5	104	98.1731529528045	19972	39.388	2
3	0	2	57	99.5413639733136	19972	21	3
4	0	1	3	68.2151470224858	195	82.974	256000
5	0	12	2151	99.6140597973808	301696	55.499	256001
6	0.216450216450216	59	1386	99.5579194465036	301696	35.028	256002
7	0.216763005780347	47	1384	99.7018285149493	301696	35.028	256003
8	0.216450216450216	33	1386	99.5579194465036	301696	35.028	256004

**Figure 16-5.** The index fragmentation for the four tables in the problem query

The same can be said of Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail, which has very low fragmentation and a low page count. Production.Product has slightly higher degrees of fragmentation; but again, the page count is very low, so defragging the index is not likely to help much. Person.Employee has one index with 66 percent fragmentation; once again, however, it's only on three pages. Finally, Person.Person has almost no fragmentation to speak of.

Here's an experiment to try as part of the iterative performance-tuning process. Run the index defragmentation script supplied in [Chapter 8](#) (and repeated here):

```

DECLARE @DBName NVARCHAR(255),
        @TableName NVARCHAR(255),
        @SchemaName NVARCHAR(255),
        @IndexName NVARCHAR(255),
        @PctFrag DECIMAL,
        @Defrag NVARCHAR(MAX)
IF EXISTS ( SELECT *
            FROM   sys.objects
            WHERE  OBJECT_ID = OBJECT_ID(N'#Frag') )
    DROP TABLE #Frag
CREATE TABLE #Frag (
    DBName NVARCHAR(255),
    TableName NVARCHAR(255),
    SchemaName NVARCHAR(255),
    IndexName NVARCHAR(255),
    AvgFragment DECIMAL
)
EXEC sys.sp_MSforeachdb
    'INSERT INTO #Frag ( DBName,
                        TableName, SchemaName,
                        IndexName,
                        AvgFragment )
SELECT ''?'' AS DBName,
       t.Name AS TableName,
       sc.Name AS SchemaName,
       i.name AS IndexName,
       s.avg_fragmentation_in_percent
      FROM ?.sys.dm_db_index_physical_stats(DB_ID('?' ),
                                             NULL, NULL, NULL,
                                             ''Sampled'') AS s JOIN ?.sys.indexes i
      ON s.Object_Id = i.Object_id
      AND s.Index_id = i.Index_id
      JOIN ?.sys.tables t
      ON i.Object_id = t.Object_Id
      JOIN ?.sys.schemas sc
      ON t.schema_id = sc.SCHEMA_ID
      WHERE s.avg_fragmentation_in_percent > 20
          AND t.TYPE = ''U''
          AND s.page_count > 8
      ORDER BY TableName,IndexName';
DECLARE cList CURSOR
FOR
```

```

SELECT *
FROM #Frag;
OPEN cList;
FETCH NEXT FROM cList
INTO @DBName, @TableName, @SchemaName, @IndexName, @PctFrag;
WHILE FETCH_STATUS = 0
BEGIN
    IF @PctFrag BETWEEN 20.0 AND 40.0
    BEGIN
        SET @Defrag = N'ALTER INDEX ' + @IndexName + ' ON ' + @DBName +
        '.' + @SchemaName + '.' + @TableName + ' REORGANIZE';
        EXEC sp_executesql
            @Defrag;
        PRINT 'Reorganize index: ' + @DBName + '.' + @SchemaName + '.' +
            @TableName + '.' + @IndexName;
    END
    ELSE
        IF @PctFrag > 40.0
        BEGIN
            SET @Defrag = N'ALTER INDEX ' + @IndexName + ' ON ' +
                @DBName + '.' + @SchemaName + '.' + @TableName +
                ' REBUILD';
            EXEC sp_executesql
                @Defrag;
            PRINT 'Rebuild index: ' + @DBName + '.' + @SchemaName +
                '.' + @TableName + '.' + @IndexName;
        END
    FETCH NEXT FROM cList
    INTO @DBName, @TableName, @SchemaName, @IndexName, @PctFrag;
END
CLOSE cList;
DEALLOCATE cList;
DROP TABLE #Frag;

```

After defragmenting the indexes on the database, rerun the query against `sys.dm_db_index_physicalstats` for all five tables. This will let you determine the changes in the index defragmentation, if any (see Figure 16-6).

As you can see in Figure 16-6, the fragmentation was not reduced at all in any of the indexes in the tables used by the poorest performing query.

Once you've analyzed the external factors that can affect the performance of a query and resolved the nonoptimal ones, you should analyze internal factors, such as improper indexing and query design.

## Analyzing the Internal Behavior of the Costliest Query

Now that the statistics are up-to-date, you can analyze the processing strategy for the query chosen by the optimizer to determine the internal factors affecting the query's performance. Analyzing the internal factors that can affect query performance involves these steps:

- Analyzing the query execution plan
- Identifying the costly steps in the execution plan
- Analyzing the effectiveness of the processing strategy

	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes	index_id
1	0	1	42	99.110452186805	4012	82	1
2	33.33333333333333	3	6	90.849196936002	4012	9	2
3	33.33333333333333	3	6	90.849196936002	4012	9	3
	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes	index_id
1	0	2	64	99.0089201877934	8845	56	1
2	17.6470588235294	5	17	96.3974796145293	8845	13	2
	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes	index_id
1	38.4615384615385	6	13	92.7999876451693	504	191.793	1
2	50	2	2	85.2606869285891	504	25.392	2
3	66.66666666666667	3	3	99.2257721769212	504	45.817	3
4	50	2	2	71.5838893007166	504	21	4
	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes	index_id
1	0	1	2	80.9241413392637	504	24	0
2	0	2	2	94.8480355819125	84	180.833	0
3	0	36	774	64.7566963182604	1597	2539.262	0
4	0	NULL	35	80.206152705708	40	5680.15	0
5	0	1	1	10.6498640968619	32	25	1
6	0	1	1	6.69631826043983	1	542	1
7	0	1	1	2.84161106992834	4	56	1
8	0	1	1	5.47319001729676	5	87	1
	avg_fragmentation_in_percent	fragment_count	page_count	avg_page_space_used_in_percent	record_count	avg_record_size_in_bytes	index_id
1	0.026267402153927	71	3807	85.7145663454411	19972	1320.83	1
2	0.961538461538462	5	104	98.1731529528045	19972	39.388	2
3	0	2	57	99.5413639733136	19972	21	3
4	0	1	3	68.2151470224858	195	82.974	256000
5	0	12	2151	99.6140597973808	301696	55.499	256001
6	0.216450216450216	59	1386	99.5579194465036	301696	35.028	256002
7	0.216763005780347	47	1384	99.7018285149493	301696	35.028	256003
8	0.216450216450216	33	1386	99.5579194465036	301696	35.028	256004

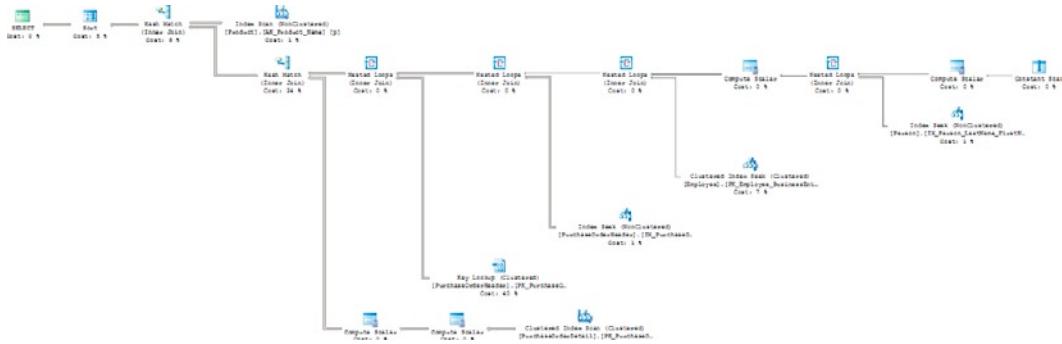
**Figure 16-6.** The index fragmentation of Production.Product after rebuilding indexes

## Analyzing the Query Execution Plan

To see the execution plan, click the Show Actual Execution Plan button to enable it, and then run stored procedure. Be sure you're doing these types of tests on a non-production system. For more details on reading execution plans, check out my book, *SQL Server Execution Plans* (Simple Talk Publishing, 2008). Figure 16-7 shows the graphical execution plan of the worst performing query.

You can observe the following from this execution plan, as explained in Chapter 3:

- SELECT properties:
  - Optimization Level: Full
  - Reason for Early Termination: Timeout
- Data access:
  - Index scan on nonclustered index, Product.AK\_Product\_Name
  - Index seek on nonclustered index, Person.IX\_Person\_LastName\_FirstName\_MiddleName
  - Index seek on clustered index, Employee.PK\_Employee\_BusinessEntityID



**Figure 16-7.** The graphical execution plan of the worst performing query

- Index seek on nonclustered index, PurchaseOrderHeader.IX\_PurchaseOrderHeader\_EmployeeID
- Key lookup on PurchaseOrderHeader.PK\_PurchaseOrderHeader\_PurchaseOrderID
- Index scan on clustered index, PurchaseOrderDetail.PK\_PurchaseOrderDetail\_PurchaseOrderDetailID
- Join strategy:
  - Nested loop join between the constant scan and Person.Person table with the Person.Person table as the outer table
  - Nested loop join between the Person.Person table and Person.Employee with the Person.Employee table as the outer table
  - Nested loop join between the Person.Person table and the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader table that was also the outer table
  - Nested loop join between the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader index and the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader primary key with the primary key as the outer table
  - Hash match join between the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader table and the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail table with Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail as the outer table
  - Hash match join between the Production.Product and Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail tables with the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail table as the outer table
- Additional processing:
  - Constant scan to provide a placeholder for the @LastName variable's LIKE operation
  - Compute scalar that defined the constructs of the @LastName variable's LIKE operation, showing the top and bottom of the range and the value to be checked
  - Compute scalar that combines the FirstName and LastName columns into a new column

- Compute scalar that calculates the LineTotal column from the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail table
- Compute scalar that takes the calculated LineTotal and stores it as a permanent value in the result set for further processing
- Sort on the FirstName and LastName from the Person.Person table

## Identifying the Costly Steps in the Execution Plan

Once you understand the execution plan of the query, the next step is to identify the steps estimated as the most costly in the execution plan. Although these costs are estimated and can be inaccurate at times, the optimization of the costly steps usually benefits the query performance the most. You can see that the following are the two costliest steps:

- *Costly step 1:* The key lookup on the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader table is 40 percent
- *Costly step 2:* The hash match between Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader and Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail is 20 percent

The next optimization step is to analyze the costliest steps, so you can determine whether these steps can be optimized through techniques such as redesigning the query or indexes.

## Analyzing the Processing Strategy

Since the optimization timed out, analyzing the effectiveness of the processing strategy is of questionable utility. However, you can begin evaluating it by following the traditional steps. If we're still getting a timeout after tuning the query and the structure, however, then more tuning and optimization work may be required.

Costly step 1 is a very straightforward key lookup (bookmark lookup). This problem has a number of possible solutions, many of which were outlined in [Chapter 5](#).

Costly step 2 is the hash match between Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader and Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail. Figure 16-8 shows the number of rows coming from each of the two tables in the order listed. These represent the inner and outer portions of the hash join. As you can see, there are 763 rows coming from Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail and 8,845 from Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail. Based on these values, it's likely that the hash join is the optimal method for putting the data together. While it is possible to change this through index tuning or query hints, it's unlikely that it will help the query to do so.

<b>Actual Number of Rows</b>	763
<b>Estimated Number of Rows</b>	429.748
<b>Estimated Row Size</b>	203 B
<b>Estimated Data Size</b>	85 KB

<b>Estimated Number of Rows</b>	8845
<b>Estimated Row Size</b>	23 B
<b>Estimated Data Size</b>	199 KB

**Figure 16-8.** Row counts leading into hash match join

---

**Tip** At times you may find that no improvements can be made to the costliest step in a processing strategy. In that case, concentrate on the next costliest step to identify the problem. If none of the steps can be optimized further, then move on to the next costliest query in the workload. You may need to consider changing the database design or the construction of the query.

---

## Optimizing the Costliest Query

Once you've diagnosed the queries with costly steps, the next stage is to implement the necessary corrections to reduce the cost of these steps.

The corrective actions for a problematic step can have one or more alternative solutions. For example, should you create a new index or structure the query differently? In such cases, you should prioritize the solutions based on their expected effectiveness and the amount of work required. For example, if a narrow index can more or less do the job, then it is usually better to prioritize that over changes to code that might lead to business testing. Making changes to code can also be the less intrusive approach. You need to evaluate each situation within the business and application construct you have.

Apply the solutions individually in the order of their expected benefit, and measure their individual effect on the query performance. Finally, you can apply the solution that provides the greatest performance improvement to correct the problematic step. Sometimes, it may be evident that the best solution will hurt other queries in the workload. For example, a new index on a large number of columns can hurt the performance of action queries. However, since that's not always true, it's better to determine the effect of such optimization techniques on the complete workload through testing. If a particular solution hurts the overall performance of the workload, choose the next best solution while keeping an eye on the overall performance of the workload.

## Modifying an Existing Index

It seems obvious from looking at the processing strategy that changing the nonclustered index on Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader will eliminate the key lookup. Since the output list of the key lookup includes only one relatively small column, this can be added to the IX\_PurchaseOrderHeader\_EmployeeID index as an included column (--AlterIndex in the download):

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [IX_PurchaseOrderHeader_EmployeeID]
ON [Purchasing].[PurchaseOrderHeader] ([EmployeeID] ASC)
INCLUDE (OrderDate)
WITH (
DROP_EXISTING = ON) ON [PRIMARY] ;
GO
```

Now run the costly query again using the Test.sql script that includes the cleanup steps, as well as the statistics information. The output looks like this:

```
SQL Server parse and compile time:
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

SQL Server Execution Times:
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.
SQL Server parse and compile time:
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 14 ms.
DBCC execution completed. If DBCC printed error messages, contact your system administrator.
```

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 62 ms, elapsed time = 382 ms.

DBCC execution completed. If DBCC printed error messages, contact your system administrator.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 141 ms, elapsed time = 157 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 31 ms, elapsed time = 51 ms.

(1496 row(s) affected)

Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0, physical reads 0, read-ahead reads 0, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'PurchaseOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 66, physical reads 1, read-ahead reads 64, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'PurchaseOrderHeader'. Scan count 4, logical reads 11, physical reads 3, read-ahead reads 0, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'Employee'. Scan count 0, logical reads 174, physical reads 2, read-ahead reads 0, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'Person'. Scan count 1, logical reads 4, physical reads 1, read-ahead reads 2, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'Product'. Scan count 1, logical reads 5, physical reads 1, read-ahead reads 8, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

(1 row(s) affected)

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 16 ms, elapsed time = 196 ms.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 47 ms, elapsed time = 247 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:

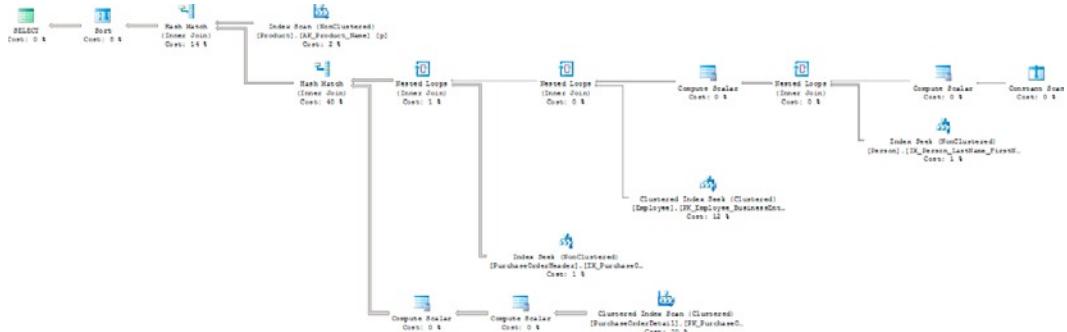
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

The number of reads on the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderTable table has dropped from 1,673 to 11. That's great! The execution time has dropped as well, but there is more you can do, and logical reads alone won't give you all the information you need. This means more tuning of the query is necessary. Figure 16-9 shows the new execution plan.

The key lookup is completely gone, and the query is just a bit simpler and easier to read. The estimated costs on the various operations have shifted, and the hash match join is now the costliest operation. The second costliest operation is now the clustered index scan against Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail. Also, the properties still show a timeout on the SELECT operator.



**Figure 16-9.** The graphical execution plan of the query after changing the nonclustered index

## Analyzing the Application of a Join Hint

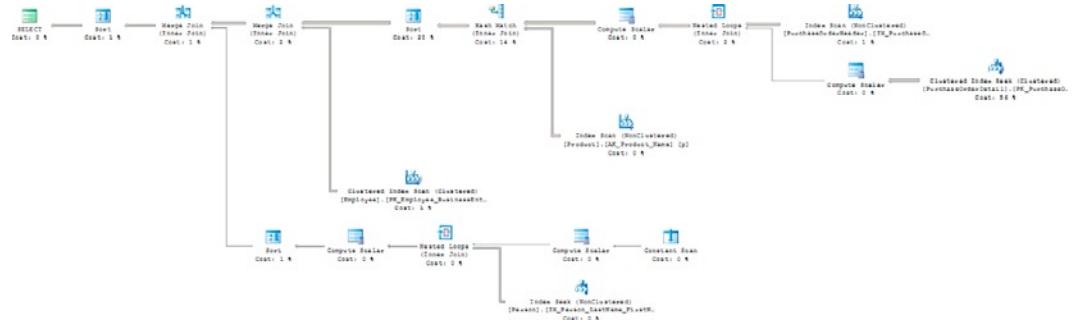
Since the costliest operation is now the hash join, it might make sense to try to change that to a different join. Based on the data being moved (see Figure 16-8), it's likely that the hash match was the appropriate choice. However, to see whether forcing the join to use a LOOP or MERGE might make a performance improvement, you simply need to modify the procedure:

```
ALTER PROCEDURE dbo.spr_PurchaseOrderBySalesPersonName
@LastName NVARCHAR(50)

AS
SELECT poh.PurchaseOrderID,
       poh.OrderDate,
       pod.LineTotal,
       p.[Name] AS ProductName,
       e.JobTitle,
       per.LastName + ', ' + per.FirstName AS Salesperson
FROM Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
INNER LOOP JOIN Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
          ON poh.PurchaseOrderID = pod.PurchaseOrderID
JOIN Production.Product AS p
          ON pod.ProductID = p.ProductID
JOIN HumanResources.Employee AS e
          ON poh.EmployeeID = e.BusinessEntityID
JOIN Person.Person AS per
          ON e.BusinessEntityID = per.BusinessEntityID
WHERE per.LastName LIKE @LastName
ORDER BY per.LastName,
         per.FirstName;
```

Figure 16-10 shows the resultant execution plan for the worst performing query.

The execution plan changed radically in this iteration. The nested loop allows for a Clustered Index Seek against the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail table. With the elimination of the hash match, you might think that the performance improved. Unfortunately, looking at the statistics reveals that the number of scans and reads on Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail increased dramatically. The scans increased to support the loop part



**Figure 16-10.** A graphical execution plan of the query with a join hint

of the Nested Loop operation, and the reads shot through the roof, from 66 to 8,960. Performance time almost doubled to 282 ms.

This is clearly not working; however, what if you changed the procedure to a merge join? There are two hash match joins this time, so you will want to eliminate both:

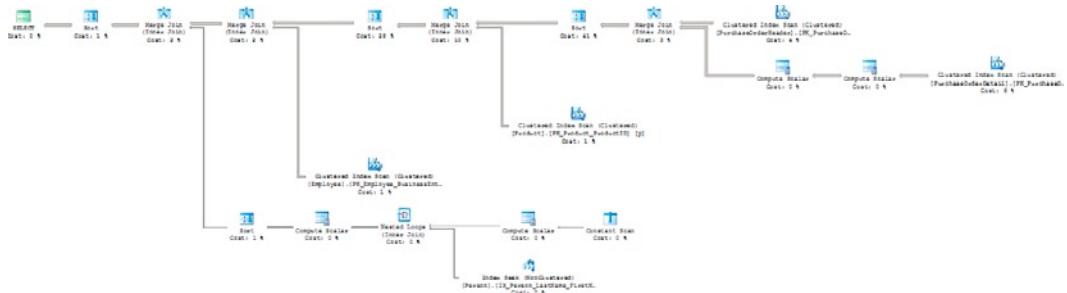
```
ALTER PROCEDURE [dbo].[spr_PurchaseOrderBySalesPersonName]
@LastName NVARCHAR(50)

AS
SELECT poh.PurchaseOrderID,
       poh.OrderDate,
       pod.LineTotal,
       p.[Name] AS ProductName,
       e.JobTitle,
       per.LastName + ', ' + per.FirstName AS Salesperson
FROM   Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
INNER MERGE JOIN Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
        ON poh.PurchaseOrderID = pod.PurchaseOrderID
INNER MERGE JOIN Production.Product AS p
        ON pod.ProductID = p.ProductID
JOIN   HumanResources.Employee AS e
        ON poh.EmployeeID = e.BusinessEntityID
JOIN   Person.Person AS per
        ON e.BusinessEntityID = per.BusinessEntityID
WHERE  per.LastName LIKE @LastName
ORDER BY per.LastName,
         per.FirstName ;
```

Figure 16-11 shows the execution plan that results from this new query.

The performance is much worse in this iteration, and you can see why. In addition to the data access and the new joins, the data had to be ordered because that's how merge joins work. That ordering of the data, shown as a sort prior to each of the joins, ruins the performance.

In short, SQL Server is making appropriate join choices based on the data supplied to it. At this point, you can try attacking the second costliest operation: the scan of `Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail`.



**Figure 16-11.** An execution plan that forces merge joins in place of the hash joins

Before proceeding, reset the stored procedure:

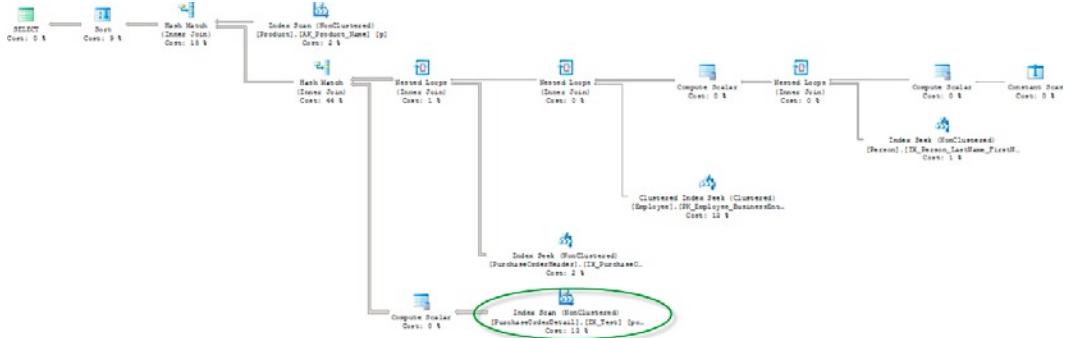
```
ALTER PROCEDURE dbo.spr_PurchaseOrderBySalesPersonName
@LastName NVARCHAR(50)
AS
SELECT poh.PurchaseOrderID,
       poh.OrderDate,
       pod.LineTotal,
       p.[Name] AS ProductName,
       e.JobTitle,
       per.LastName + ', ' + per.FirstName AS SalesPerson
FROM   Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
JOIN   Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
       ON poh.PurchaseOrderID = pod.PurchaseOrderID
JOIN   Production.Product AS p
       ON pod.ProductID = p.ProductID
JOIN   HumanResources.Employee AS e
       ON poh.EmployeeID = e.BusinessEntityID
JOIN   Person.Person AS per
       ON e.BusinessEntityID = per.BusinessEntityID
WHERE  per.LastName LIKE @LastName
ORDER BY per.LastName,
         per.FirstName ;
```

## Avoiding the Clustered Index Scan Operation

After you eliminated the key lookup, the clustered index scan against the `Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail` table was left as the second costliest operation. The scan is necessary because no other indexes contain the data needed to satisfy the query. Only three columns are referenced by the query, so it should be possible to create a small index that will help. Use something like this:

```
CREATE INDEX IX_Test
ON Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail
(PurchaseOrderID, ProductID, LineTotal);
```

Executing the original procedure using the `Test.sql` script results in the execution plan shown in Figure 16-12.



**Figure 16-12.** The execution plan after creating a new index on Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail

Creating the index results in a couple of small changes to the execution plan. Instead of scanning the clustered index on Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail, the new index is scanned (circled above). One of the Compute Scalar operations was also eliminated. This is a mild improvement to the plan.

The real question is this: what happened to the performance? The execution time did not radically improve, dropping to 154, an improvement of about 12%. The reads on the Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail table dropped from 66 to 31. This is a very modest improvement, and it may not be worth the extra processing time for the inserts.

## Modifying the Procedure

Sometimes, one of the best ways to improve performance is for the business and the developers to work together to reevaluate the needs of a particular query. In this instance, the existing query uses a LIKE clause against the LastName column in the Person.Person table. After checking with the developers, it's determined that this query will be getting its values from a drop-down list that is an accurate list of LastName values from the database. Since the LastName value is coming from the database, the developers can actually get the BusinessEntityID column from the Person.Person table. This makes it possible to change the procedure so that it now looks like this:

```
ALTER PROCEDURE dbo.spr_PurchaseOrderBySalesPersonName
    @BusinessEntityId int
ASv
SELECT poh.PurchaseOrderID,
       poh.OrderDate,
       pod.LineTotal,
       p.[Name] AS ProductName,
       e.JobTitle,
       per.LastName + ', ' + per.FirstName AS SalesPerson
FROM   Purchasing.PurchaseOrderHeader AS poh
JOIN   Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail AS pod
       ON poh.PurchaseOrderID = pod.PurchaseOrderID
JOIN   Production.Product AS p
       ON pod.ProductID = p.ProductID
JOIN   HumanResources.Employee AS e
       ON poh.EmployeeID = e.BusinessEntityID
```

```

JOIN    Person.Person AS per
ON e.BusinessEntityID = per.BusinessEntityID
WHERE   e.BusinessEntityID = @BusinessEntityID
ORDER BY per.LastName,
per.FirstName ;

```

Use this statement to execute the procedure now:

```
EXEC dbo.spr_PurchaseOrderBySalesPersonName @BusinessEntityId = 260;
```

Running this query results in the execution plan shown in Figure 16-13.

Many of the operations will be familiar. However, the costs have changed, the order of events has changed, and the plan is actually much simpler now, with close to the bare minimum number of operations. The newReason For Early Termination resulted in Good Enough Plan Found" Best of all, check out the results from the statistics:

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 1 ms.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

DBCC execution completed. If DBCC printed error messages, contact your system administrator.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 1 ms.

DBCC execution completed. If DBCC printed error messages, contact your system administrator.

SQL Server Execution Times:

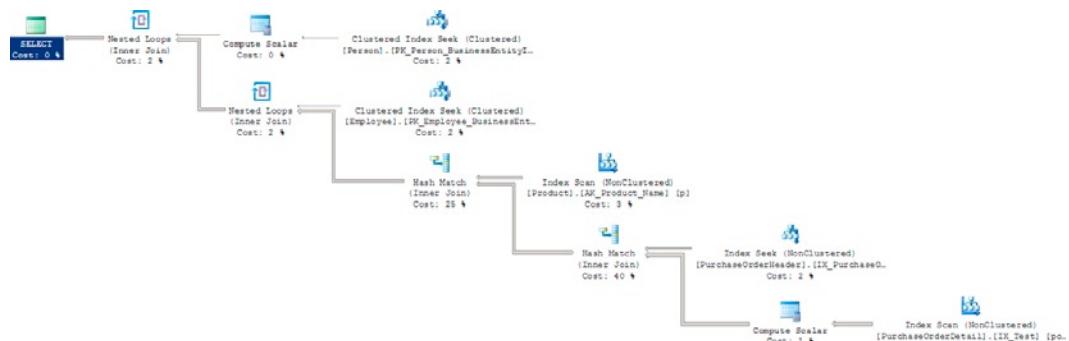
CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 3 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 31 ms, elapsed time = 49 ms.



**Figure 16-13.** The execution plan after rearchitecting the procedure

(631 row(s) affected)

Table 'Worktable'. Scan count 0, logical reads 0, physical reads 0, read-ahead reads 0, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'PurchaseOrderDetail'. Scan count 1, logical reads 31, physical reads 1, read-ahead reads 29, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'PurchaseOrderHeader'. Scan count 1, logical reads 3, physical reads 2, read-ahead reads 0, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'Product'. Scan count 1, logical reads 5, physical reads 1, read-ahead reads 8, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'Employee'. Scan count 0, logical reads 2, physical reads 2, read-ahead reads 0, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

Table 'Person'. Scan count 0, logical reads 3, physical reads 3, read-ahead reads 0, lob logical reads 0, lob physical reads 0, lob read-ahead reads 0.

(1 row(s) affected)

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 15 ms, elapsed time = 166 ms.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 46 ms, elapsed time = 215 ms.

SQL Server parse and compile time:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

SQL Server Execution Times:

CPU time = 0 ms, elapsed time = 0 ms.

The number of reads has been reduced across the board. The execution time is about the same as the last adjustment, 160ms to 154ms; however, the results illustrate how you can't simply rely on a single execution for measuring performance. Multiple executions showed a more consistent improvement in speed, but nothing radical. The CPU time was about the same at 15 ms. If you change the test and allow the query to use a compiled stored procedure, as is more likely in most production environments, then execution time drops down to 132 ms, and the CPU time drops back down to 15 ms. If you change the test again, to allow for data caching, which may be the case in some environments, execution time drops to 93 ms.

Taking the performance from 435ms to 160ms is not a dramatic improvement because this query is being called only once. If it were called thousands of times a second, getting 2.7 times faster would be worth quite a lot. However, more testing is necessary to reach that conclusion. You need to go back and assess the impact on the overall database workload.

## Analyzing the Effect on Database Workload

Once you've optimized the worst-performing query, you must ensure that it doesn't hurt the performance of the other queries; otherwise, your work will have been in vain.

To analyze the resultant performance of the overall workload, you need to use the techniques outlined in [Chapter 15](#). For the purposes of this small test, reexecute the complete workload in --workload and capture extended events in order to record the overall performance.

**Tip** For proper comparison with the original extended events, please ensure that the graphical execution plan is off.

Figure 16-14 shows the corresponding trace output captured in an extended events file in SSMS.

From this trace, Table 16-6 summarizes the resource use and the response time (i.e., Duration) of the query under consideration.

**Note** The absolute values are less important than the relative difference between the Before Optimization and the corresponding After Optimization values. The relative differences between the values indicate the relative improvement in performance.

It's possible that the optimization of the worst performing query may hurt the performance of some other query in the workload. However, as long as the overall performance of the workload is improved, you can retain the optimizations performed on the query.

	name	timestamp	cpu_time	duration	logical_reads
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:05:28.9779594	0	1000	6
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:05:29.0499635	0	2000	43
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:05:29.1539694	32000	28001	3816
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:05:29.1859713	0	1000	117
▶	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:05:29.2709761	15000	55003	44
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:05:29.7370028	0	1000	6
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:05:29.8330083	0	1000	43
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:05:29.9380143	16000	19001	3816
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:05:29.9690160	0	1000	117
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:05:30.1440261	15000	141008	44
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:05:30.4100413	0	0	6

**Figure 16-14.** The profiler trace output showing the effect of optimizing the costliest query on the complete workload

**Table 16-6.** Resource Usage and Response Time of the Optimized Query Before and After Optimization

Column	Before Optimization	After Optimization
Reads	1901	44
Writes	0	0
CPU	31 ms	15 ms
Duration	71 ms	55 ms

## Iterating Through Optimization Phases

An important point to remember is that you need to iterate through the optimization steps multiple times. In each iteration, you can identify one or more poorly performing queries and optimize the query or queries to improve the performance of the overall workload. You must continue iterating through the optimization steps until you achieve adequate performance or meet your service-level agreement (SLA).

Besides analyzing the workload for resource-intensive queries, you must also analyze the workload for error conditions. For example, if you try to insert duplicate rows into a table with a column protected by the unique constraint, SQL Server will reject the new rows and report an error condition to the application. Although the data was not entered into the table and no useful work was performed, valuable resources were used to determine that the data was invalid and must be rejected.

To identify the error conditions caused by database requests, you will need to include the following in your Extended Events (alternatively, you can create a new session that looks for these events in the errors or warnings category):

- error\_reported
- execution\_warning
- hash\_warning
- missing\_column\_statistics
- missing\_join\_predicate
- sort\_warning

For example, consider the following SQL queries (--errors in the download):

```
INSERT INTO Purchasing.PurchaseOrderDetail
(PurchaseOrderID,
DueDate,
OrderQty,
ProductID,
UnitPrice,
ReceivedQty,
RejectedQty,
ModifiedDate
)
```

```

VALUES (1066,
        '1/1/2009',
        1,
        42,
        98.6,
        5,
        4,
        '1/1/2009'
    ) ;
GO
SELECT p.[Name],
       psc.[Name]
FROM Production.Product AS p,
     Production.ProductSubCategory AS psc ;
GO

```

Figure 16-15 shows the corresponding session output.

From the Extended Events output in Figure 16-15, you can see that two errors occurred:

- error\_reported
- missing\_join\_predicate

	name	timestamp	cpu_time	duration	logical_reads
	error_reported	2012-02-20 11:33:05.1041896	NULL	NULL	NULL
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:33:05.1041896	0	1000	0
	rpc_completed	2012-02-20 11:33:05.1101899	16000	11439	20
	rpc_completed	2012-02-20 11:33:05.4261549	31000	30951	81
	error_reported	2012-02-20 11:33:17.2869687	NULL	NULL	NULL
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:33:17.2869687	0	3000	0
▶	error_reported	2012-02-20 11:33:22.2862547	NULL	NULL	NULL
	error_reported	2012-02-20 11:33:22.2864687	NULL	NULL	NULL
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:33:22.2864687	15000	8000	38
	missing_join_predicate	2012-02-20 11:33:22.3024696	NULL	NULL	NULL
	sql_batch_completed	2012-02-20 11:33:22.4764796	0	175010	1228

Event: error_reported (2012-02-20 11:33:22.2862547)	
<input type="button" value="Details"/>	
Field	Value
category	SERVER
destination	USER
error_number	547
is_intercepted	False
message	The INSERT statement conflicted with the FOREIGN KEY constr...
severity	16
state	0
user_defined	False

**Figure 16-15.** Extended Events output showing errors raised by a SQL workload

The `error_reported` error was caused by the `INSERT` statement, which tried to insert data that did not pass the referential integrity check; namely, it attempted to insert `ProductId = 42` when there is no such value in the `Production.Product` table. From the `error_number` column, you can see that the error number is 547. The `message` column shows the full description for the error.

The second type of error, `missing_join_predicate`, is caused by the `SELECT` statement:

```
SELECT p.[Name]
      ,c.[Name]
  FROM Production.Product AS p
      ,Production.ProductSubCategory AS c;
GO
```

If you take a closer look at the `SELECT` statement, you will see that the query does not specify a `JOIN` clause between the two tables. A missing join predicate between the tables usually leads to an inaccurate result set and a costly query plan. This is what is known as a *Cartesian join*, which leads to a *Cartesian product*, where every row from one table is combined with every row from the other table. You must identify the queries causing such events in the `Errors and Warnings` section and implement the necessary fixes. For instance, in the preceding `SELECT` statement, you should not join every row from the `Production.ProductCategory` table to every row in the `Production.Product` table—you must join only the rows with matching `ProductCategoryID`, as follows:

```
SELECT p.[Name]
      ,c.[Name]
  FROM Production.Product AS p
  JOIN Production.ProductSubCategory AS c
    ON p.ProductSubcategoryID = c.ProductSubcategoryID ;
```

Even after you thoroughly analyze and optimize a workload, you must remember that workload optimization is not a one-off process. The workload or data distribution on a database can change over time, so you should periodically check whether your queries are optimized for the current situation. It's also possible that you may identify shortcomings in the design of the database itself. Too many joins from overnormalization or too many columns from improper denormalization can both lead to queries that perform badly, with no real optimization opportunities. In this case, you will need to consider redesigning the database to get a more optimized structure.

## Summary

As you learned in this chapter, optimizing a database workload requires a range of tools, utilities, and commands to analyze different aspects of the queries involved in the workload. You can use Extended Events to analyze the big picture of the workload and identify the costly queries. Once you've identified the costly queries, you can use the query window and various SQL commands to troubleshoot the problems associated with the costly queries. Based on the problems detected with the costly queries, you can apply one or more sets of optimization techniques to improve the query performance. The optimization of the costly queries should improve the overall performance of the workload; if this does not happen, you should roll back the change or changes.

In the next chapter, I summarize the performance-related best practices in a nutshell. You'll be able to use this information as a quick and easy-to-read reference.

## CHAPTER 17



# SQL Server Optimization Checklist

If you have read through the previous 16 chapters of this book, then you understand the major aspects involved in performance optimization. You also understand that it is a challenging and ongoing activity.

What I hope to do in this chapter is to provide a performance-monitoring checklist that can serve as a quick reference for database developers and DBAs when in the field. The idea is similar to the notion of tear-off cards of *best practices*. This chapter does not cover everything, but it does summarize, in one place, some of the major tuning activities that can have a quick and demonstrable impact on the performance of your SQL Server systems. I have categorized these checklist items into the following sections:

- Database design
- Query design
- Configuration settings
- Database administration
- Database backup

Each section contains a number of optimization recommendations and techniques. Where appropriate, each section also cross-references specific chapters in this book that provide more detailed information.

## Database Design

Database design is a broad topic, and it can't be given due justice in a small section in this query tuning book; nevertheless, I advise you to keep an eye on the following design aspects to ensure that you pay attention to database performance from an early stage:

- Balancing under- and overnormalization
- Benefiting from using entity-integrity constraints
- Benefiting from using domain and referential integrity constraints
- Adopting index-design best practices
- Avoiding the use of the `sp_` prefix for stored procedure names
- Minimizing the use of triggers

**Table 17-1.** Original Customers Table

CustID	Name	Address	Phone	OrderDt	ShippingAddress
100	Liu Hong	Boise, ID, USA	123-456-7890	08-Jul-04	Boise, ID, USA
100	Liu Hong	Boise, ID, USA	123-456-7890	10-Jul-04	Austin, TX, USA

**Table 17-2.** New Customers Table

CustID	Name	Address	Phone
100	Liu Hong	Boise, ID, USA	123-456-7890

**Table 17-3.** Orders Table

CustID	OrderDt	ShippingAddress
100	08-Jul-04	Boise, ID, USA
100	10-Jul-04	Austin, TX, USA

## Balancing Under- and Overnormalization

When designing a database, you have the following two extreme options:

- Save the complete data in a single, flat table with little to no normalization.
- Save the data in fine-grained tables by exploding every attribute into its own table and thus allowing every attribute to save an unlimited number of multiple values.

Reasonable normalization enhances database performance. The presence of wide tables with a large number of columns is usually a characteristic of an undernormalized database. *Undernormalization* causes excessive repetition of data, which can lead to improper results and often hurts query performance. For example, in an ordering system, you can keep a customer's profile and all the orders placed by the customer in a single table, as shown in Table 17-1.

Keeping the customer profile and the order information together in a single table will repeat the customer profile in every order placed by the customer, making the rows in the table very wide. Consequently, fewer customer profiles can be saved in one data page. For a query interested in a range of customer profiles (not their order information), more pages have to be read compared to a design in which customer profiles are kept in a separate table. Also, with every bit of data in one large table, you're going to see a lot more locking and concurrency issues since more people are going to access the same data out of the same page or row much more frequently. To avoid the performance impact of undernormalization, you must normalize the two logical entities (e.g., customer profile and orders), which have a one-to-many type of relationship, into separate tables, as shown in Tables 17-2 and 17-3.

Yes, there are further normalization opportunities possible with these tables; however, that's up to you, working with your business, to determine if they're needed.

Similarly, overnormalization is also not good for query performance. *Overnormalization* causes excessive joins across too many narrow tables. Misestimations on cardinality in one table can seriously impact a large

number of others as they get joined. Although a 20-table join can perform perfectly fine and a 2-table join can be a problem, a good rule of thumb is to more closely examine a query when it exceeds 8 to 12 tables in the join criteria. That is not to say that anything below that number is good and anything above that is bad; however, this number of joins should act as a flag for evaluation. To fetch any useful content from the database, a database developer has to join a large number of tables in the SQL queries. For example, if you create separate tables for a customer name, address, and phone number, then you will have to join three tables to retrieve the customer information. If the data (e.g., the customer name and address) has a one-to-one type of relationship and is usually accessed together by the queries, then normalizing the data into separate tables can hurt query performance.

## Benefiting from Entity-Integrity Constraints

*Data integrity* is essential to ensuring the quality of data in the database. An essential component of data integrity is *entity integrity*, which defines a row as a unique entity for a particular table; that is, every row in a table must be uniquely identifiable. The column or columns serving as the unique row identifier for a table must be represented as the primary key of the table.

Sometimes, a table may contain an additional column (or columns) that also can be used to uniquely identify a row in the table. For example, an Employee table may have the EmployeeID and SocialSecurityNumber columns. The EmployeeID column serves as the unique row identifier, and it can be defined as the *primary key*. Similarly, the SocialSecurityNumber column can be defined as the *alternate key*. In SQL Server, alternate keys can be defined using unique constraints, which are essentially the younger siblings to primary keys. In fact, both the unique constraint and the primary key constraint use unique indexes behind the scenes.

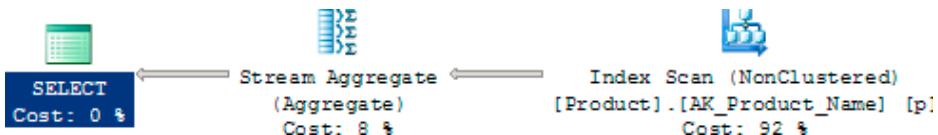
It's worth noting that there is honest disagreement regarding the use of a natural key (e.g., the SocialSecurityNumber column in the previous example) or an artificial key (e.g., the EmployeeID column). I've seen both designs succeed, but each approach has strengths and weaknesses. Rather than suggest one over the other, I'll provide you with a couple of reasons to use both and some of the costs associated with each. An identity column is usually an INT or a BIGINT, which makes it narrow and easy to index, improving performance. Also, separating the value of the primary key from any business knowledge is considered good design in some circles. One of the drawbacks of this approach is that the numbers sometimes acquire business meaning, which should never happen. Another thing to keep in mind: You have to create a unique constraint for the alternate keys to prevent the creation of multiple rows where none should exist. Natural keys provide a clear, human-readable, primary key that has true business meaning. They tend to be wider fields—sometimes very wide—making them less efficient inside indexes. Also, sometimes the data may change, which has a profound trickle-down effect within your database and your enterprise.

Let me just reiterate that either approach can work well and that each provides plenty of opportunities for tuning. Either approach, properly applied and maintained, will protect the integrity of your data.

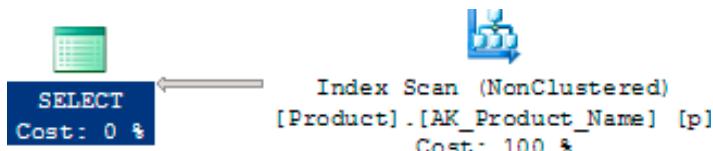
Besides maintaining data integrity, unique indexes—the primary vehicle for entity-integrity constraints—help the optimizer generate efficient execution plans. SQL Server can often search through a unique index faster than it can search through a nonunique index. This is because each row in a unique index is unique; and, once a row is found, SQL Server does not have to look any further for other matching rows (the optimizer is aware of this fact). If a column is used in sort (or GROUP BY or DISTINCT) operations, consider defining a unique constraint on the column (using a unique index) because columns with a unique constraint generally sort faster than ones with no unique constraint.

To understand the performance benefit of entity-integrity or unique constraints, consider this example. Assume you want to modify the existing unique index on the Production.Product table:

```
CREATE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [AK_Product_Name]
ON [Production].[Product] ([Name] ASC) WITH (DROP_EXISTING = ON)
ON [PRIMARY] ;
GO
```



**Figure 17-1.** An execution plan with no UNIQUE constraint on the [Name] column



**Figure 17-2.** An execution plan with a UNIQUE constraint on the [Name] column

The nonclustered index does not include the UNIQUE constraint. Therefore, although the [Name] column contains unique values, the absence of the UNIQUE constraint from the nonclustered index does not provide this information to the optimizer in advance. Now, let's consider the performance impact of the UNIQUE constraint (or a missing UNIQUE constraint) on the following SELECT statement:

```

SELECT DISTINCT
    (p.[Name])
FROM Production.Product AS p ;
    
```

Figure 17-1 shows the execution plan of this SELECT statement.

From the execution plan, you can see that the nonclustered AK\_ProductName index is used to retrieve the data, and then a Stream Aggregate operation is performed on the data to group the data on the [Name] column, so that the duplicate [Name] values can be removed from the final result set. Note that the Stream Aggregate operation would not have been required if the optimizer had been told in advance about the uniqueness of the [Name] column. You can accomplish this by defining the nonclustered index with a UNIQUE constraint, as follows:

```

CREATE UNIQUE NONCLUSTERED INDEX [AK_Product_Name]
ON [Production].[Product]([Name] ASC)
WITH (DROP_EXISTING = ON)
ON [PRIMARY] ;
GO
    
```

Figure 17-2 shows the new execution plan of the SELECT statement.

In general, the entity-integrity constraints (i.e., primary keys and unique constraints) provide useful information to the optimizer about the expected results, assisting the optimizer in generating efficient execution plans.

## Benefiting from Domain and Referential Integrity Constraints

The other two important components of data integrity are *domain integrity* and *referential integrity*. Domain integrity for a column can be enforced by restricting the data type of the column, defining the format of the input

data, and limiting the range of acceptable values for the column. SQL Server provides the following features to implement the domain integrity: data types, FOREIGN KEY constraints, CHECK constraints, DEFAULT definitions, and NOT NULL definitions. If an application requires that the values for a data column be restricted to a range of values, then this business rule can be implemented either in the application code or in the database schema. Implementing such a business rule in the database using domain constraints (such as the CHECK constraint) usually helps the optimizer generate efficient execution plans.

To understand the performance benefit of domain integrity, consider this example:

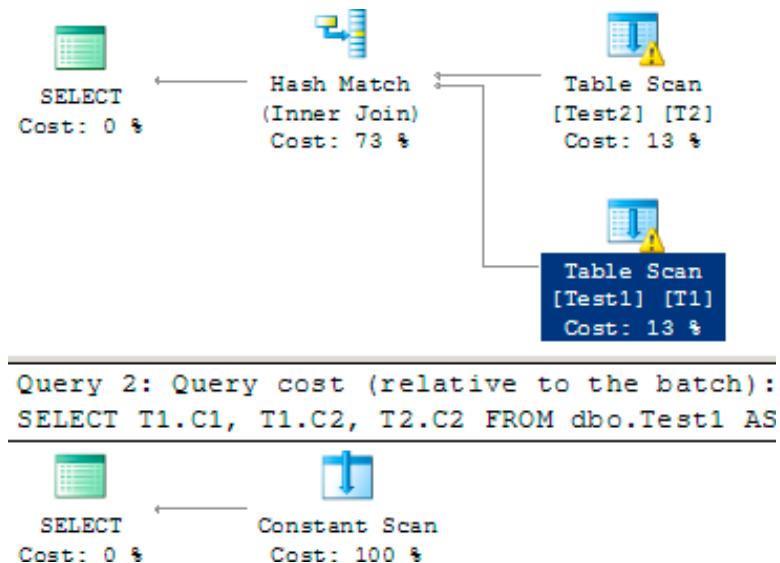
```
--Create two test tables
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test1')
 ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test1 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test1 (
    C1 INT,
    C2 INT CHECK (C2 BETWEEN 10 AND 20)
) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test1
VALUES (11, 12) ;
GO
IF (SELECT OBJECT_ID('dbo.Test2')
 ) IS NOT NULL
    DROP TABLE dbo.Test2 ;
GO
CREATE TABLE dbo.Test2 (C1 INT, C2 INT) ;
INSERT INTO dbo.Test2
VALUES (101, 102) ;
```

Now execute the following two SELECT statements:

```
SELECT T1.C1,
       T1.C2,
       T2.C2
FROM   dbo.Test1 AS T1
JOIN   dbo.Test2 AS T2
       ON T1.C1 = T2.C2 AND
          T1.C2 = 20 ;

GO
SELECT T1.C1,
       T1.C2,
       T2.C2
FROM   dbo.Test1 AS T1
JOIN   dbo.Test2 AS T2
       ON T1.C1 = T2.C2 AND
          T1.C2 = 30 ;
```

The two SELECT statements appear to be the same, except for the predicate values (20 in the first statement and 30 in the second). Although the two SELECT statements have exactly the same form, the optimizer treats them differently because of the CHECK constraint on the T1.C2 column, as shown in the execution plan in Figure 17-3.



**Figure 17-3.** Execution plans with predicate values within and outside the CHECK constraint boundaries

From the execution plan, you can see that, for the first query (with  $T1.C2 = 20$ ), the optimizer accesses the data from both tables. For the second query (with  $T1.C2 = 30$ ), the optimizer understands from the corresponding CHECK constraint on the column  $T1.C2$  that the column can't contain any value outside the range of 10 to 20. Thus, the optimizer doesn't even access the data from the tables. Consequently, the relative estimated cost of the second query is 0 percent.

I explained the performance advantage of referential integrity in detail in the “Declarative Referential Integrity” section of [Chapter 11](#).

Therefore, you should use domain and referential constraints, not only to implement data integrity, but also to facilitate the optimizer in generating efficient query plans. To understand other performance benefits of domain and referential integrity, please refer to the “Using Domain and Referential Integrity” section of [Chapter 11](#).

## Adopting Index-Design Best Practices

The most common optimization recommendation—and usually the biggest contributor to good performance—is to implement the correct indexes for the database workload. Indexes are unlike tables, which are used to store data and can be designed even without knowing the queries thoroughly (as long as the tables properly represent the business entities). Instead, indexes must be designed by reviewing the database queries thoroughly. Except in common and obvious cases, such as primary keys and unique indexes, please don’t fall into the trap of designing indexes without knowing the queries. Even for primary keys and unique indexes, I advise you to validate the applicability of those indexes as you start designing the database queries. Considering the importance of indexes for database performance, you must be very careful when designing indexes.

Although the performance aspect of indexes is explained in detail in [Chapters 4, 6, and 7](#), I’ll reiterate a short list of recommendations for easy reference:

- Choose narrow columns for indexes.
- Ensure that the selectivity of the data in the candidate column is very high (i.e., the column must have a large number of unique values).

- Prefer columns with the integer data type (or variants of the integer data type). Also, avoid indexes on columns with string data types such as VARCHAR.
- Consider listing columns having higher selectivity first in a multi-column index. .
- Use the INCLUDE list in an index as a way to make an index cover the index key structure without changing that structure. Do this by adding columns to the key, which enables you to avoid expensive lookup operations.
- When deciding which columns to index, pay extra attention to the queries' WHERE clauses and JOIN criteria columns. These can serve as the entry points into the tables, especially if a WHERE clause criterion on a column filters the data on a highly selective value or constant. Such a clause can make the column a prime candidate for an index.
- When choosing the type of an index (clustered or nonclustered), keep in mind the advantages and disadvantages of clustered and nonclustered index types.

Be extra careful when designing a clustered index because every nonclustered index on the table depends on the clustered index. Therefore, follow these recommendations when designing and implementing clustered indexes:

- Keep the clustered indexes as narrow as possible. You don't want to widen all your nonclustered indexes by having a wide clustered index.
- Create the clustered index first, and then create the nonclustered indexes on the table.
- If required, rebuild a clustered index in a single step using the DROPEXISTING keyword in the CREATE INDEX command. You don't want to rebuild all the nonclustered indexes on the table twice: once when the clustered index is dropped and again when the clustered index is re-created.
- Do not create a clustered index on a frequently updated column. If you do so, the nonclustered indexes on the table will create additional load by remaining in sync with the clustered index key values.
- Where applicable, such as when you need aggregations, consider using columnstore indexes.

To keep track of the indexes you've created and determine others that you need to create, you should take advantage of the dynamic management views that SQL Server 2012 makes available to you. By checking the data in `sys.dm_db_index_usage_stats` on a regular basis—say once a week or so—you can determine which of your indexes are actually being used and which are redundant. Indexes that are not contributing to your queries to help you improve performance are just a drain on the system. They require both more disk space and additional I/O to maintain the data inside the index as the data in the table changes. On the other hand, querying `sys.dm_db_missing_indexes_details` will show potential indexes deemed missing by the system and even suggest INCLUDE columns. You can access the DMV `sys.dm_db_missing_indexes_groups_stats` to see aggregate information about the number of times queries are called that could have benefited from a particular group of indexes. Just remember to test these suggestions thoroughly and don't assume that they will be correct. All these suggestions are just that: suggestions. All these tips can be combined to give you an optimal method for maintaining the indexes in your system over the long term.

## Avoiding the Use of the sp\_ Prefix for Stored Procedure Names

As a rule, don't use the `sp_` prefix for user stored procedures since SQL Server assumes that stored procedures with the `sp_` prefix are system stored procedures, and these are supposed to be in the master database. Using `sp` or `usp` as the prefix for user stored procedures is quite common. This is neither a major performance hit nor a major problem, but why court trouble? The performance hit of the `sp_` prefix is explained in detail in the "Be Careful Naming Stored Procedures" section of [Chapter 11](#).

## Minimizing the Use of Triggers

Triggers provide a very attractive method for automating behavior within the database. Since they fire as data is manipulated by other processes (regardless of the processes), triggers can be used to ensure certain functions are run as the data changes. That same functionality makes them dangerous since they are not immediately visible to the developer or DBA working on a system. They must be taken into account when designing queries and when troubleshooting performance problems. Because they carry a somewhat hidden cost, triggers should be considered very carefully. Before using a trigger, make sure that the only way to solve the problem presented is with a trigger. If you do use a trigger, document that fact in as many places as you can to ensure that the existence of the trigger is taken into account by other developers and DBAs.

## Query Design

Here's a list of the performance-related best practices you should follow when designing the database queries:

- Use the command `SET NOCOUNT ON`.
- Explicitly define the owner of an object.
- Avoid *nonsargable* search conditions.
- Avoid arithmetic operators and functions on WHERE clause columns.
- Avoid optimizer hints.
- Stay away from nesting views.
- Ensure there are no implicit data type conversions.
- Minimize logging overhead.
- Adopt best practices for reusing execution plans.
- Adopt best practices for database transactions.
- Eliminate or reduce the overhead of database cursors.

I further detail each best practice in the following sections.

## Use the Command SET NOCOUNT ON

As a rule, always use the command `SET NOCOUNT ON` as the first statement in stored procedures, triggers, and other batch queries. This enables you to avoid the network overhead associated with the return of the number of rows affected after every execution of a SQL statement. The command `SET NOCOUNT` is explained in detail in the "Use `SET NOCOUNT`" section of [Chapter 11](#).

## Explicitly Define the Owner of an Object

As a performance best practice, always qualify a database object with its owner to avoid the runtime cost required to verify the owner of the object. The performance benefit of explicitly qualifying the owner of a database object is explained in detail in the “Do Not Allow Implicit Resolution of Objects in Queries” section of [Chapter 9](#).

## Avoid Nonsargable Search Conditions

Be vigilant when defining the search conditions in your query. If the search condition on a column used in the WHERE clause prevents the optimizer from effectively using the index on that column, then the execution cost for the query will be high in spite of the presence of the correct index. The performance impact of nonsargable search conditions is explained in detail in the corresponding section of [Chapter 11](#).

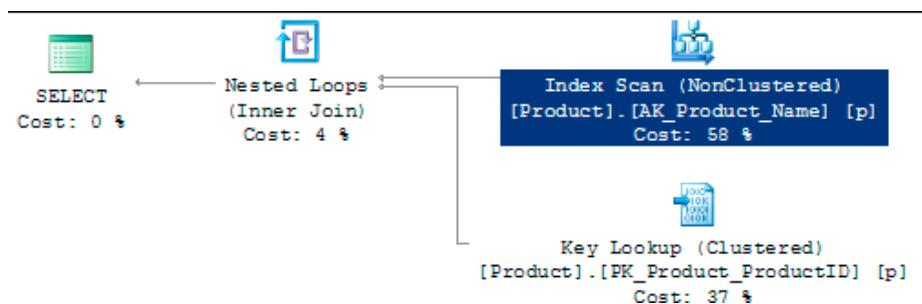
Additionally, please be careful when defining your application features. If you define an application feature such as “retrieve all products with product name ending in caps,” then you will have queries scanning the complete table (or the clustered index). As you know, scanning a multimillion-row table will hurt your database performance. Unless you use an index hint, you won’t be able to benefit from the index on that column. However, using an index hint overrides the decisions of the query optimizer, so it’s generally not recommended that you use index hints either (see [Chapter 11](#) for more information). To understand the performance impact of such a business rule, consider the following SELECT statement:

```
SELECT p.*  
FROM Production.Product AS p  
WHERE p.[Name] LIKE '%Caps' ;
```

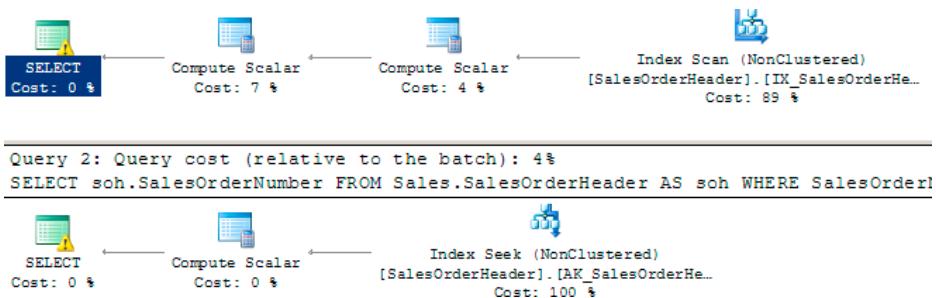
In Figure 17-4, you can see that the execution plan used the index on the [Name] column, but it had to perform a scan instead of a seek. Since an index on a column with character data types (such as CHAR and VARCHAR) sorts the data values for the column on the leading-end characters, using a leading % in the LIKE condition doesn’t allow a seek operation into the index. The matching rows may be distributed throughout the index rows, making the index ineffective for the search condition and thereby hurting the performance of the query.

## Avoid Arithmetic Expressions on the WHERE Clause Column

Always try to avoid using arithmetic operators and functions on columns in the WHERE and JOIN clauses. Using operators and functions on columns prevents the use of indexes on those columns. The performance impact of using arithmetic operators on WHERE clause columns is explained in detail in the “Avoid Arithmetic Operators



**Figure 17-4.** An execution plan showing a clustered index scan caused by a nonsargable LIKE clause



**Figure 17-5.** Execution plans showing a function that prevents index use

on the WHERE Clause Column” section of [Chapter 11](#), and the impact of using functions is explained in detail in the “Avoid Functions on the WHERE Clause Column” section of the same chapter.

To see this in action, consider the following queries:

```

SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
WHERE  'S05' = LEFT(SalesOrderNumber, 3) ;

SELECT soh.SalesOrderNumber
FROM   Sales.SalesOrderHeader AS soh
WHERE  SalesOrderNumber LIKE 'S05%' ;

```

These queries basically implement the same logic: they check SalesOrderNumber to see whether it is equal to S05. However, the first query performs a function on the SalesOrderNumber column, while the second uses a LIKE clause to check for the same data. Figure 17-5 shows the resulting execution plans.

As you can see in Figure 17-5, the first query forces an Index Scan operation, while the second is able to perform a nice, clean Index Seek. These examples demonstrate clearly why you should avoid functions and operators on WHERE clause columns.

## Avoid Optimizer Hints

As a rule, avoid the use of optimizer hints, such as index hints and join hints, because they overrule the decision-making process of the optimizer. In most cases, the optimizer is smart enough to generate efficient execution plans, and it works the best without any optimizer hint imposed on it. The same applies to plan guides. Forcing a plan will help in rare circumstances, but it’s usually better to rely on the optimizer to make good choices. For a detailed understanding of the performance impact of optimizer hints, please refer to the “Avoiding Optimizer Hints” section of [Chapter 11](#).

## Stay Away from Nesting Views

A nested view exists when one view calls another view, which calls more views, and so on. This can lead to very confusing code for two reasons. First, the views are masking the operations being performed. Second, the query may be very simple, but the execution plan and subsequent operations by the SQL engine can be very complex and expensive. This occurs because the optimizer doesn’t have time to simplify the query, eliminating tables and columns it doesn’t need; instead, the optimizer assumes that all tables and columns are needed. The same rule applies to nesting user-defined functions.

## Ensure No Implicit Data Type Conversions

When you create variables in a query, be sure those variables are of the same data type as the columns that they will be used to compare against. Even though SQL Server can and will convert, for example, a VARCHAR to a DATE, that implicit conversion will prevent indexes from being used. You have to be just as careful in situations like table joins, so that the primary key data type of one table matches the foreign key of the table being joined. You may occasionally see a warning in the execution plan to help you with this, but you can't count on this.

## Minimize Logging Overhead

SQL Server maintains the old and new states of every atomic action (or transaction) in the transaction log to ensure database consistency and durability. This can place tremendous pressure on the log disk, often making the log disk a point of contention. Therefore, to improve database performance, you must try to optimize the transaction log overhead. In addition to the hardware solutions discussed later in the chapter, you should adopt the following query-design best practices:

- Choose table variables over temporary tables for small result sets, where possible. Remember: If the result set is not small, you can encounter very serious issues. The performance benefit of table variables is explained in detail in the “Using Table Variables” section of [Chapter 10](#).
- Batch a number of action queries in a single transaction. You must be careful when using this option because, if too many rows are affected within a single transaction, the corresponding database objects will be locked for a long time, blocking all other users trying to access the objects.
- Reduce the amount of logging of certain operations by using the Bulk Logged recovery model. This rule applies primarily when dealing with large-scale data manipulation. You also will use minimal logging when Bulk Logged is enabled, and you use the WRITE clause of the UPDATE statement or drop or create indexes.

## Adopt Best Practices for Reusing Execution Plans

The best practices for optimizing the cost of plan generation can be broadly classified into two categories:

- Caching execution plans effectively
- Minimizing recompilation of execution plans

### Caching execution plans effectively

You must ensure that the execution plans for your queries are not only cached, but reused often. Do so by adopting the following best practices:

- Avoid executing queries as nonparameterized, ad hoc queries. Instead, parameterize the variable parts of a query and submit the parameterized query using a stored procedure or the sp\_executesql system stored procedure.
- If you must use lots of ad hoc queries, enable the “Optimize for Ad Hoc Workload” option, which will create a plan stub instead of a full plan the first time a query is called. This radically reduces the amount of procedure cache used.

- Use the same environment settings (such as ANSI NULLS) in every connection that executes the same parameterized queries. This is important because the execution plan for a query is dependent on the environment settings of the connection.
- As explained earlier in the “Explicitly Define the Owner of an Object” section, explicitly qualify the owner of the objects when accessing them in your queries.

The preceding aspects of plan caching are explained in detail in [Chapter 9](#).

## Minimizing Recompilation of Execution Plans

To minimize the cost of generating execution plans for queries, you must ensure that the plans in the cache are not invalidated or recompiled for reasons that are under your control. The following recommended best practices minimize the recompilation of stored procedure plans:

- Do not interleave DDL and DML statements in your stored procedures. You should put all the DDL statements at the top of the stored procedures.
- In a stored procedure, avoid using temporary tables that are created outside the stored procedure.
- Avoid recompilation caused by statistics changes on temporary tables by using the KEEPFIXED PLAN option.
- Prefer table variables over temporary tables for very small data sets.
- Do not change the ANSI SET options within a stored procedure.
- If you really can't avoid a recompilation, then identify the stored procedure statement that is causing the recompilation, and execute it through the `sp_execute_sql` system stored procedure.

The causes of stored procedure recompilation and the recommended solutions are explained in detail in [Chapter 10](#).

## Adopt Best Practices for Database Transactions

The more effectively you design your queries for concurrency, the faster the queries will be able to complete without blocking one another. Consider the following recommendations while designing the transactions in your queries:

- Keep the scope of the transactions as short as possible. In a transaction, include only the statements that must be committed together for data consistency.
- Prevent the possibility of transactions being left open because of poor error-handling routines or application logic. Do so using the following techniques:
  - Use `SET XACTABORT ON` to ensure that a transaction is aborted or rolled back on an error condition within the transaction.
  - After executing a stored procedure or a batch of queries containing a transaction from a client code, always check for an open transaction, and then roll back any open transactions using the following SQL statement:

```
IF @@TRANCOUNT > 0 ROLLBACK
```

- Use the lowest level of transaction isolation required to maintain data consistency as determined by your application requirements. The amount of isolation provided by the Read Committed isolation level, the default isolation level, is sufficient most of the time. If excessive locking is occurring, consider using the Read Committed Snapshot isolation level.

The impact of transactions on database performance is explained in detail in [Chapter 12](#).

## Eliminate or Reduce the Overhead of Database Cursors

Since SQL Server is designed to work with sets of data, processing multiple rows using DML statements is generally much faster than processing the rows one by one using database cursors. If you find yourself using lots of cursors, reexamine the logic to see whether there are ways you can eliminate the cursors. If you must use a database cursor, then use the database cursor with the least overhead: the FASTFORWARD cursor type (generally referred to as the *fast-forward-only cursor*). You can also use the equivalent DataReader object in ADO.NET.

The performance overhead of database cursors is explained in detail in [Chapter 14](#).

## Configuration Settings

Here's a checklist of the server and database configurations settings that have a big impact on database performance:

- Affinity mask
- Memory configuration options
- Cost threshold for parallelism
- Max degree of parallelism
- Optimize for ad hoc workloads
- Query governor cost limit
- Fill factor (%)
- Blocked process threshold
- Database file layout
- Database compression

I cover these settings in more detail in the sections that follow.

## Affinity Mask

As explained in the “Parallel Plan Optimization” section of [Chapter 9](#), the Affinity Mask setting is a special configuration setting at the server level that you can use to restrict the specific CPUs available to SQL Server. It is recommended that you keep this setting at its default value of 0, which allows SQL Server to use all the CPUs of the machine.

## Memory Configuration Options

As explained in the “SQL Server Memory Management” section of [Chapter 2](#), it is strongly recommended that the `max server memory` setting be configured to a nondefault value determined by the system configuration. These memory configurations of SQL Server are explained in detail in the “Memory Bottleneck Analysis” and “Memory Bottleneck Resolutions” sections of [Chapter 2](#).

## Cost Threshold for Parallelism

On systems with multiple processors, the parallel execution of queries is possible. The default value for parallelism is 5. This represents a cost estimate by the optimizer of a five-second execution on the query. In most circumstances, I’ve found this value to be too low; in other words, a higher threshold for parallelism results in better performance. Testing on your system will help you determine the appropriate value.

## Max Degree of Parallelism

When a system has multiple processors available, by default SQL Server will use all of them during parallel executions. To better control the load on the machine, you may find it useful to limit the number of processors used by parallel executions. Further, you may need to set the affinity so that certain processors are reserved for the operating system and other services running alongside SQL Server. OLTP systems may receive a benefit from disabling parallelism entirely. Try increasing the cost threshold for parallelism first because, even in OLTP systems, there are queries that will benefit from parallel execution. You may also explore the possibility of using the Resource Governor to control some workloads.

## Optimize for Ad Hoc Workloads

If the primary calls being made to your system come in as ad hoc or dynamic SQL instead of through well-defined stored procedures or parameterized queries, such as you might find in some of the implementation of object relational mapping (ORM) software, then turning on the `optimize for ad hoc workloads` setting will reduce the consumption of procedure cache because plan stubs are created for initial query calls, instead of full execution plans. This is covered in detail in [Chapter 10](#).

## Query Governor Cost Limit

To reduce contention and prevent a few processes from taking over the machine, you can set query governor cost limit so that any given query execution has an upper time limit in seconds. This value is based on the estimated cost as determined by the optimizer, so it prevents queries from running if they exceed the cost limit set here. Setting the query governor provides another reason to maintain the index statistics; doing so enables you to get good execution plan estimates.

## Fill Factor (%)

When creating a new index or rebuilding an existing one, you can use the fill factor setting to specify a default fill factor (i.e., it specifies the amount of free space to be left on a page). Choosing an appropriate value for your system requires testing and knowledge of the use of the system. Fill factor was discussed in detail in [Chapter 4](#).

## Blocked Process Threshold

The `blocked process threshold` setting defines in seconds when a blocked process report is fired. When a query runs and exceeds the threshold, the report is fired. An alert, which can be used to send an email or a text message, is also fired. Testing an individual system determines what value to set this to. You can monitor for this using events within traces defined by SQL Profiler.

## Database File Layout

For easy reference, I'll list the best practices you should consider when laying out database files:

- Place the data and transaction log files of a user database on different disks. This allows the transaction log disk head to progress sequentially without being moved randomly by the nonsequential I/Os commonly used for the data files.
- Placing the transaction log on a dedicated disk also enhances data protection. If a database disk fails, you will be able to save the completed transactions until the point of failure by performing a backup of the transaction log. By using this last transaction log backup during the recovery process, you will be able to recover the database up to the point of failure. This is known as *point-in-time recovery*.
- Avoid RAID 5 for transaction logs because, for every write request, RAID 5 disk arrays incur twice the number of disk I/Os compared to RAID 1 or 10.
- You may choose RAID 5 for data files, since even in a heavy OLTP system, the number of read requests is usually seven to eight times the number of write requests. Also, for read requests the performance of RAID 5 is similar to that of RAID 1 and RAID 10 with an equal number of total disks.
- Look into moving to a more modern disk subsystem like SSD or FusionIO.

For a detailed understanding of database file layout and RAID subsystems, please refer to the “Disk Bottleneck Resolutions” section of [Chapter 2](#).

## Database Compression

SQL Server 2012 supplies data compression with the Enterprise and Developer Editions of the product. This can provide a great benefit in space used and in performance as more data gets stored on a page. These benefits come at the cost of added overhead in the CPU and memory of the system; however, the benefits usually far outweigh the costs. Take this into account as you implement compression.

## Database Administration

For your reference, here is a short list of the performance-related database administrative activities that you should perform on a regular basis as part of the process of managing your database server:

- Keep the statistics up-to-date.
- Maintain a minimum amount of index defragmentation.
- Cycle the SQL error log file.

- Avoid automatic database functions such as AUTOCLOSE or AUTOSHRINK.
- Minimize the overhead of SQL tracing.

In the following sections, I cover the preceding activities in more detail.

---

**Note** For a detailed explanation of SQL Server 2012 administration needs and methods, please refer to the Microsoft SQL Server Books Online article, “Administration: How To Topics” (<http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/bb522544.aspx>).

---

## Keep the Statistics Up-to-Date

The performance impact of database statistics is explained in detail in [Chapter 7](#); however, this short list will serve as a quick and easy reference for keeping your statistics up-to-date:

- Allow SQL Server to automatically maintain the statistics of the data distribution in the tables by using the default settings for the configuration parameters AUTO\_CREATE\_STATISTICS and AUTO\_UPDATE\_STATISTICS.
- As a proactive measure, you can programmatically update the statistics of every database object on a regular basis as you determine it is needed and supported within your system. This practice partly protects your database from having outdated statistics in case the auto update statistics feature fails to provide a satisfactory result. In [Chapter 7](#), I illustrate how to set up a SQL Server job to programmatically update the statistics on a regular basis.
- Remember that you also have the ability to update the statistics in an asynchronous fashion. This reduces the contention on stats as they’re being updated; thus, if you have a system with fairly constant access, you can use this method to update the statistics more frequently.

---

**Note** Please ensure that the statistics update job is scheduled before the completion of the index defragmentation job, as explained later in this chapter.

---

## Maintain a Minimum Amount of Index Defragmentation

The following best practices will help you maintain a minimum amount of index defragmentation:

- Defragment a database on a regular basis during nonpeak hours.
- On a regular basis, determine the level of fragmentation on your indexes; and then, based on that fragmentation, either rebuild the index or defrag the index by executing the defragmentation queries outlined in [Chapter 4](#).
- Remember that very small tables don’t need to be defragmented at all.

## Cycle the SQL Error Log File

By default, the SQL Server error log file keeps growing until SQL Server is restarted. Every time SQL Server is restarted, the current error log file is closed and renamed `errorlog.1`. The old `errorlog.1` is renamed `errorlog.2`, and so on. Subsequently, a new error log file is created. Therefore, if SQL Server is not restarted for a long time, as expected for a production server, the error log file may grow to a very large size, making it not only difficult to view the file in an editor, but also very memory unfriendly when the file is opened.

SQL Server provides a system stored procedure, `sp_cycle_errorlog`, that you can use to cycle the error log file without restarting SQL Server. To keep control over the size of the error log file, you must cycle the error log file periodically by executing `sp_cycle_errorlog`, as follows:

```
EXEC master.dbo.sp_cycle_errorlog
```

Use a SQL Server job to schedule running this query on a regular basis.

## Avoid Database Functions Such As AUTO\_CLOSE or AUTO\_SHRINK

`AUTO_CLOSE` cleanly shuts down a database and frees all its resources when the last user connection is closed. This means all data and queries in the cache are automatically flushed. When the next connection comes in, not only does the database have to restart, but all the data has to be reloaded into the cache. Also, stored procedures and the other queries have to be recompiled. That's an extremely expensive operation for most database systems. Leave `AUTO_CLOSE` set to the default of OFF.

`AUTO_SHRINK` periodically shrinks the size of the database. It can shrink the data files and, when in Simple Recovery mode, the log files. While doing this, it can block other processes, seriously slowing down your system. More often than not, file growth is also set to occur automatically on systems with `AUTO_SHRINK` enabled, so your system will be slowed down yet again when the data or log files have to grow. Set your database sizes to an appropriate size, and monitor them for growth needs. If you must grow them automatically, do so by physical increments, not by percentages.

## Database Backup

Database backup is a broad topic and can't be given due justice in this query optimization book. Nevertheless, I suggest that, when it comes to database performance, you be attentive to the following aspects of your database backup process:

- Differential and transaction log backup frequency
- Backup distribution
- Backup compression

The next sections go into more detail on these suggestions.

## Incremental and Transaction Log Backup Frequency

For an OLTP database, it is mandatory that the database be backed up regularly so that, in case of a failure, the database can be restored on a different server. For large databases, the full database backup usually takes a very long time, so full backups cannot be performed often. Consequently, full backups are performed at widespread time intervals, with incremental backups and transaction log backups scheduled more frequently between two consecutive full backups. With the frequent incremental and transaction log backups set in place, if a database fails completely, the database can be restored up to a point in time.

Differential backups can be used to reduce the overhead of a full backup by backing up only the data that has changed since the last full backup. Because this is potentially much faster, it will cause less of a slowdown on the production system. Each situation is unique, so you need to find the method that works best for you. As a general rule, I recommend taking a weekly full backup and then daily differential backups. From there, you can determine the needs of your transaction log backups.

Frequently backing up of the transaction log adds a small amount of overhead to the server, especially during peak hours.

For most businesses, the acceptable amount of data loss (in terms of time) usually takes precedence over conserving the log-disk space or providing ideal database performance. Therefore, you must take into account the acceptable amount of data loss when scheduling the transaction log backup, as opposed to randomly setting the backup schedule to a low-time interval.

## Backup Distribution

When multiple databases need to be backed up, you must ensure that all full backups are not scheduled at the same time, so that the hardware resources are not hit at the same time. If the backup process involves backing up the databases to a central SAN disk array, then the full backups from all the database servers must be distributed across the backup time window, so that the central backup infrastructure doesn't get slammed by too many backup requests at the same time. Flooding the central infrastructure with a great deal of backup requests at the same time forces the components of the infrastructure to spend a significant part of their resources just managing the excessive number of requests. This mismanaged use of the resources increases the backup durations significantly, causing the full backups to continue during peak hours, and thus affecting the performance of the user requests.

To minimize the impact of the full backup process on database performance, you must first determine the nonpeak hours when full backups can be scheduled, and then distribute the full backups across the nonpeak time window, as follows:

1. Identify the number of databases that must be backed up.
2. Prioritize the databases in order of their importance to the business.
3. Determine the nonpeak hours when the full database backups can be scheduled.
4. Calculate the time interval between two consecutive full backups as follows: Time interval = (Total backup time window) / (Number of full backups)
5. Schedule the full backups in order of the database priorities, with the first backup starting at the start time of the backup window and subsequent backups spread uniformly at the time intervals calculated in the preceding equation.

This uniform distribution of the full backups will ensure that the backup infrastructure is not flooded with too many backup requests at the same time, thereby reducing the impact of the full backups on the database performance.

## Backup Compression

For relatively large databases, the backup durations and backup file sizes usually become an issue. Long backup durations make it difficult to complete the backups within the administrative time windows and thus start affecting the end user's experience. The large size of the backup files makes space management for the backup files quite challenging, and it increases the pressure on the network when the backups are performed across the network to a central backup infrastructure. Compression also acts to speed up the backup process since fewer writes to the disk are needed.

The recommended way to optimize the backup duration, the backup file size, and the resultant network pressure is to use *backup compression*. SQL Server 2012 allows for backup compression for the Standard Edition and better.

## Summary

Performance optimization is an ongoing process. It requires continual attention to database and query characteristics that affect performance. The goal of this chapter was to provide you with a checklist of these characteristics to serve as a quick and easy reference during the development and maintenance phase of your database applications.

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# **SQL Server 2012 Query Performance Tuning**



**Grant Fritchey**

**Apress®**

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