

First Normal Form (1NF)

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1st Normal Form Definition

A database is in first normal form if it satisfies the following conditions:

- Contains only atomic values
- There are no repeating groups

An atomic value is a value that cannot be divided. For example, in the table shown below, the values in the [Color] column in the first row can be divided into "red" and "green", hence [TABLE_PRODUCT] is not in 1NF.

A repeating group means that a table contains two or more columns that are closely related. For example, a table that records data on a book and its author(s) with the following columns: [Book ID], [Author 1], [Author 2], [Author 3] is not in 1NF because [Author 1], [Author 2], and [Author 3] are all repeating the same attribute.

1st Normal Form Example

How do we bring an unnormalized table into first normal form? Consider the following example:

TABLE_PRODUCT

Product ID	Color	Price
1	red, green	15.99
2	yellow	23.99
3	green	17.50
4	yellow, blue	9.99
5	red	29.99

This table is not in first normal form because the [Color] column can contain multiple values. For example, the first row includes values "red" and "green."

To bring this table to first normal form, we split the table into two tables and now we have the resulting tables:

TABLE_PRODUCT_PRICE

Product ID	Price
1	15.99
2	23.99
3	17.50
4	9.99
5	29.99

TABLE_PRODUCT_COLOR

Product ID	Color
1	red
1	green
2	yellow
3	green
4	yellow
4	blue
5	red

Now first normal form is satisfied, as the columns on each table all hold just one value.

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Second Normal Form (2NF)

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2nd Normal Form Definition

A database is in second normal form if it satisfies the following conditions:

- It is in first normal form
- All non-key attributes are fully functional dependent on the primary key

In a table, if attribute B is functionally dependent on A, but is not functionally dependent on a proper subset of A, then B is considered fully functional dependent on A. Hence, in a 2NF table, all non-key attributes cannot be dependent on a subset of the primary key. Note that if the primary key is not a composite key, all non-key attributes are always fully functional dependent on the primary key. A table that is in 1st normal form and contains only a single key as the primary key is automatically in 2nd normal form.

2nd Normal Form Example

Consider the following example:

TABLE_PURCHASE_DETAIL

Customer ID	Store ID	Purchase Location
1	1	Los Angeles
1	3	San Francisco
2	1	Los Angeles
3	2	New York
4	3	San Francisco

This table has a composite primary key [Customer ID, Store ID]. The non-key attribute is [Purchase Location]. In this case, [Purchase Location] only depends on [Store ID], which is only part of the primary key. Therefore, this table does not satisfy second normal form.

To bring this table to second normal form, we break the table into two tables, and now we have the following:

TABLE_PURCHASE

Customer ID	Store ID
1	1
1	3
2	1
3	2
4	3

TABLE_STORE

Store ID	Purchase Location
1	Los Angeles
2	New York
3	San Francisco

What we have done is to remove the partial functional dependency that we initially had. Now, in the table [TABLE_STORE], the column [Purchase Location] is fully dependent on the primary key of that table, which is [Store ID].

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Third Normal Form (3NF)

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3rd Normal Form Definition

A database is in third normal form if it satisfies the following conditions:

- It is in second normal form
- There is no transitive functional dependency

By transitive functional dependency, we mean we have the following relationships in the table: A is functionally dependent on B, and B is functionally dependent on C. In this case, C is transitively dependent on A via B.

3rd Normal Form Example

Consider the following example:

TABLE_BOOK_DETAIL

Book ID	Genre ID	Genre Type	Price
1	1	Gardening	25.99
2	2	Sports	14.99
3	1	Gardening	10.00
4	3	Travel	12.99
5	2	Sports	17.99

In the table above, [Book ID] determines [Genre ID], and [Genre ID] determines [Genre Type]. Therefore, [Book ID] determines [Genre Type] via [Genre ID] and we have transitive functional dependency, and this structure does not satisfy third normal form.

To bring this table to third normal form, we split the table into two as follows:

TABLE_BOOK

Book ID	Genre ID	Price
1	1	25.99
2	2	14.99
3	1	10.00
4	3	12.99
5	2	17.99

TABLE_GENRE

Genre ID	Genre Type
1	Gardening
2	Sports
3	Travel

Now all non-key attributes are fully functional dependent only on the primary key. In [TABLE_BOOK], both [Genre ID] and [Price] are only dependent on [Book ID]. In [TABLE_GENRE], [Genre Type] is only dependent on [Genre ID].

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