PostgreSQL `log_statement` Explained: Complete Guide With Real-Time Examples

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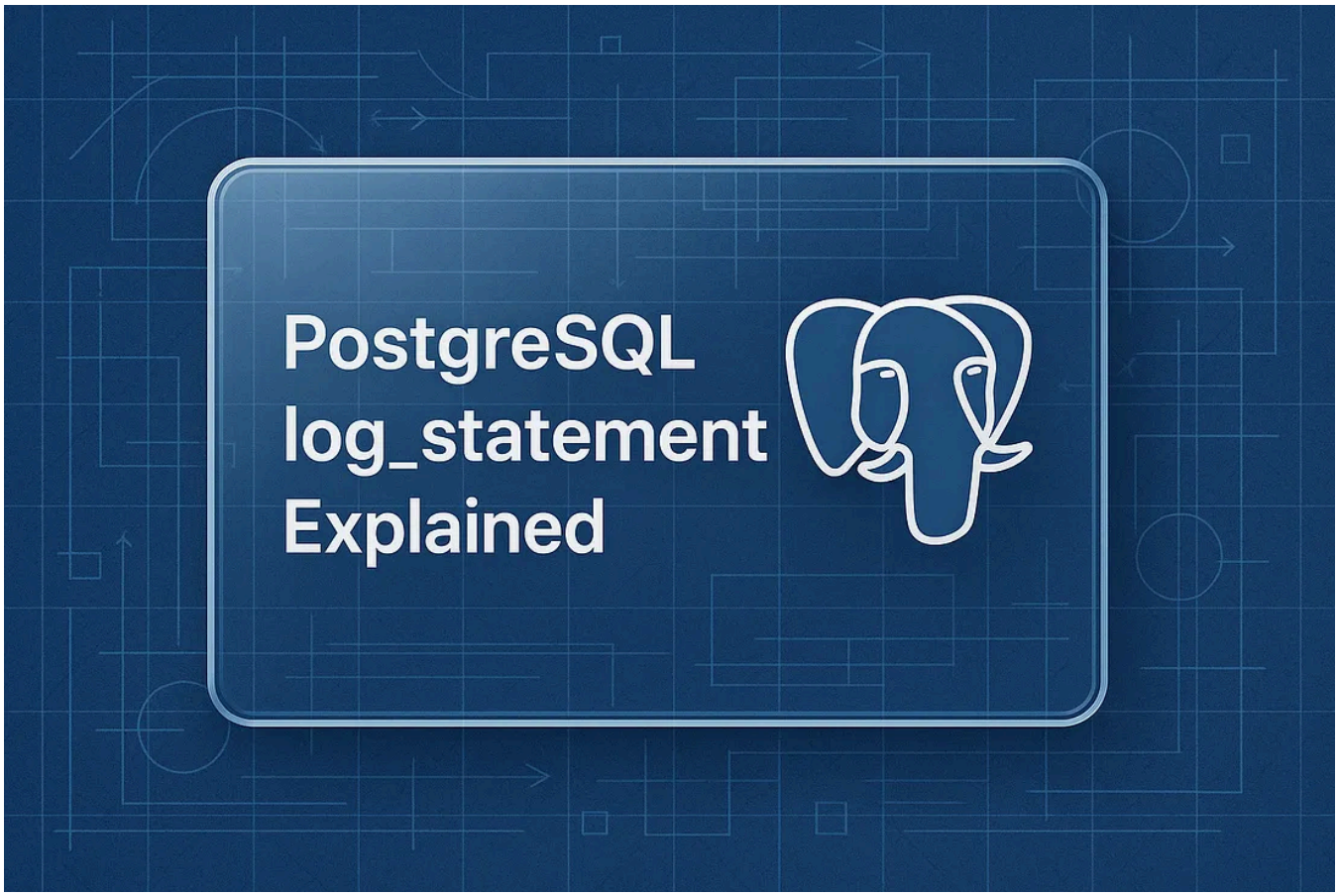

📘 Understanding `log_statement` in PostgreSQL: Your Key to Query Visibility

PostgreSQL is celebrated not only for its reliability and performance — but also for its **robust logging system**. Whether you're troubleshooting performance issues,

tracking user activity, or performing compliance audits, **query-level logging** is often your first and most powerful line of insight.

One of the **most critical logging parameters** in PostgreSQL — yet surprisingly underutilized — is `log_statement`.

In this article, we'll explore:

- What `log_statement` does
- How to configure it in PostgreSQL 13+
- Its different logging levels and when to use them
- Real-world examples that show how this parameter can make or break your observability strategy

Let's dive in.

🔍 What is `log_statement`?

`log_statement` is a PostgreSQL configuration parameter that **controls which SQL statements get logged** to the PostgreSQL log file.

Think of it as a filter that determines **how verbose** the query logs should be. It's incredibly helpful for:

- Monitoring application behavior
- Debugging complex interactions
- Auditing query patterns for compliance
- Detecting unexpected or malicious SQL activity

But with great power comes great responsibility — setting it too aggressively can flood your logs with noise, while setting it too narrowly may cause you to miss important insights.

⚙️ How to Configure `log_statement`

You can set `log_statement` in:

- The `postgresql.conf` file (permanent)
- Via SQL using `ALTER SYSTEM` (requires reload)
- Temporarily per session (for debugging)

Example (in `postgresql.conf`):

```
log_statement = 'all'
```

Then reload the server for changes to take effect:

```
SELECT pg_reload_conf();
```

🧰 The Four Logging Levels

PostgreSQL offers **four options** for `log_statement`, each increasing in verbosity:

1. `none` (default)

- No SQL statements are logged.
- Best for production systems with separate query logging tools.

2. `ddl`

- Logs only DDL statements such as `CREATE`, `ALTER`, `DROP`.
- Useful for tracking **schema changes** without the noise of everyday queries.

3. `mod`

- Logs all DDL plus **INSERT**, **UPDATE**, **DELETE**, and **TRUNCATE**.

- Great for tracking **data mutations** without logging every `SELECT`.

4. `all`

- Logs **everything**, including every `SELECT`.
- Ideal for **debugging** or during **security reviews**, but can generate large logs quickly.

🧠 **Tip:** Pair `log_statement` with `log_duration` or `log_min_duration_statement` to capture slow queries only.

💡 Real-World Example

Let's say you set:

```
log_statement = 'mod'
```

Then run the following:

```
SELECT * FROM customers; -- not logged
UPDATE customers SET active = false WHERE last_login < now() - interval '1 year
```

Only the `UPDATE` statement appears in your logs, because `log_statement = 'mod'` includes data-modifying queries, but **excludes read-only SELECTs.**

Now change it to:

```
log_statement = 'all'
```

Rerun the `SELECT` —now it's logged too.

This gives you full traceability of what's happening in your database at the query level.

🔐 Security & Compliance Use Cases

If you're in a **regulated environment** (e.g., healthcare, fintech), `log_statement` can play a key role in:

- **Auditing who did what**
- **Tracking schema changes**
- **Detecting unauthorized access patterns**

You can even combine it with **log_line_prefix** for detailed, timestamped logs with user info, session ID, and application name.

🚀 Final Thoughts

The `log_statement` parameter might seem like a minor setting, but it's a **powerful gateway to understanding your PostgreSQL workload.**

By setting the right logging level, you can:

- Debug faster
- Audit smarter
- Monitor more effectively

Whether you're chasing a runaway query or analyzing long-term behavior trends, `log_statement` gives you the **raw query data** you need to stay in control.

🔎 What Is `log_statement` in PostgreSQL?

When it comes to understanding what's happening inside your PostgreSQL database, logging is your best friend. One of the most useful — but often overlooked — logging features is the `log_statement` parameter.

💡 So, what is it?

The `log_statement` parameter in PostgreSQL **controls which SQL statements are written to the server log.** It acts as a filter to determine how much query-related information should be recorded.

This setting is especially valuable for:

- ✅ **Debugging:** Want to trace what a client or app is doing behind the scenes? This logs the actual SQL.
- ✅ **Auditing:** Need to track who changed what and when? Enable detailed logs.
- ✅ **Compliance:** In regulated industries (e.g., finance, healthcare), logging query history is a requirement.

With `log_statement`, you decide **how much detail** gets logged—from nothing at all to every single SQL command.

⚙ Default Behavior of `log_statement`

Out of the box, PostgreSQL is tuned for **performance**, not verbosity. That's why the default setting is:

```
log_statement = 'none'
```

Here's what this means:

- ✅ **No queries are logged** to the PostgreSQL log file
- ✅ **Better performance**, since there's minimal I/O overhead from logging
- 🚫 **Not ideal for troubleshooting**, since you can't see what queries were run
- 🚫 **Useless for audit trails**, as there's no visibility into user actions

This default makes sense for high-throughput environments where performance is critical — but for development, staging, or security-sensitive environments, you'll likely want to **increase the logging level**.

📌 When Should You Change It?

If you're:

- Debugging application behavior
- Monitoring data changes
- Investigating performance issues
- Auditing database usage

Then it's time to consider a more verbose setting like `'mod'` or `'all'`.

We'll cover the available options (`none`, `ddl`, `mod`, `all`) and how to apply them in the next section.

🔧 `log_statement` Options in PostgreSQL (With Use Cases)

PostgreSQL gives you granular control over how much SQL logging you want by offering multiple options for the `log_statement` parameter. Each level captures a different category of SQL statements, allowing you to strike the right balance between visibility and performance.

Let's explore each option in detail — with real-world use cases to help you choose the right setting for your environment.

1️⃣ `none` — No SQL statements are logged

```
log_statement = 'none'  -- Default setting
```

- 🧘 **Description:** Completely disables query-level logging.
- ⚙️ **Performance:** Very lightweight and optimal for high-throughput systems.
- 🚫 **Drawback:** You won't see any SQL activity in your logs, which makes debugging or auditing extremely difficult.

✅ **Use Case:**

- Ideal for **production environments** where performance is a top priority and other monitoring tools (like pgBadger or APMs) are already in place.
- Not suitable when troubleshooting or when visibility into query behavior is required.

2️⃣ `ddl` — Logs only DDL (schema) statements

```
log_statement = 'ddl'
```

- 🧱 **Description:** Logs **Data Definition Language** commands like `CREATE`, `ALTER`, `DROP`, and so on.
- 🔍 **Visibility:** Tracks structural changes without overwhelming the logs with everyday queries.

✅ **Use Case:**

- Great for **schema change auditing**, especially in teams where multiple developers work on the same database.
- Helps during **migrations or upgrades** to ensure no unintended schema modifications occur.

3️⃣ `mod` — Logs DDL + modifying DML statements

```
log_statement = 'mod'
```

- 🖍️ **Description:** Logs all DDL commands *plus* **data-modifying** operations like `INSERT`, `UPDATE`, `DELETE`, and `TRUNCATE`.
- 🔄 **Tracking Changes:** Gives you insight into any command that changes the state of your data.

✅ **Use Case:**

- Perfect for **auditing data changes** in staging or QA environments.
- Useful for **security reviews** where tracking who changed what data (and when) is essential.
- Strikes a good balance between visibility and log size for many production environments.

4️⃣ `all` — Logs everything, including SELECT

```
log_statement = 'all'
```

- 🧠 **Description:** The most verbose option — logs **every single SQL statement**, including read-only operations like `SELECT`.
- 🔎 **Full Transparency:** Allows complete visibility into query behavior, execution patterns, and user actions.

✅ **Use Case:**

- Best for **debugging** application behavior or performance issues in development environments.

- Valuable during **code testing, profiling, or training environments** where full query traceability is needed.

⚠️ **Warning:** This setting can generate **very large log files**, especially in read-heavy workloads. Use with caution in production environments.

📘 Summary Table

Option	Logs What?	Recommended Use
`none`	Nothing	High-performance production with external monitoring
`ddl`	Schema changes only	Auditing migrations, low-noise logging
`mod`	DDL + INSERT/UPDATE/DELETE	Tracking data changes, QA and audit
`all`	Every SQL statement	Development, debugging, full traceability

✅ Final Thoughts

Choosing the right `log_statement` level is all about **your environment's needs.** Use `none` when performance matters most, `mod` for balanced auditing, and `all` when you want to see everything during development or debugging.

PostgreSQL gives you the flexibility — **you just need to tune it wisely.**

💻 How `log_statement` Works in PostgreSQL

Every query executed in PostgreSQL passes through its internal **logging pipeline.** However, **only queries that match the `log_statement` level** get written to the PostgreSQL server logs.

This filtering mechanism helps database administrators and developers fine-tune how much visibility they need — without overwhelming the system with unnecessary log volume.

⚙️ How to Set `log_statement`

There are two main ways to configure the `log_statement` parameter:

1. **Via `postgresql.conf` file (permanent setting)**
   Located typically at:

```
/var/lib/pgsql/{version}/data/postgresql.conf
```

1. You'll need to edit the file and restart or reload PostgreSQL.
2. **Dynamically with SQL (no restart needed)**
   Use the following SQL command for immediate effect:

```
ALTER SYSTEM SET log_statement = 'mod';  -- Or 'ddl', 'all', etc.
SELECT pg_reload_conf();                 -- Apply the change
```

📁 Where Are PostgreSQL Logs Stored?

By default, PostgreSQL writes its log files to:

```
/var/lib/pgsql/{version}/data/log/postgresql.log
```

You can monitor logs in real time using:

```
[postgres@ip-172-31-20-155 ~]$ cd /var/lib/pgsql/17/data/log/
[postgres@ip-172-31-20-155 log]$
[postgres@ip-172-31-20-155 log]$ ls -ltr
total 8
-rw-------. 1 postgres postgres 2519 Jun 21 16:23 postgresql-Sat.log
-rw-------. 1 postgres postgres    0 Jun 22 00:00 postgresql-Sun.log
-rw-------. 1 postgres postgres  817 Jun 23 23:30 postgresql-Mon.log
-rw-------. 1 postgres postgres    0 Jun 24 00:00 postgresql-Tue.log
[postgres@ip-172-31-20-155 log]$

[postgres@ip-172-31-20-155 log]$ cat postgresql-Mon.log
2025-06-23 23:28:57.501 UTC [22503] ERROR:  invalid input syntax for type inet:
2025-06-23 23:28:57.501 UTC [22503] STATEMENT:  SELECT COUNT(*) AS client_conns
        FROM pg_stat_activity
        WHERE client_addr = 'your_ip_here';
2025-06-23 23:29:37.317 UTC [22503] ERROR:  column "query_time" does not exist
2025-06-23 23:29:37.317 UTC [22503] HINT:  Perhaps you meant to reference the c
2025-06-23 23:29:37.317 UTC [22503] STATEMENT:  SELECT
          pid, usename, query_time, query
        FROM pg_stat_activity
        WHERE state = 'active'
          AND (now() - query_start) > interval '5 minutes';
2025-06-23 23:30:58.439 UTC [22503] ERROR:  column "pid" does not exist at char
2025-06-23 23:30:58.439 UTC [22503] STATEMENT:  SELECT pg_cancel_backend(pid);
[postgres@ip-172-31-20-155 log]$
```

This is incredibly useful during development, testing, or incident investigations.

🔬 Hands-On Examples: How Different `log_statement` Levels Behave

Now let's see how PostgreSQL behaves under different `log_statement` settings. These examples will help you **visualize exactly what does and doesn't get logged.**

📌 Example 1: `log_statement = 'none'` (Default)

Check the current setting:

```
postgres=# SHOW log_statement;
 log_statement
---------------
 none
```

Run some SQL commands:

```
CREATE TABLE course (course_no integer, name text, price numeric);
INSERT INTO course (course_no, name, price) VALUES (1, 'postgres', 150);
SELECT * FROM course;
```

✅ **Result:**
None of these statements will appear in the logs. This is expected because `log_statement = 'none'` logs **nothing**.

Check the logs to confirm:

```
tail -30f /var/lib/pgsql/17/data/log/postgresql-Tue.log
```

You won't see any entries related to the above queries.

📌 Example 2: `log_statement = 'ddl'` (Schema Changes Only)

Now let's enable logging for DDL statements (schema changes):

```
ALTER SYSTEM SET log_statement = 'ddl';
SELECT pg_reload_conf();  -- Reload without restart
```

```
postgres=# ALTER SYSTEM SET log_statement = 'ddl';
ALTER SYSTEM
```

```
postgres=#
postgres=# SELECT pg_reload_conf();
 pg_reload_conf
----------------
 t
(1 row)

postgres=#
```

Run the same set of queries:

```
CREATE TABLE course (course_no integer, name text, price numeric);
INSERT INTO course (course_no, name, price) VALUES (1, 'databricks', 2000);
SELECT * FROM course;
```

```
postgres=# CREATE TABLE course (course_no integer, name text, price numeric);
CREATE TABLE
postgres=#
postgres=#
postgres=# INSERT INTO course (course_no, name, price) VALUES (1, 'databricks',
INSERT 0 1
postgres=#
postgres=# SELECT * FROM course;
 course_no |   name     | price
-----------+------------+-------
         1 | databricks |  2000
(1 row)

postgres=#
```

✅ **Result:**

Only the `CREATE TABLE` command will be logged. The `INSERT` and `SELECT` statements will not.

Confirm by checking the logs:

```
tail -10f /var/lib/pgsql/17/data/log/postgresql-Sat.log
```

You should see a log entry similar to:

```
[postgres@ip-172-31-20-155 log]$ tail -30f /var/lib/pgsql/17/data/log/postgresc
2025-06-24 00:39:22.566 UTC [22935] ERROR:  syntax error at or near "]" at char
2025-06-24 00:39:22.566 UTC [22935] STATEMENT:  ]
        ALTER SYSTEM SET log_statement = 'ddl';
2025-06-24 00:39:33.477 UTC [1823] LOG:  received SIGHUP, reloading configurati
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "autovacuum_vacuum_scale_fac
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "autovacuum_analyze_scale_fa
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "autovacuum_max_workers" car
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "autovacuum_naptime" changed
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "log_statement" changed to "
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  configuration file "/var/lib/pgsql/17/
2025-06-24 00:40:16.029 UTC [22935] LOG:  statement: CREATE TABLE course (cours
```

But no entries for the `INSERT` or `SELECT`.

🧠 Why This Matters

- Setting the right `log_statement` level gives you **precise control** over your query visibility.
- It enables **auditing and troubleshooting** without flooding your logs.
- Knowing what gets logged (and what doesn't) helps you **interpret logs more accurately** during real-world operations.

In the next part, we'll look at more examples using `mod` and `all` to see how you can log data-changing and read-only queries too.

📌 Example 3: `log_statement = 'mod'` — Logging DDL and Modifying DML

If you want to capture **data-changing activity** in your PostgreSQL logs without logging every `SELECT`, the `mod` setting is your go-to option.

Let's enable it:

```
ALTER SYSTEM SET log_statement = 'mod';
SELECT pg_reload_conf();  -- Applies the change without restart
```

Now, run the following SQL commands:

```
INSERT INTO course (course_no, name, price) VALUES (2, 'rds mysql', 5000);
DELETE FROM course WHERE course_no = 2;
```

You should see a log entry similar to:

```
postgres=# ALTER SYSTEM SET log_statement = 'mod';
ALTER SYSTEM
postgres=#
postgres=# INSERT INTO course (course_no, name, price) VALUES (2, 'rds mysql',
INSERT 0 1
postgres=#
postgres=#
postgres=# DELETE FROM course WHERE course_no = 2;
DELETE 1
postgres=#
postgres=#
```

✅ Result:

Both the `INSERT` and `DELETE` operations will be logged, because they modify data.

However, if you run a `SELECT` query like:

```
SELECT * FROM course;
```

```
postgres=# SELECT * FROM course;
course_no  |   name     | price
-----------+------------+-------
         1 | databricks |  2000
(1 row)

postgres=#
postgres=#
```

It **will not** be logged — because `mod` doesn't log read-only operations.

📝 Summary:

- ✔️ **Logs:** `INSERT`, `UPDATE`, `DELETE`, `TRUNCATE`, and all `DDL` (e.g., `CREATE`, `ALTER`)
- ❌ **Does not log:** `SELECT` (unless it triggers a data-modifying function)

Use this setting if you want visibility into **data mutations** without the performance hit of logging every single query.

📌 Example 4: `log_statement = 'all'` — Logging Every Query

Need full visibility into every query hitting your PostgreSQL instance? Set `log_statement` to `all`:

```
ALTER SYSTEM SET log_statement = 'all';
SELECT pg_reload_conf();  -- Reload the config
```

```
postgres=# SELECT * FROM course;
course_no  |   name     | price
-----------+------------+-------
         1 | databricks |  2000
(1 row)
```

```
postgres=#
postgres=# ALTER SYSTEM SET log_statement = 'all';
ALTER SYSTEM
postgres=#
postgres=# SELECT pg_reload_conf();
 pg_reload_conf
----------------
 t
(1 row)

postgres=#
```

Now, run a few sample queries:

```
INSERT INTO course (course_no, name, price) VALUES (3, 'oracle', 10000);
SELECT * FROM course;
```

```
postgres=# INSERT INTO course (course_no, name, price) VALUES (3, 'oracle', 100
INSERT 0 1
postgres=#
postgres=# SELECT * FROM course;
course_no  |   name     | price
-----------+------------+-------
         1 | databricks |  2000
         1 | oracle     |  10000
(2 rows)

postgres=#
postgres=#
```

✅ Result:

Every query — yes, even simple `SELECT` statements—will be written to the PostgreSQL logs.

Check it with:

```
tail -30f /var/lib/pgsql/17/data/log/postgresql-Tue.log
```

You'll see log entries like:

```
2025-06-24 00:39:22.566 UTC [22935] ERROR:  syntax error at or near "]" at char
2025-06-24 00:39:22.566 UTC [22935] STATEMENT:  ]
        ALTER SYSTEM SET log_statement = 'ddl';
2025-06-24 00:39:33.477 UTC [1823] LOG:  received SIGHUP, reloading configurati
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "autovacuum_vacuum_scale_fac
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "autovacuum_analyze_scale_fa
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "autovacuum_max_workers" car
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "autovacuum_naptime" changed
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "log_statement" changed to "
2025-06-24 00:39:33.478 UTC [1823] LOG:  configuration file "/var/lib/pgsql/17/
2025-06-24 00:40:16.029 UTC [22935] LOG:  statement: CREATE TABLE course (cours
2025-06-24 00:43:21.637 UTC [22992] LOG:  statement: ALTER SYSTEM SET log_state
2025-06-24 00:44:29.489 UTC [1825] LOG:  checkpoint starting: time
2025-06-24 00:44:34.711 UTC [1825] LOG:  checkpoint complete: wrote 53 buffers
2025-06-24 00:44:55.863 UTC [22992] LOG:  statement: ALTER SYSTEM SET log_state
2025-06-24 00:45:01.315 UTC [1823] LOG:  received SIGHUP, reloading configurati
2025-06-24 00:45:01.316 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "autovacuum_max_workers" car
2025-06-24 00:45:01.316 UTC [1823] LOG:  parameter "log_statement" changed to "
2025-06-24 00:45:01.316 UTC [1823] LOG:  configuration file "/var/lib/pgsql/17/
2025-06-24 00:45:19.968 UTC [22992] LOG:  statement: INSERT INTO course (course
2025-06-24 00:45:28.648 UTC [22992] LOG:  statement: SELECT * FROM course;
2025-06-24 00:49:29.417 UTC [1825] LOG:  checkpoint starting: time
2025-06-24 00:49:29.524 UTC [1825] LOG:  checkpoint complete: wrote 2 buffers (
```

⚠️ Warning:

Using `log_statement = 'all'` provides **maximum visibility**, which is great for debugging, audits, and development environments. **But in production, be careful:**

- 🚨 Can **quickly bloat log files** in read-heavy applications
- 💥 May **impact performance** due to disk I/O overhead

🧠 Best Practice:

Use `log_statement = 'all'`:

- In **development**, for deep debugging
- In **test environments**, for auditing or query pattern analysis
- With **short-term time limits**, to avoid excessive log generation

🔚 Wrapping Up This Section

With these hands-on examples, you've now seen how PostgreSQL reacts to each `log_statement` level:

Setting Logs What? Ideal For `none` Nothing High-performance prod environments `ddl` Schema changes Change tracking & auditing `mod` DDL + data-modifying DML Data mutation monitoring `all` Every SQL statement Debugging, full traceability

🧮 Quick Comparison: What Does Each `log_statement` Level Capture?

When choosing the right `log_statement` level, it helps to see a **side-by-side comparison** of what each setting actually logs.

Here's a quick reference table:

`log_statement`	Logs DDL (`CREATE` , `ALTER` , `DROP`)	Logs DML (`INSERT` , `UPDATE` , `DELETE`)	Logs `SELECT`
`none`	❌ No	❌ No	❌ No
`ddl`	✅ Yes	❌ No	❌ No
`mod`	✅ Yes	✅ Yes	❌ No
`all`	✅ Yes	✅ Yes	✅ Yes

This table gives you a clear understanding of how much query activity each level captures — so you can choose one that matches your observability needs without compromising performance.

🔐 Where Should You Use `log_statement` ?

The ideal setting for `log_statement` depends on **your environment** and **your goals.** Here's a breakdown of common environments and the recommended setting for each:

Environment Recommended Setting Why? Development `all` Full visibility into all queries for debugging and learning **UAT / QA** `mod` Capture schema and data changes, skip noisy SELECTs **Production** `none` or `ddl` Prioritize performance, optionally log schema changes for traceability **Compliance / Auditing** `mod` Ensure all DDL and DML operations are tracked for audit purposes

By aligning the `log_statement` level with the purpose of your environment, you avoid unnecessary noise while still capturing the information that matters.

📑 Conclusion: Fine-Tuning PostgreSQL Logging for Visibility and Performance

The `log_statement` parameter is one of PostgreSQL's most **powerful logging tools**. It gives you full control over how much query activity you want to observe, track, or audit—without requiring any external plugins.

Whether you're debugging, auditing, or protecting performance, `log_statement` helps you balance:

- 🔎 **Query visibility** — know what's running and when
- 📊 **Auditability** — trace who changed what and why
- ⚙️ **Performance** — avoid log bloat in high-throughput environments

🎯 Key Takeaway:

There's no one-size-fits-all setting. Use `log_statement` **strategically**, adjusting it based on your current workload, environment, and operational needs.

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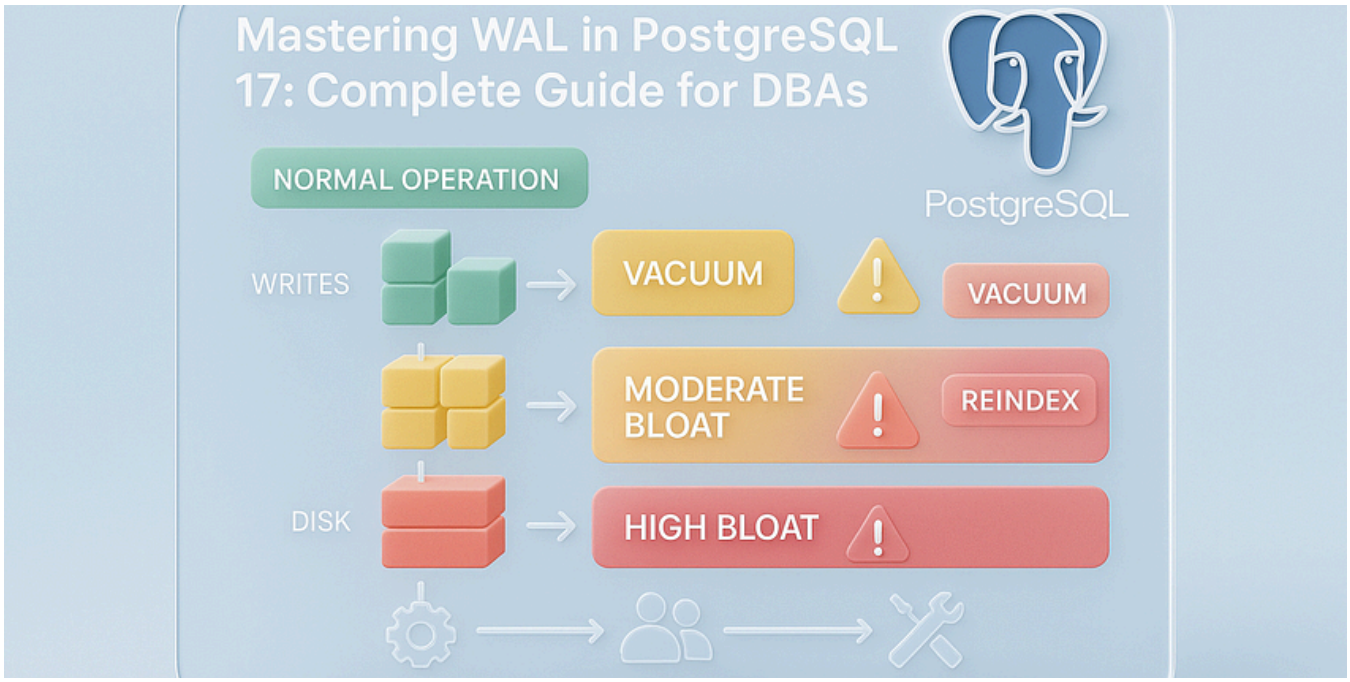

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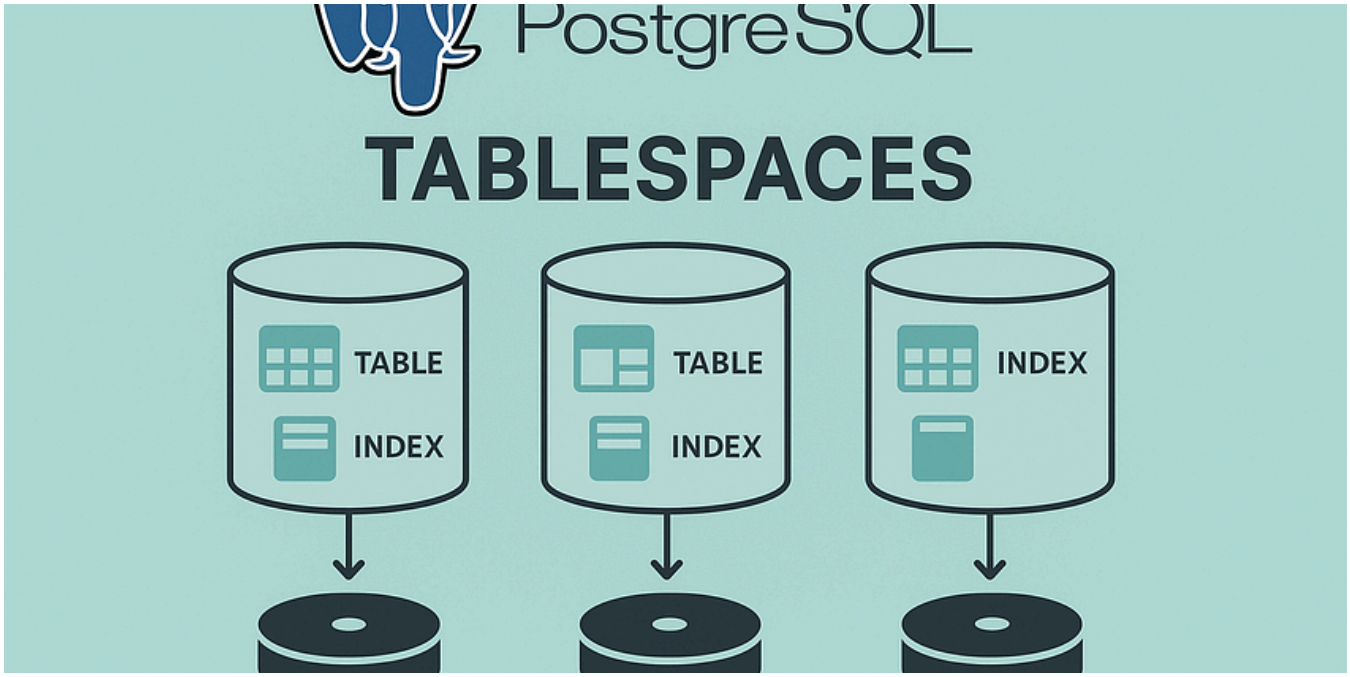

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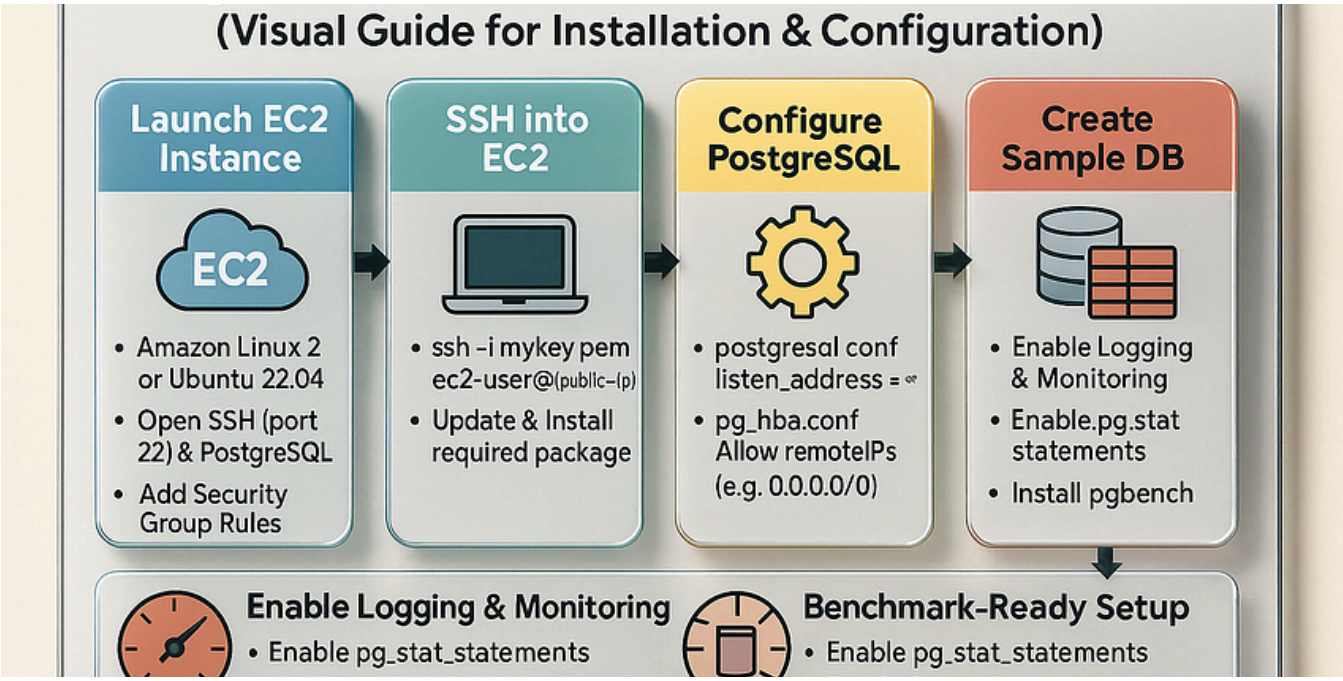

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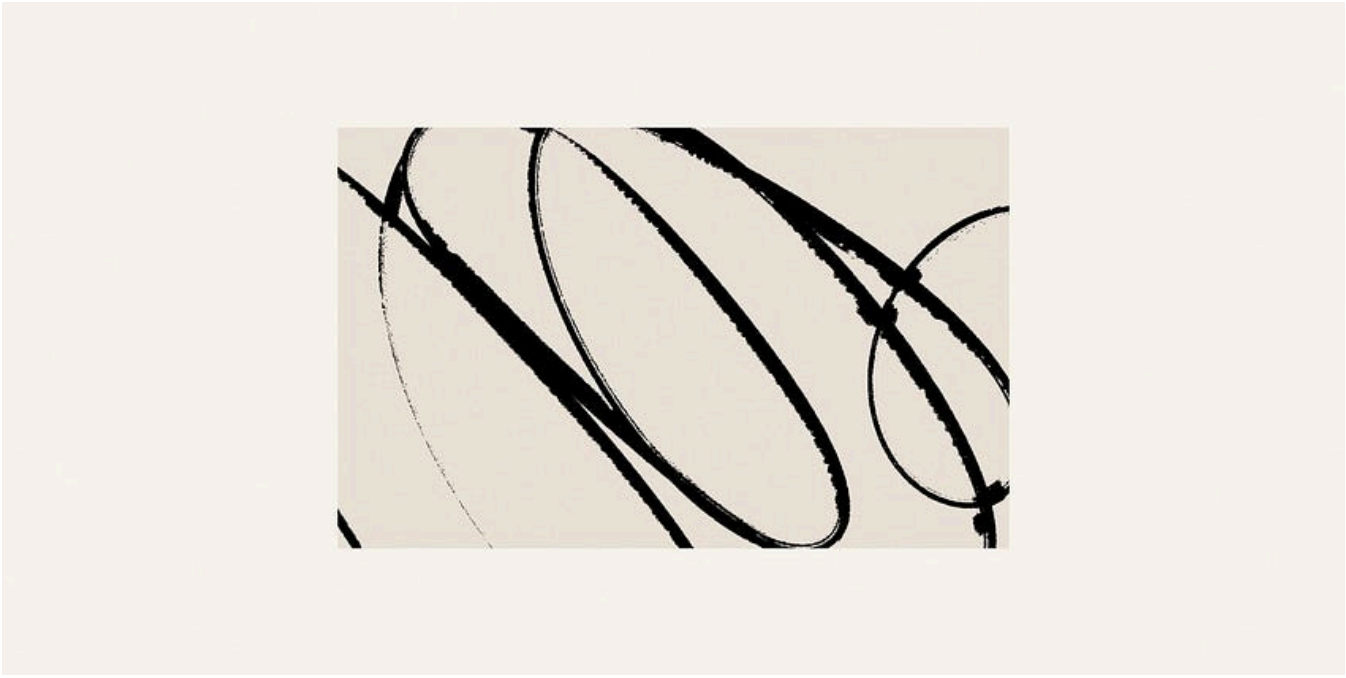

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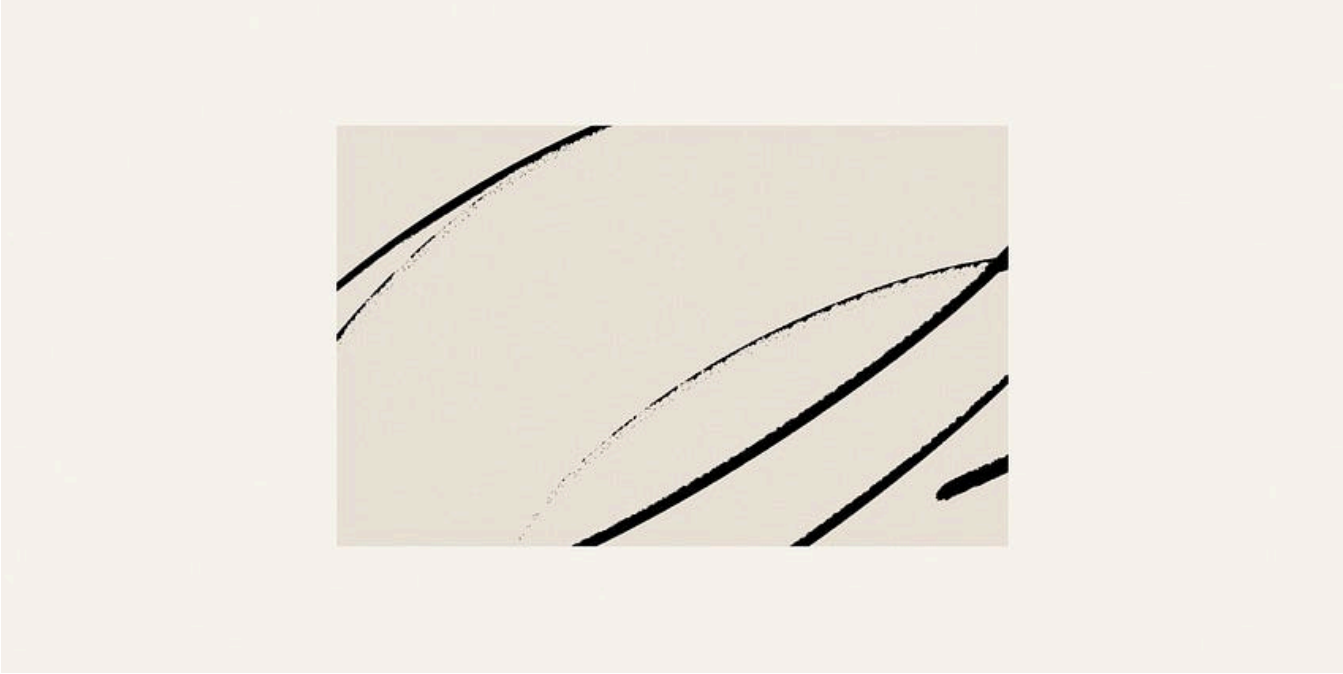

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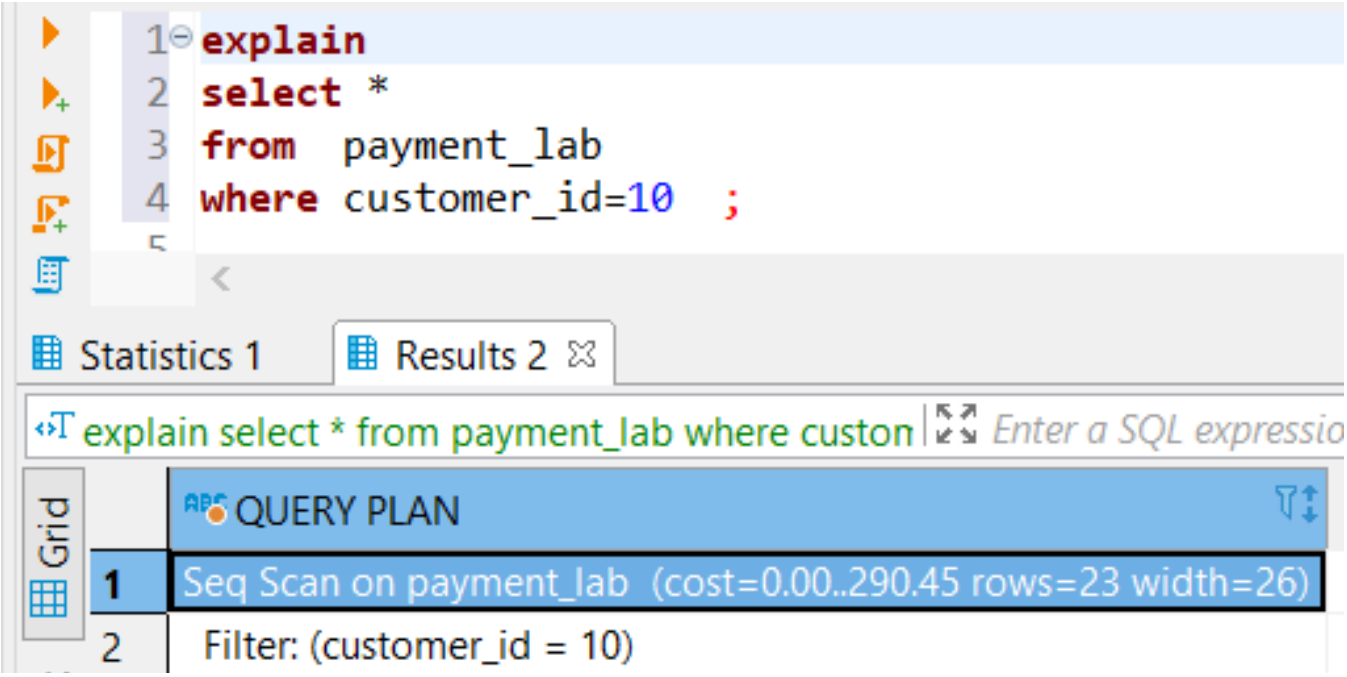

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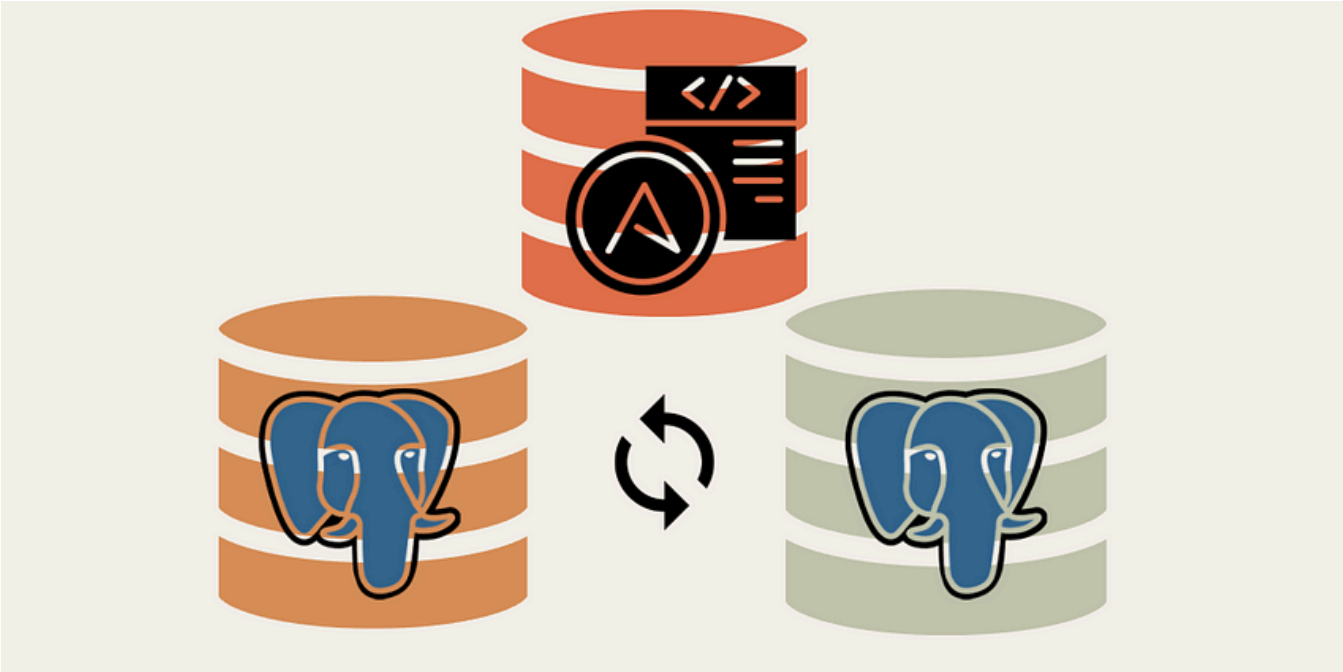

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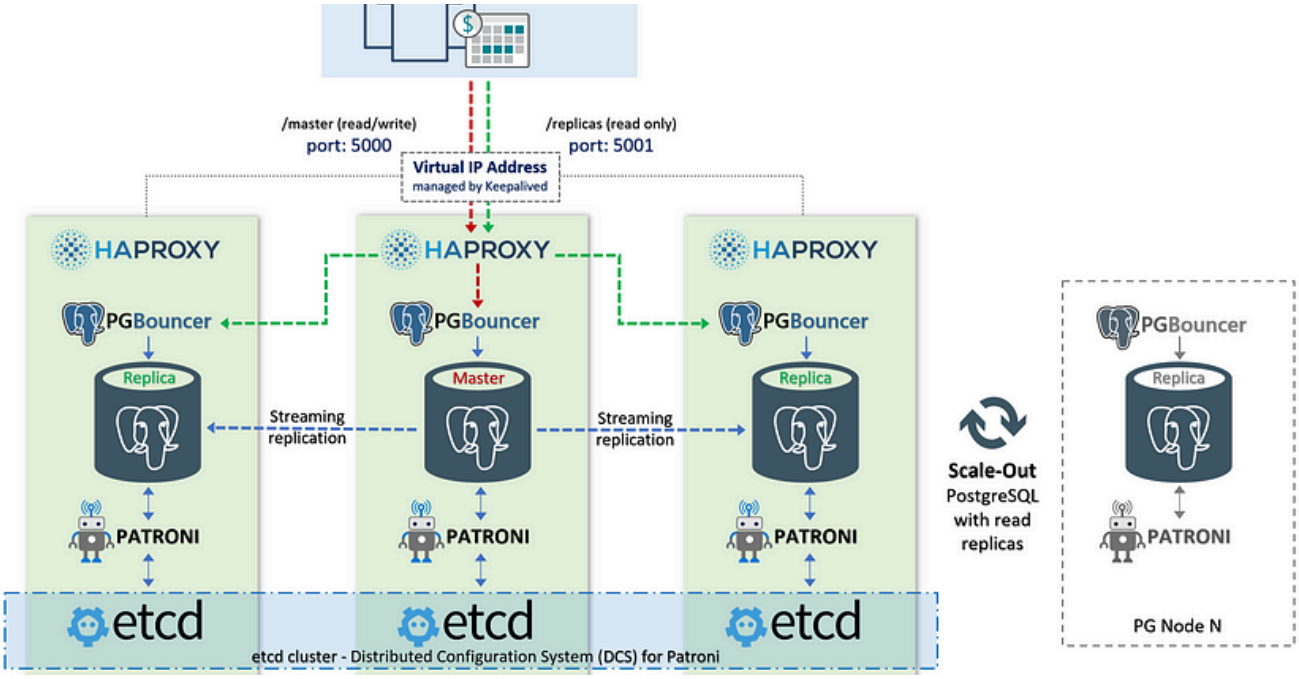

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