

SQL for the rest of us

If you're not a data scientist but you have questions, you want to know SQL



Justin ✓
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26



Good morning everyone! I published the most recent free Technically post on the site (technically.dev), but I wanted to share it here on Substack in case it's more convenient. It's a complete, practical beginner's guide to SQL and being a useful data literate teammate.

Apologies if there's any confusion about where Technically content gets published – I'll make sure to continue distributing every post here, even if it's as a link. This post has been Technically's most popular so far (almost 4K views!).



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@itunpredictable

SQL for the rest of us: a complete, practical beginner's guide to SQL and being a useful data literate teammate technically.dev/posts/sql-for-...



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SQL FOR THE REST OF US

If you're not a data scientist but you have questions, you want to know SQL. This guide will run through everything you need to get started: from technical topics to how to be a useful, smart teammate.

- What is SQL, exactly?
- Database schemas
- Basics of a SQL query
- Where and how to write SQL
- Query performance
- The advanced stuff: window functions, nesting, and such
- Practical tips for getting better and being a good teammate
- Where to learn more

One very, very important caveat: SQL queries can **write** data to a database, not just read it. But that's mostly for engineers and database admins, so this post will focus on **reading** data – probably 99% of what you want to do.

SELECT

The **SELECT** keyword designates which columns of data you want in your results. Tables will usually have more columns than you need for your analysis, so you'll pick a subset of them in your query. If you want to return *all* columns in a table, you can write **SELECT *** instead of spelling out all of the individual column names.

Workplace Example

The phrase "select star" is pretty common in conversation among data and engineering teams. You might hear something like "select star isn't working" which means that a table is down and not > queryable because you can't select anything from it (i.e. **SELECT *** doesn't work).

Workplace Example

The **SELECT** part of your query isn't just where you pick columns, though; part of what makes SQL powerful is what you can do *with* the columns you're selecting, like adding them together or transforming them. We'll cover that in the "everything else" section.

FROM

A database usually has a bunch of tables, so you need to specify which table you want to pull your data from. Each query can only have one source table, but

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As always, if anyone has any questions, topic suggestions, or feedback - just reply to this email and send 'em my way.

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