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Starting up Access 2007 for the first time can be a daunting experience for the uninitiated. This chapter briefly explains how Access works and introduces Access 2007’s new user interface.

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Getting Started

Start thinking about your database now. What do you want it to do? What information do you need to keep?

What is Access 2007?

Access 2007 is the latest incarnation of Microsoft’s popular Database Management System, or DBMS for short. By using Access 2007 you can:

- Store data using user-friendly forms
- Query the database for specific information
- Create attractively styled business reports
- Share data with colleagues over a network of computers

However, Access 2007 is much more than a means of entering and retrieving data. If you want to, you can build complete software applications limited only by your requirements and creativity.

And the good thing?

You don’t need to be a computer scientist to use it. To be honest, you can use nearly all of Access’s functionality without entering a single line of code. All that is required is a bit of patience, forward planning, and a clear idea of why you are building a database in the first place!

So What is a Database?

A database is simply an ordered collection of records. For example, the Rolodex on your office desk is a type of database. Open it up and you have the names, telephone numbers, and addresses of your business contacts.

In a computer, database information is organized in a much more structured way but the general idea is the same. Access keeps data in tables. A table is like the Rolodex – it contains all the data we need. Each row of the table contains data about a specific thing. In a Rolodex it would be a business card. The columns of the table help us to organize the data. Each column contains some specific item of data such as the address of a contact.

In the next chapter we take a deeper look at the way databases are structured and how to create them. For now, the rest of the chapter is devoted to getting you started with Access 2007.
The Getting Started Screen

Every time Access 2007 is launched you’ll be greeted by the new, welcoming face of the Getting Started screen. Designed to do exactly as its name suggests, the Getting Started screen provides all the options you need to get the most out of Access 2007.

Below are some of the components that we will be discussing throughout this chapter.

Components of the Getting Started Screen

The Getting Started screen changes dynamically as new content and features are introduced. For example, you will see new database templates added as Microsoft makes them available.
The Quick Access Toolbar

The Quick Access Toolbar provides quick and convenient access to commonly used commands such as Save, and is normally found at the top left of the Access 2007 screen.

By default the Quick Access Toolbar features only three buttons: Save, Print, and Undo. Although these are useful in themselves the choice of action is somewhat limited. As your confidence with Access 2007 increases you will soon want to have certain actions within easy reach. Luckily we can customize the Quick Access Toolbar and add or delete extra buttons.

**Customizing the Quick Access Toolbar**

To add any action to the Quick Access Toolbar simply right-click its icon on the Ribbon and select ‘Add To Quick Access Toolbar’.

1. Press the arrow to the right of the last button
2. Click a menu item to add that command to the Quick Access Toolbar

**Adding an Action**

Some of the most useful commands can be added to the Quick Access Toolbar using the menu to the right. However, many more functions can be added by clicking the “More Commands...” menu item. This launches the Customization dialog, which is discussed in more detail on the opposite page.
It’s often convenient to distinguish between different groups of actions according to their function, for example separating file access actions from table creation actions. In order to separate actions on the Quick Access Toolbar choose the Separator action.

Repositioning the Quick Access Toolbar

1. Click the arrow at the end of the Quick Access Toolbar
2. Click the “Show Below the Ribbon” menu item

Don’t forget

The Quick Access Toolbar can be returned to its previous position above the Ribbon if need be.
Using the Office Button

The Office Button eases both file management and database administration tasks. Not only does it allow you to open and save databases; the Office Button can also be used to email databases to colleagues or perform maintenance operations on your database.

The Office Button is located to the left of the Quick Access Toolbar.

Opening a Database

1. Click the Office Button
2. Click Open from the Office Button menu
3. Find the database you want to open using the file dialog
4. Double-click the database name to open it

Click here to change directory
Double-click a file to open it
Type a file name here to search for it

To open the Office Button menu quickly, press the Alt+F keys.
By default Access opens a database in a restricted mode of operation. Specifically, it disables the execution of Visual Basic for Applications code and macros. To enable all the features of the database click the “Options...” button located between the Ribbon and the main database window.

This displays a security dialog. Click the “Enable this content” radio button and then press “OK”.

Saving a Database

1. Click the Office Button
2. Click the Save option

Beware

Only enable content if you are absolutely certain that it doesn’t contain malicious code. In most cases such code would only be present if you were opening a database from someone else.

Hot tip

To save a database quickly at any point press Ctrl+S.
**Creating a New Database**

1. Click the Office Button to display the drop-down menu
2. Click the New menu item
3. Choose a name for your new database and enter it into the text field
4. Press the Create button

To save your database in a directory other than My Documents, click the Browse button.

**Exiting Access 2007**

Access 2007 is great, but despite its brilliance there will come a time when you want to switch it off. Here’s how to do it:

1. Click the Office Button
2. Click the Exit Access button at the bottom right of the Office Button menu
Personalizing Access 2007

The Personalize options screen contains various settings that affect the way you view and interact with Access 2007. For example, you can decide whether or not you want Enhanced ScreenTips such as the one below to appear.

1. Click on the Office Button
2. Click on the Access Options button located at the bottom right of the Office menu
3. Click the menu items at the left-hand side of the Access Options dialog to switch between sets of options
4. Click on the drop-down menus to change option settings
Converting Older Databases

Access 2007 makes it easy to open and work with a database created with an older version of Access. The older database will look and feel exactly the same as a database created with Access 2007. The only drawback is that you won’t be able to make use of the new features packed into Access 2007, such as the Multi-Valued Look-up Fields and the new Attachment data type.

Luckily, Access 2007 can quickly convert your old database to the new ACCDB file format so that you can use these features.

1. Open the database you want to convert
2. Click the Office Button
3. Click Convert
4. Choose a directory in which to save the converted database using the Save As dialog
5. Type a name for your database here
6. Click the Save button

**Beware**

Once you’ve converted a database you will no longer be able to use it with Access 2003 or earlier versions of Access.
Converting Databases to Older File Formats

There may come a time when you need to share your database with others and as a consequence you may have to convert your Access 2007 database to a file format that will work with previous versions of Access. Perhaps your database is to be kept in a shared folder and updated by your colleagues directly.

1. Open the database you want to convert
2. Click the Office Button
3. Hold the cursor over the arrow at the right of the Save As command
4. Choose a file format to convert the database to
5. Use the Save As Dialog to navigate to the directory in which the converted database is to be saved
6. Type a name for the database in the “File name” field
7. Click the Save button on the Save As dialog

Click OK to get rid of the warning

Consider your options carefully before you convert a database to an older file format, as you will no longer be able to use the new features of Access 2007.
Using Office Online

Office Online is an invaluable new feature of Access 2007 that quickly and conveniently helps you to search for new content such as database templates, improve your knowledge with online training programs, and keep your installation of Access 2007 up to date with program downloads and updates. In fact, Office Online is such a convenient feature that Microsoft have kindly incorporated it into the Getting Started screen.

Beware

The templates on this screen will be updated over time.
Get Training Online

Although using this book will give you a good understanding of how to design and administrate databases effectively, Access 2007 contains many more features than could possibly be covered here. As you become more confident with Access 2007 you should actively search the Office Online training pages for courses that will help you to improve your databases and so keep one step ahead of the competition. To access the Office Online training pages simply repeat the following:

1. Open the Getting Started screen by closing all the databases that are open.

2. Click the Training hyperlink located under the label “More on Office Online.”

3. Enter Access 2007 into the Search utility at the top of web page.

4. Select a training course from the search results by clicking on its hyperlink.

Hot tip

If you can’t find the training you want, search again using related keywords. You might find that the help you need is covered in another topic.
New content is being made available all the time thanks to Microsoft’s continual improvement of Access 2007. The content in question can either be conversion tools that let you work with databases created with older versions of Access, or product updates that add further functionality to your current installation of Access 2007.

1. Open the Getting Started screen by closing all the databases that are open.
2. Click the Downloads hyperlink located under the label “More on Office Online”.
3. Access now opens a web browser. Scroll down to the section entitled “Browse Downloads by Product” and click the 2007 Office System tab once.
4. Select the specific content you wish to download by clicking its link and then clicking the download button on the content summary screen that follows.
Access 2007 contains many professionally designed database templates and for many users these templates will more than meet their needs, albeit with a bit of tweaking. However, not all users have the same needs and if none of the pre-installed templates meets your requirements there is a good chance that a template on Office Online will.

1. Open the Getting Started screen by closing all open databases

2. Click the Templates hyperlink located under the label “More on Office Online”

3. If a template catches your eye, click on its hyperlink for more information
Using Templates

Access 2007 ships with many high-quality templates that, for most people, can be used straight out of the box. For example, if your sole reason for investing in a Database Management System is to maintain the contact details of your customers then Access 2007’s Contact template might be perfect for your needs.

The best way to see if Access 2007’s templates are right for your organization is to open them up and see what they do.

Opening a Template

1. Open the Getting Started screen by closing all the databases that are open.
2. Click once on a template category.

Access displays the templates currently available within that category in the center of the Getting Started screen.
...cont’d

3. Select a template by clicking once on its icon

4. Click the Download button at the far right of the Getting Started screen

Once a template is downloaded, Access 2007 prepares it for use and opens it automatically.
Using the Ribbon

In previous versions of Access users created and interacted with databases by choosing commands from menus, but not any more. You interact with Access 2007 using a menu of icons called the Ribbon.

Rather than laboriously searching through an uninspiring collection of gray menu items, you can find the command you need more quickly and easily with the help of the icons of the Ribbon.

The Ribbon

Click the tabs to switch between different collections of icons

Click an icon once to use it

Icons are grouped according to their function

Switching Between Views

1. To switch between views click the down arrow beneath the word View

2. Select the desired view by clicking on its icon
Using the Navigation Pane

Just as the old Access menu bar has been superseded by the Ribbon, so the Database Window has been replaced by the Navigation Pane. This can be found at the side of the main screen whenever a database is open.

The Navigation Pane makes finding Database Objects such as Tables and Queries easier by filtering them according to their type, the date they were created, and their group.

Filtering Database Objects

1. Click the down arrow at the top of the Navigation Pane

2. From the drop-down menu select a category to filter by clicking the category name once

3. Further refine your filter by clicking once on a group name
Using the Help System

Screaming “Help!” is a common side-effect of working in close proximity to computers. Thanks to Access 2007’s revised user interface it is now even easier to find the help you need.

As you’ve already seen, Office Online is a convenient means of finding help online, but that doesn’t mean that you have to be connected to the Internet to get help.

1. Click the Help Button at the top right of the Access main window.

2. Click on a link to read an article

Searching for Specific Topics

1. Type a query into the Search text field and then click Search

2. Access will give more than one answer to your query. Choose one that interests you by clicking its link