



Preface

*“Language is by its very nature a communal thing;
that is, it expresses never the exact thing but a
compromise—that which is common to you, me, and everybody.”*

—Thomas Earnest Hulme, *Speculations*

Learning how to retrieve information from or manipulate information in a database is commonly a perplexing exercise. However, it can be a relatively easy task as long as you understand the question you’re asking or the change you’re trying to make to the database. After you understand the problem, you can translate it into the language used by any database system, which in most cases is Structured Query Language (SQL). You have to translate your request into an SQL statement so that your database system knows what information you want to retrieve or change. SQL provides the means for you and your database system to communicate.

Throughout our many years as database consultants, we’ve found that the number of people who merely need to retrieve information from a database or perform simple data modifications in a database far outnumber those who are charged with the task of creating programs and applications for a database. Unfortunately, no books focus solely on this subject, particularly from a “mere mortals” viewpoint. There are numerous good books on SQL, to be sure, but most are targeted to database programming and development.

With this in mind, we decided it was time to write a book that would help people learn how to query a database properly and effectively. We produced the first edition of this book in 2000. With this new edition, we also wanted to introduce you to the basic ways to change data in your database using SQL. The result of our decision is in your hands. This book is unique among SQL books in that it focuses on SQL with little regard to any one specific database system implementation. This second edition includes hundreds of new examples, and we included versions of the sample databases using the popular open-source MySQL database system. When you finish reading this book, you’ll have the skills you need to retrieve or modify any information you require.